

## *Moral Education Curricula in East Asian Countries*

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### **Abstract**

Recent years have seen a rise in interest in social-emotional learning (SEL) in the United States and other Western countries. What is the approach of Eastern wisdom to this topic? In this study, the official middle school SEL-related curricula of a few East-Asian countries including China (mainland China, Taiwan region and Hong Kong SAR), Japan and Korea are gathered and examined with the framework of curricular spider web suggested by van den Akker (2003). This study aims at identifying the similarities and differences among the SEL-related curricula in these countries and to bring insights to other scholars and education policymakers. The biggest similarity identified is that most of these curricula emphasize the concept of “morality”. Meanwhile, the biggest difference identified is that SEL is conducted in a separate subject in mainland China (Morality and Laws), Japan (Morality) and Korea (Morality) while SEL is integrated with other academic subjects, integrative activities, and school events in Taiwan region and Hong Kong SAR. This paper does not provide a definitive conclusion but acts as an informative paper for interested parties.

Keywords: Moral Education, Social-Emotional Learning, East Asia, Morality and Laws, Values Education, Curricular Spider Web

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## **Introduction**

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has received much attention in recent years. In the U.S., up to 2020, “[e]ighteen states have introduced K-12 SEL standards or competencies, and 26 states have produced guidance documents or websites designed to support SEL implementation” (Shriver & Weissberg, 2020). Studies have pointed out that SEL not only helps reduce students’ behavioral problems, but also helps students improve their academic performance. In this paper, we will shift our eyesight to East Asia and explore how SEL is conducted in East Asian countries. Official curriculum documents of China (mainland China, Taiwan region, Hong Kong SAR), Japan and Korea are gathered and examined in order to know more about how SEL is conducted at schools. In particular, this study focuses on the middle school curricula (ages around 11 to 15).

One reason that makes it worthy studying in East Asian SEL-related curricula is their highly impressed citizenship. Some of these countries have an excellent reputation among its citizen. We have a favorable impression of their politeness and attention to order and detail. This impression is evidenced quantitatively, too (see, for example, Ipsos, 2022; Social Progress Imperative, 2022). Although there is some controversy with regard to the criteria used in these indexes, they don’t avoid us to say some of these countries have a good impression of their citizenship. There must be something that other countries can learn. We also know that these societies are highly influenced by Confucianism or Taoism and Buddhism (Jeynes, 2008, p. 17; Kam, 2013), which makes these societies comparable. Exploring the similarities and differences can bring insight to scholars, policymakers and practitioners on exploring the best practice of SEL implementation.

## **Literature Review**

### ***SEL in the U.S.***

In the U.S., the leading organization for SEL is CASEL, or the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. CASEL was founded in 1994 and was the first organization that “lead a growing movement to make SEL an integral part of education” (The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], n.d.). The CASEL framework “addresses five broad and interrelated areas: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making”, aiming at helping students “acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions” (CASEL, n.d.). Surrounding the five areas are the contexts of classrooms, schools, families & caregivers and communities, identifying strategies from different roles of various parties on enhancing students’ SEL.

### ***SEL in East Asian Countries***

In East Asian countries, they have similar curricula taking care of students’ social and emotional welfare. It is easy to understand that students do not only come to school to learn, but child development is always an important goal besides academics. These learning activities are conducted in different titles in these countries. In China, the title is Morality and Laws (道德与法治) (Ye, 2022, p. 63). The course is called Moral Education (道德) (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [MEXT], n.d., p. 4) in Japan and

Moral Education (도덕) (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea [MOE (Korea)], 2015, p. 3) in Korea. The term used in Hong Kong SAR is Values Education (價值觀教育) (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2021, p. 5) while related items are delivered under the framework of Integrative Activities (綜合活動) in Taiwan region (Ministry of Education of the Republic of China (Taiwan) [MOE (Taiwan)], 2018). Although the scopes of the curricula are slightly different and the items listed in each curriculum are not covering exactly the same area, we can still learn how SEL-related activities are conducted in these countries.

