

Cultural Differences in Moral Judgement

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Abstract. Morality can be explained as an innate sense of morality, a basic sense of fairness and a basic sense of justice. Moral judgments refer to people's positive or negative evaluations of what they see and hear and the actions of others. Moral judgments are affected by different factors. Cultural differences are one of the factors that can influence moral judgments. This article summarized and analyzed recent research regarding the impact of different cultures on moral judgments. The influence of culture on moral judgment was discussed from three aspects: cross-cultural similarity, differences across cultures, and developmental perspective. In the part of cross-cultural similarity, the influence of different genders and ages in different cultures on moral judgments was discussed. In the part of differences across cultures, the article compared the differences in moral judgments of participants from Eastern and Western cultures. The differences between collectivists and individualists in their moral judgments were also discussed. In the part of developmental perspective, how different cultures shape people's moral values and standards of moral judgment were analyzed and discussed. Through the analysis of recent research, it can be concluded that across all cultures, women and the elderly rely more on emotion when making moral judgments, while men rely more on reasoning. Besides, both collectivists and individualists were willing to punish violators when faced with immorality. Both collectivists and individualists were harsher when criminals were members of their own race. Individualists, after reflection, would reduce their dislike of offenders, but collectivists would not be affected by reflection. There are some limitations of recent studies. These include a lack of longitudinal comparisons and experimental procedures using assumed scenarios. The addition of follow-up experiments and simulated behavioral scenarios in future studies can solve these problems. At present, there is a lack of research regarding the influence of cultural differences on moral judgment in the research field. This paper fills this gap by analyzing the standards of moral judgment shaped by different cultures.

Keywords: Morality, Moral Judgments, Culture.

1. Introduction

People have different definitions of morality. In the preface of "Just Babies," morality is seen as an innate sense of morality, compassion for those around, a basic sense of fairness and a basic sense of justice [1]. Moral judgments are just like one's aesthetic judgments. People make positive or negative comments about what they see and hear, and about other people's behaviors. Moral judgment is influenced by different factors, among which cultural difference is one of the factors that affect people's standard of moral judgment. People from different cultural backgrounds may hold very different principles. In a collectivist society, people are perceived as subordinates to a social group, such as a state, a nation, or a race [2]. In this culture, group interests are prioritized over individual pursuits, and people are encouraged and appreciated for sacrificing their own interests for the good of the whole group. In contrast, people in individualistic societies focus more on their own rights and freedom, and individuals' moral worth is emphasized [3]. In general, people who grow up in collectivist societies value the bond between each other more and perceive themselves and other group members as a unity, while people from individualistic backgrounds pay more attention to advocate for their own rights. Understanding the impact of cultural differences can help people establish more appropriate standards for moral judgement, which is conducive to regulating human behavior and optimizing social environment.

In the late 18th and 19th centuries, with the end of the French Revolution, the birth of the United States, the end of slavery and the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, people's opinions had changed. Among them, Bentham's utilitarianism influenced many people. According to Paul's article,

utilitarianism requires that whenever people have a choice between alternative actions on social policies, they must choose the one that has the best overall consequences for everyone concerned [4]. In the famous trolley problem, when the trolley had to go to a certain track to hurt people, most people chose to move the train to a less crowded track to minimize the damage. Sacrificing the few to save the many is the way to maximize happiness, which explains Bentham's utilitarianism.

Kant's absolute moral rules also affect people's understanding and view of morality. Moral obligation does not depend on people's specific desires. Everyone has a responsibility and obligation to follow certain rules, no matter what special needs and desires people have [4]. Unswervingly following every rule is what people should do, such as refusing to lie. Kant believes that people should not lie under any circumstances, because people do not know whether the result caused by lying is good or not.

In short, utilitarianism enables people to consider the opinions of most people when making moral decisions. Absolute moral rules let people stick to their principles and act according to them. Differences in values across cultures may lead to differences in moral judgment. Nowadays, there are few articles in the academia that study the influence of cultural differences on moral judgment. In order to fill in the academic gap, the review discussed moral judgment from the aspects of cross-cultural similarity, differences across cultures, and developmental perspective.

2. Moral judgement in different cultures

2.1. Cross-cultural similarity in moral judgement

Women are identified as emotional beings in all cultures, while men are described as rational beings in all cultures. Women may be more influenced by emotions when making moral judgments than men. Mohammad et al. 's research recruited 33,691 participants from 67 countries to study the effect of gender on moral foundations [5]. Researchers used operationalization of a moral foundation – a person's attitudes and perceptions about caring, fairness, loyalty, authority, and purity to collect data. The experimenters also collected country-level data from independent international organizations and analyzed the role of national culture, economy, and gender in the moral judgments of different cultures. The results showed that women in all cultures scored higher than men on measures of caring, fairness and purity, possibly due to their higher empathy. When it came to loyalty and authority, gender differences were quite fluid across cultures. These results confirmed that women in all cultures were more likely to be emotionally influenced in their moral judgments because they were more empathic. Therefore, compared with some more rational moral foundations, such as authority, women scored higher on emotional aspects of moral foundation, such as caring, fairness and purity.

