

# THE CHARACTER FORMATION OF CHILDREN IN JAPAN: A STUDY OF JAPANESE CHILDREN TEXTBOOK ON MORAL EDUCATION (*DOUTOKU*)

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this research was to explore any underlying messages or moral principle in Japanese elementary school textbook titled "Watashitachi no Doutoku" and its correlation with the character formation of children in Japan. The method used in this research was the literature review that was derived from corpus data in the form of an original Japanese manuscript. The corpus data were derived from textbooks that were still being used in Japan to date, in the form of original books in the Japanese language from the first grade to sixth grade elementary school, whereas the research method used a descriptive analysis method. The problem analysis was divided into four sections, including intrapersonal morality, interpersonal moral value, morality toward nature, and morality toward society. The conclusion indicates that character installment through special school subjects, namely moral education (doutoku), using Watashitachi no Doutoku influences character formation of elementary school children in Japan.*

**Keyword:** character formation, children character, Japanese children textbook, moral education

## INTRODUCTION

Moral education is a process, the approach used in a comprehensive manner, this education should be carried out conductively both in the school, home and community, all partisans and communities are involved. Socialization of moral education needs to be held for school principals, teachers, students, parents, and community leaders who are essential. It needs attention to the background of students involved in the life process of moral education. The attention of moral education must last for a long time (continuously), and moral learning must be integrated into the curriculum praxis in schools and society (Raharjo, 2005).

Character education is initially introduced by a German pedagogue F.W. Foerster (1869-1966). The strength of one's character is visible in four required basic traits; those are regularity, coherence, autonomy, tenacity, and fidelity (Koesoema, 2015). Ki Hadjar Dewantoro has long been striving to sustain the spirit of character education as the factor that shapes the personality and identity of a nation. Raharjo (2007) also says that moral education must continuously give to children, and moral learning should be integrated in the curriculum in school and praxis community.

Despite the importance of moral and character education, the implementation is, however, still on and off in our national education curriculum. Currently, its implementation is integrated into other school subjects, such as Religious Education, History, Pancasila and Citizenship

Education (PPKn), and Civics which indicate that this nation has actually a deep concern about its character formation (Koesoema, 2015).

Unlike the circumstance in Indonesia, the focus of elementary education in Japanese school is to emphasize the importance of Moral Education. Morality has become the foundation that is instilled 'intentionally' into the children in Japan. While there is one specific subject at school that teaches the children about morality; the moral value is integrated into all subjects and daily life. Moral Education has been instilled since the Meiji Restoration in 1868 up to now by including the specific school subject that teaches the children about morality. The subject is a moral study using the textbook titled *Watashitachi no Doutoku*.

There are two problems in this research namely the importance of moral lessons for Japanese studies and what the moral values in the relevant books. While the objective of this research is to find out any underlying moral principle in Japanese elementary school textbook from first grade to sixth grade titled *Watashitachi no Doutoku*. This research will look for the significance of the moral behavior of children in Japan with the teachings in the textbook.

After find out what moral lesson in the textbook, the benefit that can be gained from this research is to obtain a comprehensive data and knowledge concerning the moral principles that are instilled into the children in Japan using the school textbook named *Doutoku* (moral) and the possibility of its application in Indonesia.

## METHODS

The research of moral education in Japan was previously carried out by Poukka (2011) that is examining education value in Japanese schools at the beginning of the millennium. Poukka, in her research, it compares moral education in Japan and Poland. In her research, she questions the curriculum and moral education in Japan in the comparative terminology with moral education in her country, Poland. The corpus data used is a moral education textbook in Japan entitled *Kokoro no Noto*, published by the Japanese Ministry of Education.

Other research related to moral education in Japan is conducted by Nakayama (2017) that questions whether moral education in schools can effectively instill morale in children. Conclusions from Nakayama's research that to get effective results in planting moral values needed some improvement, in terms of adding moral lessons and teaching methods, so that moral teaching in schools could be successful.

