Cultivating morality in the Asia-Pacific: Influences, issues, challenges and change

Minkang Kim & Monica J. Taylor

Published online: 10 Mar 2017.

Submit your article to this journal ↗

Article views: 128

View related articles ↗

View Crossmark data ↗

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

EDITORIAL

Cultivating morality in the Asia-Pacific: Influences, issues, challenges and change

The Asia-Pacific and moral education

The Asia-Pacific is characterised by geopolitical and economic heterogeneity, ethnic, linguistic and religious pluralism. Geographically, it covers a huge area, commonly interpreted as around the Pacific Ocean and including East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania. It comprises vast, wild, interior landscapes and small island archipelagos, often subject to natural disasters. Its peoples are connected by old trading routes and contemporary migrations in search of economic betterment. They may live in some of the most populous cities on earth, or in tiny, remote villages. Culturally, the region has ancient histories, yet is newly developing, with Western socio-cultural influences on its own distinctive, indigenous and deeply-rooted values and traditions. Religion may play a central, institutionalised role, be an implicit, underlying ethos and structure, or, if seen as challenging to political ideology, may be persecuted. Many nation states are post-colonial or relatively recently created, as a result of wars or disputes; contested boundaries contribute to ongoing regional tensions. Politically, systems range from one-party states to emerging and fully-fledged democracies in various forms. Economically, the region is developing rapidly, vibrantly and competitively, drawing on massive natural and human resources, and taking full advantage of modern and post-modern technologies to forge new industries, and infrastructures for communities and cities, with improved communications within and between countries of the region and globally. The twenty-first century has been widely predicted to belong to the Asia-Pacific. So it is fitting that *JME* readers are offered this access to some contemporary academic work in moral education in the Asia-Pacific region.

Moral education in this diverse region both reflects and seeks to influence this human, cultural and ideological diversity, taking account of individual, family, national and political aspirations, amidst the challenges of accelerating regional and global change. Each education system, those who devise and administer its policies and institutions, and those who engage in practices of teaching and learning, have to confront and manage controversial sociocultural issues in the development of societies and the participation of citizens. Some countries of the Asia-Pacific, especially those in East Asia, have long traditions of moral education in formal and informal learning, and continue to accord considerable weight and importance to it in the educational structures, curricula and practices of schools and colleges. From the early 1970s, due to historical, cultural and linguistic links, *JME* published articles from Australasia, and, towards the end of that decade, articles written by scholars in East Asia—initially from Korea, Japan, Malaysia and Singapore—were included in almost every volume. It was not until 1990 that an article from China, which explicitly recognised that 'moral education in China is the weapon of ideological-political indoctrination' (Li, 1990, p. 170) was included. Over the years, connections with scholars—especially in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan—were established, which led to close cooperation and in-depth work resulting in the seminal *JME* special issue 'Moral Education in Changing Chinese Societies' (Li, Taylor, & Yang, 2004; see pp. 406–409).

Since then, in a rapidly developing economic region, there have inevitably been changes to the socio-cultural contexts, educational curricula, pedagogy, and ideological perspectives on the

way in which moral education is conducted in the Asia-Pacific's constituent countries. In what ways, in recent years, have the nations of the Asia-Pacific responded to the challenges of change with respect to trying to ensure the moral well-being, social behaviour and civic engagement of their peoples; which socio-moral issues are controversial, and why; what goals and directions for moral education are espoused for the future? This special issue, focusing on the Asia-Pacific, offers some insights from the perspectives of some of the contemporary scholars most closely associated with developments of policy and practice, research and evaluation, teaching and learning, in certain countries of the region.

