

# The Gender and Cultural Differences in Moral Choices under the Trolley Dilemma and the Footbridge Dilemma

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**Abstract.** The Moral judgment is an activity in which an individual measure the moral value of another individual or group's behavior or event according to social moral norms and value measurement standards. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the individual's moral choice from the perspectives of male and female, Eastern and Western cultures. In the face of, for example, the trolley dilemma or the footbridge dilemma, moral judgment is influenced by describing the problem as the number of people that could be saved or killed, whether the action resulting in negative moral consequences is a means to an end or an incidental effect to an end, whether it is intentional or unintentional, the number of reasons, and the relative number of lives that could be saved. Moral judgments from different perspectives will produce different differences. The differences in physiological structure, social attributes, positioning and thinking modes between men and women, and the differences in thinking modes under the influence of Western and Eastern cultural values, all have different psychological reactions to the same event, although the differences in moral choices are not obvious. However, there are obvious differences from the level of individual psychological activities.

**Keywords:** Moral judgement; Gender difference; Cultural values; Psychological activities.

## 1. Introduction

Moral dilemmas are used to measure an individual's moral judgment and reasoning. Comparing the classic trolley dilemma and the footbridge dilemma, the difference between them is that in the trolley dilemma, individuals are more likely to make the choice of sacrificing one person to save the other five people, while in the footbridge dilemma, individuals are more difficult to make the choice of sacrificing one person to save the five others [1]. From the perspective of culture and gender, the purpose of this paper is to summarize the differences between Eastern and Western cultures. Western thought tends to be more rational, objective and simple, while Eastern thought tends to be more perceptual, harmonious and complex. Different cultural backgrounds obviously have an impact on people's moral judgments. Nevertheless, both Easterners and Westerners are more likely to choose not to push fat people in the footbridge dilemma [2]. In addition, from the perspective of gender, women's moral values regard caring for others as their obligation and avoid harm to others, while men's moral values are manifested in a fair attitude towards life and making judgments after rational thinking [3].

In the first part of this paper, two moral dilemmas, namely the trolley dilemma and the footbridge dilemma; the second part of this paper makes a thorough understanding of the similarities and differences of the psychological activities of men and women in the face of moral dilemmas; in the third part, further studies the moral judgments under the social cultures of the East and the West. From the macro cultural perspective to the moral choices made by the physiological gap, the way of thinking gap and the social attribute gap brought about by gender, the different effects of moral factors on individual psychology from more perspectives can be analyzed, promoting the fully understand the relationship between individual psychology and moral background.

## **2. Trolley Dilemma and Footbridge Dilemma**

### **2.1 Trolley Dilemma**

If the driver of a runaway trolley car speeding from a distance continues to drive along the original route, he will hit five people on the road ahead, resulting in the death of five people; if he wants to avoid these five people, he can only turn the trolley car to another fork road, which will cause the death of one person on the fork road [4]. Under the moral proposition of the classic trolley dilemma, most people will choose to sacrifice one person to save five people on the road, and individual moral judgment is influenced by the underlying social background [5] and direction of the task of moral judgment [6]. A moral dilemma and other objective factors, so the number of deaths or lives saved, legal norms, social moral standards and other factors become the primary analysis factors.

### **2.2 Footbridge Dilemma**

Suppose the person is standing on an overpass with a fat man standing next to him, when a tram comes from a distance, but finds that the tram is out of order. If the tram continues to move forward, it will hit five people on the road ahead, resulting in five deaths. If the person wants to save these five people, that have to push the fat man next to the person off the overpass, because only the fat man's weight can stop the tram from moving forward, which will lead to the death of the fat man [7]. Most people will choose not to do anything in the flyover dilemma, which is obviously different from the choice of the tram dilemma.

### **2.3 Summary**

The difference between the two dilemmas is that under the same conditions, the more significant difference is whether the person involved in the footbridge dilemma personally executes the killing for rescue. In the footbridge dilemma, the person involved needs to complete the rescue process through his own media, that is, directly touching causes the death of the fat person, so that five people can be saved. In the 18th century, Hume proposed that emotion is the direct factor driving human moral judgment. In the process of this dilemma, the emotional value of the parties was inspired by the implementation of actions. The first dominant factor became emotion, and the direct emotional response promoted moral choice. Therefore, in the trolley dilemma, when emotion is not the first factor, most people choose to push the pull rod; However, in the footbridge dilemma, after emotion became the first factor, the proportion of people who chose to push fat dropped significantly.

