

Comparing Elements of Moral Development in Japanese and Chinese Middle Schools

by Marilyn Higgins, Ph. D.

The development of “prosocial” attitudes and behavior, that is, actions and ways of thinking that bring about greater unity, harmony and community spirit is considered to be an essential aspect of moral development in any culture. Researchers have found that factors which develop prosocial behavior include close family and social ties, a sense of self-esteem, positive socialization through balanced methods of discipline, and direct instruction using a variety of role models in the educational process.

This article reports on a research project carried out in 1998 comparing 200 students in four middle schools (two in Yamaguchi Prefecture, Japan, and two in Anhui Province, China). The survey focussed on attitudes and behavior of students and teachers, discipline styles at home and school, and other factors in the students’ internal and external environments thought to be related to moral development. The results of the research confirmed that the above mentioned factors do bear a relationship to high versus low functioning in the moral behavior of students. The study highlights that these factors tended to be higher among the Chinese students than for the Japanese students, corresponding to higher average “moral force” scores in the survey for Chinese middle school students. The implications for improving social and family ties through educational approaches and social services is considered.

Introduction

Bullying, violence, truancy, classroom breakdown—these issues crop up in the Japanese news as community issues while schools, parents and community point fingers at each other in blame and frustration. Although each case presented may have involved only one or a few students in a single classroom or school, they are representative of problems that affect thousands of children across the nation. Who is responsible, really, for the moral education of children? What is the basic cause of these disconcerting problems?

Moral education is one of the most widely bewildering aspects of the field of education. While there is general agreement that moral education is needed, the elements of what should constitute “moral education” and who should be “in charge” of it are controversial to the point of paralyzing forward movement. So education systems in many countries, including Japan, continue to veer back and forth in a zigzag course between going back to “old” methods of strict discipline, rigidly controlled rules and the abandonment of these in favor of various other approaches, or neglecting the process of moral development entirely in the belief that it is probably someone else’s responsibility. Schools may say it is up to the parents, the parents blame the school or community, the community claims it is the school and/or parents’ role. So the cycle continues like a dog chasing its tail.

However, common sense and scientific research indicates that moral education is influenced

by three environments: home, school and community. It is a developmental process that requires the same kind of focussed effort, and careful, patient nurturing that any other talents or skills require. It is not merely a process of learning facts or even values. What must be developed and nurtured are inner powers and processes of cognition, emotion, and will. These must be recognized as equally important and interconnected in educating (leading forth) attributes and behavior of human beings who are both loving and lovable, as well as capable and willing to act according to such noble principles as truthfulness, responsibility, caring, and so on. Ideal moral development involves raising individuals in such a way that they use their unique capacities in service of society rather than becoming self-centered, social burdens or even destructive elements in the social system.

How important is moral education? Few people will disagree with the reasoning of the 19th-20th century spiritual educator, Abdu'l-Baha, who stated that "... schools for academic studies must at the same time be training centers in behavior and conduct. Good behavior and high moral character must come first, for unless the character is trained, acquiring knowledge will only prove injurious. Knowledge is praiseworthy when it is coupled with ethical conduct and a virtuous character; otherwise it is a deadly poison, a frightful danger. A physician of evil character, and who betrays his trust, can bring on death and become the source of numerous infirmities and disease the foundation-principle of a school is first and foremost moral training, character building, and the rectification of conduct." (1987, p. 35) This comment in no way reduces the equally strong responsibility of parents and the community as a whole to foster good character and full moral development.

So what is moral education? How can it be evaluated and enhanced? Further, can it be assessed and diagnosed while in process so that its deficits can be addressed and corrected early and failure avoided? Do we have to wait until a person commits a heinous crime before judging that his or her moral development is off track? It is helpful to think of moral development as a process similar to building good health. Children require various kinds of food, exercise, shelter, and educational experiences at specific times, or in a fairly predictable sequence to grow up healthy and strong. In the field of pediatrics doctors and nurses are able to use simple diagnostic tests to see whether a child is developing at the proper speed and with all the due strength so that diet, or environment, or activities can be adjusted to give the best chance of physical health and development.

The processes of moral development have been studied in the twentieth century in various fields of social science including psychology, sociology, education, and recently in more hard-science fields such as neurophysiology. These fields themselves have historical roots that go back thousands of years and are influenced by the episteme (the common view or way of thinking) of various ages and their religious and social movements. The episteme of our time seems to carry the attitude that the authority of reason and science is more likely than spiritual authority of faith and religion to solve our problems, including the problem of moral education. It is the view of this author that in the arena of moral education a balanced understanding of the human reality from both a scientific and spiritual/religious perspective will be most effective. As Nobel prize-winning physicist, Albert Einstein (1954) has suggested, "religion without science is lame, science without religion is blind."

Research psychologist, William Damon, has pointed out that from a scientific perspective,

moral education has been one of the best researched and least applied fields of social science during the past half century (1988). He suggests that the fault lies in the gap between academic research and public awareness. More work must be done to bring the results of this generous body of research to public attention and application.

The 25th anniversary issue of the *Journal of Moral Education* summarized the most recent quarter century of social science research in the field. Editor, Monica Taylor (1996) pointed out that "to date, moral education continues to be evaluated almost exclusively in terms of internal cognitive changes in moral reasoning." Much of this research revolves around the paradigm of Kohlberg (1981), and others regarding the development of moral reasoning, but has not shown a direct relationship to moral behavior. Taylor quotes Emler (1996) that "... the ultimate goals of moral education ... should have effects on conduct." Further, she notes that Damon and Colby (1996) have pointed to the desirability of moral values or personal qualities, as bases of good character, a topic widely researched and reported on by such moral educators as Lickona (1991). Moral qualities and attitudes have become the focus of various projects in recent years by Khavelin-Popov, et al. (1997) and others, aimed at developing educational materials which reintroduce the language of virtues, character development and values, in order to address the moral gap in the academic curricula of schools. Parent education is another area of development with this focus.