### ***Modern Curricula in East Asian Countries***

World War II (WWII) had a significant impact on East Asian curricula. The aftermath of the war, coupled with the advent of new ruling governments in mainland China and Taiwan region or re-ruling in Hong Kong, and the influence of the American Education Mission in Japan and Korea, marked a turning point in the development of modern curricula. The first iterations of modern curricula in these countries emerged in the late 1940s and 1950s and “were strongly and deliberately modeled after the Western educational rubric” (Jeynes, 2008, p. 1). However, Jeynes (2008, p. 17) claimed that although “the reality of western moral education was used ... the actual principles were Confucian in nature”. Their histories and geographic limitations affect their beliefs as well. For example, as an island nation, Japan suffers from a lot of natural disasters, which generate a sense of the powerlessness of life. In the spirit of Bushido, contempt for one’s own life is considered the most noble quality (Fusé, 1980, p. 62).

### ***Recent Reforms***

Interestingly, it is revealed from this study that all of these countries have undergone some sort of reform in the late 2010s and early 2020s. The biggest reform was in Japan, in which they renewed their Moral Education curriculum by raising Moral Education to the status of a specific subject in 2017 (Fujioka, 2018). Hong Kong SAR launched its Values Education curriculum in 2021 based on the foundation of the existing Moral and Civic Education curriculum (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2021, p. 2). China, unlike previously that they have various versions of textbooks, has changed its policy and reinstated the “one guideline, one textbook” policy in its Morality and Laws curriculum (Ye, 2022, p. 60). These updates were based on their society needs and these reasons will be explored more deeply in a later section of this paper. In contrast, although Taiwan region and Korea updated their curricula in 2018 and 2022, respectively, the modification is not huge and basically continues the existing framework.

### **Methods**

In this study, I first gathered the official curriculum documents provided by the education bureau websites. Unfortunately, only a few of these documents are available in English. Therefore, other documents were downloaded in their native language, and were translated into English by Google Translator. A few other online translators were also used for triangulation purposes. The titles and hyperlinks of these documents were summarized in the following table. Besides the official curriculum documents, additional peer-reviewed articles were also used in order to keep the translation consistent and for additional information that is not provided in the official documents.

Country/ Region	Curriculum Document	Hyperlink
Mainland China	Curriculum standards of Morality and Laws 2022 (道德与法治课程标准 2022) (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China [MOE (China)], 2022)	<a href="http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A26/s8001/202204/t20220420_619921.html">http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A26/s8001/202204/t20220420_619921.html</a>
Taiwan region	The national curriculum for the primary and secondary schools: Integrative activities (十二年國民基本教育課程綱要 綜合活動領域) (MOE (Taiwan), 2018)	<a href="https://www.naer.edu.tw/eng/PageSyllabus?fid=148">https://www.naer.edu.tw/eng/PageSyllabus?fid=148</a>
Hong Kong SAR	Values education curriculum framework (Pilot version) (價值觀教育課程架構 (試行版)) (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2021) Secondary education curriculum guide (2017) - Booklet 6A: moral and civic eEducation: Towards values education (in English) (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2017)	<a href="https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/4-key-tasks/moral-civic/curriculum-documents.html">https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/4-key-tasks/moral-civic/curriculum-documents.html</a>
Japan	Guidelines for junior high school study: Morality (中学校学習指導要領 道德篇) (MEXT, 2017)	<a href="https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/new-cs/1387016.htm">https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/new-cs/1387016.htm</a>
Korea	The national curriculum for the primary and secondary schools (in English) (MOE (Korea), 2015) Annex 6 - Moral Education curriculum(별책6_도덕과 교육과정) (MOE (Korea), 2022)	<a href="http://koreaneducentreinuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/The-National-Curriculum-for-the-Primary-and-Secondary-Schools-2015.pdf">http://koreaneducentreinuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/The-National-Curriculum-for-the-Primary-and-Secondary-Schools-2015.pdf</a> <a href="https://ncic.re.kr/mobile.dwn.ogf.inventoryList.do">https://ncic.re.kr/mobile.dwn.ogf.inventoryList.do</a>

Table 1. Curriculum documents in East Asian countries.

Once these documents were translated, they were examined with the guidance of the curricular spider web suggested by van den Akker (2003, p. 6). A summary of these components and questions was organized in the table below. It is acknowledged that not all of these questions can be answered by examining the official documents, and these omissions will be identified in the limitation section of this paper.

