

DOCTORAL THESIS

Situational influences on moral orientation and moral judgment of the Chinese people: theoretical exploration and empirical validation

Tam, Ka Keung

Date of Award:
2004

[Link to publication](#)

General rights

Copyright and intellectual property rights for the publications made accessible in HKBU Scholars are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners. In addition to the restrictions prescribed by the Copyright Ordinance of Hong Kong, all users and readers must also observe the following terms of use:

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from HKBU Scholars for the purpose of private study or research
- Users cannot further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- To share publications in HKBU Scholars with others, users are welcome to freely distribute the permanent URL assigned to the publication

Situational Influences on Moral Orientation and Moral Judgment
of the Chinese People: Theoretical Exploration and Empirical Validation

TAM Ka Keung

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Principal Supervisor: Prof. MA Hing Keung

Hong Kong Baptist University

March 2004

Abstract

A five-stage moral development model is presented in this study. It is believed that different people with different moral judgment levels will have different understanding toward particular situational characteristics, and so will have different patterns of moral orientations. In this study, situational characteristics are operationalized into (i) whether bystanders are present or absent, and (ii) whether it needs to scarify a very high cost to offer help. Moral orientations are operationalized into the tendency to offer help to people of different human relationships (parents, best friends, strangers who are very weak or very young or who are elite of the society, common strangers, and enemies, i.e., R_1 , R_2 , R_3 , R_4 , and R_5 , respectively) under different situations. A testing instrument, Moral Development Questionnaire (MDQ), was designed for data collection and measuring purposes. This questionnaire consisted of two hypothetical dilemmas. Each dilemma was followed by two sets of questions. One set concerned one's tendency to offer help at a cost of one's own life being threatened or for a chance of self-actualization, which generated moral orientation indices. The other set of questions measured one's moral judgment that supported their helping, which generated moral judgment indices. An in-depth interview with a group of 32 students of different academic backgrounds was conducted to help design the testing items. The questionnaire was evaluated by a series of validity and reliability tests and then used to examine the hypotheses. A sample of 529 Chinese subjects in Hong Kong was drawn. Results of the validity and reliability studies indicated that the MDQ had good test-retest, internal consistency reliabilities, consistent convergent-divergent validity with other psychological tests. In addition, the moral orientation indices of the MDQ for high academic achievers were significantly higher than for low academic achievers', and the correlation of the MDQ's judgment indices with age and grade level was also positive and significant. Results of the hypothesis examinations were: (a) the helping tendency of an individual formed a hierarchical structure that decreased consistently from R_1 to R_5 ; (b) the helping tendency of an individual decreased in the presence of bystanders; (b) the level of moral judgment was positively related to education level and helping tendency; (d) people adopted higher moral judgments when faced with a helping situation that was life threatening than when faced with a threat to a chance of self actualization; and (e) for people of higher moral judgment levels, their helping tendency toward R_1 was less influenced by situations than other human relationships than influenced the helping tendency of people of lower moral judgment levels.

Table of Contents

<u>Content</u>	<u>Page</u>
Declaration	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	vi
List of Tables	viii
List of Figures	ix
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: Literature Review	
Major Streams of Studies in Moral Psychology	9
Freud and the Psychoanalytic Approach	
Overview	9
Criticisms	10
The Behavioral and Social Learning Approach	
Classical Behavioral Approach: Overview	13
Classical Behavioral Approach: Criticisms	14
Social Learning Approach	14
The Cognitive Developmental Approach	16
Piaget' s Theory of Morality	
What is morality?	16
Piaget' s two major moral stages: Heteronomy and autonomy.	18
Kohlberg' s Theory of Morality	
What is morality?	20
Kohlberg' s six stages of moral judgment.	20
Moral judgment interview.	22
Criticisms	24
Situations: A Mediating Factor Between Moral Judgment and Moral Action	
Consistency of Moral Judgment with Moral Action	25
Situational Variations in Moral Behaviors	28
Research Studies of Situational Influences on Morality: Limitations	31
Theoretical Framework	
Overview	35
Redefining the term <i>Situation</i>	36
Situational Influences and Moral Decision Making	38
Moral Development vs. Moral Schema	

Content (Cont.)

