

**Reason and Ethical Decision-making in  
Korea and India**

**Vyjayanti Raghavan**

© Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi

Institute of Chinese Studies,  
B-371 (3rd floor), Chittaranjan Park,  
Kalkaji, New Delhi - 110 019  
Landline Telephone: +91-11-4056 4823 Fax: +91-11-23830728  
Email: [info@icsin.org](mailto:info@icsin.org)  
Website: [www.icsin.org](http://www.icsin.org)

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Vyjayanti Raghavan** is Professor at the Centre for Korean Studies, School of Language, Literature & Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi. She has a Master's degree in Korean History from Seoul National University and a PhD from the Department of Disarmament, School of International Studies, JNU. She has been teaching Korean language and culture at JNU since 2000. She has co-authored and edited many books and contributed a number of articles to journals and newspapers.

**Contact:** jayantiraghavan@gmail.com

*This work was supported by the Core University Program for Korean Studies through the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the Korean Studies Promotion Service of the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS-2016-OLU-225008)*

## **Reason and Ethical Decision-making in Korea and India**

### **Abstract**

When confronted with the question of decision making in any circumstance, very often, human beings have various alternatives to evaluate and choose from. This process involves, firstly, being aware of the various alternative options and their consequences, then weighing and evaluating them and finally, choosing the best option and implementing it. This is where the question of ethical decision making comes in, which requires eliminating the unethical options. What aids a person in making ethical decisions? Herein lies the issue of the process of reasoning, as much as the conditioning of the mind at arriving at ethical decisions.

There are various views of scholars and theorists regarding how human beings get guided on what is morally right or wrong. Humes is one of them who holds the view that it is more a function of moral norms or emotional response which manifests itself in the forms of approvals and disapprovals. On the question of whether these moral norms are guided by natural instincts or by conventions set by humans that guide through approvals and disapprovals, Humes holds that some actions are natural and some guided by convention.

Based on Humes theory this paper aims to see what are the natural instincts or conventions of reasoning or conditioning of the Korean and Indian mind that shape its ethical decision making process. It strives to understand how the philosophical moorings of Indians and Koreans lay the foundation for social values and norms of behaviour in the two countries in the present times. The objective is to use a comparative analysis methodology to assess whether ethical decisions lead to efficient outcomes in the two countries.

### **Keywords**

Reason, Social values, Ethical process, Decision-making, Indian philosophy, Confucianism

## **Introduction**

When confronted with the question of decision making in any circumstance, human beings, very often, have various alternatives to evaluate and choose from. This process involves being aware of the various alternative options and their consequences, weighing and evaluating them and then choosing the best option and implementing it. This is where the question of ethical decision making comes in which requires eliminating the unethical options. Even though, often decisions are made in a fraction of a second, yet, what is it that aids a person in making ethical decisions? Herein arises the question of the process of reasoning as much as the conditioning of the mind in arriving at ethical decisions. This paper aims to see what are the processes of reasoning or conditioning of the Korean and Indian mind that shape its ethical decision making. In other words, the paper strives to understand how the Indian philosophy and Korean philosophy lay the foundation for social values and norms of behaviour in the two countries in the present times.

This paper draws on Humes' aspect of ethical decision making theory that states that some human actions are guided by natural instincts and some by conventions (Cohon, 2010) and tries to analyse Korean and Indian actions in society to see what the natural impulses of people are which have been guided over a period of time by conventions. It merely attempts to understand the grooming of the mindset of the people of Korea and India to assess what the motivational reason behind their actions is. It, however, needs to be made clear that the paper does not evaluate the concept of ethics in totality as propounded by Confucianism. It merely looks at the grooming of the Korean mind by those values of Confucianism that aids them towards ethical decision making which translate into fruitful social outcomes. The researcher hopes that this exercise would help in understanding the relationship between ethical decisions and efficient outcome, in the hope that a better understanding of the mind set may help enhance the understanding between the people of the two countries.

However, before delving into the issue of ethical decisions directly the paper tries to first understand what the concepts of 'reason' or 'ethics' are in philosophical terms.

## Understanding 'Reason'

Reason is said to be an important tool of man's understanding. To arrive at an understanding of something requires reasoning to prove what is to be proved. Reason is explained by a 'why' question. Ancient philosophers, it is said, were of the view that the 'why' question which is an important stage in understanding, could be in modern parlance, either a 'what for' question or a 'how come' question. For instance, the answer to the question 'why are the leaves on a tree green' would be largely a 'how come' rather than a 'what for' question. The answer would involve a biological answer that leaves are green because the chloroplast membrane in them has a pigment called chlorophyll which when active absorbs the red and blue wavelengths of the light and reflects only the green, and therefore, the leaves appear green. This process of understanding 'why' or 'how come' the leaves are green has required a process of reasoning before accepting the proposition that leaves are green as a statement of conclusion. But a question like, 'Why was the person punished?' would be a 'what for' question rather than a 'how come' one, also requiring explanation of a reason for such an action to have been taken. However, it is not always easy to make a distinction between the 'what for' and the 'how come' questions. But in both cases a form of reasoning is required.

