

SOCIAL MORAL REASONING IN CHINESE CHILDREN: A DEVELOPMENTAL STUDY

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The present study investigated developmental changes in moral reasoning about sibling and parental relationships in Mainland Chinese children. More specifically, motives of a protagonist with conflicting obligations in the family were examined. Results suggested universal stage-like progression in moral judgment from superficial (stages 1 and 2) to profound (stage 3). However, culture-specific moral reasoning also existed. For example, in comparison to children in Kohlberg's studies, Chinese children's moral decisions emphasized respect for authority, altruism, and concern over their sibling's moral correctness. The authors argued that Chinese children's moral characteristics are influenced by the cultural context. © 2003 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

The validity and universality of Kohlberg's theory of moral development has been widely supported by longitudinal studies (e.g., Colby, Kohlberg, Gibbs, & Lieberman, 1983; Page, 1981; Walker, 1989) and crosscultural research (Boyes & Walker, 1988; Rest, 1986; Snarey, 1985). However, controversy about the validity of preconventional moral thinking in different cultural contexts has been raised by a number of researchers (e.g., Keller, Eckensberger, & von Rosen, 1989). In a review of Kohlbergian moral judgment studies in 27 countries, Snarey (1985) concluded that Kohlberg's stages 1 through 4 are represented in varied cultural groups. In Damon's (1977) study of children's reasoning concerning fair distribution and legitimate authority, it has been reported that at least stages 1 through 3 were in evidence. Ma (1988, 1992) constructed a developmental model of moral judgment using the Defining Issues Test (Rest, 1975) by integrating Piaget's, Kohlberg's (1981, 1984), as well as the Chinese perspectives on moral development based on Confucianism and Taoism. Ma concluded that the initial three stages were universal, but the final three stages of moral development were influenced by cultural contexts.

Crosscultural studies of moral reasoning about responsibilities and obligations in friendship also suggested culture-specific patterns. Accumulated research indicated that participants from Asian cultures, when offering moral arguments, tended to refer to concepts of interpersonal harmony, concern for the welfare of others, mutual benevolence and love (Boyes & Walker, 1988; Eckensberger & Zimba, 1997; Miller & Bersoff, 1995; Snarey, 1985). For example, in a crosscultural study of moral reasoning on friendship obligations, the priority of various moral concerns differed considerably between Icelandic and Chinese children. Icelandic children referred more often to self-interest and contractual concerns (promise-keeping), whereas Chinese children focused more on altruistic and relationship concerns. However, with increasing age, both Icelandic and Chinese children mature morally with the same understandings of close friendships, but do so along different pathways (Fang, Fang, & Keller, 1994; Fang, Fang, & Wang, 1996; Keller, Edelstein, Schmid, Fang, & Fang, 1998).

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Gibbs, Basinger, and Faller (1992) suggested that cultural differences in moral reasoning may be the result of moral development not being exclusively constructive. It can best be illustrated in the nonsocial cognitive realm, rather than in social development. In Gibbs' view, moral development depends, at least partly, on a modified internalization process, which is influenced by the cultural context. He contended that moral norms and values such as keeping a promise, telling the truth, helping others, claiming property rights and so on, are transmitted from generation to generation. The constructive process, whatever its precise nature, does not take place in a vacuum.

Guided by Gibb et al.'s (1992) theoretical interpretation of the cultural influences on moral development, we investigated Chinese children's development of moral reasoning in the context of family relationships. Chinese society, with a long history of the Confucian tradition, is oriented to collectivist values. Thus, maintenance of harmony is important and human conflicts are usually resolved by reconciliation and collective decisions. A morally mature member of the Chinese society makes a judgment by taking into consideration not only LI (moral rightness), but also QING (affection). In contrast, Western society is oriented to individualism. In the Kohlbergian view, the Western man is an autonomous being who takes free and rational decisions based on rights and responsibility (Dien, 1982; Hsu, 1970; Ma, 1988). Further, there are other prevailing norms that have dominated the Chinese family and society for thousands of years: XIAO (showing filial piety to one's parents), TI (loving and respecting to one's elder brother), and CI (love of the parents for their child). Although Chinese society is undergoing rapid changes in political and social structures, these traditional norms, as modified by the spirit of the new era, still work and affect how the Chinese behave relative to their families and how they deal with conflicts within the family (Yang, 1986). Through the role-taking opportunities the children encounter in their environment they gradually acquire the meaning of those norms.

