Research Article

Ideological Education of College Students in China: Based on the Distribution Characteristics of Moral Development Stage

Yuping Zhao[1]
Beijing University of Post and Telecommunication

Yuwei Xia[2]
Beijing University of Post and Telecommunication

Xi Chen[3]

Yunnan University

Xiaohong Miao[4]
Beijing University of Post and Telecommunication

Abstract

Kohlberg's theory of moral development stage is a research model of moral formation, with the development of moral judgment as the standard to measure the level of moral development. Based on Kohlberg's theory of moral development stage and the questionnaire experiment method, 167 college students and 411 college students from national colleges and universities are investigated with the restrictive question Test II and moral judgment ability test as tools. The main conclusions are as follows: (1) The moral development level of contemporary college students is mainly at the conventional level and post conventional level of morality. (2) Contemporary college students mainly prefer the fifth stage and the sixth stage in moral emotion. (3) The moral judgment ability of college students is generally at the middle level. According to the present situation of ideological education in colleges and universities in China, the following suggestions are put forward: firstly, the teaching form needs to be innovated; secondly, the work enthusiasm of the teaching staff in the student department needs to be improved; and thirdly, the life management of the students should be relaxed appropriately.

Keywords

Moral Development Stage Theory • Ideological Education • College Students

[1]School of Economics and Management, Beijing University of Post and Telecommunication, Beijing 100876, China. Email: ansenbupt@163.com

[2]School of Economics and Management, Beijing University of Post and Telecommunication, Beijing 100876, China. Email: xiayuwei@bupt.edu.cn

[3]**Correspondence to:** Xi Chen (PhD), School of Business and Tourism Management, Yunnan University, Kunming 650091, China. Email: chen_xi1231@qq.com

[4]School of Economics and Management, Beijing University of Post and Telecommunication, Beijing 100876, China. Email: miaoxh77@163.com

Herbart, the father of education, said: "I can't think of any education without instruction, and just as on the contrary, I do not recognize any instruction without education." Moral education is to promote students' moral cognition, moral emotion, moral will and moral behavior, cultivating students' moral consciousness and forming moral habits (Kohlberg, 1964). Colleges and universities are the last place for many adults to receive ideological education before they enter society. The thoughts of college students are different from those of other age at all levels (Granfield, & Koenig, 1992). The methods of ideological work for college students also need to follow the development of the times and make continuous changes.

The study of moral development has experienced three phases: Piaget, Kohlberg and post-Kohlberg. The theory of moral development at home and abroad has been developing from emphasis on moral cognition and moral reasoning to emphasis on moral emotion and moral personality, as well as from male as the main research object to the gender difference. Up to now, the theory about the stage of moral development at home and abroad is mature (Eisenberg, 2000), and can be applied to the ideological and moral education of colleges and universities.

Contemporary college students are no longer satisfied with accepting the rigid and uniform way of ideological education. Compared with the past, contemporary college students are more individualistic, more self-conscious, more open-minded, and more eager to follow new ideas and trends (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). Under the new era, the contemporary college students have stronger autonomy and independence no matter in personal study or in life. The research on the ideological work strategies of college students is conducive to improving the efficiency of ideological education in colleges and universities, cultivating social members with good personal accomplishment and excellent personality characteristics, promoting the overall development of college students and helping college students to solve practical problems in study and life, so as to keep their mental health in future study or work, establish right outlook on life and value, and even more specifically, the outlook on occupation, consumption and love.

Ideological work refers to the educational themes and methods including ideological education, political education, legal education, moral education and psychological education. The theory of moral development stage in this paper refers to Kohlberg's theory of moral development stage, and other research results based on this theory (Kohlberg & Kramer, 1969). In the past, researchers used the theory of moral development stage to maintain classroom discipline in primary and secondary schools, not to promote the overall development of people. Similarly, research involving specific data and experiments is few. According to the theory of moral development, this paper tries to find out the distribution of moral development level of college students in China. Combining with the characteristics of the times, this paper explores the effective strategies for carrying out college students' ideological work.

The innovation point of this research is that Kohlberg focuses on the moral development level of individuals in time order in his theory, and the research object is mainly male, while this paper studies the distribution characteristics of the moral development level of contemporary college students from the first grade to the fourth grade, and combines the ideological education work carried out in colleges and universities, so as to

bring inspiration to the effective ideological education work and the cultivation of contemporary young students.