Reason is said to be a member of syllogism (Vidyabhusana,1988: 60-61)<sup>1</sup>, which in common parlance is defined as a kind of logical argument that applies deductive reasoning to arrive at a conclusion based on two or more propositions that are asserted or assumed to be true. In effect, it is the backbone of logic through which conclusion is deduced. Therefore, logic is said to be the language of reasoning.

---

<sup>1</sup> Vidyabhusana has identified the following elements of syllogism. (i) Proposition (*pratijna* in Indian philosophy) or what is to be proved; a reason (*hetu*) or the means for proving the proposition; an explanatory example (*udharana*) which could either be a homogeneous example that is, an instance known to possess the property to be proved, or a heterogeneous example – an instance which is devoid of the property to be proved; an application of example (*upanaya*) which if it is a homogeneous one is proved in the affirmative and is said to therefore possess the property. If it is a heterogeneous one then the application is in the negative and the instance is reasoned to therefore be devoid of the property and hence 'not being so'; a statement of conclusion (*nigamana*). The conclusion arrived at in both the above mentioned instances would be the statement of conclusion. He has also explained it with the help of an example (Vidyabhusan 1938, 32).

In this paper, Reason will be seen just as an important element of understanding, which is also called ‘the middle term’ and is said to be inseparably connected with the major term. Reason cannot come into existence unless the major term exists. The example that Vidyabhushan gives to explain is that smoke (in this case, minor term) exists only because fire exists (the major term). In other words ‘fire’ is the cause and ‘smoke’ is the effect. Both of these are important for an understanding of the proposition that smoke is a product of fire, and Reason, the middle term, links the cause and the effect.

In the realm of logic there are further subdivisions of reason but since this paper is not on logic it will not delve into details of the classifications of these. Suffice it to say that the cause and effect are important elements of reason. But, where does the reasoning take place? Obviously, it is a cognitive skill which is different from the function of mere senses. It is a product of evolution through which human beings have acquired the cognitive capacity and developed an understanding of the world. It is the power of reason that is an enormous tool that has made man a rational being. It helped him overcome dogma and superstition through rationalism.

When relating reason with our action we confront the question of motivational reason. The motivational reason is, as the name suggests, the reason that motivates one to act. It could therefore, either be a moral reason or a personal one. The former is a normative one, that is, one which judges, after much deliberation of course, whether an action is right or wrong, good or bad. Or it could be a personal reason like likes and dislikes, or habit, which may or may not be driven by moral considerations. It is said that there is often a conflict between morality and what a person really would like to do (Rosati, 2016). When it is not an action due to personal whims what then guides a person’s actions? This is where the question of ethical decision making comes in.

### **Motivational Reason and Principles of Ethical Decision making**

In the process of decision making when there is a dilemma it is usually the cognitive process dictated by the values, principles etc. that one holds which guide the individual’s decisions and actions. This is then called an ethical decision making process. There are various theories of ethics on the basis of which actions can be judged as being right or wrong. However, that is not

what we wish to deal with here. But, we are concerned with the ethical principles that guide the actions. Of these too there are quite a few. The division of ethical principles as identified by the American Psychological Association, which seems representative of all, are as follows:

1. Respecting autonomy
2. Doing no harm (nonmaleficence)
3. Benefiting others (beneficence)
4. Being just (justice)
5. Being faithful (fidelity)

Respecting autonomy is the principle that emphasises that every individual has the right to exercise freedom of thought and action, yet they need to act in a manner that ensures that their actions do not negatively impact the life of others. From there comes the principle of non-maleficence or doing no harm to others which mandates that actions guided by this principle ensure that an action by one does not run the risk of harming others. Then follows the principle of beneficence which, as the name suggests, are actions guided by the principle that our actions should promote the larger well being of others. The principle of justice in its broader sense is that of being fair. Fairness in turn is guided by the three standards of impartiality, equality and reciprocity. Finally, the principle of fidelity stipulates being loyal, faithful and committed to the cause.

While these principles may sound good in theory, we need to understand what the motivational reasoning is that normally guides an individual in resolving ethical dilemma. In case of professional lives there may be specific codes of ethics of a profession that may govern the actions of individuals facing ethical dilemma. In politics too there is often a conflict between ends and means, wherein, in order to achieve good results questionable means might be used. Therefore, this article will confine itself to ethical decision making in personal lives of Koreans and Indians, which affect social outcomes.

On the question of how human beings get to know what is morally right or wrong, there are many theorists who are of the view that the process of reasoning plays a very important role. Over the years there have been scholars of different views of how reasoning takes place for

ethical decisions. Some are of the view that humans make ethical decisions with the help of divine guidance, others who say it is a function of conscience guidance or yet some others who are of the view that it is by a moral sense guided by approvals and disapprovals. Humes belongs to this last class of ethical theorists and holds that while logical reasoning may be an important component of ethical decision making in terms of helping one discover the facts of a situation but that by itself is not enough to arrive at a decision. It is more a function of reasoning conditioned by moral norms or emotional response which manifests itself in the forms of approvals and disapprovals. This aspect perhaps is what is known as ‘intuitive reasoning’ by modern day theorists.

Then arises the question of what guides these moral norms or intuitive reasoning. Are these guided by natural instincts or by convention i.e whether it is the natural impulses of human disposition that guide actions or whether it is the rules of actions set by humans as conventions that guide the approval and disapproval. Humes holds that some actions are natural impulses and some guided by convention (Cohon, 2010). This paper draws on Humes’ this aspect of ethical decision making theory and tries to analyse Korean and Indian actions in society to see what the natural impulses of people are which have been guided over a period of time by conventions.