The present study is a part of a larger project that combined a cross-sectional with a longitudinal study. The data reported here are based only on the cross-sectional study. With respect to the differences in social context between China and Western countries, the authors are interested in exploring whether Chinese children experience alternative pathways to mature understanding of moral rules in parent-child, and sibling relationships. Findings from studies based on Western culture showed that children at stage 2 already entertain an internally based understanding of moral rules and relationships (see Keller et al., 1989). The present investigation focused on the exploration of Chinese children's development of morality of care and fairness in the context of family in three domains: priority of moral concerns, sibling relationships, and mother-daughter relationships. The specific research questions in each domain are as follows:

1. Priority of moral concerns: (a) what are the developmental patterns in the priorities of moral concerns among Chinese children? (Should the older sister tell on her younger sister?)
2. Sibling relationships: (b) what is the most important aspect in sister relationship? (c) Will the sister relationships be affected if the older sister tells the truth?
3. Mother-child relationships: (d) what is the most important aspect in mother-daughter relationships? (e) Will the mother-daughter relationships be affected if the daughter does not tell on the truth about the younger sister?

METHOD

Participants

A total of 350 students with an equal number of boys and girls (80 7-year-olds and 90 children in each of three age groups of 9-year-, 12-year- and 15-year-olds) from the Beijing area participated in this study. Children were randomly sampled from both key schools and average schools in Beijing. The parents of participating children from these schools were predominantly

professionals, clerical employees, or blue collar workers. The educational level of the parents fell into two categories: high educational group (college or university graduates) and low educational group (middle or elementary graduates). The educational background corresponded rather closely to the occupational status of the parents.

Materials

Children were presented with a slightly modified version of Kohlberg's "Judy dilemma" in which a mother has given a promise to let her daughter Judy go to a rock concert if she paid for the ticket with money she had earned herself. At the last minute, the mother withdrew her permission and requested that Judy used the money to buy a school dress. Judy decided to lie about the money she had earned and to go to the concert anyway. The question was that should her older sister Louise, who was informed about Judy's plan, tell her mother the truth or not?

In the Chinese version, the names of the protagonists were changed into common Chinese girls' names. The modification of Kohlberg's dilemma used in the present study consisted of confronting Xiao Lan (Louise) with the dilemma of telling on her sister (Xiao Hong) who wants to go to the movies instead of a concert. Interviewer's questions centered on students' moral reasoning about (a) the action choice (telling or not telling) and an alternative choice (imagining the reason for the opposite choice), (b) about property rights (should a mother monitor how her daughter spends money?), (c) promise-keeping (should a mother keep her promise to her daughter?), (d) sibling and child-parent relationships (what is the most important aspect of the sister's, and daughter-mother relationships?), (e) about consequences of choices (would the sister's relationship be affected if Xiao Lan tells the truth? Would the daughter-mother relationship be affected if Xiao Lan does not tell the truth?), and (f) about conflict solution. In the present study, children's responses to questions in only three domains (i.e., action choice; sibling, and child-parent relationships) were analyzed.

Scoring

Using the criterion judgments of the standard scoring manual (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987), approximately 40% of the statements could be matched. The remaining statements of stages 1 and 2 did not fit the theoretical formulation of preconventional moral reasoning. However, the remaining statements did contain stage 3 normative and interpersonal concerns, but in a structurally simpler form. To take into account both universal and social moral reasoning norms that are unique to the Chinese culture, children's reasoning was matched to criterion judgments in both the Standard Scoring Manual (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987) and the manual incorporating the Chinese children's responses (Chinese version). Eighty cases were randomly drawn from the subjects with 20 in each age group in order to establish interrater reliability ($r = .90$). Interrater agreements were 84% with a difference of one half stage accepted.

The developmental levels were transformed into numerical scores. Thus, levels 0, 0/1, 1, 1/2, 2, 2/3, and 3 corresponded to the scores 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. Spearman's correlation coefficients between the items ranged from 0.70 to 0.88 ($p < .01$), suggesting good internal consistency. The scoring criteria in the Manual is consisted of four full levels and two half levels.

LEVEL 0

The subjects could not understand the protagonist's (Xiao Lan) dilemma. They tended to give irrelevant statements for the moral justifications.

LEVEL 1: PRENORMATIVE SOCIAL MORAL REASONING

This level is characterized by obeying normative rules and authority, engaging in concrete interactions and material exchange, showing gross undifferentiated intimacy, and unilateral conflict resolution.

Tell or Not Tell

Almost all children at this level argued that the elder sister, Xiao Lan, should tell the truth because “a girl/boy must not tell a lie,” “a child can not cheat people,” “a child can not spend money without mother’s approval.” When asked to imagine the reason for the opposite choice (i.e., not telling), most children at this level had considerable difficulty stating a reason. A few children argued that “because Xiao Hong, her younger sister asked her to tell.”

