Divinity Revised: The De- and Re-Contextualization of Adolescent Divinity Reasoning in Globalizing Thailand

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Abstract

This article explores how globalization reshapes moral development in northern Thailand. Employing a cultural-developmental approach to examine interview data gathered over the course of one year, the article discusses variations in Divinity-based moral reasoning among adolescents residing in variously globalized Thai communities. Quantitative analysis shows that moral reasoning diverges across contexts of globalization, with rural adolescents reasoning more in terms of the Ethic of Divinity than urban adolescents. Qualitative analysis shows how the meaning of Divinity diverges, with the Ethic of Divinity co-occurring alongside the Ethic of Community among rural adolescents, and the Ethic of Divinity co-occurring alongside the Ethic of Autonomy among urban adolescents. Analyses further indicate that rural and urban adolescents invoke distinct Divinity principles altogether. Findings suggest that in urban settings, Divinity is decontextualized from traditional community-driven Thai Buddhism and recontextualized to align with values that are adaptive in a globalized society. This article contributes to, and offers suggestions for, the empirical study of the moral psychology of globalization. © 2019 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.
Moral psychology has recently witnessed a surge in empirical and theoretical scholarship addressing the culturally situated nature of this fundamental psychological phenomenon (e.g., DiBianca Fasoli, 2018; Jensen & McKenzie, 2016; Knight, Carlo, Basilio, & Jacobson, 2015). In this article, I extend the cultural focus to examine moral development in light of sociocultural and economic change. The present study explores how Divinity-based moral reasoning varies among adolescents growing up in northern Thai communities differentially affected by globalization. Employing a cultural-developmental approach, this article further offers theoretical and data analytic suggestions for the empirical study of the moral psychology of globalization.

Globalization in Thailand

Thailand has experienced dramatic economic growth over the past 30 years, transitioning from a low-income to an upper-middle-income country in less than a generation (World Bank, 2017). Urbanization, a process intimately linked to economic growth, has dramatically increased in Thailand in recent years; the percentage of Thai population residing in urban cities has risen from 31% in 2000 to 53% in 2017 (World Bank, 2018). In turn, the expansion of and movement to major Thai cities has enabled the pursuit of higher education and expanded career opportunities (World Bank Group, n.d.).

In Thailand, as in many other rapidly globalizing regions of the world, Gemeinschaft ecologies (rural, small scale, internally homogeneous, low in technology, and with a relatively poor, subsistence-based economy) are overwhelmingly transforming into Gesellschaft ecologies (urban, large scale, high in technology, and with a wealthy, commerce-based economy) (Greenfield, 2009). Greenfield’s theory holds that shifting sociodemographic variables—namely, urbanization, economic activity, and technology—alter cultural values, learning environments, and developmental pathways in rather dramatic ways. International research has widely supported Greenfield’s theory by linking increasing urbanization, economic means, and formal education to the endorsement of independence, self-reliance, choice, and autonomy—values which are adaptive in Gesellschaft, but not in Gemeinschaft, ecologies (Kağıtçıbaşi, 2017; Manago, 2012; McKenzie, 2018b). Little is known, though, about whether and how religious values are altered in nonsecular societies as a result of globalization-related sociodemographic shifts. Thailand is—as we shall see—an ideal location for this examination given both the tremendous historical significance of religion, and the extent to which it has changed in recent years.

Theravada Buddhism is the prevailing religion in Thailand. Indeed, polls suggest that Thailand is home to among the highest percentages of Buddhist adherents in the world (Pew Forum, 2012) and that it is among the most religious countries in the world (Gallup International Survey, 2014). Religious studies scholars and anthropologists have long pointed to the
embeddedness of Buddhism in the everyday lives, psychological processes, and moral frameworks of Thais (e.g., Cassaniti, 2015; Eberhardt, 2006). Swearer (1995) noted that the “moral ethos” of Theravada Buddhist countries such as Thailand is founded upon indigenous moral concepts of rebirth and karma (the belief that one’s actions in this life or previous lives affect current or future lives). Particularly in rural areas, Thais’ deep connection with the temple is evinced through a variety of modalities: merit-making practices (engaging in meritorious deeds for one’s soul) of offering alms to monks, community events centered on the temple, and temporary ordination as a monk constituting part of the traditional life course for Thai men and their families. Also core to Thai Buddhism is the five precepts, a set of moral guidelines which entail abstaining from killing, stealing, lying, intoxication, and sexual misconduct.

