

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of 2020, the world has experienced several waves of a global pandemic that has continually challenged our lives as human beings, and more specifically our reliance on moral education. Therefore, at this historic moment, APNME scholars are reflecting on the most relevant moral issues and thinking further about how this global pandemic has given us a clearer understanding of the need to promote moral education. This book is a collection of APNME members' reflections and collective memories regarding this event.

During this challenging period, different countries and cultures have adopted different strategies, rules, and methods for dealing with various problems arising from the global pandemic, and people from different areas have also had different responses to the continually changing nature of the pandemic. As a result, people's ideas about and conceptions of morality have also been changing. Scholars and educators in the field of moral education have been especially influenced. Moreover, those coming from different cultural traditions have naturally responded in different ways to the current urgency of dealing with the COVID-19 situation, leading to still further moral issues and ethical dilemmas.

In this book, authors from different countries and cultural settings provide their collective data, analyses and interpretations regarding the social and educational phenomena and related moral issues tied to the pandemic. The various analytic approaches include qualitative and quantitative methods, and both micro and macro perspectives. The book chapters comprise psychological, philosophical, sociological, and comparative cultural studies. When the initial outbreak of COVID-19 appeared in 2020, the APNME committee quickly decided to compile this book. Our 2021 APNME online conference was an additional source for APNME members' reflections on these historic events. However, collecting scholars' completed chapters, editing the English text, and making other improvements took a considerable amount of time. We hope this book will not only record the APNME's collective memories of the pandemic, but also help us to think more generally about how to best promote moral education in current and future societies, especially those in the Asia-Pacific region.

Four chapters report empirical studies by researchers in Mainland China who collected students' and teacher's experiences during the global pandemic. They clearly show how the pandemic has changed children's and teachers' behavior patterns and moral values in that country. In one of these studies, Caiping Sun and her colleagues developed a questionnaire to survey how the pandemic was influencing children's understanding of moral values in China's Hubei and Jiangsu provinces. In 2020 Hubei province and its capital city, Wuhan, were severely affected by COVID-19, much more so than Jiangsu province and its capital, Nanjing. This research shows that children from Hubei province had more negative emotional and physical reactions to COVID-19 than children from Jiangsu province. In addition, awareness of the value and importance of the society's good health, unity, and solidarity increased during the pandemic period.

Jin Xie's and Yifang Wang's chapter describes their investigation of how the pandemic influenced the conduct of online classes dealing with moral education in primary and secondary schools in Beijing, and how these classes advanced the healthy functioning of school-family partnerships. During this period, teachers and parents adopted digital platforms to better communicate with each other and make their relationships more cooperative. Moreover, humanistic and life-centered themes, social norms related to the pandemic and its social controls, and positive values such as empathy and caring were further emphasized.

Hongyan Cheng's research project included interviews of six female professors who worked in Wuhan. The professors had to face many new challenges in their daily life during all four stages of the pandemic: the initial period of Wuhan's closure, the period of online classes, the period when the ban was lifted, and the period when people's routine life could be resumed. The pandemic gave these female scholars not only greater difficulties in their family and professional lives, but also new opportunities to reflect on and perhaps change their status in the academic society.

The fourth chapter by an author from Mainland China describes Meiyee Wong's empirical exploration of the situation in Hong Kong during the pandemic. She reports that even people who experienced negative emotions such as worry, anxiety, and stress still clearly retained at a high level positive values such as caring, empathy,

sharing, commitment, courage, and responsibility. Moreover, she came to better understand people's everyday life and the everyday dilemmas they faced.

As we know, moral education has been greatly emphasized in the Asia-Pacific region for a long time. Among the countries in this area, Japan in particular is known for its moral education. However, the pandemic seems to have created many new challenges for moral education in Japan. Yasunari Hayashi's chapter not only highlights the effectiveness of online or hybrid classes in Japan, but also exposes the contradictions between Japan's moral education curriculum and social phenomena such as expressions of the Olympic spirit and the commercialization of sports games. He further distinguishes two Japanese folklore terms, "*hare*" (celebration days) and "*ke*" (ordinary days) to analyze the moral problems created by the Olympics being held in Japan. Finally, he suggests that Japan's moral education should focus more on a behavioral orientation and social cooperation.

