

Is University Education a Golden Key for a Happy Life?

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Abstract

This article explores what the ultimate purpose of university education is, and whether a university is indeed a golden key for a happy life. Two research questions are addressed as follows: for what the young study in a university?; and a university, is it a golden key for happiness? To defend the research questions systematically, the author uses a descriptive content analysis method with a cross cultural approach. The first research question is discussed from three perspectives: teleological, ontological, and pragmatic. And the second research question is focused on a positive role of university education from standpoints of individual, social, and national. As the result of this study, the author evaluates university education as a significant determinant which provides not only opportunities and rewards to pursue utility and to cultivate oneself for an individual, but also chances and benefits to promote culture, economy, and national competitiveness for a society and a state. Focusing on the positive side of university education, the author judges that a university may be a golden key to open the triple doors, namely, individual happiness, social welfare, and national prosperity.

Keywords: university education, happiness, knowledge, Korean higher education

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Introduction

Everyone wants a happy life. The common purpose or the ultimate goal of life is an individual happiness and social well-being, whatever he or she pursues money, power,

fame, success, ideology, thought, and religion, or whatever anyone seeks worldly desires such as material, consumption, sexuality, and pleasure based on materialism, mammonism, and hedonism. On the contrary, she or he pursues belief, ideality, meditation, and self-discipline grounded on spiritualism, pietism, asceticism, and mysticism. In a daily life, health and wealth are significant conditions or factors to live a happy life in general, on the other hand, religion, art, sports, music, and recreation are facilitators to fulfill such a life.

The feeling and degree of happiness, however, differs from every individual, and the criteria and pursuit of a happy life is also different from a person. Because each person has different thought about such questions: what is happiness?; where is happiness?; and how does an individual seek after happiness? In particular, the quality and quantity of happiness is various according to race, nation, religion, culture, and history as well as age and sex. The reason is that happiness can be close or far, sensible or insensible, visible or invisible, tangible or intangible, intrinsic or extrinsic, practical or abstract, peace or pleasure, and mine or yours.

Supposing that happiness is the ultimate goal of human beings' life, we could say that happiness would be the highest goodness and value as Aristotle's assertion. In other words, happiness is the most significant goal in human life, and the highest value which anyone should pursue.

At the present time, with the enhancement of national competitiveness, several nations and organizations of the World such as Bhutan, Canada, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, United Nations, and UNESCO, not only study well-being subjects at several research agencies and groups -- EFA Global Monitoring Report: UNESCO, EuroQOL Survey: <http://www.euroqol.org/>, Gross National Happiness, Happy Planet Index: NEF, Planning Commission of Bhutan, Quality of Life Index: <http://www.isoqol.org/>, Quality of Living Survey: Mercer Human Resource Consulting, The World Factbook: CIA, The Oxford Happiness Inventory, UN Human Development Index, Vanderford-Riley Well-Being Schedule, and World Database of Happiness -- to enhance social welfare and national prosperity, but also pursue the welfare policy of higher education. In addition, a number of scholars or researchers (Annas, 1995; Bruelde, 2006; Bruni and Porta, 2007; Diener, 1984, 2000; Easterlin,

1995; Frey and Stutzer, 2002; Gilbert, 2006; Griffin, 2006; Hecht, 2007; Holowchak, 2004; Klein, 2006; Layard, 2005; McMahon, 2005; Myers, 1992; Oswald, 1997; Ott, 2005; Schoch, 2006; Seligman, 2002; Tkach and Lyubomirsky, 2006; Veenhoven, 1993, 2007; White, 2006) who mainly work in the fields of philosophy, religion, social psychology, social welfare, sociology, and economics studies have lively studied happiness or well-being subjects with qualitative and quantitative research methods. Several western scholars (Barrow, 1980; Frey and Stutzer, 2002; Halpin, 2003; Hodgkinson, 1982; Krueger and Lindahl, 1999; Michalos, 2007; Noddings, 2003; Smith, 2005; Stefano, 2006) have researched happiness from an educational perspective, but the happiness studies (Frey and Stutzer, 2000; Hartog and Oosterbeek, 1998; Keller and Mangold, 2002; Miller and Tcha, 2005) related to university education are only a few.