The formation, goals and development of The Asia-Pacific Network for Moral Education (APNME)

Why APNME? In the early years of the millennium, the second author was aware, from educational research cooperation and academic connections, that within the Asia-Pacific in the field of moral education and development there existed few opportunities for sharing academic research, or engaging in open dialogue and discussion of concerns. Review of policy and practice existed at the level of formal regional or global educational institutions (such as the Asia-Pacific Programme of Educational Innovation for Development); occasional international moral education conferences had taken place in the Asia-Pacific (see Li et al., 2004, p. 409); and a few academics from the Asia-Pacific region attended annual Association for Moral Education (AME) conferences. Looking back to the early millennium, academic communications were being greatly facilitated and enhanced by new technologies, making day-to-day working together on research projects, shared writing and dissemination across the globe feasible in a way now taken for granted. At that time, many countries in the Asia-Pacific were paying much attention to moral education and quality research was increasingly undertaken. Yet, although there were some within-country associations for moral education, these were usually not cross-disciplinary and did not deal with both theoretical and empirical research, nor were there opportunities for regional exchanges. Thus, awareness, academic experiences in the Asia-Pacific, good connections and opportunism gave rise to the idea of trying to continue, deepen and extend our dialogues by developing a new regional academic forum for research-based academic and school-oriented interchanges in the Asia-Pacific as a whole. Professor Nobumichi Iwasa and his colleagues graciously agreed to host an initial small meeting of Japanese, Korean and Chinese scholars at Reitaku University, in October 2006. This led to further work to expand the incipient network and the formal constitution in 2008 of APNME.

APNME provides, in the Asia-Pacific region, a forum for professional educators, with an interest in and awareness of theory and/or practice of moral education and moral development to: reflect, deliberate on and address moral issues and values questions faced by educators and students; network, share and exchange ideas, perspectives, experiences, practices, research, and teaching and learning resources; and promote, develop and support cooperation and collaborative relationships among individuals, institutions and organisations working in this field, with particular reference to the Asia-Pacific region, but not limited to it. APNME is thus a resource, by means of conferences, a website, dissemination, joint projects and publications.

Within APNME moral education has been broadly defined to include values education as a whole and citizenship education more specifically. During conferences the ideological bases of moral education in different countries are presented, analysed and critiqued, as are research topics, methods and findings. The process of critique is encouraged and facilitated in an open and tolerant atmosphere, with ongoing collaborative support. An emphasis is placed on informal discussion and exchange and encouraging junior scholars and post-graduate students. Members are invited to examine underlying perspectives of their work and to create new approaches, whilst being aware of academic scholarship in the field as a whole, and being sensitive to cultural

backgrounds, local needs and national endeavours to enhance regional goals in a changing global environment. As far as APNME is concerned, the Asia-Pacific is regarded as having permeable boundaries; whilst most members and conference participants hail from countries within the geographic Asia-Pacific, most annual conferences are also attended by some academics from central Asia (e.g. India, Pakistan) and a few non-regional scholars (from Africa, Europe, North and South America) with an interest in it.

APNME's website (http://www.apnme.org) lists the locations and programmes of its annual conferences, documenting a gradual increase in the number and countries of origin of participants presenting scholarly work, and engaging in critique, discussion and debate. Over the 10 years of its existence, annual conferences in the common language, English, have been held in China (4), Indonesia, Japan (2), Korea, Taiwan, and, most recently Australia, each conference dealing with a range of regionally current topics in a specific local context. An occasion of special note was the joint APNME, AME and *JME* 40th anniversary conference, 'Cultivating Morality: Human Beings, Nature and the World', in Nanjing, China in 2011, which attracted over 300 scholars from around the world.

From tentative beginnings, over the last decade APNME has developed into an academic and supportive forum for moral educators in the region and beyond. Each year a core group of participants gather to network, and develop cross-country and regional research collaborations with a new group of first-time participants often residing in the host country or location. Annual General Meetings take place at conferences and community participation is expected and encouraged. Whilst there has been some electronic circulation of newsletters and other information, as with other organisations, APNME has found it difficult to sustain regular ongoing formal communication within the membership. To foster and strengthen moral education and development throughout the region, APNME welcomes cooperation and partnering with institutions, especially with the hosting and co-organising of events. Over the last decade those participating in APNME conferences were from 30 countries, exceeding current individual membership which extends across 18 nation states and territories of the Asia-Pacific. Future developments include activating an agreement with the JME Trust for reduced personal subscription to the *JME* for conference participants and members and, hopefully, further contributing to other international exchanges, such as http://moralcapital.info.