### **Basic Principles of Ethical Values in Korea**

Now, let us revert to the question of how does ethics work in the decision making process of the Koreans, or what is their guiding principle? In any society, what propels human action and what helps actions become a convention are the moral, religious or philosophical values. In Korea, Confucianism was the central philosophy which laid the foundation for social values, ways of self-cultivation and the order to be followed in the society. Though this philosophy came from China in the third and fourth century A.D but it took its own shape and interpretation in Korea. The genesis of Confucianism was during the warring states period in China, which was a period of extreme conflict amongst the warlords fighting for hegemony. So it was natural that the general qualities that Confucius (551-479 B.C) wished to propagate were those of loyalty, benevolence, filial piety, trust etc, which were seen to be getting eroded. These were the tenets that came into Korea too, a few centuries later. Unlike Shamanism which was

Korea's indigenous belief system or Buddhism which also entered Korea around the same period as Confucianism, Confucianism did not concern itself with the other world or after life. It was concerned with life here and in this world. However, Confucianism went underground in Korea for a short period from the tenth to thirteenth century when Buddhism was the state religion and the order of the day. Despite the prevalence of Buddhism as state religion the social values of Confucianism remained prevalent even then. Confucianism resurfaced in the fourteenth century in a new garb as neo-confucianism wherein the social and political order of a hierarchical society got even more reinforced.

Confucian ethics is essentially monistic and communitarian, where individuals of the Confucian community are governed by one authoritative ethical value system governed by the principles of benevolence or “*In*”, righteousness or “*Yi*”, ritual propriety or “*ye*”, and “*ji*” or wisdom. Benevolence and righteousness are both attributes that come from within and are the moralistic guiding principle which make one act for the benefit of others. The paper highlights these two traits.

Besides these, the human relationship in a Confucian society is governed by the five cardinal ethical bonds between the ruler and the ruled, between the old and the young, between the husband and wife, between father and son, and between friends. These are encoded in Confucius' *Book of Rituals*. The book is quite categorical in stating that while other social conventions may change, this basic principle of human relationship should never change. It must be noted that the relationship that holds between most of these pairs is one of inequality and subordination.<sup>2</sup> These have, therefore, become, more or less, the underlying cultural grammar on which the Korean society is based, and which in turn lays the framework for

---

<sup>2</sup> The five relationships and their basic duties for right living as enumerated by Confucius are between: (i) Father and son, based on filial piety, where the father on the basis of his knowledge and wisdom takes the responsibility of the son, and the son is completely obedient and respectful of the father; (ii) Elder brother and younger brother, based on fraternal piety, where the order of hierarchy is maintained, where the older brother sets a good example for the younger one, teaches him proper behaviour and is responsible for his behaviour, and the younger brother is reverent of the older brother and does nothing to bring shame to the family; (iii) husband and wife, based on matrimonial piety, the husband provides a living for the family and the wife runs the household and does nothing to bring shame to the family, and both have the duty to honor each other; (iv) Emperor and subject, based on civic piety, where the emperor having gained power through heredity and military power continues to acquire knowledge and cultivate himself, and he continues to enjoy the power till he has the 'mandate from heaven'. He is responsible for the safety and welfare of his subjects. The subjects in turn respect and obey their emperor and are loyal to him; (v) Friend to friend, based on mutual piety. This is the only relationship that has no hierarchical order, and is based on mutual respect and trust.

conventional ethical norms. This is certainly so in the Korean society which, one may say with some amount of conviction, seems more Confucian in its orientation than other East Asian societies.

The Confucian value of '*In*' (benevolence) and '*yi*' (righteousness) are closely intertwined and are seen in the Korean spirit of *Hong-ik-ingan*, which translates into English as devotion to the larger welfare of mankind. This is a trait which is righteous and at the same time for the benevolence of mankind. It can be seen exemplified in the lives of many of their historical figures, like Queen Seondok, Lady Shin Saimdang or her son Yi Yi (aka Yulgok). The high sense of community spirit in Koreans also emanates from here. Their sense of duty towards the community, even in the face of hardship, is so deeply ingrained that it exudes a high level of forbearance. That would partly explain how the North Korean leaders are able to extract unquestioning hardwork and total commitment to their nation (read Kim Il Sung and his progeny) from their citizens with very little in return.

**Natural Impulses in Korea:** Even though Koreans, like other East Asians no longer live in traditional Confucian society but Confucianism has left such a strong legacy in all walks of Korean life that unto this day there is no aspect of Korea that can be understood without an insight into this underlying philosophy. Confucianism has on the one hand, deeply instilled the virtues of benevolence and righteousness, besides others, and, on the other, has also groomed them for collectivistic behaviour. Collectivistic to the extent of preferring anonymity has become the convention.