## **3. Differences and causes of gender selection between men and women**

There are obvious differences between men and women in terms of physiological structure and resource allocation. Men pay more attention to social events and are more prominent in rational thinking, logic, space imagination, etc., while women are more meticulous, sensitive and perceptual. In the case of social development up to now, women's concern for moral development has always been poor, including when making experimental measurements and moral judgments, representing the whole human morality from the male moral perspective, ignoring the moral development of women [8]. Therefore, the moral thinking and moral choices brought about by the distinction between men and women are worthy of more extensive differentiation and in-depth study. In terms of psychological activities, the direct moral choices brought about by emotions are obvious.

### **3.1 Commonality**

Kant believes that reason is the only driving force in moral judgment [9]. In the two dilemmas, when the rational factor is the first element, the moral judgment made by men and women is mainly based on the listing and analysis of the objective factors of the matter to obtain the choice that most conforms to the moral judgment.

For example, in the trolley dilemma, men and women face the same situation, and it is more consistent with objective moral judgment to push the lever to save five people at the expense of one person; Once the assumptions in the situation are added and the victim's identity is related to the individual, men and women will also make more complex moral judgments, and individual judgments will be more affected by emotions, especially when the identity of the object changes. Therefore, in the social environment, the change of social roles will directly affect emotions. At this time, the gender difference between men and women will decrease due to the change of social environment and social roles.

### **3.2 Difference**

Carol Gilligan pointed out that there are two orientations in the development of human morality: justice and care [10]. Men tend to be fair while women tend to be caring. Women have been in an unequal environment for a long time in the process of social development and resource allocation. In the process of their moral development, caring for and understanding others, good communication, thinking for others, and emotional experience have become an important part of women's moral judgment. When facing moral problems, the emotional feelings of individuals tend to serve as an important basis for judgment. Women are easily influenced by negative information, on the one hand, because of the different deep cognitive processing caused by the different social roles of men and women, on the other hand, women adopt a more moral judgment mode [11].

For example, in the footbridge dilemma, when men also choose to personally push the fat man to save the other five people, they will be more inclined to the objective and realistic social standards, whether the contradiction between individuals and society will cause negative consequences to individuals because of this behavior; Women, on the other hand, tend to balance the relationship between individuals and others, individuals and society, and others and society before making choices, which is a more perceptual and moral intuitive judgment. The difference between men's and women's psychological activities lies in that men's interest evaluation is greater than emotional value, while women's emotional value is greater than interest evaluation. When the two are in the social environment, the social and cultural background is the main reason for the formation of gender differences in moral development, so moral standards will become potential psychological activities and make corresponding moral judgments.

## **4. Choice in the Context of Eastern and Western Culture**

### **4.1 The Western Culture**

The influence of Western culture is expanding from technology to education to ways of thinking. In terms of thinking, reductionism is the dominant way of thinking in the West. It's a way of thinking that the best way to understand anything is to break it down into its component parts, emphasize the parts rather than the whole, and it's embodied in every corner of Western thought, from physics to genetics to biology and so on [12]. Even in ethics, the 'FELICIFIC CALCULUS' proposed by Jeremy Bentham [13], the father of utilitarianism, means that can calculate which actions are better according to formulas. This simplified way of thinking has effectively promoted the development of science, and many problems with vague boundaries have been liquidated. When dealing with the two dilemmas, a single list-like list can quickly make moral choices, which can be said to be very intuitive, but similarly, the judgment made by ignoring individual feelings is meaningless.

Through objective and rational analysis, that can compare the existing conditions and make a favorable judgment that conforms to the social moral standards. In the simple context of the trolley dilemma, this way of thinking can make quick and popular judgments, which are rigid and controversial once social roles are added or changed. The prominent controversial part of the footbridge dilemma is an important factor in people's decision to push or not to push. The controversy comes from whether the individual himself causes the death of the fat man through active behavior. In this controversial part, in the Western way of thinking, most people will choose by listing,

comparing and judging. If the individual himself becomes a social critic because of pushing the fat man, when they touch the legal boundaries, these individuals will choose not to push fat people.

It can be said that the psychological activities embodied in the way of thinking in Western culture are based on the priority orientation of interest assessment, which is also part of the social moral standards in Western culture, and the influence of both exceeds the individual's emotional value.

