Factors of Chinese Adolescents' Moral Judgment Competence – Findings from Hubei Province

Jing Zhang (Guangdong University of Foreign Studies)

Review of Relevant studies on Moral Judgment Competence

With economic globalization, political multi-polarization and the rapid development of technology, Chinese moral education shows the characteristics of diversity and variability, which leads to moral problems and dilemmas both to educators and the educated. So it's an important and urgent issue for educators and society to raise adolescents' moral awareness and moral judgment competence under the complex social environment.

Ethics, as guidelines for regulating human's relations and norms, is the most basic condition for maintaining harmonious relationships. Once human beings exist, morality exists also and plays an irreplaceable role comparing to law. Kohlberg pointed out, if you want to find a reasonable solution to the moral basis of the conflict, people must be able to understand not only the arguments that agree with us, but also those disagree with us. This competence is the ability to judge, and it is convinced to be the moral core as well as the most necessary moral element.

Georg Lind, professor of psychology at the University of Konstanz, proposed the "Dual-Aspect Theory of moral behaviors and development," Which says that moral behavior and development is defined by two different aspects, namely by moral orientations (the affective aspect), and moral judgment competence (the cognitive aspect). In 1976 he designed the "Moral Judgment

Test," which he validated through years of research and practice since then (Lind, 2008a). It is the first test which lets us simultaneously measure moral judgment *competence* and moral *orientations*. Lind used Kohlberg´s six moral orientations for designing arguments in favor and against the decisions in two moral dilemma stories (Workers and Doctor). In other words, the MJT is a multi-variate experiment in which three factors: the moral quality of an argument, its opinion (dis-)agreement, and its dilemma context. By rating the MJT's 24 arguments, the participants demonstrate the degree to which he or she lets moral concerns determine his or her behavior. This degree is reflected in the C-score, the MJT's index for moral judgment competence.

In recent years, Lind's research began to draw the attention of Chinese scholars. In 2002, Zhanqiang Zhao of Hebei Normal University made the Chinese version of MJT. In 2003，Shaogang Yang and his student Huihong Wu made an empirical research using the MJT in Jiangsu province. In 2007, Yunqiang Wang, and others used MJT to investigate the effect of mood state on adolescents' ability of moral judgment. And in 2008, Xiaoning Zheng used MJT on criminals.

Above all, the researches about moral judgment competence are getting more and more, and there are many achievements also. However, because of the short time of research and limitation from the conditions, it has many disadvantages, such as the narrow content, lack of systematic reflection, no theoretical framework, etc.

The present study was designed in order to answer the following research questions: Which factors determine Chinese adolescents' moral judgment competence. Participants were taken from the Hubei Province as an example.

Empirical Study

The Sampling
1.   Participants: high school students, undergraduates, graduates, farms, young migrants, young employees.
2.   Districts：5 cities（Wuhan, Xiangfan, Yichang, Huangshi, Jingzhou in Hubei Province.
3.   Figure 1.
4.   Ages: from 12 to 27.
5.   Gender: male and female.
6.   Number of the participants: 2612 pieces collected (878 pieces from Wuhan, 459 from Xiangyang, 422 from Huangshi, 442 from Jingzhou), 1933 pieces effective.

Validity Analysis

Although the validity of the Chinese version has already been established we followed the recommendation by Lind to analyze the cross-cultural validity of the data in each study, especially when the terrain of research on moral judgment competence is relatively new as it is in China. Lind (2008) proposes three rather rigorous validity criteria: preference hierarchy, quasi-simplex structure, and affective-cognitive parallelism.
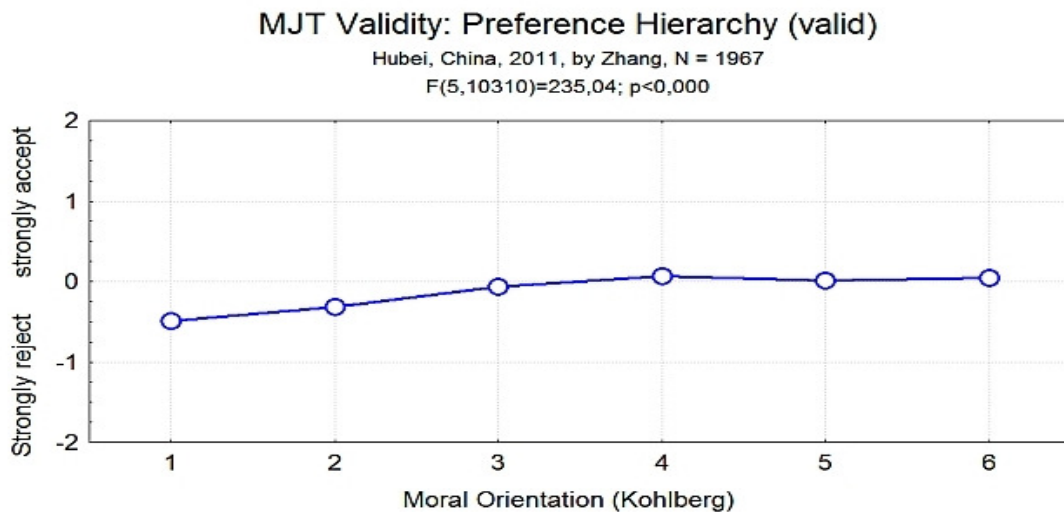
(1) Validity of Preference Hierarchy

