

## ***Cross-Cultural Reflections on Citizen's and Mankind's Moral Identity as a Foundation of Community with a Shared Future***



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**Abstract:** Citizens' moral identity is not only reflected on the individual level, but also in terms of belongingness, community, and even cosmopolitanism. It is the basic demand of a community with a shared future in morality. Moral identity is closely related to moral behavior, and the study of moral identity can predict one's moral behavior. Community is the cultural basis of citizens' moral identity. To study citizens' moral identity in the community can also enable one to predict people's moral behavior in that community. At present, the construction of a community with a shared future still lacks a species moral identity generally recognized by all cultures and countries. In order to achieve that goal, we must strengthen cultural inclusion, advocate and practice species moral identity of a community with a shared future. Species moral identity is based on the existence of humankind as a species with autonomous identity, so it is necessary to establish the mechanism of cultural respect and equal discussion, and to strengthen the construction of the species moral identity. Only in that way can we accomplish the mission of establishing species moral identity. In the following paper, I will advocate for these ideas with Kant's and Marx' thoughts.

**Keywords:** Citizenship; community with shared future; moral identity; species moral identity; Kant; Marx.

### **Introduction**

After thousands of years' evolution of civilization, there developed a variety of spiritual beliefs, moral values, ethical principles, and rights – including these on health (and global health) related – with both common and particular characteristics, COVID-19 unexpectedly struck the world. Countries and governments adopted different measures and policies against it that revealed great cultural differences, even between neighboring countries, and resulted in serious cultural discrepancies or even conflicts due to policies, political morality and ideologies, and other social and economic reasons. Behind these discrepancies, there hide many moral and ethical issues for educators to ponder, clarify, and maybe to improve. What we could learn from both gains and losses during this epidemic (pandemic or even “syndemic” [e.g., Horton 2020]) situation, when we try to reconstruct the new orders of international relations and build up a community with a shared future to solve the cross-cultural conflicts, has become an urgent task for

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researchers and educators in many fields, including the moral one. And learning – also defined in terms of a more classic category called “Bildung” – is not limited to a selected and privileged country, society, or group of scholars. When Kant considers the “whole of all man” in his religious cosmopolitan writings, not only legal or political, cross-national connections or mobility are meant. He postulates a rise of the moral community [*ethisches Gemeinwesen*], that is, a community based on shared moral consciousness – basic aims, duties and virtues – making up a specific identity. However, developing such an identity would not be possible without education [*Bildung*], a foundational category of the Enlightenment, which is a historical achievement not reducible to the European space.

Furthermore, if there is competition or conflicts between members of such a community, as Kant argues, competition and conflicts provide an opportunity for all to learn and improve their “Bildung”-level, and so to overcome narrow, egocentric and selfish orientations. This “has in it something great which expands people’s narrow, selfish and intolerant cast of mind, especially in religious matters, to the idea of a cosmopolitan *moral community*, and it is a good means of enlivening a community to the moral disposition of brotherly love which it represents” (Kant 1999, 6:199–200 and 188–189; see also Moran 2011; Nussbaum 2010; van der Linden 1988). A cosmopolitan moral community might be a normative or spiritual “continuation” historically sparked or inspired by a religious community, for religions sometimes divide people instead of connecting them. One “may well assume the form of a ritual communal partaking at the same table” (Kant 1999, 6:199–200; 188–189), the same endeavor, or just a project. What is important here is the idea of community, which transcends the limitations of individual political systems and confessions, simply seeking the common moral nature of human beings. If one were to stick to an orthodox religious interpretation of Kant’s idea, it would prevent us of rethinking a similar idea on the basis of Marx’s approach, who was, as is well known, ‘religiously unmusical,’ as Max Weber wrote to Ferdinand Tönnies in a private letter in 1909 (Habermas later referred to in one of his speeches) (see e.g., Pfändtner 2014). However, a moral community should be a bottom-up one. According to Kant,

it would be a contradiction (*in adjecto*) for the political community to compel its citizens to enter into an ethical community, since the latter entails freedom from coercion in its very concept. Every political community may indeed wish to have available a dominion over minds as well, according to the laws of virtue. (...) The citizen of the political community therefore remains, so far as the latter’s lawgiving authority is concerned, totally free: he may wish to enter with his fellow citizens into an ethical union over and above the political one, or rather remain in a natural state of this sort. Only insofar as an ethical community must rest on *public* laws and have a constitution based on them, must those who freely commit themselves to enter into this state, not [indeed] allow the political power to command them how to order (or not order) such a constitution internally, but allow limitations, namely the condition that nothing be included in this constitution which contradicts the duty of its members as *citizens of the state* – even though, if the ethical bond is of the genuine sort, this condition need not cause anxiety.

