

A Written Conversation between Monica Taylor and Angela Chi-Ming Lee

Monica J. Taylor (Former Editor of the *Journal of Moral Education* (JME), current JME Trustee, and Honorary President of the Asia-Pacific Network for Moral Education (APNME))

and

Angela Chi-Ming Lee (李琪明) (Distinguished Professor (Retired), College of Education, National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU), Taiwan)

A note on procedure: Angela agreed to a written rather than an audio Conversation. Having reviewed the documents requested, Monica sent Angela the questions in italic, labelled Q1a, etc. After receiving Angela's written responses, R1a, etc, Monica sent some follow-up questions, Q1a1, Q1a2, etc to which Angela replied, R1a1, R1a2, etc, elaborating and clarifying. We hope this way of working provides breadth and depth without losing the flow of the responses.

PART I: Educational Roots & Academic Calling

Monica: *In the biographical summary which you kindly provided, as requested, as background information to our Conversation, you mentioned that you studied education with interdisciplinary grounding in moral philosophy, moral psychology and curriculum studies.*

Q1a: *What led you to want to study education as an undergraduate? Was there anything in your schooling or family background which piqued your interest?*

Angela R1a: My undergraduate and graduate degrees were completed at the College of Education, National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU), which, during the decade of my studies (1983–1995), was the premier institution in Taiwan for training secondary education teachers. My choice of a teacher education university was deeply rooted in my high school experiences and partially influenced by my parents.

I grew up in a military dependents' village—a unique community for military families—under the atmosphere of Taiwan's martial law era.

Monica Q1a1: *Could you say what was distinctive about this community? Did it have particular values?*

Angela R1a1: Military dependents' villages, or Juancun, were distinctive settlements established across Taiwan between 1949 and the 1960s to house military families following the Chinese Civil War. I lived in one until I completed middle school. Most have since been redeveloped into high-rise residential complexes.

In my experience, these communities were marked by a strong internal homogeneity. Although the residents consisted largely of first-generation Mainlander men and local Taiwanese or Indigenous women, Mandarin functioned as the sole lingua franca. There was also an intense and unwavering loyalty to the Nationalist Government, which fostered a kind

of 'walled' mentality—a socially insular world unto itself. This environment generated remarkable internal solidarity, yet it also cultivated isolation and a certain exclusiveness toward the broader society.

I still vividly remember the death of Chiang Kai-shek during my sixth-grade year of primary school. The entire village was immersed in collective mourning, and we all wore white flowers as a sign of grief. Looking back, I now feel a certain unease at how profoundly that atmosphere of political indoctrination permeated everyday life.

Yet despite their insularity, the villages also became cultural crossroads. Different provincial traditions from mainland China interacted with local Taiwanese influences, gradually giving rise to a distinctive Juancun subculture—one that continues to evoke deep nostalgia for many people today.

Angela R1a: I was an academically excellent and 'conforming' student, earning high praise from elders in the community and teachers. However, entering the nationally renowned Taipei First Girls' High School (TFG) at age 16 marked a significant turning point in my youth. The concentration of high-achieving peers and range of diverse extracurricular activities liberated me from the constraints of taking the world for granted. For instance, participating in my first debate competition was a transformative experience that opened my eyes to the power of critical inquiry.

Monica Q1a2: *Can you tell us more about this example?*

Angela R1a2: To be honest, the specific topic of that first debate has long faded from my memory, yet the intellectual exhilaration it sparked remains remarkably vivid. It was my first genuine encounter with the power of reasoned argument and evidence — the realization that truth was not merely something transmitted by authority, but something that could be explored, negotiated and constructed through logic and critical inquiry.

The path that eventually led to my leadership role took an unexpected turn. In my second year of high school, after a reshuffling of classes, I was assigned to the very class that my debate team had defeated the previous year. In a sense, I entered the classroom as a former rival stepping into unfamiliar territory.

I did not become the class leader immediately. Rather, it was a gradual process of earning trust and respect through sustained academic engagement. I still remember the oral presentations I gave during that first semester: I devoted enormous effort to making them both intellectually rigorous and genuinely engaging. My new classmates, who already associated me with the logical strengths I had displayed during the debate competition, were further impressed by the seriousness, clarity and sincerity of my classroom contributions.

By the second semester, they elected me as the class leader. For me, this became a profound early lesson: consistent, thoughtful communication and the transparent use of reason could transcend divisions and foster genuine trust, even among those who had once been opponents.

Looking back now, I can clearly see how these formative experiences planted the earliest seeds of my lifelong commitment to the 'Moral Thinking and Communication' (MTC) model.

Angela R1a: Furthermore, serving as a class leader taught me complex social lessons: I had to navigate challenges to my authority from exceptionally gifted peers, learning the delicate balance of tolerance and persuasion. These experiences shifted my perspective from passive acceptance of the status quo to active and multifaceted thinking for myself and in different ways.

My father was a Mainlander who had relocated from mainland China to Taiwan, while my mother was a local Taiwanese. In addition to this background, my father was a retired military officer who moved into a quasi-public service role (similar to a government-affiliated position). As a child, I was often fearful of his strong temperament, constantly misinterpreting his fiery nature as mere irritability and worrying about his potential for conflict. However, as I grew older, I realized that this same intensity gave him the courage to speak out against injustice and advocate for rights. My mother was a kind-hearted soul, always helping others. When filling out my university applications, I analysed my strengths: I had good grades, leadership experience, and strong communication skills, coupled with a sense of justice and kindness. Crucially, I saw that I had inherited both my father's sense of justice and my mother's kindness. I realised that through the teaching profession, I might exert a positive, lasting influence on others, transforming my early observations of character into a professional commitment to moral education.

This was perhaps when I began to see education not merely as a profession, but as a meaningful moral and social endeavour.

Monica Q1b: *How did you become interested in aspects of education as a subject for further (PhD and post-doctoral) inquiry?*

Angela R1b: My time at National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU) not only initiated my journey into educational inquiry but also shaped my lifelong academic commitment to civic literacy and moral education. During my undergraduate years, I was deeply influenced by three core courses: Educational Psychology, Ethics, and Moral Education. Educational Psychology introduced me to the systematic study of human psychological development; Ethics enabled me to appreciate the profound philosophical underpinnings of moral thought; and Moral Education prompted me to question the 'Party-State loyalty' sentiments that had been upheld during the martial law era and lingered even as Taiwan began to democratise. In particular, my professor's introduction to Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral cognitive development fascinated me and helped define my research trajectory through my Master's and Doctoral studies.