This APNME special issue

Why an APNME special issue? The idea of marking the 10th anniversary of APNME with a publication, to bring to wider notice the range of current theoretical and empirical research in moral education from around the Asia-Pacific region, originated in 2014 with the immediate past Chair, Chris Drake, and an APNME Publications Sub-committee. Implicit in the aims of such a special issue were to make it both retrospective over APNME's lifespan and forward-looking, offering some pointers for the future in a situation of recurrent change. After further discussion among the APNME Committee as a whole, we, as the then incoming Chair and the Honorary President, were appointed to act as editors of a proposed publication.

Following editorial discussion, we compiled a proposal, in 2015 accepted as a *JME* special issue. In considering who to invite as contributors, we were aware of a pool of potential colleagues and, through their APNME conference contributions and previous publications, of what their likely approach and subject matter might be. However, we were concerned that we would be selecting contributors from among the APNME membership, and thereby might be perceived as apparently endorsing or implicitly excluding certain colleagues who might have liked, for personal reasons or out of national pride, to participate. We trusted that chosen contributors would enjoy the challenges of the extensive and sometimes educative processes of writing, review and revision associated with publishing in an international Western journal, whereby we were

all learning to express and communicate ideas, research and reflections beyond their original geographical, social and cultural boundaries. This was in line with an objective of the publication, which endorsed a goal of APNME itself, to strengthen the quality of scholarship by providing academic leadership, enhancing the networking dialogue between members, and exploring ways in which members can collaborate. In this sense, there was added value from the process itself.

Ten potential contributors—from among APNME members, from various countries in the region, from different disciplinary backgrounds and with diverse research interests, about half of whom had previously published in *JME*—were invited to write original material. The guiding intention was that each author should address, in English and in around 4000 words, significant regional or country-based issues in moral education related to the past decade of APNME's existence, and consider present needs, as well as implications for future prospects for cultivating morality in the Asia-Pacific region. Contributors were invited to identify and justify a focus they felt relevant to moral education in their country, their research and individual concerns. We asked authors to take a personal approach—another layer of meaning and interest—to offer a thought-piece, and present an argument based on theoretical or empirical research, with their own critique and evaluation. Thus, this special issue aimed to reflect some of the regional diversity in moral education policy, teaching and learning practices and curriculum approaches, offer a critique of underlying challenges and suggest issues for further attention.

The experience of producing this special issue has been collaborative, educative and academically robust. About halfway through the writing and editing process most contributors had an opportunity to engage with the editors face to face, share their topics, orientations and arguments with one another and summarise them in a plenary symposium at APNME's December 2015 conference at the University of Sydney. This occasion provided collegial support and important further feedback for consideration prior to submission to the *JME* peer-review system. In addition to the usual issues of publishing in a peer-reviewed international Western journal there were some particular challenges for this special issue. Language was the first challenge: contributors had to be able to convey their ideas, evidence and arguments in English, which for several authors is their second, third or even fourth language. Secondly, as a backdrop to understanding and critical appraisal, it was necessary to provide sufficient description of national circumstances and cultural conditions for readers around the world who might lack such detailed knowledge in the Asia-Pacific context. Most importantly for the authors, being able to offer a critique whilst remaining adequately politically correct and safe in critiquing—something academics in many Western countries take for granted—were added concerns for certain authors, who had to find their own boundaries. A further challenge for contributors (not unlike that for authors in the *JME*'s 40th anniversary special issue; Taylor, 2011) was the request to approach the task from a personal, as well as a professional perspective on their own political contexts and to explicitly give something of themselves, their background, experiences and reasons for their chosen subject matter and views. This kind of academic writing is still not usual, is often undervalued, and was an added difficulty in the review process, when, despite having their attention drawn to it, some referees seemed unwilling to grasp that authors had been asked to offer personal insights, in reflecting on and critiquing what they had chosen as significant issues in their context. This gave rise to requests for elaboration and extensive referencing, not possible in the word length given initially, but became so, as despite efforts, for different reasons, two intended articles were withdrawn. With any special issue there are limitations to its scope; here there is an unfortunate absence of articles from certain countries in the Asia-Pacific where considerable weight is placed on moral education, and others in Southeast Asia, Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia, where a lack of contact, available information and inclusion persists, thus remaining as challenges for APNME outreach and collaborative support, and publication in *JME*.