Further, since the duties of virtue concern the entire human race, the concept of an ethical community always refers to the ideal of a totality of human beings, and in this it distinguishes itself from the concept of a political community. Hence a multitude of human beings united in that purpose cannot yet be called the ethical community as such but only a particular society that strives after the consensus of all human beings (indeed, of all finite rational beings) in order to establish an absolute ethical whole of which each partial society is only a representation or schema; for each of these societies can in turn be represented, in relation to others of this kind, as situated in the natural state, with all the imperfections of the latter (as is also the case with separate political states not bound together through a public international law) (Kant 1999, 6:97, 107–108).

Kant's legacy has inspired the author of this contribution to consider a human and civil moral identity as a precondition of activism based on common virtues' and values', when such global-scale and long-term emergency challenges like a pandemic arise, and to discover affinities between Eastern and Western philosophical traditions.

### **I. Civil Moral Identity and Cultural Conflicts**

Human beings are beings who had to live together with their species from the very beginning, as soon as they appeared on the earth, otherwise they could not have endured and evolved biologically up to now in the natural world alongside so many wild animals. And therefore human beings at present, with so many different cultures, often need some harmony and cooperation and have gradually formed some cross-cultural communion and consistency with similar essential values shared by the whole human species. China's traditional "harmony" culture, the proposition of "harmonious society" and "harmonious world" advocated by contemporary China as well as the "Belt and Road" initiative and the construction of a community with a shared future, have all demonstrated the existence of a species moral identity that means that there are moral rules and regulations that every human culture and country should discuss, negotiate, commonly agree and follow. Although we do not deny that there are some serious conflicts in moral values among different cultures, thus, for instance, during the epidemic situation some cultures strongly require people to wear masks while some cultures do not have such a requirement and even encourage people to make their own choice freely. However, that kind of democracy and freedom cannot prevent the quick spread of the virus, millions of people have died of this disease, and the social order and economy across the world have been seriously impacted. We have to think about the kind of species, moral identity and culture we should foster to not to put each other's safety at risk, to enable subjects to resolve their socio-moral conflicts, and to realize the harmonious coexistence.

### **II. Forms of Cultural Conflict During the Pandemic**

Beginning in 2019 and up to now COVID-19 has spread very rapidly around the world, different cultures have revealed their different ideologies and values, and adopted

different health measures to fight against the epidemic, and therefore have triggered intense cultural conflicts in the following forms:

Firstly, deep-rooted social inequalities and economic marginalization have deprived a significant number of people in many countries of their necessities (e.g., Horton 2020). In the face of the outbreak of the epidemic situation, those people, in despair, have had to take risks to earn their living by leaving their home to work and even crossing into the neighboring countries. Without the protection of effective measures, the virus spreads very quickly around the world, and therefore the conflicts between countries with different values have become more serious and stronger.

Secondly, the long-standing perception of individualism in Western society makes many people ignore government mandates, refuse to wear masks and protective equipment, and even gather together for mass demonstrations. That makes the epidemic situation in some countries out of control, intensifying the conflicts among people in the country. Although the individualism has the advantage of encouraging people to dig out their potential and to realize their own values, and also advocating people to show their own ideas freely, however, in the context of such serious disaster as COVID-19, traditional Eastern collectivism, especially China's governance, has shown its effectiveness.

Furthermore, racism and racial discrimination have led to serious conflicts, injustice and disadvantages in certain countries. In particular, there appeared some racial discrimination and violent attacks against Asians, Africans and Muslim Arabs in some Western countries, such as cyberbullying, racist rhetoric, and irresponsible dissemination of epidemic conspiracy theories by politicians and leaders in some countries, all of which has exacerbated cross-cultural conflicts during the outbreak.

Of course, we admit that different cultures and governments adopted different attitudes and measures towards COVID-19, which are grounded in the civil moral identity in their own cultures, however COVID-19 is an international disease, every country in the world should adopt some common or similar measures to fight against it spreading within and outside of the country, otherwise, even if they are more concerned about economic problems, without species moral identity the present measures cannot prevent the spread of the pandemic situation in the world and the economy cannot easily and quickly recover.

In today's world, the epidemic is still not over, and various forms of cross-cultural conflict are still emerging. The moral problems behind all of these developments are worthy of deep reflection for our educators and researchers in the moral field.

### **III. Citizenship and Citizens' Moral Identity**

Citizenship refers to belonging to a country, recognized by law and equipped by

rights and liberties.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, scholars have focused their research on citizens' moral identity, arguing that moral identity can predict a citizen's moral behavior in a culture (Jia & Krettenauer 2017). However, the above proposal is limited to national perspectives, which is quite narrow and lacks the overall concern of the global community with a shared future.

