

## **Study of the Effect of Chinese Confucian Ideas on Korean Youth Education and Culture and Teaching Method – Based on the Data of University Students\***

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to examine the current status of Chinese Confucian ideas that have affected Korean youth culture and to draw up more effective education methods. A survey was conducted after teaching three different groups with the use of three teaching methods over two weeks. Before the experiment, Korean teenagers had preferred different teaching methods depending on their origins. However, after learning from the three teaching methods (cramming, mixed, and discussion teaching methods) for two weeks, the participants preferred the discussion method. Thus, the survey found that while Chinese Confucian ideas have a great influence on Korean youth, there is a possibility for change in preferred teaching methods.

**Keywords:** *Chinese Confucian ideas, cramming teaching method, mixed teaching method, discussion teaching method*

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to determine the most effective method for education after examining the influence of Chinese Confucian thought on Korean youth culture. In the section regarding the influence of Confucian thought, I analyze the

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junior high school textbook on morals and the high school textbook on ethics to reveal the degree of its influence in Korean education. I then analyze the data collected from administering quantitative and qualitative surveys to 90 students (30 students from each region) from three different universities (Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Andong University, and Chonbuk National University) from Seoul, Gyeongsang Province, and Jeolla Province, respectively.

Chinese Confucian thought was introduced in Korea after it had been created by Confucius, and has had a great influence on Korean mindsets and behaviors (Nam, Kim, & Kim, 2016). Traditionally, the Koreans accepted Confucian ideas as they were, without objection, because they admired Confucius' philosophy. Thus, educational customs involved teachers giving lectures and students reciting the lessons of the teachers (Moon, 2011; 2013). Questions and discussions were not required for learning. If Confucius' thought was interpreted differently, the students were punished (Lee, 1988).

During the Chosun Dynasty, teachers were considered to be in the same class as parents, and greatly respected. As a result, what the teacher said was absolutely right. When studying at Seodang in the Chosun Dynasty, the teacher taught in front of the students and the students followed along, memorizing the lesson. The learning atmosphere was very rigid and it was difficult to satisfy students' curiosity (Oh, 2003). This educational climate has been inherited and can still be seen.

As a result, the educational climate in Korea continues to be one of teaching by rote, where teachers teach in front of students and the students accept the information as is. The presented paper aims to determine how this Confucian educational climate influenced Korean youth education culture and what kind of educational methods students prefer. In addition, I analyze junior high school and high school textbooks to see how Confucian thoughts are described. I also analyze how much emphasis is placed on the notion of absolute filial piety, the authority of fathers and teachers, as well as gender discrimination. I then explain teachers' teaching methods.

In addition, in order to increase the accuracy of the survey, I examine regional variations according to the degree of influence of Confucian thoughts after conducting three different educational methods (cramming teaching method (CTM), mixed teaching method of cramming and discussion (MTM), and discussion teaching method (DTM)). I also present the trends of the educational methods that the participants find most effective.

## **Research Methodology**

The survey was conducted twice. First, questionnaires and qualitative surveys were conducted from July 10, 2018, to August 10, 2018. A lecture was conducted in three different ways over two weeks; I then examined the changes through research. The participants in the survey were 90 university students (30 students from each region) from Seoul (the capital of Korea), the Gyeongsang Province (the southeastern part), and the Jeolla Province (the southwestern part). As the paper examines the influence of Confucian ideas on youth culture and their relevance to educational methods in Korea, I divided the target area into the region where Confucianism elements remain the strongest (Gyeongsang Province), the region in which Western methods of education were quickly adopted (Seoul), and the middle area (Jeolla Province).

The research method combines an analysis of the junior high school textbook on morals and high school textbook on ethics with surveys for students. I analyzed these textbooks to determine the degree of influence of Confucian thoughts, and investigated teachers' educational methods to examine the degree of implementation of those Confucian methods.

To examine the most effective educational methods, CTM, DTM, and MTM were used in lectures with the students being surveyed. The survey then asked university students from the three regions to select the most effective teaching method among the three (Moon, Nam, & Kim, 2014).

CTM is a teaching method that is considered to be the closest to the Confucian educational method, since the teacher teaches in front of students and the students accept the lessons. DTM is considered to be the most open, in that it gives the students the most autonomy, and MTM is a mixture of cramming and debate. In the paper, I investigate the educational methods that are most preferred by the university students from the three regions and examine the relationship between education methods and Confucian thoughts.

