

# Religion and Moral Education In China and America

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It is paradoxical that China, a nation that regards religion as superstition and has done much to eliminate and forbid religion in their country, should have a prominent place for moral education in its schools, while America, a nation that is based on religion and which promotes religious freedom, should neglect direct moral education in its schools. Neither nation teaches about God or the laws and teachings of a higher power as reflected in a religion in its schools. China does not because it does not believe in or subscribe to either of these ideas and America does not in the name of religious freedom.

China believes that good behavior and moral character are essential for proper individual conduct and a well-functioning society and therefore they are a required element of the school curriculum. America would agree that good behavior and moral character are essential, but tends to see these things as part of religion, and therefore not in the domain of the schools. This is faulty and dangerous thinking, especially as religious institutions in America are increasingly losing the hold on the minds and hearts of its people. The failure of any American institution, from the families to the national government, to properly train their young people in character and conduct is a serious omission that will directly undermine the well being of all levels of society.

The parents, especially the mothers, play a vital role in this training. Without any religious orientation, Chinese mothers and fathers seem to take this responsibility more seriously and are more diligent in carrying out this task than American parents. Students in China see their efforts in education as a moral responsibility, therefore they work harder, hold higher ideals and are willing to sacrifice more. The Communist Party has replaced the role religion has played in other societies in providing a moral framework. The Party has made its own principles of "religion" and trained its followers to be faithful, obedient, "God-fearing" believers. America has looked primarily to Christianity for its guiding principles. Though Christianity has been taught directly in the schools for most of American history, it is rarely mentioned today. The religious institutions in America that are expected to teach spiritual principles and morals have not been able to maintain their vitality. These spiritual principles and morals, needed for a happy fulfilled life and a well-balanced and progressive society, are not being addressed. Secular humanism may be an attempt to fill this void.

If we use the Ten Commandments from the Bible as a standard of moral behavior, China would score higher than America. If we use the Protestant work ethic for which America is known, again Chinese students rate much higher than American students. The Chinese students work harder, sacrifice more, are more dedicated and have higher motives than American students.

The Chinese schools engender these American moral values more in their students than American schools. They consciously, deliberately and unabashedly teach them to their students.

**A school will reflect the professionalism of its educational personnel. The teachers, as the people most directly involved in the direct delivery of instructions, are the most important individuals to display professional conduct, but without the support of administration their efforts can be hampered. If the school administration does not have the mandate and support of higher agencies, they too can be frustrated in their attempts to respond professionally to the needs of their clients.**

**Several aspects negatively impact on the level of professionalism in China. First people generally do not get to choose their profession, rather it is chosen by the governmental agencies based on needs and examination scores. It is rare to find students in college to become teachers whose first choice is to be a teacher. If people have not chosen to enter a profession, it will be harder for them to be as dedicated and committed to it as someone who does.**

**The opportunities to be trained professionally and continue to develop professionally are much more limited in China. It is more reminiscent of a teacher training over 50 years ago.**

**In the promotion, creation and advancement of the various branches of knowledge, America displays much higher levels of attainment.**

**In terms of the ethical and moral conduct of each country's professionals, this is a more complicated question which must consider the differing cultures and contexts.**

## **Knowledge**

Teachers, in order to effectively teach, must be knowledgeable. They must know the subjects they teach well enough to be able to teach it effectively. They must have an adequate general knowledge to be liberally educated. They must also have the knowledge and skills to know how to teach. This last, pedagogical knowledge is basic to the task of teaching and is treated separately.

Service Orientation

Schools are to serve the best interests of their students. Students in turn need to be trained to be of service. The broader and higher this level of service the better. Students should be encouraged to realize the highest individual levels of service. China is much more effective in engendering this attitude of service through direct instruction, example and practical application. Their art and literature promote the value of service. Their teachers, leaders and role models are to be examples of service. The students are required to perform service activities that are incorporated in their education. In fact the very purpose of education in China is to serve the country. Persons are selected for higher education based upon their capacity to be of service to the society. This higher purpose and service orientation greatly incorporates the Chinese system which otherwise has so many handicaps.

America yet higher and more inspiring level of service is service for the welfare of all humanity. Such noble vision levels of service, which has the capacity to awaken ever greater potentialism is yet to be realized in either China or America. America, by virtue of its role in world affairs, might be said to have achieved a greater service orientation to the world, but it could be argued that their activities are more self-serving than world-serving.

Neither country can be said to have promoted the idea of world citizenship and service to all humankind. Recently these two countries have been pitted against each other over differences.

### **Observations**

A large bag falls off a truck in front of you; you swerve to miss the bag/rock/container and then must slam on your brakes to avoid hitting the truck which is stopping in the road to pick it up.