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**Moral and character education in Taiwan: History
and lessons to be drawn**

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Abstract

Moral and character education had been a mandatory subject in Taiwanese schools for several decades. However, since 2004 moral and character education course was no longer part of formal curricula due to educational reforms. The ongoing policy of moral and character education is the "*Moral and Character Education Improvement Program*" (MCEIP), which stresses character-based school culture to balance Eastern and Western, traditional and modern cultures. The history and development of Taiwanese moral and character education reveals a complicated blending of education, culture and politics. A number of issues, controversies and debates on moral and character education need to be addressed and drawn the lessons learned by the worldwide scholars and educators as follows: 1. How to balance cultural identity and difference in a diversified society; 2. How to cultivate virtuous persons and good citizens in a global society; 3. How to rebuild legitimacy and interdisciplinary approaches in a learning society; 4. How to connect theory and practice to improve quality in a postmodern society. From a reflection on the Taiwanese experience, several implications and suggestions for moral and character education are provided, including certain old questions regarding moral and character education field not yet clarified; some emerging issues regarding moral and character education field need to be answered; a topic of how to balance universal values and local characteristics of moral and character education needs attention; and facilitating an exchange of ideas on moral and character education should be encouraged.

Key words: moral and character education, educational policy, Taiwanese experience

I. Taiwan's background: an immigrant and multicultural society

Taiwan, an island with a total area of nearly 36,000 square km and a population of 23.2 million, is located in the Asia Pacific region. From the 16th century to the 1940s, Taiwan was subject to the influence of a series of Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch and English powers, Han culture during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), and Japanese colonization (1895-1945). From the three decades following 1949, which saw the Nationalist (KMT) government's move from China to Taiwan, the leaders gradually erased the colonial influence of Japanese culture and revived Chinese cultural heritage and language, in particular Confucianism (Kung, 2000). In 1987 the formal abolition of Martial Law, Taiwan has been profoundly affected by the concepts of modernization and democracy imported from the USA and Europe. Over the course of history, Taiwan has witnessed great conflicts between East and West, the traditional and the modern, and among the country's many sub-cultures (Mainlanders, Taiwanese, Hakka, Aboriginals, and New Immigrants) (Kung, 2000). Similarly, the changes and challenges of Taiwan's moral and character education clearly reveal an interaction between culture and politics and the associated intertwines of knowledge, ideology and power.

II. Dramatically changes of Taiwan's moral and character education

In the past six decades of contemporary history, Taiwan has gradually moved from authoritarianism to democracy, from impoverishment to wealth, from traditionalism and orthodoxy to social and cultural diversity. Moral and character education can be divided into the authoritarian (1949-1980s), transitional (1980s-2003) and current periods (2004-untill now).

Authoritarian period From 1949 to the 1980s, the ultimate goal of Taiwanese educational system was to fulfill and reinforce the ideals, enumerated by Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, and stated in the Three Principles of the People: Nationalism, Democracy and Social well-being. Education was seen as a means of indoctrinating political ideology and Chinese traditional culture into the populace. As a result, moral and character education consisted of ideological, nationalistic, political education and the teaching of a strict code of conduct. The goal of moral and character education was to educate students to conform to the group and nation rather than to be autonomous. The government set up formal moral curricula, which were regularly scheduled subjects, at every level: for instance, "*Life and Ethics*" in elementary schools (age 7-12), "*Civics and Morality*" in junior high schools (age 13-15), "*Civics*" in high schools (age 16-18) and "*The Thought of Dr. Sun Yat-Sen*" in colleges and universities. Besides, the Taiwanese Ministry of Education (TMOE) stressed "*Youth Regulations*" and eight cardinal virtues. The former comprises 12 items, for example, "Article 1: Loyalty and bravery are the bases of patriotism." The latter mostly originates from traditional Confucian thinking and contains loyalty to ruler or nation (忠zhong), filial piety (孝xiao), benevolence (仁ren), love (愛ai), trustworthiness (信xin), justice (義yi), harmony (和he) and peace (平ping). (Lee, 2004)