Table 1

Three Levels and Six Stages of Theory of Moral Development Stage

Level	Foundations of moral judgement	Development stage	Performance
I Pre conventional level	Moral values exist in external quasi-physical events, bad behaviors, or quasi-physical needs, but not in human beings and norms. No moral ideas have been formed.	Stage1: Punishment and obedience stage	Egocentrically follow superior power or privileges, or tend to avoid trouble. Obey the norm simply to avoid punishment.
		Stage2: Relative utilitarian stage	Have a simple orientation of egoism, and abide by norms in order to gain appreciation or reward from others. Believe that the right act is to satisfy the needs of others and recognize that the value is relative to the needs and perspectives of each actor. Simple egalitarianism is orientated to exchange and reciprocity.
II Conventional level	Moral values exist in playing a good or bad role, as well as in maintaining the order of customs and the expectations of others. Morality is judged by the standards set by others.	Stage 3: Interpersonal expectation and coordination stage (also known as "good child" stage)	Seek recognition. In order to gain the favor of adults, tend to praise, please and help others. Obey most stereotypes or natural role behavior. Believe that the behavior satisfying the expectations of the public is the right behavior, but perform strongly from it.
		Stage 4: Social system or conscience maintenance stage	Maintain authority and social order orientation. Tend to "fulfill their obligations", respect authority and maintain a given social order for their own purposes. Think that the law has supreme authority and regard all kinds of social laws as moral norms.
III Post-conventional level	Moral value exists in the obedience of the ego to common norms, rights, or responsibilities. The social norm that the moral concept exceeds the popular approval forms the self-requirement.	Stage 5: Right and social contract stage	Legislative Tendency of Contract. Recognition of a personal preference component in a rule or expectation for the purpose of an agreement is a starting point. Define the liability according to the contract. It is generally avoided to violate the wishes or rights of others and the majority, but it is sometimes possible to violate the law for the benefit of the public.
		Stage 6: Universal ethical principles stage	Orientation of conscience and principle. It tends not only to social rules that are enacted in practice, but also to principles of choice that involve recourse to the universality and consistency of logic. Tends to take a conscience as a guiding force.

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Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development Stage

Kohlberg constructed the theory of moral development in the 1960s along the line of Piaget's study of children's moral judgment (Kohlberg, & Kramer, 1969). He invented a way to quantify Piaget's observation that "the moral reasoning of children changes over time." Kohlberg used the method of moral dilemma, that's, using a series of moral problems such as "Heinz stealing drugs" to test the children's response, thus discovering the progressive process of moral reasoning at three levels and six stages (Basinger *et al*., 1995).

Kohlberg points out that there are essential differences in the way children think and solve problems at different stages. These different ways of thinking are in order in the development of individuals. Cultural factors may accelerate, slow down or stop the development of individuals, but they cannot change the order of the development of individuals. In the development of the cognitive stage, the cognitive structure of the advanced stage always replaces the cognitive structure of the lower stage, and individuals always prefer to use the highest thinking level that he can reach to solve the problem. Moral development can only move from low level to high level in turn, but not jump stages, nor reversely develop.

In the theory of moral development, there are two main points in Kohlberg's view, one is that an individual's moral level is based on his cognitive level. With the development of cognition, the moral level may also be developed. But the development of morality is not rising naturally with the improvement of cognitive level. Kohlberg argues that the intrinsic motivation for moral development stems from the individual's desire for self-realization and social acceptance. The second is that the basic moral concepts that people use in making moral judgments are similar and the stages of moral development are the same, so that he puts forward that the law of moral development is consistent and the moral development is universal (Kohlberg, 1969). Third, moral judgment is based on reason. A person's reasoning development has relative stability, so moral judgment also has certain stability, as well as objectivity, universality, consistency and inclusiveness. Fourth, moral judgment is the core of moral development. Kohlberg's study of moral development stage described the stage characteristics of moral cognitive development in detail, but also left more research space for future researchers (Lind, 2006). Kohlberg's theory is about the moral development of individuals in order, while this paper is about the distribution of moral development level of college students in the stages from the first grade to the fourth grade.

Research Method

MJT scale and DIT2 test are used in this study. Moral Judgment Test (MJT) is a method for the study of moral cognitive development of adolescents and adults, which is developed by German psychologist Lind based on Kohlberg's theory of moral development (Rest, Thoma, & Edwards, 1997). The MJT scale has a reliable reliability and validity with a unique experimental questionnaire method and a single experimental design of $6 \times 2 \times 2$ variables. The MJT scale was originally designed for college students with the same sensitivity to all stages of moral development. MJT has been revised into more than 20 languages, and numerous tests have shown that it has cross-cultural validity, as well as cultural fairness (Greenwald, 1975).