The elderly and women are considered sensual beings in all countries. Older people are thought to be more emotional and susceptible to emotional factors than younger adults. Men are more likely than women to rely on reasoning to make moral judgments. Arutyunova et al. 's study discussed whether culture, gender, and age affect a person's moral judgment [6]. People from Russia were divided into the Eastern group. People from the United States, Britain and Canada were divided into the Western group. Except for the two control scenarios, the remaining 30 scenarios depicted a person sacrificing a few people for the sake of having more people. Participants were asked to rate the behavior in the scenarios which a few people were sacrificed to save many. By analyzing ratings of the behavior in the hypothetical scenario, the experimenters found that men in both cultures were more likely than women to make utilitarian decisions, i.e., sacrificing the few to save the many. Utilitarian judgments tend to diminish as people get older. Older people in both cultures showed a greater reluctance to accept utilitarian judgments than younger people. These results confirmed that older people and women in all cultures relied more heavily on emotional thinking when making moral judgments. Both groups were less willing to hurt other people because they had more empathy. Men, on the other hand, relied more on reason when making moral judgments and therefore made decisions that maximize the benefits.

2.2. Differences in moral judgement across cultures

People in developed countries are thought to be generally educated and have higher moral qualities. People in developing countries are considered not all educated and there is space for improvement in humanities education. People in developed countries may tend to be more rational in making moral judgments than people in developing countries. McNamara et al.'s research discussed whether the relative importance of intention and consequence in moral judgments is influenced in Yashawa Island, Indo-Fijians, and North Americans [7]. The experiment consisted of four short stories, all of which involved some immoral behavior, such as stealing or hurting others. The results showed that the Yashawans paid less attention to intent and more attention to outcome than other groups. In North America, intentions were heavily emphasized. This may be due to cultural differences between the Yashawans' opaque mental norms and the North American mind-centered concept of the relationship between mind and behavior. Mental state reasoning can explain the mode of moral judgment shaped by society in cultural transmission. It turned out that people in developed countries relied on reasoning to the same extent as people in developing country to make moral judgment. The concept of human rights in developed countries made them focus not only on the results of things, but also on the causes of things.

Eastern culture emphasizes the harmony of group, family and society. Compared with Eastern culture, Western culture pays more attention to maintaining independence, freedom, human rights and so on. When confronted with immorality, people in both cultures are expected to stop it. The paper of Pedersen et al. believed that the probability of third-party punishment appearing in real life is lower than that in experiments [8]. Only when third party perceives collateral damage would they punish the offender. Participants from the United States and Japan were asked to describe the last time they saw someone hurt another person, and whether and how they helped them. The participants then had to decide, if the experimenter could give a sum of money to the participant, the victim, or the perpetrator, to whom the participant would give the money. The results showed that both groups from the United States were more likely than the Japanese students to intervene or punish violence. When a third party attached importance to the welfare of the victim, anger was generated and punishment was imposed. These results suggested that not all cultures were willing to stop or punish immoral behavior. Compared with Japanese participants, American participants were more willing to help victims of immoral behavior, which may be related to Western countries' emphasis on human rights.

In collectivist societies, collective interests take precedence over individual pursuits. In contrast, people in an individualistic society pay more attention to their own rights and freedoms and emphasize individual moral values. In general, people who grew up in collectivist societies value their connections to each other more and consider themselves and other group members as a whole, whereas people from individualistic backgrounds may care about people's own rights. Ziyang et al. discussed the influence of adults growing up in different cultural backgrounds in third-party punishment. They found that people would want to punish their ethnic groups quickly and spontaneously, which was universal in culture [9]. When participants made thoughtful decisions, participants from different cultures showed different behaviors. Participants from Chinese and Western cultures played a game about economic distribution. In the experiment, members of the same race and different races would propose fair or unfair allocation of funds. Participants had to observe their proposals and decide whether to punish the selfish member and how much money they wanted to deduct from the member. The results showed that participants raised in both Chinese and Western cultures could not help but criticize the internal group in a reflexive mode (rapid, spontaneous). However, in reflective mode (which occurs more slowly and diligently), the Western participants were less biased toward the in-group after reflection. Chinese participants' reflection may not change their in-group bias due to their adherence to the cultural values of group harmony, which is closely related to cultural expectations. The results confirmed that people living in collectivist countries, such as the Chinese participants, were more likely to focus on unethical behavior within their own group, which was unaffected by reflection. Collectivist people were willing to sacrifice their own interests

for the interests of the group. Therefore, when they saw in-group members destroying the interests of the group, they felt angrier and punish in-group members more severely.

