

Character-building education for children and adolescents in Hong Kong: What can we learn from research?

**Daniel TL Shek^{1*}, PhD, FHKPS, BBS, SBS,
JP, Britta M Lee¹, MA, Lu Yu¹, PhD,
Li Lin¹, PhD, Cecilia Ma², PhD,
Florence Wu³, EdD, Hildie Leung¹ PhD,
and Moon Law², PhD**

¹Department of Applied Social Sciences,
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University,
Hong Kong, PR China

²Hong Kong College of Technology,
Hong Kong, PR China

³Faculty of Education,
The University of Hong Kong,
Hong Kong, PR China

Abstract

To promote our understanding of moral behavior of adolescents as well as moral and civic education in Hong Kong, Wofoo Foundation collaborated with The Hong Kong Polytechnic University to conduct five studies. While the first three studies are survey studies examining the issues from the perspectives of high school students, teachers and parents, the fourth and fifth studies reviewed moral and character education in Hong Kong and examined the views of principals and teachers on moral and civic education, respectively. In this paper, we present the major findings and recommendations of these studies and integrate them for future service, policy and research considerations.

Keywords: Adolescence, children, moral behavior, character building, education, Hong Kong

Introduction

There are concerns about moral and character development in young people. Twenge et al. (1) suggested that young people show egocentric characteristics and they generally perceive themselves to be better than others. At the same time, there is evidence showing that empathy declines in young people (2, 3). Such worrying phenomena reflect that there is a need to understand the nature of moral and character development in young people, and review whether moral and character education policies and curriculum are effective.

To enrich our understanding of character development in adolescents in Hong Kong, with the financial support from Wofoo Foundation, researchers at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University launched a collaborative project entitled “Character building – A shared mission for a better future” to examine moral

* **Correspondence:** Daniel TL Shek, PhD, FHKPS, BBS, SBS, JP, Interim Vice-President (Research and Innovation), Associate Vice President (Undergraduate Programme), Chair Professor of Applied Social Sciences and Li and Fung Professor in Service Leadership Education, Department of Applied Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hunghom, Hong Kong, PR China. Email: daniel.shek@polyu.edu.hk

attributes in young people in Hong Kong and review moral and character education in Hong Kong. To achieve this overall objective, five studies were conducted (4-8). In the first three studies, character development in high school students was studied based on the responses of students, teachers and parents, respectively. The research design in these studies is presented in Table 1. In the fourth study, we

reviewed moral and civic education policies in Hong Kong with reference to other Western (UK and USA) and non-Western countries and areas (Singapore and Taiwan). In the final study, we conducted a qualitative study to understand the perceptions of moral and civic education in Hong Kong and the related implementation issues.

Table 1. Information of the three quantitative studies under the project

	Study 1: Student Survey	Study 2: Teacher Survey	Study 3: Parent Survey
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand adolescents' perceptions of moral character, psychosocial competence, and social behavior in their own To understand adolescents' perception of the above-mentioned aspects in Hong Kong adolescents To understand adolescents' perception of their family and school life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand teachers' perceptions of the moral attributes of adolescents To discuss the role of teachers in moral development of adolescents Collect teachers' views on the implementation of moral and civil education through quantitative research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand parents' perceptions of the moral character, psychosocial competence, and social behavior in their children To investigate parents' perception of the moral attributes of Hong Kong adolescents To examine parents' perceived parental behavior and parent-child relations
No. of participating schools	20 Schools	11 Schools	9 Schools
No. of participants	2, 474 high school students	568 secondary school teachers	431 parents or guardians
Gender distribution of participants	1,123 Male 1,271 Female 80 participants did not indicate their gender	216 Male 345 Female 7 participants did not indicate their gender	101 Male 323 Female 7 participants did not indicate their gender
Method	Written questionnaire	Written questionnaire	Written questionnaire

Study 1: Character development in high school students (student survey)

This study covers seven research questions as follows:

- Questions 1-3: What are the perceptions of adolescents of their character traits (Research Question 1), psychosocial competences (Research Question 2), and social behavior (Research Question 3)?

- Questions 4-6: What are the perceptions of high school students of the character traits (Research Question 4), psychosocial competences (Research Question 5), and social behavior (Research Question 6) of Hong Kong adolescents in general?
- Question 7: What are the perceptions of adolescents of their family and school lives?