## 4.2 The Eastern Culture

The culture of Taoism and Confucianism in the oriental culture (Chinese culture in this paper) has exerted a profound influence on the whole social culture, thinking and morality. The relationship between man and nature emphasized by Taoism and Confucianism is a profound non-dualism [14], that is, Yin and Yang represent two aspects of a unified whole, rather than two things that need to be reconciled. Under such a cultural background, the oriental way of thinking always shows its complexity, things are not a single composition, the individual is one of the important components, the formation of individual thinking is dominated by culture on the one hand, on the other hand, it is influenced by the individual itself, at the same time, the relationship between individual and things is not a single one, individuals affect things, things also affect individuals, individuals and things are independent. It is also interactive, showing a shape similar to a "circle". What is more important is the reverence for nature, which is produced by following the laws of nature [15], not fearless "belief in God", which also extends to the reverence for ancestors.

Thus, it can be seen that the way of thinking under the influence of oriental culture is very difficult to list and analyze the objects of analysis in a logical way. Although such analytical conditions are objective and exist, whether to judge through such objective conditions depends more on the influence of individual intuition. Therefore, the influence from intuition is a more important factor to consider when making moral judgment under the oriental thinking. Moral intuition refers to the subject's deep understanding and application of the established moral principles under the established moral behavior norms, and the first reaction choice when an emergency occurs, rather than the choice under logical deduction and rational thinking.

In the trolley dilemma, most people still choose to push the wrench without additional assumptions, and once the assumptions appear, the way of thinking and emotional experience behind intuition will be the dominant factor, thus affecting the choice. Similarly, the controversial part of the footbridge dilemma determines that the first factor of most people changes from rational thinking to intuition, and that some people are influenced by "letting nature take its course", that is, natural arrangement and determination of individual fate, and decide not to push fat people. In this process, the nature of the other five people will have a great impact if they are tied to the track. That means that the actions of these individuals are beyond the laws of nature, and if they are free to walk and appear on the track, it will become the consequence of these people's spontaneous actions, not the accident caused by "malfunction".

Therefore, although compared with the trolley dilemma, most people in the Oriental culture also make the choice not to push the fat man in the footbridge dilemma, but their dominant behavior is not because of the judgment of objective conditions, but because of the "consequences" caused by the fat man's autonomous behavior. This typical emotional value as the dominant psychological activity is the embodiment of social moral standards under the Oriental culture, and the individual's psychological activity is that moral standards and emotional values are greater than interest assessment.

## 4.3 Summary

Morality has the attribute of culture, and the choice of moral behavior is the choice made under the influence of culture, while in the process of constant choice, it is in turn transforming the cultural system. There are obvious differences in the way of thinking under different cultural backgrounds, but in specific cases, whether it is the trolley dilemma or the footbridge dilemma, most people still choose to pull down the wrench to save more people in the trolley dilemma, and choose not to push

the fat man in the footbridge dilemma. However, the reasons for the choice under culture are indeed different. The logic of Western culture is clearer and more rigorous, which is reasoning and judgment with factual basis, while Eastern culture is more subjective intuition guided by nature than concrete analysis of things. This is not only the morality under the influence of culture, but also the culture changed by morality.

From the three aspects of social moral standards, interest evaluation and emotional value, the moral judgment in Western culture is the combination of social moral standards and interest evaluation, while the moral judgment in Eastern culture is the combination of social moral standard and emotional value.

## 5. Conclusion

Through the analysis of individual's moral choice from the perspectives of male and female, Eastern and Western cultures, this paper recognizes that the order of individual's psychological activities is different from different perspectives, and the multiplicity of reasons for the differences not only enables researcher to better study the psychological activities of individuals and even social groups in the face of moral dilemmas, but also enables researcher to better study them. But also have a deeper understanding of the process of moral development.

Through the analysis of individual moral judgment to find that men's rational thinking leads men to make moral choices that are more in line with interest assessment, while women's perceptual thinking leads women to make moral choices that are more in line with emotional values, and the moral judgment of both sexes deeply reflects social moral standards, and at the same time acts on the social culture that produces social moral standards; The difference of social moral standards produced under different cultural backgrounds is obvious. The Western thinking is more objective and rational, which is in line with the social moral standards of interest evaluation. The Eastern thinking is also objective, but more perceptual, which is more inclined to the social moral standards of emotional value. Moral choice cannot be separated from moral culture, and morality and culture are mutually influenced and interacted.

The moral judgments produced in different cultures can be similar, but from the perspective of individual psychological activities, the differences are obvious. Therefore, the study of the influence of different social moral cultures and moral standards on individual psychological activities and on the psychological activities of men and women can help researcher better understand the conflict and integration of civilizations and the contradiction between men and women, and can also bring about the value significance of psychology, sociology, culture, philosophy and other fields.

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