The field of moral development research, then, has had one focus on the area of moral cognition and reasoning, a second on behavior and conduct including studies into the effectiveness of various styles of discipline in relation to the development of prosocial behavior (see Baumrind, 1989), a third on attitudes, values and virtues (including research on the development of the so-called "moral imagination" as it relates to prosocial choices in behavior). Another area of evaluation of moral capacity is the area of emotional development, especially the development of the capacity for empathy noted in the work of Hoffman (1989), and Eisenberg, et al (1987, 1990) as a key to developing perspective-taking capacity, prosocial attitudes and behavior, and the "emotional intelligence" work of Goleman (1997). A final related research area is that of self-efficacy, sense of self, self-esteem, the inner self-evaluative capacity for reflection, imagination, thought, reason and so on, noted in the work of Seligman (1990), and Lickona (1991).

Development and Testing of an Assessment Instrument

Taking these various elements into account the author has attempted to develop a simple, but comprehensive instrument targeting the various aspects of the learning environment of schools, homes and within the thinking/feeling processes of students themselves that have been shown to be connected to the development of prosocial behavior. It is hoped that if strengths and weaknesses within the individual, the social environment and the school environment can be assessed, appropriate intervention strategies to overcome deficits in these nested environments can be taken in order to foster better moral development.

A Likert-style scale was designed to address pertinent variables. The first part of the teachers' questionnaire included questions regarding attitudes toward their role as teacher, their view of the quality of the school atmosphere as displayed in its overtly or covertly expressed educational goals, style of classroom discipline, and the extent to which they include a focus on role models in their teaching. The second part of the survey asked each teacher to indicate their

observations of 37 behavioral problems, ranging in severity from (1) "seldom, or of no consequence" to (4) "frequently of extreme consequence," or (0) if the behavior was never observed for each student they selected to survey. The teachers were also asked to indicate strengths of each student with a list of 37 positive qualities and attributes. The score on this section, the total of positive attributes, minus the score of behavior problems provided the independent variable for this study, the so-called "moral force score".

The two schools in China and two schools in Japan that participated in the study were in non-urban, but not totally rural areas. The schools were selected by local administrative officials who were asked to indicate one school that they viewed as "high-functioning" from a moral or behavioral viewpoint, and one school viewed as "low functioning" or known to have more problems than the average school. Within each of these schools, five teachers volunteered to take part in the survey. Each of the teachers was asked to select ten of their students: five who they viewed as high functioning, and five viewed as low-functioning from a perspective of moral or prosocial behavior. The issue of whether the school was high or low functioning was never discussed with the teachers, and the teachers were asked not to indicate to their students the reason that these students were selected for the survey.

Both the behavioral and the "moral force scores" of the students were significantly correlated with the teachers designation of high and low functioning students. However, it was interesting to note that the high functioning schools had a higher behavior problem score. Close examination of the data showed that although the high functioning students in high functioning schools have somewhat higher moral force scores, the low functioning students in these schools tend to exhibit more extreme behavior problems than did the students in so-called low-functioning schools. In other words, the behavior of low functioning students in high functioning schools seemed to be either more extreme or was of more concern to the teachers.

In addition to the variables listed above in the teachers' questionnaire, a number of dependent variables were selected for the students' questionnaire and measured against the moral force scores of students judged by the teachers. The dependent variables included number and quality of mentoring or close relationships in a student's life, students' attention to qualities of role models, students' perception of discipline processes at home and school, students' self-appraisal and self-esteem, students' explanatory style (how problems or successes are explained) and students' understanding of his or her relationship to authority.

When the survey was carried out and the data evaluated, a few significant differences were found between high functioning schools and low functioning schools in terms of teacher attitudes. More significant differences were found between high and low functioning students. As

Figure 1 (A lower score indicates better behavior.)

The average score on behavior problems for all subjects was 21.78.	
For all students in high-functioning schools :	In low-functioning schools :
24.83	18.74
For all high-functioning pupils :	For low-functioning pupils :
16.2	27.35
For all Chinese pupils :	For all Japanese pupils :
11.2	32.37

mentioned above, the instrument showed a significant reliability in relation to confirming teacher's perceptions of high and low functioning students and on measures regarding social relationships, relationship to authority, role models and so on data showed some connection to predicted research outcomes. However, the most striking differences were found between Japanese students and Chinese students. The data indicated that Chinese students have significantly higher scores overall. On several significant variables, the scores showed a pattern of Chinese students following a high moral profile, while Japanese students tended to follow a lower moral profile. Although the findings also suggest that more work must be done to refine the instrument itself, the strengths and weaknesses indicated in the social/moral indexes of the survey, supported by the body of moral development research mentioned above, may give some clues to improving moral education in the schools as well as in families and in communities at large in Japan, in China, or in other countries where the survey might be used to give a rough estimate of "holes" in the moral development fabric.

A complete documentation of this doctoral dissertation research is available in Higgins (1999). However, for the purposes of this article, just a few of the critical findings related to the variables of most concern regarding Japanese students will be noted. Specifically three areas will be reported: the number and quality of mentoring or close relationships in a student's life, students assessment of their own powers and qualities and students' explanatory style (how problems or successes are explained). The variables of role models, attitude toward some specific virtues will also be touched on. Finally some comments will be made about the potential use of the instrument as an assessment guide for pinpointing specific problems within the moral environment so that teachers, parents, schools and the students themselves might correct any areas of difficulty before they become serious problems.

Results

Mentoring Relationships :

Among the conclusions drawn by researchers in the field of moral development is that "... by virtue of their participation in essential social relationships, children encounter the classic moral issues facing humans everywhere." "... Children's love and attachment feelings for their parents establish an emotional foundation for children's developing respect for authority." "... Relations with peers introduce children to norms of direct reciprocity and to standards of sharing, cooperation and fairness." "... Moreover, the perspective-taking skills fostered by peer relations enhance children's growing moral awareness and improve the effectiveness of children's helping act." (Damon, 1988, p. 117-118) This succinct summary represents wide ranging research which indicate that the better and more consistent the relationships are between children and their parents, mentors and peers the better becomes their capacity for prosocial behavior.