On the contrary of these trends, almost all of countries in the world spur to develop human resources as human capital for the strengthening of national competitiveness with the trends of globalization and global capitalism on the basis of the theory of market economy. Now, Korean government and universities also emphasize globalization and professionalization to foster globally professional man power as well as to increase national competitiveness. Current Korean higher education, on the one hand, concentrates upon the improvement of educational quality suitable for the global standard, on the other hand, keeps in step with the strengthening of national competitiveness, regardless of the ultimate purpose that university education should pursue individual happiness, social welfare, and national prosperity. For this reason, the author attempts not merely to review the ultimate purpose of university education but also to examine the relations between university education and happiness, and then provides university administrators, policy makers, and researchers with a theoretical basis for which higher education should go in the correct direction.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore what the ultimate purpose of university education is, and to examine whether a university is indeed a golden key for a happy life. Although there are a number of conditions and factors enable to pursue happiness, this study will be limited to two factors, knowledge and education, especially university education. The study mainly focuses on current Korean higher education. For this study systematically, two research questions are addressed as the following:

First, for what the young study in a university?

Second, a university, is it a golden key for happiness?

In order to defend the research questions systematically, the author will use a descriptive content analysis method with a cross cultural approach.

University Education and Happiness

In order to examine the relationship between university education and happiness, the author first intends to describe the concepts of knowledge and education, and next review the functions of the university. Finally, the author will discuss what and where happiness is in terms of education.

Education and Knowledge

How can we get knowledge? Knowledge can be obtained by many routes and ways. Drawing an inference from the origin of the word in the West and the East, knowledge is composed of not only education but also experience, discretion, perception, observation, and consideration from the material and spiritual world. In ancient Greek, there are several terms used without making any distinction between knowledge and wisdom. In the treatises of Plato and Aristotle, there are a few examples: *phronesis* comprises justice, beauty, and goodness related to practical knowledge or wisdom; *sophia* means philosophic wisdom; *episteme* implies theoretical knowledge concerned with material, experience, and skill; *politike* purports political wisdom striving for effective human relationship in a communal society and nation; and *techne* signifies arts, skills and technical knowledge (Barker, 1946; Jowett, 1991; Ross, 1988).

Knowledge comprehending the concepts of wisdom formed through various objects and process was more diversified in the period of the Roman Empire: *scientia* means knowledge, science, or skill; *intellegentia* comprises intellect, perception, and idea; *doctrina*, practical knowledge; *experientia*, empirical knowledge; *cognito*, cognition; *sapientia*, wisdom and discretion; *prudentia*, prudence and self-awakening; and *consilium*, speculative consideration. In particular, *scientia* is classified several ways after combining with Christian doctrines as follows: innate knowledge (*scientia infusa*),

acquired knowledge (*scientia acquisita*), empirical knowledge (*scientia experimentalis*), intuitive knowledge (*scientia visionis*), simply intellectual knowledge (*simplicis intelligentiae*), essential knowledge (*scientia necessaria*), natural knowledge (*scientia naturalis*), liberal knowledge (*scientia libera*), and so on. Supposing that the concepts of knowledge in the Hellenic period stayed in the spiritual and material world, the concepts of knowledge in the Roman epoch comprehended the *theo*-centric and *anthropo*-centric world.

As the same as the West, knowledge in the Confucian civilization area of the East can be acquired by education as well as experience, discretion, perception, and consideration from the material and spiritual world. Knowledge, however, is classified “knowing” and “wisdom.” The former as an academic virtue can be obtained from teaching, training, and learning, on the other hand, the latter as a practical virtue can inhere in human nature. In *The Great Learning*, one of Confucian books, things being investigated, knowledge became complete, and persons were cultivated (Legge, 1971). In other words, self-cultivation as morally illustrious virtue can be achieved by knowledge.

In Confucius’ teaching, knowledge can be obtained through learning and teaching. Consistent learning and practice in the Confucian Analects means education. Being combined with several Chinese characters, ‘teaching’ in the classical texts of ancient China indicates the importance of education. For instance, there are ‘teaching and upbringing,’ ‘teaching and learning,’ ‘teaching and practice,’ ‘teaching and edification,’ and ‘teaching and governance’. Like Confucian concepts of education on the basis of teaching and learning, *paideia*, an ancient Hellenic term including the meaning of education, comprehends the concepts of teaching, learning, practice, and culture. In the Latin language, however, the meaning of education appears in the following several terms: *eruditio*, leading out human capacity through teaching and learning; *doctrina*, the process of knowledge practice through instruction and learning; and *institutio*, having the concepts of custom, education, and consultation. The above terms comprehend not only educational process and procedure but also ethical, social, and political phenomena.