Figure 1. Preference hierarchy

This criterion states that all people prefer the six moral orientations as defined by Lawrence Kohlberg in a certain way, namely they prefer high "stage" reasoning (type 6 and 5) most, and they prefer lower stage reason less; actually they reject the lower type reasoning. The figures 1shows that indeed Chinese participants show the same preference hierarchy as people all over the world. The prefer stage 5 and 6 moral orientations mist. The pattern of participants' moral orientation is basically in line with Kohlberg's theory, that is, their preferences for the six types of moral orientations are monotonically increasing. Though the fifth stage is slightly lower than the fourth stage and the sixth stage is back up.
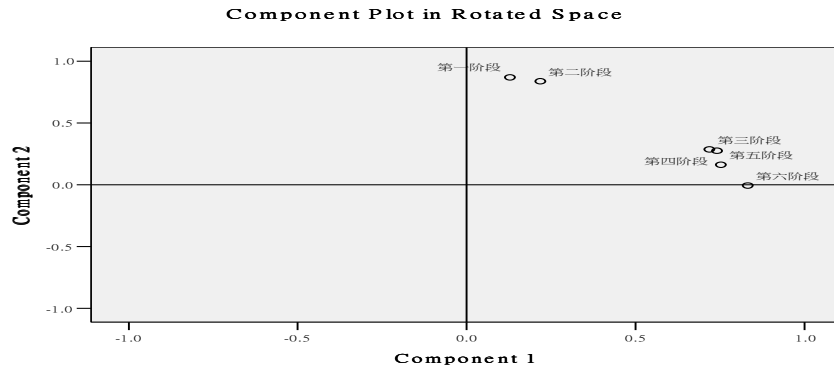
(2) Validity of quasi-simple structure

Figure 2. Quasi-simplex (rotation) structure.

The quasi-simplex structure refers to the correlations which should exist between the six moral orientations. This criterion states that the correlations between "neighboring"-orientations should be higher than between moral orientations which are more distant on Kohlberg's scale. Figure 2 shows that stage one and stage two is closer, stage three and stage four is much closer, stage five and six is closer than the correlations than. So the data are valid.

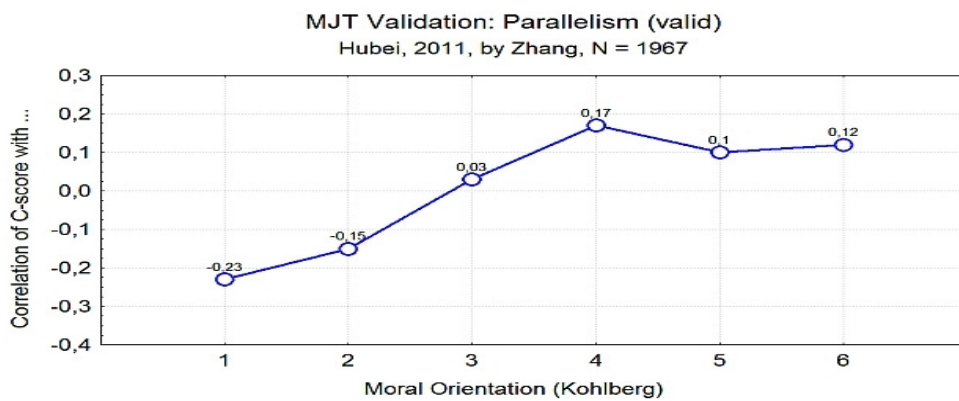*(3) Validity of cognitive-affective parallelism*

Figure 3. Cognitive-affective parallelism

Figure 3 shows, as the criterion of cognitive-affective parallelism predicts, that the affective and the cognitive aspect of moral judgment behavior are very strongly correlated: The higher participants' C-score (the index for the cognitive aspect), the more clearly do they prefer arguments which represent high stage moral orientations, and the more clearly do they reject arguments which represent low level moral orientations.