For this reason the topic of relationships between parents, other family members and/or mentors and peers was addressed by the survey. The results found are in keeping with the findings of other research. They are also worth noting in relation to the wide gap between the moral force scores of Japanese and Chinese in this survey, for they indicate an alarmingly high percentage of socially isolated Japanese children.

Of the high functioning students, 84% report that they have at least two or more people they can talk to about problems or hopes "who listen and help me figure things out." Among the lower

functioning students, 78% report two or more. At the same time, 7% of the low functioning students report having no such “mentor” while just 3% of the high functioning students are without such a relationship. It was noted that while 44% of Japanese students report 4 or more such relationships (compared with 30% of the Chinese), 7% of Japanese report having no one they can talk to and another 7% did not answer the question. *This suggests that at least one in fourteen, and possibly one in seven of these Japanese middle school students are quite isolated.* Only 3% of the Chinese students reported having no one to talk to and only 1 did not answer.

Sixty-one percent of the high functioning students report talking things over often or most often with their mothers. Only 46% of the low functioning students talk things over with their mother that frequently. None of the high functioning students said they never talk things over with their mothers at all, although 15% said they rarely do. However, 26% of the low functioning students reported either never talking to their mothers (13%) or that they rarely do so (13%), and another 6% did not answer. It is noteworthy that while 65% of Chinese students often or most often talk things over with their mothers, only 42% of Japanese students’ answers fell into this range. *But 31% of Japanese students reported that they rarely (12%) or never (11%) talk things over with their mothers, or did not answer (8%).* (See Figure 2)

In relation to fathers, 34% of the high functioning students talk things over with their fathers often or most often. Of low functioning students, 26% do so that often. Just 9% of high functioning students said they did not talk things over with their fathers at all, while 29% of low functioning students said they never talk things over with their fathers. These exact figures appeared again comparing the Japanese and Chinese students. Nine percent of Chinese versus 29% of Japanese never talk things over with their fathers. Of the Chinese students, 46% said that they often or most often talk things over with their fathers, while only 14% of Japanese students do so. Although the survey shows that the higher functioning students in the higher functioning school in China were somewhat less likely than their low-functioning peers to talk things over

Figure 2

Talk things over with mother ...

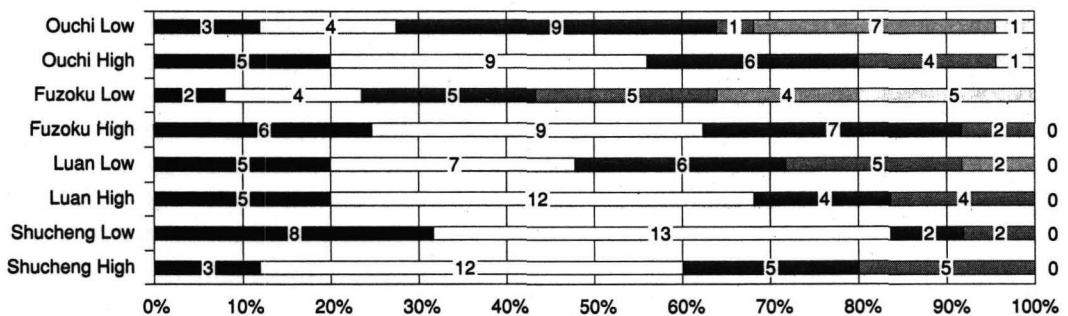


Figure 3

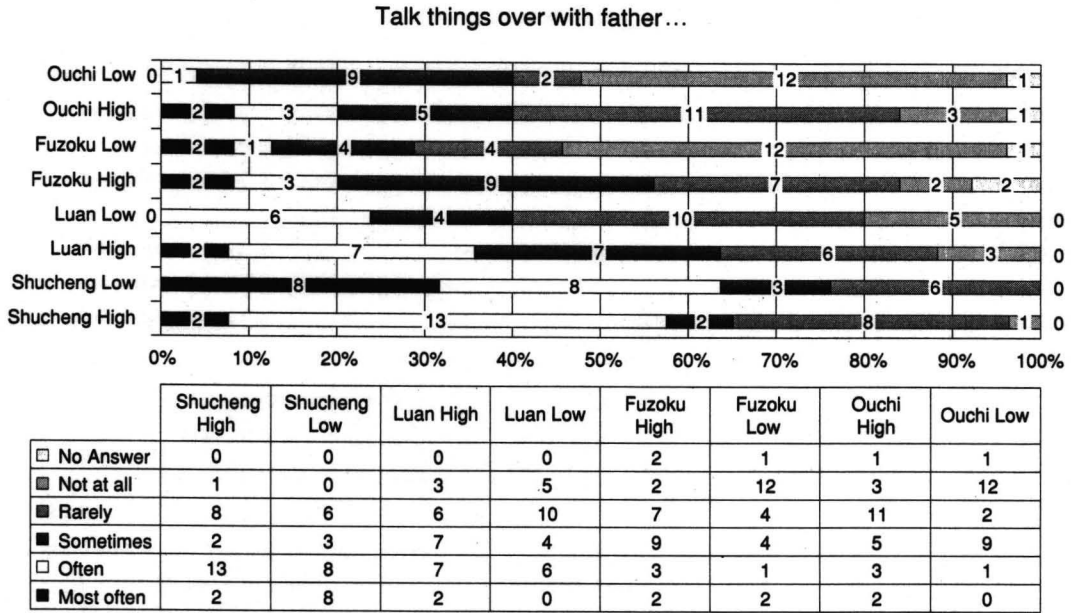


Figure 4

	Japanese	Chinese
Talk to older family members often	6%	21%
Talk to older family members sometimes	16%	33%
Do not talk to older family members	58%	14%
Talk to adult non-family members often	7%	17%
Do not talk to adult non-family members	56%	17%
Talk things over with teachers often	10%	22%
Do not talk things over with teachers	31%	17%

with their mothers or fathers so often, this factor is likely a result of the fact that these high-functioning students are often boarding students whose parents actually live quite some distance from the school. *The data of most concern is that up to 58% of Japanese students report rarely or never talking to their fathers, including 5% with no answer.* (see Figure 3)