In total, 2,474 secondary school students (Mean age = 14.8 years) from 20 schools participated in the

study and responded to a self-report questionnaire containing measures of their character, psychosocial competences, social behavior, family lives and school lives. Several observations can be highlighted:

1. In contrast to other studies (e.g., The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups, 1997), around one-fifth to one-fourth of the students displayed signs of materialism and egocentrism.
2. While most respondents saw themselves as possessing many good character qualities, some of them indicated that they lacked some good character traits such as diligence.
3. Most students agreed on the importance of moral character. However, a significant proportion of them did not show a positive evaluation of Hong Kong adolescents' morality.
4. Comparing with junior high school students, senior secondary school students showed higher levels of materialism and egocentrism, and lower levels of social trust and life satisfaction.
5. Generally speaking, the participants had favorable perceptions of themselves as compared with those based on general Hong Kong adolescents.
6. Students considered family, school and peer as the most important factors that influenced their character development. In contrast, they underestimated the influence of the media and the Internet.
7. Most of the students considered general Hong Kong adolescents' psychosocial competences as mediocre.
8. Many students endorsed the importance of life skills, but they thought moral education and life skills education were insufficient.
9. The overall social trust of students was low, especially their trust toward the government and political parties.
10. Most of the students positively rated their fulfillment of responsibilities, but they still showed a lower level of fulfillment in some areas (e.g., caring about the community, Hong Kong, and the country).

11. Although the prosocial attitudes of students were positive, they seldom engaged in prosocial behavior.
12. Students' overall perception of school life was positive, but a considerable proportion of them reported that punitive techniques were frequently used in their schools.

Study 2: Character development in high school students (teacher survey)

Based on the data collected from 568 teachers recruited from 11 high schools in Hong Kong, there are three major objectives of the study: a) to compare the perceived moral character qualities of their students and those based on Hong Kong Chinese adolescents in general; b) to explore teachers' views of their role in moral education, and c) to examine teachers' perceptions of moral education policy and its implementation in high schools. In the survey, teachers were invited to respond to a self-report questionnaire. Several points can be highlighted:

1. Although nearly half of the teachers perceived Hong Kong Chinese adolescents possessed good character traits, 67.3% of them perceived that there was a decline in morality among Hong Kong adolescents.
2. Most respondents perceived that Hong Kong adolescents were materialistic.
3. Many teachers agreed that there was room for improvement regarding adolescents' sense of responsibility (85.0%), emotional competence (97.5%) and ability to cope with adversities (98.8%).
4. Generally speaking, teachers saw the qualities in their students to be more positive than in general adolescent population.
5. Around 80% of the respondents agreed that teachers and schools played an important role in adolescent moral development. Over 90% of the teachers agreed that they should teach moral values and serve as role models for students.
6. Around 60% of the teachers had positive perceptions of school policies and the

implementation of moral and civic education. Most respondents expressed their willingness to spend time in studying related policies and attending professional training programs and courses related to moral and civic education.

7. Around one-fifth of the respondents disagreed that the Education Bureau had provided clear instructions and only around one-fifth perceived that there were adequate resources for moral education.

Study 3: Character development in high school students (parent survey)

Based on the responses of 431 parents recruited from nine high schools in Hong Kong, there are ten research questions in this study:

1. Questions 1-3: How do parents perceive the character characteristics (Research Question 1), psychosocial competence (Research Question 2), and social behavior (Research Question 3) of their adolescent children?
2. Questions 4-6: How do parents perceive the character characteristics (Research Question 4), psychosocial competence (Research Question 5), and social behavior (Research Question 6) of Hong Kong adolescents in general?
3. Question 7: How do parents perceive their character strengths?
4. Question 8: Do parents' perceptions of the character characteristics, psychosocial competence, and social behaviors of their children and their perceptions of Hong Kong adolescents in general differ?
5. Question 9: Are parents' perceptions of their character strengths and those based on their children different?
6. Question 10: What are parents' perceptions of parenting practices and relationship with their children?

Several findings of the study are worth noting:

1. Generally speaking, parents had positive perceptions of their children's character

traits, psychosocial competence, and social behavior.

2. Some parents worried about their children's morality, such as materialism.
3. Some parents perceived that their children were sometimes egocentric, did not do housework or care about Hong Kong, the country, the society, and the world.
4. Parents tended to perceive their children as less materialistic and egocentric, and having higher levels of psychosocial competences, character traits, and social behaviors than the general population of Hong Kong adolescents.
5. Parents perceived that both their children and Hong Kong adolescents had a high level of trust towards the police and courts of Hong Kong, with a relatively low level of trust towards government and different political parties.
6. Parents perceived that Hong Kong young people did not have a high level of morality, and their moral level was decreasing.
7. While most parents endorsed the importance of psychosocial competences, they perceived that the psychosocial competence of Hong Kong adolescents was weak, and schools did not provide sufficient knowledge and training in this aspect.
8. Parents generally had a positive evaluation of their own parenting practices and relationship with children.
9. Parents tended to perceive themselves as more morally competent compared to their children.