Transitional period Beginning in the 1980s, educational reform has been regarded as one of the social movements and introduced to meet the needs of a greatly changing and emerging democratic society, as well as to make more manifest the intrinsic value of education. Political ideologies and traditional culture in moral and character education were gradually phased out. Moral and character education became no longer focused solely on a group or nation, but also on individual students. In particular, the increasing rate of juvenile crime, behavioral deviation, smoking, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, school drop outs and a rising suicide rate made clear the significance of a new moral and character educational policy in Taiwan's newly emancipated society. However, during the atmosphere of "value-free", "moral and character education" became a symbol of outdated ideology during the 1990s. Coincidentally, there is no longer a specific moral and character education course (but remaining Civic education as one subject of Social Studies) in Taiwanese schools because the TMOE promulgated "*The guidelines for a nine-year joint curricula plan of elementary and junior high schools*" in 1998 and had it fully implemented by August 2004.

Current period Since there was no longer an explicit moral and character education course in Taiwan's school systems, scholars and educators were concerned about how to rebuild and implement moral and character education. In response to concerns expressed by Taiwanese academics, school faculty, parents and leaders of social organizations, the TMOE released a "*Moral and Character Education Improvement Program*" (MCEIP) (the first five-year period from 2004 to 2008) in late 2004 and amended in 2006. This program offers guidelines for implementing moral and character education in primary and secondary schools, as well as postsecondary education. The program's main goals are (Taiwan Ministry of Education, 2006):

"to facilitate the development of students' moral thinking and their ability to select, reflect on, cherish and identify with core ethical values and codes of conduct; to develop a character-based school culture in Taiwanese schools, one involving teachers, students, administrators, parents and community leaders; to strengthen the roles parents and community leaders play in schools' moral and character education; and to give non-political organizations, cultural and educational foundations, as well as the mass media, a larger role in schools' moral and character education."

In addition, the program's main principles to implement moral and character education (Taiwan Ministry of Education, 2006) are: quality improvement through creative integration of traditional and modern values; core ethical values democratically decided; cooperative participation between school teachers, parents and social organizations; moral and character education with multi-channels of formal, informal and hidden curriculum; and encouraging schools to share the experience of implementation and effectiveness of moral and character education with others. Furthermore, the TMOE proclaimed the second five-year period from 2009 to 2013 of MCEIP and refreshed several policies for promoting the quality and sustainability of moral and character education in 2009. Particularly, the program lists the six Es (Example, Explanation, Exhortation, Environment, Experience and Expectation) as strategies of moral and character education and ten dimensions, which covers characteristics of school, administrative leadership, teacher professionalism, resources integration, formal curriculum, informal curriculum, hidden curriculum, student progress, school atmosphere and sustainable development, as evaluation indicators of moral and character education. (Taiwan Ministry of Education, 2009)

III. A reflection on Taiwan's current policy and its lessons to be drawn for other countries

From the history and development of Taiwan's moral and character education, it reveals not only a complicated blending of education, culture and politics but also the common issues and challenges of moral and character education worldwide.

1. How to balance cultural identity and difference in a diversified society

As Taiwan has become more of a multicultural and globally-aware country, the influence of western culture, which emphases individualism, independence and rationality, has been assimilated into traditional Asian culture which emphasizes community, connection and affection in the modernization of society. Therefore, Taiwanese people face differing degrees of confusion, and gaps between values, attitudes and behavior occur between the two extremes of liberalism and communitarianism, and both between and within different generations. Moral and character education should be expected to play a role in promoting greater appreciation of cultural diversity and building a sense of social identity. Moral and character education in Taiwan assumes the importance of traditional Confucian moral values, which are rooted in Chinese culture. However, the role of an authoritarian moral hierarchy or values system has gradually faded in modern society, which emphasizes openness and pluralism. It is a great challenge for moral and character education to prevent the weakening of traditional values from leading to moral relativism, and to build a suitably modern and universal moral values system based on democracy, justice and caring. (Lee, 2004)

"A character-based school culture", the Taiwanese MCEIP indicates, is an integrated concept to balance Eastern and Western, traditional and modern cultures and to avert a crisis of cultural connection and social identity. School culture is an important contextual variable influencing school effectiveness and students' adjustment to school (Higgins-D'Alessandro and Sadh, 1998; Schoen and Teddlie, 2008). A positive school culture is "*one in which teachers and students care about and support one another, share values, norms, goals, and a sense of belonging, and participate in and influence group decisions*" (Barr and Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2007, p.234). It is clearly desirable values to have schools that are moral communities with just, caring and developmental-disciplined school culture, all of which are interrelated, to improve individuals' moral development and school moral atmosphere (Lee, 2009). Accordingly, the main purpose of Taiwanese recent policy on moral and character education is to build a character-based school culture, which emphasizes school moral and character education becoming a product of cultural integration of universal and local values and being imparted through various forms of curriculum instead of remaining a unique subject in a diversified society.