Currently, when COVID-19 is spreading across the world, all the governments take measures against it. However, due to their different cultures, governments adopted different attitudes towards the epidemic and measures to deal with it, which therefore involves the civil moral identity in their own cultures. The differences are worthy of our reflection. As some scholars have pointed out, "From the perspective of philosophy and ethics, the global risk of COVID-19 shows us the urgency to form the ethical consciousness of the global community of human destiny" (He Lai 2020).

The construction of a community with a shared future is closely related to citizens' moral identity and, therefore, to establish a species moral identity is absolutely the requirement for the construction of a human community with a shared future. The citizens of any country would advocate for legal, sound and just social life, which, from a psychological point of view, is the emotional basis of civic morality and the basic demand of the existence of the species moral values in a community with a shared future (Yang 2010).

Citizens living in such a community must abide by the ethics and values generally accepted by most community members. That is not only the requirement of civic morality, but also the foundational basis of the values of the community's moral identity.

In the complex international context at present, it is quite difficult to achieve the species moral identity in such a complicated world community. Many scholars identified some moral characters that the citizens of the human community should possess, such as politeness (courtesy), harmony, honesty, self-control, tolerance, trust, compassion, responsibility, political effectiveness, cooperativeness, loyalty, courage, respect for values, concern for common good, and other core civic values (Patrick 1999; Arthur 2005). The Chinese government has also put forward the core values in 24 Chinese characters for Chinese citizens in recent years. However, all these moral characters and core values are the moral requirements for the citizens in their own country to abide by, and they have not been commonly accepted (or equally highly prioritized) by representatives of the other cultures, communities and countries in the world, and therefore they have not become the essentials of the species moral identity.

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<sup>1</sup> However, not all people are fortunate enough to have citizenship status and there is still exclusion or discrimination on this basis, for example in the case of political refugees, expellees, forcibly displaced persons, etc. whose right to have rights and even the right to enter a certain community (or communities) is denied (e.g., Hirsch & Bell 2017).

#### **IV. Moral Identity and Cultural Inclusion**

Although it is not easy to establish species moral identity of the human community, it is still possible to some extent. When studying morality's cultural orientation, scholars attach great attention to how culture helps to form some specific thinking patterns and promotes some specific moral values (Norenzayan & Heine 2005). It has been found that there may exist universally accepted basic moral principles. However, due to the great impact of different countries and cultures on morality, those basic moral principles change under cultural pressure at the national levels. Thus, even if there are similar or identical moral identities, they are usually shown in different ways among different cultures and societies. Obviously, cultural factors must be taken into account when studying species moral identities, which is a new research orientation in recent years.

Contemporary psychologists use questionnaires and empirical research in a certain cultural group to study moral identity. However, some scholars clearly pointed out that these moral attributes and characteristics are mostly Western moral values, which do not extend to world cultural inclusiveness. In order to find out the species moral identities of the human community, an expansion in the range and the number of the participants is required (Miller 2007). Therefore, some scholars believe that we should develop some culturally unbiased tools to measure moral identities. The first step is to find out the concept of a "moral person" with archetypal significance from different cultures, especially from groups of the East and West, which reveal great differences in cultures. Although this is a laborious and time-consuming study, there are still scholars who are pursuing this path. Jia conducted a cross-cultural comparative study between China and the United States. The results showed that there were some similar moral identities between those two cultures, but the identities were defined differently in terms of culture. Moral identities which can effectively predict people's moral behavior in American culture proved to be ineffective in Chinese culture (Jia 2016).

Although Jia's research is quite promising, its subjects are limited to Chinese and American cultures, which makes it hard to illustrate the moral identities of the human community with a shared future. Other scholars have also conducted similar research in their own countries and cultures, but due to the sample size, the cross-cultural study in moral psychology is still taking individual culture as the target, instead of a group which includes all cultures. In this sense, the study of the species moral identities needs the moral and cultural inclusion of a human community.

#### **V. Citizen's Specific (Species-like) Moral Identity of A Community with Shared Future**

Although the community with a shared future provides the soil for species moral identity, there is still a long way to establish it, because such a community with a shared

future is composed of and coexists with the specific countries and cultures (many sub-communities), and the moral identities of these sub-communities have some important, decisive and restrictive effects on the moral behavior of its members.

From the different anti-COVID-19 measures adopted by different countries, we can clearly see that measures are influenced and constrained by deeply-rooted political ideology as well as moral identities in the countries' own culture(s). In such an era when globalization is irreversible, advocating for the establishment of species moral identity of a community with a shared future is not only the historical mission, but also a major subject that all of our moral researchers need to focus on.

