

Chinese Traditional Culture Education: Implementing the Child's Position and Perspective in the Elementary School Textbook *Morality and Law*

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Abstract

Purpose: Failure to clarify the position of children in Chinese culture is a significant issue faced by Chinese traditional culture education (CTCE). Indeed, moral education needs to establish child's perspective and position in Chinese society and incorporate these into the curricula on the excellent Chinese traditional culture. This study explores how the elementary school textbook, *Morality and Law*, has approached CTCE.

Design/Approach/Methods: First, this article analyzes practical difficulties in CTCE: omission child's position. Second, this article explores the child's position needed by CTCE based on Rousseau, Montessori, and Dewey's contemporary views on children. At last, this article explores the strategy of how to implement the child's position in CTCE based on *Morality and Law*.

Findings: In respect to CTCE, *Morality and Law* positions children in various ways. In terms of its educational goal, the textbook is intended to improve children's cultural education and appreciation. While the textbook's editors mainly select positive content, negative content is also included. Always taking the child into consideration, the textbook incorporates systemized knowledge into children's own lives, particularly insofar as the teaching strategy uses events or experiences in which children are interested.

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Originality/Value: Following the reform of China's curriculum at the start of the 21st century, moral education textbooks were developed on the basis of the child's position but remained weak in terms of traditional culture education. The approach adopted in *Morality and Law* and illustrated in this study bridges the gap between children and traditional culture, improves the effectiveness of CTCE, and provides other countries with insight based on China's experiences in cultural education.

Keywords

Child's position, China, Chinese traditional culture education, elementary school textbook, *Morality and Law*

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Introduction

China is a country with a rich cultural heritage. In recent years, the Chinese government has emphasized the teaching of the excellent traditional Chinese culture. However, failure to clearly define the child's perspective and position in Chinese society has hindered the effectiveness of this educational objective. At the beginning of the 21st century, China initiated the reform of the moral education curriculum based on the theory of life-based moral education (Lee & Ho, 2005; Lu & Gao, 2004; Zhan & Ning, 2004). This reform sought to reduce the reliance on the learning of abstract moral concepts, while enhancing children's respect for their daily life experiences and guiding them to construct their own moral lives. These efforts are an important manifestation of the child's position.

However, in a comparative analysis of the traditional cultural content in the social study textbooks of primary schools in Chinese mainland, Taiwan region, and Japan, Cai et al. (2018) found that the child's perspective and position was inconsistently applied in the selection and presentation of traditional cultural content. Certainly, while this is fairly straightforward in subjects directly related to children's lives, such as family and school, it is relatively difficult to identify the child's position in subjects like history, geography, law, and traditional culture, which are more knowledge-based and further away from children's lives. Accordingly, these topics need to be explored in respect to accumulated experience of education reform.

Moreover, while several countries—including Japan, Korea, and Singapore—have explored the child's position in their social study curricula, these studies have not focused on traditional cultural contents. The elementary-level moral education curriculum constitutes one of the most important vehicles of Chinese traditional culture education (CTCE). As such, in order to improve the effectiveness of CTCE, it is necessary to explore new ways of establishing the position and perspective of children in Chinese society and culture through elementary school moral textbooks. In May

2012, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (MOE) appointed Jie Lu, a professor at Nanjing Normal University, to lead a team in compiling a set of elementary school moral textbooks to be used nationwide. Their work resulted in the publication of *Morality and Law*, which presents CTCE based on the child's perspective or position. Addressing these issues, this study explores the content of traditional culture teaching in *Morality and Law*, revealing how these textbooks use the position or perspective of the child to effect learning.

Omission of the child's position: Practical difficulties in CTCE

Current CTCE is hindered by the omission of the child's position. This problem has emerged as a result of ignoring three aspects of children's lives: namely, children's practical needs, the characteristics of child psychology, and the value of children's experiences. This section explores these aspects and their value to CTCE in greater detail.

Ignoring children's practical needs

CTCE ignores the practical needs of children in several ways. First, CTCE is intended to help students accept their Chinese heritages and civic obligations. CTCE seeks to instill the belief that when an individual experiences conflict with traditional culture, they must defer to the stipulations of the latter. However, this objective often overrides the practical needs and realities of children's lives. For example, in the 1990s, a movement advocating that children study the classics tended to value these books more than childhood, resulting in the reading of the classics at the expense of children living their lives (Liu, 2016).

