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An Exploration of the Affecting Factors of Taiwanese’ Ethics and Moral Concepts

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Abstract

For long time, Chinese people believed in karma originated from traditional religious believes and philosophy, which maintaining the social order; but recently, the concepts and behavior related to ethics and moral has gradually declined is showing obviously. To explore the possible affecting factors, this research collected relevant examples which connected to the concepts of ethics and moral, divided them into three constructs of ethics roots, academic viewpoints, and the practical status, then developed a questionnaire to conduct the exploration study of Taiwanese’ ethics and moral concept. 1222 subjects response were analyzed, the result showed that about 75 % of subjects have no specific believes, and the effect of life experience is far more than the traditional doctrines, possible showing that the influence of religious and philosophy believes is downgrading. Although the overall variance explanation to the construct of academic viewpoints is merely acceptable, the analyzed result also shown that Taiwanese people’ rating to the theories of power dominance, self-interest, and Utilitarianism are negative, which further affected the down-rating to the workplace ethics and current status of education. Finally, the exploration regression analysis shown that the current status of education has strong correlation and explanation to the variance of the practical status, which revealed the importance of education relevant to the local customs and workplace ethics.

Keywords: Ethics and moral; ethics roots; academic viewpoints; the practical status; questionnaire survey

1. Introduction

Traditionally, Chinese people are upholding the general principles of loyalty and justice, value the ethics and moral disciplines which is important to maintain the social order, but the concepts and behavior related to ethics and moral has gradually declined because the prevalence and impact of individualism and utilitarianism, even some political and/or opinion leaders proclaimed the improper slogans such as “Why not? As long as I like it!” , “It’s OK when everyone is doing it!” to catch their
audiences’ attention and enthusiasm. The social norm and traditional value are deteriorating, reflected by the disorder behaviors of younger generation, and ignorance and frustration of elder generation.

In order to explore the practical status of the affecting factors of nowadays Taiwanese’s ethics and moral concepts, an exploratory study with questionnaire survey was conducted and try to reveal the potential problems and their internal constructs’ casual relationships.

2. Theoretical Background

Research team summarized the key argument of each major theory, proposed a theoretical model to be verified by the empirical data collected from the questionnaire survey, and developed a standardized questionnaire. Each of the above mentioned research procedures are briefly described as following sections.

2.1. Theories and principles

To develop a verifiable theoretical model, research team first categorized the major theories and their practical meaning relate to ethics and moral disciplines such as:

- The Stakeholder Theory: Management can give due regard to the interests of related groups which are stakeholders of a corporation [1]. This is a theory attempts to address the “Principle of Who or What Really Counts.” [2].
- The Utilitarianism: Emphasizing the most benefits for the majority [3], and “The ends always justify the means” [4].
- Kant Deontology: “Do unto others, do not impose on others” [5], advocating mutual respect and inclusion among people [6].
- Theory of Justice: A work of political philosophy and ethics by John Rawls which is known as "Justice as Fairness", from which Rawls derives his two principles of justice: “the liberty principle” and “the difference principle” [7].
- The Power Theory: The “authority” is often used for power perceived as legitimate by the social structure [8], power can also be seen as various constraints on human action, but also as that which makes action possible, although in a limited scope [9].

2.2. Questionnaire Development

After categorized the focal point of various theories and literature arguments related to ethics and moral concepts, research team conceptualized 3 constructs namely as ethics roots, academic viewpoints, and the practical status, each of the construct have 8-10 questioning items to collect the perceived affective rating from subjects. The constructs and their questioning items are listed as following (variable name coded in parentheses):

**Ethics Roots (8 questions)**

- Asking subjects to respond the degree of influence of …
  - The religious believes upon your ethics concept (A1)?
  - The Confucianism upon your ethics concept (A2)?
  - Laws and regulations upon your ethics concept (A3)?
  - Customs upon your ethics concept (A4)?
  - Family education upon your ethics concept (A5)?
  - School education upon your ethics concept (A6)?
  - Past experience upon your ethics concept (A7)?
  - Social expectation upon your ethics concept (A8)?