Sibling Relationships

What is most important in sister relationships? At this level, the most important aspect in sister relationships perceived by children are related to obeying moral norms and general love with material exchange. Their typical responses included, “children can’t cheat,” “can’t tell lies,” “they should play well with each other and not quarrel,” “The elder sister should humor the younger sister,” and “the younger sister should listen to the elder.”

Will the Sister Relationships Be Affected If the Older Sister Tells the Truth? At this level, the children know that people have different subjective worlds. For example, if a child acts unfavorably toward the other, the other would feel angry. Therefore, the answer for this question generally is “Yes.” The rationale included “because the younger sister would get angry and not play with her elder sister anymore.” However, some children would answer “No,” “because the elder sister should tell the truth to the mother, and the younger should not feel angry.” In this case, children insisted that others should also have the same moral consideration as they do.

Mother–Daughter Relationships

What Is Most Important in Mother–Daughter Relationships? At this level, the child focused on obeying the moral norms and showing love for her mother. In their words, mother and daughter should “be nice to each other,” “the child should listen to her mother,” “do what mother wants,” “not to cheat mother,” “greeting her mother when the child comes back from school,” or “be polite to her mother, give her a cup of tea when she is back home.” Children also expect the reciprocity from the mother. For example, “the mother should not beat her child,” “give good food, good clothes to her child,” and “help her with homework.” Thus, children regarded the mother as playing a role of care-giver.

Will the Mother–Daughter Relationship Be Affected If the Daughter Does Not Tell the Truth About the Younger Sister? At this level, children’s answers focused on obeying the moral norms. If the child violated the norms, she would be punished. Most answers to the question were “yes, mom should scold her” or “You can’t cheat your mom.” Only very few children said “no.” The rationale is that “Her mother will forget it very soon.”

LEVEL 2: NORMATIVE SOCIAL MORAL REASONING

Children’s moral reasoning at this level is characterized by comprehending the meaning of moral rules. Their understanding of family relationships progressed from elaborating on concrete activities to taking the other person’s perspectives into consideration, and resolving conflicts through

communication and emphasizing the parental educational function. Children at this level could understand the meanings of a great number of the moral rules such as telling the truth (be honest), promise-keeping, helping others (altruism), and relying the moral rules as their subjective values to guide their actions.

Tell or Not Tell

Most children argued that Xiao Lan should tell the truth “because a girl should be honest, otherwise she will be useless when she grows up” or “mom has reasons not to allow her to go because she will probably have an accident, mom is worried about her.” At this level, children can imagine the reasons for not telling. For example, Xiao Lan should not tell “because her mother should keep her promise” or “because the sisters get along well, the elder doesn’t want to offend her younger sister.”

Sibling Relationships

What Is Most Important in Sibling Relationships? The important aspects in sister relationships is “to help each other do well in school, and take care of each other,” or “being honest, not to cheat others, not to cover up the sister’s mistakes.” Children also valued the sister’s relationship as providing “love, affection, and harmony.”

Will the Sister’s Relationship Be Affected If the Older Sister Tells the Truth? Children responded either “yes” or “no.” The rationale they gave for the “no” response included, “because Xiao Hong should understand that her sister is helping her by telling her mother.” In the case of “yes,” their rationale was, “Xiao Hong would feel angry because she feels betrayed.”

Mother–Daughter Relationships

What Is Most Important in Mother–Daughter Relationship? Children’s answers to this question centered on the educational function of parenting instead of materialistic favor given at Level 1. As they stated: “mom should cultivate and guide her child and correct her mistakes;” “mom should discipline her child not to tell a lie and to be honest.” Children also valued the child–parent relationship. They argued that “affection is most important because mom gave her child life. Mom loves her child and the child also loves her/his mom,” and “If she does not love her child, the child can’t grow up properly.”

Would the Child–Mother Relationship Be Affected If They Did Not Tell? At this level, children emphasized the moral norms of not cheating, especially not cheating his/her own mother because she would get very angry if she found out. Typifying this is the answer, “yes, because her own child is not honest, she feels she was fooled, then she would not believe her child anymore.” However, some children answered “no” to the question. They argued that it was common for children to make mistakes. “if the child makes a mistake, the mother should help him/her so the relationship would not be affected.” Typical “no” answers to the question included, “no, the mother would criticize her daughter, but regardless what the daughter did, the mother should always love her.”

LEVEL 3: GENERALIZED SOCIAL MORAL REASONING

Reasoning at this stage is characterized by children taking integrated perspectives or the ability to take other’s perspectives. Their moral rules are internalized, showing conceptualized responsibilities, equality, and conflict resolution through mutual understanding.