The first difference of this research with Poukka (2011) is the difference in corpus data. The data used by Poukka is a textbook titled *Kokoro no to*, and data in research is a textbook entitled *Watashi tachi no Doutoku*. In addition, Poukka's (2011) research covers a wide range, concerning the curricula of the two countries, Japan and Poland, while the focus of this research is only to limit moral themes or moral messages contained in the textbook *Watashitachi no Doutoku*. In addition, the results of Nakayama's research state that moral lessons in schools can help develop children's character. The disadvantage in Nakayama's research is not discussing moral themes/messages completely in his research. However, for readers in Indonesia, the researchers think it would be more useful if the data related moral themes are fully explained. This will be very useful, as data material from the main sources of primary school textbooks. For education researchers, this data can be used for research with the theme of education, especially moral education in Japan.

The research method applies literature review and textual analysis derived from corpus data in the form of an original Japanese manuscript. The corpus data is derived from the school textbooks that have been used up to now, in the form of original Japanese textbook from first grade to sixth-grade elementary school. The result data is processed and triangulated to obtain valid data with a descriptive analytical method.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In summary, the book *Watashitachi no Doutoku*, which the corpus data is derived from, the theme covered are divided into four sections, comprising intrapersonal morality, interpersonal moral values, morality toward nature, and morality toward society. Table 1 shows the moral value in that book.

In *Watashitachi no Doutoku* textbook, the moral value is introduced in the section that discusses own self (intrapersonal). The focus of this first-section consists of maintaining rules and self-discipline in doing something. As Poukka (2011) has said as an essential part of *kokoro* education is Japanese moral education that focuses on polishing *kokoro* (heart).

In this section, students are taught a few things such as taking care of their health, for example by having

a healthy breakfast. They are also taught the proverb "*hara hachibun ni isha irazu*" (If you keep your diet healthy, you will not need anymore doctor). Besides, students are taught how to tidy their stuff without the need of being ordered, to revise the lesson at home, and other interesting things such as being thrifty, for example, by using up pencil and eraser thoroughly.

Table 1 The Moral Values Contained in Textbook *Watashitachi no Doutoku*

<i>Wata-sitachi no Doutoku</i>	Intra personal	Interpersonal	Nature	Society
Class 1-2	Self-reflection	Make friends with others	Valuing life	Do good to others
Class 3-4	Self-respect	Together with everyone	Relishing life	In contact with everyone in society
Class 5-6	Self-reform	Connected with others	Cherishing life	Connected with everyone

To give a clearer picture, the teachers show some short stories related to the moral theme to be conveyed, such as the story titled *Ruppe doushita no?* (Why, Ruppe?) (Monbukagakusho, 2014). This short story tells of a monkey child named Ruppe, who must be woken up daily by his mother, should be reminded to put socks up properly. It is also told of Ruppe's behavior, that if he does not like a thing, he will frown and grab the sand and throw it at his friends so that his friends fear and dislike Ruppe. From these short stories, students are invited to reflect on what Ruppe does, what Ruppe should and should not do.

The moral value to be conveyed in this section is intended for students to think. If a person does not pass according to the habits and rules correctly, there are consequences caused, which will distress yourself and others. Students are also suggested to take time (do not be late), keep things well (understand the value of things and money), live in an orderly, as well as neat and orderly manner.

The second section of moral intrapersonal is doing a work in earnest. In this section, students are asked to give a helping hand to the housework in earnest. The moral value to be addressed in this sub-section is that someone must do his/her work in earnest so that he/she can be successful later in his/her life. If they decide to work in something, work it to the end. In this section, the focus of teaching is how the student must do seriously and until the completion of an activity or work. A very popular Japanese word "*ganbare*" shows a never-ending surrender.

The third section is to continue doing what is considered good. In this section, there are some emphases on the theme of moral value. Those are things which are not morally allowed, for instance, telling a lie, hitting a friend, stealing things from others, playing a prank on friends, discrediting friends, and hiding others' stuff. Students are invited to think about how to have the courage to do something. Sometimes, even though what a student will do is right, but in practice, it takes courage to that. If it is considered good, students must dare to continue it.