Korea is a heteronomous society as opposed to an autonomous one, and their system of moral reasoning is conditioned by the institution of their tradition, philosophy and encoded laws of social behaviour. So much so, that even at the autonomous stage of moral reasoning that the psychologist Jean Piaget talks about, the conditioning of the mind that happens at the heteronomous stage continues even in adulthood<sup>3</sup>. Korean adults adhere to the norms and

---

<sup>3</sup> According to Jean Piaget there are two stages of moral development in children. The first stage is the heteronomous morality stage where the child follows instructions given by adults totally. The next stage is the autonomous morality stage, which is a later stage where the child takes independent decisions based on the situation instead of just following instructions.

behave in a manner that is predictable and expected of them. This aspect has been referred to as Collectivist behaviour by Geert Hofstede and many others after him (Hofstede, 1983)

For the purpose of this paper I will confine myself to the impact of Confucian value system of benevolence and righteousness on the social behaviour of the people and in their decision making realm. Their social behaviour is dictated by social norms or values which might or might not be different from individual values. But collectivism which is the general guideline of behaviour ensures that at least socially there is no conflict between the two.

The various socio-psychological feeling like those of *Cheong* or human affection, *haan* or feeling of resentment, grief, pain and anger etc. are attributes common to almost all Koreans. These are expressed so uniformly that it gives an impression of having been guided by their *noonchi* or sixth sense consciousness of how to behave collectively in a social situation. The feeling of *Cheong* is a characteristic so typically Korean and bonds individuals so intimately that it sets them apart from even the Japanese who are from the same culture stock. This attribute has gained a Koreanness to it from the Confucian values of human relationships. Similarly *haan* is a feeling of sorrow or resentment that evolves from collective suffering or resentment and guides them towards resilience. It gives them hope in the face of extreme hardship and thus binds the nation together in times of crisis of which there has been no shortage throughout Korean history.

Regarding collectivist behaviour, it is said that collectivists are likely to sacrifice self-interest for collective interest and are very conscious of the consequences of their action on the members of the in-group. In Korea, no individual would want to be a nail that sticks out and gets hit on the head. In fact, there is a saying in Korean to that effect '*Monan dol-i jeong majneunda*' meaning – an angular stone gets chiselled. Everyone prefers to behave in a manner that does not attract attention to himself/herself. This aspect is quite different from the norm in India, and will be discussed later. This is the part of the underlying social regulation and a form of convention that works even in Korean modern society. However, all this must not be taken to mean that this in any way curtails individual freedom. It is just that individuals out of choice prefer group social harmony and prosperity through collective actions.

**Manifestations of the spirit of *Hongik Ingan*:** As mentioned the spirit of *Hongik Ingan* encompasses benevolence and righteousness. Historically too, Korea has endured survival strategies through hardship with the help of communal voluntary organisations like - *kye*, a kind of credit association which provided a mechanism for people to pool funds and take turns in using it for specific purpose in times of need, or *ture*, the agricultural system of pooled labour which had special provisions for the old, infirm and widowed women, or even in the practice of *Kimjang* or the making of kimchi jointly by the neighbouring community, enhancing the sense of belonging. All this not only helps individuals tide over crisis but also promotes a feeling of joint well-being, and arouses a sense of empathy for the pain and discomfort when any member suffers. No individual would, not only not exhibit, but also not enjoy any kind of happiness if it isn't a collective one. The country is therefore able to overcome any crisis because of this high sense of collective harmony.

Examples of overcoming adversity jointly by pooling of resources, including labour, can be found in many instances even in modern South Korean society. The most recent case is their success in quickly and effectively navigating the Corona virus pandemic even without a country-wide lockdown. Despite there not being any coercion to install the tracking app on their phones they opted to adopt it because rational thinking indicated it as the best possible way to track infection and to quarantine. They were in turn assured of their privacy not being trespassed. But, besides this, there are many other instances in the past of community spirit for the welfare of the larger community. For instance, the *Saemaeul Undong* or the New Village Movement of President Park Chung-hee which modernised their rural economy in the 1970s was a great success despite the hardships faced by the rural communities. Its success depended on a system of self-governance and cooperation that was required among the rural communities. This New Village movement successfully bridged the gap in the living standards of the urban and rural communities. Despite structural transformations that took place the resistance was little as it was conceived as being good for the larger community. Though it is true that authoritarian governance at that time ensured compliance but nevertheless, it would not have seen the kind of success it did if the cooperative work had been undertaken only under duress.

The overcoming of the 1998-99 financial crisis so expeditiously and so successfully is another case in point of collective behaviour for a larger good. The pooling of personal gold for repaying the IMF debt the country had incurred is a sacrifice unthinkable in many countries. The fact that even as a geographically small nation Korea has not only survived but also done so well economically despite having to contend with constant terrorism and nuclear threats from an aberrant immediate neighbour, and various kinds of pressures from the bigger powers are all instances of this kind of social fabric holding them in good stead.

In Korea, therefore, the cause and effect of reasoning in ethical decisions are closely intertwined with that of general well-being of all or collective harmony. An unethical decision would be one which is aimed at individual well-being or which disregards communal well-being or harmony. Expressing a view different from others would make one stand out and therefore be disapproved. It is said that, “Confucianism is inclined to view ethical disagreements as something regrettable, or something that is a result of human errors that can be overcome through proper ethical or rational training” (Chan,2003:131). The disapproval of ethical disagreements is conventionally so strong that it is avoided at all costs. Ethical and rational training is what is instilled in Korean societies, in fact, in all Confucian societies since childhood. However, in Korea, this also means that they are trained to think logically, and this would explain as to why they were able to shed quite easily the traditional ways of attire and doing things without sentimental attachment. This was because it was seen as something required for the general good.