Do students talk to other adult family members? Both for high functioning and low functioning students 43% say they sometimes or often talk to other adult family members such as a grandmother. However comparing Chinese and Japanese on this item, 58% of the Japanese say they do not speak to other older family members at all, while just 14% of Chinese do not speak to other adult family members. Among Chinese students, 54% do talk to other adults in their family at least sometimes, whereas only 22% of Japanese students do (among them 6% say often, and only 2% most often). Japanese students are also less likely to speak to adult non-family members. Fifty-six percent say they do not do so at all, while only 7% do so often or most often. Only 17% of Chinese students, however, said that they do not speak to adult non-family members at all. There was only a 5% difference between high and low functioning students on this point, though. Of high functioning students, 30% versus 25% of low functioning students talk

Figure 5

	Japanese	Chinese
Do not talk things over with friends	21%	0%
Talk things over with friends often	44%	72%
Do not talk with siblings/cousins	57%	15%
Talk with siblings/cousins often	9%	30%
Do not talk with other young people	66%	8%
Talk with other young people often	6%	37%

to adult non-family members at least sometimes, while 35% versus 40% respectively do not do so at all. (See Figure 4)

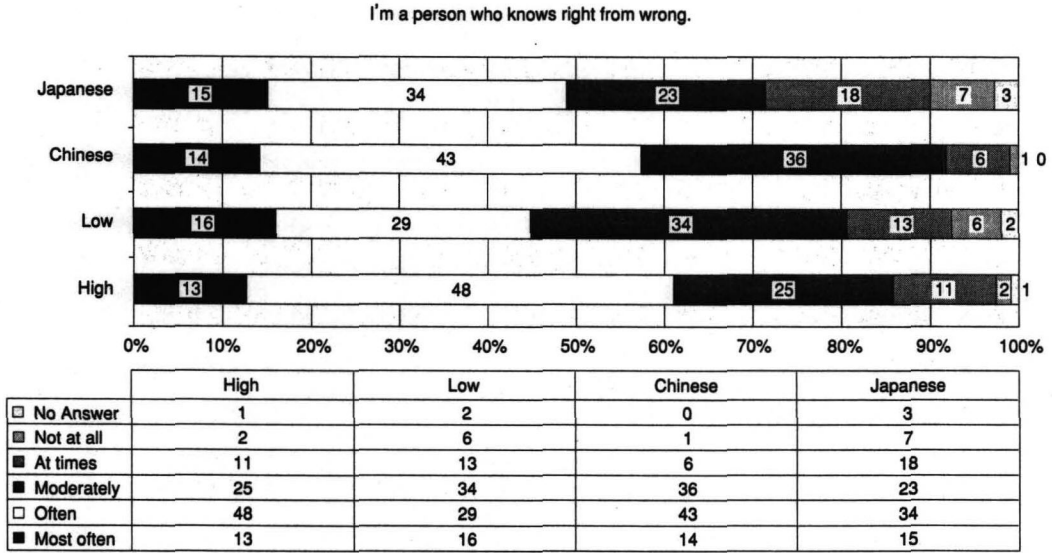
While there was no strong difference between high and low functioning students found in this survey in regard to talking with teachers overall, low functioning students were more in the extreme ends, either rarely or never talking to the teacher, or more likely than high functioning students to talk with the teacher often. While only 10% of the Japanese students said they talk to their teachers often, 22% of Chinese students do so. Thirty-one percent of Japanese said they do not talk things over with their teachers privately at all, while only 17% of Chinese students said that they do not talk things over with their teachers at all.

Most students DO talk to their friends. This is no surprise. Comparing high functioning students and low functioning students, 85% and 72% respectively talk things over with their friends at least sometimes. However twice as many of the low functioning students (14% versus 7%) say that they do not talk to their friends at all. Of Chinese students, 89% talk things over with their friends at least sometimes. No Chinese students said that they never do so. In contrast, although 68% of Japanese students do talk things over with their friends at least sometimes, 21% said they never do so, another 9% rarely do so.

Although no stark differences were noted in high functioning students versus low functioning students who talk things over with brothers or sisters, or male and female cousins, it was surprising to note (given the one-child policy of China) that over 50% of the Chinese students report that they talk things over with siblings or cousins at least sometimes, while only about a quarter of the Japanese students report doing so. Over 50% of Japanese students say they never talk things over with brothers, sisters or male or female cousins, in contrast to about 15% of the Chinese students. What is more, 66% of the Japanese students said that they do not talk things over with other young people at all (outside of their close friends) versus only 8% of Chinese who never do so. Sixty-one percent of Chinese students at least sometimes talk things over with other young people in contrast to just 14% of Japanese students who do so. Higher functioning students were more likely to report talking things over with other young people (41% at least sometimes) than low functioning students (34% sometimes or more often do so). Of high functioning students, 33% versus 41% of low functioning students reported that they do not talk things over with other young people at all. (See Figure 5)

These figures show a surprising disparity between the two cultures, and an unsettling portrait of the isolation of many of these Japanese young people, which is thought to relate to an inadequate environment for moral development.

Figure 6



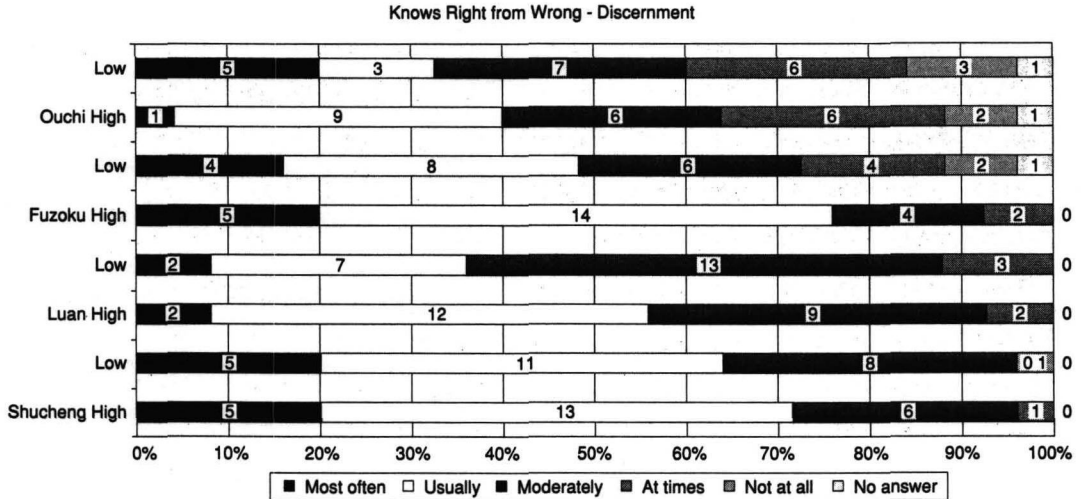
Self-esteem and Explanatory Style :