Influences, issues and challenges permeating this special issue and moral education in the Asia-Pacific

In presenting a special issue addressing aspects of contemporary moral education in the Asia-Pacific, it might be thought legitimate to ask if there is a regional perspective, rather than idiosyncrasy, pluralism and/or nation state diversity. Attempting to address this question in relation to this special issue it is, above all, necessary to view what has been identified as salient by contributors—what they chose to write about and how they did it—by stepping back from Western or other perspectives, entering into a learning experience about this region and its characteristics and priorities, and trying to see it within its own terms as mediated by the contributors. Looking at the articles as a whole, the range of topics covered is considerable: from indigenous values to universal values; from early childhood morality to teachers' perceptions; curriculum reviews and pedagogy in practice; implementing moral education in homogenous and culturally diverse societies. Rather than attempting to identify overlapping content in detail, it may be more instructive to try to discern any underlying narrative or internal logic common to the articles, especially where the context is not free or open to criticism and may be redolent with weighty cultural and national expectations. This overview draws out some connecting threads running through this special issue and comments on some common challenges, strengths and weaknesses, as well as opportunities indicated by the contributors.

There is a general expression of an ongoing need for appropriate moral education relevant to young people in each nation state. Context is of great significance. Some countries are dealing with bitter legacies of war and strife or post-colonialism, ongoing territorial disputes, major movements of peoples within and from beyond their boundaries. In some countries, there is discrimination by the dominant cultural majority and unacknowledged cultural diversity, with lack of recognition of, and support for the values and beliefs of indigenous or other minorities, whilst other countries are largely heterogeneous societies only on the brink of cultural and moral diversity. Many countries are attempting to deal with Western influences, to control them, and how they play out in relation to local sociocultural practices and ways of life. There is also general implicit recognition that access to the internet is a significant influence, with potential for good or bad, but its current effect on moral learning or how it may be harnessed to moral education are largely unexplored. A widespread perception among contributors to this special issue is that over the last decade there have been significant changes in the moral fabric of societies and the moral values and behaviour of students, and that each government needs to do more to enhance and support formal moral education and development. As ever, in implementing the explicit goals of government policy for moral education—ranging from individual happiness and well-being to social engagement and civic participation—their interpretation in the curriculum, its standing and means of delivery, and the capacities of its teachers are all key. These vary according to whether or not a climate exists in which controversial ideas and practices can be safely discussed, policies and implementation openly critiqued, where indoctrination and binary thinking are transcended, and rights to non-conformity and diversity respected. Whilst some contributors began to move towards such hopes for the societies in which they live and work, they generally experienced difficulties in seeing clear and detailed implications for the moral education of the future. Sometimes, as in Mainland China, it is enough to try to cope with the rapid pace of change in everyday life, ascertaining current rules in order to stay within the boundaries, whilst dealing with bureaucratic corruption.

Nevertheless, taken as a whole, a number of common themes or strands may be identified from the contributions to this special issue. Many of these point to mismatches, paradoxes, gaps between appearance and reality, especially: the rhetoric of policy and actual educational practices; the ideologies of governments and the reality of day-to-day experience of those living in their societies; the curriculum teachers are supposed to teach and what is needed by students in their

daily lives; the structure and environment of the school, which may work against rather than in harmony with espoused moral education policies and the curriculum; the lack of accountability and transparency of some school administrators and the politics of cover up; the attitudes and practices of teachers which may, because they are more advanced or lagging behind, be out of step with curriculum implementation in practice, or in disagreement with one another; the expectation on teachers to bridge the gaps of interpretation and delivery between government requirements for moral education and community, parent and student needs, often without adequate or appropriate teacher education and in-service support. Whilst many of these mismatches are also common in other countries and regions of the world, the contributors to this special issue offer us insights into their own distinctive concerns, based on their experiences as academics influencing policymaking and curriculum development, undertaking research, and engaging with students and teachers.