Study 4: Review of moral and civic education in Hong Kong

This study reviewed moral and character education in Hong Kong as well as related policies and implementation strategies in different Chinese communities and other countries. Conceptually, the study pointed out that there was a need to clarify concepts related to morality, character, and citizenship, and to clarify how these concepts were related to social and emotional learning (SEL), positive youth

development (PYD), and 21st century skills. Based on a review of moral development and character development in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America, several problems of the moral and civic education policies in Hong Kong were identified. These include: 1) lack of systematic and long-term planning; 2) slow development of moral and character education; 3) blurred concepts and lack of strong conceptual framework; 4) weak emphasis of moral and character education comparing with academic subjects; 5) problems of the “penetrative” approach in program implementation; 6) lack of evidence-based curriculum; 7) implementation problems in moral education and civic education; and 8) inadequate and unsystematic evaluation in moral and civic education.

With reference to the above problems, several recommendations were proposed, including 1) critically review the existing policies as well as moral and character education; 2) review the content of moral and character education with reference to social and emotional learning and 21st century skills elements; 3) propose moral and character education to be an independent subject; 4) collaborate with other social systems (particularly the family and community systems) to promote moral and character development in students; 5) step up teacher’s training and cultivate healthy school culture; 6) regularly conduct studies on adolescent’s moral and character development, as well as psychological and social competencies of adolescents; and 7) promote systematic evaluation research, particularly on program effectiveness.

Study 5: Qualitative study based on school principals and teachers

This qualitative study investigated the perceptions of principals and teachers on moral education and civic education (MCE) among Hong Kong primary and high schools. We conducted ten sessions of focus groups involving twenty-six principals in primary schools and high schools and six high school teachers with reference to seven research questions:

1. What are the perceived meanings and significance regarding moral education for children and adolescents?
2. Regarding the official and school-based policies in the implementation of moral education, what are the understanding of the stakeholders?
3. How do principals and teachers perceive the leadership in promoting moral education for children and adolescents?
4. What are the perceptions of principals and teachers on the resources from Education Bureau (EDB) and school?
5. What is the understanding of the principals and teachers regarding the implementation of moral education in school?
6. Do the informants see any benefits in advocating moral education in school settings?
7. Are the informants ready in implementing moral education and what are the challenges involved?

Several interesting observations can be extracted from the findings:

1. The informants pointed out that the MCE was very important for primary and high school students.
2. Creative adjustments in implementing related policies in MCE consistent with school missions and background were carried out by schools.
3. School leadership was identified as an important factor in implementing MCE.
4. Resources and support from the Education Bureau were seen as inadequate. Integration of official materials with school-based designs was difficult.
5. Tailor-made teaching materials were preferred and desired.
6. The informants saw the benefits of moral and civic education in the students as well as in the teachers.
7. Heavy workload in teaching academic subjects was regarded as a constraint which reduced the time and capacity of the teachers in developing moral, and civic education in the school context.

Table 2. Recommendations based on Study 1

Finding	Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roughly one-fourth of the students showed signs of materialism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening value education Exploring ways to promote positive values in adolescents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> About one-fifth of the students showed egocentric attributes More than half of them showed empathy, but some were deficit in some areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening adolescent psychosocial competence such as empathy Promoting prosocial intention and competence in students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most students believed they have good character, but there were deficiencies in some areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening character education Exploring how to implement character education and related activities Exploring discrepancies between self-perceptions and perceptions by others
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most students saw the importance of morality More than half of the students saw the moral standard of Hong Kong adolescents to be “mediocre” Students saw their morality and character to be better than those of their peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing positive guidance to students Strengthening character education Promoting self-understanding in students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students believed that family, school and peers influence moral development. In contrast, they saw the influence of media and Internet to be smaller 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening parent-based character education Strengthening school-based character education Promoting psychosocial competence of students to counteract undesirable peer influence Helping students understand the influence of media and Internet on their behaviors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More than three-tenths of the students showed low life satisfaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening mental health education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most students saw that psychosocial competence of adolescents was not strong One-fourth of students saw the inadequacy of moral education Most students saw the importance of life skills, but half of them saw the inadequacies of related education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening positive youth development education Implementing personal development subjects/programs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social trust was not strong, particularly trust of the Central Government, Hong Kong Government and political parties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploring the causes of low trust Promoting social trust in young people
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Socially responsible behavior was fine but there are deficiencies in some areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting socially responsible behaviors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prosocial behavior was low Prosocial attitude was fine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing Service Learning and community services for students Promoting compassion in students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compared with mothers, paternal control and understanding of children was lower 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening family life education for parents and adolescents Promoting school-parent communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School atmosphere was fine, but was seen to have excessive punishment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflecting on school climate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compared with junior high school students, senior high school students were more materialistic, egocentric, with lower social trust and life satisfaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offering mental health education for students Strengthening value education in senior high school students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students had more favorable evaluation of oneself relative to others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting self-understanding and realistic perceptions