One of the keys to developing prosocial behavior is that children should have a clear understanding of their own developing strengths and weaknesses, and a positive view of how their actions and attitudes can affect others as well as themselves. Seligman (1990) has stated that without a realistic perspective of their own abilities, children (and often adults) develop a “learned helplessness” which undermines their positive development and their potential contributions. He further showed in his research how “explanatory styles” that is, how children explain their own failures or successes to themselves affects their “moral” attitudes and behaviors in terms of how much responsibility they take, how able they are to put problems into a helpful perspective and select an effective course of action.

One section of the survey explored students’ evaluation of their own powers and abilities. They responded to such items as “I have a good mind,” “I’m a person who notices things,” “I have a good imagination,” “I’m a person who can reason things out,” “I’m a person who remembers things well,” “I’m a person who knows right from wrong,” “I’m a person who can be trusted,” “I’m a person who tries to do better,” “I’m a person who can be patient,” and a few others. On items such as patience, trust, reasoning and noticing things, the high functioning students clearly had more certainty that they exercise these abilities “often” or “most often”. What was more striking is that the total of the Chinese students’ responses followed or exceeded the pattern for high-functioning students, while the total responses for the Japanese students followed or were at times weaker than the low functioning student responses. The following figures show the responses on the item “I’m a person who knows right from wrong.” (See figure 6)

Figure 7 shows that, in general, high functioning students in high functioning schools are more likely than low functioning students in either situation to feel that they know right from wrong often or most often. Overall, 61% of high functioning students report that they often, or most often know right from wrong. While just 47% of low functioning students express the same level of this power of discernment. The remainder say they know right from wrong only moderately,

Figure 7



at times, not at all, or did not answer. On the lower end of the scale it was noteworthy that 25% of the Japanese students say they know right from wrong only at times (18%) or not at all (7%), while only 6% of Chinese students reported that they are able to discern right from wrong only at times, 1% not at all. Figures in this area were especially of concern for the low functioning Japanese school in this survey. However, even the percentage of students in the high functioning school of Japan who said they have a poor ability to discern right from wrong exceeded those of Chinese students in this category.

Explanatory Style :

Concepts such as “perspective taking” and “responsibility taking” refer to the person’s ability to reflect on a problem from various points of view, their own as well as others, and to identify actions which they might carry out to be helpful in a situation. Patience is sometimes the best policy, but not always. The ability to be patient is clearly identified as one of the significant indicators of successful moral development. However, there must also be the ability to discern the appropriate time of action and the kinds of action required by an individual to bring about desired results. These proactive abilities are able to be measured to a certain extent by examining “explanatory styles”. What do students tell themselves when things go right, or when things go wrong? Seligman (1998), who has thoroughly researched this topic concludes that people who view problems as “temporary” rather than continuous or unchanging and “local” rather than pervasive or universal, are able to keep a positive attitude, identify and take appropriate responsible action and gradually turn failures into successes. People who see situations as having no relation to their own action, as unchangeable, or as someone else’s responsibility are likely to become depressed and unable to develop strength to make a positive response.

The survey included a short section addressing the explanatory style of students. Three questions focussed on the blame/shame attitude : When things go wrong “I feel it is often my own fault,” “I feel it is usually other people’s fault,” “I try to let others know it wasn’t my fault or on purpose.” The results showed that high functioning students are more likely than low functioning

Figure 8

Percent answering "often" or "most often" :	High	Low	Japanese	Chinese
When things go wrong I look for a way to fix it :	64%	62%	54%	72%
When things go wrong I try to understand reason :	37%	32%	32%	37%
When things go right I look for what I did right :	28%	18%	21%	25%

Figure 9

Percent of students answering "sometimes" or more :	High	Low	Japanese	Chinese
When things go wrong I feel weak :	53%	41%	69%	35%
When things go wrong I feel stupid :	54%	53%	64%	42%
When things go wrong I feel confused :	54%	53%	49%	57%
When things go wrong I feel, "It wasn't a good day :"	57%	53%	47%	63%
When things go wrong "I feel I will never do better"	8%	15%	17%	6%

students to accept blame for themselves (55% versus 38% said that they often or most often feel at fault when things go wrong.) Low functioning students are more likely than high functioning students to feel that things are often or most often the fault of others (22% versus 11%). Japanese students are less likely to assign blame to either self or others than Chinese students. Chinese students (40%) are more likely than Japanese students (21%) to feel that they often must protect themselves by letting others know that a problem was not their fault.

Practical ways to deal with problems include understanding the reasons for the problem, looking for a way to fix it, reflecting on what one has done well when things go right. On the three items concerning these attitudes, it is interesting to note that not so much difference exists between high and low functioning students when things go wrong. But, as shown in Figure 8, when things go right, high functioning students are more likely than low functioning students to "try to look at what I did right." Here, too, there are some striking cultural differences, however. It is interesting to note that 72% of Chinese students said that when things go wrong they look for how to fix a problem often or most often, while only 54% of Japanese students said they do so. When things go well 63% of the Chinese students say they look for what they did right at least sometimes, while only 49% of Japanese students answered at least sometimes or more.