DIT comes from Kohlberg's theory of moral development stage, and DIT2 is an improved version of DIT. The subjects are required to evaluate different perspectives on the dilemma and put them in order of importance. P score represents the degree to which the subject's value different moral principles when making the moral dilemma judgment, and is an effective index to measure the moral development level of the subjects. In questions of "Heinz stealing drugs", the questions have the following relation with the reaction stage: Question 3 corresponds to the second stage; Questions 2, 5 and 11 correspond to the third stage; Question 1 and 6 correspond to the fourth stage; Questions 10 and 12 correspond to the fifth stage; and Question 8 corresponds to the sixth stage. Questions 4, 7, and 9 are unrelated questions used to test the subjects for serious answers.

In the ranking of data processing according to importance of each story, the first important to the fourth important is recorded as 4-1 points. The importance positions of the topics belonging to the fifth and sixth stages in the four blank spaces filled in by subjects are scored. The score is divided by a total score of 10 and a P score is obtained. The P score represents the moral development level of the subjects.

The MJT scale includes two moral dilemmas: "Factory Storm" and "Doctor's Dilemma". For the behavior of the protagonist in the story, the subjects judge between complete disagreement (-4) to complete agreement (4), and then evaluate the 12 positive and negative arguments behind each story. The 12 arguments behind each story are pro-or anti-stance, and prepared based on the six stages of Kohlberg's theory of moral development stage. By adding the scores corresponding to each stage and comparing the scores in the six stages of subjects, the higher score in a certain stage shows that the subject is more inclined to this stage in terms of moral emotional preference.

The index of moral judgment ability is C score, for the calculation of C score, the following steps are adopted to calculate the moral cognition ability score, stage1-stage6 represents the degree of preference of the subjects to the first to sixth stages, w1-w13 and d1-d13 represent the item of "Factory Storm" and "Doctor's Dilemma," respectively, in the MJT scale:

$$stage1 = w2 + w13 + d5 + d11 \qquad stage2 = w6 + w10 + d4 + d12$$

$$stage3 = w4 + w12 + d7 + d8 \qquad stage4 = w3 + w8 + d6 + d13$$

$$stage5 = w7 + w11 + d3 + d9 \qquad stage6 = w5 + w9 + d2 + d19 \qquad (1)$$

Calculate the mean of the total variance:

$$SS_{mean} = (w2 + w3 + \ldots + w13 + d2 + d3 + \ldots + d13)^2 / 24 \qquad (2)$$

Sum of squares of total deviations:

$$SS_{dev} = w2^2 + w3^2 + \ldots + w13^2 + d2^2 + d3^2 + \ldots + d13^2 - SS_{mean} \qquad (3)$$

Sum of squares at the general stage:

$$SS_{tol} = stage1^2 + stage2^2 + \ldots\ldots + stage6^2 \qquad (4)$$

Variance at the general stage:

$$SS_{stage} = SS_{tol}/4 - SS_{mean} \qquad (5)$$

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Coefficient of determination :

$$r2 = SS_{stage}/SS_{dev} \tag{6}$$

Moral cognitive ability:

$$C = r2 * 100 \tag{7}$$

C score is usually divided from low to high into 1-9 points, 10-19 points, 20-29 points, 30-39 points, 40-49 points, and more than 50 points. The C score examines the response pattern of individuals in the face of moral dilemmas, rather than the isolated view or behavior of a point of view. Therefore, C score reflects the relationship and structure between individual responses to different arguments. The degree of preference of the subjects for each of the six stages is expressed by scores in the scale. The correspondence between questions and stages is as follows:

Table 2
Scoring Criteria for Emotional Preference in MJT

Stage	Topic
Stage 1	Factory Storm 2 & 13; Doctor's Dilemma 5 & 11
Stage 2	Factory Storm 6 & 10; Doctor's Dilemma 4 & 12
Stage 3	Factory Storm 4 & 12; Doctor's Dilemma 7 & 8
Stage 4	Factory Storm 3 & 8; Doctor's Dilemma 6 & 13
Stage 5	Factory Storm 7 & 11; Doctor's Dilemma 3 & 9
Stage 6	Factory Storm 10 & 9; Doctor's Dilemma 2 & 10

Data Analysis and Discussion

Kohlberg's Moral Development Stage

Table 3
Distribution of P Score

Moral development level	P score	Number	Proportion
Pre-conventional level	0-20%	15	10.07%
Conventional level	20-50%	83	55.70%
Post-conventional level	50-100%	51	34.21%

In this study, the sampling time of DIT2 is May 2018, and 167 samples are collected through the www.sojump.com network platform, including 149 valid samples. There are 62 male and 87 female students, with a distribution of 45 students in Grade 1, 21 students in Grade 2, 33 students in Grade 3 and 50 students in Grade 4.