During my graduate studies, our curriculum emphasized a broad and integrated perspective, requiring a foundation in the philosophy and history of education, educational psychology and policy, and curriculum and instruction. My Master's thesis, *'Textbook Content Analysis of the Junior High School Civics Course'* (1991), and my Doctoral dissertation, *'A Critique of Political Ideology in Moral Education: A Comparative Study of 'De-Yu' [Moral Education] in Compulsory Education in Taiwan and Mainland China'* (1996), foreground several defining characteristics of my research. These include an attempt to integrate moral philosophy, moral psychology and sociology into curriculum analysis; a focus on Taiwan as the primary subject within its historical context; and a comparative perspective that examines

similarities and differences in moral education between Taiwan and Mainland China, particularly in relation to the influence of political ideology.

During my doctoral studies, I began teaching as a lecturer at NTNU and subsequently advanced to the ranks of associate professor and full professor. My academic career has been one of continuous growth in breadth and depth. I have remained firmly rooted in my concern for civic and moral education in Taiwan, while also engaging with diverse perspectives from the international academic community. However, this has not been an easy path, but rather a solitary one. In the era of transition to democracy between the late 1980s and the early 2000s, insisting on critical inquiry into political ideology and cultivating interdisciplinary interconnections (psychology, philosophy and sociology) often meant going it alone, a lack of peer support and facing considerable resistance in order to break through. Furthermore, even within the Taiwanese educational community, moral education was often perceived as merely 'habitual discipline', 'life education' or equated with Confucian thought. This positioned me as a scholar who consistently worked against the prevailing currents.

In retrospect, this period not only defined my research agenda but also shaped my enduring commitment to examining the complex relationship between education, morality and political ideology.

Monica: *What you say about being institutionally isolated by being interested in moral education is, I think, not uncommon. I, myself, was a lone voice speaking up for education in moral values in my institution – and I know others who felt they were working alone in this domain in their respective institutions. You also had another significant dimension at play – trying to introduce a critical perspective on political ideology. We have each experienced resistance to cultural change, you with respect to the equation of moral education with Confucian thought and I, in a British context, trying to argue for a distinction between the dominant religious education and moral education.*

PART II: Scholarly Contributions & The MTC Model

Monica: *I asked you to choose six of your published works which you regard as most personally satisfying, academically well regarded, or influential on research or practice. This selection from your 100 peer-reviewed papers must have been quite challenging. You kindly supplied six papers in English. As you know, I cannot read Chinese, and this Conversation is taking place in English and will be uploaded to the JMETS website in English.*

Q2a: *Please could you say how you see each of these six works (which you can reference) as fitting the above criteria (which may or may not overlap, of course), and why.*

Angela R2a: The common thread among my six selected representative works is that they were all written in English, a language that is not my native Mandarin Chinese. This presented a significant personal challenge, requiring a substantial investment of time and energy for each piece.

Monica: *Yes, as a basically monolingual person, I remain in awe of you and other colleagues who write about complex academic subjects in languages totally different from your own.*

Angela R2a: These papers were published in well-regarded international journals in the field of moral education and underwent rigorous SSCI peer review — a process I consider both demanding and deeply rewarding.

Monica Q2a1: *Could you say, from your memory of the beginning of engaging in this process, in a language other than your own and one which may have involved different cultural expectations and processes, one or two things you recall learning from the process?*

Angela R2a1: Engaging with international academic standards was a journey that demanded immense dedication, particularly because my entire education had been completed in Taiwan. My early English training was largely examination-oriented, offering little preparation for genuine academic communication or scholarly argumentation. Therefore, after being promoted to full professor in 2000, I set myself a clear and deliberate goal: I must enter into global academic dialogue.

Reflecting on this period now, I realize that the challenges of language and cultural transition taught me two profound lessons.

At the beginning, I often felt that even when my ideas were clear in Chinese, they somehow appeared indirect or insufficiently structured in English academic writing. This was initially frustrating, because I gradually realized that the challenge was not merely vocabulary or grammar, but a different expectation regarding how arguments should be organized and communicated within international academic culture.

The Translation of Thought, Not Merely Words

I came to understand that writing across languages involves far more than linguistic conversion; it requires a transformation of intellectual and academic logic. Although I possessed deep knowledge of my field and maintained an independent critical perspective — refusing simply to transplant Western theories into Taiwanese contexts — I nevertheless had to learn how to present those arguments in ways that audiences from different cultural and academic backgrounds could recognise and engage with.

To bridge this gap, I wrote every draft myself and then worked closely with native language consultants to discuss not only wording, but also reasoning and structure. My purpose was never merely to have someone 'correct' my English. Rather, I wanted to identify my intellectual blind spots and learn how to articulate complex ideas with greater precision and clarity.

The Value of Rigorous Mentorship

I must thank you, Monica, especially for your extraordinary patience and guidance throughout this process. I still vividly remember my first submission to the *Journal of Moral Education (JME)*, which returned covered with well over a hundred comments and annotations. At the time, the experience felt overwhelming. Yet every published paper ultimately carried the traces of those struggles, and through your mentorship, what initially

appeared as setbacks gradually became some of the most rewarding moments of intellectual growth.

These experiences taught me that meaningful communication is not simply a matter of linguistic fluency. Rather, it requires the courage to expose one's deeply held convictions to broader scholarly critique while still preserving one's own academic voice and identity. In this sense, each published paper represents not only an academic achievement, but also a successful synthesis of local intellectual experience and global scholarly discourse.

Angela R2a: Each of my chosen works demonstrates a distinct form of academic originality, grounded in either long-term historical analysis or empirical inquiry. These six works can be broadly categorized into four themes:

1. *Historical Analysis of Transformation.* Two papers provide a longitudinal analysis of the evolution of and challenges for moral education as Taiwan it transitioned from authoritarianism to democracy: Lee (2004) in the *Journal of Moral Education* and Lee (2024) in *The Routledge International Handbook of Life and Values Education in Asia*.
2. *Academic Landmarks and Global Trends.* My collaboration with you, Monica (Lee & Taylor, 2013), analysed trends in papers published in the *Journal of Moral Education* over 40 years. Contributing to this landmark project, which maps the global development of moral education research, remains a source of deep professional satisfaction.