All three results of this analysis show that the MJT data of this study are highly valid.

Results

(1) Attitude's analysis of the two dilemmas

	N	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3
Workers' Dilemma	1967	474	209	133	770	100	171	118
Doctor's Dilemma	1967	197	150	169	750	207	246	256

Table 1. Attitude's distribution

	Absolutely disagree -3	Natural 0	Absolutely agree +3
Workers' Dilemma	24%	39%	6%
Doctor's Dilemma	10%	38%	13%

Table 2. Attitude's analysis

Workers' Dilemma involves two core values: law (theft) and human rights (privacy, dignity and safety). From table_1 and table_2, we can see that most subjects disapprove the workers' stealing. 24% are strongly against, 32% are neutral, only 6% agree with it.

Doctor's Dilemma also involves the two core values: law (murder) and human rights (life). From table 1and table_2, we can see that most subjects don't disapprove the doctors' murder. Only 10% are strongly against, 38% are neutral, 13% agree with it.

The author gives the following possible reasons for these: First, the participants are influenced by Chinese traditional culture—the middle of the road, that is, most people would like to obey the public moral code, avoiding breaking laws and regulations in facing moral dilemmas. Second, it is the culture differences between China and western countries. Most people can accept the doctor's behavior since he helps the patient away from suffering. They don't

think he is a murder. But people hate stealing because they think thefts are bad persons without morality and break the law at the same time. Thirdly, the consciousness of human rights is not as strong as that in western countries, so most people don't realize the workers' human rights (privacy, dignity and safety) are offended.
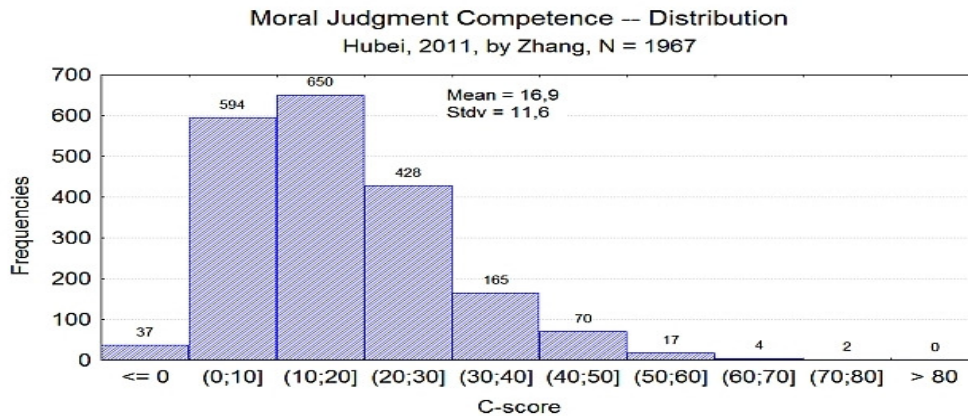
(2) Distribution of the C-scores

Figure 4. Distribution of C-scores

Figure 4 shows that the average C-score is 16.9 which is much lower that the C-scores of western European countries. Most participants' C-score is below a C of 20. It is not easy to explain this. There are several possible explanations which are still being analyzed. We cannot rule out the possibility that methodological problems have depressed the C-scores. In an earlier study (Yang & Hu 2006) found a higher mean C-score in a Chinese sample. This methodological question will have to be addressed in a future study.

(3) Further analysis of C-scores

This test mainly gives analysis from seven aspects about the participants' gender, residence, education, political affiliation, only one-child family or more children, occupation and age.

