

# Infusing moral education into English language teaching: an ontogenetic analysis of social values in EFL textbooks in Hong Kong

William Dezheng Feng\*

*Department of English, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong*

This paper investigates the representation of social values and their ontogenetic development in English as a foreign language (EFL) textbooks in Hong Kong. Adopting a social semiotic approach, it considers social values in textbooks as semantic categories which are constructed by complex semiotic discursive resources, and develops an explicit framework to model what values are selected and how the values are constructed. Analysis of 19 textbooks from Primary 1 to Secondary 4-6 shows that the social values change from the personal domain (e.g. good hygiene and healthy lifestyle), through the interpersonal domain (e.g. politeness and respect), to the altruistic concern for all mankind. The result also suggests that the textbooks are more concerned with the didactic education of good citizens than with cultivating children's critical thinking. The analytical framework and the findings can be used for the explicit instruction and critical analysis of social values in English language teaching.

**Keywords:** moral education; social values; EFL textbooks; multimodal construction; ontogenetic development; Hong Kong

## Introduction

In May 2011, the Hong Kong government proposed the new Moral and National Education (MNE) curriculum as a compulsory subject in schools from September 2012. The new subject led to heated controversy and strong opposition from teachers, students, parents, and politicians, who criticized it as 'brain-washing'. The awareness that literacy may become a tool of ideological control echoes the positions of Critical Curriculum Studies (e.g. Apple, 2004; Pennycook, 1994) and New Literacy Theories (e.g. Street, 2003), which assert that literacy practice is a set of sociocultural practices that reflect the dominant values and beliefs of a society. While these researchers point to the danger of ideological manipulation, others insist that teachers and schools have a responsibility to 'help children become ethically mature adults, capable of moral thought and action' (Ryan, 1986, p. 228). As Ryan, Bolin and Thayer (1996, p. 1) point out in the *Character*

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\* Email: [will.feng@polyu.edu.hk](mailto:will.feng@polyu.edu.hk), [dezhengfeng@gmail.com](mailto:dezhengfeng@gmail.com)

*Education Manifesto*, ‘education in its fullest sense is inescapably a moral enterprise – a continuous and conscious effort to guide students to know and pursue what is good and what is worthwhile’. In this paper, it is argued that critical pedagogy and moral education are not contradictory. On the contrary, they should be integrated in the analysis of moral values because moral education requires ‘critical distance on tradition, exposure to alternatives, informed and reflective deliberation about how to think and live’ (Nord & Haynes, 2000, p. 17).

While moral education is conducted in special subjects such as social studies or liberal studies, researchers agree that in general, most effective and popular moral education programmes are integrated within the curriculum (e.g. Morris & Morris, 1999; Nucci, 1987). In the context of Hong Kong, Morris and Morris (1999) find that most students’ exposure to moral education is through ‘the implementation of cross-curricular guidelines and more popular subjects such as Chinese language and Chinese history’ (p. 8). However, among the subjects, English language has only recently been considered as a carrier of moral education (e.g. Brown, 1997; Johnston, 2003; Shaaban, 2005), and there has been no such study in Hong Kong. Researchers have proposed rationales, principles and methods for incorporating moral education in the English classroom, notably Shaaban (2005), who argues that the EFL classroom is a natural place for moral education and develops a detailed framework for carrying out moral education in ESL/EFL classrooms. Situated in this context, this study investigates the social values constructed in EFL textbooks in Hong Kong and their ontogenetic change throughout primary and secondary levels. The data for analysis is extracted from the Primary Longman Express (12 books, 1A to 6B), and Longman Activate (7 books, Secondary 1A to 3B, and a theme book for Secondary 4–6).

As moral and ideological messages are very often disguised in textbooks and curriculum materials, referred to as ‘covert grammar’ (Brown, 1997), teachers should guide students to analyze moral issues in textbooks and teaching materials functionally and critically. However, based on the author’s experience of teaching EFL teachers in Hong Kong who were doing postgraduate studies, the challenge they faced was that they had neither an overall picture of the social values in EFL textbooks, nor a metalanguage to analyze them systematically. As a result, many teachers simply ignored these values, others merely pointed out the moral messages in a text without guiding students to understand them, let alone encouraging them to analyze them critically. It is therefore a pressing task for discourse analysts to provide a thorough understanding of what values are packaged in the textbooks and how they are constructed, which is precisely the objective of this paper.

In what follows, I will first provide a brief overview of the central role of textbooks in Hong Kong and the place of moral education in the Hong Kong Curriculum Guide. After that, I will establish the framework of analysis, which includes the parameters of social values and their multimodal semiotic construction. Then findings about the distribution of different social values in EFL textbooks from Primary 1 to Secondary 6 are reported. Finally, based on the analysis, critical reflection on the selection and design of social values in the textbooks is provided, followed by concluding remarks on the significance and implications of the study.