**Academic Viewpoints (10 Questions)**

- Asking subjects to respond the degree of recognition to the viewpoint of …
  - Ethics decision should consider the interested groups (B1)?
  - Ethics is the authoritative justice (B2)?
  - Ethics is the own rules set by specific group (B3)?
  - Ethics is the best interests of the majority of people (B4)?
  - Ethics is the principle that fits-all (B5)?
  - Ethics is the test of do unto others; do not impose on others (B6)?
  - Ethics is the social relations of equality and justice (B7)?
  - Ethics is the legal and moral rights” (B8)?
• Ethics is the human ontology of benevolence and forgiveness (B9)?
• Ethics is the ideal life of courtesy and cheerfulness (B10)?

The Practical Status (9 Questions)

Asking subjects to respond the degree of recognition to the statement or status of …

• Unscrupulously to achieve the purpose (C1)?
• Why not? As long as I like it! (C2)?
• King for successor, bandit for losers (C3)?
• It’s OK for everyone is doing it (C4)?
• When there is principle, there must have more exceptions (C5)?
• Ethics change with situation (C6)?
• Current value of Taiwanese’ overall customs” (C7)?
• Current status of Taiwanese’ workplace ethics” (C8)?
• Current status of Taiwanese’ ethics education” (C9)?

The last 3 questions (C7-C9) also served as the “regressors” as research team try to establish the predictive model of casual relationships between questioning items.

All above mentioned 27 questions using the standardized Likert 5-points scale to collect subjects’ rating, scale 1 represent the negative views of barely any influence, strongly disagreed; scale 3 represent neutral or no opinion; scale 5 represent the positive views of strong influence, totally agreed.

To compare if there were different averaged opinion between various demographic characters among subjects. The questionnaire also collect subjects’ demographic data such as gender, occupation (student, civil servants, private institutions, and others), having religious believe or not (Yes or NO), and the philosophy oriented (no specific, Greek philosophy of “Truth, Freedom, and Equality”, Roman ideology or Chinese Legalism of “Law and Order”, Christ civilization of “Faith and Love”, Confucian philosophy of “Benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trust”, Taoism of “Natural inaction”).

2.3. Theoretical Model

The theoretical model and the hypotheses between constructs’ casual relationship proposed by research team is show in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. Theoretical model](image)

H1: Since ethics and moral norm are originated from different cultures and/or religious beliefs, research team believed that the ethic roots have positive correlation with the academic viewpoints, and the ethics roots will affect the academic viewpoints.

H2: We also assumed that the ethics roots have positive correlation with the practical status, and the ethics roots will affect the practical status.

H3: People learning the ethics and moral norm from school and institutions, therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the academic viewpoints will have positive correlation with the practical status, and the academic viewpoints will affect the practical status.

The theoretical model and the hypotheses between constructs’ casual relationship proposed by research team is show in Figure 1.

Considering the sample size, it is generally aware that 10-20 times the questionnaire questions are favourable for the statistical test power [10]. This study issued 1400 copies of questionnaire in the whole month of March 2011, the issued quantities is far more than planned sample size. The valid
returned questionnaire number is 1222, with a valid returned rate of 87%. The results and discussion of data analysis are report as followed. [13]

3. Data Analysis and Discussion

This study use SPSS 18.0 for basic statistical analysis and LISREL 8.7 for the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) analysis.

3.1. Exploratory Data Analysis

To verify the correctness and the analyzability of data file, research team conducted the exploratory data analysis by checking the percentage of missing value, the outlier, and the normality of each variable (question items).

The frequency analysis of all variables’ responses shown that the missing value percentage are no more than 1.1%, which is way below the upper limit of 5% suggested by Roth and Switzer [11]. So we have enough confidence to ignore the influence of missing value.

As to the influence of outliers, the Box-&-Whisker Plot of all the question items’ response showing as Figure 2. There are only three items showing a negative response of C1 “Unscrupulously to achieve the purpose”, C2 “Why not? As long as I like it!”, and C4 “It’s OK for everyone is doing it”. Figure 2. also shown that there are 12 items with lower or upper hand outliers, but, since all the response scale are allowable, research team decided to treat those outliers as available data in successive analysis procedures.