Second, the educational contents are often disconnected from children's real lives. According to Li (1996), Redfield proposes two categories of society: the "great tradition" and "little tradition." The former refers to "the culture represented by the gentry and intellectuals in a society's upper class, and is mainly an elite (or high) culture created by thinkers and religionists after thoughtful introspection" (p. 143). In contrast, the latter refers to "the culture represented by the common people, especially the culture in their daily lives" (Li, 1996, p. 143). Currently, CTCE tends to value the "great tradition" while dismissing the "little tradition." From the elementary to college level, CTCE is dominated by the "great tradition" representing the elite culture, while the "little tradition"—that is, common culture and daily life—is practically absent. For example, textbooks typically cite well-known Qin classics and people with lofty aspirations as a means of educating students on moral ideals. Meanwhile, the customs and norms embedded in daily life and conventional morals, the reasons for human behavior, and the subtle impacts of such customs on students are largely ignored. According to Qin (2006), the absence of the "little tradition" in current CTCE indicates that it has veered far away from common people, their lives, and the grassroots of society. CTCE does not reflect the realities of the world in which people live or students' practical needs for

individualized development. Essentially, the teaching of the “great tradition” lacks a solid foundation. In fact, the lack of positive interactions between these two categories renders CTCE ineffective (Qin, 2006).

Ignoring the characteristics of child psychology

Many children in China find traditional Western festivals more attractive than Chinese festivals. Although the impact of market and commercial factors cannot be completely ruled out, the reason Chinese children are so attracted to Western festivals is that they contain many aspects congruent with characteristics of child psychology. For example, the Easter holiday involves symbols of eggs and rabbits, as well as child-centered activities and rituals of painting, hiding, and hunting chocolate eggs and rabbit-shaped candies. In contrast, despite their excellent traditional cultural contents, traditional Chinese festivals—such as the Lunar New Year, Tomb-Sweeping Day (*Qingming*), Dragon Boat Festival, and Mid-Autumn Festival—contain fewer aspects that correspond to the characteristics of child psychology. Modern Chinese society is multicultural, which means that it is comprised of traditional and modern cultures, as well as local and Western cultures. Consequently, it is necessary to consider ways of making CTCE more attractive, especially to children.

Many have criticized CTCE as ineffective. For any form of education to be effective, it needs to be based on children’s psychological structure and tailored to fit their inner psychological characteristics. This is equally true of CTCE. However, a common assumption in current CTCE is that anything taught to children must have “educational” value. The Chinese have always been disdainful of Western education, which begins with the teaching of childish words like “cat” and “dog.” In contrast, the primary CTCE method is making 8-year-old and 9-year-old children read and memorize the classics, which are thought to contain profound truths. Unfortunately, this approach contradicts the findings of educational research. For instance, the steak has a high nutritional value, but it is only nutritional for those who have the ability to digest it—feeding a newborn baby steak is simply ridiculous.

Ignoring the value of children’s experiences

Mainly comprising the classics, CTCE largely ignores children’s experiences. Gaining popularity in the 1990s, arguments promulgating the need for children to study the classics are historically rooted. The movement’s main advocates attached great value to the reading of the classics. For instance, Caigui Wang advanced theories of “*tian niu*”—that is, infusion—and the golden age of memory in advocating that children need to memorize and rote learn the classics (Liu, 2004a). According to Huaijin Nan, children between the ages of 6 and 9 ought to read *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Mencius*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, and *The Great Learning*, and know these texts

so well that they can recite them from memory. Nan further advocated that children memorize and be able to recite several extracurricular books, including *Enlightening Stories for Children*, *Poetries of a Thousand Poets*, and *Three Hundred Tang Poems* (Liu, 2004b). Another proponent, Qing Jiang, held that imparting rudimentary knowledge to beginners merely required them to learn the contents by rote and be able to recite it from memory (Xue, 2004).