Tell or Not Tell?

The child at this level argued that the elder should tell the truth, “because honesty is a basic moral quality of a person,” or “because a good elder sister should set a good example for her younger siblings and be responsible for their action.” On the other hand, children also began to challenge their parent’s authority. They argued that the elder should not tell “because the younger sister is not completely wrong, mom should not have changed her mind, and she should also consider her daughter’s freedom of choice.” They further argued that “a mother should try to understand their child, be a friend to their child, so that their child is more willing to share with them his/her innermost thoughts and feelings.” Thus, the relationship between child and parents has been strengthened on the basis of mutual understanding and mutual trust.

Sibling Relationships

What Is Most Important in Sibling Relationships? At this level, the children’s reasoning focused on the sibling’s moral well-being as they argued that it was most important “to treat each other openheartedly; if one makes a mistake, the other will point it out in time and help her correct it.” The sister’s relationship was characterized as “the dearest affection, and that differs from the affections directed toward parents or friends . . . they depend on each other and trust each other deeper than friends.”

Will the Relationship between the Sisters Be Affected If the Elder Tells the Truth? Children’s responses typically revolved around sibling loyalty and concerns for moral obligations. These themes are conveyed in these examples, “Yes, Xiao Hong trusted her sister very much and told her the plan, now she feels betrayed, she would not believe in her sister anymore” or “No, if Xiao Lan explained the reasoning why she should tell her sister clearly, and if what she said made sense, the younger sister would be grateful for her help.”

Mother–Daughter Relationships

What Is Most Important in Mother–Daughter Relationship? At this level, children claimed that “love and affection are most important. If there is no love in the family, people in the family will feel cold and the family will be broken down.” Other reasoning included, “the daughter should show her filial piety to her mother with all her heart;” “a mother should try to understand her child. This way, the child could treat her mother as a friend, sharing with the mother her innermost feelings,” or “trustworthiness is important, breaking the trustworthiness would certainly break people’s hearts in the family.”

Will Mother–Daughter Relationships Be Affected If Xiao Lan Does Not Tell the Truth? Children’s responses emphasized mutual trust as well as parental forgiveness for their children’s mistakes. For example, one replied that “Yes, as mother and daughter, they should trust each other and communicate their innermost feelings. But if the daughter deceives her mother, the mother would feel hurt.” In another example, the child responded, “No, because the parents should always forgive their child even if the child makes a mistake. The mother would make all efforts to help her daughter rather than dislike her.”

TRANSITIONAL STAGES

Tell or Not Tell?

There were also transitional levels between levels 1 and 2 (i.e., 1–2), and between levels 2 and 3 (i.e., 2–3). For example, to justify why Xiao Lan should tell truth, children at level 1 argued that “a child cannot tell a lie” “a child cannot cheat people.” Children at level 1–2 (transitional

level) would argue: “a child should not tell a lie” or “should not cheat people,” “the elder sister should not lie for her young sister.” Their reasoning reflected a process leading to the internalization of moral responsibilities (i.e., from use of *cannot* to the use of *should not*).

Children at level 2 argued that “telling a lie itself is wrong” or “because she wants to be an honest girl, she should not cover up her sister’s mistake.” At level 2–3 (transitional level), children would argue that “she wants her sister Xiao Hong to know that she did something wrong and she cannot hide the truth,” or, “she knows that her younger sister Xiao Hong is wrong, however, she could persuade her mother to forgive her sister.” Children at level 3 would argue that “because honesty is a basic moral quality of a person” “her inner strength will impel her to tell the truth,” or “mutual understanding is important. By telling the truth, the mother would know her daughter better, and at the same time also know her own mistakes.” We hypothesized that the main difference between the reasoning of level 2 and level 3 is that level 2 referred to the morality of autonomy depending on the contextual situations, and level 3 more mature reasoning would be evident. The statements scored as level 2–3 were defined with the structure of the transition from concrete normative reasoning to generalized reasoning. We also scored the half stages for sibling relationship and mother–daughter relationship.

With respect to sibling relationships, the examples of normative concerns included, “not to tell a lie” (level 1); “to be honest, not cheat her sister” (level 1–2); “to keep promise, not to reveal sister’s secret” (level 2); “not to cheat people because cheating is immoral, the elder should teach the younger to know about that (level 2–3)”; “the elder should set a good example of being honest for the younger to help her to become a good person when the younger grows up (level 3).

The examples for the interpersonal concerns reflected the theme of love and harmony included answers such as, “be nice to each other” (level 1); “love each other because they are dear sisters” (level 1–2); “to help each other, understanding of each other, live in harmony” (level 2–3); and finally, “it is a sister’s friendly affection enabled them to talk with each other heartedly and make progress together” (level 3).