Monica: *For me too! It was a laborious, analytic and genuinely collaborative process of mutual learning resulting in a major overview.*

Angela:

3. *Theoretical Developments.* (The MTC Model): In Lee & Thoma (2018) and Lee *et al.* (2024), I sought to extend Kohlbergian and Neo-Kohlbergian frameworks by integrating Jürgen Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action and discourse ethics to develop the Moral Thinking and Communication (MTC) model. These works represent my effort to articulate a contemporary framework for moral development and to examine its application through cross-national empirical studies.
4. *Auto-ethnographic Reflection.* Lastly, Lee (2011) is an auto-ethnographic inquiry. As an educator, I explored the interrelationship of professional knowledge and personal experience while navigating the challenges of parenting a highly capable yet independent-minded son, situating this journey within Taiwan's evolving cultural and generational context.

These six English-language publications represent sustained intellectual and personal commitment, and I am grateful for the opportunities to share them with the international academic community. Taken together, they reflect my broader effort to reframe moral and civic education by bridging moral psychology, philosophy and sociocultural analysis in order to critically examine how moral development is shaped, contested, and transformed within changing political and cultural contexts.

Monica Q2a2: Regarding your description in Lee (2011), the word 'yet' is a bit revealing here because it suggests to me that you were reluctant for him to be independent-minded (yet you are interested in promoting a critically reflective approach to learning). Would you prefer to put 'and'?

Angela R2a2: Monica, your keen eye for that 'yet' is quite revealing indeed! You've captured the exact tension I was navigating as both a scholar and a mother.

In the Chinese cultural context, the line between being 'rebellious' (叛逆) and being 'independent-minded' (獨立思考) is often incredibly fine. While my professional philosophy champions critical reflection, the lived reality of parenting a highly capable and strong-willed son was far more turbulent.

I chose 'yet' because it reflects the genuine struggle I felt at the time — the gap between my academic ideals and my maternal anxieties. To me, his independence often manifested as defiance, and finding the balance between supporting his autonomy and maintaining parental guidance was an arduous, daily negotiation. If I were to change it to 'and', it would suggest a harmonious integration that I certainly hadn't mastered back then. By keeping 'yet', I want to remain honest about the 'messiness' of that auto-ethnographic journey. It was a humbling process of learning to accept that the very 'independent mind' I advocated for in my students was the same one challenging me at the dinner table.

Perhaps a more precise phrasing would be: 'navigating the challenges of parenting a son who was as gifted as he was fiercely independent — a journey where professional theory met the raw reality of adolescent rebellion.'

To this day, even though he is now married and has a family of his own, our relationship remains a dynamic mix of tension and warmth. It seems the 'independent-minded' son I wrote about in 2011 continues to challenge and inspire me in equal measure. Perhaps that is the ultimate lesson of moral communication: it is not a destination of perfect harmony, but a lifelong commitment to staying in the dialogue, regardless of the 'yet' that stands between us.

Six works in English

Lee, A. C-M. (2004). Changes and Challenges for Moral Education in Taiwan. *Journal of Moral Education*, 33: 4, 575-595.

Lee, A. C-M. (2011). Learning to be a good parent across cultural and generational boundaries. *Journal of Moral Education*, 40:3, 377-385.

Lee, A. C-M. & Taylor, M. J. (2013). Moral education trends over 40 years – a content analysis of the *Journal of Moral Education* (1971-2011). *Journal of Moral Education*, 42: 4, 399-429.

Lee, A. C-M. & Thoma, S. J. (2018). Developing and Testing a Scale of Moral Thinking and Communication (MTC) Functioning: A preliminary study and its implications for Moral Development and Education. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 38:1, 32-50.

Lee, A. C-M. (2024). Transformation of Character and Moral Education During Taiwan's Transition from Authoritarianism to Democracy: Challenges and Possibilities. In: J. C.-K. Lee and K. J. Kennedy (Eds). *The Routledge International Handbook of Life and Values Education in Asia*. Routledge. pp.380-389.

Lee, A. C-M., Walker, D. I., Chen, Y.-H. & Thoma, S. J. (2024). Moral thinking and communication competencies of college students and graduates in Taiwan, the UK, and the US: a mixed-methods study. *Ethics & Behavior*, 34:1, 1-17.

Monica Q2b: *If you had been able to choose six publications in Chinese and in English, which of your publications in Chinese would you have selected, and why?*

Angela R2b: If I were to introduce my Chinese-language scholarly works, I would select six from my eight single-authored monographs, all written in Traditional Chinese. In the earlier stages of my academic career, the fields of education and the humanities placed strong emphasis on monographs as a medium for comprehensive and sustained argument. However, as academic paradigms shifted toward international (SSCI) and domestic (TSSCI) journal publications, I sought to maintain a balance: using journal articles for scholarly exchange, while employing monographs to more fully articulate my educational philosophy/psychology for practitioners.

Given the limited commercial viability of scholarly publishing, I have self-funded several of these recent works in both print and digital formats, and have donated them to libraries in order to promote moral and character education. Collectively, these six books trace the historical progression of Taiwan's moral character education — from a 'stand-alone subject' to 'whole-school ethos building', and more recently toward a 'core competency-based approach'. I have categorised them into the following three types:

Type I: Foundations and Ideal Construction of Moral Curriculum

1. *[Ideals and Construction of Moral Curriculum]* (2000): Adapted from my first National Science Council project, this book analyses Taiwan's moral textbooks and constructs an ideal curriculum model.
2. *[Ethics and Life: Transformation and Discernment of Good and Evil]* (2003): A 'popular science' style work blending civic literacy with applied ethics. It explores seven major ethical dilemmas without providing fixed answers, encouraging diverse moral discourse.

Type II: Educational Policy and School Ethos Building

3. *[Moral and Character Education and School Ethos Building]* (2011): This work responded to the disappearance of moral education as a stand-alone subject during Taiwan's 2000s reforms. It establishes a theoretical and practical framework for "Character-based School Ethos" and was recognized as an Outstanding Scholarly Book by NTNU.