## **The influence of Confucian ideas**

### **Confucian ideas in the textbook**

In the textbook analysis, the high school ethics textbooks were used as a basis, and the junior high morals textbooks were also analyzed. The ethics and morals textbooks were analyzed because most Confucian ideas are described in them.

First of all, in terms of filial duty, people usually cite the original text from Confucian scriptures. Although there are cases where people cite Buddhist scriptures known as “Parents’ Immense Grace,”<sup>1</sup> most of the citations are from the key books that represent Confucianism, such as “Analects of Confucius,” “Mencius,” “Classic of Rites,” “Sohak,”<sup>2</sup> “Myongshimbogam,”<sup>3</sup> and “Book of Filial Duty.”

**Table 1.** The contents of filial piety in morals and ethics textbooks of junior high schools and high schools (Choi, 2018).

Classification	Original Text	Contents	Textbook
Confucianism	Analects of Confucius	A Sin of Impiety Toward One’s Parents	Morals in the First Year of Junior High School
		Specific Contents of Traditional Morality	Morals in the Second Year of Junior High School
	Mencius	Five Kinds of Impieties Toward One’s Parents	Morals in the First Year of Junior High School
	Classic of Rites	Thinking of Parents, Practicing Good Deeds	Morals in the First Year of Junior High School
		Body Given by Parents	Morals in the First Year of Junior High School
		Supporting Parents	Traditional Ethics in High School
	Sohak	Manners Toward One’s Parents	Morals in the First Year of Junior High School
		Five Kinds of Impieties Toward One’s Parents	Morals in the Second Year of Junior High School
		The Specific Practice of Filial Duty	Traditional Ethics in High School
	Book of Filial Duty	Family Ethics	Morals in the First Year of Junior High School
		The Principle of Filial Duty	Traditional Ethics in High School
	Keokmon-gyokeol by Yi I*	How to Practice Filial Duty	Traditional Ethics in High School
		Serving Dead Ancestors	Traditional Ethics in High School
	Myongshim-bogam	The Importance of Home	Morals in the Second Year of Junior High School
The Family Life of Ancestors		Morals in the Third Year of Junior High School	

<sup>1</sup> A Buddhist scripture emphasizing the depth of parental grace

<sup>2</sup> A book created to teach Confucianism for children at the age of about 8

<sup>3</sup> A book compiled with a fine collection of Confucian scholars’ writings to educate children

Classification	Original Text	Contents	Textbook
Buddhism	Parents' Immense Grace	Ten Kinds of Graces of Parents	Morals in the Second Year of Junior High School
		Ten Kinds of Graces of Parents That Should Be Rewarded	Traditional Ethics in High School
		Serving Dead Ancestors	Traditional Ethics in High School

\* A book written by Yulgok Yi I (1536–1584), a Confucian scholar of the Joseon Dynasty, to teach Neo-Confucianism (1577).

Table 1 refers to filial piety, which is often mentioned in junior high school morals textbooks as well as high school ethics textbooks. This trend is also reflected in elementary school morals textbooks. In other words, Korean teens' thoughts and behaviors are deeply influenced by acquiring Confucianism for a total of 10 years, with similar content from the third grade through the third year in junior high school to the third year in high school.

In the textbooks, filial piety is defined as “the right things for a child to do for his/her parents.” Indicative of a good heart and human nature, it is stressed that filial piety should be expanded from the level of neighbors and society to the level of the nation. In other words, the textbook states that children should expand the filial duty toward their parents to respecting their neighbors; they should form a cooperative community in society, have a sense of belonging to the nation, and develop a universal love for mankind.

According to the junior high school morals textbook, “People should be devoted to their parents, and brothers should be friendly” (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2008a; 2008b) and if filial piety conflicts with loyalty, filial piety should be prioritized, since a lack of filial piety is disloyalty (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2008c). Filial piety and loyalty are identified, considering that “If you are not loyal to the king, it is a lack of filial piety; if you go to war and do not win fame, you are not filled with filial piety” (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2008a).

These textbooks reflect the notion of the core idea of Confucianism, i.e., “Home and country are one.” It also defines the father and the king in the same position and rationalizes patriarchy.

High school ethics textbooks also emphasize the importance of filial piety. “Having a peaceful family and having friendship in brotherhood,” “respecting the elderly and keeping order in society,” and “being proud as the nation's people and loving mankind” are also defined as filial piety in the textbooks (Namkung, 2014).