In synthesizing the concepts of education and knowledge shown in the classical texts of the West and the East, education is a way or route to obtain knowledge, and both are inseparably related to each other. Therefore, knowledge which we are in need of

should be obtained the total phenomena educational, ethical, social, political, and cultural through the process or procedure of learning, experience, discretion, perception, observation, and consideration. Supposing that education is behavioral pedagogy leading out the potential capability of human beings through learning and practice, knowledge would be the total synthesis of the material and spiritual world necessary for human beings to obtain through various ways and procedures for a whole life.

The Functions of a University

A university, according to John H. Newman (1959), is defined as a place of teaching universal knowledge. The term “university” etymologically originated from the Latin word *universitas*, being applied to the guild or society of students and masters (Wieruszowski, 1966). In addition, “the term *University* was applied for the first time to the Parisian school” (Malden, 1835: 11). However, the term “*universitas*” in the earlier part of the Middle Ages had no more connection with the words “*universisale*” (universal) and “*generale*” (general), but the word “*universitas*” was applied to “*communica*” (towns or communities) as organized bodies, specifically a “*universitas literaria*” (learned community) (Laurie, 1912: 175).

According to Eric Ashby (1904-1992) who was a British educator and botanist, after rising universities in the Middle Ages Europe for over a few centuries, the universities of the West performed mainly four principle functions as the following: to train the students for certain professions such as the church, medicine, and law; to foster gentlemen, administrators and statesmen; to be a center for scholarship and research; and to be a staff college for technical experts and specialists (Yanase, 1989: 138). In the West, as Millet (1962: 54) points out, the objectives of university education are the preservation, transmission, and advancement of knowledge

In the current twenty first century, however, the term “university” has cast off the old concepts of “*universitas doctorum et scholarium*” and “*universitas magistrorum et scholarium*” as towns and gowns having the power of conferring degrees in the Middle Ages, and now universities are pursuing the new concepts coping with the trends of globalization and academic capitalization in the age of information communication technology (ICT) as follows: a multi-university seeking after diversification; a global or

an international university following to the tendency of globalization; a virtual university, mega-university, on-line university, and e-multi-campus chasing the internet age or a knowledge-based society; and an entrepreneurial university running after university capitalization and academic utilization.

Therefore, the main functions of a university have changed into instruction, research, and community service. In addition, the purpose of a university is not only the preservation, transmission, and advancement of knowledge, but also the up-bringing human power or human resources having professional knowledge and scientific skill for the enhancement of the life quality of an individual and for the establishment of a welfare society and nation

What and Where Happiness Is: In Terms of Education

Supposing that a human being is an existence who seeks after truth, and that the ultimate purpose of life is happiness, a human would be a being who is pursuing intellectual activities to know something unknown as well as to understand uncertain things clearly through empirical practice and logical speculation. In addition, following to the nature of truth pursuit, a human learns and practices knowledge, and he or she is able to pursue, feel, or possess happiness that is the most sublime value of human life through education.

Now, what and where is happiness? For all times and places, a number of sages and scholars have inquired happiness and asserted their ideas and theories about it until the present time. For several instances, in Buddha's teaching, happiness is achieved by overcoming desire in all forms; in *the Politics* of Aristotle, happiness is the actualization and complete practice of virtue (Book VII, Chapter 13); in the *Tao Te Ching* of Lao-tzu, an ancient Chinese philosopher, the best way to run the world is nothing but the skill of doing nothing against the *Tao* (Way: Chapter 48) (trans. Kwak et al., 1993); in *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas, the ultimate end of human existence consists in *felicity* (blessed happiness) (trans. Shapcote, 1991); and in his book *Authentic Happiness*, Martin Seligman (2002) who is one of the founders of 'positive psychology' considers happiness as the consisting of positive activities and emotions.