Type III: The Trilogy of Moral Dimensions: Cognition, Affection and Action

4. *[Moral Thinking and Communication]* (2016): Focused on the cognitive dimension, introducing the MTC model and core competency scales tailored for the Taiwanese educational context.

5. [*Curriculum and Inquiry in Moral Emotions*] (2022): Focused on the affective dimension, defining educational goals for moral emotion, empathy, identity and care through specific curriculum schemes.
6. [*Exemplars of Moral Action*] (2024): Focused on the action dimension, analysing Nobel Peace Prize laureates to create a multidimensional inquiry teaching model for moral agency.

Taken together, these works represent my effort to translate and extend theoretical understandings of moral and civic education into sustained educational practice. They reflect a parallel trajectory to my English-language publications, through which I seek to reframe moral and civic education by integrating moral cognition, emotion, communication and action within their sociocultural and educational contexts.

Six books in Traditional Chinese

- 李琪明(2000)。德育課程之理想與建構——我國國民中小學德育課程之研究。臺北：師大書苑。[Lee, A. C.-M. (2000). *Ideals and Construction of Moral Curriculum: A Study of Moral Curriculum in Taiwan's Compulsory Education*. Taipei: Shida Bookstore.]
- 李琪明(2003)。倫理與生活——善惡的變與辨。臺北：五南。[Lee, A. C.-M. (2003). *Ethics and Life: Transformation and Discernment of Good and Evil*. Taipei: Wu-Nan.]
- 李琪明(2011)。品德教育與校園營造。臺北：心理出版社。[Lee, A. C.-M. (2011). *Moral and Character Education and School Ethos Building*. Taipei: Psychological Publishing.]
- 李琪明編著(2016)。道德思辯：品德教育核心能力的理念與實踐。臺北：李琪明。[Lee, A. C.-M. (2016). *Moral Thinking and Communication: Theory and Practice of Core Competencies in Moral and Character Education*. Taipei.] (Self-published)
- 李琪明(2022)。道德情意課程與探究。臺北：李琪明。[Lee, A. C.-M.(2022). *Curriculum and Inquiry in Moral Emotions*. Taipei.] (Self-published)
- 李琪明(2024)。道德行動典範：諾貝爾和平獎的多元跨國探究。臺北：李琪明。(Lee, A. C.-M. (2024). *Exemplars of Moral Action: A Transnational and Multidimensional Study of Nobel Peace Prize Laureates*. Taipei.] (Self-published)

PART III: From Policy Advocacy to School Ecology

Monica: You have both taught and conducted research throughout your distinguished 37-year career at National Taiwan Normal University. Your research (of which 40 projects were supported by Taiwan National Science and Technology Council and Ministry of Education) has been wide ranging and has used many different methods to focus on the development of moral character and citizenship education across theoretical, empirical and policy dimensions.

It seems to me, as I have known you for the last quarter of a century or so, that whilst you have been very interested in Western thinking and research on moral development and education you have at heart Taiwan, and how other theoretical and empirical work might be applied and adapted in the Taiwanese context. Two of your chosen papers, published in 2004 and 2024, have dealt with changes and challenges for moral education in Taiwan and the transformation of character and moral education during Taiwan's transition from authoritarianism to democracy and ongoing challenges and possibilities.

Q3a: *In the former paper you advocated the need for more critical thinking, the development of civic values, and multiple teaching approaches. You were involved for many years in advising educational policy makers in Taiwan. Do you think you were able to influence policy in these respects?*

Angela R3a: My research over the past several decades has consistently focused on the development of moral/character and civic education in Taiwan. Throughout this journey, I have continually reflected on how to integrate the fundamentals of Western and progressive theories within an evolving global and domestic context, so that they may be meaningfully adapted to Taiwanese society — an endeavour that has become my lifelong academic mission.

I have come to see my role as that of a multifaceted bridge: linking scientific research with educational practice; connecting Western theories of moral and civic development with Taiwanese academic discourse; and, most importantly, embedding moral education within the lived cultural context of contemporary Taiwan.

Around the year 2000, I began my involvement in educational policymaking in Taiwan. At that time, educational reforms had led to the removal of moral education as a stand-alone subject in primary and secondary schools — whether by design or oversight. This generated considerable public concern. Given my research background in the historical development of Taiwan's moral curriculum, as well as my familiarity with international pedagogical trends, I was invited by the Ministry of Education to contribute to policy responses.

My involvement extended across multiple domains, including policy communication and advocacy, the promotion of initiatives such as the 'Excellence in Character and Moral Education' school program, and the development of the Character and Moral Education Resource Network. Given the traditionally integrated nature of moral and civic education in Taiwan, I also participated in curriculum standard-setting, textbook review processes in civic education, and served for many years on the Human Rights Education Committee. One of the most significant honours of my career was serving as a core committee member and convener of the 'Modern Civic Literacy' theme at the 2010 National Education Conference, where we helped shape key policy directions for the subsequent decade.

Across this intertwined trajectory of research, teaching, and policy engagement, I have sought to synthesise and reflect upon these experiences in my publications, including in the two papers from 2004 and 2024 selected for this interview.

It is important to recognise that Taiwan's experience — 38 years of martial law (ending in 1987) alongside a deep-rooted Confucian cultural tradition — has profoundly shaped national

perceptions of moral education. For a long time, it was regarded primarily as 'life discipline' or adherence to traditional virtues, often lacking a robust theoretical and professional foundation. The introduction of Western frameworks, such as Kohlberg's stages of moral development and dilemma-based reasoning, was at times perceived as a form of external transplantation rather than a locally grounded approach. Consequently, it was not easy to shift the deeply embedded mindsets of educators and administrators.