Table 3. Recommendations based on Study 2

Finding	Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roughly four-tenth of the teachers perceived that the moral standard of students was low • Roughly 70% of the teachers believed that there was a downward trend in student morality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening moral and civic education quality and weight in the curriculum
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most students believed they have good character • Character deficiencies in some areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening character education • Exploring how to implement character education and related activities • Exploring discrepancies between self-perceptions and perceptions by others
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Around 70% of the teachers indicated that the psychosocial competence of students was weak 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening psychosocial competence training in moral and civic education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 90% of the teachers viewed that young people lack life skills • More than 70% of the teachers viewed that life skills education in school is inadequate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening life skills education focusing on soft skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 40% of the teachers viewed that students lacked respect for the traditional culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting young people's interest in traditional Chinese culture
Finding	Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Character development is shaped by multiple factors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investing concerted effort to promote character development in young people
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Around 30% of the teachers viewed that their communication with the school leadership was inadequate • 70% of the teachers were willing to understand moral and civic education • 30% of the teachers shared that they lack exchanges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting internal communication amongst colleagues in the school context • Having regular meetings with teachers on the development of moral education and exchange of experience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 60% of the teachers were willing to receive training on moral and civic education • Roughly 30% of the moral and civic education curriculum lacks variation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting teaching quality through teacher training
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Around 30% of the colleagues viewed that the work of EDB in implementing moral and civic education was inadequate and the direction was not clear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building a platform to have regular exchanges for schools and teachers on successful experience • Winning more support from EDB

Table 4. Recommendations based on Study 3

Finding	Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roughly one-fifth of the parents viewed their children as materialistic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivating positive values in adolescents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A significant proportion of the parents viewed that their children were egocentric 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening psychosocial competence of students • Strengthening prosocial motive, attitude and skills in students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While parents viewed their children as having good character attributes in some areas, they also showed concerns over some areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting character education in students either via school or family
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 80% of the parents perceived that the moral standard of Hong Kong adolescents was mediocre or low • More than half of the parents perceived that the moral standard of young people was declining • Parents saw morality and character of their children to be better than adolescents in general 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting positive values in high school students • Strengthening character education • Encouraging more self-critical views of parents and young people
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents believed that peer influence is the most important factor affecting youth development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting adolescent psychosocial competences to resist bad peer influence • Helping parents understand the potential influence of moral development in adolescents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most parents viewed psychosocial competencies in students as weak • More than 90% of the parents viewed that life skills are important • Roughly 60% of the parents viewed that life skills education in school is inadequate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening adolescent psychosocial competencies • Developing and implementing more PYD programs • Strengthening moral education resources • Helping schools cultivate the importance of life skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents perceived that social trust amongst their children was low 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring the factors leading to low social trust • Exploring the ways to promote social trust • Creating an environment leading to social trust
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents saw their children engaging in socially responsible behavior • Socially responsible behavior was seen to be more negative in adolescents in general 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting social responsibility in students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental self-evaluation was better than that for students, which was better than that for adolescents in general 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivating more realistic perceptions of oneself, students and adolescents in general

Table 5. Recommendations based on Study 4

Finding	Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of progress on moral and civic education in the past decades 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transformation and healthy evolution of the related policies should keep in pace with societal changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of coordinated planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moral education policies should be devised with reference to youth policy, family policy, social development policy, health policy and education policy Orchestration across government departments is much needed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blurred moral education concepts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moral education concepts must be based on well-articulated theoretical foundations and research findings Building links between theories on moral development, character development, citizenship, 21st century skills, social-emotional learning, and holistic development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moral development received little attention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The weight on academic subjects and character education subjects in the curriculum should be reconsidered.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Penetration” approach weakens moral education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More solid emphasis on moral education Separating moral education from other subjects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of systematic moral and character education curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing evidence-based moral and character education curriculum materials
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of holistic implementation strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formulation of holistic implementation strategies involving key stakeholders Systematic training programs for teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of evaluation on moral education programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systematic evaluation of moral education programs