For the normality test of all the question items’ response, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and Shapiro-Wilk test are all significant, showing that the sampled data are not good fit to normality. But, since the larger sample size tend to increase the chance of test significance, and the missing values and outliers checks are all normal. This study assumed the premise that all the question items’ response are normal, and leave the normality and homogeneity test for specific analysis procedures, if the specific test showing a profound normality violence, then, we will report the Non-Parametric statistics instead of parametric statistics.
As for the reliability and validity test of overall questionnaire and the assumed constructs, Table 1. shows the test statistics of internal reliability and construct validity. According to the general rule-of-thumb for the test statistic Cronbach’s $\alpha$ for internal consistency, it is better for construct Cronbach’s $\alpha$ larger than .70, and .80 for the overall questionnaire; and KMO test statistic should be larger than .70 for having enough construct validity. As can be seen from Table 1. the construct “C. the Practical Status” and the overall questionnaire have a statistic value merely less than the expected criteria both for internal reliability and construct validity. The overall questionnaire also has a statistic value merely less than the expected criteria.

![Table 1](image)

### 3.2. Descriptive Statistics

Referring figure 2., the majority response of medium of 27 questions is within the response scale between 2-4. Each question has its average response trend toward the negative or positive rating, according to the meaning of questions. We report the descriptive statistics as followed:

**Ethics Roots:** Two average responses of questions are “neutral or no opinion” for “A1 The religious believes upon your ethics concept?” (3.12 ± 1.29) and “A2 The Confucianism upon your ethics concept?” (3.13 ± 1.23), the other 6 responses are all positive trend toward having positive influence.

**Academic Viewpoints:** Four average responses of questions are “neutral or no opinion” for “B2 Ethics is the authoritative justice?” (2.79 ± 1.08), “B3 Ethics is the own rules set by specific group?” (3.10 ± 1.12), “B4 Ethics is the best interests of the majority of people” (3.16 ± 1.15) and “B5 Ethics is the principle that fits-all?” (3.14 ± 1.19), the other 6 responses are all positive trend toward having positive degree of recognition to the viewpoints.

**The Practical Status:** Two average responses of questions are positive recognition for “C5 When there is principle, there must have more exceptions?” (3.55 ± 1.17) and “C6 Ethics change with situation?” (3.64 ± 1.13), the other 6 responses are all negative trend toward having negatively recognition to the statements.

For the descriptive statistics of subjects’ demographic, the gender proportion is approximately equal (53.9:46.1 %) with little more female subjects than male subjects. For the occupational classifications, the “student” group is the largest group (40.1 %), following sequentially by “private institutions” (29.6 %), “civil servants” (20.0 %), and the “others” (10.3 %). For the “having religious believe or not” classification, the “No” group (74.8 %) is significantly larger than the “Yes” group (25.2 %). Finally, for the classifications of “philosophy oriented”, the “No specific philosophy” group is the largest (49 %), following sequentially by “Confucian philosophy” (22 %), “Taoism” (9 %), “Greek philosophy” (9 %), “Christ civilization” (6 %), “Roman ideology or Chinese Legalism” (3 %), and the “others” (2 %). It is obvious and as expected that the traditional philosophy thinking of Confucian and Taoism together are the majority among subjects.

### 3.3. Test of Group Differences

For the group differences of subjects’ demographic, $t$-test were used to test the gender and “having religious believe or not”. One-way ANOVA were then used to test the groups’ differences between the occupation, philosophy oriented classifications. Only those having significant effect are reported as followed.

**Having religious believe or not:** among the 27 question items’ responses, only 2 items showed significant effect between “having religious believe or not”. For “A1 The religious believes upon your ethics concept?” those answered “Yes” has significant higher average response (3.78 ± 1.14) than those answered “No” (2.89 ± 1.26) ($t (577) = -11.549, p = .000$). The effect size $r = 0.433$ fall into the medium effect range [12]. For “A2 The Confucianism upon your ethics concept?” those answered
“Yes” has significant higher average response (3.50 ± 1.18) than those answered “No” (3.00 ± 1.22) (t (1217) = -6.243, p = .000). The effect size r = 0.177 also fall into the medium effect range [12].