Such descriptions encourage students to put more emphasis on parents than on themselves, and on groups rather than on individuals. Consequently, they emphasize obedience over personality. In Korea, these textbooks have educated students to practice Confucian thinking by teaching Confucian ethics over a decade of self-formation (Choi, 2014).

In the “High School ethics” textbook, conjugal relations are explained by the principle of Yin-Yang (Namkung et al., 2014; Byun et al., 2014; Cho et al., 2014; Jung et al., 2014). It states that men and women should be defined as yang and yin respectively, and that they should be mutually harmonized (Kim, 2018; Kim, 2017). This view, however, reveals the limitation of viewing gender relations as a vertical relationship rather than an equality relationship, as it contains the ideology of Dong, Jung-Seo, in which yin and yang are seen as the relationship between master and servant (the principal and the subordinate) and yang governs yin (Fung, 1992).

Meanwhile, the meaning of marriage is described as “the beginning of the marriage of the descendants,” referring to the Confucian book, “Classic of Rites.” The book emphasizes the importance of chastity among married couples by stating that the customs of discrimination against women have existed for a long time and that women were not allowed to remarry in the Chosun Dynasty (Jung et al., 2014). This idea inculcates the traditional patriarchal concept to students by defining marital fidelity as the woman’s duty, along with loyalty to the king and filial piety to parents (Lee, 2014).

The idea of equating filial piety with loyalty develops into the concept of equating the teacher with the father and the king (Kim, 2015). The notion that one should honor one’s teacher as if he were filial to one’s parents was absolute to the authority of the teacher. As can be seen in the proverb, “Do not step on the shadows of the teacher,” the teacher’s authority was sacrosanct.

In general education in the Chosun Dynasty, the teacher read first and students followed. Questions and discussions were not necessary because students were required to memorize the scriptures mentioned by Confucius.

There was a high chance that students would pass when they recited the Confucian scriptures in the civil service exams. In the Chosun Dynasty, they adopted memorization as a very effective educational method. These teaching methods have been passed on to modern times, eventually becoming CTM, wherein teachers teach in front of students and students take notes. Teachers were accustomed to using this teaching method because that was how they learned. Students are comfortable using this method, since they are accustomed to it. CTM is a prime example of how Confucian ideas have influenced Korean teaching methods.

### Most preferred teaching method

I asked 90 students who participated in the survey what their favorite teaching method was. Results show that the students of the Gyeongsang Province preferred CTM, those from the Jeolla Province preferred MTM, and those from the Seoul area preferred DTM.

**Table 2.** Which teaching method was most effective for you? (n=90)

Category	CTM	DTM	MTM
Seoul	21%	48%	31%
Gyeongsang Province	43%	28%	29%
Jeolla Province	14%	40%	46%

For the students from the Gyeongsang Province, the reason why they preferred the CTM was that they had learned Chinese characters since an early age, so the method of memorization was easy and familiar. Since they studied in both junior high and high school in this way, they preferred memorization, even after entering college. The Andong area is the part of Korea where Confucian customs still have the strongest hold and where Sadoang Chinese character education is still being implemented.

On the other hand, the students from the Jeolla Province preferred MTM (46%). The qualitative survey showed that the students relied on the teacher's explanation, preferring the MTM because they do not have many academies in rural areas. The Jeolla Province is a region which is rich in grain and has a history of being robbed by officials, which has developed a sense of criticism in the population.

The students from Seoul preferred the DTM. It is believed that Seoul, the nation's capital city, has quickly embraced Western methods of education and the students were exposed to educational methods that have allowed them to freely engage in discussions in schools and private academies since childhood.

## Research Results

Three teaching methods were implemented over two weeks from August 13 to August 27, 2018, to examine the changing process of the most preferred and most effective teaching method. Three lectures were given to the students from three universities in three different regions using three teaching methods. Each teaching method was conducted for two hours on three subjects.

For example, in CTM, Korean history was divided into the Three Kingdoms Period (57BCE-676CE), Unified Silla (676-935CE), Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392), the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910), and the Japanese occupation (1910-1945); the students were to memorize the important events after the explanations. They were asked to memorize the years of the major events in history and were not allowed any questions or discussions. In MTM, after the Korean culture was explained (Moon, 2012), the students were allowed to ask questions and to engage in discussions. After explaining the three topics, such as with the questions, “What are the meanings of traditional wedding dresses?”, “Why did the Koreans enjoy white clothes?”, and “Why did the Koreans use Ondol (a traditional heating system)?”, they could freely ask questions.