Table 6. Recommendations based on Study 5

Finding	Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants believed in the importance of moral and civic education for primary and high school students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reinforce such positive beliefs to motivate teachers Uphold the importance of moral and civic education with the evidence of empirical studies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools made creative adaptations in implementing moral and civic education consistent with the school mission and background attributes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging the adaptations and accommodation Sharing of integrated and innovative practice among teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledgement of the significant role of school leadership in driving moral and civic education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mobilizing school leaders and arising teachers’ concern Providing trainings for school leaders in launching moral and civic education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inadequate resources and support from the Education Bureau Difficult to integrate materials provided by EDB and school-based programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EDB should develop more resources More support from the Government
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers welcomed tailor-made materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tailor-made materials should be developed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledge the benefits of moral and civic education in promoting the development of teachers and students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reinforcing this belief Documenting the benefits of moral and civic education on student and teacher development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited time and capacity to develop moral and civic education materials because of heavy workload in teaching the academic subjects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policies to reduce the heavy workload of teachers are needed Providing extra resources to teachers

Discussion and overall recommendations

After integrating the findings in these five studies, several recommendations are proposed. First, as significant proportions of adolescents in Hong Kong were regarded as showing signs of materialism (Table 7), there is a necessity for stepping up value and character education in Hong Kong. Second, many adolescents are perceived as egocentric (Table 8). Hence, helping adolescents to look at themselves in a realistic manner and appreciating other people is

important. Third, more efforts to step up respect for the traditional Chinese culture are needed (Table 9). Fourth, participants endorsed the importance of moral character and they expressed deep concern on the moral attributes of Hong Kong adolescents (Table 10). Hence, the evidence strongly suggests the need of stepping up moral education in Hong Kong. Fifth, the participants had negative perceptions of psychosocial competencies in adolescents in Hong Kong (Table 11).

Table 7. Participants' perception of materialism (students, teachers and parents)

Items	Comparison between students, teachers, and parents			In HK adolescents		
	Students' perception in their own	Teachers' perception in their students	Parents' perception in their children	Students' perception in HK adolescents	Teachers' perception in HK adolescents	Parents' perception in HK adolescents
	4+5 n(%)	4+5 n(%)	4+5 n(%)	4+5 n(%)	4+5 n(%)	4+5 n(%)
I/My students/My child/HK adolescents believe that making money is more important than any other things	<i>741</i> (30.0%)	<i>290</i> (51.1%)	<i>85</i> (19.8%)	<i>1113</i> (45.1%)	<i>396</i> (69.9%)	<i>162</i> (38.0%)
I/My students/My child/ HK adolescents believe that making money is everything	<i>438</i> (17.7%)	<i>186</i> (32.8%)	<i>58</i> (13.6%)	<i>1089</i> (44.1%)	<i>320</i> (56.5%)	<i>152</i> (35.6%)
I/My students/My child/ HK adolescents believe that the rich can get respect from others	<i>469</i> (19.1%)	<i>254</i> (44.8%)	<i>83</i> (19.6%)	<i>1117</i> (45.3%)	<i>396</i> (69.9%)	<i>190</i> (44.8%)
I/My students/My child/ HK adolescents would abandon some principles for the sake of money	<i>144</i> (5.9%)	<i>140</i> (24.9%)	<i>24</i> (5.7%)	<i>811</i> (32.9%)	<i>310</i> (54.7%)	<i>110</i> (25.9%)
I/My students/My child/ HK adolescents believe that the amount of money one makes is a fundamental indicator of one's success	<i>354</i> (14.3%)	<i>253</i> (44.7%)	<i>77</i> (18.1%)	<i>1073</i> (43.5%)	<i>397</i> (70.0%)	<i>181</i> (42.3%)

Note: A 5-point Likert scale was used.

(1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Somewhat disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Somewhat agree, 5 = Strongly agree).

Figures deserving attention are in italics.

Table 8. Participants' perception of egocentrism

Items	Comparison between students, teachers, and parents			In HK adolescents		
	Students' perception in their own	Teachers' perception in their students	Parents' perception in their children	Students' perception in HK adolescents	Teachers' perception in HK adolescents	Parents' perception in HK adolescents
	4+5 n(%)	4+5 n(%)	4+5 n(%)	4+5 n(%)	4+5 n(%)	4+5 n(%)
I/My students/My child/ HK adolescents regard their experience are more important than those of others	426 (17.2%)	475 (83.8%)	202 (47.0%)	1355 (54.9%)	509 (89.9%)	285 (66.7%)
I/My students/My child/ HK adolescents think that their interests are more important than those of others	418 (16.9%)	436 (77.0%)	112 (26.2%)	1325 (53.8%)	495 (87.4%)	255 (59.7%)
I/My students/My child/ HK adolescents always find justifications for their behavior	556 (22.6%)	462 (81.5%)	228 (53.5%)	1379 (56.1%)	492 (87.0%)	303 (71.8%)
Most of the time, I/my students/my child/ HK adolescents think that other people's criticisms about them do not make sense	384 (15.7%)	264 (46.6%)	126 (29.6%)	1025 (41.7%)	380 (67.2%)	236 (55.7%)
Even if they make other people unhappy, I/my students/my child/ HK adolescents are true to their experience	284 (14.8%)	336 (59.2%)	157 (36.5%)	1168 (47.4%)	456 (80.6%)	263 (61.7%)