This is not to say that the classics have no place in CTCE. Rather, it is necessary to recognize the inherent conflicts between the classics, which are adult, systemized, and rationalized, and the nature of children's experiences, which are non-adult, day-to-day, and nonrational. The classics are known as such because they represent the accumulation and summary of human experiences over long periods of time. They also symbolize authority and conformity. In contrast, children's experiences are considered imperfect and of little value, and even inappropriate and worthless by some. This perspective has inevitably led to the rejection of children's experiences by CTCE in the past.

In reality, traditional culture itself becomes rigid when the value of children's experiences is ignored. This is because the addition of children's experiences enriches overall human experience, revitalizing traditional culture. According to Dewey, when adults and children live together, the active participation of children impacts the social behavior—including approach, spirit, and attitude—of adults, leading to more positive social experiences and perceptions of traditional culture. Consequently, social and life experiences become imbued with the vitality of children's experiences. Consistently increasing the proportion of social experiences to which children are introduced will help them adapt to those experiences and understand society. When this happens, children will begin paying attention to social experiences and learning in order to actively maintain those experiences. This results in bidirectional construction moving upward, with the original social experiences serving as the foundation (Xia & Tao, 2015).

Positioning children in order to enhance CTCE effectiveness

Current CTCE has been criticized as ineffective and failing to value the practical needs and experiences of children. This issue can be solved by clearly articulating the position and role of children in Chinese society. This section elucidates this argument by detailing the way in which children and childhood should be treated, as well as the roles of children in Chinese society.

Recognizing children as individuals and the value of childhood

The first step in positioning the child in CTCE is recognizing that, like adults, children are individuals with their own personality and dignity. It is also necessary to recognize that childhood has independent value. While the majority of people are aware of this, many either consciously or unconsciously dismiss the individuality and value of children and childhood. For example, many people adopt future utilitarian goals as the only criterion with which to measure the value of a

child's life. In other words, if a child fails to achieve a specific goal in the future, adults dismiss all that had been done to that point as worthless—regardless of whether the child enjoyed and gained happy experiences in the process. This approach fails to recognize the independent value of childhood.

The opposite of such a future-oriented perspective of educational value is one focused on the present. A present-oriented perspective emphasizes the educational value of the present moment, allowing children to fully enjoy the learning process while downplaying the external goals of education. In short, childhood should not merely serve as preparation for adult life. As Lu (2008) has noted, education is not good if it fails to consider children's actual lives. The expectation that children should sacrifice their right to a happy life today in exchange for a promise of a happy life in the future is a form of deceptive education. As Lu (2008) asked: What will become of tomorrow if children are deprived of the opportunity to grow up free, healthy, and happy today?

Children are still children and their uniqueness should be respected

While children should be respected as individuals, they should also be treated as children. It is important to recognize their own unique ways of understanding the world, as well as the characteristics of their growth. As Rousseau (2001, p. 71) noted, "Humankind has its place in the order of all things; childhood has its place in the order of life; adults should be treated as adults, while children should be regarded as children." In treating children as children, the first step is to respect the natural laws and stages of their physical and mental development. In this respect, it is important to recognize that their development differs from one stage to another: The process can be rapid and tumultuous at one time, and slow and steady at another. This implies that "children are not only different from adults, but children themselves have differing characteristics depending on their age" (Yang, 1998). Montessori also believed that children undergo continuous and advancing development and that changes occur in stages. The characteristics exhibited during one stage of development are significantly different from those of another stage (Huo, 2000).

Treating children as children also means respecting their interests, needs, and unique ways of perceiving the world. In regard to practical education, some adults believe that children are immature and incapable; view their questions as stupid and their explorations as inept and unsophisticated; and treat their games, fantasies, and doodling as a useless waste of time (Jiang & Liu, 2014). However, as Montessori (2005, p. 79) argued, "children's psychology and personality are completely dissimilar from that of adults. These are differences in fundamental nature, rather than merely one of degree." This is the reason why children and adults do not understand each other.

Children are the future citizens and creators of the ideal society

Although children are individuals, they are still children and should not be left to their own devices. The world of children has its own logic, differing from that of the adult world. This does not mean that adults do not need to educate children; rather, it underscores the need for adults to base children's education on a thorough understanding of the child's world. Adults must enter the living world of children, as well as understand, discover, and fully respect that world. Only then can they rationally and actively guide children to expand their understanding of the living world (Liu, 2011). In other words, the education of children should be based on children's development potential.