Component	Core question
Rationale	Why are they learning?
Aims and objectives	Toward which goals are they learning?
Content	What are they learning?
Learning activities	How are they learning?
Teacher role	How is the teacher facilitating learning?
Materials and resources	With what are they learning?
Grouping	With whom are they learning?
Location	Where are they learning?
Time	When are they learning?
Assessment	How far has learning progressed?

Table 2. Curricular spider web. (van den Akker, 2003)

## Findings and Discussions

### *Rationale*

Based on the framework suggested by van den Akker (2003), curriculum comparison can start with rationale and aims. “[C]urriculum design and implementation problems have taught us that it is wise to pay explicit attention to a more elaborated list of components” (van den Akker, 2003, p. 4). Rationale and aims are usually listed at the beginning of the curriculum documents. Some curricula listed their rationale briefly, while others spent a few pages explaining. For comparison, I provided the summarized versions as follows, and I provided the page number for interested readers’ references.

#### Mainland China:

Focus on the core qualities of Chinese students’ development, cultivate students’ correct values, necessary character and key abilities for future development, guide students to clarify the direction of their life development, and grow up to be socialist builders and successors with comprehensive development of moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic and labor. (MOE (China), 2022a, p. 1-2)

#### Taiwan region:

Through the implementation of core literacies, the coherence of subjects in each stage of education, and the integration of cross-disciplinary/inter-subjects, students are guided to engage in experiential, reflective, practical, and innovative learning activities to construct internalized meanings and cultivate altruistic feelings. (MOE (Taiwan), 2018, p. 1)

#### Hong Kong SAR:

Values influence everyone’s perceptions and attitudes, and serve as the standards and principles behind people’s judgments, choices and attitudes... [W]e should not only consider our personal positions and opinions, but also base our judgments and decisions on the well-being of the nation and the positive values held by society. (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2021, p. 5)

#### Japan:

[I]n moral education, it is important for students to learn about the rules and manners that have been handed down and shared in the past, and the various moral values that have been valued in society, in accordance with their stage of development and based on a certain educational plan, so that they can understand and acquire these values and deepen their own ideas by considering them from various angles. (MEXT, 2017, p. 3)

#### Korea:

Morality is embodied in the process and outcome of tension, conflict, and harmony between morality as a social norm and virtue that operates within each individual. Therefore, for the cultivation of morality, the curriculum should include the three components of the process of linking moral knowledge and practice: an inquiry into moral phenomena, reflection on inner morality, and daily practice. (MOE (Korea), 2022, p. 5)

From a Western perspective, I find that the rationale of these East Asian moral education curricula emphasizes more on cultivating the next generation’s sense of social responsibility

in addition to the emphasis on students' personal growth and needs. In Ellis's (2004) words, the East Asian moral education curricula take a more society-centered approach. Compared with the rationale of CASEL, the leading organization in SEL education in the U.S., the CASEL curriculum seems to take a more student-centered approach to its rationale. While the East Asian curricula seem to be more balance between student-centered and society-centered approaches.

In addition to outlining the rationale for the curricula as a whole, curriculum documents also specify the reasoning behind recent reforms. While the reforms in Korea and Taiwan region were primarily updates as part of the routine national curriculum review cycle, those in mainland China, Japan, and Hong Kong SAR were driven by a clear sense of urgency.

In China, the reform was corresponding to the national policy on reducing students' study load. In Japan, the reform was a response to increasing youth criminal rates, bullying incidents and suicide rates. The catalyst for the reform was a series of serious bullying cases, "including a brutal incident in which a junior high school student committed suicide in October 2011, after being severely bullied by classmates at his school" (Nishino, 2017, p. 2). The document also pointed out that because moral education was not arranged as a subject, teachers and students pay less attention to moral education than other academic disciplines (MEXT, 2017, p. 1). The reform in Hong Kong SAR was closely related to the anti-government riots in 2019, which resulted in over 10,000 persons arrested, "of which 1,754 were aged under 18" (Hong Kong Press Releases, 2022).