And yet, rapid economic and sociocultural change is modifying Thai Buddhist practices, including decreasing centrality and restricted roles of monks (Fuller, 2012), increasing consumerism from within religious institutions (Kittiarsa, 2008; Taylor, 1990), and shifting psychological orientations toward religious practices (McKenzie, Tsutsui, & Prakash, 2018). The latter study showed that rural Gemeinschaft-dwelling adolescents held an interdependent orientation toward religion, framing their religious practices as fundamentally relational. Urban Gesellschaft-dwelling adolescents held a primarily independent orientation toward religion, often qualifying their relational religious practices by emphasizing distinctions between their own and their parents’ religious practices and highlighting feelings of obligation that accompany practicing with family.

Thailand, then, is at once a very religious country and a country that is undergoing rapid economic and sociocultural change. Research suggests that adolescents’ psychological orientations toward religious practices diverge across communities differentially affected by globalization. We do not yet know, however, whether adolescents’ divergent orientations toward their religious practices manifest in considerations of their private moral worlds.

Morality, Divinity, and Culture

Jensen’s (2008, 2015) cultural-developmental approach offers a robust framework from which to study the potential moral implications of globalization. Bridging developmental psychological and anthropological insights, the cultural-developmental approach examines the cultural nature of morality and self across age groups and cultural communities by mapping use of three ethics of moral reasoning (Shweder, Much, Mahaputra, & Park, 2003). Briefly, the Ethic of Divinity focuses on the spiritual or religious self, and includes virtues of holiness, purity, and sanctity; the Ethic of Community focuses on the social self, and includes duty to others, and concern with the customs and welfare of groups; the Ethic of Autonomy
focuses on the individual self, and includes the interests, well-being, and rights of individuals (self and other). Cultural-developmental research has exposed variations in moral reasoning in Brazil (Guerra & Giner-Sorolla, 2015), Finland (Vainio, 2015), India (Kapadia & Bhangaokar, 2015), and the United States (Hickman & DiBianca Fasoli, 2015; Jensen & McKenzie, 2016).

The cultural-developmental approach is unique in its inclusion of the Ethic of Divinity, a component of moral reasoning that has long been neglected. Research on Divinity-based moral reasoning has uncovered distinct moral life course narratives among U.S. evangelical and mainline Protestant communities (McKenzie & Jensen, 2017). These narratives carry implications for community members’ meaning-making about their moral experiences and Divinity reasoning across the life course. Another study focusing on the moral conversations of evangelical Christian parent-child dyads found that parents were more likely to use Divinity, and children were more likely to use Autonomy, reasoning (DiBianca Fasoli, 2018). It was further shown that conversations typically involved multiple ethics—especially Divinity and Autonomy—and that parents employed Divinity justifications to align with or legitimize their child’s Autonomy reasoning, to counter their child’s Autonomy justification, and to scaffold Divinity reasoning through Autonomy reasoning. This study illustrates how co-occurring ethics relate to one another for evangelical youth being socialized into a moral outlook that prioritizes Divinity.

The Ethics of Divinity, Community, and Autonomy are further differentiated into sub-ethics (sixteen for Divinity, thirteen for Community, fifteen for Autonomy) (for Coding Manual, see Jensen, 2015). Divinity sub-ethic analyses have found that U.S. evangelical Protestant children, adolescents, and adults primarily employed Scriptural Authority and God’s Authority. Mainline adults, meanwhile, relied almost exclusively on God’s Authority (Jensen & McKenzie, 2016). Such analyses add a layer of understanding beyond evangelicals using more Divinity reasoning than mainliners by highlighting Scriptural Authority as a Divinity principle in the moral repertoire of evangelical, but not mainline, Protestants.