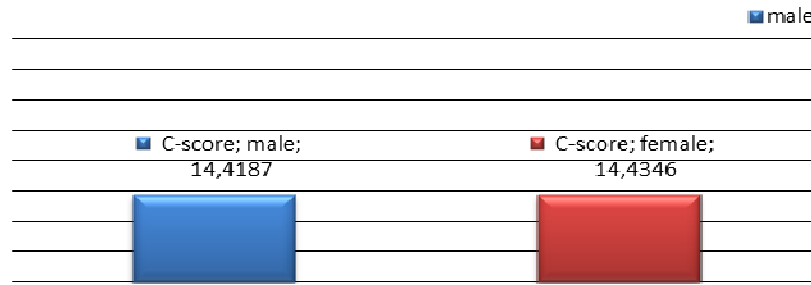a) Gender and moral judgment competence

Figure 5. C-score of gender.

Figure 5 shows that the average C-score of female is 14.435, males is 14.419. There is no significant difference between genders. Gender does not seem to have an impact on moral development. Men and women have the same level of moral judgment competence.

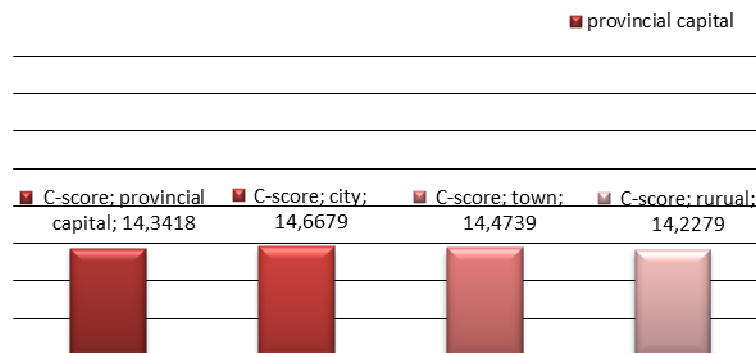b. Residence and moral judgment competence

Figure 6. C-score of residence.

Figure 6 shows that the average C-score of city is the highest 14.67 C-points, C-score of participants with a rural background is the lowest (14.23), but the differences are very small and not statistically significant. The residential background of the participants does not seem to have any impact on moral-cognitive development.
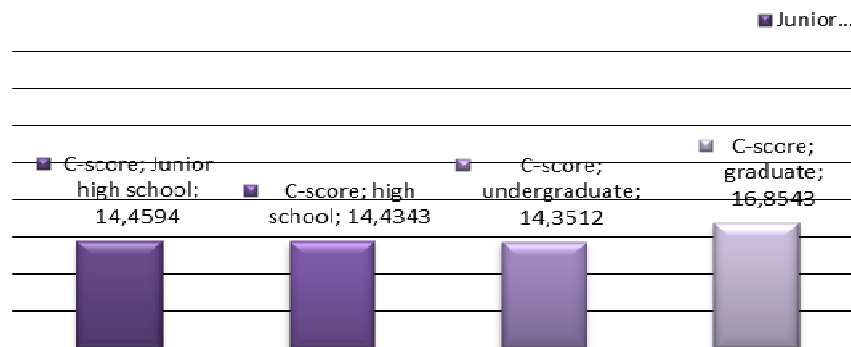
c. Education and moral judgment competence

Figure 7. C-score and level of education

As Figure 7 shows, the level of education hardly correlates with the development of moral judgment competence though the average C-score of graduates is slightly higher (16.85) than the C-score of all other levels of education. There is no significant difference among different education level.

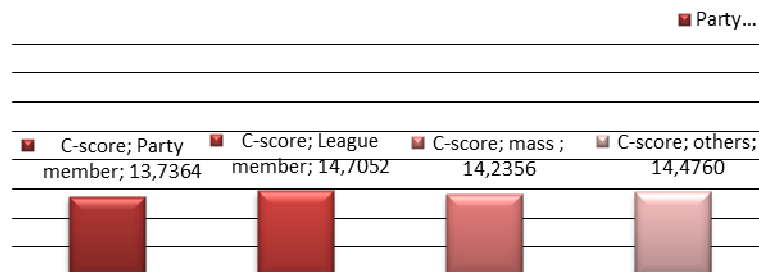d. Political affiliation and moral judgment competence

Figure 8. C-score of persons with different political affiliation.

Figure 8 shows that political affiliation seems to have little influence on moral judgment competence. The average C-score differ only very little. They do not support the hypothesis that political affiliation influences moral development.