Monica Q3a1: *I'm very interested in what you say here. You thought it was very important to introduce Western theoretical frameworks and empirical approaches to Taiwan's moral development and education. Was it not possible to have worked further to elaborate and extend locally grounded philosophical foundations to inform pedagogical practices? What I mean here is: Could you and others in Taiwan have worked to develop something distinctively Taiwanese, irrespective of Western influences? You seem to indicate that you do not value some more recent curriculum approaches, but I suppose I am thinking more of philosophical traditions such as Confucianism in a contemporary context since it is embedded in the culture.*

Angela: R3a1: Monica, your question touches upon a profound tension that many Asian scholars of my generation have navigated. You ask, 'Why we didn't focus solely on elaborating locally grounded foundations, such as Confucianism?' This hits at the heart of my academic journey, and I would like to clarify my stance through two crucial points:

First, it is important to understand that what was often labelled as 'Confucian thought or culture' in Taiwan was, for a long time, a construct framed and constrained by specific political agendas. During the martial law era, traditional values were sometimes instrumentalised to reinforce state authority and top-down indoctrination. To rely strictly on that 'politically filtered' version of tradition would have been problematic. I believe the true essence of the 'Taiwanese spirit and culture' is a living, evolving project that we are still in the process of deeply excavating; it was not something that could be simply 'plucked' from the existing curriculum of that time.

Second, I view certain 'Western' theoretical frameworks not as foreign imports, but as part of a shared global language of modernization and scientific inquiry. Seeking the modernisation and scientific grounding of moral education in Taiwan does not equate to a 'Western transplant. Logic and empirical methods belong to all of humanity; these tools allowed us to move beyond dogmatism and create a space for rational deliberation.

Therefore, my work was never choosing 'West over East'. Instead, I felt it was essential to introduce these frameworks to provide a critical and transparent tool to interrogate our own cultural roots. The Moral Thinking and Communication (MTC) model is the direct result of this synthesis. It is not 'Western'; it is a model that uses universal logical tools to cultivate a moral autonomy that is deeply relevant to our specific Taiwanese cultural and democratic context.

I believe that by subjecting our traditions to the rigour of international dialogue, we do not lose our identity— rather, we strengthen the contemporary relevance of our local foundations.

Reflecting on this entire journey, I feel a deep sense of gratitude toward you, Monica. You were the one who opened the door to the international community for me and consistently provided opportunities for me to grow. As a 'home-grown' scholar from Taiwan, navigating these global waters was often daunting, but your mentorship gave me the courage to persevere. I hope that my work and my dedication to the field of moral education have, in some small way, lived up to the trust and expectations you placed in me all those years ago.

Angela R3a: With the gradual consolidation of democracy and sustained reform efforts, the goals I advocated in 2004 — critical thinking, civic values, and diversified pedagogical approaches — have increasingly taken root. While it is encouraging to see these principles incorporated into other domains, such as social studies, it is also somewhat paradoxical that the absence of a dedicated subject for moral education has occasionally created spaces where value formation may become more susceptible to religious, political, or other external ideological influences.

Monica: *That's an interesting comment. We probably don't have space to discuss this here, but in the UK where we do not have a separate subject 'moral education' we have a legally protected timetabled subject, 'religious education', and schools would also see it as very much part of their role to allow space for discussion of political and diverse cultural values, possibly in Personal and Social Education.*

Angela R3a: While I believe I have made meaningful contributions to policy dialogue and development, I remain humble regarding the extent of my influence. The evolution of character and moral education is inseparable from broader cultural transformations, and thus cannot be attributed to any single policy initiative or individual effort.

Monica Q3b: *Would you like to say something about your recent reflections over 20 years and how your analysis suggests the context for moral learning has changed? I'm thinking here not only of your work on the curriculum but also your work developing the moral ecology of schools and with the exemplary school principals.*

Angela R3b: In my 2024 analysis of Taiwan's Character and Moral Education (CME) — published exactly 20 years after my 2004 study — the trajectory of CME's evolution became increasingly clear. I conceptualised this transformation across three interrelated dimensions.

First, at the level of organizational structure, there has been a shift from stand-alone subjects toward school-wide initiatives, accompanied by the selective integration of moral and civic themes into formal subject curricula. Second, in terms of curriculum content, the focus has gradually moved away from traditionally entrenched ideological themes toward more authentic engagement with contemporary life issues. Third, at the macro level, these changes reflect Taiwan's broader societal transition from a relatively closed and controlled context to a more open, pluralistic and democratic society.

Building upon this analysis, I formulated three critical lines of inquiry: How can CME be democratically embedded within curriculum structures? How can we navigate between the risks of ideological dogmatism and ethical relativism? And what insights can be drawn from CME's development within a society undergoing democratic transition?

Ultimately, I realise that I may have been somewhat optimistic about the resilience and stability of Taiwan's democratic development. Since the second decade of the millennium, the rapid advancement of digital technologies and artificial intelligence has profoundly reshaped the conditions of human life and learning. While Taiwan occupies a central position in the global semiconductor ecosystem, it is simultaneously confronted with a 'fragmented reality' fuelled by algorithmic echo chambers. The challenges here extend beyond 'information warfare' — the manipulation of digital content and disinformation — into the realm of 'cognitive warfare', which seeks to destabilize the mental frameworks and social identities of citizens through the deliberate manipulation of public perception and the erosion of the shared factual basis necessary for democratic deliberation. These internal and external dynamics pose significant challenges to democratic societies, rendering CME particularly vulnerable to processes of identity construction, value distortion and ideological influence.

Despite these concerns, a broader historical perspective reminds us that human societies have always evolved through cycles of tension and transformation. Progress is rarely linear; rather, it is gradually accumulated through sustained, and often quiet, efforts. In this sense, I see myself as but a small participant within a much larger historical process. In both research and service, I have sought to act with commitment and integrity, without becoming overly attached to outcomes. Nevertheless, the lasting imprints left by these endeavours remain meaningful to me.

A pivotal moment in this journey was the launch of the National CME Improvement Project (CMEIP) in 2004. As I took part in drafting this policy initiative, I felt a deep responsibility to bridge the gap between policy and meaningful implementation. This commitment led to years of close collaboration with primary and secondary schools, through which we worked to cultivate what I have termed a 'moral ecology' within school communities.

At that time, school leadership in Taiwan was often highly centralised, and moral education was commonly perceived as the sole responsibility of civics teachers. In contrast, my approach emphasized a collaborative, school-wide model led by principals, in which the entire school community — teachers, staff, and parents — would be engaged. To realise this vision, I actively sought out forward-thinking principals and worked alongside them to foster a more democratic and evidence-informed approach to CME.