A third type of response to things going well or badly is the focus on ones own feelings. Items that addressed feelings of weakness or stupidity, or confusion did not reveal strong differences between high and low functioning students. (see Figure 9) High functioning students were more likely than low functioning students to express that they feel weak sometimes. Nearly an equal percentage of high and low functioning students said they at least sometimes feel stupid, or confused. However, Japanese students were far more likely to express these feelings of self-deprecation : 69% of Japanese versus 35% of Chinese said that they sometimes feel weak when things go wrong. Sixty-four percent of Japanese versus 42% of the Chinese students said they sometimes, often or most often feel stupid when things go wrong. Only on the item about feelings of confusion did the Chinese students answer at a higher level than the Japanese : 57% of the Chinese students versus 49% of Japanese said they feel confused sometimes, often or most often.

A feeling of helplessness can be a danger sign for mental problems and often moral fortitude and good behavior is reduced when depression or lack of confidence increases. The feeling that

Figure 10

Percent answering "sometimes" or more :	High	Low	Japanese	Chinese
When things go right "I ... have done ... well" :	74%	57%	58%	73%
"I feel confident good things will continue :"	38%	46%	43%	88%
"I feel happy to try again"	85%	71%	68%	89%
"I feel happy and able"	79%	75%	61%	94%

one can never do better can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Lower functioning students are more likely than high functioning students to express discouragement that they will never do better. Japanese students are nearly 3 times as likely (17% vs. 6%) than Chinese students to feel they will never do better. On an item not shown in Figure 9, 69% of Japanese indicated that at least sometimes feel they must hide their feelings, while only 45% of the Chinese students felt they must hide their feelings.

Seligman suggests that a more helpful attitude is to feel that the unpleasant situation is temporary, that no matter how long the struggle, one can take each day at a time. A positive, prosocial person carries the attitude that what has gone wrong is "just a bad day" (indicating that tomorrow may be better). It was confirmed that high functioning students are a bit more likely to take this attitude than low functioning students. Less than half of Japanese students express this attitude, while nearly two thirds of Chinese students feel that way at least sometimes or more.

On the opposite end of the emotional scale, when things go right, optimistic people who build on their positive experience are more likely to express happiness and confidence. High functioning students (74%) were more likely than low functioning students (57%) to say at least sometimes "I think I must have done something well." Of Chinese students, 73% versus 58% of Japanese students sometimes attribute success to themselves in this way. Thirty-nine percent of Japanese versus 26% of Chinese rarely or never say that they did something well. (see Figure 10) Although there not much difference between high and low functioning students in their expressions of confidence or lack of confidence when things go right (low functioning students, if anything, express a slightly higher degree of confidence), 88% of Chinese say they at least sometimes do feel confident that good things will continue versus just 43% of Japanese who reported feeling confident at least sometimes. Of these, 29% of the Chinese students feel confident most often, while only 7% of the Japanese feel confident most often. *Fifty-three percent of the Japanese versus 9% of the Chinese rarely or never feel confident that good things will continue when things go well.*

Who feels happy to try again, or happy and able when things go well? High functioning students slightly more often than low functioning students express that they "feel so happy that they want to try again" (61% versus 53% say often or most often : 85% versus 71% at least sometimes). Of high functioning students, 79%, versus 75% of low functioning students at least sometimes feel happy and able when things go well, although 60% of the low functioning students compared with 57% of high functioning students expressed this often or most often. However, comparing the Chinese and Japanese, the pattern of optimistic views of Chinese students versus pessimistic views of Japanese students held. Seventy-five percent of Chinese students versus 39% of Japanese students expressed that they often or most often are happy to try doing more when

things go well. Ten percent of Chinese students rarely or never feel that way, *but 29% of Japanese rarely or never feel happy to try again*. Of Chinese students, 94% feel happy and able at least sometimes (47% most often, 41% often, 6% sometimes), while only 61% of Japanese students expressed the feeling of being happy and able (14% most often, 15% often, 31% sometimes). *Thirty-seven percent of these Japanese students said they rarely (22%) or never (15%) feel very happy and able when things go well*. Only 5% of Chinese students rarely feel that way and no Chinese student expressed that they never feel happy and able.

Role Models:

Fifteen items on the survey were directed at finding out what kind of attributes students admire in their role models. It has been shown that when people pay attention to attributes in others, they tend to develop those attributes in themselves (Fotos, et al, 1995). There was less disparity between high and low functioning students than was expected on this section. On two attributes ("I admire people who are kind." "I admire people who are helpful.") the span between higher versus lower functioning students was 10% or more in favor of the higher functioning students, and one ("I admire people who keep only the rules they like") that lower functioning students chose 10% more often. In a total of 12 out of the 15 items, however, the difference between high and low functioning groups was more than 5%. High functioning students agreed more often than did low functioning students that they admired people who were kind (69% versus 54%), honest (76% versus 69%), helpful (78% versus 68%), fair (73% versus 66%), and persevering (81% versus 74%). More lower functioning students agreed that they admired people who make few mistakes (28% versus 21%), were strong physically (31% versus 25%), who were leaders (40% versus 33%), who kept promises (73% versus 67%), who kept only the rules they like (26% versus 16%), who act as they want others to act (68% versus 62%), and who get along with others (68% versus 61%).

It was surprising to note that 14% of the low functioning students disagree that kind people are to be admired (half that number, 7% of the high functioning students, also disagreed). Another area of disparity was that 71% of higher functioning students clearly did not admire people who only follow the rules they like, whereas only 44% of the lower functioning students answered that they did not, 26% agreed that such people are admirable and 30% expressed no opinion versus 16% of the higher functioning students who agreed and 13% who had no opinion.

There were some interesting and sharp disparities between cultures regarding role models. A high percentage of Chinese students agreed that the people they admired were persevering (91%) and hard-working (81%), while *only 64% of the Japanese students agreed that the people they admire are persevering, and a mere 38% agreed that they admired hard-working people. One quarter (25%) of Japanese students actually disagreed that they admire hard-working people, and 37% had no opinion*. Japanese students were more likely to agree that the people they admire are kind (70% versus 42% for the Chinese) and get along well with others (73% versus 56% for the Chinese). Of high and low functioning Chinese students, 15% and 18% (respectively) disagree that they admire people who are kind and get along, while 30% and 29% (respectively) expressed no opinion. Chinese students expressed a higher level of agreement in some other areas. They are more likely to admire people who are helpful (81% versus 65% for the Japanese), honest (80% versus 65% of Japanese who agree, *while 10% of Japanese students disagreed that honest people are admired by them*). Eighty percent of Chinese students agree that people who act in the way

that they want others to act are to be admired, while only 50% of the Japanese students agreed. Seventy-seven percent of Chinese students said they admire people who are clever at getting out of trouble, while only 24% of Japanese students agreed to this. Chinese students were more likely to admire people who make few mistakes (31% versus 19%), while 43% of the Japanese students disagreed (compared to 36% of Chinese students who disagreed).