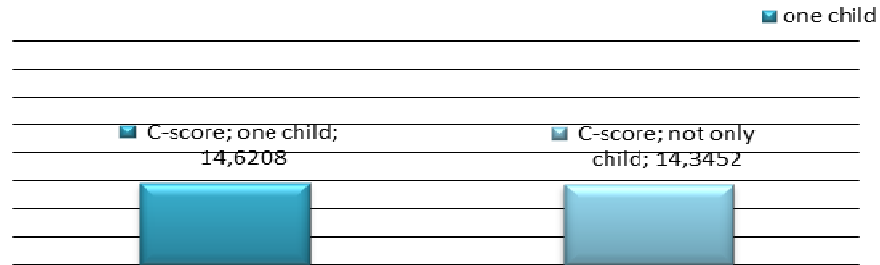e. One child family or more children and moral judgment competence

Figure 9. C-score of participants from a one-child family and a more-children family.

Figure 9 shows that the average C-score of participants from a one-child family is 14.62 and of participants from a more children family is 14.35. The difference is very small and statistically not significant. Family size does not seem to have an impact on moral judgment competence.
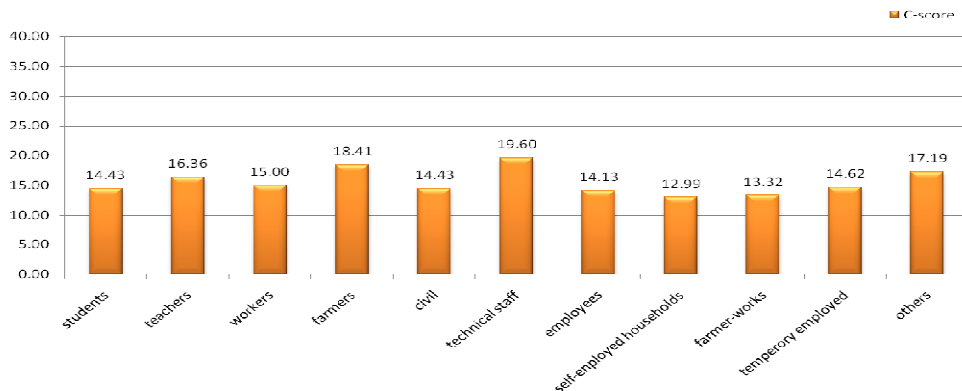
f. Occupation and moral judgment competence

Figure 10. C-score of persons having different occupation.

Figure 10 shows that the average C-score of technical staff is the highest 19.60, of self-employed households is the lowest 12.99. The C-scores of the other groups are located in between. The differences between the different occupations are not statistical significant. Yet they are larger than in the other analyses.
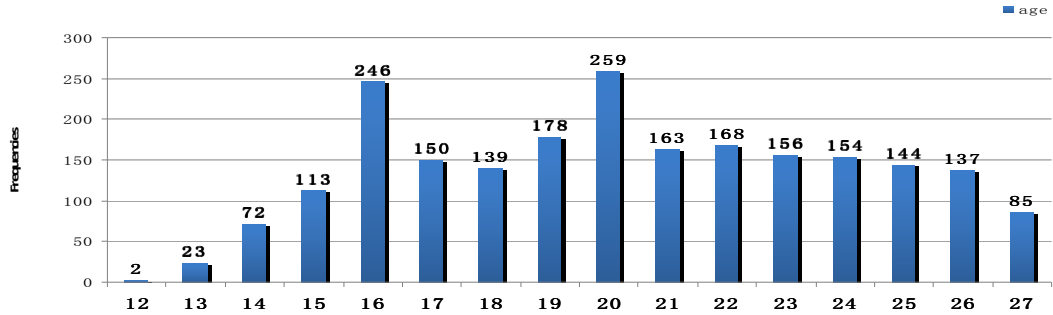
g. Age and moral judgment competence

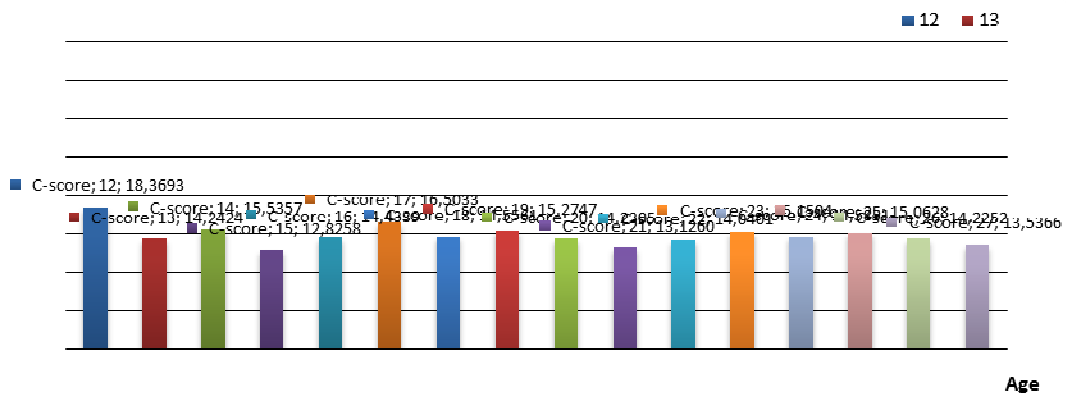Figure 11. Distribution of age in the sample