With the ingestion of western culture modern Korean society too is becoming afflicted to a certain extent with western values and somewhere beginning to lose its hold on its Confucian values. It is as a reaction to this that scholars like Emmanuel Pastreich talk of the revival of Korean *Seonbi Jeongshin* or the Korean scholarly spirit, one amongst which is the intellectual’s social responsibility and to preserve Korean traditional rural areas as their core cultural spheres( Pastreich, 2013: 49-50). Same concerns of the conflict in the political sphere between traditional foundation and the modern structure on it are voiced by another scholar when he says, “the gist of the East Asian problem lies in the systemic discord between the more or less liberal-democratic institutional political hardware (an import from the west) and the socio-cultural software that should operate it. Put differently, liberal discourse and liberal-democratic

institutions are not socially relevant in East Asian societies, where citizens are soaked in Confucian habits and mores, often without self awareness". (Kim,2014:10). However, with the influx of western culture there may have developed some strains in the social fabric of Korea but the basic warp and weft remains intact. The conventional practices and expectations of behaviour have kept the underlying value system intact, and the one ethical value system helps in bringing about uniformity.

### **Social fabric and Principles of Ethical Values in India**

Like in Korea, in the Indian case too it can be said that "India never changes; under the veneer of the modern, Indians still think like the Vedas" (Ramanujan, 1989). Indian values are codified in the software of the Indian brains. But what are these values?

In India the code of conduct is dictated by the *dharma*, which itself has various meanings and can be interpreted as - duty, morality, righteousness etc. It is often mistaken to mean 'religion' too. But the peculiarity of *dharma* is that it is determined by the *varna* or caste to which one belongs. As Ramanujan quotes, "Each class (*jati* or caste) of man has his own laws, his own proper ethic, not to be universalised. Hegel shrewdly noted this Indian slant: 'While we say, "Bravery is a virtue," the Hindoos (*sic*) say, on the contrary, "Bravery is a virtue of the Cshatriyas." (Ramanujan,1989: 7). Therefore, even though majority of the population are Hindus yet there isn't one code of conduct. While Korea is monistic India is extremely pluralistic. There is plurality of ethnicity, religion, community, caste, cultural norms etc. In the Indian context it is very difficult to instil a uniform code of behaviour in a certain situation. Each individual determines his course of action in a given situation by what his *dharma* tells him to do. The diversity ensures that there is no convention that is applicable to all uniformly.

It is not as though everyone carries around his dharma code of law in the form of a book with him/her, nor is it as though each person is taught these codes of conduct explicitly during his/her childhood. The children are taught ethics and morality through folk tales and stories largely in the two great epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, which are called the *Puranas*. *Ramayana* is the epic story of the life of Prince Rama and includes his fourteen year exiled life in the forest, where he is faced with various situations and needs to take decisions.

*Mahabharata* is a story of a battle between the two sets of brothers, the *Pandavas* and *Kauravas*. The *Mahabharata* war is also known as a *Dharma Yudh* meaning a ‘Righteous war’. An important section in this epic is the *Bhagavad Gita*, which is a dialogue between warrior Arjuna in a battle field and his charioteer Lord Krishna (God incarnate). Since Arjuna has to fight the war against his own kin he is faced with a moral dilemma and despair. Lord Krishna as his guide counsels him on various aspects of the former’s *dharma*. Besides the battle field, it covers a wide range of ethical dilemma and philosophical issues. These two epics form the core of ethics in India. Besides these, there are the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* as spiritual literary texts, which embody the philosophical thoughts of the ancient Vedic times (roughly 1500 BC – 500 BC). The *Nyaya Sutras* which are variously estimated to have been composed between 6<sup>th</sup> century BC and second century AD was also an important book of knowledge and logic. It does not mean that prior to these epics and literary texts being written there was little ethical values in India. It did exist but they just got codified through these epics.

Some other philosophical concepts intrinsic to Indian culture are *karma*, *moksha* etc. A.K Ramanujan in his paper titled, “Is there an Indian Way of Thinking” says that Indians use the notion of *karma* and *talavidhi* alternately to explain the present events around them. *Karma* is one’s action or deed, and *Talavidhi* is a Tamil/Malayalam term meaning ‘fate’. The two have a cause and effect relationship. The entire Indian philosophy is based on the belief that the *karma* or one’s actions in this world is such a powerful instrument that it influences one’s future life. In other words one’s *karma* in this world is the cause for the effect it has on one’s fate in the next life. It is therefore, closely related to the concept of rebirth which is innate to Hinduism.

Here I take the liberty of digressing a bit from the main topic. Ramanujam says that these two notions of *karma* and *talavidhi* are inconsistent with each other, because *karma* implies one’s past doings determining one’s present, whereas *talavidhi* or ‘headwriting’ as he calls it, is one’s predestined fate, so they are self-contradictory. But my own understanding would be that one’s *talavidhi* or fate in this birth is predetermined by one’s *karma* in the previous birth, and so there is no contradiction. However, the entire effort of any Hindu is to attain *moksha* or salvation and be liberated from the cycle of death and rebirth.