Finally, in DTM, I asked them to discuss three topics: “What is the staple food for the Koreans?”, “Why do the Koreans cry out loud when people die?”, and “Why do the Koreans like to do things quickly?” After teaching Korean history and culture through the three teaching methods for a total of 16 hours over a period of two weeks, I asked the students to determine the most effective method and broke down the data according to the place of origin, noting the extent to which the Confucian teaching method remains.

**Table 3.** What is the most effective teaching method for you? (n=90)

Category	CTM	DTM	MTM
Seoul	11%	58%	31%
Gyeongsang Province	28%	30%	42%
Jeolla Province	12%	52%	36%

What is noteworthy is that the preferred teaching method for the students changed compared to their preferences before conducting the three experimental teaching methods. After the experiment, the students in the Gyeongsang Province (42%) liked MTM the most, while those in Seoul (58%) and the Jeolla Province (52%) preferred DTM.

**Table 4.** Changing trends in the most effective teaching method (n=90)

Category	CTM		DTM		MTM	
	b	a	b	a	b	a
Seoul	21%	11%	48%	58%	31%	31%
Gyeongsang Province	43%	28%	28%	30%	29%	42%
Jeolla Province	14%	12%	40%	52%	46%	36%

Note: Before survey = b, After survey = a



These changes appeared to vary from region to region. In the case of the Gyeongsang Province, the most preferred method was CTM (43%) before the experiment. However, that changed to MTM (42%) after it. CTM decreased dramatically, from 43% to 28%, while MTM increased from 29% to 42%. In the Jeolla Province, the most preferred method (46%) was MTM before the experiment, but DTM was the most preferred (52%) after the experiment. MTM decreased by 10% and DTM increased by 9%. In the Seoul area, in the both pre-experiment (48%) and post-experiment (58%) results, the students preferred DTM. Although they preferred DTM both before and after the experiment, the preference increased by 10%.

Analysis of the results of this survey shows that preferences in the Gyeongsang Province changed from CTM to MTM, while those in the Jeolla Province changed from MTM to DTM. In other words, the Gyeongsang Province students, who had long been exposed to the Confucian education system, were transformed into students who preferred MTM, who can solve questions and pique curiosity. It can be seen that those from the Jeolla Province were easily converted into those who preferred a discussion culture because they reported a combination of CTM and DTM preferences.

In sum, Confucian ideas are affecting not only the educational environment but also the way Korean youth learn. The results showed that the students prefer CTM, and even after being exposed to an environment with free questions and debates, they switched to preferring DTM through a change in preference to MTM, rather than undergoing a drastic change.

## **Conclusion**

I examined Chinese Confucian thoughts and the most effective teaching method for Korean youth culture. First, I analyzed Confucian thoughts in junior high school morals and high school ethics textbooks. Confucianism, including such concepts as filial piety, loyalty, patriarchy, and gender discrimination, was widely described in them. Korean teenagers naturally acquire Confucian core ideas by studying Confucianism for about 10 years from elementary school to high school. In this study, the preference of CTM is the most powerful influence of Confucian thoughts on Korean education culture.

If one looks at filial piety in the textbooks, Confucian ideas account for as much as 80%, with the exception of “Parents’ Immense Grace,” a Buddhist ideology. These Confucian ideas had the students accept the teacher’s teachings as they were and

made it difficult to ask questions or point out problems. The results showed that CTM was the most preferred choice in the Gyeongsang Province, where traditional Confucian ideas remained, while free DTM was preferred in Seoul, the most open area, and MTM in the Jeolla Province, the intermediate area.

However, after conducting lessons using three teaching methods over two weeks, changes were evident in the Gyeongsang and Jeolla Provinces. In the Gyeongsang area, the preference was changed from CTM to MTM, and in the Jeolla area, it shifted from MTM to DTM. In Seoul, it was found that the students preferred the discussion culture, as they had before.

The most preferred teaching method for the Korean youth in this survey was DTM, which allows them to freely express their opinions. However, when we look at the trends of change, we can see that the students do not come to prefer DTM directly, but prefer DTM after changing from CTM to MTM.

In conclusion, it can be seen that the influence of Chinese Confucian thoughts on the Korean educational culture influenced CTM (accepting the teacher's teaching as is), but after the introduction of Western culture, the culture has been transformed into a discussion culture.

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