Though little is known about the moral developmental implications of globalization, research with adolescent-parent dyads in variously globalized Thai communities has pointed to a double-gap in moral reasoning across age groups and cultural communities (McKenzie, 2018b). That is, rural adolescents and parents’ moral reasoning were characterized by similitude, with the dominant ethic being Community. Urban adolescents and parents’ moral reasoning were characterized by divergence, with adolescents reasoning overwhelmingly with an ethic of Autonomy and parents invoking Autonomy and Community reasoning roughly equally. The dyadic moral disconnect in the urban—but not in the rural—setting suggests that shifts in moral reasoning and perceptions of selfhood accompany globalization-related sociodemographic shifts.
Current Study

This study examines the role of Divinity in the private moral worlds of adolescents residing in distinct Thai sociodemographic ecologies. To determine the interconnectedness between the Ethic of Divinity and other ethics and the manner in which these interconnections may change as a result of cultural change, it employs an ethical co-occurrence analysis on the moral discourses of rural Gemeinschaft-dwelling and urban Gesellschaft-dwelling Thai adolescents. To identify stability and transformation of indigenous moral concepts, it further investigates rural and urban adolescents’ Divinity sub-ethnic use.

Ethnographic Field Sites. Ethnographic fieldwork took place in northern Thailand from January to December 2012. The rural field site was Mae Kiaw (a pseudonym to protect the identities of those in this small community); the urban field site was Chiang Mai. In spite of their shared common history, language (Kam Muang: คำม่ำแยง), cuisine (Ahan Muang: อาหารเมือง), and geographic proximity (separated by a mere 25 miles), they constitute distinct sociodemographic ecologies.

Mae Kiaw’s six sub-districts have a total population of roughly 21,000. Rice fields and low-lying mountains pervade the district. The predominant profession is farming, and census data show that over 67% of the population has a primary education or less. Because there is just one high school in the entire district, many students who wish to complete secondary school must drive 1 hour up dangerous mountainous roads (typically on motorbike, the most common form of transit in the district) to reach their school. In part for this reason, but also due to the need for supplemental income and assistance on farms and in the home, it is not uncommon for adolescents to drop out before completing secondary school.

Chiang Mai’s sixteen sub-districts have a population of just over 234,000. This district is also home to Chiang Mai city, the largest city in northern Thailand. The city’s cultural and Buddhist significance (there are over thirty temples in the small city center alone) make it a popular tourist destination. Professions in Chiang Mai are highly diverse; the two most common professions are wage laborers (typically in the service industry) and students. Census data show that over 61% of the population have completed at least some high school, and a sizeable chunk of the population (22.8%) has a Bachelor’s Degree or higher. High school students have a wide variety of schools from which to choose, including government, private, and international schools.

Recruitment for this project began with visiting government high schools in each location. After building rapport with students, teachers, and administrators, adolescents interested in being interviewed provided contact information for themselves and their parents. Potential participants were then vetted according to the following criteria: (1) adolescents must reside in the district, (2) Chiang Mai adolescents must reside within a
10-mile radius of the school (to ensure a sufficiently urban sample); Mae Kiaw adolescents must reside within a 20-mile radius of the school (an expanded radius in this community was necessary due to very low population density), and (3) a parent of the adolescent must consent to their child being interviewed.

**Participant Demographics and Interview Procedure.** Forty adolescents ($M_{age} = 17.30, SD_{age} = 0.56$), evenly divided between rural and urban communities, participated in individual semi-structured interviews. Rural and urban participants alike included more females (fifteen and twelve, respectively) than males. Among rural adolescents, eighteen self-identified as Buddhist, one identified as Muslim, and one identified as Christian. Among urban adolescents, eighteen self-identified as Buddhist and two identified as Christian.

Evincing the distinct ecologies across field sites, parent education levels and annual family income (gathered from parents when they provided consent for their child to be interviewed) varied widely. Whereas most rural parents had either primary-level or no education, most urban parents had a Bachelor's Degree or higher. The average annual household income of urban families ($16,480) was over seven times more than the average annual household income of rural families ($2,250).