Nobody, however, lucidly answers the question or distinctly explains his or her thought and principle regarding the truth of happiness. The definition and the existence of

happiness have been not merely discussed diversely in accordance with race, religion, culture, and academic backgrounds, but also expressed variously according to epochal trends, historical contexts, and societal situations. This is the reason that the nature and characteristic of happiness can not be examined by logical speculation and scientific inquiry, but includes both physical and metaphysical aspects.

Nonetheless, happiness is anywhere existent as the supreme value after which human beings are seeking. Furthermore, there is no doubt that happiness is the ultimate goal and purpose of every individual for all times and places in the history of world culture. In a daily life, to learn and practice knowledge and wisdom may be a valuable means to enhance the quality of life and an effective way to obtain happiness. Especially, to learn professional knowledge and special skills through university education is the main goal for self actualization as well as for societal success to promote the quantity and quality of life physically and spiritually. In this vein, the author argues that knowledge and education are necessary conditions and determinants to pursue and to obtain happiness.

For What the Young Study in a University?

For what the young study in a university? The reason of this question necessary is that the purpose of university education is inseparably bound to the purpose of our lives. Although this question apparently shows a teleological color, it also includes philosophically ontological meanings and pragmatically physical utility. Thus, the author intends to discuss the question from three perspectives: teleological, ontological, and pragmatic.

First, from a teleological perspective, this question inquires the purpose of study. Although the aims of life and learning are various according to individuals, the pursuit of happiness may be a common thought of all humans. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle claims that happiness (*eudaimonia*) is the highest end of virtuous life or ultimate goodness (trans. Ross, 1988). He also asserts that human beings thirst for happiness, and happiness can be achieved by a virtuous life based on moral virtue and intellectual goodness being able to be cultivated by the habit (*ethos*) of practical wisdom and the formation of Golden Mean (*mesotes*). In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle viewed

happiness as self-sufficient being a contemplative activity or as an activity of soul in accordance with perfect virtue. The former (*eudaimonia*) is perfect happiness being obtained by humans; the latter (*makarios*) being blessed by the Absolute or Superiority. If happiness is the ultimate goodness or the highest end, and human beings thirst for the highest thing, happiness is the best thing which they eagerly desire. Therefore, the purpose of study in a university is to be happy or for happiness.

Next, from an ontological perspective, the above research question includes an existential problem about who I am. In the *Nicomachean Ethics, Chapter X. 7*, Aristotle argues that “if happiness is activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable that it should be in accordance with the highest virtue; and this will be that of the best things in us” (trans., Ross, 1988: 263). In this vein, an individual can make the ultimate goodness his or hers when he or she sublimates himself or herself having a virtuously lofty-minded character through practice or education.

Like Aristotle’s assertion, Xun Zi [Hsun Tzu] (300-230 BC), one of the greatest Confucian philosophers of the classical epoch in China, also stresses the learning of propriety with self-cultivation in order to change the inherently immature and evil human nature (Cheng, 1991). Particularly, Xun Zi emphasizes that individuals have to learn the teaching of sages. In a university, the young can meet sages indirectly and learn sages’ teaching systematically and theoretically. To rebirth as a virtuous person through learning and education might be one of the most important purposes in university education.

Last, from a pragmatic perspective, pragmatically physical utility means not only the pursuit of virtue and happiness through learning and practice, but also the means or tools for solving the necessities of life, of course, money, power, fame, health, and status. Furthermore, it includes the meanings for enjoying and obtaining the practical and pragmatic things enable to maintain human dignity and to seek pleasure. According to Xun Zi, a human being is born with desire. Desire is closely related to material possessions, and it is viewed as a fundamental source to achieve such physical sufficiency. Xun Zi argues that desire can be controlled through education and practice (trans. Cheng, 1991). In this vein, education is a practical tool to fulfill physical sufficiency as well as a moral medium to restrain physical desire. Thus, the young study in a university for the sake of practicality, such as money, power, fame, and success,

individually and socially.

Summing up the above discussion, the author argues that the young study in a university so as to obtain practicality, to cultivate themselves, and to pursue happiness.

University, Is It a Golden Key for Happiness?

Is a university indeed a golden key for opening the door of happiness? The author intends to examine the question focusing on a positive role of university education from standpoints of individual, social, and national.