The moral theme in this forth-section is about honesty. The moral value that wants to be conveyed is that

when someone does something that does not conform to the heart; the feeling will not be composed. It also illustrates the concept of “*makoto*” which means sincerity. The focus of the moral theme of this section is about honesty and how it affects the hearts. If someone is honest, the heart will feel calm, happy, and cheerful, while dishonesty makes the heart tormented and sad. Discussion of this theme is poured in the form of stories. Shown a short story about a brother who lies to his parents that his sister has torn the book when he does it. But in his heart, he is overwhelmed with guilt and shame because he feels the doll toys and robot toys in his room seem to laugh at him. Finally, he apologizes, just after apologizing for his feelings becomes relieved. The moral value to be conveyed in this sub-chapter is that if someone does something that is not in accordance with the heart, his/her feelings will not calm down. This chapter also describes the concept of *makoto*, which students are invited to train the heart to be honest and sincere, also not to lie, because lying can make the heart not calm.

The fifth section is about seeking new things for improvement (creativity). The focus of the moral theme is about creativity. Students are asked to think about how to make their dreams come true. Lickona in Narvaez (2002) has said that children need to hear moral stories in order to develop moral literacy and moral character. That is the reason why in *Watashitachi no Doutoku* gives examples of stories of people who make changes with their creativity. This is so that students can follow the example of a great person who is very inspiring.

This book also discusses interpersonal moral. Interpersonal intelligence or social intelligence is defined as the ability and skill to establish a relationship, to build the social link so that both parties are in a situation that can enjoy the mutual benefit. A figure in intelligence psychology explicitly has stated that interpersonal intelligence is a form of social intelligence (Azwar, 2004). In this section, there are four themes become the main focus; a good behavior, empathy for others, say thank you, and moral value in respecting nature and life.

First is a good behavior (manner/etiquette). Japanese education teaches its students to build harmony. Harmony can be built when a good behavior (manner) is practiced by every individual accommodated to his/her portion. In this interpersonal morality section, good behavior starts from how to teach his or her students to exchange greeting (*aisatsu*). Exchanging greetings such as *ohayou gozaimasu* (good morning), *konnichiwa* (good afternoon), *arigatou* (thank you) is cultivated in Japan since childhood. Since they live together with different people, they must have courtesy in speaking and acting. In addition, students are expected to use good phrases when talking to friends, especially if talking to adults. It also teaches to be friendly to everyone. How do they behave towards the elderly, to the younger, and others. This sub-chapter emphasizes the behavior of doing good to others, for example in the student's attitude book if there is old person pregnant women, and disabled in the train. What students will help them. In this section, students are invited to help others in need.

Second is empathy for others (*Omoiyari*). The focus on this theme is how to develop empathy (*omoiyari*) for others who experience hardships. It is how to develop empathy in the students that are shown in everyday behavior especially with the emergence of bullying phenomenon (*ijime*). Japan also experiences the phenomenon of bullying (*Ijime*). Therefore one of the efforts to handle it is the provision of materials to build an *omoiyari* to friends. Beside

that, in this sub-section also focuses on the development of student character with a focus on friendship. In this section, it is taught that playing and learning with friends is a happy thing.

Third is about to give thanks to people who have helped (gratitude). The focus of this section is how the students express a feeling of gratitude to those who have helped them in life. This section emphasizes how people show gratitude to those who have helped them in the daily life. Besides that, it also highlights what friends (*tomodachi*) mean. Friends do not just mean playmates, but in times of difficulty, friends have more meaning. Although he/she has many friends, among friends, there must be different none of the same; both from the thoughts and feelings must have differences between one to other. Therefore he/she must understand each other. To understand the differences among friends, it also teaches students to have a broad heart and avoiding prolonged debate with their peers.

Fourth is moral value to respect for nature and life, also an important point in Japanese children's moral education. Japanese people are known for a society that cherishes nature. From way back, the close relationship between Japanese people and nature is reflected in *haiku* (a typical Japanese poem) that is always related to nature. This sub-section will show the moral value instilled to the students to respect for nature and life, such as to respect for life and living things, to live in harmony with nature/animals/plants, make heart soft, and sensitivity to aesthetic beauty. Children are taught to respect all that exists in life to emphasize how important it is, if look at the whole perspective of life, from the point of human, nature, social relations. Human intellectuality reflects how he/she interprets the value of life, such as feel the heartbeat, sleep soundly until morning, go to school, learn, and feel pleasure with everyone.

Realizing the importance of life can make people find happiness, such as educate children to love nature, in this case, flora and fauna (plants and animals). Japanese people are known to love nature and live in harmony with nature. Flora and fauna are an important part of the environment. By loving the environment, the destruction of the global environment can be avoided. At this stage, playing in nature as in waterfalls, eating from grown produce, feeding animals, touching animals or plants, directly creates strong bonding with nature.