Moreover, Dewey proposed that children be educated from the stance of their being "future citizens," particularly insofar as the construction and development of a democratic society depends on the continuous influx of children, who will go on to implement the "ideal society." The relationship between children and society is like that of fresh blood and the body, while the process of society educating children is similar to hemopoiesis in the body. When society transforms children, it promotes its own healthy living, allowing it to continue moving toward "social ideals." As such, the form or ideal of future society depends on the current direction of children's learning and activities. After all, the children of today will become the adults of tomorrow, and their growth is thus intricately linked to society's development. For example, the democratic educational approach and school atmosphere are conducive to the development of children's democratic character, thereby facilitating the construction of a democratic society.

Positioning the child and approaching traditional culture education in Morality and Law

As such, it is vital to position children critically and clearly in CTCE. This section examines the way in which the elementary school textbook, *Morality and Law*, has used the child's position to ensure more effective CTCE.

Educational goal: Improving children's cultural appreciation

From the perspective of child education, CTCE at the elementary school level should seek to educate children about their culture, enhancing their cultural understanding and appreciation rather than focusing on knowledge. Adopting the child's position in CTCE means respecting children and their stage of development. For students in elementary school, knowledge-oriented CTCE does not correspond with their developmental stage. As such, CTCE during this stage should focus on cultivating their cultural spirit. Based on this educational goal, elementary-level CTCE should seek to enhance cultural understanding and appreciation rather than the rote memorization of information regarding traditional culture. It is also necessary to focus on the overall influence of traditional culture on children's lives. In reality, many elementary schools implementing CTCE evaluate its effectiveness based on how much of the *Three Character Classic* or the number of

ancient poems and classical Chinese writing children can recite from memory. Indeed, rote learning is deemed the most important or only evaluation criterion. In terms of the child's position, this evaluation method does not respect children because it violates the objective laws of their development. Even if they were able to memorize such content by rote learning, the lack of understanding means that no direct relation is formed between the content and their lives. As Dewey argues, the resultant impact of the contents on children is "indirect" and "weak."

If the goal of CTCE is the education of cultural literacy, then two developments are necessary. First, the connection between traditional culture and children's current lives must be emphasized. Only when traditional culture infiltrates their actual lives will children be able to recognize and understand traditional culture, effectively narrowing the gap between these worlds. When this occurs, traditional culture will have a positive impact on children's overall lives. In *Morality and Law*, traditional cultural elements in children's lives were used as the starting points from which to guide their experience of traditional culture, thereby enhancing their familiarity with and affinity toward traditional Chinese culture. For example, the tenth lesson in Volume II of the fourth-grade textbook, entitled "Our local customs" (Figure 1), allows students to experience the traditional Chinese virtues of caring for the young and respecting the elderly by having them reminisce and share memories of the customs that they grew up with.

Second, importance must be attached to cultivating the inner spirit of traditional culture. As CTCE at the elementary school level focuses on improving cultural understanding and appreciation, it is necessary to pay attention to the favorable influence that the spirit of traditional culture has on children.

Content selection: Focusing on the positive but including the negative

Traditional culture is myriad, complex, and contains both the best and worst elements of society. Selecting positive content is conducive to the transmission of traditional culture, while including the negative content facilitates the cultivation of children's critical consciousness. Cai et al. (2018) found that the textbooks used in Chinese mainland, Taiwan region, and Japan did not focus on the negative contents of traditional culture.

CTCE employing the child's position considers the characteristics of a child's age and stage of development. While curriculum content should be predominantly positive, it should be supplemented by some negative content. Psychological research has shown that, in general, positive education should be the focus for those with poorer comprehension abilities. In contrast, a combination of positive and negative education should be adopted for those with better comprehension abilities (Huang, 2000, p. 167). Elementary school students—especially those in the lower grades—have relatively little ability to distinguish between right and wrong. Therefore, *Morality and Law* focuses on positive contents for CTCE at this level. The materials strive to screen and select

10 我们当地的风俗^a

风俗就在我身边^b

每个地方都有独特的风俗，这些风俗和我们的生活密切相关。^c

出生^d



听爸爸妈妈说，在我出生后，他们煮了很多鸡蛋，并把鸡蛋都染成红色后送给了亲朋好友。这叫作“报喜”。^e

满月^f



听爷爷奶奶说，我们这里小孩子满月时都要剃胎发，所以，我满月的那天，爷爷和奶奶自动手给我剃了胎发。^g

伴随我成长的风俗还有……^h



伴随你成长的风俗还有哪些？这些风俗寄托了长辈们哪些美好的祝愿？ⁱ

这些与我们成长有关的风俗寄托了长辈对晚辈的美好祝愿。^l

Figure 1. Example of bringing traditional culture closer to children’s lives.