This special issue starts and ends with two contributors, writing in their native language of English, with experience of living and working both in countries of the Asia-Pacific and the West. Laurance Splitter is concerned with the development of identity, morality and education in the Asia-Pacific, and argues philosophically for a relational view of personhood, based on regarding oneself as 'one among others', rather than as a free standing or a collectivist individual, part of a larger political, religious, cultural or ideological grouping. He suggests the framework of the classroom community of inquiry, familiar to Philosophy for Children, to accommodate and develop both the relational conception of personhood and the linking of knowledge, via language, to each person's self-awareness and awareness of others, in order to facilitate moral development as members of a diverse range of collectives and traditions, and as persons. In another country-based pedagogical approach, Terry Lovat describes the Australian government's Values Education Program, which permeated the curriculum, focusing on school ambience and teaching discourse directed by core values. Importantly, he points to empirical evidence that this form of values education not only enhanced emotional, social and moral growth but also served to facilitate academic development. He argues that values education is good practice pedagogy, as supported by recent evidence from neuroscience, and should be widely integrated into teaching and learning. Such an approach is not common in most countries of the Asia-Pacific, where moral education, often textbook-based, usually occupies a prescribed place in the timetabled curriculum. The relative efficacy and effectiveness of moral education delivered through curriculum slot, cross-curricular permeation, ethos and/or specific pedagogy is an old debate, and, as Lovat's article illustrates, the approach a government endorses can soon change as political and other considerations arise.

Moral education as a contested concept

Indeed, moral education—an essentially contested concept—is always subject to ideological influence and political intervention in any country and region. This is perhaps nowhere more so than in the Asia-Pacific. In order to appreciate the complexities of moral education in the Asia-Pacific region, it is necessary to take into account the all-pervasive and multifaceted political contexts that operate both within and across its constituent nations. We should note in passing, however, that the political context of moral education in Western countries is not often discussed as a backdrop to moral education, and Western academics may refrain from being too overtly critical of government policies and established norms in professional life in order not to become marginalised, to continue in their positions and to obtain research grants. In the Asia-Pacific political influence on moral education is particularly evident when it is associated, one way or another, with forms of citizenship education that try to instil patriotism and promote the notion of the virtuous citizen, as is often the case in China, and also in Korea and Japan. The

educational issues that come to the surface in the merging of moral education and politics, in this way, raise questions about both the content of what is being taught and also pedagogy: how is the prescribed content to be taught and to what purpose? For example, is it the purpose of moral education to 'instil' prescribed beliefs, whether political, religious, or even specific moral values or virtues? Is there, or shouldn't there be, in terms of pedagogy, a clear distinction between what is acceptable as 'education', in contrast to 'indoctrination'? Whilst to a reader located in a liberal Western democracy these may seem like old debates from the 1970s, such questions are highly relevant to contemporary moral education in many nation states in the Asia-Pacific, and, apparently, in the Western world again too.

Within most nations of the Asia-Pacific—especially in East Asia—there is also an overwhelming concern to maintain nationalistic pride. But such nations are not alone (consider, for instance, France and the US). In the context of a moral education seen as upholding a nation's core values, as in East Asia, such pride inevitably places considerable limits on what any author can say by way of published criticism. So, the very questions raised above, for example, might in themselves be viewed as politically sensitive, or even unacceptable in some nation states or territories within the region. In such situations the official view—and maybe that of some administrators—would be that, instead of asking critical questions, moral educators should simply get on with making sure children grow up to be unthinkingly compliant! Concern to maintain nationalistic pride might even extend to influencing what a reviewer from the region might unquestioningly accept in an article, rather than raising critical questions about its authenticity, for fear of being identified with politically 'unacceptable' comment. Moreover, the intermingling of this kind of political correctness with religious and/or cultural norms of acceptability, as happens in nations such as Indonesia and Malaysia for example, muddies the water even more. Academics can thus feel constrained by pressures to uphold implicit political, social and cultural practices even when they are acting in a more open and liberal academic context, such as at a regional conference or when writing for an academic journal.