Adolescents determined interview date, location, and language. In the rural setting, the overwhelming majority of adolescents requested interviews at home (90%) and in Kam Muang (95%). In the urban setting, most adolescents requested interviews at school (65%) and in English (75%). No matter the interview location and language, I traveled alongside a local research assistant. A native speaker of the adolescent's preferred interview language led each interview; when in Kam Muang or Thai, I asked follow-up questions on occasion during the interview and conversed with participants before and after interviews. All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed.

**Interview Questions.** The section of the interview presently analyzed was a participant-generated private moral experience. The prompt was as follows:

Now I'm going to ask you to tell me about a time when you had an important experience that you think involved a moral issue. It could be a time when you did something that you think was morally right or morally wrong. Please first describe that experience, and then I'll ask you a few questions about it.

Follow-up questions included: “Do you think you behaved in a morally right or wrong way?” “Why?” and “Are there any other reasons you would like to mention?”

**Capturing Local Perspectives.** This research was calibrated to local norms, and local perspectives were captured, in four ways:
1. Data collection was preceded—this visit and while residing in Thailand several years prior—by my learning Thai and Kam Muang. Engaging in long-term fieldwork and language study enabled the cultural sensitivity necessary to establish rapport and trust among community members prior to and during data collection. Prolonged engagement in the field is also an important validity procedure within qualitative research (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

2. Prior to the initiation of this project, I consulted with Sociology and Anthropology faculty at Chiang Mai University to determine research locations and data collection procedures. I further worked closely with local informants and research assistants to develop relationships with administrators and teachers at the high schools from which adolescents were recruited, and spent time building relationships with adolescents via school visits.

3. My data collection procedure reflected indigenous practices in two key ways. First, traveling alongside a local research assistant reflected cultural practices—particularly in rural Thai regions—of traveling with others. Second, the interview question to which participants responded ensured that the issues discussed were personally and culturally relevant. Particularly in the rural community, data collection techniques that require the quantification of subjective states (e.g., questionnaires, scales) would be unfamiliar and thus threaten validity.

4. Indigenous practices were also followed in method of compensation. Rather than monetary reimbursement for their time, adolescents were given a gift (e.g., hat, notebook, wallet) to thank them for their participation.

**Ethic of Divinity Reasoning**

**Interview Categories and Coding.** The three most common categories of moral experience that participants discussed included instances of: helping (e.g., building a dam), social roles (e.g., working on the family farm when a relative is sick), and dishonesty/honesty (e.g., lying or telling the truth to others).

All interviews were coded for use of the Ethics of Divinity, Community, and Autonomy and accompanying sub-ethics, resulting in a total of 135 codes administered. A trained coder and I assessed inter-rater reliability on 20% of randomly selected interviews. Cohen's Kappa, calculated for use of the three ethics, was 1.0; there was 90.9% sub-ethic agreement. Differences of opinion were resolved through discussion.

**Amount of Divinity Reasoning.** An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare mean numbers of Divinity codes across rural and urban samples. Results revealed a significant difference in Ethic of Divinity reasoning between participant groups, \( t(22) = -2.51, p = .02, d = .79 \), with rural adolescents reasoning more in terms of the Ethic of Divinity.
Figure 4.1. Ethics used.

(M = 0.75, SD = 1.12) than urban adolescents (M = 0.10, SD = 0.31). Moreover, while 40% of rural adolescents used Divinity reasoning at least once, just 10% of urban adolescents used Divinity reasoning.

But is it simply that amount of Divinity reasoning differs across contexts of globalization, or does the meaning of Divinity also differ? To investigate this question, the remainder of this paper focuses on the moral reasoning of adolescents who employed the Ethic of Divinity.

**Ethical Co-Occurrence and Primacy.** To determine whether Divinity reasoning was used in isolation or co-arose alongside other lines of reasoning, interviews were labeled as either “divinity alone” (if Divinity justifications occurred only alongside other Divinity justifications) or “divinity co-occurrence” (if Divinity justifications co-occurred alongside Community or Autonomy justifications). This follows DiBianca Fasoli’s (2018) ethical co-occurrence analytic procedure.

