

Development And Transformation of Moral Education in Japan

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Abstract. Over the past century, moral education in Japan has undergone significant transformations, particularly in the context of globalization. This essay explores the main components of the three forms of Japanese moral education: specialized moral courses, subject-based moral education, and special activities. It argues that Japanese moral education exemplifies the processes of localization, nationalization, and globalization through three key qualities. First, there is the integration of Eastern and Western philosophical ideas, reflecting a blend of traditional Confucian values with modern Western democratic principles. Second, the promotion of collaboration between families, communities, and schools is emphasized, creating a comprehensive support system for students' moral development. Third, there is the fusion of local characteristics with international perspectives, ensuring that moral education is both culturally relevant and globally aware. These qualities highlight Japan's dynamic approach to moral education, showing how it has evolved to meet the changing demands of a globalized world while retaining its unique.

Keywords: moral education, Japan, evolution, characters.

1. Introduction

Moral education is simply education with respect to a specific topic (Dominik, 2023), and many believe that moral education is a good candidate for a mechanism that causes moral progress. (Rehren1, 2022). In Japan, the moral education has revolved over the past century. As the official website of the Ministry of Education, Culture , Sports, Scicence, And technology-Japan shows, Japan's moral education policies have been continuously reformed and updated, throughout the history of moral education reforms, many factors have had an impact on Japan's moral education policies, and the website highlights that “ It is very important for children to acquire the morality of the norms consciousness such as the mind to cherish life, the mind to think of others, the judgment of good and evil.”(mext.go.jp). Nevertheless, given the fact that the reform of Japanese moral education influenced by some factors, the in-depth relation between Japanese moral education with local/nation/global factors has rarely been investigated. This essay will thus investigate this relationship, examining the forms and qualities of Japanese moral education.

We have explored various of outlook and definition of moral education, and this paper will use the definition of Professor Kazuyuki. "Moral education" is a new concept and term that emerged in modern times. In the 1770s, the German philosopher Kant referred to education aimed at cultivating free individuals in accordance with moral principles as "morlische Erziehung." Concurrently, Pestalozzi, a contemporary of Kant, also used the term "moral education," and the British educator Spencer explicitly divided education into "intellectual education," "moral education," and "physical education" in his work "Education: Intellectual, Moral, and Physical."Professor Kazuyuki Hashimoto of Miyazaki University in Japan provided the following interpretation of moral education in his work "Issues and Prospects for Creatively Advancing Today's Moral Education": "Moral education is the core of character formation and can be considered the culmination of education. Its success or failure holds significant importance in determining the success or failure of education."

2. The Evolution and Reforms of Moral Education in Japan : From Historical Roots to Modern Developments

The uneven development of politics, economy, and culture during Japan's modernization process has resulted in a series of social contradictions. The Japanese government considers the

modernization of moral education as a crucial strategy to address these contradictions, continually adapting the content, concepts, models, environments, methods, and approaches of moral education to align with the evolving requirements of societal modernization.

Moral education in Japan has its roots deeply entrenched in historical influences, initially stemming from Chinese ideals and later being shaped by American educational theories in modern times. Throughout history, Japanese culture and moral standards have been heavily influenced by Confucian thought. Certain Confucian values and ethical perspectives have become entrenched as moral norms and are ingrained in the national psyche among the Japanese populace. Hence, early Japanese moral education was imbued with strong Confucian ethical ideologies. Scholar Reischauer (1977), in his seminal work "The Japanese" notes that contemporary Japanese are evidently no longer the 'disciples of Confucius and Mencius' in the sense of their ancestors from the Tokugawa era, yet they still retain permeations of Confucian values and ethics.

Upon examining the official website of the Ministry of education, culture, sports, science, and technology-Japan (https://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/hakusho/1420041_00011.htm). It is clearly that has undergone a series of reforms. These reforms have continually adjusted the content and methods of moral education to address the changing needs of society.

In the modern era, post-World War II Japan heavily relied on the United States, thus being influenced by the pragmatic educational philosophy of John Dewey and democratic educational ideals. During this period, Japanese school education advocated for the holistic development of intellect, morality, and physique, with intellectual education taking precedence. This aligns with the post-war American-led transformation of Japan and the country's democratization process.

In response to Japan's national circumstances and the evolving times, the country has implemented a series of moral education reforms, continuously adjusting the content of moral education in alignment with the education laws and regulations that have been established, significant achievements have been made in this regard.

Prior to the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan predominantly implemented a form of holistic moral education guided by Confucian ideology. This education emphasized collectivism over individualism and prioritized national and collective interests over individual freedom. This spirit of dedication to the group played a significant role during wartime and Japan's economic ascent.

Following the Meiji Restoration, Japan began extensively adopting Western scientific technology and cultural ideas. Western democratic principles and individualism began to influence Japanese moral education. In 1871, the Japanese Ministry of Education was established. Drawing inspiration from France, it introduced the first moral education curriculum in school education called "Shushin". Textbooks were compiled uniformly by the Ministry of Education, incorporating Confucian thought and introducing translated works on Western ethical morals and legal concepts, including the indoctrination of nationalistic militaristic ideology among citizens.