It was thought that low functioning students might show less clarity about the qualities they admire in role models and mentors. It was noted that on only about half of the items (8 out of 15) did the lower functioning students have a higher percentage of “no opinion” answers than did the higher functioning students. It was interesting, however, to note that Japanese students had a higher percentage of “no opinion” answers on 13 out of 15 of the items tested, the only exceptions being the items about people who are “kind” and “get along”.

At the end of this section, students were given an opportunity to write in the name or names of people they most admired. While not all students put in an answer, the kinds of answers that came from Chinese versus Japanese students reveals further cultural and educational differences. In the Chinese schools Zhou En Lai was mentioned by about a quarter of the students who responded to this section. Other political leaders including Mao Ze Dong, Zhu Rong Ji, Lu Xun and Zhang Hon Chi were also mentioned. Lei Feng, a cultural icon whose legendary moral feats are taught to school children was also mentioned by several students. Among the foreign figures mentioned were Karl Marx, and foreign English teachers that some of the students had encountered.

Very few of the Japanese students filled in this section. Some students wrote in “*toku ni nai*” meaning, “no one special”. But among those who did write in this section, there was wide variation ranging from historical figures, including soldiers, statesmen, scientists and poets to recent cartoon characters. The students mentioned recent rock stars, sports figures both in and out of Japan, writers, some figures from Western history including Galileo and Copernicus, friends, coaches, parents, and general qualities such as “people who have wide hearts” or “people I have been close to lately.” Prince Shotoku (Shotoku Taishi) was one of the few historical figures who obtained more than a single mention (noted by 4 students), but a figure mentioned more often was Mother Theresa. Jesus Christ, Pele, Helen Keller, Mark Twain, Scotty Pippen, Michael Jordon, and John Cage were among other non-Japanese who received mention by some students as people most admired. “Ultraman” and “Kamen Rider,” two Japanese action-animation heroes popular with very young children also were mentioned.

It may be wondered whether admiration or lack of it for role models connects to what the students actually expect or think of themselves. Looking at the example of honesty, in the section on personal powers students were asked if they were truthful. Of high functioning students, 46% said they were usually or most often honest, while 48% of the low functioning students said so. Compare that with the high and low functioning students who admire people who are honest (76% versus 69%). Observing the differences in perspective between Chinese students (80%) and Japanese students (65%) who said they admired honesty, it is noteworthy that 68% of the Chinese student versus only 26% of Japanese students say they are usually or most often truthful. As mentioned above, 10% of Japanese students claim that they do *not* admire honest people. It may be noted that, in fact, 15% of the Japanese students do *not* consider themselves at all honest, while only 1% of Chinese students fell into this category.

In the area of caring and doing good, it is also remarkable that while there is very little difference between the so-called high and low-functioning students in this area, we can see that 61% of Chinese students versus 26% of Japanese students consider themselves usually or most often caring. Of Chinese students, 69% versus 27% of Japanese students consider themselves people who do good. Of Japanese students, 13% (10% of lower functioning and 3% of high functioning students) say they are not at all caring, compared with only 1%, one lower functioning Chinese student. Fifteen percent of the Japanese students (10% lower functioning and 5% higher functioning students) feel that they are not at all people "who try to do good." These findings parallel the above notation that only 65% of the Japanese students admire people who are helpful (compared with 81% of the Chinese) and 10% said they do not admire helpful people. Comparing high functioning students and of low functioning students, 77% versus 70% say that they at least sometimes help others with their problems or worries. Only 3% of students identified as high functioning versus 7% of those identified as low functioning said that they do not help others at all. In line with the findings in the above section on role models and powers that Japanese students less often consider themselves to be caring or to do good, while 83% of the Chinese students answered in this section that they sometimes or more often "help others with their troubles or worries", and while only 10% of the Chinese considered themselves rarely (8%) or not at all (2%) helpful, 32% of Japanese students said they helped others with their troubles or worries rarely (24%) or not at all (8%), while only 63% said that they were sometimes (32%), often (18%) or most often (13%) helpful to others.

Summary and Discussion

These research findings seem to indicate that in a number of areas, the Japanese middle school students studied are morally disempowered by various elements in their environment and their own way of thinking. To summarize the major points found:

1. Many Japanese students by their own reports are isolated socially:
 - 31-39% rarely or never talk to their mothers,
 - 53-58% rarely or never talk to their fathers,
 - Over 50% do not talk to other adults at all,
 - Over 50% do not talk to siblings or cousins about things of importance to them,
 - 60% do not talk with other youth about things of importance to them,
 - 25% do not talk even with their friends about things of importance to them.
2. Many Japanese students lack a positive view or confidence in their own abilities and capacities. Particularly of concern is that
 - 25% do not have a strong sense of their ability to discern right from wrong.
 - 53% do not feel confident that things will continue to go well even when things go right for them.
 - 29% say that they are not happy to continue to try, even when things go well for them.
 - 37% do not feel happy or able even when things go well.
3. Regarding qualities they admire and role models they choose, and their own view of themselves as people who are honest, helpful or caring, Japanese students express a surprising tendency toward asocial and in some degree antisocial rather than prosocial attitudes:
 - Although hard work and perseverance are often mentioned as qualities supremely

“Japanese,” only 64% of these Japanese students agreed that they admire people who are persevering, and only 38% said they admire hard working people. One quarter of the students stated they do not admire hard working people, and one third expressed no opinion.

- Although honesty and truthfulness are foundations of social and moral development, only 65% of the Japanese middle school students surveyed agreed that honesty was an admirable quality. One tenth expressed that they do not admire honest people. Only 26% consider themselves truthful, while 15% do not consider themselves at all honest.