In a collectivist society, people are encouraged and admired for sacrificing their own interests for the good of the whole group. People in an individualistic society more likely to pay more attention to their own interests and rights. When unethical behavior occurs, people in collectivism were more willing to sacrifice its own interests to protect the interests of the group. Rabellino et al.'s experiment studied altruistic punishment and antisocial punishment behavior in China and Italia by having participants in different countries perform third-party punishment experiments in the dictator game [10]. Player A was the dictator who had the initial points (20 points) and can choose to share them with Player B. Player B had no points and had to wait passively to see if it is shared. The nationalities and groups of players A and B in the game were known by Player C. Player C's task was to observe the behavior in the game and decided whether to punish the dictator with his own number of points (4 points). The results showed that participants in both groups engaged in altruistic punishment, in which participants were willing to spend some of their points to punish selfish rule-breakers. It turned out that participants in both cultures were willing to sacrifice their own interests to defend justice. When collectivism discovered that the victim was of their own race, they would pay more to punish the rule-breakers. Collectivists acted this way because they had been taught from an early age to put the collective interest first. Their education and society influenced their behavior.

People living in modern cities are generally thought to be well-educated and have higher moral quality. People who live in small communities often assumed that not all people are educated. Participants from larger cities relied more on reasoning to make moral judgments than participants from smaller communities. Many studies have shown that considering a person's intentions and motives is a common human practice when making moral judgments. Barrett et al. argued that intentions cannot influence moral judgments in all cultures. Because most hypotheses about intentions influencing moral judgments were made in western countries, where participants tend to be rich and educated (WEIRD). Barrett et al., by studying eight small-scale societies and two western societies, discussed the impact of intention on moral judgment in small-scale societies [11]. Participants were recruited from eight small-scale societies with traditional hunting, gathering, herding or gardening traditions, or from two western societies (one urban and one rural). Participants were told four stories and asked to answer questions about morality based on the story. By asking participants to rate stories, the experimenters could measure the impression of intention on moral judgments across cultures. The results showed that the effect of intention on moral judgment varied greatly in different societies and situations. In some cases, intention could not influence a person's moral judgment. The dimensions of cross-cultural differences in moral judgments may have important implications for understanding cultural differences in wrongful behavior. The results showed that moral judgments were not affected by community size, but were affected by different cultures. The culture in which one lives can shape one's judgment of the morality of one's actions. Different cultures shape different standards of moral judgment, which also leads to different standards people rely on in moral judgment.

3. A developmental perspective

The two developed countries (The United States and Canada) from North America have abundant natural resources and excellent educational resources. Compared with the two developed countries, South Africa, China and Turkey are slightly lacking in educational resources. Children from two North American countries were more likely to share than those from three developing countries. Cowell et al. studied children's attitudes and behaviors toward sharing under five cultural backgrounds (United States, Canada, South Africa, China and Turkey), and discussed the factors that affect people's moral cognition [12]. All children were asked to complete questions about moral judgment by playing games or watching scenes. The children watched videos and were asked to rate the people in the scenes. In addition, experimenters measured the generosity of children in the children's version of the dictator game by recording the number of stickers they shared. The results

showed that children in South Africa and Turkey were less likely to share than children in other countries, and children in China were less likely to share than children in Canada. Therefore, children's moral cognition and generosity were influenced by different cultural backgrounds. The results confirmed that children in the United States and Canada were more generous than those in South Africa, China and Turkey. This result was probably because a society with sufficient resources reduced the desire to compete for resources, which made children more willing to share. In addition, children in developing countries did not show the same desire to share, suggesting that children's generosity was influenced by different cultures.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, there are similarities and differences in the standards of moral judgment shaped by different cultures. Older people and women in all cultures tend to be very emotional in their moral judgments, and they become susceptible to emotional factors because they have more empathy. Women in all cultures pay more attention to emotional aspects of moral foundation, such as caring, fairness, and purity. Men showed that they relied more on reasoning to make moral judgments than women's emotions, allowing them to make more profit-maximizing decisions. Besides, people in developed countries are more rational when making moral judgments. They not only consider the consequences but also pay attention to the intentions behind. This is because people in developed countries pay attention to human thoughts and human right more. In addition, compared with people of Eastern culture, people of Western culture are more willing to stop immoral behaviors when they encounter them. It may be because Western countries attach importance to human rights, so they are more willing to safeguard justice. In the face of immoral behavior, both collectivists and individualists are willing to sacrifice part of their own interests to punish those who break the rules. Both collectivists and individualists are harsher on transgressors when they find out that someone within the group is behaving immorally. However, when introspected, individualists reduce punishments for violators, but collectivists do not. Last but not the least, under the influence of different cultures, people shape different standards of moral judgment. Culture influences people's moral values.

There are some limitations in the recent studies of morality and culture as well. The lack of follow-up studies is one. Existing studies on cultural differences and moral judgments have used horizontal comparisons of data from participants at the same point in time, which can only yield phased results. In addition, most experiments on moral research now require participants to imagine a scene, which may lead to a discrepancy between the scene imagined by participants and the reality, resulting in inaccurate results. In future studies, the experimenters could add follow-up experiments to investigate a person's moral judgement at different ages. Increased chase experiments can study overall changes in people's morals. Besides, when designing experiments, experimenters can simulate real scenes to make participants experience more real and vivid scenes, which is conducive to improving the accuracy of results. Finally, this paper analyzed the influence of cultural differences on moral judgment, which can contribute to relevant future research regarding morality and culture.

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