

FOREWORD I

It has been an ambition of the Asia-Pacific Network for Moral Education (APNME), and especially of Professor Meiyao Wu, its Chairwoman, (2017-2022), to have a book publication, a sequel to the Journal of Moral Education (JME) Special Issue, *Cultivating Morality: The Asia-Pacific Experience*, which marked the 10th Anniversary of the Asia Pacific Network for Moral Education (Kim & Taylor, 2017). This new online publication is grounded in the Coronavirus outbreak which spread from China across the whole world in 2019-20. The pandemic, and the many significant ethical issues which it raised and their implications for moral education, has provided a focus around which members of APNME could continue their theoretical and empirical research during lockdowns and social isolation from students and colleagues.

This collection of book chapters contains contributions from mainland China, Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan, Malaysia and South Korea which address some key concerns during the most challenging of times for societies and citizens. The papers demonstrate the commonalities and diversity of governmental and organisational responses across the different countries of the Asia-Pacific region, which have been further diversified globally and in countries unused to viral outbreaks and severe restrictions on personal liberties. Timely in its publication, researchers here record various ways in which institutions, teachers, students and parents have responded, with ingenuity, resourcefulness and care, to severe requirements and ongoing needs whilst trying to maintain and develop educational practices and moral learning during unprecedented times.

The pandemic in all contexts across the world has called into question fundamental issues of morality and real-life daily practices in terms of thinking, decision-making, behaviour and action and our willingness to reappraise these in relation to their effects on others and ourselves. This is the very stuff of moral education. For a time—a year or so—until vaccines were discovered which reduced the most severe effects of COVID-19 and reduced the number of deaths, which dominated each day's news, our individual health and social situations and our behaviour in relation to others and theirs in relation to us were our predominant consideration. The pandemic highlighted the moral principle of universalizability. For example, mask wearing—which is much more common in many countries of the Asia-Pacific than in the West, where it was

reluctantly but legally required at the height of the pandemic—is as much for the safety of others, and thus other-considering in practice, as much as it is for one’s own personal safety. The pandemic highlighted, most dramatically, our human interdependence locally, nationally and globally. Temporarily at least, in the UK, for example, we had a heightened consciousness that what an individual did or did not do could clearly and directly affect others. People reassessed their priorities and life’s meaning for them. Moreover, the pandemic emphasized social and economic inequalities, which meant that certain ethnic groups of people, especially the poor, living in overcrowded conditions, in face-to-face jobs with the public, including schoolteachers, and particularly those caring for others in homes and hospitals, were disproportionately at risk and affected. Although health workers were given genuine recognition and appreciation by the public, opportunities for governmental reassessment of health priorities and other social challenges may have been short-lived. Can we maintain the same degree of care and consideration for others, and ourselves, as the virus becomes less prevalent, and we easily revert to a semblance of pre-pandemic, new normal life?

This book is an historic contribution, at a specific point in time, to an analysis of how the pandemic in certain countries of the Asia-Pacific has given rise to new ethical issues and questions for the moral life and implications for moral education in theory and in practice at all ages across the lifespan. The book’s editor, Professor Wu, and the APNME colleagues whose work is represented here, should be commended for their research in challenging circumstances and written efforts to make their endeavours freely available to the widest possible global audience through the internet. There is much of interest to make reading worthwhile and, hopefully, to encourage responses from other colleagues in other Asia-Pacific countries, where moral education is also valued. APNME was quick to embrace new ways of working as an organisation online during the pandemic and to offer webinars to its members and others who were seeking support through a community of scholars. It is to be hoped that this publication will provide a lead to the academic work of members of the organisation so that other topics of common interest can be explored and brought to wider attention beyond that of conferences and the Asia-Pacific region itself.

References

Kim, Minkang & Taylor, Monica J. (2017) Cultivating morality in the Asia-Pacific: Influences, issues, challenges and change. *Journal of Moral Education*, 46(1), 1-11, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2017.1285222>

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