Figure 4.1 displays ethics used by percent among Divinity-using rural and urban adolescents.

**Rural Adolescents.** The Ethic of Divinity accounted for most Divinity-using rural adolescent codes, followed by the Ethic of Community. Indeed, for this participant group, Divinity and Community reasoning often co-arose, and in some cases, were framed as inseparable.

Describing a moral experience of having given alms to monks, an 18-year-old girl wove between Divinity (her intent to make merit, and the negative fortune she accumulated for doing so incorrectly) and Community (having received a negative social sanction) reasoning, stating:

> When I went to the temple, I made merit. I intended to do something good—I gave alms to the monks. But there were some elders that commented about
me, “When you give alms to the monk, you should stand up!” They said the young [should] give alms to monks after the elders... So instead of getting merit, I got karma.

She went on to explain that this issue was important:

...because it is involved with morality—we have to be moral to live in society. We have to walk the Middle Path—we shouldn’t do too many bad deeds... Sometimes what they say is meant to teach me. I’m young and they’re mature.

Here, she invokes Community-based concerns by pointing to the necessity of behaving morally “to live in society,” and suggests that this is achieved by following the Buddhist doctrine of “walk[ing] the Middle Path.” By ultimately suggesting that she is “young and they are mature,” she points to the presumed role of elders as moral and spiritual educators.

Another 18-year-old girl spoke about participating in a traditional Thai dance at the temple. After taking several minutes to consider a moral experience, the conversation went as follows: “Can I say something about making merit? (I: You can say anything.) I went to make merit at the temple... [I danced in] Fon Lep, Fon Kan Dok, and Fon Sao Mai.” She explained that she behaved in a morally right way because she “made merit by helping villagers,” because “the monks asked me to help them, so I did,” and because “it’s about the temple—I got merit from dancing at the temple.” In this case, the participant referred to a moral experience with Divinity at its core (making merit at the temple) and indicated that doing so is morally right because it heeds the wishes of monks—important spiritually-defined persons. Her framing of helping villagers who attend the temple (a Community-oriented virtue) as a form of merit-marking indicates the intertwinedness of Divinity and Community for this participant.

For these and other rural adolescents, Community-based concerns were bookended by Divinity-based concerns. Three-quarters of rural adolescents’ moral experiences were instances in which they behaved exclusively or mostly in a morally right way; the most common instances involved assisting their local temple. It should be further noted that most rural adolescents who used Divinity reasoning led with that ethic. Such ethical primacy suggests that Divinity was at the fore of their minds.

**Urban Adolescents.** Among Divinity-using urban adolescents, the Ethic of Autonomy accounted for most codes, followed by the Ethic of Divinity (see Figure 4.1).

For this participant group, Divinity reasoning co-occurred alongside—and after—Autonomy reasoning. One 17-year-old girl shared a personal moral experience of having lied to her family, not telling them about a potentially serious medical issue. She explained that this was, in part, morally right because, “My mom—she’s busy with her work. And if she
worries about me—her work, and my sister, and my father, and me—it's kind of, you know, I want her to be relaxed.” Here she employs Autonomy-based reasoning, considering her moral action in light of another person's psychological well-being (namely, her mother's potential distress). She explained, though, that this action was also morally wrong “because I'm not telling the truth—and I'm Buddhist, and there's the five precepts. You know, I don't want to tell a lie . . . but if I tell the truth, what will happen next?” Here she invokes Divinity reasoning, referring to the Buddhist precept of abstaining from false speech.

Let us now turn to a 17-year-old boy who recalled having stolen money from classmates in elementary school. In the excerpt below, he first employs Autonomy (by focusing on the interests of the person from whom he stole), then Divinity (by referring to Buddhist precepts), and finally, Autonomy (by discussing the psychological well-being of his mother).