Notes. I. Translation of embedded Chinese characters are as follows: (a) Our local customs. (b) Customs are a part of my life. (c) Every place has its own unique customs, which are closely related to our lives. (d) Birth. (e) I heard from my parents that after I was born, they boiled lots of eggs, dyed them red, and distributed them to relatives and close friends. This is known as “*baoxi*” (announcing good news). (f) Baby’s one-month celebration. (g) I learned from my paternal grandparents that babies here must have their fetal hair shaved when they are one-month old. So, on the day that I turned a full month old, they shaved me themselves. (h) Other customs that I grew up with include ... (i) What are some of the other customs that you grew up with? What well-wishes and blessings do our elders bestow upon us through such customs? (j) The customs associated with our growing up are ways in which elders bestow their best wishes on the younger generation. (k) Caring for the young and respecting the elderly are traditional virtues of the Chinese people. Many of the customs that we grow up with reflect the tradition of caring for the young. Correspondingly, there are many other customs that highlight the virtue of respecting the elderly. (l) Introduction to customs that show respect and veneration for the elderly.

尊老爱幼是中华民族的传统美德。伴随我们成长的很多风俗体现了爱幼的传统，相应地，也有很多风俗体现了尊老的美德。^k

尊老敬老风俗介绍会！

请收集一张给老人祝寿的照片、了解一种祝寿的礼节或者一种寿宴食品，给大家介绍或者表演一下，再议一议这些风俗寄托了我们对长辈什么样的美好祝愿。^m



我听爸爸说过，寿宴上会摆放寿桃，一般是八个小桃，一个大桃，取“八仙祝寿”，暗合“长久”之意。ⁿ



在我的家乡，寿星要吃“长寿面”，面条绵长，表示长寿。晚上则安排酒宴，寿星坐在正位，接受亲友和晚辈的祝贺。^o



在我家，老人寿辰当天亲友们会聚在一起。老人看到晚辈围绕在身边就特别开心。^p

在你的家乡，还有哪些风俗与尊老有关呢？^q



我的家乡人们这样给老人祝寿……^r

Figure 1. (Continued). (m) Please choose a photograph showing a family celebrating an elderly person's birthday and find out about a related custom or a special food item for that birthday banquet. Then, introduce or demonstrate it to the class. Next, discuss the well-wishes conveyed to the elderly through such customs. (n) I heard my father mention that longevity buns are displayed at the birthday banquet. Usually, eight small buns are arranged around a large bun to symbolize the eight immortals sending birthday wishes and for the number "nine" to coincide with the meaning of longevity. (o) In my hometown, the elderly eat longevity noodles on their birthdays. Each strand of noodle is very long, representing longevity. A banquet is organized and held in the evening. The elderly person sits in the central and most important position to receive greetings and well-wishes from relatives, friends, and the younger generation. (p) In my family, all relatives and friends gather at the elderly person's home on the morning of their birthday. They feel especially overjoyed looking at the young children as they make noise and have fun around them. (q) What other customs practiced in your hometown are related to respecting the elderly? (r) In my hometown, we celebrate an elderly person's birthday in the following ways ... 2. The image was from Gao, D., & Lu, J. (2019). *Textbooks in compulsory education: Morality and law* (vol. 2 of grade 4, pp. 72, 74) [in Chinese]. People's Education Press. © 2019 by People's Education Press.

cultural elements that express the progressive ideas of traditional Chinese culture, such as self-improvement, emotional affinity for one's home and country, and social responsibility. These elements were integrated into the textbooks to facilitate and promote student growth.