### *Aims and Objectives*

The second question in van den Akker's (2003) framework is about the curricula's aims and objectives. The summarized aims and objectives from each curriculum documents are listed as follows:

#### Mainland China:

Cultivated political identity, moral cultivation, rule of law, sound personality, and sense of responsibility. (MOE (China), 2022a, p. 8-16)

#### Taiwan region:

Develop students' ability to "explore values, integrate experiences, and innovate in practice," including promoting self and career development, practicing life management and innovation, and implementing social and environmental care. (MOE (Taiwan), 2018, p. 1)

#### Hong Kong SAR:

Cultivating positive values and attitudes, enhancing abilities such as resilience, emotion management, judgment, problem solving, communication, social skills, and self-control, as well as qualities such as love for life, self-esteem and self-confidence, perseverance, empathy, self-discipline, and courageous commitment, equip them to contribute to society in the future. (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2021, p. 5)

#### Japan:

Thinking about the way of life as a human being, acting under the judgment of the subject, and aiming to develop moral qualities, which are the basis for living better with others as an independent human being. (MEXT, 2017, p. 14)

Korea:

Development of moral human beings through the cultivation of morality... to make the society in which moral human beings must live together a more just society. (MOE (Korea), 2022, p. 5)

It is clear that the stated aims and objectives reflected the emphasis on both personal growth and needs and cultivating citizens' social responsibilities, rather than mainly emphasising personal growth as in the CASEL framework.

### *Content*

<b>Countries</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Number of items</b>
Mainland China (MOE (China), 2022a, p. 34-41)	Life Safety and Health Education	5
	Law Education	16
	Chinese Traditional Culture Education	5
	Revolutionary Tradition Education	5
Taiwan region (MOE (Taiwan), 2018, p. 17-23)	National Education	4
	Self and Career Development	3
	Life Management and Innovation	3
	Social and Environmental Care	3
Hong Kong SAR (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2021, p. 30-32)	Personal	9
	Family	7
	School	7
	Relationships	6
	Society, Nation & World	7
Japan (MEXT, 2017, p. 25; Han et al., 2018, p. 5)	Matters regarding me	5
	Matters regarding a relationship with others	4
	Matters regarding a relationship with community or society	9
	Matters regarding a relationship with nature or sublimity	4
Korea (MOE (Korea), 2022, p. 6-10; Han et al., 2018, p. 5)	"I" as a moral self	7
	Relationship with "we", others, and society	6
	Relationship with country, nation, and global community	7
	Relationship with nature and transcendent existence	2

Table 3. Content and categories in East Asian moral education curricula.

Interestingly, the learning items were categorized in a similar framework, generally starting from learning about oneself, and gradually expanding the attention to family and friends, schools and local communities, and at last to the nation and international affairs. If we compare these frameworks with the CASEL framework which was categorized into self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social-awareness and relationship skills, the content discussed in the East Asian moral education curricula does not have a huge difference from those in a Western SEL curriculum.

It may be interesting to point out that I believe although the concepts of East Asian curricula that expand gradually further and further away from a child make a structure which may

make curriculum development easier, the concept of CASEL actually makes more sense from a practitioner's perspective because a lot of SEL or moral issue discussed in the lessons can be related to more than one categories. In fact, it is explicitly mentioned in some of these East Asian curricula that although the items are listed under different categories, teachers should bear in mind that these moral issues can be interrelated and should not limit to one category during discussion [MOE (China), 2022a. p. 53; MOE (Taiwan), 2018, p. 16; Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2021, p. 13, 18; MEXT, 2017, p. 81; MOE (Korea), 2022, p. 5]. However, Fujioka (2018, p. 28) pointed out that this is a limitation of using textbooks because textbooks were prepared based on the categories and it is not easy for teachers to consider expanding the discussion to other categories.

### ***Learning Activities***

Evaluating the curriculum documents, not much difference can be identified regarding learning activities. Disciplinization in mainland China, Japan and Korea lead to separate learning times when teachers and students discuss moral issues during moral lessons, so I believe that students in these countries would have more time to read, listen and discuss moral issues than the students in Taiwan region and Hong Kong SAR. Other than that, the descriptions among different documents describing learning activities are pretty similar. During the moral lessons, students explore the related concepts by conceptual learning, theme learning, inquiry learning, group discussion, essay writing, cooperative learning, role-play learning, project-based learning, etc. (MOE (Korea), 2022, p. 20). Outside classrooms, moral or SEL-related education is conducted by site visits, site observation, volunteer services, and study tours, etc. (MOE (China), 2022a. p. 49). These activities effectively connect the knowledge students learn at schools with the real world.