I Do you think you acted in a morally right or wrong way?
P Wrong.
I And why do you think it was wrong?
P Taking other people's stuff isn't good.
I And why isn't that good? Why is that wrong?
P It makes trouble to the person we stole from—maybe they don't have any money.
I Oh, OK—it negatively impacts the other person. Any other reasons why it was the wrong thing to do?
P It's wrong in Buddhism . . . I don't know which precept, but I know it's one of the Buddhist rules.
I It's not good in terms of Buddhism either?
P Mmmmm. Well—when I stole money, I felt happy. But, when I got caught I felt bad—my mother came to school and she cried . . . I felt sad.
I Why [did you feel] sad?
P Because I made my mother cry.

Here, Divinity reasoning is sandwiched between Autonomy reasons. We also see that Divinity came up only after he was probed for an additional reason by the interviewer. Finally, his mention of not “know[ing] which precept” he had violated suggests a foggy understanding of the Buddhist precepts.

The co-arising of Autonomy and Divinity among urban adolescents indicates a sharp contrast with rural adolescents’ conceptions of divinity. The arising of Divinity reasoning only after framing their behavior in light of Autonomy indicates that conceptions of persons as autonomous individuals is at the fore of urban adolescents' minds.

Types of Divinity Reasoning. An analysis of Divinity sub-ethics used by each participant group revealed that rural and urban adolescents relied on different Divinity principles altogether.

As seen in Figure 4.2, rural adolescents invoked a variety of Divinity sub-ethics when speaking about their behaviors. Of the ten sub-ethics used,
Interest of Self’s Soul, Interest of Other’s Soul, and Important Spiritually-Defined Person’s Authority were most common. Moreover, half of rural adolescents who reasoned in terms of Divinity employed more than one Divinity sub-ethic. (See Table 4.1 for description of Divinity Sub-Ethics relevant for this study.)

In the earlier example of the rural adolescent who gave alms to monks, she invoked Interest of Self’s Soul by referring to her intention of making merit; she also invoked Karma by referring to the bad fortune she received for having done this incorrectly.

An 18-year-old boy who spoke about having spent a week at a Buddhist retreat invoked three Divinity sub-ethics. Speaking about the moral good of contributing to the temple’s development by cleaning the toilet, he invoked Means-End reasoning. Speaking about volunteering at the temple as facilitating others’ merit-making, he explained, “I did it for the public—for people who came to practice Buddhist teachings. They’ll get merit”; here, he invoked Interest of Other’s Soul. Finally, he explained that he did something that was not morally right while there: he snuck in some snacks. Here, he invoked Duty-based Divinity reasoning, explaining that this was wrong “because when I went there, well—they had rules for us, and I broke the rules.”

Urban adolescents, in contrast, used one Divinity sub-ethic: Scriptural Authority. (This sub-ethic was conspicuously absent in rural adolescent...
### Table 4.1. Divinity Sub-Ethics Relevant for This Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Divinity Sub-Ethic</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interest of Self’s Soul</td>
<td>When the interest promoted or hindered pertains to the self’s spiritual interests, status, or soul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest of Other’s Soul</td>
<td>When the interest promoted or hindered pertains to another person’s spiritual interests, status, or soul</td>
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<tr>
<td>Important Person’s Authority</td>
<td>Important persons have taught or exemplified that it is wrong or right. Use Ethic of Divinity when the person is seen as a representative of God or the divine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scriptural Authority</td>
<td>The scriptures have stated in the form of injunction or as revealed truth that it is wrong or right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God’s Authority</td>
<td>God has indicated or exemplified by action or otherwise that it is wrong or right. Doing what is pleasing or not pleasing to God. This category includes references to violating the sacred, committing sacrilege</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customary or Traditional Authority (of spiritual/religious nature)</td>
<td>Practices or traditions or customs go against it and indicate it is wrong or encourage it and indicate it is right. It is what we do, or what we do not do. Use Ethic of Divinity when the tradition or custom is religious, when a tradition or custom is seen as having a divine origin or being divinely sanctioned</td>
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<tr>
<td>Karma6</td>
<td>The belief that one’s actions in this life or previous lives affect the current or future lives. It can refer to having already accumulated good or bad fortune, or to karmic repercussions as a result of the accumulated good or bad fortune</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duty (as spiritual/religious being)</td>
<td>An obligation of station to behave in certain ways in certain circumstances due to one's status or position (e.g., Muslim, Brahmin, etc.). The category includes absolution from duty. Use Ethic of Divinity when the duties obtain due to a person's status as a human being, or as a faithful person, or result from being sworn to uphold a divine order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Means-Ends Considerations: Ends of Religion6</td>
<td>When means serve religious or divine ends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward Seeking (from God[s])</td>
<td>Action is or should be done so that actor can receive benefits from God(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtues (divinity-oriented)</td>
<td>Attitude or trait that, if manifested in the situation, would make behavior right and, if not manifested, would make behavior wrong. If informant talks about vice, then manifestation of attitude or trait would make the behavior wrong, and absence of trait or attitude would make it right. Also habitual manner of action. Virtues include gratitude, respect, devotion, loyalty, sympathy, love, etc. Use Ethic of Divinity when the virtues pertain to a person's status as a transcendental being, or when the virtues pertain to traditions that have a divine basis</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Source: Jensen (2015).*
Both urban adolescents whose discourse was represented above referred to having violated Buddhist precepts. The girl who lied to her parents about her medical condition said she had violated the precept of abstaining from false speech; the boy who stole money from classmates said he had violated the precept of abstaining from taking what is not given.