From perspective of individuals, 34.21% of college students are in the post-conventional level in Kohlberg's moral development stage. There is little difference between male and female students. 10.01% of college students are at the pre-conventional level. Students at different levels have great differences in the way of thinking when looking at the same social problem or moral problem. Students at the pre-conventional level only pay attention to their own interests. Students at the conventional level recognize the authority and the evaluation of others. Students at the post-conventional level attach importance to social contract and can think about the conflict between law and rule and morality. In the face of students in different stages of moral development, educators should adopt different methods to carry out ideological education.

Moral attitude and moral emotional preference

This study is based on the MJT scale. The sampling time of the subjects is April 2018. 437 samples are collected through the www.sojump.com network platform, including 411 valid samples collected. Samples are from 206 colleges and universities across the country.

Distribution of moral attitudes

Law and human rights are the core values in the two moral dilemmas such as "Factory Storm" and "Doctor's Dilemma". According to the moral distribution of 414 subjects, in the "Factory Storm", Chinese contemporary college students as a whole oppose the "theft" in the sense of law, even in order to safeguard the "privacy" of human rights and the legitimate interests of workers themselves; in the "Doctor's Dilemma", the subjects' attitudes are evenly distributed, and the overall preference is to support the doctor's behavior, that's, don't think that the doctor's behavior is "murder" but to support the doctor to alleviate the patient's pain.

Table 4
Distribution of Moral Attitudes Among Subjects

	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
Factory Storm	104	81	101	55	38	22	6	4	0
Doctor's Dilemma	31	35	34	40	79	41	85	52	14

Distribution of moral emotional preference

The subjects' preference for the six stages of Kohlberg's moral development tends to rise from one to six overall. Subjects have the highest preference for Stage 5, their preference for Stage 2 is lower than for Stage 1 and their preference for Stage 6 is lower than for Stage 5. This shows that the contemporary college students have the highest moral emotional preference for Stage 5, that's, rights and social contract stage, and then Stage 6, namely, the stage of universal ethical principles. This conclusion is consistent with the preference grade standard in the validity test standard of MJT scale, that's, the preference of the subject group for each stage rises from Stage 1 to Stage 6, and inversion may occur between Stage 1 and Stage 2, and between Stage 5 and Stage 6. From an individual point of view, 40.88% of the college students prefer Stage 5 of Kohlberg's moral law, 31.87% prefer Stage 6, and 16.55% prefer Stage 4.

Table 5
Distribution of C score in Subjects' MJT Scale

Grade	Total people	C score
Grade 1	67	18.25±13.16
Grade 2	96	18.04±11.29
Grade 3	110	16.69±11.21
Grade 4	138	18.33±12.51
Total	**411**	**17.81±11.98**

The theory of moral development stage holds that the development of moral cognition level is the necessary condition for the development of individual moral level. C score is an index used to judge the moral cognition ability of the subjects. The average C score of subjects' MJT is 17.81 ± 11.98, which is mainly 2-15 and 22-28. In two MJT tables, 10-29 represents middle moral cognition, and 30-40 represents higher moral cognition.

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Research conclusions

This study is a preliminary exploration of the distribution characteristics of the moral development stage of college students in China, and exploring the effective strategies for carrying out ideological education in combination with the present situation of ideological education in colleges and universities in China. The main findings of the study are as follows:

First, the moral development level of contemporary college students is mainly at the conventional level and post-conventional level. The way of thinking of college students in different stages of moral development is very different when they look at the same moral problem. Students in the third stage of moral development take whether they can be praised by teachers, classmates or other external factors as a standard while judging problems. Students in the fourth stage are keen to maintain the authority of teachers and schools. When college students in the fifth stage of moral development face social views, they will integrate various views through proper processes such as formal consultation, making contracts, and setting up objective and fair mechanism. Students in the fifth stage admit that there is sometimes a conflict between morality and law in society, and there is sometimes a conflict between morality and school rules on campus. College students in the sixth stage of moral development advocate justice and equality, and attach importance to personal dignity, conscience, freedom and the value of life.

Second, contemporary college students prefer the fifth and sixth stages in moral emotion. The moral emotion preference of college students is most inclined to the fifth stage of Kohlberg's theory of moral development stage, followed by the sixth stage. A small number of students prefer the fourth stage, and individual students are in a lower stage. There is little difference between male and female, and among different types of institutions in moral emotion preference. This shows that contemporary college students prefer the fifth stage (right and social contract stage) and the sixth stage (universal ethical principle stage) of Kohlberg's theory. This kind of moral preference reflects the moral pursuit and belief of college students. Moral behavior is driven by moral emotion. One of the goals of ideological education is to cultivate moral behavior into moral habits. The curriculum and activities of ideological education in colleges and universities should pay attention to the participation of students, and arouse the emotion of students, to cultivate the moral habits of students.