I was also deeply conscious of the need to challenge the conventional image of the 'detached academic' who engages with schools primarily as sites for data collection. Instead, I regarded schools as genuine partners in knowledge creation and educational practice. I made a deliberate effort to be present in the field, participating in nearly every stage of the process. This sustained engagement ensured that my research remained closely grounded in practice. For this journey, I continue to feel a deep sense of gratitude.

Monica: *This was a major involvement and commitment given all your other teaching, research and policy advisory responsibilities.*

PART IV: Bridging Local Foundations with Global Dialogue

Monica: *You have, as you have described it, been interested in ‘bridging local foundations with international dialogue’. This is exemplified by reference to two of your other chosen papers: one paper, with our esteemed colleague, Steve Thoma, reports on *Developing and Testing a Scale of Moral Thinking and Communication (MTC) Functioning*; the second is an explication of how this measure and other methods were employed by you and other colleagues to investigate the competencies of college students and graduates in Taiwan, the UK, and the US. This work seems to me to relate centrally to your main psychological concerns with moral awareness, moral judgment, moral discourse and moral decision making.*

Q4a: *Would you like to say something about the challenges of doing this project with colleagues internationally and what you learned from engaging with them?*

Angela R4a: Although I did not pursue formal academic training abroad, my scholarly trajectory has always been internationally oriented. After being promoted to full professor, and with your encouragement, Monica, from around 2001 onwards, I became increasingly engaged in connecting Taiwan’s research with the global moral education community. This journey from local immersion to global engagement has been both challenging and deeply rewarding. It reflects my conviction that meaningful academic dialogue is not determined by where one is trained, but by how one contributes, connects and shares insights. By bringing Taiwan’s unique experiences into international discourse, I have sought to demonstrate that Asian perspectives on moral and civic education can both inform and be informed by global scholarship.

One of my central efforts has been to cultivate substantive and reciprocal intellectual exchanges. My work has involved not only adapting international theories to local educational contexts, but also presenting Taiwan’s empirical findings to the wider academic community. I have consistently aimed to position Taiwan not merely as a recipient of Western paradigms, but as an active contributor. In doing so, I have integrated traditional and contemporary perspectives, fostering cross-disciplinary approaches to moral and civic education, within the Taiwanese educational context. This has gradually evolved into a comprehensive framework encompassing theoretical reflection, curriculum development, pedagogical practice, and rigorous mixed-methods research.

My collaboration with Steve Thoma and other colleagues on the Moral Thinking and Communication (MTC) scale is a cornerstone of this endeavour. As a leading scholar in the Neo-Kohlbergian tradition and a long-time mentor and friend, Steve offered invaluable insights into the development and application of the Defining Issues Test (DIT). However, my intention was not simply to replicate Neo-Kohlbergian theory or to transplant established instruments, such as the DIT or the Moral Judgment Test (MJT), into a different context. Drawing upon my background in moral psychology, higher education, and sustained engagement with K–12 schools, I sought to extend this tradition by incorporating ‘moral discourse’ and ‘moral decision-making’ as essential dimensions — elements that I believe are necessary to address the complexities of contemporary moral life. In this sense, the MTC framework serves as an attempt to extend Neo-Kohlbergian approaches toward a more communication-oriented and context-sensitive model of moral functioning.

My collaborations with Steve Thoma, David Walker, and Yen-Hsin Chen were both intellectually stimulating and culturally enriching. These exchanges brought together perspectives from the United States, the United Kingdom and Taiwan, creating a dynamic space for comparative inquiry. One of the most significant personal challenges I faced was developing the capacity to think and communicate academically in English at a deeper level — moving beyond literal translation toward nuanced participation in both face-to-face and virtual scholarly dialogue.

Following the foundational 2018 MTC study (Lee and Thoma, 2018), I became increasingly interested in examining the broader application of this framework across cultural contexts. This led to our 2024 comparative research involving university students and graduates in Taiwan and English-speaking countries (Lee *et al*, 2024). The process, however, was not without its challenges. We encountered differences in cultural interpretation — particularly on ethically sensitive issues such as abortion — as well as practical difficulties related to participant recruitment, data collection and cross-cultural analysis.

Nevertheless, through close collaboration with international colleagues and the dedicated efforts of our research teams, these challenges were gradually addressed. In retrospect, these experiences have culminated in what I might describe as 'the profound satisfaction that follows hardship'. More importantly, this journey represents my personal and intellectual transformation: from a student who once admired Kohlberg's work, to a scholar who sought to develop an original framework grounded in my own cultural context, while remaining in dialogue with the global academic community.

Monica Q4b: *You have aimed to use research to provide empirically informed guidance for moral pedagogy. Did this research stimulate new thoughts about application to the Taiwanese context?*

Angela R4b: I have always maintained that research in moral education must embrace diverse paradigms and cross-disciplinary integration. As you, Monica, correctly noted, my dedication to providing empirically informed guidance for moral pedagogy is a conscious strategic choice. In the context of Taiwan's academic and educational landscape, where such evidence-based approaches are relatively underdeveloped, I chose this 'less-travelled road' despite the limited academic resources available to me in Taiwan. Although this path is often neglected or misunderstood, I remain committed to opening up this space for inquiry and dialogue. Much like Kohlberg, who integrated the roles of moral philosopher and moral psychologist, I strive to foster a dynamic integration of theoretical reflection and empirical validation.

My years spent analysing character and moral education in Taiwan have revealed a field often dominated by philosophical reflection, with a notable lack of systematic empirical inquiry. Existing empirical tools are often limited, insufficiently validated, or lack standardization. Furthermore, many current practices are not grounded in rigorous research design or evidence-based evaluation. There remains a persistent perception among practitioners that evaluation is either a hollow formality or that morality is inherently unmeasurable, leaving the field largely confined to conceptual or 'armchair' theorising.

Secondly, even within philosophical frameworks, the discourse is often confined to traditional Confucian thought, lacking the critical selection, reconstruction and engagement with contemporary global theories that a multi-paradigmatic approach would require. This results in a significant disconnection. Theory often remains abstract and idealised, while practice is reduced to institutional routines or the unreflective reproduction of personal beliefs by educators without specialised training. In recent years, various religious and private organizations have entered schools under the banner of 'life education' or traditional character education; however, these initiatives often lack both a systematic theoretical grounding and robust forms of empirical validation.