**Discussion**

Let us now consider the constellation of findings in each cultural context, and what these findings elucidate about the intersection of globalization, moral reasoning, and religion.

Compared to urban adolescents, rural adolescents reasoned more in terms of the Ethic of Divinity. That rural Divinity-using adolescents primarily discussed morally right actions suggests a proactive conceptualization of morality. Rural adolescents’ Divinity reasoning was also used alongside Community reasoning, and the wide range of Divinity principles invoked speaks to the nuanced and multifaceted nature of Divinity in this sociodemographic ecology. Urban adolescents reasoned comparatively less in terms of the Ethic of Divinity. That urban Divinity-using adolescents discussed morally wrong actions suggests a prohibitive conceptualization of morality. Urban adolescents’ Divinity reasoning was also used alongside Autonomy reasoning, and the exclusive focus on Scriptural Authority indicates a restricted Divinity in this sociodemographic ecology.

Previous research which included both Divinity- and non-Divinity-using rural and urban Thai adolescents indicated that Divinity was in fact not the overall dominant ethical discourse in either community (McKenzie, 2018b). Among rural adolescents, the Ethic of Community was primary; among urban adolescents, the Ethic of Autonomy was primary. The current analysis indicates that Divinity reasoning functions to support adolescents’ primary conceptions of the moral self. In the rural Gemeinschaft ecology where Community reasoning reigns, the self is conceptualized as an office holder (Shweder et al., 2003). In such relatively self-contained Thai Gemeinschaft environments where people rely on proximal others—kin and nonkin—throughout the life course, Divinity serves Community reasoning. Indeed, in this context, divinity is the thread that knits together self and other.

Rural adolescents’ interweaving of Divinity and Community, and the embeddedness of Divinity in relationships can be meaningfully understood alongside Menon’s (2002) work, which suggests that surrendering the self to others and knowing one’s position are perceived pathways of cultivating a divine self in India. Rural Thai adolescent discourse indicates that the divine self is similarly cultivated via surrendering the self to others (local villagers, monks, and laypeople) and recognizing one’s subordinate position (e.g., the adolescent who reflected on her immaturity and ignorance compared to temple-going elders). For this participant group, fulfilling obligations is a
spiritual endeavor. It is also telling that among the many Divinity principles invoked by rural adolescents, several (Interest in Other’s Soul, Important Spiritually Defined Person’s Authority, Duty) link directly to other spiritual beings.