First of all, species moral identity is based on the existence of humankind as a species. On the one hand, it emphasizes that humankind has the same destiny, sharing benefits, mutual respect and cooperation, and a win-win or multiple win strategy; on the other hand, it is committed to and respects the differences in cultures. In other words, species moral identities should not only consciously accept and recognize the most basic and universal moral values in a community with a shared future, but also affirm the moral culture and values inherent in different countries and nations. However, we should be aware that in such an era with a common destiny and globalization, these two aspects are not in binary opposition, but are intrinsically consistent, and need to be protected by the moral identity of different countries and cultures. Although the present world is still mainly based on "material interdependence," this is in the stage of what Karl Marx called "the capitalist development of human society," whose essence is a "false community." On this point Marx was much more skeptical and predictive compared to *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*.<sup>2</sup> While criticizing the "false community," Marx put forward the idea of "the Union of Free Men," arguing that "under the conditions of true community, individuals acquire their own freedom through such union" (Marx 2002; see also Wartenberg 1982; Byron 2016). This is Marx's profound expression of the community of human destiny, which is based on the moral identity of the freedom and autonomy of human subjects. When we build up a community with a shared future today, this principle needs to be thoroughly discussed, and followed.

Secondly, we need to establish the mechanism of respect and equal discussions in cultures, in terms of species moral identities. In this era, symbiosis and competition exist in different cultures. If we do not establish a discussion mechanism in such a community, which shows respect for different cultures, it will lead to a value crisis in species moral identity, which would seriously hinder the construction of a community with a shared future. The "respect and honesty" principle in Confucianism in China embodies the profoundness in cultural respect, including etiquette, integrity, respect, loyalty and

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<sup>2</sup> In his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx declines to recognize civil society in Hegel as either a human or a political community: "In virtue of its character, civil society, or the unofficial class, does not have the universal as the end of its essential activity. Its essential activity is not a determination of the universal; it has no universal character. (...) What actually exists is only accidental multitudes of various sizes (cities, villages, etc.). These multitudes, or this aggregate, not only *appears* but everywhere really is an aggregate dispersed into its atoms" (Marx 1970, 76-77).

other moral values. This principle has important role in cultural enlightenment for the construction of a community with a shared future. For example, etiquette between different cultures helps to avoid value disputes; honesty increases cultural trust; courtesy wins the mutual respect; loyalty promotes harmonious relationships, and so on. Therefore, in the process of building a community with a shared future, we should make full use of the essence of our ancient traditional culture and try our best to form and perfect the mechanism of discussion by respecting different cultures.

Thirdly, it is imperative to strengthen the construction of moral identity in a community with a shared future. With the development of economic globalization, social informationization and networking, from one country, one region to one person, wherever they are, whatever religion or ideology it is, no one can exist outside of a community with a shared future. As the Chinese General Secretary Xi Jinping said, “No country can meet the challenges that human kind is facing now alone, nor can it retreat to a self-enclosed island.” He therefore called on the world “that all peoples must work together to build a community with shared future and build a world of peace, security, and common prosperity; a world full of openness and tolerance, cleanness and beauty” (Xi Jinping 2017).

However, the inertial thinking of capitalism drives some individuals and countries to separate their special interests and values from the common interests and values of all mankind, and even put their special interests and values above the common interests and values of mankind, leading to constant conflicts and crises in the international community. The current outbreak of COVID-19 has sounded the alarm to the world, which tells us that the construction of a community with a shared future should focus on the establishment of international organizations related to such a community with a shared future, on the formulation of some institutions related to this human community, as well as on the implementation of the ethical rules, value consensus, and related laws and regulations. Only in this way can we guide the country and the national community to coexist with such a community with a shared future, coordinate and progress together, achieve the species moral identity of a community with a shared future, and finally realize the comprehensive development of human beings.

Finally, we need to practice and perfect species moral identity through moral education. In addition to active discussions and cooperation between governments and organizations, education should also take responsibility. Creating a good moral environment and moral atmosphere will not only provide a moral example for the citizens of the community, but also enhance the species moral identities of citizens in such a community. Studies have found that people who often notice unethical events in life would form a bad impression of the immoral environment of their society. In contrast, the experience of moral goodness in social life can promote people’s moral identity and pro-social behavior (Aquino & McFerran 2011). These findings have revealed the central role of enlightenment for moral education.



The species moral identity of a community with a shared future must be realized through education, but the effectiveness of education needs to be achieved by the cooperation of the human community in moral education. It goes without saying that educational guidance goes hand in hand with the construction of social morality, and is the basis for the establishment of species moral identity among citizens of the community. Therefore, we should not only vigorously strengthen the education of our citizens' moral identity, and enhance the moral literacy of citizens, but also actively guide and promote education for species moral identity of a community with a shared future. This is a more difficult and long-term mission of the time than the economic mission of a community with a shared future. It is also the moral and educational power that drive us, moral educators, to fight for a brighter or, – which is the imperative of now – safer future open to fellow humans. Just as we began our considerations by drawing on Kant, we can conclude them with an important thought of this philosopher: that although there is an “asocial” tendency in human behavior (a not too distant relative of alienation), there is also a counter-tendency called “sociability.”

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