<u>Content</u>	<u>Page</u>
What are schemas?	41
Schemas and situational influences.	43
Difference in Competence of Making Moral Decisions	47
Situational characteristics: Presence or absence of bystanders.	50
Situational characteristics: Costliness of offering helping.	52
Relationship between the help seeker and the potential help giver.	54
Cultural Specific vs. Cultural Universal	
Morality and Morality of the Chinese People	56
Morality of Chinese: Affection and human relationships.	58
A Five-Stage Moral Development Model of Hong Kong Chinese People	63
Stage One: Obedience and Situational Dependent	65
Stage Two: Instrumental and Cost-and-benefit Analysis	65
Stage Three: Affective and Human Relationship	67
Stage Four: Group Norms and Law Obedience	68
Stage Five and above: <i>Jen</i> and Situational Consistency	70
Hypotheses and Research Questions	72
Chapter Three: Methodology	
Procedure	81
Pilot Study	82
Main Study	
Samples	85
Sample One: An in-depth interview.	85
Sample Two: Validity testing.	86
Sample Three: Reliability testing.	88
Sample Four: Hypothesis testing.	88
Moral Development Questionnaire (MDQ)	
Overall Structure	89
Design of the Hypothetical Dilemmas	90
First-person vs. Third-person Perspectives	91
Measurement of Moral Orientations	92
Measurement of Moral Judgment Levels	
Theoretical background.	93
Testing format.	94
Construction of the test items.	96

Content (Cont.)

<u>Content</u>	<u>Page</u>
Orientation and Judgment	99
Indexing of Moral Orientation Indices	100
General Indices: R_i , D_j , and S_k .	101
Dilemma – Human Relationship Indices: D_1R_i & D_2R_i .	102
Situation – Human Relationship Indices: S_1R_i , S_2R_i , & S_3R_i	103
Dilemma – Situation Indices: D_1S_k & D_2S_k .	103
Indexing of Moral Judgment Scores	104
Validation of the MDQ	105
Defining Issues Test (DIT)	108
Moral Development Test (MDT)	110
Adolescent Behavior Questionnaire (ABQ)	111
Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Junior version, JEPQ)	112
Family Environment Scale (FES)	112
Chapter Four: Results	
Reliability and Validity Analysis of MDQ	
Reliability Analysis	
Internal consistency reliability.	114
Test-retest reliability	114
Validity Analysis	
Face validity and ecology.	115
Criterion group validity.	116
Convergent-divergent validity.	117
Hypothesis Testing	
Hypothesis 1	121
Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3	124
Hypothesis 4	125
Hypothesis 5	128
Hypothesis 6	129
Hypothesis 7	130
Hypothesis 8	131
Hypothesis 9	132
Moral judgment and human relationship.	132
Moral judgment and bystander effect.	134

Content (Cont.)

<u>Content</u>	<u>Page</u>
Chapter Five: Discussion	
Overview	137
Reliability and Validity Studies of MDQ	
Reliability of the MDQ	138
Validity of the MDQ	139
Moral Orientations	
Hierarchical Structure of Helping Tendency	146
Situational Influences on Moral Orientations	148
Variations in Bystander Effects	153
Moral Judgment	
Hierarchical Structure of Moral Judgment Indices	156
Age/Grade Effect	157
Difference in Moral Judgment between Dilemmas	158
Moral Judgment and Moral Orientations	161
Situational Influences on Moral Orientations and Moral Judgment	162
Levels	
Bystander Effects and Moral Judgment Levels	165
Chapter Six: Conclusion	171
Reference	179
Appendix A : An Interview Schedule for Designing MDQ	244
Appendix B: A Sample of the Moral Development Questionnaire (MDQ)	250
Appendix C: Prototypic Responses of the Five Stages Moral Development	257
Appendix D: A Descriptive Summary of the Moral Orientation Indices in Different Grades and Sex	260
Curriculum Vitae	261