With respect to mother–daughter relationships, the examples included, “not to cheat her mom;” “to obey is a virtue in a good girl” (level 1); “Be honest, not to cheat her mother” (level 1–2); “to teach her daughter not tell a lie, be honest” (level 2); “is trustworthy, if the child cheats her parents, the parents will not be fond of her; if the parents cheat the child, the child will not believe them;” (level 2–3); “is to understand her child, let her child make her own decision for her own business, not to interfere with the child’s private activities, consider the child’s request” (level 3).

The examples for the interpersonal concerns included “mom is nice to me and I am nice to mom” (level 1); “love her child, not to physically discipline her, reason with her” (level 1–2); “is maternal love, it means that mom helps her child with correcting her mistake, takes care of her, helps her do well in school” (level 2); “is that they should know each other well, in this way they could strengthen their relationship” (level 2–3); “is to trust and respect mutually, it means that the young generation should value the experiences of the elder generation. The elder generation should respect the different view point of the young generation” (level 3).

RESULTS

In this study we explored three domains of moral development in the context of the family, that is: (1) What is the priority of moral concerns among Chinese children (should the elder sister tell or not tell, and why?); (2) Sibling relationships (what is the most important in the sibling relationship? Will the sister relationship be affected if the elder sister tells the truth?); and, (3) Mother–daughter relationship (what is the most important in the mother–daughter relationship? Will mother–daughter relationship be affected if the elder sister does not tell the truth?)

Priority of Moral Concerns

The priority of moral concerns were analyzed in terms of judgment (tell or not tell) and reasoning (why?).

Judgment. The difference amongst age groups regarding decisions to “tell” or “not tell” was significant, $\chi^2 = 15.57$, $df = 3$, $p < .01$ (see Figure 1). Most young children (7- and 9-year-olds) preferred to “tell the truth” rather than “not tell.” However, the choice for not telling increased with age.

Reasoning. Children were also asked to justify their choices for either “telling” or “not telling.” Two separate 4 (age) \times 2 (Gender) analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted on the levels of reasoning in regard to sibling as well as mother–daughter relationships. Significant main effects were obtained for age on both variables: mother–daughter relationships, $F(3, 293) = 200.54$, $p < .0001$, and sibling relationships, $F(3, 293) = 172.55$, $p < .01$. There was no significant age \times gender interaction effects nor significant gender differences.

As shown in Figure 2, most 7-year-olds were at level 1; 9-year-olds at level 1–2 or 2; 12-year-olds at level 2 or 2–3; and 15-year-olds at level 2–3 or 3. The developmental progression of social moral reasoning was slow and gradual with about half a level improvement over a period of 2 to 3 years.

Sibling and Mother–Daughter Relationships

Separate 4 (age) \times 2 (gender) ANOVAs were performed on levels of moral reasoning for sibling and mother–daughter relationships. Significant age effects were found for both variables: sibling relationship, $F(3, 339) = 328.76$, $p < .0001$, and mother–daughter relationships, $F(3, 339) = 279$, $p < .001$. There was no significant age \times gender interactions nor significant gender differences. As shown in Figure 3, older children demonstrated higher levels of moral reasoning in both situations.

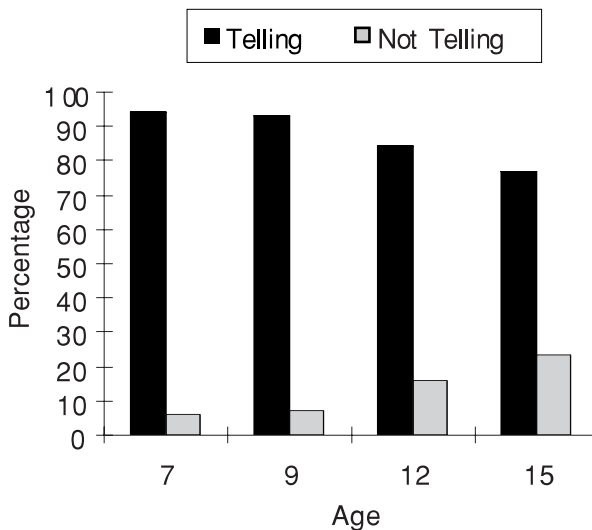


FIGURE 1. Action choice.