- Although kindness and getting along were listed by the students as the most admired qualities, only about one in four (26%) of the students consider themselves to be caring, 27% considered themselves people who do good, while 13% do not consider themselves caring and 15% do not consider themselves people who do good. Nearly one in three (32%) of the Japanese students say they rarely or never help others.

Taking the results of the survey overall, although there are indications for the Japanese that teachers care about students and have an adequate grasp of teaching methods, and although discipline styles seem to be less authoritarian than in the past, allowing for more student input, the problem seems to be in the lack of focus on moral qualities and issues within the students' lives. Students are not getting enough time nor encouragement to develop their prosocial capacities in family and social relationships. They have a weak sense of their own cognitive and emotional capacities because the focus of the curriculum seems to be on the “tools” of reading, writing, history, math and science, rather than on the “construction” or “development” of better, more trustworthy, caring and able human beings. More time needs to be given to human relationships and human value both in school and outside of school.

The Ministry of Education has placed a revision of moral education as a priority. Yet they are still searching for appropriate ways to improve the moral education of Japanese children. Based on experiences in other education systems and on educational research, the author ventures to recommend some remedial steps :

- Those responsible for education of children, that is parents, teachers, administrators, and society in general, would do well to consider education from three viewpoints : the powers of the mind (cognitive or mental), the powers of the body (physical), and the powers of the heart (moral or spiritual). Education of moral capacities particularly include strengthening powers of discernment, disciplining of willpower and the emotions, nurturing of empathy, the development of virtues, social values and moral imagination and should be integrated with all other aspects of curriculum.

- Education in school must be balanced with home and society. Society as a whole must address the rebalancing of time so that family and community relationships are strengthened.

- The role of parents as educators, guides, authorities and counselors of their children needs to be strengthened through a community-wide focus that may come from schools, government or social organizations. This is an imperative social need at this time.

- Role models that provide examples of social and moral attainment both in the present and in the past should be drawn from both the local and global settings and from the widest fields of interest to provide educational inspiration. Discussion about these role models should focus on their struggles toward worthy goals that led to their achievements and on the virtues and moral integrity represented in their actions.

Comparing Elements of Moral Development in Japanese and Chinese Middle Schools

- Educational methodologies should be more cooperative than competitive in nature, and exercise a wider variety of learning styles. Large group, small group and individual learning activities should be balanced. Through cooperative activities students learn to appreciate the diversity in their own strengths as well as those of others. Evaluation of students should include a focus on character and social abilities, as well as academic skills, and primarily be of an encouraging nature.

- Methods of discipline should be neither overly authoritarian nor too permissive. Research has shown that inductive methods that involve students in the process of making and keeping rules based on agreed-upon principles for social harmony are most effective in developing their own powers of discernment and discipline. Both reward and punishment are necessary aspects of discipline, but must be administered with temperance, respectfully and justly.

- Wherever possible children should have the opportunity to use their learning in active volunteer activities in the home and local community. Through service to others, children learn most about their own capacities and their longing to be useful can be ignited, stimulating their own learning goals. Further, international volunteer activities such as working with UN organizations can strengthen the students view of themselves as global citizens whose connection and impact can be felt throughout the world.

In summary, these suggestions are ones that can be considered useful in any culture, but when such activities are particularly targetted at the above noted deficits the results are bound to be most effective.

References :

- 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1976) Extracts from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha. In Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, (compilation) *Baha'i Education*, Wilmette, Illinois : Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- Baumrind, D (1989) Rearing competent children. In W. Damon (Ed.), *Child Development Today and Tomorrow*, San Francisco : Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers.
- Damon, William (1988) *The Moral Child*, New York : The Free Press.
- Einstein, Albert (1954) *Ideas and Opinions*, New York : Dell Publishing, p. 55.
- Eisenberg, N. and Miller, P. (1990) The development of prosocial behavior versus nonprosocial behavior in children. In Lewis, M. and Miller, S. M. (eds.) *Handbook of Developmental Psychopathology : Perspectives in Developmental Psychology*. New York : Plenum Press, 181-188.
- Emler, N. (1996) "How Can We Decide Whether Moral Education Works ?" *The Journal of Moral Education*, Volume 25, Number 1, March 1996.
- Fotos, S., and Hansen-Strain, L. (1995) Investigating Spiritualization : Noticing Processing and the Function of Time—Empirical Evidence for a Cognitive Model. Paper given at the 9th Annual Conference of the Association for Baha'i Studies—North America. San Francisco, California, USA. October, 1995.
- Goleman, Daniel (1995) *Emotional Intelligence*, New York : Bantam Books.
- Higgins, M. S. (1999) *Assessing Environments for Moral Education*, Doctoral Dissertation, Hawaii : Greenwich University.
- Hoffman, M. L. (1989) Empathy and prosocial activism. In Eisenberg, N., Reykowski, J., and

- Straub, E. (eds.) *Social and Moral Values : Individual and societal perspectives*, Hillsdale, NJ : Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Kavelin-Popov, L., Popov, D., and Kavelin, J. (1997) *The Family Virtues Guide*, New York : Plume (Penguin Group).
- Kohlberg, Lawrence (1981) *Essays on Moral Development : Volume I : The Philosophy of Moral Development*, New York : Harper and Row.
- Krevans, J. and Gibbs, J. C. (1996) Parents' use of inductive discipline : Relations to children's empathy and prosocial behavior, *Child Development*, Vol 67(6), 3263-3277.
- Lickona, Thomas (1991) Moral development in the elementary school classroom. In Kurtines, W. M. and Gewirtz, J. L. (eds.) *Handbook of Moral Behavior and Development*, Hillsdale, NJ : Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Seligman, Martin E. P. (1990) *Learned Optimism*, New York : Simon & Schuster, Inc.
- Taylor, Monica J. (1996) "Unanswered Questions, Unquestioned Answers," 25th Anniversary Issue Moral Education : From the 20th into the 21st Century, *Journal of Moral Education*, Vol. 25(1), 5-20.