In effect, *Karma* is an ethical theory where the moral responsibility of an action is less on the actor and more on the affected person's predistined fate. But equally important are the actor's intent, attitude and desire during the action which will have a bearing in his next life. The *Karma* theory, thus, does not provide a uniform code for all in society.

When dealing with the 'duty' aspect of *dharma* the Indian philosophy says that devotion to the 'duty' is something that is performed for duty's sake and not motivated by any reward. It goes on further to say that only such actions can be regarded as moral or ethical actions as these are bereft of any self-interest. It is thus very much in tune with the views that Emmanuel Kant held. This as stated in *Bhagavad Gita*'s Chapter 2, 47<sup>th</sup> verse is

*“Karmanye vadhikaraste Ma Phaleshu Kadachana,  
Ma Karmaphalaheturbhurma Te Sangostvakarmani”*

The meaning of the verse is—

“You have the right to work only but never to its fruits.

Let not the fruits of action be your motive, nor let your attachment be to inaction.”

(Vivekanada, 2014).

In situations of moral dilemma the Hindu philosophy also says to invoke the *Dhi or Buddhi Shakti*, or the power of intelligence, the highest mental power that a human being can possess (Frawley, 2014). It is the reasoning faculty of the mind, but is also considered to be the basis of one's enlightenment and is said to dwell in the *Ajna Chakra*<sup>4</sup> or the pineal gland. It is

---

4 According to the Hindu philosophy, in every human being, along the spinal cord, from the perineum to the medulla oblongata, there are 6 knots or nerve centres called *chakras*, which are the spheres of energy. Of these, *Ajna Chakra* or the Command *chakra* is also one. This *chakra* is also known as the third-eye *chakra*. It resides in the brain and can be made more powerful through meditation in Yoga.

positioned just like the third eye in the centre of the forehead. The power of this is invoked and used to help in finding answers or solutions to questions or problems.

The passage below from one of the most famous ancient Indian plays reveals how moral reasoning is done in India when one is faced with a moral dilemma.

One of the famous sayings of Kalidasa (pronounced Kaalidaasa), a classical Sanskrit writer and poet, in his drama *Abhajnana-shakuntalam* which is one of the many stories in *Mahabharata*, and which translated in English means ‘The recognition of Shakuntala’ is:

*‘Satām hi sandeha-padeṣu vastuṣu,  
pramāṇamantaḥkaraṇapravṛttayah’*

This is the dialogue of King Dushyanta with his inner conscience when he beholds a beautiful maiden called Shakuntala for the first time in the forest. The Sanskrit words when translated mean, “in conflicting doubts, the secret promptings of the good man's soul are an unerring index of the truth”. In other words, a man’s soul or conscience is his guide during periods of dilemma.

In Indian philosophy, it would often seem that the line dividing one’s conscience and one’s soul is a very thin one. But it is the soul which one hopes to release from the cycle of rebirth and attain *moksha* or salvation through one’s *karma* or actions. It is this soul, which is equated to god, that one pays obeisance to while greeting a person with both palms pressed together in front of one’s chest, because it is believed that the soul resides in the heart region. The word uttered

while greeting is *namaskar* and has its etymology in the Sanskrit work ‘*namaha*’, which means paying obeisance. An Indian would ideally look to this soul within him to guide him in times of dilemma.

---

Therefore, in the Indian context there is no universal code of conduct applicable to any situation. A person has to be true to his conscience and invoke his inner reasoning to arrive at a decision during a dilemma. It is his inner soul, which is equated to god that needs to be kept pure. Indian philosophical thought thus advocates inner discipline. So, in the Indian context it is the divine guidance or conscience guidance that helps one in a dilemma. The divine guidance and conscience guidance are both synchronous because the conscience is equated with soul which is taken to be the god within you.

It is believed that the fear of having one's fate in the next life decided by one's actions in the current one often keeps in check bad actions. But in the contemporary world this concept of life coming back in full circle is often forgotten and not seen to keep actions in check.

Like the concept of *hongik ingan* in Korea, Indian tradition too has the concept of *Vasudaiva kutumbakam*, i.e. the tradition of treating the world as one family. This moral concept is found in the old Hindu texts, the *Maha Upanishad* and the *Rig Veda*. Again, in the contemporary world, we find very few instances of such selfless deeds. Mostly the attitude is to ask 'what is there in it for me', or 'how will this benefit me'. The well developed system of logic contained in the *Nyaya Sutras* or the system of *tarka* or deliberation in it before arriving at the truth all seem to have just lost their true essence and made the Indians as mere 'Argumentative Indians'. Moreover, the fragmentation of the society into various small groups confines the selflessness to only one's immediate in-group, be it one's family or community.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion one might say that despite the modern inherits and the success of modern institutions in Korea the country retains its core values and remains typically Korean in nature because of its conventions ingrained in its social fabric, and which is hard to demolish. The cause and effect of reasoning in ethical decisions in Korea are closely intertwined with that of collective harmony. This is a major contributing factor for the country having not only survived many crisis but having come out of them as winners.

Whereas in India, the concept of collective harmony is as fragmented as the divisions in the society. Though India can be proud of the fact that it is a 'land of belonging rather than of blood' but today, the sense of belonging seems to be confined to the narrow in-group. The cause and effect of any action is debated or judged in terms of one's own calling. The conscience guidance during a dilemma is very contextual and individualistic. Moreover, the country is too diverse for a uniform code of conduct.