However, studying the official curricula means we are only considering the intended curricula. Other research methods, for example, an ethnographic study or a grounded theory research, need to be adopted in order to identify the similarities and differences in practice in moral education among these countries.

### ***Teacher Role***

Mainland China: Specific teachers with a license in moral education.

Taiwan region: Homeroom teachers, all teachers and adults.

Hong Kong SAR: Homeroom teachers, all teachers and adults.

Japan: Homeroom teachers, all teachers and adults.

Korea: Specific teachers with a license in moral education.

While the curriculum documents from these East Asian countries do not show huge differences in their rationale, aims and objectives, content and learning activities, we start to notice the differences when we shift our attention to the teacher roles. These differences are greatly due to the models of the curricula, which will be discussed more deeply in a later section.

All countries emphasize the importance of leadership from principals and vice-principals. At schools, moral education programs are usually coordinated by an appointed moral education coordinator, who should have more professional training on this matter. All teachers and adults, especially homeroom teachers, are responsible for SEL.

In mainland China and Korea, moral education lessons are conducted by specific moral education teachers. These teachers have to hold a specific license in moral education in order to be qualified to teach moral lessons at schools (Chu et al., 1996, p. 4; National Education Examinations Authority, n.d.). These teachers are usually graduated from a degree program in related disciplines and hired as moral education experts. Developing moral education curricula and teaching moral education lessons are their major role at schools.

The requirements to teach moral education in Japan, Taiwan region and Hong Kong SAR are not as strict. In Japan, all teachers can teach moral lessons as long as they obtain a teaching license in the corresponding schools (elementary schools, middle schools or high schools). Local education bureaus also hire local community members to enter campuses to provide specific skills during the moral education lessons and activities (special teachers, or Kokoro no Sensei) (MEXT, 2002). In Taiwan region and Hong Kong SAR, SEL-related education is integrated into other academic subjects and school activities and they do not have a standalone subject for moral education or values education. Therefore, all teachers and adults are responsible for modal education during school time, and they are not required to obtain a specific license for doing so.

### ***Materials and Resources***

Mainland China: National curriculum, one textbook (Ye, 2022, p. 60).

Taiwan region: School-based curriculum, textbook not mandatory, teaching materials available on bureau's website.

Hong Kong SAR: School-based curriculum, no textbook, teaching materials available on bureau's website.

Japan: National curriculum, multiple textbooks (Han et al., 2018, p. 4-5), a uniform supplementary textbook distributed (Our morality, 私たちの道徳) (MEXT, 2014a).

Korea: National curriculum, multiple textbooks (Han et al., 2018, p. 4-5).

Because of the different models of moral education curricula, the usage of textbooks and materials also differs among these countries. Mainland China takes the most centralized approach in that it uses a national curriculum and all schools use the same set of moral education textbooks (Ye, 2022, p. 60). Japan and Korea have multiple publishers that publish different versions of textbooks for schools to choose from. In addition to the chosen textbooks, Japan MEXT also provide a uniform supplementary workbook called Our Morality (私たちの道徳) (MEXT, 2014a) to over 95% of schools (MEXT, 2014b, p. 1). For Taiwan region and Hong Kong SAR, although they also publish curriculum documents, they release more freedom to schools to develop their school-based curricula according to the frameworks provided. There are publishers in Taiwan region that publish textbooks with the title of Integrative Activities, while there are no specific textbooks related to SEL in Hong Kong SAR.

### ***Grouping and location***

Mainland China: A standalone subject

Taiwan region: Integrated under the scope of integrative activities

Hong Kong SAR: Integrated into academic subjects and school events  
Japan: A standalone subject  
Korea: A standalone subject

Looking into the models of education programs, there are two different models these countries adopt. Disciplinization is adopted in mainland China, Japan and Korea. This means that a certain number of teaching periods are set aside for moral education. During these periods, students attend moral lessons just like they attend other core subjects' lessons. They have a particular teacher to teach them on this subject, and these assigned moral education teachers play a major role in the moral education program at schools.