Table 9. Participants' perception of moral character

Items	Comparison between students, teachers, and parents			Hong Kong adolescents		
	Students' perception in their own	Teachers' perception in their students	Parents' perception in their children	Students' perception in HK adolescents	Teachers' perception in HK adolescents	Parents' perception in HK adolescents
	1+2 n(%)	1+2 n(%)	1+2 n(%)	1+2 n(%)	1+2 n(%)	1+2 n(%)
2. Friendly	73(3.0%)	15(2.6%)	8(1.9%)	334(13.6%)	58(150.3%)	43(10.2%)
4. Helpful	117(4.8%)	42(7.4%)	14(3.9%)	496(20.2%)	82(14.5%)	73(17.4%)
5. Diligence	624(25.3%)	234(41.2%)	90(21.2%)	649(26.4%)	196(34.6%)	143(33.9%)
7. Virtue	128(5.2%)	19(3.4%)	4(0.9%)	420(17.1%)	54(9.6%)	45(10.7%)
10. Devoted	323(13.1%)	175(30.9%)	44(10.4%)	681(27.8%)	188(33.2%)	111(26.5%)
11. Self-disciplined	420(17.0%)	239(42.1%)	81(18.9%)	683(27.8%)	201(35.5%)	131(31.2%)
15. Humble	186(7.5%)	131(23.1%)	35(8.2%)	651(26.5%)	145(25.7%)	102(24.3%)
16. Austere	235(9.5%)	128(22.5%)	44(10.4%)	851(34.7%)	216(38.2%)	143(34.5%)
25. Respecting traditional culture	356(14.5%)	161(28.5%)	56(13.0%)	845(34.4%)	226(40.0%)	145(34.1%)

Note: A 5-point Likert scale was used. (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Somewhat disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Somewhat agree, 5 = Strongly agree). Figures deserving attention are in italics.

Table 10. Participants' perceptions of moral attributes in Hong Kong adolescents

Items	Students		Teachers		Parents	
	n(%) ^a	n(%) ^b	n(%) ^a	n(%) ^b	n(%) ^a	n(%) ^b
1. Do you agree on "It is more important for adolescents to have good moral character than excellent academic results"?	295 (12.6%)	2054 (87.4%)	31 (5.5%)	535 (94.5%)	38 (9.0%)	382 (90.9%)
2. Do you think the moral competence of Hong Kong adolescents is high or low?	476 (20.1%)	479 (20.3%)	225 (39.6%)	45 (7.9%)	156 (36.5%)	70 (16.4%)
3. Do you think the moral competence of Hong Kong adolescents are gradually going upwards, downwards, or similar to the past?	760 (34.0%)	292 (13.1%)	382 (67.3%)	21 (3.7%)	217 (51.7%)	49 (11.7%)

Note: Item 1 rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Somewhat disagree, 3 = Somewhat agree, 4 = Strongly agree).

Item 2 rated on a 5-point Likert scale (0 = Don't know, 1 = Very low, 2 = Low, 3 = Neither high nor low, 4 = High, 5 = Very high).

Item 3 rated on a 4-point Likert scale (0 = Don't know, 1 = Going downwards gradually, 2 = Going upwards gradually, 3 = Similar to the past)

^a For item 1 and 2, n(%) means the percentage and number of participants who selected 1 and 2; for item 3, n(%) means the percentage and number of participants who selected 1. ^b For item 1, n(%) means percentage and number of participants who selected 3 and 4; for item 2, n(%) means the percentage and number of participants who selected 4 and 5; for item 3, n(%) means the percentage and number of participants who selected 2. Figures deserving attention are in italics.

Table 11. Participants' perception of psychosocial competence in adolescents in Hong Kong

Items	Students	Teachers	Parents
	1+2 n(%)	1+2 n(%)	1+2 n(%)
1. The ability to control emotions	824(35.0%)	304(53.6%)	190(44.4%)
2. The ability to distinguish right from wrong	730(31.0%)	221(39.0%)	150(35.0%)
3. The ability to cope with adversity	956(40.7%)	401(70.9%)	231(53.8%)
4. The ability to solve problems	709(30.2%)	303(53.6%)	199(46.6%)
5. Having ideals or aspirations	447(19.0%)	174(30.7%)	100(23.4%)
6. Being grateful	747(31.9%)	283(50.0%)	148(34.6%)
7. The ability to work with others	431(18.4%)	144(25.5%)	93(22.0%)
8. Having integrity	448(19.2%)	142(25.2%)	2(17.1%)

Note: A 5-point Likert scale was used.