The focus on positive content during the selection process does not mean that negative content was rejected entirely, particularly insofar as the transmission of traditional culture does not require that it be accepted without criticism or change. Rather, there should be a process of critically developing what is useful and discarding that which is not. At the same time, children must be taught to reflect upon and be critically aware of traditional culture. This helps children overcome the negative elements of traditional Chinese culture, thereby connecting traditional culture with the spirit of the times. For example, while the tenth lesson in Volume II of the fourth grade textbook, entitled "Our local customs" (Figure 2), guides students to understand the traditional Chinese customs of caring for the young and respecting the elderly; it also encourages them to reflect on other customs that should be eliminated or changed.

Indeed, it is necessary to include appropriate negative contents in order to develop children's abilities to reflect and think critically. Such contents enable students to recognize the shortcomings of traditional Chinese culture, often provoking anger and resentment. Although these emotions cannot directly elicit their passion for traditional Chinese culture, their critical awareness can be enhanced under the teacher's rational and effective guidance. As such, negative examples can be an effective tool.

The approach of having predominantly positive contents supplemented by negative contents actually conveys the true and inclusive spirit of traditional Chinese culture. Students will gradually develop their true character and personality when allowed to understand and explore both the positive and negative aspects of traditional Chinese culture. Even if school education emphasizes the positive content and prevents students from understanding negative aspects, children will encounter negative elements in their daily lives. In such a scenario, students may come to mistrust school education, eventually forming a hypocritical attitude. However, when students are permitted to understand both the positive and negative aspects of traditional Chinese culture, their personality will gradually develop to embrace inclusiveness and forgiveness.

Textbook structure: Integrating systemized knowledge into daily life

CTCE from an adult's perspective often prioritizes accurate and systemic content while ignoring the value of children's experiences. This has proven ineffective. CTCE from a child's perspective prioritizes appropriate and interesting content, while recognizing the value of children's experiences. Although this approach is less systemized, students are more engaged with the content, making it more effective. In the past, the design of textbooks tended to favor an adult

第四单元

感受家乡文化

关心家乡发展

a

风俗的演变

b

随着社会的发展，有些风俗已经不能满足人们的需要，不再适应社会的发展，这就需要淘汰或者加以变革。

c

小调查

d

请通过翻阅图书、上网或者采访长辈等途径，调查一下自己所生活的地区有哪些需要淘汰或者加以变革的风俗。

e

小调查

f

风俗的名称	g
调查的途径	h
风俗的主要活动	i
淘汰或者变革的理由	j
可能的替代性活动	k

Figure 2. Example of guiding children to treat traditional culture rationally and critically.

Notes. 1. Translation of embedded Chinese characters are as follows: (a) Module No. 4 Cultural awareness and being concerned about the development of one’s hometown. (b) Changes in customs over time. (c) As society progresses, some old customs no longer satisfy people’s needs or are no longer relevant. These need to be eliminated or modified. (d) Mini survey. (e) Please investigate the customs in your area that should be removed or changed. You can do so by looking through reference books, searching the Internet, interviewing your elders or other means. (f) Mini Survey. (g) Name of custom. (h) Investigation method. (i) Main activities associated with the custom. (j) Reason(s) for elimination or modification. (k) Possible alternative activities. 2. The image was from Gao, D., & Lu, J. (2019). *Textbooks in compulsory education: Morality and law* (vol. 2 of grade 4, p. 79) [in Chinese]. People’s Education Press. © 2019 by People’s Education Press.

viewpoint and consider the systemic nature of traditional cultural knowledge, resulting in the common mistake of using a system that is external to the daily lives and experiences of the students themselves.

2 说话要算数^a

谁还相信他的话^b

说话算数是人的一个重要品质。说话不算数不仅会对别人造成伤害，也会对自己造成伤害。^c

议一议^d

有个同学，大家都叫他“爱保证”，在学校和家里到处都能听见他做保证的声音。想一想，“爱保证”同学多次说话不算数，你认为接下来会发生什么事情。假如你是他的老师、朋友或家人，你会做些什么呢？可以分角色演一演。^e



The illustration shows three scenes where a boy makes promises. In the top left, he promises his friends to bring a racket. In the top right, he promises his teacher this is his last late assignment. In the bottom center, he promises his mother to feed the cat on time. Each scene is enclosed in a light blue hexagonal frame.