The social moral value in society is also an important theme in this textbook. There are four themes become the main focus in this section, they are the commitment to live in the community, have a sense of justice, build awareness to play a role in society, longing for a happy family.

First is the commitment to live in the community. The focus of this moral theme is to become an individual that keeps his/her promise and commitment on living in the community. In a social order of society, there is already a long-standing, inviolable, and mutually agreed on social tradition and norms, such as not engaged in violence act (*bouryoku*) in society, not bullying others (*ijime*), not stealing others' belonging, not injuring others, and also not deceiving others. This chapter also teaches the importance of social, legal and regulatory matters, as well as fosters a sense of public morality in the process of performing obligations and respecting rights. Children are expected to have an awareness of normative behavior, attach importance to commitment and regulation in everyday social life. It is also hoped that students can know how to behave in general and maintain or comply with the generally accepted



commitments.

Second is having a sense of justice. The constitution of Japan has set the rights and duties of all of its citizens. Consequently, as its citizen, it is obliged to understand his rights and duties. Third is to build awareness to play a role in society. The moral theme taught is how to build awareness of the students so that they play a role in society. Any role or the slightest thing must have meaning in the group. If someone can be compared in performance, there must be actors, musicians, directors, and others. If one of the roles is not executed as it functions, then the show does not work either.

The fourth theme is longing for a happy family that emphasizes the importance of a family. Students are expected to play a role in helping their family, however small. For example, by tidying up the house, helping mother with her shopping, and other types of assistance, and in addition, not to disobey parents. Thus the happy family can be realized. At this stage, more actively involved in family life. That is, thinking what can they do for the happiness of the family, realizing their role for the family deepens trust in family ties.

Love for one's country and one's hometown is one of the themes that is discussed in this book. It aims to cultivate the children's love of regional, local, and cultural tradition with the spirit of nationalism. One's hometown plays a major role in self-establishment as well as lifelong spiritual support. It needs positive and proactive initiative/involvement and love of the origin/local/regional environment. The eyes of the children will be directed to see and observe the area around the house, the school, and the wider life by playing. Growing a love of regional/regional nature must be conditioned to live with a culture that fits both hospitality and deepening contact with local people. This stage is expected to develop the attitude of love of the state, especially matters related to interest and engage in cultural activities, regional traditions or nations. This stage aims to prepare a generation who loves his/her country.

The generations who know the efforts of their ancestors' struggle and are responsible for preserving its history and generations that can bring the culture and traditions of the nation to the overseas/regional domain.

Then, open to foreign culture and way of thinking, befriend with people around the world is also the theme of this book. Children are expected to have an international perspective and have a good intention always to understand and respect people from around the world. As a nation, it is mandatory to have pride in its people. They do not carry away the flow of foreign culture but still respect the nation itself and is responsible for introducing Japan to the international world, such as exchange opportunities, promotion, and strengthening peace/humanity. The teachers encourage them about international understanding and friendship in mind. At this stage, students learn to develop social awareness with deepen the attitude of thinking and understand life with affection and pride in the traditions and cultures of each country, understand and appreciate people outside Japan, also deepen understanding of the traditions and cultures of other countries.

From these description, it is clear how the Japanese government efforts to build students moral through a textbook. The researchers also link the theme of the moral theme in the textbook *Watashitachi no Doutoku* with data about the moral phenomenon in Japanese elementary school student.

The data from the MEXT (2016) explain that the purpose of teaching morality as one of the school subjects is to develop a moral character in a child's characteristics. The Japan Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) has decided to implement the discipline subject in education through *doutoku* in class 1-2 for 34-35 hours. According to the research by MEXT, in 2009 on the condition of student's disciplinary level, Japan has ranked first in terms of children's discipline compared to South Korea, United States, England, and Germany. This is indicated in Figure 1.