In October 1890, Emperor Meiji promulgated the "Imperial Rescript on Education," which emphasized the role of moral education in politics. Moral education continued to revolve around the "Shushin" curriculum.

In 1891, the Japanese government issued a new "Elementary School Regulations Outline," emphasizing moral education and the cultivation of "children's good hearts," "nurturing their moral sentiments," and "imparting practical methods of humanity."

In December 1945, in accordance with the directive from the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers to "cease moral education, Japanese history, and geography courses," the pre-war moral education practiced in Japan came to an end.

Post-World War II, under the influence of the United States, Japan underwent educational reforms that integrated Western democratic ideals with Japanese moral traditions. During this period, moral education primarily served political and societal needs under the reign of the Japanese emperor.

In 1947, the Japanese government promulgated the "Fundamental Law of Education," prioritizing moral education in educational reforms. It declared the purpose of education to be the "completion of

personality," aiming to cultivate "nation builders with complete personalities" by integrating individual values into societal values.

Soon after, the conservative party proposed amendments to the "Fundamental Law of Education" to align it with the Japanese constitution, thereby further strengthening the political function of education. Some aspects of the amendments downplayed citizens' rights while reinforcing their obligations, drawing criticism from many scholars at the time. Under American influence, the "Fundamental Law of Education" excessively emphasized the economic value orientation of education.

In 1958, the Ministry of Education introduced "moral education time" in elementary and middle school curricula and "social studies" in high school curricula, along with publishing the "Guidelines for Learning - Morality" for elementary and middle schools.

In 1966, the Central Education Council released "The Desired Japanese," outlining the qualities of an ideal personality from across various roles, including individuals, family members, societal members, and Japanese citizens.

Subsequently, the economic prosperity brought about by rapid economic development fostered hedonism and selfishness in Japan. Consequently, Japan has faced a series of social problems, such as rising youth crime rates. From 1971 to 1989, Japan implemented its third moral education reform, rearranging the components of school education and placing moral education at the forefront. This reform emphasized the crucial role of moral education in cultivating spiritually rich individuals.

With the continuous advancement of information technology, information ethics have gained widespread attention globally. In 1982, Japan proposed to become an international nation, and the term "information ethics" first appeared in the revised "Guidelines for Learning," reflecting Japan's response to the globalization of information.

In 1984, Japan established a temporary Education Reevaluation Committee without the involvement of the Central Education Council, vigorously promoting neoliberal policies in the education sector.

In February 1989, when revising the curriculum guidelines for elementary and middle schools, moral education was once again placed prominently, addressing "spiritual neglect in children" and proposing "spiritual education."

In 1996, the Central Education Council proposed cultivating children's survival skills in a relaxed environment, formally juxtaposing "survival skills" with "spiritual education," and emphasizing the cultivation of "spiritually rich Japanese individuals."

In June 2006, the Abe administration formulated a new "Revised Basic Law of Education" based on the old "Fundamental Law of Education."

In the past two decades, against the backdrop of globalization, Japan has strengthened its international education, explicitly aiming to cultivate "Japanese individuals oriented towards the world," emphasizing the "eternal" and "contemporary" aspects of education. With the vigorous development of international exchanges and urbanization, Japan has faced issues such as indifference in interpersonal relationships, conflicts in values, and a lack of ideals and norms among youth. These challenges have led to a surge in education-related problems, including youth suicide and school bullying. To address these pressing social issues, in 2015, the Japanese Ministry of Education formally announced the implementation of "moral education subjectification." In 2016, additional topics such as bullying and new internationalization issues were included. "Moral education subjectification" was fully implemented in 2018, with the subject named "Special Subject: Morality," and schools using nationally approved textbooks titled "Our Morality" for teaching.

In 2018, the revision of the "Guidelines for Learning in Elementary and Middle Schools" defined information literacy as one of the three major skills that elementary and middle school students should develop.

Looking at the development trajectory of moral education in Japan, it is evident that Japan considers moral education as a crucial pillar for promoting its economic development, with profound political implications. Each step of moral education reform has been geared towards serving the

nation by addressing social issues. Globalization, internationalization, and informatization have continuously impacted traditional cultural values in Japan, prompting ongoing transformations in moral education. The goals of moral education have transitioned from being society-oriented to a balanced focus on both societal and individual perspectives.

In summary, Japan's moral education policy has evolved by integrating historical traditions with modern influences, undergoing continuous reforms to meet political and social needs, and diversifying its educational content and methods. Influenced by deep-rooted Confucian values, Western educational theories, changing political contexts, social issues, and the pressures of globalization and informatization, these policies reflect a dynamic response to the complexities of modern society.

3. Approaches of Moral Education in Japan

Examining the emphasized content of moral education reform in Japan as referred, it is evident that there are three implementation approaches: specialized moral education courses, moral education within various subject curricula, and moral education through special activities.