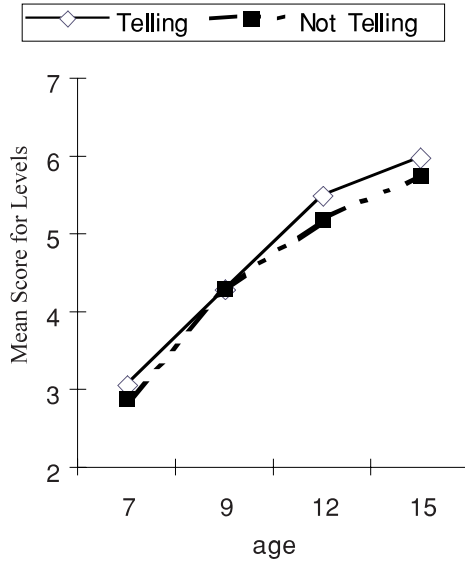


FIGURE 2. Developmental levels for moral decision.

DISCUSSION

The present study focused on the development of Chinese children’s social moral reasoning based on Kohlberg’s moral constructive developmental theory. Consistent with Western theories, our findings suggested that the social moral development of Chinese children proceeds from heteronomous morality to autonomous morality. Further, perspective-taking develops from “unilateral”

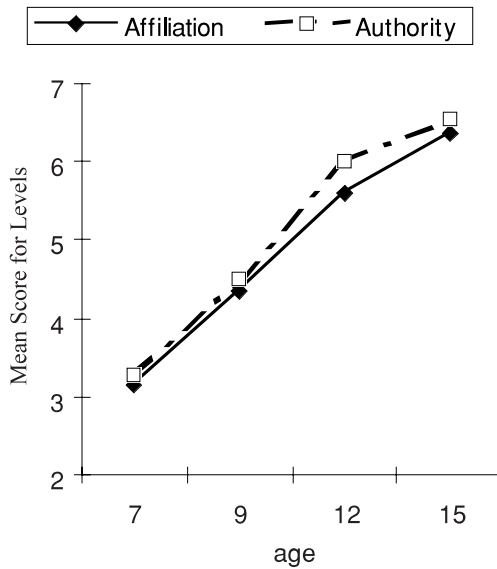


FIGURE 3. Developmental levels for affiliation and authority.

to reflective thinking and then to a more mature level of social moral reflection (Selman, 1980). Cultural variations in Chinese children's social moral reasoning concerning the priority of the moral concerns, reasoning about parent-child relationships, and sibling relationships were found.

Priority of Moral Concerns

According to Kohlberg's manual, there are two main issues in the Judy dilemma, that is, *authority* (in the case of telling) and *contract* (in the case of not telling). The main question about authority was "should a daughter help her mother exercise authority even if doing so meant that her sister's contract or property right would be violated?" We found that majority of Chinese children were oriented to the issue of authority, even though this trend decreased with increasing age (94, 93, 84, and 77% for the age groups of 7, 9, 12, and 15 years, respectively). This implied that the majority of Chinese subjects preferred being a loyal daughter to being a loyal sister, and that even in adolescence (for the 15-year-olds) the norm of authority still played a predominant role.

Children's justification for the moral decision emphasized the respect for authority (not cheating mother) and altruism (helping sister) and concerns over sister's moral rightness (not cheating). Less attention was paid to the contractual aspect (keeping a promise). It seems that the norms of telling the truth and helping others develop earlier among Chinese children, and the norms of keeping a promise and respecting property rights develop later compared with Western counterparts. In fact, this notion was also supported by a similar study in Iceland. Fewer Icelandic children (66 and 44% of 12- and 15-year-olds, respectively), in comparison to Chinese children, were oriented to the authority issue (Keller, Edelstein, Fang, & Fang, 2000). It appears that the Icelandic children shifted the orientation from loyal daughter to loyal sister much earlier than do Chinese children. Findings from a comparative study of friendship (Keller et al., 1998) offered further evidence that the moral concerns of helping others developed earlier, and the concern of promise keeping developed later in Chinese subjects compared with their Icelandic peers.

Mother-Daughter Relationships

How children judged the role of their parents in a family influenced the moral decisions that children made that involved parent-child relationships in Judy's dilemma. Our findings suggested differences between Western and Chinese children in the evaluation of parent-child relationship. At stage 1 in Kohlberg's manual, children regard parents as "older, bigger, and powerful boss of the family." They obey them because they could "get punished if they don't." At stage 2 children emphasized their own interests. For example, "a good mother should help her daughter do what she wants or full fill her wishes," "a good mother should not force her to do something she doesn't want to do," "if a mother doesn't stay on good terms with her daughter, the daughter will rebel, or won't do what she (the mother) wants." At stage 3 young adolescents realized that "her mother has her daughter's best interests at heart," "is acting for her own good, is doing her best to bring up her daughter," but "a mother should be unselfish, considerate, or keep her daughter's best interests in mind," "if the daughter loves her mother, she would realize how much her mother has done for her;" therefore, "her mother deserves to be appreciated" (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987). In sum, Kohlberg's subjects, while valuing the parent-daughter relationship, focused on the daughter's own interests, even at stage 3 the rationale for the mutual appreciation of interpersonal relationship is still based on the principle of reciprocity rather than the principle of altruism. The role played by the parents is to pay respect for children's own interests or own views, to fulfill their children's wishes, and to help the children's dreams come true.