Figure 12. Average C-score by age.

Figure 12 shows that moral judgment competence is not correlated with age. There seems to be some correlation at the early age levels (age 12 to 16), yet this correlations may be accounted for by schooling. Besides, in some age groups the sample is very small and thus the data not very reliable. In other words, we are not becoming morally wiser as we become older.

Conclusions

Which conclusions can we draw from this empirical survey of Chinese participants of Hubei Province? The author believes that this survey shows the following:

(1) In regard to the affective aspect of the moral behavior, most of the

participants show rather appropriate moral orientations. High level moral reasoning is preferred most; inadequate levels of moral reasoning are rejected. The same result was found in the research by Yang and Wu (2008) in Jiangsu Province before.

(2) The average moral judgment competence of people in the Hubei Province (16.9 C-points) seems to be lower than that of people in Western European countries, also lower than that of Jiangsu Province habitants (Yang & Hu 2006). However, we cannot rule out that some methodological problems may have depressed the test-scores. Future studies will have to clarify this question.

(3) All differences are small. There is little difference in the C-scores between males and females; among participants in urban areas, provincial capital, town and city; there is little difference between middle school students, college students and graduate students, but the C-score of graduates is a little higher than others; little difference in regard to their C-score show Chinese Communist Party members (CCP), CYL (Chinese Youth League) members, mass and others. Little difference has also been found between the C-scores of participants from a one-child family and a more children family. Little difference among different occupations, and the C-sores of farmers and technical staff are higher than others. Age seems to be also not correlated with moral judgment competence.

(4) Of special interest is the low correlation between moral judgment competence and level of education. The schools of the province of the participants do not seem to foster moral judgment competence – as schools in some countries, like Germany do. It is too early to make a final judgment. More carefully designed studies are needed. Yet, on the basis of this study we can safely conclude that in order to be more effective, Chinese schools need to adopt new methods of moral education like the *Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion* (Lind 2008b).

Literature

Kohlberg, L. 1972. A Cognitive Development Approach to Moral Education. *Humanist*, November-December.

Kohlberg, L. 1987. Using a Hidden Curriculum for Moral Education. *Digest*, May.

Piaget, J. 1965. *The Moral Judgment of the Child*. New York: The Free Press.

Lind, G. 2000. Essay Review: "The Measurement of Moral Judgment' by Anne Colby, Lawrence Kohlberg." *Human Development*: 388-397

Lind, G. 2008a. The Meaning and Measurement of Moral Judgment Competence revisited - A Dual-Aspect Model. A revised version of this paper will

appears in: D. Fasko & W. Willis (Eds.), *Contemporary Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives on Moral Development and Education.* Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Lind, G. 2008b. Teaching Students to Speak Up and To Listen to Others: Cultivating Moral Democratic Competencies. In: D.E. Lund & P.R. Carr (Eds.), *Doing Democracy and Social Justice in Education: Political Literacy for All Students*, 319-335. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Yang, S. & Wu, H. 2008. The Features of Moral Judgment Test Among Chinese Adolescents. *Asia Pacific Education Review* 9(3).

Jing Zhang (Guangdong University of Foreign Studies)

Factors of Chinese Adolescents' Moral Judgment Competence — Findings from Hubei Province

Abstract: This paper uses MJT designed by German moral psychologist Lind as a measurement tool, selects 1933 teenagers from Wuhan, Xiangfan or Hubei province. The result shows that participants' C-sore of different age is 16.90. Character of politic lies remarkable difference, and gender, profession, education, etc., doesn't. But the specific characters of them have something to be concerned. On this basis, the author gives some advices and countermeasures for education departments.

Key words: Moral Judgment Test, C-scores, Chinese adolescents