Meanwhile, integration is adopted in Taiwan region and Hong Kong SAR. On a student schedule, one would not find a period assigned for SEL-related lessons, but the SEL-related concepts are integrated into academic subjects and other school activities. In this case, the responsibility of attaining the goal of SEL-related curricula is distributed among all subject teachers and adults. Homeroom teachers play a major role in this model, although SEL is usually not their main focus at schools.

An interesting discussion can be made on Japan's decision in 2015 of shifting from integration to disciplinization. Because of increasing bullying cases among the youth, higher suicide rates and lower interest rates, the Japanese government and society thought that the previous integrative approach of moral education has to be reviewed. They revealed that because moral education is not a standalone subject, students and teachers pay less attention to moral education as compared with other academic subjects because of academic pressure. As a result, Japan decided to shift to disciplinization in 2017 (for elementary schools) and 2018 (for middle schools). Based on Japanese educational regulations, turning moral education into a standalone subject means that they need to introduce nationally approved textbooks and implement evaluations on student learning. As far as I know, there is no widely accepted conclusion so far as to whether disciplinarity has achieved the desired goal, or whether the benefits of disciplinarity or integration are inherently controversial. However, for external observers, the Japanese decision can already be inspiring that different countries/regions have to select their model of conducting SEL or moral education based on their own situation. There is no one model that is better than another, only that maybe one model is better suited than another.

		<b>Model of Curriculum</b>	
		<b>Disciplinization</b>	<b>Integration</b>
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ The number of learning hours can be guaranteed.</li> <li>❖ Evaluations are conducted under the scope of moral education, which is easier for students and teachers to stay focused on the goal of moral education.</li> <li>❖ Specific teachers teach moral lessons and are more well-trained professionally.</li> <li>❖ Learning area coverage can be guaranteed.</li> <li>❖ Specific learning time makes the organization of enrichment activities easier.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Moral or SEL-related topics are ubiquitous.</li> <li>❖ Integration makes the connection between moral or SEL-related topics and academic knowledge easier.</li> <li>❖ Students learn the concept of morality not only by attending lectures but also by observing adults' practice.</li> <li>❖ Although homeroom teachers may not be as well-trained as specific moral education teachers, they are the adults who know the children most at school.</li> </ul>	
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ A separate moral subject may lead students to discuss moral related issues only in moral lessons and may create a discrepancy between knowledge and practice.</li> <li>❖ If students learn and memorize "correct" answers because they need to obtain a high score on the assessments, they can not achieve the goal of moral education.</li> <li>❖ Need specific moral education teachers and so more pedagogical training is needed.</li> <li>❖ Specific moral education teachers spend less time with students (1 or 2 periods per week) and they may not know the students as a person as compared with their homeroom teachers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Because the teachers are not specifically trained as moral education or SEL-related teachers, they may pay less attention to these topics as compared with their teaching academic subjects.</li> <li>❖ Lack of professional training may also lead to teachers' tendency on avoiding sensitive topics.</li> <li>❖ Assessment of moral education learning can be more difficult.</li> <li>❖ More difficult to arrange enrichment activities, or may need to use after-school time or other subjects' teaching time.</li> </ul>	

Table 4. Advantages and challenges in disciplinization and integrative approaches.

### *Time*

Mainland China: 6-8% of total instructional time (MOE (China), 2022b).

Taiwan region: 3 periods are allocated for integrative activities among the total of 32-35 periods, which is around 9%. But Home economics and Scouting are also conducted during these periods, so time allocated for SEL-related topics must be less than 9% (MOE (Taiwan), 2014, p. 10).

Hong Kong SAR: No designated time for values education.

Japan: 35 among 1015 total teaching hours are allocated for moral education, which is around 3% (MEXT, 2017, p. 124).

Korea: 1 to 2 periods among 34 teaching periods are allocated for moral education, which is around 3-6% (Institute of Education and Culture, 2019).

From the comparison, students in China spend more time on moral education than in other countries. In Japan and Korea, students spend around 3-6% of total instruction time in moral education. Taiwan region and Hong Kong SAR take the integrative approach, so the actual instructional time is not clearly identified.