我保证下次一定带球拍！^f

老师，我保证这是最后一次拖欠作业了。^g

我保证下次一定按时给小猫喂食！^h

Figure 3. Example of the dispersed integration of traditional culture into different learning topics in a lesson entitled, “Keeping one’s promises.”

Notes. I. Translation of embedded Chinese characters are as follows: (a) Keeping one’s promises. (b) Who will still believe what he says? (c) Keeping one’s promises is an important personal quality. Not doing so causes harm to others and oneself. (d) Discussion. (e) There is this student everyone calls “Promise King” because he often makes promises in school and at home. However, he seldom keeps his promises. Think about it: What will happen next? If you were his teacher, a friend, or a family member, what would you do? Please take on different roles and act out possible scenarios. (f) I promise that I will bring a racket next time! (g) Teacher, I promise this is the last time that I will hand in my assignment late. (h) I promise that next time, I will feed the cat on time! (i) Module No. I Peers and interactions.

第一单元 同伴与交往 **i**

活动园 **j**

在我国传统文化中，蕴含着许多劝导人们为人处世要讲信用的教诲。请收集有关失信的故事或成语，与小组同学分享。**k**

我知道一个表示失信的成语“食言而肥”。这个成语背后的故事是……**l**

我还知道有一个关于失信的故事……**m**

我在读《西游记》时发现，唐僧取经遭遇的第八十一难也是一个关于失信的故事。这个故事是……**n**

从这些由于失信而导致害人害己的故事中，你得到了什么启示？**o**

1. 对他人说话不算数，失信于人会对别人造成伤害。在……故事中，别人受到的伤害是……**p**

2. 对他人说话不算数，也会伤害到自己。在……故事中，失信者本人受到的伤害是……**q**



Figure 3. (Continued). (j) Activity corner. (k) Traditional Chinese culture embodies many lessons advising people to be true to one's words in life and when treating others. Please find some stories or idioms related to going back on one's word and share these with other students in the group. (l) I know of a related idiom on breaking promises: to grow fat by eating one's words. The background story of this idiom is ... (m) I know of another story about not living up to one's promises ... (n) When I read *Journey to the West*, I realized that the 81st hurdle that Tang Sanzang must overcome on his way to obtain the scriptures was related to broken promises. The story is ... (o) What revelations did you get from these stories about broken promises which brought harm to others and oneself? (p) Not keeping one's promises to others will harm them. In ... story, the hurt experienced by others was ... (q) Not keeping one's promises to others will also harm oneself. In ... story, the hurt experienced by the dishonest person was ... 2. The image was from Gao, D., & Lu, J. (2019). *Textbooks in compulsory education: Morality and law* (vol. 2 of grade 4, pp. 10-11) [in Chinese]. People's Education Press. © 2019 by People's Education Press.

Cai et al. (2018) found that moral or social education textbooks in Chinese mainland and Japan had a knowledge-oriented approach to the contents of traditional culture education—despite the former purporting to be based on the child’s position. As a result, there was an observable gap between the textbook content and students’ lives. To address this issue, *Morality and Law*’s rooted CTCE in the child’s perspective, thus integrating systemized knowledge into the logic of children’s daily lives.

Traditional Chinese culture has an inherent internal system. As Liang (2011, p. 29) contended, “Chinese culture is a whole”—that is, its various components are all interconnected in various ways. However, given the need to organize the contents of traditional Chinese culture according to the logic of children’s lives, the design of *Morality and Law* is based on a decentralized approach. This refers to the assimilation or integration of traditional Chinese culture into specific events in children’s lives. Doing so not only effectively integrates CTCE with other lessons but facilitates the consolidation of CTCE itself. Rather than treating CTCE as a stand-alone subject, this approach was actively applied in the relevant modules of *Morality and Law*. For example, a lesson entitled “Keeping one’s promises” concerns the topic of trustworthiness (Figure 3).

In contrast, a centralized approach involves the use of specialized textbooks, modules or dedicated classes. Although this practice is systemic, there is the danger of the contents being dissociated from children’s daily lives. While organizing the contents of traditional Chinese culture based on the logic of children’s lives may not maintain its inherent logic, doing so takes into account the hierarchical issues faced in CTCE. That is, this approach considers the distinction of internal CTCE hierarchies in targeting children of different age-groups, which should be done according to the characteristics of their respective developmental stage.

