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Does change in ethical education influence core moral values?

Towards history- and culture-aware morality model with application in automatic moral reasoning

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ABSTRACT

We focus on ethical education as a means to improve artificial companion's conceptualization of moral decision-making process in human users. In particular, we focus on automatically determining whether changes in ethical education influenced core moral values in humans throughout the century. We analyze ethics as taught in Japan before WWII and today to verify how much the pre-WWII moral attitudes have in common with those of contemporary Japanese, to what degree what is taught as ethics in school overlaps with the general population's understanding of ethics, as well as to verify whether a major reform of the guidelines for teaching the school subject of "ethics" at school after 1946 has changed the way common people approach core moral questions (such as those concerning the sacredness of human life).

METHODS

We selected textbooks used in teaching ethics at school from between 1935 and 1937(pic.1), and those used in junior high schools today (2019-pic.2) and analyzed what emotional and moral associations such contents generated. The analysis was performed with an automatic moral and emotional reasoning agent and based on the largest available text corpus in Japanese as well as on the resources of a Japanese digital library.

(pic. 1)



(pic.2)



ETHICS TAUGHT IN JAPAN'S SCHOOLS- promoted values

BEFORE WW2:

piety, loyalty, friendship, benevolence, sincerity, building of prosperity, respect, courage, modesty, obedience, docility, conformity and submission of children to parents and teachers, nation, and the emperor.

AFTER WW2:

self-sacrifice for the good of others, conformity over individuality (derived from Confucianism) as well as self-awareness and the development of moral thinking

DISCUSSION

How should ethics lessons be organized?

Is it possible to condition a child's moral compass through ethics classes?

Is it possible at all, as the Japanese Ministry of Education seems to imply, to evaluate and grade a student's ethical outlook in the same way you would grade homework in mathematics?



INTRODUCTION

This study is an attempt at measuring to what degree the change in the way children are introduced to moral principles through the school curriculum is reflected in the broader mindset of the population and visible in associations with certain ethical categories and societal key concepts before and after major historical events.

EXPERIMENTS & RESULTS

While subject to a school curriculum centered on values such as nation, serving others, devotion to the motherland, the Japanese chose to superficially believe or attribute value to what they were taught was morally proper in ethics lessons. At the same time, privately, they maintained a more inconclusive approach to several ethical problems.

This sharp distinction between understanding what is beneficial to society as a whole and what is beneficial for the person performing a certain positive action is in line with Charles Leslie's Stevenson's emotivism (the hurrah/boo theory)



Percentage of positive and negative emotional consequences of ethically meaningful phrases in Experiment 1

Sample phrase (W – Watashitachi no dōtoku, S – Shūshin kyōjūshi)	% of positive / negative consequences		Sample sentence from YACIS
	Social	Emotional	
感謝の気持ちを持つ (I feel gratitude) – S	100% / 0%	51% / 42%	感謝の気持ちを持つことは、習慣のようなところがあり、なれないと、感謝感があるかもしれません。(“Being grateful is like a habit, and if you don't develop it, you may feel uncomfortable”)
一人ではない (not suffer on your own) – S	50% / 50%	51% / 48%	“大で強まないうちの事だなんだとわん言する。ある程度を認めるよすががどういけど社出している。(“Don't worry on your own and talk to someone close to you. At some point, though it might be embarrassing, you just have to get it out of your system”)
思いやりを持つ (be empathic) – S	88% / 14%	13% / 88%	母がくれた時、お母さんが優しくお話を聞いてくれたおかげで、私は生まれてからずっと、お母さんがくれた愛を、いつかいつかお返ししたい。(“My mother supported me when I was frustrated and explained that I was born with kindness and compassion to understand the pain”)

CONCLUSIONS

Past and contemporary Japanese share a similar moral outlook on certain basic moral concepts, although there is a discrepancy in the way in which they evaluate those concepts in terms of benefit to society and emotional consequences.

Some phrases containing an ethical evaluation associated with a nationalistic trend in education, assessed positively in the pre-Second World War sample have also disappeared from the scope of post-war schoolbooks.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS & REFERENCES

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