Specialized Moral Education Courses: Before the Meiji Restoration, under the influence of traditional Confucian moral ideology from China, Japan had a subject called "Shushin", which was a form of moral education. In modern times, there are specific moral education courses and social sciences courses. For example, in the "Guidelines for Junior High School Learning," moral education courses are categorized as experiential courses primarily implemented by homeroom teachers. Correspondingly, there are guidelines for high school education as well.

Moral Education within Various Subject Curricula: Moral education is integrated into the teaching content of various subjects. For instance, the texts used in language courses serve not only as materials for language teaching but also as materials for moral education. In high school, moral education is integrated into various subject courses.

Special Activities: These activities primarily focus on social studies and local moral education. Japanese primary schools introduce social studies classes starting from the third grade, which relate to subjects such as land transportation, environmental construction, agriculture, forestry, and fisheries. Various special programs promoting regional education activities for elementary and middle school students are launched, such as the "Rediscovery Plan of Children's Waterfront," "Activities for Getting Closer to the Ocean and Aquaculture," "Forest Clubs," and "Children's Long-term Nature Experience Villages." Local governments collaborate with diverse organizations and industrial sectors to enhance extracurricular moral education activities in elementary and middle schools. Additionally, cross-regional activities such as "Short-term Rural Study Abroad" are organized. Various local industry associations, agricultural associations, traditional industry associations, and non-profit organizations provide opportunities for elementary and middle schools to engage in various educational experiential activities.

Regarding local moral education, Japan has established a multi-faceted social collaboration mechanism, manifested in regional curriculum development and the establishment of integrated learning time. According to statistics from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology on "Moral Education-Related Teaching Materials and Instructional Materials Produced by Each Local Government," among Japan's 47 prefectural-level administrative regions, 43 have created local editions of moral education supplementary materials. Additionally, 84 municipal-level administrative regions and 13 town-level administrative regions have developed materials with regional characteristics.

"Integrated Learning Time" is a comprehensive curriculum format that integrates thematic, comprehensive, and autonomous elements. For example, at Saga University Attached High School, "Integrated Learning Time" includes activities such as "Kyoto Culture and Kyoto Essays," aimed at enabling students to understand the reasons why Kyoto is known as "Heian-kyo" (the city of peace

and tranquility), exploring whether "Heian" reflects Kyoto's urban commercial and industrial features or its ceremonial traditions like the Gion Festival.

Table 1. School Moral Education Content and Approaches

Stage	Form	Education Content	Features
Kindergarten	School Enlightenment & Family Moral Education		
Primary School	School Special Moral Education Courses & Moral Education in Various Subjects & Special Activities	Based on the moral education objectives mentioned above, efforts are being made to enhance the strong connection with moral education through various courses, extracurricular activities, integrated learning time, and special activities. Through systematic and developmental guidance, supplemented by complementary and deepened integration, students are encouraged to recognize moral values and deepen their reflection on their life attitudes. The aim is to cultivate students' ability to practice morality.	The "Guidelines for Primary and Secondary School Education" stipulate that the objective of moral education is to cultivate students' morality.
Secondary School	School Special Moral Education Courses & Moral Education in Various Subjects & Special Activities	The aim is to cultivate students' morality, judgment, awareness of practice, and attitudes; to develop students' rich inner world, promote their understanding of life attitudes, and cultivate their survival abilities; to foster their conscious establishment of correct life views, and cultivate them into citizens with good qualities needed to construct a peaceful and democratic country and society; to nurture students' scientific inquiry spirit, enabling them to deepen their understanding of modern society and humanity from a broad perspective, actively investigate and study the fundamental issues of modern society, and make fair judgments; to cultivate students' correct life views, sound moral judgment, and attitudes.	
University	Moral Education in Various Disciplines	The overall objective is to cultivate individuals who respect human rights, revere life, and are committed to building a democratic society and nation characterized by diverse cultures, while actively contributing to the creation of a peaceful international community as Japanese citizens. Emphasis is placed on fostering attitudes that respect tradition and culture, love the homeland, and show respect for other countries while contributing to peace and development in the international community.	This emphasizes the international and global aspects of moral education.

In summary, moral education in Japan emphasizes the coordination among schools, families, and society, and diversifies the means of moral education. In terms of content, the primary objective of moral education is to achieve the integration of individual values and societal values.

4. Conclusion

Moral education in Japan exhibits the following characteristics: it reflects the national conditions of Japan; it respects students' subjective moral experiences; it combines classroom teaching with practical instruction; moral education is carried out through the collaboration of schools, families, and society; it integrates Western educational ideologies with the nation's traditions and realities, achieving a fusion of nationalism and internationalism; and it displays a strong emphasis on local characteristics.

Japanese scholar Yamashita Shinji posits, Globalization has not led to cultural homogenization, nor does it oppose localization. Instead, globalization has resulted in cultural integration and localization.

Moral education in Japan is influenced by both Eastern Confucianism and Western theories. It continuously evolves within the process of globalization, leveraging its national conditions and natural social resources to develop local moral education and seek more opportunities. Japanese moral education serves as an exemplary model of localization, nationalization, and globalization.

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