Unlike children in Kohlberg's studies, Chinese children evaluated mothers from a different perspective. At stage 1, children regarded the mother as a nurse who looks after the material needs

of child; at stage 2, they added the educational function to the parenting (e.g., “a good mother should educate her child, help him/her correct mistakes they make”); at stage 3, the arguments were based on mutual understanding, trust, and respect. They were satisfied by the role of teacher played by the parents, and to stand on an equal footing with them as a good friend. As they put it, “being an older generation, parents should be good teachers and helpful friends to their children; in so doing they can sustain a good relationship with their children.” In short, as a qualified mother, her role in the growing child’s eyes should be changed from a nurse’s (at stage 1) to teacher’s (stage 2) and finally, to a teacher and a friend (stage 3).

Furthermore, in contrast to the traditional Confucian view of interpersonal harmony, Chinese children in this study challenged the authority of parenting. Children at stage 1 idealized their parents. The parents were the absolute authority as indicated by the children’s statement “a mother can do what she wants because she is a mother.” The children had a stereotyped conception of the parents that “listening to the parents is characteristic of a good child.” At stage 2, they found that parents were not always perfect; they argued that a child should listen to the parents; however “sometimes the parents’ idea could be wrong, we can’t follow them.” Children claimed that parents should also conform to the normative rules such as being honest, keeping a promise to their child; if they don’t, “the child will not trust them later on.” At stage 3 the young adolescents argued that “as parents they should not only take the responsibility for the moral quality of their child, but they should also try to understand their child, pay attention to different viewpoints of the child since everyone in family has a right to speak up.” Therefore, parental authority required not only the parents’ ability to adjust their roles in the different developmental stages of the growing child, but also to set a good example for the child.

Sibling Relationships

One of the central issues of this study was sibling relationships in the context of social moral reasoning as a function of the dilemma. Findings suggested that views on sibling relationships in terms of the role played by the elder sister differs between Western and Chinese children. In Kohlberg’s manual children at the preconventional level focused on egoism and instrumental considerations when defining the sibling relationship. For example, sisters should keep a secret or promise to each other; they should not interfere with the sister’s business and, so on, for the sake of their self-interests. At stage 3 they evidence a mutual appreciation of the interpersonal relationship. The sibling relationship was characterized as quality, negotiation for conflict and symmetry.

In contrast to the role the elder sister assumed in Western cultures, the elder sister in the Chinese family assumed a leading role in the sibling relationship as illustrated in the Chinese saying: “The elder sister acts as a half mother.” At stage 1, the elder should “humor the younger sister/brother.” For example, if there are two pears, she should give the bigger one to the younger, and leave the smaller one for herself. On the other hand, the younger sister “should listen to the elder.” At stage 2, the elder sister should be concerned with the younger sister’s moral righteousness; therefore, “she should not cover up for her sister’s mistakes.” At stage 3, the elder sister “should set a good example for the younger;” “make progress together;” and “correct the younger sister’s mistake for the sake of her future.” The sibling relationship was characterized by asymmetric and half-authoritative features between the elder and younger brother or sister. There are few traces of self-interest orientation even at the preconventional level.

Development of Morality of Care in Chinese Children

According to Kohlberg (1984), the child at the preconventional level is oriented to individual self-interests. At stage 1, the main goal of moral behavior is to obey authority and avoid punishment; at stage 2, children focus on instrumental need and exchange; only at stage 3 of the con-

ventional level will develop the mutual appreciation of an interpersonal relationship. There is little sign of morality of care in pre-conventional child. The developmental logic or trajectory in Kohlberg's subjects represents a shift from self-interested orientation to prosocial intention or mutual concern of interpersonal relationship.