From an individual viewpoint, first of all, university education provides not only opportunities to learn and practice knowledge and skills suitable for utility but also a number of practical benefits and rewards to enhance the quality of life. In addition, it offers individuals chances to become gentlemen or virtuous persons with self-cultivation.

According to the research results of several Western institutions and scholars (Becker, 1994; Cohn and Geske, 1986; Krueger and Lindahl, 1999; Leslie and Brinkman, 1993; Schultz, 1971; Useem and Karabel, 1986; Institute for Higher Education Policy: Davis and McSwain, 2007; Carnegie Foundation: Colby et al., 2003; US Census Bureau, 2007), university education, as private investment, brings its graduates a lot of benefits and rewards: better jobs and higher salaries, more optimistic view of their past and future life, more cultured and open-minded, greater personal status, higher rates of exercising and better overall health, longer life expectancies and lower mortality rates, more hobbies and more community involvement, and better child health and higher educational outcomes for their children.

Beyond the opportunities, rewards, and benefits above, university education provides individuals with chances to become well educated and cultured ladies and gentlemen, with cultivating themselves.

From a social viewpoint, secondly, as the research results of several Western scholars (Cohn and Geske, 1986, Garfinkel and Haveman, 1977; McMahon, 1981; Schultz, 1971), university education as social investment improves local economy, offers nonmonetary social benefits, facilitates recreation, and promotes social welfare.

In South Korea, as the result of Korean Educational Development Institute's (KEDI) survey, *'The Values of Educational Credentials in Korean Society'*, shows that

“low educated-persons are generally related to low income, low earning occupations requiring physical labor, and in the poor urban or rural areas, while high educated-persons are commonly concerned to high income, high earning occupations requiring mental labor, and living in the higher class or middle class urban district” (Lee and Hong, 2002: 249).

In terms of the cultural history of Korea, from the feudal age to the present time, learning has been regarded as a means for seeking one’s fortune and fame as well as for obtaining a socio-political position and wealth through education. Justifiably, of course, education as a tool for cultivating moral character, practically the main function of *Seongkyunkwan*, as the highest national Confucian academy, was to foster bureaucratic Confucian elites (Lee, 2002, 2003). In the contemporary Korean society, credentials and degrees of higher education are viewed not only as determinants to get a higher earning job and to enhance a socio-economic position but also significant tools or means to obtain wealth, power, and fame.

In a social aspect, the other important role of university education is that a university studies and develops the culture and value of society as well as offers the clues or solutions of social problems and agenda.

From a national viewpoint, finally, as the Korean people have considered university education as an effective tool to increase individuals’ socio-economic positions and interests, the government has viewed university education as a prime motive to develop national economy and to bring industrialization (Lee, 2002). On the basis of these ideas, Korea rapidly achieved industrialization and democratization with the expansion of higher education, and became a membership country of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

According to the 2007 edition of *Education at a Glance*, the annual publication produced by the OECD, in the younger group, between 25-to-34-year-olds, South Korea has the highest achievement in the 29 OECD countries, with 97% reaching, in terms of the proportion of younger people who have completed an upper-secondary education. In addition, South Korea is the first ranked in descending order of the percentages of their students who expect to complete tertiary education (OECD: Education at a Glance 2007, p. 76). South Korea in the 1960s had a national wealth on a level with Afghanistan, but in

the 2006 Gross National Income (GNI) per capita was \$17,690, and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was \$888.06 billion (World Bank website 2008, <http://www.worldbank.org/kr>). Now, South Korea belongs to one of high-income industrialized nations and one of high-income OECD membership countries within a short time period of a half century (OECD, 2007; World Bank: Suh and Chen, 2007).

As the reports of OECD and World Bank reveal, South Korea as “a newly industrialized economy” or “a knowledge-based economy” became a model of remarkable education and economy success. South Korea has shared her development experiences and lessons, including economic development-oriented national policies and strategies, adoption of a rapidly high-growth development agenda, promotion of the labor force, and increase of social capital through educational expansion, a knowledge-based economy that is an economy which utilizes knowledge as the key motive of growth, and national development plans, with developing countries (World Bank website 2008, <http://www.worldbank.org/kr>).