(1 = Very weak, 2 = Weak, 3 = Average, 4 = Strong, 5 = Very strong).

Figures deserving attention are in italics.

Although they saw the importance of stepping up life skills education in Hong Kong, they thought that current moral education and life skills education were inadequate (Table 12). The findings suggest that there is a strong need to promote moral education and life skills education in Hong Kong. Sixth, there are deficiencies in socially responsible behavior in adolescents in Hong Kong (Table 13). As such, there is a need to promote socially responsible behavior in adolescents. Seventh, there is a need to promote social trust in adolescents in Hong Kong (Table 14). Finally, adolescents appeared to overlook the influence of mass media and the Internet on their development (Table 15). Besides stepping up related education, there is a need to conduct more research in the area of moral and character development. In the long run, it would be important and desirable to establish a research center on moral and character development in young people in Hong Kong so we can track moral development of young people in Hong Kong over

time and develop evidence-based moral and character education curriculum with teaching and learning materials.

With specific reference to moral education policy and the implementation, several recommendations are made based on the research findings. First, there is a need to review the policies on moral and civic education. On the one hand, how related education policy can be integrated across government bureaus should be explored. On the other hand, we have to review our vision about the desired attributes of young people. The issue of academic versus non-academic development and related tension in the education system should be reflected. Second, there is a strong need to revisit the conceptual foundation of moral and civic education in Hong Kong, especially on the existing theories of model development, character building, citizenship, social-emotional learning, 21st century skills, life skills, non-cognitive skills and holistic children and adolescent development. Con-

ceptual integration with Chinese cultural values such as diligence, responsibility, caring, gratefulness, and virtues are also desirable. Third, building up evidence-based moral and civic education programs with support from rigorous evaluation findings is essential and the evidence can be used in designing such programs. Fourth, there is a need to review the training programs for teachers, including pre-service training, in-service training and refresher training programs. Evaluation of the training programs can clearly reflect if there are positive changes in participants' attitude, knowledge and skills, which is also essential for program development in long term. Fifth, the review of the implementation arrangements is needed. In

particular, we have to review the benefits and problems of applying the "penetration" approach and treat civic and moral education seriously in the formal curriculum. Sixth, we have to consider how to support teachers in teaching civic and moral education, such as reduction of workload, providing teaching assistance, and facilitating teachers' involvement in the process. Finally, there is a need to evaluate civic and moral education programs by using different evaluation strategies, such as objective, subjective and qualitative evaluation, which are severely lacking in Hong Kong. In the long run, longitudinal evaluation studies tracking student changes are also indispensable.

Table 12. Participants' perceptions of knowledge of life skills in students

Items	Students		Teachers		Parents	
	1+2 n(%)	3+4 n(%)	1+2 n(%)	3+4 n(%)	1+2 n(%)	3+4 n(%)
1. Do you think it is necessary for Hong Kong adolescents to learn knowledge of life skills? (e.g. the ability to control emotions and cope with adversity)	196 (8.5%)	1957 (84.6%)	17 (3.1%)	544 (96.3%)	9 (2.2%)	406 (96.4%)
2. Do you think the moral education provided in schools is sufficient?	663 (29.0%)	1458 (63.9%)	310 (54.6%)	245 (43.1%)	164 (38.8%)	223 (52.7%)
3. Do you think the knowledge of life skills Hong Kong adolescents have learned in the formal school curriculum is sufficient? (e.g. the ability to control emotions and cope with adversity)	960 (41.5%)	1146 (49.5%)	409 (72.2%)	141 (25.0%)	253 (59.5%)	141 (33.2%)

Note:

Item 1 rated on a 5-point Likert scale (0 = Don't know, 1 = Extremely unnecessary, 2 = Unnecessary, 3 = Necessary, 4 = Extremely necessary)

Item 2 and 3 rated on a 5-point Likert scale (0 = Don't know, 1 = Very inadequate, 2 = Inadequate, 3 = Adequate, 4 = Very adequate).

Figures deserving attention are in italics.