Compared with children in Kohlberg's studies, Chinese children displayed a different developmental trajectory of the morality of care manifested in a clear structural developmental trend. The morality of care was already established at the pre-conventional level. At stage 1 the children argued that a child should "respect parents" (e.g., being polite to the parents, greeting parents, serving a cup of tea to parents when they come back home). At stage 1–2 the motivation of telling the truth derives from concerns with mother's feelings. For example, "if sister didn't tell, her mother would feel worried." At stage 2, the child further elaborated the telling-the-truth argument by saying that "mom has reasons not to allow the younger sister to go because she is worried about the sister having an accident." Children at stage 2 are also concerned with the younger sister's moral correctness ("the elder sister wants to help her younger sister correct her moral mistake of lying"). At stage 3, children emphasized that "if the elder sister want to help her younger sister sincerely, she should ask her to tell the truth instead of covering up for her younger sister's mistake." In summary, the prosocial motivation is already in place in the young children's arguments, progressing from showing empathy for another person to concern for other's feelings and moral righteousness and advancing to take responsibility for the other's well-being.

Chinese Children's Social Moral Reasoning: A Cultural Explanation

Chinese children's predominant concerns over parental authority (e.g., more important to be a loyal daughter than a loyal sister) and their intense attention to moral correctness of self and others are strongly tied to the Chinese economic system and its tradition in moral education.

For over 2000 years, China has been dominated by an agricultural economy. The Chinese depended on small scale farming run by the family. The society was rather immobile, where for generations families remained in the same restricted areas. Compared with Western industrial societies characterized as mobile, where members of families moved frequently to seek economical success and where family ties thus tend to be more tenuous, the Chinese system demands stable, within family and cross generational relationship. In Confucianism, there were five categories of interpersonal relationships influenced by five moral rules: the relationship of the emperor and his subjects constrained by ZHONG (loyalty); the relationship between parents and child constrained by XIAO (filial piety) and CI (love of parents for their child); the relationship between sibling constrained by TI (fraternal duty, respecting the elder brother); the relationship between friends constrained by CHENG (sincerity) and XIN (trustworthiness) and the relationship between husband and wife constrained by FUCONG (domestic harmony as expressed by the saying: "the husband sings, and the wife follows the song"). Confucius regarded the family relationship as fundamental. XIAO, TI, and CI were the basic moral qualities of an individual because the principles of XIAO, TI, and CI could be extended to the entire society to coordinate the relationships of rulers, officials, and the common people. Thus, even today Chinese take a Confucian view of obeying parents, respecting the old generation and loving young children.

Why do Chinese children pay such an intense attention to the moral correctness of the self and that of the others? Answers to this question need to be situated in a historical perspective. In ancient times the people were divided into two categories: In one category, there is JUNZI (gentleman or man of noble character, the Confucian term meaning the ideal person whose character and acts are in accordance with ritual and rightness); in the other category, there is XIAOREN (literary translated as "small man," laborers). Confucius said: "The gentleman understands what is the moral; the small man understands what is profitable" (cf. *The Analects of Confucius*). If the

small man wants to be a gentleman, he must train himself to be a morally good person and follow the gentleman's political ambition: XIUSHEN, QIJIA, ZHIGUO, PINGTIANXIA. These concepts are interpreted as following: educating oneself to become a moral person as the first step, securing harmony and prosperity of the family as the second step, and in consequence, qualify to govern the country very well in times of peace. One of Confucius' student named ZENGZI sated: "I engage +in introspection several times everyday in order to question myself whether I fulfill my commitment without sparing any effort; whether I associate with my friends trustworthily; whether I review the lectures taught by my teachers."

Even today's schools, families, and society still regard the moral education as the priority of the subjects for children's growth. The parents admonish the child following the traditional saying "as a child you should not tell a lie, you should not cheat people, you should not spend money extravagantly . . . if you do, you will be useless in the society when you grow up." Teachers in the schools call upon the students to make very effort to earn the title of "students of three goodness"—good health, good grades, and good moral conduct. A list of student rules are publicly displayed in every classroom (i.e., "respecting teachers," and "taking pleasure in helping others").

In conclusion, we affirm the cognitive constructivist stance by agreeing that certain features of moral reasoning about family relationship in Chinese children are universal. Among the universal features is a stage-like progression from superficial to a profound understanding of moral rightness (Gibbs, 1992). The growing child's expanding working memory, as well as increasing role-taking opportunities enable the child to simultaneously attend to multiple features of relationships. The constructive processes eventually result in the achievement of a mature understanding of the intrinsic or underlying meaning of moral values. Our data support earlier criticisms of Kohlberg's theory of preconventional morality as exclusively oriented toward self-interest (see Keller et al., 1989). The results also suggest that in Chinese children, both normative (fairness) and interpersonal concerns (care) constitute basic components of emergent morality and form culturally unique developmental sequences. We argue that morality, in part, is influenced by cultural context. The priority of family relationships in the moral development of Chinese children provided evidence that traditional and prevailing values as well as specific cultural norms can deeply affect children's moral reasoning.

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