2. How to cultivate virtuous persons and good citizens in a global society

Since the formal abolition of Martial Law in 1987, Taiwan has gradually moved from authoritarianism to democracy. Beginning in 1990s, the impact of social movements on social development has been positive

because of their concern with the necessity of environmental protection, consumers' rights, women's rights, reparations and an end to ethnic discrimination (Chung, 1999). The democratizing process changes ideas of educational philosophy, such as: transferring the curriculum paradigm from inculcation of knowledge to the development of multiple-intelligence and independent thinking; strengthening students' learning and life experience; designing diverse approaches in teaching; encouraging parental participation. In addition, civic values rather than private values should be emphasized in Taiwanese moral and character education, as a basis for a democratic and pluralistic society. That is, a good and modern citizen should possess the general knowledge, good character and skills needed to participate in public life. Being a person of good character in a democratic society should include having and practicing civic virtues, including political values (e.g., respect for others' political positions, national identity), legal values (e.g., rule of law, justice), economic values (e.g., honesty, diligence), social values (e.g., caring, cooperation) and cultural values (e.g., tolerance, esteem) (Zhang & Lee, 2002). In addition, professional ethics should be stressed in school, especially in higher education and adult/continuing education.

Several points of the Taiwanese MCEIP fit in with the aforementioned trends of citizenship with multiple dimensions as follows: First, one goal of the program is "*to facilitate the development of students' moral thinking and their ability to select, reflect on, cherish and identify with core ethical values and codes of conduct*" rather than indoctrination of political ideology or cultural orthodoxy. Second, another goal of the program is to strengthen a larger role of parents, community leaders, non-political organizations, cultural and educational foundations, as well as the mass media in schools' moral and character education, thus connecting moral and character education and life experience. Third, one of the program's main principles indicates that core ethical values of character-based school culture should be democratically decided by students, teachers and parents in order to show the unique characteristics of individual schools. The democratic principle demonstrates a concept of grass-root and school-based instead of fixed nationwide virtues decided by the TMOE in advance. Finally, the MCEIP emphasizes "*moral and character education is not only good for spiritual life of individuals, but beneficial for a sustainable development of community to an ideal of civil society.*" Therefore, the program involves civic virtues (e.g. justice, caring) and multiculturalism (e.g. respect and tolerant members of different gender and ethnicity) into moral and character education instead of the traditional and narrow meaning employed in the past.

3. How to rebuild legitimacy and interdisciplinary approaches in a learning society

Taiwanese moral and character education had been a means of spreading political ideology (Three Principles of the People) and cultural orthodoxy (Confucianism) for several decades during the period of authoritarianism. Moral and character education research wasn't considered a legitimate field until the late 1970s. Since then, some scholars have studied abroad and introduced western theories (particularly British and American moral education theories) into Taiwanese academics and educational system, including theories of language analysis and meta-ethics on moral and character education, cognitive-developmental moral theory, values clarification method, modern virtue ethics, and new character education. Presently moral educators are faced with numerous approaches to moral and character education, with alternative philosophical, psychological, sociological and cross-disciplinary theories from traditional to modern and post-modern. A big challenge of moral and character education is how Taiwanese scholars and administrative staff choose and adapt various theories into the unique Taiwanese context.