Thus, one may go a step further to say that in the modern context the reason for some countries doing well than others in similar situations can be found in their philosophical make-up. Why are some countries able to think more rationally or logically in a situation than other countries? Why are some countries able to overcome hurdles in their path of economic development more easily than others? Why are some countries able to think of the larger good than immediate gains? Answers to these to a great extent lie in their philosophical antecedents and moorings; and more so because of their retention of these.

The reasons why countries of East Asia and Southeast Asia which have a large Chinese ethnic group and Confucian upbringing have done better than other countries against similar odds could also be found in this. In the case of South Korea, which is more Confucian than others, but also has its own innate qualities and values, the ability to overcome crisis has been exemplary. India and Korea attained independence around the same time but the latter has made far greater strides against various odds than the former. Some of the severe odds Korea has had to contend with are - a state of near annihilation after the Korean War, a long phase of a very authoritarian military dictatorship, constant terrorist threats and incursions from across the border, a civil war during its phase of democratic consolidation, one of the worst impacts of Asian financial crisis, and one of the worst impacts of the SARS, MERS and COVID-19 epidemic (because of the larger influx of foreigners and international travel of domestic citizens). That it has withstood all this without any great ramifications might be indicative of some innate quality that the country as a whole has.

The author believes that while a lot depends on many other factors like the kind of governance, the level of education and awareness amongst the citizens, but Korea has always been able to successfully overcome any crisis more successfully because of the intrinsic quality of its

citizens to act cohesively in any situation. The underlying value system of the society serves as the beacon of light. It is a value system and a code of ethics that is unidimensional, uniform and context-free in nature and therefore, not only has it become a convention, but is also easy to understand and follow by the people.

On the other hand, people in India exhibit different kinds of innate strength. They are more at peace with themselves and more easily able to accept adversities than many others because of their acceptance of their predestined fate. India has also had more stable political and economic institutions over time, and it has rich philosophical moorings and a culture of creativity. India has also not been too badly affected by any crisis either, but that is because of its sheer size and the gravitas it possesses. It may not have achieved similar levels of growth or development as Korea has, because of different priorities of a country of this size. However, the reason the country is not able to act cohesively in any crisis is because it is composed differently, but also because of its diversity. People think differently and more than anything else, are philosophically indoctrinated differently. Indian value system is contextual in nature and the concept of being answerable mainly to one's conscience, or even the ability to bypass any situation makes it multidimensional with little room for cohesiveness.

### **References:**

Bagnoli, Carla, 2012. "Reason and Ethics", Maria Cristina Amoretti and Nicla Vassallo eds., *Reason and Rationality*, 111-128, Germany: Ontos.

Bhaduri, Sadanand. 1975. *Studies in Nyaya-Vaisesika Metaphysics*, Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.

Bhawuk, D. P. S. and Richard Brislin, 1992. "The Measurement of Intercultural Sensitivity using the Concepts of Individualism and Collectivism", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 16, Issue 4 (Autumn): 413-436.

[https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767\(92\)90031-O](https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(92)90031-O) (accessed on 5 October 2019)

Chan, Joseph, 2003. "Confucian Attitudes Towards Ethical Pluralism" Richard Madsen and Tracy B. Strong eds., *The Many and the One: Religious and Secular perspectives on Ethical Pluralism in the Modern Worlds*, 129-153, New Jersey: Princeton University

Lee, M.,2017. Confucianism, Kant, and Virtue Ethics. In Jones D. (Ed.), *Confucianism: Its Roots and Global Significance* (pp. 92-101). Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Chatterjee, Satishchandra, 1988. *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, New Delhi: Rupa

De Mente, Boye, Lafayette, 1998. *The Korean Mind*, Singapore: Tuttle

Erez, Miriam P. and Christopher Earley, 1993. *Culture, Self-Identity and Work*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Cohon, Rachel, 2010. "Artificial and Natural Virtues" Section 9, Edward N. Zalta (ed.) "Hume's Moral Philosophy", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2010 Edition). <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/hume-moral/> (accessed on 25 Aug. 2019)

Fischer, R., 2009. "Where is Culture in Cross-Cultural Research? An Outline of a Multilevel Research Process for Measuring Culture as a Shared Meaning System". *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, 9: 25-48.

<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1470595808101154> (accessed 4 May 2019)

Hofstede, Geert,1983. "National Cultures in Four Dimensions: A Research-Based Theory of Cultural Differences among Nations, *International Studies of Management & Organization*", 13:1-2, 46-74, DOI: 10.1080/00208825.1983.11656358 (accessed 18 Aug 2019)

Hofstede, Geert,1991. *Cultures and organizations: software of the mind*, London: McGraw-Hill.

Hofstede, Geert,2001. *Culture's Consequences: comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations* (2nd ed.), Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Hui, Harry C. and Harry C. Triandis, 1986. "Individualism-Collectivism: A Study of Cross-Cultural Researchers" *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 1986 ,17: 225.

<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0022002186017002006> (accessed on 26 Oct. 2019)

Ramanujan, A.K., 1989. "Is there an Indian Way of Thinking: An informal essay", *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 1989,23-41.

[journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/006996689023001004](http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/006996689023001004) (accessed 14 Sept. 2019).

Kim, H.O, 2010. *Reading in Korean Culture for Foreigners*, Seoul: Episteme.

Kim, Sungmoon, 2014. *Confucian Democracy in East Asia: Theory and Practice*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Koo, John H. and Andrew C. Nahm, eds., 1997. *An Introduction to Korean Culture*, Korea: Seoul: Hollym.

Madsen, Richard and Tracy B. Strong, eds.,2003. *The Many and the One: Religious and Secular perspectives on Ethical Pluralism in the Modern Worlds*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Pastreich, Emmanuel, 2013. *한국인만 모르는 다른 대한민국* (Hanguk-in-man moreuneun dareun daehan-minguk), Korea: Book21

Rosati, Connie S, 2016. "Moral Motivation", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.),

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/moral-motivation/> (accessed on 9 Sept. 2019)

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan,1926. *The Hindu Way of Life*, Harper: Element.

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, 1939. *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, New Delhi: Oxford India

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore, 1957. *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, New York: Princeton University Press.

Shin, Yong-Ha, 2003. *Essays in Korean Social History*, Seoul: Jisik-sanup Publications.

Vidhyabhusana, S.C., 1988. *A History of Indian Logic*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass

Singh, Sahana, 2017. *The Educational Heritage of Ancient India: How an Ecosystem of Learning Was laid to Waste*, India: Notion Press.

Swami Vivekananda Quotes, updated on 9 May 2014.

<http://www.swamivivekanandaquotes.org/2014/05/bhagavad-gita-chapter-2-verse-47.html>

(accessed on 16 Aug. 2019).

Tomasz Sleziak, 2013. “The Role of Confucianism in Contemporary South Korean Society”.

file:///C:/Users/HP/Downloads/No\_1\_2013.27-46%20(1).pdf (accessed on 20 Sept. 2017)

Yee, J. 2015. “Social Capital in Korea: Relational Capital, Trust, and Transparency”

*International Journal of Japanese Sociology*, 24: 30–47.

## ICS OCCASIONAL PAPER *Back Issues*

ICS Occasional Papers showcase ongoing research of ICS faculty and associates on aspects of Chinese and East Asian politics, international relations, economy, society, history and culture.

<b>Issue No/Month</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>
No.78 Oct 2021	Can off tracking Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) cost India's gain from BCIM?	Saheli Bose
No.77 Sep 2021	"Loveable" China in times of COVID-19 China's "Vaccine Diplomacy" in Southeast Asia	Anurag Vishwanath
No.76  Aug 2021	Demographic U Turn in China: Xi Jinping's Vision 2035 and the Three Child Policy	Poonam Surie
No.75  July 2021	COVID-19 and Online Learning in Rural China: Challenges, Impact, and Opportunities	Prateeksha Tiwari
No. 74 June 2021	The 8th Congress of Workers' Party of Korea, Kim Jong-un's Thoughts and Future of North Korea	Kuri Sravan Kumar

## PRINCIPAL SUPPORTERS TO ICS RESEARCH FUND

### TATA TRUSTS



MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS  
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA



INDIAN COUNCIL OF  
SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

GARGI AND VIDYA  
PRAKASH DUTT FOUNDATION



JAMNALAL BAJAJ  
FOUNDATION

PIROJSHA GODREJ FOUNDATION

## ICS PUBLICATIONS



A short brief on a topic of contemporary interest with policy-related inputs



Platform for ongoing research of the ICS faculty and associates

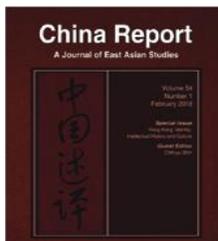


Authored by the faculty, also emerging from research projects and international conferences



Draft paper of ongoing research

## ICS JOURNAL



In its **57th** year, *China Report* is a refereed journal in the field of social sciences and international relations. It welcomes and offers a platform for original research from a multi-disciplinary perspective, in new and emerging areas, by scholars and research students. It seeks to promote analysis and vigorous debate on all aspects of Sino-Indian relations, India-China comparative studies and multilateral and bilateral initiatives and collaborations across Asia.

*China Report* is brought out by Sage Publications Ltd, New Delhi.

Editor  
Associate Editor  
Assistant Editor  
Book Review Editor

Sreemati Chakrabarti  
G. Balachandirane  
Rityusha Mani Tiwari  
Vijay K Nambiar



**INSTITUTE OF CHINESE STUDIES**  
B-371 (3rd floor), Chittaranjan Park,  
Kalkaji, New Delhi - 110 019  
Landline Telephone: +91-11-4056 4823

<http://www.icsin.org/>

[info@icsin.org](mailto:info@icsin.org)



[twitter.com/ics\\_delhi](https://twitter.com/ics_delhi)



[facebook.com/icsin.delhi](https://facebook.com/icsin.delhi)



[In.linkedin.com/icsdelhi](https://in.linkedin.com/icsdelhi)



[soundcloud.com/ICSIN](https://soundcloud.com/ICSIN)



[youtube.com/ICSWEB](https://youtube.com/ICSWEB)



[instagram.com/icsdelhi](https://instagram.com/icsdelhi)