Therefore, in my teaching and scholarship, I advocate for the professionalisation of moral education through a multi-paradigmatic lens. By holding this field to the same rigorous qualitative and quantitative standards as other academic disciplines, we can more effectively advance both knowledge and practice. I see myself as a sower of seeds; if the vitality of these diverse approaches takes root, they have the potential to grow into a flourishing forest.

PART V: Cross-Cultural Dialogue & The Wisdom of Retirement

Monica: *You were committed to international dialogue on moral education and development for over 25 years: promoting it in various ways in Taiwan with international visitors and conferences; through your loyal participation in many annual conferences of the Association for Moral Education; and, notably, as a diligent member of the Editorial Board of the Journal of Moral Education. You were typically generous in agreeing to work with me on an analysis of trends in the content of 40 years of the Journal of Moral Education to celebrate that anniversary (Lee and Taylor, 2013). Not only that, but you, yourself, persisted in updating it for the Journal's 50th anniversary (Lee, 2023). This project required a huge amount of work and some drilling down into interpretations of concepts and methods. Modern technology made it possible for us to have such discussions from our different East/West and psychological/philosophical perspectives relating to education.*

Q5a: *The resulting papers are specific, longitudinal, historical studies which can be mined for further reflection. I suspect insufficient attention is paid to the influence of history. Do you have any thoughts on key takeaways for the further development of our field?*

Angela R5a: Since 2001, the *Journal of Moral Education* (JME) and the Association for Moral Education (AME) have truly become my primary academic homes, as well as the regional engagement provided by the Asia-Pacific Network for Moral Education (APNME). As a dedicated participant, I have deeply valued the rigorous international dialogue and cherished intellectual companionships they offered. These platforms have provided invaluable spaces for intellectual exchange, mentorship and enduring friendships. I have actively contributed to this community by reviewing manuscripts, serving on editorial and executive boards, organizing conference panels, mentoring emerging scholars, and inviting international colleagues to engage with research on moral and civic education in Taiwan. Furthermore, I am deeply grateful to Marvin Berkowitz for inviting me as a visiting scholar to the University of Missouri–St. Louis (UMSL) for three months in 2004. This experience

allowed me to observe first-hand the implementation of character education in the United States while immersing myself in American cultural and educational contexts.

These communities have afforded me invaluable opportunities to present my work, publish scholarly articles, and engage in profound cross-cultural dialogue. They serve as a constant reminder that academic pursuits are not a solitary journey; rather, they are anchored in collaboration, dialogue and a shared commitment to the values of justice, empathy and moral growth. Through these connections, I have witnessed how moral education can act as a bridge between cultures and as a foundation for more compassionate and democratic societies.

Among my representative publications, I take particular pride in the collaboration with you, Monica, on two landmark analytical papers for the JME's 40th and 50th anniversaries. These projects demanded immense effort. Over several years, I led teams of graduate students and assistants to overcome linguistic barriers while meticulously analysing over one thousand published articles. This process involved intensive communication with you in the UK — ranging from conference meetings and video consultations to visiting your home for extended discussions and hosting you in Taiwan.

This collaboration has a threefold significance. First, it highlights the rich intellectual legacy of successive editors and contributors to the *Journal of Moral Education*. Second, it reveals the historical trajectories and evolving research paradigms within the international field of moral education. Third, it brings a Taiwanese scholarly perspective into this global conversation, thereby contributing to a more plural and context-sensitive understanding of moral development and education. In this sense, these longitudinal analyses not only review the past, but also provide an empirical and interpretive basis for rethinking the future directions of the field.

Through these analyses, I sought to demonstrate how local perspectives can enrich international understandings of moral development and citizenship education. Engaging in these commemorative projects has deepened my sense of belonging to this academic community and reaffirmed my commitment to fostering cross-cultural dialogue and collaborative scholarship.

However, at a global level, the field of moral education appears to be experiencing a relative stagnation of theoretical innovation. Since the time of Lawrence Kohlberg, there has been a lack of widely shared, integrative theoretical frameworks, while rapid technological and social transformations have significantly reshaped the prioritisation, interpretation and application of moral concepts and value judgments across varying contexts. In many respects, scholarly development has struggled to keep pace with these changes. As digital culture transforms moral reasoning and social interaction, educators are increasingly challenged to redefine the goals and practices of moral learning in contemporary contexts.

This evolving landscape calls for the integration of new dimensions, such as digital citizenship and AI ethics, and implications for moral empathy, intercultural understanding and global justice. At the same time, it underscores the importance of historical consciousness—recognizing that the future development of moral education must be informed by a critical understanding of its intellectual and cultural past. These challenges compel us to move beyond static theoretical positions and to re-envision moral education as a dynamic, context-responsive and historically grounded practice.

Monica Q5b: *In the process of collaboration, I learned things from you and maybe you learned things from me. We might each say what they were. You even repeated the process analysing an extra decade of papers published in JME! Sadly, you were unable to attend the JME's 50th anniversary conference in the UK. As you know, I gave a paper, with reference to the 50th analysis. I wonder if the emphasis of our reflections on the analysis would have been different.*

Angela R5b: Reflecting on the collaborative process of the two JME content analysis papers is profoundly meaningful for both you, Monica, and me. We were not merely detached observers; rather, we were akin to chroniclers of an academic genealogy, weaving a 'long river of memory' for the field of moral education. In my eyes, you epitomise a scholar of intellectual stature, combining profound erudition with a keen sensitivity to language. Your cultural inclusiveness and lifelong stewardship of the JME have not only sustained the journal but also nurtured generations of scholars. As the longest-serving Editor-in-Chief since JME's inception (1976–2011), you have been deeply devoted to this community, fostering its growth and vitality through your intellectual and personal commitment. My own journey began in 2001 when you encouraged me to engage with the international community, leading to my appointment as an Editorial Board member in 2005. I once asked you (do you remember?) why you chose to collaborate with me on these reviews, and you replied: 'Because you are trustworthy, and I knew that, with you, this arduous task would reach completion.'

In our 2013 retrospective for the 40th anniversary, we articulated the significance of this partnership:

'Our undertaking of this project may be seen as a particular example of cross-cultural collaboration on a topic of common interest and shared value... Though the content analytic process was the same for each researcher, our experience and learning were somewhat different... we remain convinced that our cross-cultural and interdisciplinary collaboration added stimulus, a wider frame of reference and complementary perspectives to the final work.'