Table 13. Participants' perception of socially responsible behavior in high school students

Items	Comparison between students, teacher, and parents			Hong Kong adolescents		
	Students' perception in their own	Teachers' perception in students	Parents' perception in their children	Students' perception in HK adolescents	Teachers' perception in HK adolescents	Parents' perception in HK adolescents
	1+2 n(%)	1+2 n(%)	1+2 n(%)	1+2 n(%)	1+2 n(%)	1+2 n(%)
1. Study hard	533(21.7%)	185(32.6%)	85(19.7%)	392(16.0%)	91(16.0%)	50(11.7%)
2. Respecting seniors	146(5.9%)	75(13.2%)	23(5.3%)	526(21.5%)	121(21.4%)	80(18.8%)
3. Self-control	395(16.1%)	222(39.2%)	86(20.1%)	649(26.5%)	187(33.0%)	127(29.8%)
4. Respecting others	68(2.8%)	107(18.9%)	19(4.4%)	613(25.0%)	163(28.7%)	102(23.9%)
5. Abiding rules	125(5.1%)	98(17.2%)	24(5.6%)	524(21.4%)	148(26.1%)	82(19.3%)
6. Doing housework	607(24.7%)	252(44.6%)	175(40.8%)	859(35.1%)	276(48.9%)	224(52.6%)
7. Caring the community	714(29.1%)	211(37.2%)	131(30.5%)	645(26.4%)	145(25.6%)	165(38.6%)
8. Caring Hong Kong	580(23.6%)	217(38.2%)	129(30.3%)	519(21.2%)	130(23.0%)	163(38.1%)
9. Caring the Nation	833(33.9%)	351(61.7%)	167(39.1%)	899(36.8%)	310(54.7%)	217(50.9%)
10. Caring the world	526(21.5%)	333(58.6%)	154(36.6%)	644(26.4%)	269(47.5%)	186(43.9%)

Note: A 5-point Likert scale was used.

(1 = Worst, 2 = Not good, 3 = Average, 4 = Good, 5 = Excellence).

Figures deserving attention are in italics.

Table 14. Participants' perception of trust of different social institutions

Items	Comparison between students, teacher, and parents			Hong Kong adolescents		
	Students' perception in their own	Teachers' perception in their students	Parents' perception in their children	Students' perception in HK adolescents	Teachers' perception in HK adolescents	Parents' perception in HK adolescents
	1+2 n(%)	1+2 n(%)	1+2 n(%)	1+2 n(%)	1+2 n(%)	1+2 n(%)
1. Police	562(23.0%)	164(29.0%)	47(11.1%)	1468(60.8%)	375(66.7%)	181(42.8%)
2. Courts of Hong Kong	307(12.5%)	35(6.2%)	24(5.6%)	894(37.0%)	116(20.7%)	120(28.4%)
3. Government of Hong Kong	1143(46.9%)	345(62.2%)	94(22.2%)	1665(69.0%)	470(84.5%)	202(48.0%)
4. Pro-establishment camp	1523(62.6%)	425(75.6%)	241(56.3%)	1606(66.6%)	499(89.0%)	275(65.3%)
5. Pro-democracy camp	1388(57.0%)	242(43.0%)	261(61.6%)	1255(52.1%)	299(53.5%)	246(58.7%)
6. Localist and self-determination groups	1446(59.6%)	258(45.7%)	307(72.9%)	975(40.5%)	219(39.2%)	226(54.0%)
7. Legislative Council	1144(46.8%)	293(52.0%)	169(39.6%)	1453(60.3%)	368(65.9%)	226(53.7%)
8. Central Government of PRC	1719(70.5%)	506(90.4%)	283(66.7%)	1943(80.7%)	534(95.7%)	330(78.6%)
9. The publishing industry	956(39.2%)	134(23.9%)	153(36.1%)	730(30.3%)	204(36.4%)	185(43.8%)
10. The TV industry	890(36.5%)	176(31.4%)	117(27.5%)	700(29.0%)	262(46.8%)	155(37.2%)
11. Social network	1035(42.3%)	64(11.3%)	124(29.0%)	324(13.4%)	71(12.7%)	101(23.9%)

Note: A 4-point Likert scale was used.

(1 = Very high level of distrust, 2 = Some distrust, 3 = Some trust, 4 = Very high level of trust).

Figures deserving attention are in italics.

Table 15. Participants' perceptions of factors influencing moral development of HK adolescents

Items	Students	Teachers	Parents
	3+4 n(%)	3+4 n(%)	3+4 n(%)
Family	1618(68.8%)	547(96.5%)	330(77.6%)
School	1496(63.6%)	440(77.6%)	315(74.3%)
Peer	1689(71.8%)	552(97.3%)	342(80.9%)
Media	711(30.3%)	453(79.9%)	270(63.7%)
The Internet	1001(42.6%)	504(89.0%)	321(75.5%)

Note: A 4-point Likert scale was used.

(1 = No influence at all, 2 = Some influence, 3 = Much influence, 4 = Strong influence).

Figures deserving attention are in underline.

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