Synthesizing the above discussion, university education as a significant determinant provides not only opportunities to pursue utility and to cultivate oneself for an individual, but also chances to promote culture, economy, and national competitiveness for a society and a state. If the author focuses university education on a positive side, a university may be a golden key to open the triple doors, namely, individual happiness, social welfare, and national prosperity.

Summary and Conclusion

This study examined what the ultimate goal of university education is, and whether a university is indeed a golden key for a happy life. In order to defend the research questions logically, the author used a descriptive content analysis method with a cross cultural approach. In order to examine the relationship between university education and happiness, the author described the concepts of knowledge and education, reviewed the functions of a university, and then discussed what and where happiness is in terms of education.

First, the author discussed the first research question, “For what the young study in a university?”, from three perspectives: teleological, ontological, and pragmatic. A

teleological perspective is that the purpose of university education is inseparably bound to the purpose of our lives, and an ontological perspective includes an existential problem about who I am. Lastly, a pragmatic perspective comprehends not only the pursuit of virtue and happiness through learning and practice, but also the means or tools for solving the necessities of life, including money, power, health, fame, and status. Furthermore, it includes the meanings for enjoying and obtaining the practical and pragmatic things enable to maintain human dignity and to seek pleasure. Therefore, the author judged that the young study in a university so as to obtain utility, to cultivate themselves, and to pursue happiness.

Second, the author inquired the second research question, “Is a university indeed a golden key for opening the door of happiness?”, focusing on a positive role of university education from standpoints of individual, social, and national. From an individual viewpoint, first of all, university education provides not only opportunities to learn and practice knowledge and skills suitable for utility but also a number of practical benefits and rewards to enhance the quality of life. Furthermore, it also offers individuals chances to become gentlemen or virtuous persons with self-cultivation. Secondary, from a social standpoint, the other important role of university education is that a university studies and develops the culture and value of society as well as offers the clues or solutions of social problems and issues.

Third, from a national viewpoint, the government regards university education as a prime motive to develop national economy and to bring industrialization. In sum, university education as a significant determinant provides not only opportunities to pursue practicality and to cultivate oneself for an individual, but also benefits and rewards to promote culture, economy, and national competitiveness for a person, society, and state.

In consideration of the functions and roles of a university, a negative side of university education cannot be overlooked. In a Korean society, the value of education has been traditionally regarded as a significant means for seeking one’s fortune and fame as well as for obtaining a better socio-political position. Such an educational value reinforced education fever or zeal to the Korean people and became a prime motive for the development of national economy as well as for the extension of higher education.

Due to excessive education fever, however, a number of educational and social problems in South Korea have occurred as follows: an examination hell for college or university entrance, excessive private education expenditures, promotion of an academic attainment-oriented society, educational inflation and credentialism, and social disharmony between the rich and the poor (Lee, 2002: 186). South Korea became a newly industrialized high income country with rapidly remarkable educational and economic success. In terms of the quality of life or the indicator of happiness, however, we cannot say that South Korea is a welfare society or nation.

Almost all of the Korean people recognize that they need at least university diplomas so as to live a humane life, and that they particularly need the diplomas of a prestigious university to achieve individual and social success. On the other hand, they negatively judge the persons who obtained higher academic credentials in the aspects of morality, accountability, and social contribution (Lee, 2003: 192).

Like South Korea, universities in the majority countries of the world also ignore individuals' moral cultivation and pursuit happiness, while they are striving hard after individuals' utility, economic growth, and national power. Moreover, a number of nations in the current world regard higher education as a tool or means for the development of national economy and for the promotion of national competitiveness under an epochal trend, namely globalization, in the age of information-communication technology (ICT) or in the age of internet.

However, can a materially affluent society and a powerful country indeed bring their people a happy life? Can university education truly make an individual's life happy? Can future universities change into happiness institutions for the achievement of individual happiness, social welfare, and national prosperity? The author suggests that the above questions should be studied by various research methodologies in the future.

Finally, the author suggests that today's universities should become "happiness pursuit universities" or "happiness research institutions" based on a classical utilitarian principle, quantitative maximization of happiness, as prime motives to enhance an individual's moral character, social welfare, and gross national happiness, with seeking after individual utility, social service, and national competitiveness as reward effects.

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