Philosophy orientation: There are 11 question items among the 27 showed significant effect between “philosophy orientation” and the test statistics and post-hoc test results are listed as table 2. Among those 11 significant items, only “A1 The religious believes upon your ethics concept?” have medium effect size of group differences, and “A2 The Confucianism upon your ethics concept?” have large effect size of η², all other 9 items are considered small effect size.

Table 2. ANOVA test results of significant group differences among the philosophy orientation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Test Statistics</th>
<th>Post-hoc Test Results</th>
<th>The Effect Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>K-W χ² = 64.87, p = .000</td>
<td>Confucian (3.59) &gt; No Specific (2.86)</td>
<td>0.054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>K-W χ² = 175.65, p = .000</td>
<td>Confucian (3.96) &gt; All other groups (3.26)</td>
<td>0.146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5</td>
<td>K-W χ² = 27.42, p = .000</td>
<td>Confucian (4.41) &gt; Christ (3.84)</td>
<td>0.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A6</td>
<td>K-W χ² = 25.40, p = .000</td>
<td>Confucian (3.96) &gt; Legalism (3.29)</td>
<td>0.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A7</td>
<td>F = 3.31, p = .003</td>
<td>Greek (4.07) &gt; Christ (3.43)</td>
<td>0.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B4</td>
<td>F = 3.17, p = .004</td>
<td>Legalism (3.57) &gt; Christ (2.97)</td>
<td>0.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B8</td>
<td>F = 2.80, p = .010</td>
<td>Legalism (3.51) &gt; All other groups (2.76)</td>
<td>0.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B9</td>
<td>K-W χ² = 52.52, p = .000</td>
<td>Confucian (3.92) &gt; No Specific (3.37)</td>
<td>0.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B10</td>
<td>K-W χ² = 53.97, p = .000</td>
<td>Confucian (3.92) &gt; No Specific (3.37)</td>
<td>0.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C6</td>
<td>K-W χ² = 22.47, p = .001</td>
<td>Greek (4.03) &gt; Christ (3.29)</td>
<td>0.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C7</td>
<td>K-W χ² = 25.25, p = .001</td>
<td>All other groups (3.26) &gt; Christ (2.77)</td>
<td>0.022</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Only those have significant effect are listed; †Report the non-parametric statistic of K-W χ² when the Levene homogenity test were significant; ‡Only compared the maximum and minimum score group. §The effect size for ANOVA η² = SSw/SST.

3.4. Linear Regression Predictive Models

To explore if there were predictive models could be established. We treat the items “C7 the degree of recognition to the current value of Taiwanese’ overall customs”, “C8 the degree of recognition to the current status of Taiwanese’ workplace ethics”, and “C9 the degree of recognition to the current status of Taiwanese’ ethics education” as the dependent regressors, and all other question items as independent predictors, and conducted step-wise linear regressions. The results are reported as follows:

\[ C7 = .58 + .25(C8) + .14(C9) + .10(B9) + .07(A4) \]  
\[ R_{-adj}^2 = .28, F = 94.53, p = .000 \]

C8 workplace ethics is positive correlated with C7 overall customs: β = .26, p = .000
C9 ethics education is positive correlated with C7 overall customs: β = .26, p = .000
C6 situation change is positive correlated with C7 overall customs: β = .16, p = .000
B9 human ontology is positive correlated with C7 overall customs: β = .10, p = .000
A4 customs is positive correlated with C7 overall customs: β = .08, p = .003

\[ C8 = .23 + .38(C9) + .24(C7) + .07(C1) + .06(C4) + .06(B10) + .06(A8) + .05(B3) \]  
\[ R_{-adj}^2 = .36, F = 96.59, p = .000 \]