The Taiwanese MCEIP defines moral and character education as "*a value-laden process and product of leading learners to know the good, love the good and do the good with multiple dimensions of moral knowing, feeling, will and behavior in both private and public spheres.*" Moreover, the program focuses on "core ethical values" and "codes of behavior". The former stresses both the importance of virtues and the process of moral judgment, feeling and action. The latter stresses the norms and strategies to implement core ethical values into various contexts. According to the aforementioned definitions, the program follows the cultural legacy of Taiwanese history because virtues and codes of behavior had existed in moral and character education curriculum and school discipline for a long time. Furthermore, the program adopted from cognitive-developmental approach of moral and character education, theory of virtue ethics and several comprehensive character education programs implemented in the USA, such as Character Education Partnership (CEP) addressing "*Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education*", and transformed them into Taiwanese educational system. Therefore, the MCEIP is an organic integration of Taiwanese tradition and international innovation to rebuild legitimacy and interdisciplinary approaches of modern moral and character education in a learning society.

4. How to connect theory and practice to improve quality in a postmodern society

Aronowitz and Giroux (1991, p.187) argues that postmodern education demands *"the reconstruction of a view of language and theory that establishes the groundwork for viewing schooling and education as a form of cultural politics, as a discourse that draws its meaning from the social, cultural, and economic context in which it operates."* Based on this argument, the Taiwanese MCEIP is truly a product of political discourse and negotiation on the nature of moral and character education from different perspectives of scholars, representatives of teachers, parents and educational organizations. The author, as a drafter of the MCEIP and a consultant of the TMOE, attended more than fifteen meetings to discuss with different interest groups before policy-making in 2004 and revision in 2009. There were several topics debated at the meetings, such as what should be the title of this program (moral education, character education, or moral and character education), what kind of content should be included in this program (civic education, human rights education, gender equality education, service learning etc.), and which virtues should be listed in this program for an example (traditional or modern values, local or international values). In short, the MCEIP has become a broad umbrella to include various arguments and paradigms through discourse, compromise and revision.

Moreover, the practice of the program in schools shows its diversities and chaos, even the award-winning schools, some traditional and some progressive, some anti-democratic and some liberal, due to limitations of policy advocacy and teacher training for school administrative staff and teachers. Lee (2009) analyzed the award-winning schools and discovered several problems. One problem was that some principals and teachers defined moral and character education as "morality is just to do it", so they usually emphasized the norms for daily conduct and good habits (e.g. politeness, cleaning and order), and tended to rely on traditional Confucian values (e.g. filial piety, frugality, respect for teachers). These definitions oversimplify and limit the depth and breadth of modern and research-based moral and character education. Another problem was several award-winning schools cooperated with religious organizations to implement their school moral and character education. However, schools may need to show care on how to prevent religious preaching from infusing into school education according to Taiwanese "Basic Education Law" or from indoctrinating students to be compliant and obedient. The other problem was that most schools only focused on students' achievement but neglected adults' behavior or positive school culture building. Schools need to improve the role models and professions on moral and character education for teachers and administrators in order to establish a moral and sustainable school culture with justice, caring and developmental discipline.

Finally, some Taiwanese school administrators, teachers and parents found it hard to accept an idea of research-based moral and character education. They often borrowed from their own or others' experiences and established culture to plan and implement the moral programs and activities but lacked theoretical bases or specific educational objectives. Some of them also excluded academic research because there was thought to be a significant gap between theory and practice and most theories were not easily transplanted from abroad. Therefore, the evaluation indicators of moral and character education, listed in the second edition of the MCEIP, faced some critiques and obstacles to enforce. One myth for character and moral and character education in Taiwan is that "an evaluation for moral and character education is useless, unworkable or overly formalistic". Therefore, schools seldom had scientific evaluation for their curricula or activities of moral and character education.

IV. Conclusion

From a reflection on the Taiwanese experience, several implications and suggestions for moral and character education are provided as follows: 1. There are certain old questions regarding moral and character education field, such as why be moral and virtuous, what is moral and character education, who teaches morality and virtues, and how to implement moral and character education, not yet clarified. 2. There are some emerging issues regarding moral and character education field, such as new topics and moral dilemma in bioethics, environmental ethics, and information ethics, need to be answered. 3. As there is a close connection between politics, culture and moral/character education, how to balance universal values and local characteristics of moral and character education needs attention. 4. In order to facilitate an exchange of ideas on moral and character education, it is encouraged to publish related papers and books, to hold regional and international conferences and to construct a digital network both nationally and internationally.

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