Actually, it may be misleading if we judge the level of commitment to moral education or SEL by comparing the teaching hours. In a previous section, we discuss that some countries integrate moral education into other academic subjects and school activities, while others deliver moral education as a standalone subject. For example, Hong Kong SAR does not assign a Values education time, but students in Hong Kong SAR learn about persistence, caring and empathy in a Chinese reading lesson while developing national identity through watching videos of the Chinese satellite launching process in a Science lesson (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2021, p. 54). Although teachers may or may not explicitly tell the students about the values behind these learning and these learning do not count toward the so-called Values education time, students are learning these values and I would argue that this type of learning may have an even stronger impact than learning these values in a moral education lesson.

### ***Assessment***

Regarding evaluation, moral education or SEL emphasize less on knowledge acquisition and more on thought development, curriculum documents from all countries mention that evaluation should take multiple strategies. Paper-based assessment, portfolio assessment, observation and oral assessment are used to evaluate students' growth. Self-evaluation and peer-evaluation are also suggested. While most countries emphasize that evaluation aims at students' growth and will not be used in filtering students from enrollment to the next stage of education, mainland China takes a different approach by involving moral education in high-stakes exams for high schools and universities.

Again, there must be gains and losses for this arrangement. Relating moral education evaluation with further education opportunities must force teachers and students to pay more attention to this subject. However, the goal of moral education will not be achieved if students answer what they think the teacher wants because of the need for assessment, rather than responding according to their own feelings and thoughts. It can be an interesting research area to see how mainland China assess their students in the public exams because it is unique among these countries.

### **Conclusion**

Studying the curricula documents of moral or SEL-related education in East Asian countries can be interesting from a Western perspective. Identifying similarities and differences among the curricula can inspire us on reflecting our current practices and explore new directions for their development.

The first finding of this study is that all of the studied curricula emphasize the concept of morality. Mainland China, Japan and Korea use the term morality as the subject name, Hong Kong SAR uses the term Values Education, while although Taiwan region doesn't put the term as the name of the subject, the concept is integrated throughout its curriculum. This may be due to the influence of their long histories and the traditional Confucianism and Buddhism.

The second finding is about the difference in the model adopted in moral or SEL-related education. Moral education is conducted in a separate subject in mainland China (Morality and Laws), Japan (Morality) and Korea (Morality) while related topics are integrated with academic subjects, integrative activities and school events in Taiwan region and Hong Kong SAR. The curricula are centralized in mainland China, Japan and Korea, while Taiwan region and Hong Kong SAR provide a centralized framework for schools and they have more freedom on constructing their school-based curriculum based on the centralized framework. In terms of the level of centralization, mainland China takes the most centralized approach by adopting one uniform series of textbooks across the nation. The centralization in Japan and Korea is lower than in mainland China by publishing a centralized curriculum but schools adopt textbooks provided by publishers. Schools in Taiwan region and Hong Kong SAR have more freedom to develop their school-based curricula based on the centralized framework.

The third finding is about the teacher arrangement. Specific teachers are arranged to teach the lessons in mainland China and Korea, and these teachers have to hold a specific license in order to be qualified to teach moral education lessons. Moral or SEL-related education is conducted by homeroom teachers in Japan, Taiwan region and Hong Kong SAR, who are usually trained as subject teachers in general.

At last, it is also revealed that only mainland China among the studied countries relates students' moral education learning outcome to high school and college enrollment opportunities.

This study does not aim at providing a definitive conclusion, but by comparing similarities and differences among East Asian moral education or SEL-related curricula, this paper can act as an informative resource for further research.

### **Limitations and Further Studies**

There are a few limitations in this study. Firstly, this study relied solely on official curriculum documents, so only the intended curricula were examined. The practice at schools can be different from the intended curricula to various extents, and this study did not study the potential difference between the official documents and actual practices. In addition, some areas such as the learning activities and actual time allocation are not identifiable by examining the curriculum documents. At last, most documents were gathered in native languages and were translated into English using online translators. So, there are some risks that the documents were misinterpreted although the author has made an effort on inviting native language users to check the documents and this paper.

There are a few areas that can be interesting for further studies. First, a qualitative study can be conducted to reveal the similarities and differences in learning activities related to moral or SEL-related education among these countries. For example, an ethnographic study or a grounded theory research can be conducted to explore the actual practice in moral education

lessons. Another further study area is to examine the evaluation method in mainland China and its impact on people's moral level because mainland China is the only studied country that relates students' learning outcomes with their high school and college enrollment opportunities.

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