Third, the moral judgment ability of college students is generally at the middle level. In this study, the subjects' C score is the middle moral cognition level. According to Lind's theory, most contemporary college students can reject the ideas of the lower stage of Kohlberg's theory of moral development stage, even if they are in their own interest. A small number of students do not have the essential ability to distinguish among different ideas, and only judge by whether the viewpoint is in line with their own position. Another small number of students can to a certain extent understand and accept the views different from their own in the rejection of the lower stage. Individual students' moral judgment ability is very high, can treat equally the ideas consistent and opposite with own position. In the ideological education of college students, colleges and universities should consider the level of students' moral cognition and the difference among students' moral cognition, to teach students according to their aptitude and improve the level of students' moral cognition.

Enlightenments and Suggestions

The dominant role of students in educational activities should not be neglected (9 Ping *et al* ,2004). This study finds that about one-tenth of Chinese college students are in the pre-conventional level of moral development, which is almost equal to the level of junior middle school students. For the students with different levels of moral development, different methods of moral education guidance should be adopted. For the college students at the conventional level, they should not only be strict with the dignity of teachers, but also be guided gently to understand the difference between morality and law and rules and regulations to improve their moral development level. For the college students at the post- conventional level, ideological education needs to be rational and emotional, because these students have a strong understanding ability. Most importantly, educators should patiently and carefully distinguish students at different levels of moral development so as not to backfire in the process of ideological education. Based on this study, the following suggestions are put forward for the ideological and moral education of Chinese college students:

First, enrich the form of classroom education and enhance students' initiative. Classroom teaching is one of the most common forms of education in colleges and universities in China. The disadvantage of classroom teaching is that the textbook is the center and the teaching method is single, which make the students under the platform lack of initiative. This kind of teaching method is more effective for the students at the pre-conventional level and the conventional level of moral development, but the students at the post--conventional level will reduce their interest in the course. Therefore, it is necessary to enrich the form of classroom education and enhance students' initiative.

Second, use the network teaching platform to provide students with free space for discussion. Apply network technology and multimedia technology, and build a network platform from the perspective of students under the guidance of certain teaching theories and ideas. Discussion-based network teaching is more suitable for the students at the post-conventional level for thought collision, to achieve the goal of ideological education. But for college students at the conventional level, it is likely to draw consistent but incorrect conclusions to enable them free to discuss a problem on the network platform, and students and teachers trying to provide diverse ideas may be excluded.

Third, actively carry out social practice activities. For students with lower moral level, universities should promote the development of their moral cognition. Social practice can make college students face the practical problems in life effectively, and make them think in the process of contacting different people and solving the practical problems, to achieve the goal of ideological education.

Fourth, carry out the experiential moral education in the student group. Experiential moral education is an effective method of ideological education. The experiential moral education can arouse the moral emotion of the students because it pays attention to the students' feeling and the characteristics of all the students' participation. Contemporary college students in China are more inclined to the fifth stage and the sixth stage in moral emotion, so they can better accept the ideological education through experiential moral education, to

improve the ability of moral cognition and moral judgment and finally contribute to all-round development of themselves.

Fifth, carry out the individualized education of special groups. Individualized education can be used for college students who have deviation in outlook on life and values, or have problems in study and behavior. In the process of individualized education, educators should realize that students are the people to be developed, they have the potential of sustainable development, and the development of individuals is different in speed and direction. Educators must fully understand the educated, for example, to roughly judge which level of their moral development is. It is not difficult for the students at the pre-conventional level or conventional level to change their behavior, and the educators are only required to show their authority, together with the persuasion of the students' cadres, giving a clear account of the stakes in the matter. For the students at the post-conventional level, educators need to discuss with them the causes of improper behavior or improper thinking.

Sixth, the life management of students should be relaxed appropriately. In the aspect of student management, colleges and universities should take moderate and appropriate measures. College students live on campus much longer than they study in class. Campus and dormitory become the main places for students to exchange information and ideas offline. Students in the third and fourth stages of moral development are keen to abide by the rules and regulations of universities. Unless there is a bad atmosphere among their peers and groups, they will have a high level of consciousness. For students at the conventional level, managers only need to show the expectations, and clearly state the rules and regulations, instead of giving repeated emphasis and showing distrust of the students. Students in the fifth and sixth stages of moral development are mature in thought and can analyze and solve problems in their daily life. Therefore, the life management of college students cannot be set up with too many rules and regulations, but with reasonable and gentle guidance.

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