Challenges in raising controversial issues

In practice, this means that authors located in 'Eastern' cultural and political settings have to satisfy the demands of two very different sets of readers, when writing for a predominantly 'Western' journal, published in English, and therefore accessible internationally beyond the meanings conveyed by a national language. On the one hand, having a publication in a Western journal generally enhances an Eastern author's academic profile. Also, when writing in that context, authors are largely free to say what they think and believe to be true, as long as it satisfies conventional academic standards of relevant, rational and supported argument and/or robust empirical evidence, and does not infringe laws of copyright, plagiarism and libel. On the other hand, however, Eastern authors publishing in an international English language journal will be acutely aware that they may have other readers 'back-home'. If they write critically about their national situation it is likely to be viewed as unacceptable—as a betrayal of national pride and a violation of political/cultural/ religious norms. Those who choose to raise questions or make critical comments may find that their writing may be implicitly rejected by country-based reviewers on political grounds, but, if, despite this, through academic consensus it achieves publication, they may face intense criticism 'back-home'.

Two articles in this special issue bravely raise issues that will be viewed as controversial 'back-home'. By means of an analysis of the dynamics of the history and politics of education in multicultural Malaysia, Vishalache Balakrishnan expresses concerns about the hegemony of Islam in Malaysia, not just in implementing Islamic Education for Muslims but in deciding and orienting the values, content and structure of school-based Moral Education for non-Muslims

and the system of teacher training to deliver it. Alternative strategies are offered to bridge these two subjects in order to provide student learning experiences to promote foster good relations among students and promote national unity. In a second case, Meiyao Wu both raises doubts about Chinese claims to Taiwan, since the aboriginal peoples of Taiwan, with Austronesian linguistic and genetic ties to ethnic groups found in the Pacific and beyond predate the occupying Chinese by millennia, and also draws attention to the fact that, until very recently, indigenous traditional culture and values have been devalued and discriminated against—a form of moral hegemony. She considers ongoing challenges faced by the indigenous population, and examines recent curricular reforms and new Taiwanese educational discourses that reject the ethnic and racial prejudice reinforced by previous national governments and affirm the ideals of ethnic and cultural freedom and equality, thereby exemplifying moral education in its truest sense. We should not forget that ethnic and racial discrimination also applies in other countries of the region, such as Australia with its aboriginal peoples, and China, with its 55 ethnic groups apart from the dominant majority Han. Much also remains to be done in the moral education of majorities to recognise and respect human rights and cultural diversity, so it is welcome news that in China there is ongoing revision to include the ethnic minorities in moral education textbooks for Han students. In this special issue, not surprisingly, in some other articles tensions between the moral and the political are operating just below the surface, while, in others pro-nationalist elements are evident.

Other ways to access the political/cultural/religious ambiguities in regard to moral education in the region involve focusing on how the subject came to be part of the curriculum in a given nation, how it is currently being debated, and what other factors, such as sociocultural practices, parental moral education and teachers' perceptions of good citizens, are seen as relevant. Mayumi Nishino provides an account of how, after 60 years, moral education policy is being revised by the government in Japan to make it more appropriate to contemporary society, through the modernisation of subject textbooks. The focus of this reform is described as 'a shift from reading to thinking and discussion', complemented by active learning, collaborative work, perspective taking and problem solving to enhance children's abilities to reflect and to act proactively. Teacher education is needed to introduce new methods of teaching and learning to help students examine conflicting values in everyday life and ethical issues involving interacting values; social support will also be key to realising the potential of this subject. By contrast, Nobumichi Iwasa, starting from the same recent events in Japanese society which have acted as a catalyst to reappraisal—in particular persistent and extreme bullying—questions whether or not moral education in Japanese schools is effective. He gives more weight to deeply-rooted sociocultural practices, evident in Japanese people's responses to natural disasters. By means of a small-scale research study, he seeks to show that the well-disciplined behaviour of Japanese people in daily life, social solidarity and education at home are the major components of the moral upbringing of Japanese people. Thus, he advocates that children's everyday experiences should become the focus of moral education in schools, so as to become learning resources for their moral growth in an environment where the teacher promotes good student relationships.