Teaching strategy: Beginning with events or experiences of interest to children

This poses the question of how CTCE from the child’s position should be implemented. First, it should start by using a life event in which students are interested or with which they are personally familiar. When selecting the relevant topics, textbook writers and compilers must strive to bridge the gap between children and traditional Chinese culture. To achieve this, they should place themselves in the child’s position, choosing contents that are not only part of children’s life experiences but also closely related to traditional culture. For instance, customs incorporating children can be used when introducing the traditional Chinese virtues of caring for children and respecting the elderly; examples include “*baoxi*” (announcing births), the 12 Chinese zodiac signs, and birthday celebrations for elderly relatives. When reminiscing about and reflecting on these customs, the students are guided to experience and understand the meaning contained in these practices, as well as the desires that the elders have for the younger generation or vice versa. This is necessary because abstract moral concepts and theoretical systems cannot constitute the basic

contents of textbooks, as this would require a return to the previous method of knowledge and virtue indoctrination. Using children's lives as the starting point not only closes the gap between them and traditional culture but enhances the effectiveness of CTCE. It is only when the material involves scenes from their real lives that children are able to understand traditional culture and feel its inner spirit.

Second, classroom teaching must be connected with the traditional cultural activities in students' lives that bring them delight. Teachers need to identify activities and games in traditional Chinese culture in which children are interested and can participate, but that do not contain any safety or era-related concerns. Examples include paper cutting and Chinese knotting for the Lunar New Year, lantern making and guessing word-based riddles for the Spring Lantern Festival (the 15th day of the first lunar month), kite making and flying for the Tomb-Sweeping Festival, and tug-of-war and making sachets for the Dragon Boat Festival.

Although some traditional activities have been continued and become modern activities—evidencing the strong vitality of these activities—that these activities originated from tradition and have the genes of traditional culture cannot be denied. Therefore, from the perspective of traditional culture education, teachers need to guide students to understand the traditional stories or experience the traditional values involved in these activities. Teachers also need to consider the safety of these activities in the process of incorporating them into education, including the use of knives and scissors in craft activities. These considerations also reflect the child's position, as children's activities often require greater attention to safety protocols and adult supervision than those intended for adults.

Moreover, teachers should actively explore the elements in traditional culture in which children are interested and design teaching activities accordingly. For example, many traditional customs in China are related to eating—an activity that appeals to most students. Therefore, eating can be used to develop child-related activities. For instance, in spring, teachers can take students outside to pick, observe, and sample wild vegetables, while fall activities might include the picking and sampling of winter fruits, like melons. Teachers can also actively explore other activities by combining the characteristics and cultural traditions of the local region that concern or interest children. Such activities will help realize the effective connection between the excellent traditional Chinese culture and children's lives, experiences, and interests, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of CTCE.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the 21st century, China reformed its moral education curriculum by enhancing the child's position—a focus reflected in textbook development. However, the comprehensive Chinese moral education curriculum at the primary level includes numerous knowledge-oriented

disciplines, such as traditional culture, history, geography, and law. In comparison to family and school life, such knowledge-oriented fields are far from children's everyday lives, making it harder to center the child's position in their instruction. This study examines the way in which the child's position has been implemented as a pedagogical tool in traditional culture education in China, which has implications for a number of disciplines and curricula reform.

More specifically, this study shows how, by exploring various aspects of CTCE from the child's position and perspective, *Morality and Law* successfully bridges the gap between traditional culture and children's daily lives, thereby improving the effectiveness of CTCE. Although these findings are based on traditional Chinese culture and children, the Chinese experience can provide other countries with insight into cultural education, particularly insofar as the moral education or social curricula of other countries similarly contain diverse cultural content.

Nonetheless, the value of CTCE based on the child's position still needs to be validated through the future educational research in China. In addition, ways of addressing the relationship between traditional and modern culture, as well as between traditional culture of different ethnic groups and regions, require further considerations. Indeed, children face issues of multiculturalism in their daily lives and are thus integral to developing the child's position in educational curricula and resources. Teachers also need to consider how to implement the child's position in traditional culture teaching—after all, the textbook is but a tool of teaching.

Author's note

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