In addition to Yasunari Hayashi, whose chapter notes how Japan's cultural background has affected people's reactions to the pandemic, the authors of two other chapters based their comparative studies on cultural factors. Visha Balakrishnan compared how different cultures have influenced people's behavior in Japan, Malaysia, and Indonesia during the pandemic. For example, she notes the significance of certain Japanese cultural characteristics, including the fact that the Japanese tend to have fewer physical interactions with one another than do people in Malaysia and Indonesia, where Islam and various other religions or belief systems play a significant role in citizens' common life. Therefore, it seemed easier for the Japanese than for the Malaysians to follow the new norms required by the pandemic. Even though the pandemic has confronted us with many challenges, moral education can clearly help us form new behavior patterns and adopt positive perspectives on our "new normal" society.

Another comparative study is described in the chapter by Yan Huo and Yong Guo, who analyzed Chinese and British virtue languages. Specifically, she discovered much commonality between the key virtues emphasized in speeches by Chinese President Xi's and the British Queen's speeches and those found in neo-Aristotelian virtue-ethics language, while noting other relevant similarities and differences between the two speeches. For example, the speeches highlight that while the virtues

of appreciation, responsibility/duty, helping others, and compassion are prominent in both cultural contexts, the virtue of modesty has higher billing in Chinese society, whereas the virtues of pride and humor are emphasized more in British society. Here again, we find that whereas some values, such as goodness, may seem to be universal, others clearly expose cultural differences.

Besides Yan Huo and Yong Guo's chapter presenting their analysis of virtue terms used in the pandemic period, the book contains another philosophically oriented chapter by Cheng-Hi Chien, who discusses global ethics in the post-pandemic era. He suggests that communitarianism and multiculturalism challenge liberalism, and he uses an evaluation of contrasting opinions about the necessity of wearing a mask in Asian and Western socio-cultural contexts to support his argument. In addition, Chien invokes I. Primoratz's ethical patriotism as a theoretical foundation for his views, and he argues that this ethical patriotism can be conducive to international cooperation in the post-pandemic era.

Two chapters focus mainly on the online lessons taught in Japanese and Korean schools. Aya Fujisawa found in her quantitative research study in Japanese schools that there were no significant differences in the effectiveness of online moral-dilemma discussions (OMDD) and face-to face moral dilemma discussions (FMDD) for teaching morality and communication skills, even though the pre-test scores of the two groups showed little difference. In other words, her study confirmed the effectiveness of online lessons in moral education. Jiyoung Choi reported her study in which she employed a qualitative method to analyze four kinds of dilemmas teachers face about how to conduct online classes in Korean schools: the appropriate role of the teacher, how to protect privacy rights, the meaning of "class participation," and how to ensure the fairness of online examinations. She concludes the chapter with suggestions for improving the efficiency of online moral education lessons.

In the third of three chapters that deal in different ways with dilemmas faced by teachers in online classes, Meiyao Wu reflects on various moral dilemmas appearing at individual, organizational, and societal/national levels during the pandemic period from a macro-sociological perspective. She points out that individuals, organizations, and societies often differ in how they understand the importance of moral values or virtues. Making proper moral decisions in a short timeframe requires long-term

cultivation of one's personality, sufficient professional competence, and knowledge of how to work effectively in a team.

To sum up, this collection of studies and reflections by Asian scholars on the moral issues raised by the COVID-19 pandemic teaches us that people's prioritizing of moral values or virtues tends to continually change during the course of their life, and cultural factors may influence how they decide to follow the new norms of a post-pandemic society. Of course, digital devices and online modes of instruction will increasingly enable face-to-face interactions between and among teachers and students; therefore, developing new ways of using these tools to further enhance students' professional competence and encourage good behavior will become increasingly important in the post-pandemic era. Readers can find more detailed and in-depth discussions of the relevant issues in the chapters not summarized in this introductory chapter. The APNME's publication of this anthology will surely encourage educators and scholars in the field of moral education to further promote this discipline not only in the Asia-Pacific region but all over the world.

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