In another context, Xiao-lei Wang's article analyses the methods employed by Chinese parents interactively in everyday situations to instil the moral values of traditional literature rooted in Confucianism. Using evidence from research and recent news reports on moral conduct in Mainland China, she argues that, despite their best intentions, moral socialisation practices in Chinese families may be problematic, and she suggests alternative approaches which may enable children to bridge the gap between moral learning and moral action in contemporary contexts. From a complementary perspective, Hui Li and Chuanbao Tan offer qualitative research to indicate that the perceptions and influence of teachers are important factors in the implementation of school-based moral education in Mainland China. In their study teachers' concepts of the good citizen were limited to that of a personally responsible citizen, not one who participates

in civic life or is prepared to take justice-oriented moral action, thus pointing to the need for more teacher training for a civic education which aims to develop a civic society. What is clear from each author's chosen focus, topic and argument in these articles is that the politics and delivery of moral education are contested between professionals and within societies, and that the methods of teachers and parents need serious revision to be able to meet the challenges which young people face growing up in rapidly changing contemporary societies experiencing new global influences.

Problematising the advocacy of moral education

Yet another way to probe political ambiguities is to ask of any given nation: who are the advocates of moral education, what are their beliefs and commitments, and what is their educational background? Alternatively, who or what might be constraining what academics in such a context feel safe to say about moral education in their nation when writing for a Western international journal? As we do not have an article from South Korea, these kinds of questions may be applied to the Korean context as an illustration. Moral education, under the title of National Ethics, was introduced into the curriculum as a separate subject by the government of Park Chung-Hee, the military dictator in Korea 1961–1979. Its introduction, part of what was called the 3rd National Curriculum Revision, was to maintain a stable and conformist society during military rule. In universities, departments of National Ethics were established to train teachers to teach the subject, and, in one form or another, they continue to this day.

There is, however, another strand that has fed into moral education in South Korea: Kohlbergian and neo-Kohlbergian theories, that were very influential in the second half of the twentieth century in North America and some European countries (Kim, in press), and which were introduced to Korea by, for example, Professor Moon Yong-lin, who completed his studies in America at the University of Minnesota. Within university departments, over time, there has been a comingling of these two different strands. However, the overall emphasis continues to be predominantly political—mainly party political of the ruling party—with a renewed focus on 'teaching national patriotism' (Kim & Chang, 2014, p. 297). The point is not that the advocates of moral education in Korea are of one political orientation, though for historical reasons they are, but that this political orientation, combined with a strong sense of national pride, forms a subtle but also powerful setting for the conduct and discussion of moral education in Korea. In practice this means that it is difficult to instigate a debate that is critical of government moral education policies or that questions nationalistic sentiment as a moral issue. This political orientation of a large number of moral educators is also one of the reasons there is a strong tendency towards description rather than critical analysis in articles about moral education in Korea. However, these issues are not restricted to Korea; they are widespread across the Asia-Pacific region. Safe contexts, in which the development and application of skills of critical appraisal and avowal of alternative stances towards moral education policy and practice are legitimate, are lacking or insecure in many of the region's nations.

Pro-nationalistic sentiment might also impact what gets published in international Western journals. The point is that pro-national political bias, the concern to promote blind uncritical allegiance to patriotism and what is deemed to be virtuous behaviour in the Asia-Pacific region, can result in readers from outside the region receiving a one-sided view from authors. Moreover, in the review process while every reviewer's report requires close examination, in contexts where moral education is seen as upholding the nation's core values and national pride there may be an additional factor to bear in mind when evaluating the referee's report. In the interest of approximating to so-called academic 'objectivity' and regional relevance in the peer review process, it is possible that an alternative, critical and non-nationalistic side of any particular debate is being

silenced. Editors, reviewers and readers should beware of articles that are highly descriptive and do not shine a critical light on what is actually going on. In this special issue, there was a deliberate attempt to encourage authors to take a critical and reflective stance in their writing and, where possible, to situate themselves within the debate and not simply as 'objective' outsiders.