Urban adolescents’ interweaving of Divinity and Autonomy must be situated alongside the discourses of choice, competition, and individual success to which they are exposed in school and at home (McKenzie, 2018a, 2018b). Religious virtues that are adaptive in the rural Gemeinschaft community (surrendering the self to others, acknowledging one’s subordinate position) may undermine virtues that are adaptive in the urban Gesellschaft society (concern for the rights, needs, and well-being of autonomous individuals). Urban adolescents’ singular focus on Scriptural Authority—abiding by Buddhist precepts—aligns with their primarily Autonomous moral framework. Adhering or not adhering to particular precepts may disturb other individuals (e.g., by inconveniencing another person or by negatively impacting another person’s psychological state); it is less likely, however, to affect the collective social and moral order. An autonomous and scriptural authority-driven divinity is, it appears, a more functional form of divinity in a Gesellschaft ecology where values of independence, self-reliance, and choice are prioritized.

Taken together, data suggest that Thai Buddhism detaches from its historical intertwinedness with community in an urban Gesellschaft ecology. In such ecologies, where the self is adaptively conceived as an individual preference structure (Shweder et al., 2003), Divinity is folded into this primarily autonomous orientation. The proposal is thus that increasing wealth, urbanization, and education facilitate a transition from interdependent to more independent value orientations, which in turn alters the moral frameworks through which adolescents view the divine self.

Thai Buddhism expert Brooke Shedneck (2015) has argued that the study of religion in modernity “should not center on measuring people’s increase or decrease in religious behavior, but instead on the decontextualization of religious practice from its institutional framework” (p. 3). Though Schedneck’s research focuses on the decontextualization of meditation from its Thai Buddhist context among international meditators and tourists, data presented here suggest a decontextualization of divinity from its traditional community-driven context among Thai natives residing in urban settings. And yet, data also indicate that Thai adolescents recontextualize divinity to align with autonomous values that are adaptive in a globalized Gesellschaft ecology.

I will close this section by noting limitations and future directions. Adolescents both volunteered to take part in this study and volunteered moral experiences. As such, these findings may not generalize to the Divinity reasoning of adolescents growing up in other rapidly globalizing communities and societies. Indeed, the globalization-based implications of moral reasoning are bound to be culturally variable (McKenzie,
in press). In addition, rural and urban ecologies were used as proxies to examine Gemeinschaft-to-Gesellschaft transitions (Greenfield, 2009). Prolonged engagement in Thailand and in other rapidly globalizing societies is critical in order to track Gemeinschaft-to-Gesellschaft sociodemographic shifts and their developmental ramifications on the ground.

Conclusion

The distinct constellations of adolescent moral reasoning suggest an altered form and function of divinity in the Gemeinschaft-to-Gesellschaft transition in this historically nonsecular society. Divinity is less integrated into the private moral sphere of adolescents growing up in urban Gesellschaft than in rural Gemeinschaft ecologies. And yet, Divinity does not completely drop out of moral reasoning; rather, it is reconstituted as the types of Divinity principles considered narrow, and as Divinity detaches from Community and attaches to Autonomy—a line of moral thought that is adaptive in a globalized Gesellschaft ecology.

This study also contributes suggestions for the empirical examination of the implications of globalization on moral reasoning. First, it demonstrates the utility of the cultural-developmental approach and of ethical co-occurrence analyses to track shifting ethical constellations as societies undergo economic and sociocultural change. Second, and relatedly, it demonstrates the utility of layered, mixed methods analyses. The inclusion of qualitative data collection and analytic methodologies brought religious moral reasoning into focus by capturing the distinct roles that Divinity serves in the psychological realities of adolescents in each setting. Third, it illustrates the utility of assessing moral reasoning via private, participant-generated moral experiences. Doing so aids in understanding the moral worlds traversed by adolescents growing up in variously globalized cultural communities.

Notes

1. For a comprehensive overview of personal moral experiences discussed, see McKenzie (2018b).
2. Because Levene's test indicated that equal variances could not be assumed (\(F = 22.64, p < .001\)), degrees of freedom were adjusted from 38 to 22.
3. “I” refers to lead interviewer; “P” refers to participant.
4. These are different types of traditional northern Thai dance.
5. At Buddhist retreats, laity are expected to maintain monk's schedules of eating only in the morning.
6. These sub-ethics were added following McKenzie's (2014, 2018b) qualitative analysis of Thai interview data on moral issues.

References


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