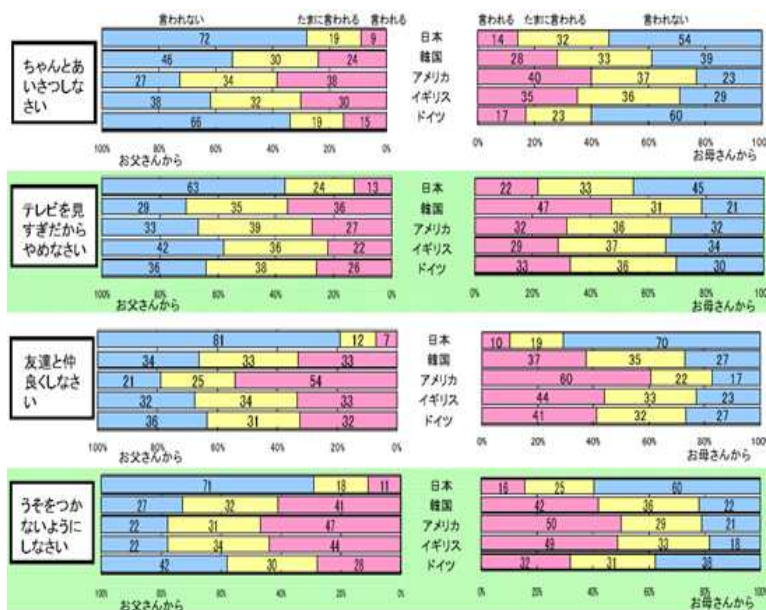


Figure 1 Comparison of Disciplinary Level of Elementary School Student between Japan and Four other Countries (Source: *Kodomo no tokuiku ni kansuru kondanka, Monbukagakusho*, 2009)



Figure 2 Moral Intrapersonal of Japan Elementary Students (Source: Monbukagakusho, 2009)

In the left part of Table 1 is the father's percentage that disciplines his child directly, while the right part shows a mother that disciplines her child directly. According to Kazuhiko (2016), the moral attribute that is inherent in the child is intended to make his/her existence and his/her way of life better. Attributed to the result of diagram analysis in Figure 1, it can be concluded that the moral values that are instilled into the children through teaching at school have been successfully formed into an acceptable character in society. The curriculum in developing human traits such as feeling, decision-making ability, motivation to practice, and attitude based on morality established by the Japanese government has produced an excellent result.

The following data reveals a connection between the content of moral values in the *Watashitachi no Doutoku* textbook and its correlation with the character of the elementary school student in Japan. As in some sub-sections that have been explained, the values in intrapersonal morality such as the regularity in daily activities, honesty, and other values are sufficiently instilled into the elementary school students.

Figure 2 explains the questionnaire results on the 6th grade of elementary students on some questions. In the first part asks about whether the students have breakfast every day. From the data it is known that 88% of elementary school students eat breakfast every day, often breakfast but sometimes not, it is ranged in the number 7,6%, rarely breakfast 3,0% and students who do not breakfast 0,7%. Likewise with the next question about the waking hours of students who become respondents. The most ranges are students who wake up between 6.00-6.30 (31,4%) of students who wake up between 6.30-7.00 (38,4%). The next question is about bedtime. Respondents mostly answer sleeping at 8 to 10 pm by 40,4% and those who answer the hours of 10 to 11 pm in the night are 38,3%. The data show the majority of students who become respondents doing their daily activities regularly. Living regularly is also one of the children's character development goals in the *Watashitachi no Doutoku* textbook.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the analysis of *Watashitachi no Doutoku* textbook, the researchers discover the intrapersonal moral values that are associated with one's self, interpersonal moral values namely social morality that is related to how people connect with others in the neighborhood, values related to relationship, nature-related moral values that is a moral value how we as a human being in touch with and live alongside nature. Through this research, the researchers understand why the Japanese government does not drop the special school subject *doutoku*. Revisiting the case, it can be concluded from the high level of discipline of the students from the data. The proven data indicate that the character of the child has obtained the moral values through *doutoku* education taught at school.

Thus, the researchers can conclude that the moral instillment through special school subjects, *doutoku* using the book *Watashitachi no Doutoku* influences the character formation of elementary school children in Japan. It has also displayed result those children who have the moral characteristic (*doutoku*) are accepted in society through the teaching of *Watashitachi no Doutoku* for elementary school students in Japan.

The next research that will be carried out is to continue the research on moral values contained in textbooks for junior high school students in Japan. This is intended to make the data on teaching books on morals more comprehensive.

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