The problem of pro-national bias and the promotion of patriotism prompt a further question, whether moral education in the nations of the Asia-Pacific is actually moral? Whether, that is, the content of moral education is focused on developing young people's understanding of moral concepts and values, as well as enhancing their moral awareness and sensitivity, perspective taking, and enabling them to behave morally. We may also ask whether much of moral education is *educational* in its methods, in the sense of encouraging open-ended enquiry which allows the individual to form his or her own values, make personal moral judgements and act justly in social and civic contexts. This is not the place to pursue these big issues in detail, but the jumbling together of many different aims, objectives, dimensions and learning components under the heading of 'moral education' (when translated from a national language into English), as, for example, in the wide-ranging moral education curriculum in China, begs the question whether what is placed under the umbrella of moral education would necessarily bear that title in an English-speaking context.

The contribution of APNME to moral education over the past 10 years and future directions

The articles in this special issue have sought to represent aspects of what might usually be considered to count as moral education. This is in keeping with the direction that APNME has taken over the past 10 years, where the aim has been to encourage critical debate and raise the academic status of moral education, as an *educational* endeavour. As regional and moral education organisations go, APNME is a relatively new undertaking, now entering its adolescence, a time of change and development. Our aims in producing this special issue are both to gain recognition within and beyond the region for APNME's efforts in bringing those working in moral education together to enhance awareness and more informed dialogue across the region, and to showcase to an international audience some of the current research concerns of the contributors as part of regional debate. We hope, moreover, that this special issue will be a springboard within APNME and the region for the development of educational advances, in which diverse and critical perspectives may be freely voiced, and that, whilst showing awareness of Western and other scholarship, distinctive research and curriculum approaches to specific regional, national and socio-cultural issues and concerns, will be developed. This may have enhanced significance with the rise of nationalism globally. There are exciting and unique opportunities for moral education in the Asia-Pacific region to critique Western theories, values, norms and curriculum approaches, from different values sources, strong cultural perspectives and diverse social contexts. There are also growing opportunities to engage in regional, national and local cultural critiques, so as to arrive at and articulate theories, research and educational practices which are regionally relevant and nationally and culturally appropriate in its constituent developing contemporary societies. Thus we trust that, in the years ahead, APNME will be in a position to further advance and support moral education endeavours in the region, and to engage on its own terms with other bodies and organisations in the field of moral education and development.

Acknowledgements

their work, in the face of detailed requests for revisions. In turn, we owe a debt of gratitude to the referees who, in the peer review process, noted specific points, ideas and arguments which benefited from further attention, clarification and elaboration.

References

Kim, M., & Chang, H. (2014). An investigation of Korean children's prejudicial attitudes toward a national tragedy in Japan. *Journal of Moral Education, 43*, 282–301.

Kim, M. (in press). The dynamics of moral development: Rethinking what develops and how?. In K. Kennedy & C. Lee (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook on schools and schooling in Asia*. London: Routledge.

Li, M. S. (1990). Moral education in the People's Republic of China. *Journal of Moral Education, 19*, 159–171.

Li, M. S., Taylor, M. J. & Yang, S. G. (2004) (Eds.) Editorial: Moral education in Chinese societies: Changes and challenges. In: M. S. Li, M. J. Taylor & S. G. Yang (2004) (Eds.) Moral education in changing Chinese societies. Special issue. *Journal of Moral Education*, 33, 405–428.

Taylor, M. J. (2011) Integrating the personal, professional and political: moral learning in editing the JME. In M. J. Taylor (Ed.) Moral learning: Integrating the personal, professional and political, *Journal of Moral Education*, 40th Anniversary Special issue, 40, 277–288.

Minkang Kim

The University of Sydney, Australia

✉ minkang.kim@sydney.edu.au 🆔 http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1864-2920

Monica J. Taylor

Honorary President, Asia-Pacific Network for Moral Education

✉ drmonicajtaylor@onetel.com