C9 ethics education is positive correlated with C8 workplace ethics: β = .40, p = .000
C7 overall customs is positive correlated with C8 workplace ethics: β = .24, p = .000
C1 Unscrupulously to achieve the purpose is positive correlated with C8 workplace ethics:
\[ \beta = .08, p = .001 \]
C4 It’s OK for everyone is doing it is positive correlated with C8 workplace ethics:
\[ \beta = .07, p = .008 \]
B10 the ideal life of courtesy and cheerfulness is positive correlated with C8 workplace ethics:
\[ \beta = .06, p = .008 \]
A8 social expectation is positive correlated with C8 workplace ethics: β = .06, p = .008
B3 own rules set by specific group is positive correlated with C8 workplace ethics:
\[ \beta = .06, p = .018 \]

\[ C9 = .75 + .44(C8) + .24(C7) + .10(C4) + .10(A6) + .06(B7) + .06(B4) - .06(C3) - .07(A7) - .07(A5) - .07(B3) \]  
\[ R_{-adj}^2 = .36, F = 67.36, p = .000 \]
C8 workplace ethics is positive correlated with C9 ethics education: β = .41, p = .000
C7 overall customs is positive correlated with C9 ethics education: \(\beta = .22, p = .000\)

C4 It’s OK for everyone is doing it is positive correlated with C9 ethics education:
\[\beta = .01, p = .000\]

A6 school education is positive correlated with C9 ethics education: \(\beta = .09, p = .002\)

B7 equality and justice is positive correlated with C9 ethics education: \(\beta = .06, p = .024\)

B4 the best interests of the majority of people is positive correlated with C9 ethics education:
\[\beta = .06, p = .018\]

C3 King for successor, bandit for losers is negative correlated with C9 ethics education:
\[\beta = -.06, p = .012\]

A7 past experience is negative correlated with C9 ethics education: \(\beta = -.06, p = .017\)

A5 family education is negative correlated with C9 ethics education: \(\beta = -.06, p = .032\)

B3 own rules set by specific group is negative correlated with C9 ethics education:
\[\beta = -.73, p = .003\]

The adjusted determination coefficients \(R^2_{adj}\) of predictive regression model (1)-(3) are all showed significant effect. It is noteworthy that the major contribution predictors of equation (1) and (2) are came from the “The practical status” items, especially the “C9 ethics education” item. These regression results revealed the influence of ethics education upon overall customs (C7) and workplace ethics (C8).

3.5. Exploring the Structural Model

To explore if the theoretical model proposed by this study could be verified by the empirical data, an exploratory SEM analysis was also conducted by this study. The model fitness statistics \(\chi^2/df = 10.90, \text{RMSEA} = 0.09\), showing that the model is not well fitted. The structural model (figure 3.) shows that the casual relationship (path coefficient = .01) between “B. Academic Viewpoints” and “C. The Practical Status” does not support by the empirical data, further more, the casual relationship between “A. Ethics Roots” and “C. The Practical Status” is a negative correlation, which is unexpected and difficult to explain.

![Figure 3. The structural model](image)

4. Research Findings

From the results of data analyzed, this study summarized following findings:

a. For the “having religious believe or not” classification, the answered “No” subjects are significantly larger than the answered “Yes” group (75 : 25 %). Whether or not these “Non-religious believers” have impact to the concern issues of ethics and moral norm is worthy for further investigation.

b. The internal reliability and construct validity of construct “B. Academic viewpoints” are not enough. Whether this is the major cause for the not fitted structural model or not, is worthy to adjust and remedy.

c. In the Box-&-Whisker Plot of Exploratory Data Analysis, only two items (C1 & C2) have a negative recognition trend. C1 questioning the recognition to the statement “Unscrupulously to achieve the purpose”, C2 questioning “Why not? As long as I like it!”, are the incites slogans from the political opinion leaders. The subjects sampled by this study reflect the fact that those incites slogans actually inflicted a negative response.

d. In the descriptive statistics of construct “A. Ethics Roots”, the “life experiencing” related items (A3-A8) have more profound effects than the “traditional doctrines” related items (A1, A2), which is also echoing the above finding a.
From the regression analysis, all the predictive models showed a profound effect, and we can find that the major contributors for the predictive model are came from the construct “C. The practical status”, and there are major influence of ethics education (C9) upon overall customs (C7) and workplace ethics (C8). These finding match and confirm the research expectation.

Since the theoretical model assumed by this study can not be fully support by the empirical data, the casual relationship between the constructs, and the composition question items of each construct (especially the construct “B. Academic viewpoints”) should be refined or re-considered to get a better predictive theoretical model.

References