Beyond these formal reflections, what I personally learned from you was the essence of 'academic humanism'. I vividly recall an evening at your home when, for the purpose of the analysis, we were trying to verify the gender of certain authors—a task complicated by cultural differences and name changes through marriage. I was deeply moved to find that you seemed to 'know' every author; you could recount personal stories of your interactions with them, transforming what might otherwise have been abstract data into a living network of human relationships.

Regarding the 50th-anniversary analysis, I deeply regret that the pandemic prevented my conference attendance. In my prepared PowerPoint, I had written:

'In witnessing the 50th anniversary of the publication of JME, this historical analysis demonstrates that Minerva's owl has indeed already taken flight in nurturing cognition in the field of moral education... we envisage the widening and deepening of sensitivity and appreciation, towards a future where the owl with its wisdom and insight can fly

and dance in accord with the harmony and grace of the crane, intertwining perspectives and recognition.'

Conventionally, one might expect the Western scholar to represent the analytical 'Owl' and the Eastern scholar to embody the poetic 'Crane'. However, I have recently come to a fascinating realisation: we were both 'outliers' within our own cultural traditions, with our academic roles intriguingly reversed. You, the British philosophy scholar, were the 'Crane'—radiating an intellectual poise and idealistic, life-oriented aesthetic. Meanwhile, I, as an Asian cross-disciplinary scholar, assumed the role of 'Minerva's Owl', contributing a more analytical, structured, and empirically grounded perspective to our shared inquiry.

Monica: *I do not count as a scholar of philosophy; it was my undergraduate study, but my professional life was in educational research, so empirically grounded. But I think I am always willing to ask questions about what is being done or said and the meaning and interpretation of concepts and findings.*

Angela: Indeed, your philosophical roots and broad humanistic vision are inseparable from who you are. Beyond these roles, I must highlight what many might overlook: your immense, often quiet, contribution to the international scholarly community. For decades, you have practised a form of intellectual generosity that is rare in our field. As Editor-in-Chief, you did more than manage a journal; you nurtured it as a sanctuary for diverse voices. Your meticulous attention to refining our language and your unwavering support for scholars from non-English speaking backgrounds have served as a vital bridge, enabling many of us to join the global dialogue. This lifelong stewardship—the countless hours spent polishing others' words and fostering their confidence—is, in my eyes, the true essence of your academic legacy.

Angela R5b: Interestingly, this reflection reminds me of the parable 'The Owl Moving Eastward'. It was my late father's favourite story — the only English story he knew from his childhood — and I vividly recall how proudly he recounted it to you in English when I invited you to visit my parents. In the story, an owl wishes to move east because its hooting is disliked in its current home, only to be cautioned by a dove that unless it can 'change its voice', moving east will be in vain. On the long journey of cross-cultural research, I, as the 'Owl', did not change my voice; rather, in my encounter with your 'Crane', I discovered a resonance that transcends conventional East–West dichotomies. True wisdom, I have come to believe, lies not in abandoning one's voice, but in allowing it to enter into meaningful dialogue with others across cultural contexts.

Carrying this profound scholarly heritage and the enduring rewards of our collaboration, in August 2024, I bid farewell to my career as a professor and to both domestic and international academic communities, taking early retirement and relocating to Tainan. Tainan, as the historic capital of Taiwan, embodies over four centuries of layered cultural development — from the Dutch, Qing and Japanese periods to the postwar era and the emergence of contemporary democratic Taiwan. For me, retirement and relocation do not signify a withdrawal from moral education; rather, they represent a more integrated and transformative phase of life. They extend the spirit of multi-paradigmatic inquiry that has shaped my academic career — an orientation grounded in curiosity, openness and inclusivity. While my previous work required sustained focus within specific domains, I now find the

freedom to engage more expansively with the world, returning to the agency and spirit of Taiwan through the living heritage of Tainan. Retirement has granted me the time and space to reflect, to act, and to process the full spectrum of life's experiences. In this sense, it has deepened both my resilience and my sense of fulfilment — perhaps reflecting the most personal meaning of my lifelong engagement with moral education.

Angela's Postscript

The process of responding to these questions has felt like a profound reflection on my life's journey: from the initial seeds of moral education sown during my student years, to the sustained and intensive research throughout my academic career, and eventually to my participation in the international scholarly community as a bridge between cultures. Since retiring, I have reconnected with my authentic self, re-examining my identity and reconnecting with the historical and cultural roots of Taiwan. Although this retrospective process has been demanding, it has yielded insights that are both significant for me and intellectually rewarding.

The five questions posed by Monica are profound and thought-provoking, engaging deeply with both professional and existential dimensions of life. It is through this reflective writing process that I have been able to enter into dialogue with my past at my own pace. In doing so, I am personally practising the spirit of integration — harmonising the diverse cultural and professional layers of my life — which is a core value we have always advocated in moral education.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Brian Gates for providing this platform through the Journal of Moral Education Trust website. I am truly honoured to be part of the 'Conversations with Moral Educators' series and to engage in this process with my dear colleague and friend, Monica. I believe that our lives will continue to unfold in diverse and meaningful ways, guided by our shared commitment to the advancement of moral education. I sincerely hope that readers can gain inspiration from this dialogue that transcends culture and personal life experience.

Tainan, Taiwan, April and May 2026

Monica's Postscript

Thank you, Angela, for your willingness to engage in this Conversation through the to and fro of written questions and answers in which you have reflected sincerely and openly about your professional and personal commitments to our field, providing rich cultural insights into Taiwanese society and moral education as well as insightful comments on Western theoretical frameworks and cross-cultural work in moral development and education. In so doing you have been more than generous about my contributions as an enabler, and, at the same time, I think that you have ably demonstrated your own intellectual abilities and personal strengths which not only made our cross-cultural collaboration possible and fruitful, but also underwrote all the many significant contributions you have made to moral education and development in Taiwan and internationally. Our exchange here in this

Conversation is a representation of the culmination of our appreciative friendship and respectful collegueship and your devotion to our field. Thank you.

Wakes Colne, England, April and May 2026