### **Moral education, EFL textbooks, and the Hong Kong English curriculum**

In the curriculum reform undertaken by the Education and Manpower Bureau (Education Bureau) in 2001, it was argued that ‘in whole-school curriculum planning, moral and civic education (MCE henceforth) should continue to be given a prominent position’ (Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council, 2002a, p.1) (CDC henceforth). As the first post-colonial curriculum in Hong Kong after the handover to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, one of the most salient features of the Basic Education Curriculum Guide (CDC, 2002a) is that Chinese values such as perseverance and national identity figured prominently. The Curriculum (CDC, 2002a) clearly stipulates that ‘all schools should try to nurture in their students the five priority values and attitudes: perseverance, respecting others, responsibility, national identity and commitment’ (p. 1). In accordance with the Basic Education Curriculum Guide, the English Language Education Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide (CDC, 2002b, The ELE Guide henceforth) prescribes MCE as one of the four key learning tasks of English language teaching. The ELE Guide proposes a set of values and attitudes to be included in the school curriculum, which includes personal values such as honesty, self-esteem and perseverance, and social values such as equality, interdependence and tolerance of difference. It further exemplifies in detail what values should be implemented at each of the four key stages across primary and secondary levels (12 years from Primary 1 to Secondary 6). For example, honesty, respect and good hygiene habits should be taught at Key Stage 1 (Primary 1–3), while equality, kindness, and more abstract social values such as freedom, justice, and human dignity should be taught at Key Stage 3 or 4 (Secondary 1–6). Meanwhile, The ELE Guide proposes a set of ‘Learning Objectives Contributing to the Development of Values and Attitudes’. For example, in Key Stage 2 (Primary 4–6), students are required to ‘identify values, attitudes and beliefs expressed in texts’ (CDC, 2002b, p. 71). By Key Stage 4 (Secondary 4–6), students should have developed ‘a critical attitude in analyzing and discriminating the different meanings or shades of meaning of words or texts’ (CDC, 2002b, p. 73).

To achieve the aims of moral education as well as critical thinking, the ELE Guide recommends that schools and teachers should ‘select or develop materials or activities with relevant themes (e.g., showing respect for people from different cultures, showing one’s commitment to society) and provide opportunities for learners to discuss the relevant values in class (CDC, 2002b, p. 91). Among the materials, textbooks are unequivocally the most important carrier of social values. As CDC (2004) suggests, ‘textbooks are the basic learning materials used to support learning and teaching’ (p. 211). As with other EFL contexts, textbooks are very much a ‘curricular artefact’ and the ‘main manifestation of the intended curriculum’ in Hong Kong (Ma, 2012, p. 237). As Chow (2004, p. 4) points out, ‘textbooks fulfill the experience target of the Hong Kong government’s mandated English curriculum. That means the use of textbooks can achieve the learning target for the experience in English’. As a result, textbooks in Hong Kong have long been considered as the ‘primary resources’ in English language education (Morris, 1995, p. 126). The central role of textbooks is also supported by studies from the perspectives of both teachers and students (e.g. Chow, 2004; McGrath, 2006). Hong Kong students learn English in the classroom setting and English teachers depend heavily on textbooks for teaching and organizing classroom instructions and activities. Outside school, students have almost no informal contact with English speakers and they have

very little exposure to written English and the English media (Yang, Huang, & Lee, 2000).

Through textbooks, students acquire socioculturally appropriate information, values and ways of thinking that authors of textbooks assume students should have (Curd-Christiansen, 2008). The awareness that textbooks carry hidden values and ideologies has motivated numerous critical analyses of textbooks and curriculum materials over the last two decades, focusing on the representation of culture, ideology, gender and ethnic stereotypes, emotions and attitudes, and so on (e.g., Chen, 2010; Lee & Collins, 2008; Liu, 2005; Mahboob, 2009; Xiong, 2012). Among the studies, English textbooks, which are the focus of the current paper, have attracted much attention from various EFL regions, for example, China (Xiong, 2012), Japan (Lee, 2014), and Iran (Asgari, 2011). In Hong Kong, however, not many studies have been carried out. Poon (2009) reviewed 108 papers spanning over 25 years on English language education in Hong Kong and none of them is concerned with textbook analysis. Among the very few studies, Lee and Collins (2008) found that recent improvements in the status of women in Hong Kong are reflected in patterns of gender representation in Hong Kong secondary English textbooks. Yuen (2011) analyzed the representation of foreign cultures in EFL textbooks and found that cultures of English-speaking countries are favored while the cultures of Africa are underrepresented. Aside from this imbalance, he also argues that the cultures are represented from a 'tourist's perspective' and lack depth. Yang (2012), by analyzing the content and language of a currently published Hong Kong English language textbook series for Grade 1 students, found that males and females are almost equally represented and are portrayed in a similar range of activities.

Two gaps can be identified from the brief review above: moral education is a neglected topic in EFL textbook research (in particular, in Hong Kong) and there has been no explicit modelling of how the values are constructed. Addressing this gap, the present study provides a theoretical framework for the systematic understanding of moral values in textbooks, and maps out the ontogenetic change of values from primary to secondary levels in English textbooks. Such explicit semiotic modelling is crucial for both moral education and critical thinking, both of which are premised on the training of analytical skills. The study thus addresses the curriculum requirement for the development of critical attitude in analyzing the texts that students encounter, and the pedagogical need for an explicit metalanguage in moral education. Such an endeavor contributes to the 'integrated approach' (namely, incorporating MCE in ELE) recommended in the Basic Education Curriculum Guide (CDC, 2002a). Meanwhile, the consideration of ELE and the detailed analysis of English textbooks complement current moral education research in Hong Kong (e.g. Chan, 2004; Cheng, 2004).

### **A social semiotic framework of value representation**

From a semiotic point of view, social values are designed using various semiotic discursive strategies. Therefore, they should not be taken as transparent, but should be interpreted based on the systematic analysis of the discursive features. As Machin (2009) explains, describing multimodal texts on the basis of a semiotic theory is 'to replace commonsensical terms such as "evoke" and "suggest" that we often use with systematic

and stable terms that allow us to talk in concrete terms about how such a composition communicates' (p. 182). One important consequence of, and motivation for, a semiotic approach is that 'it will constrain analysis so that it is more reliable and trustworthy' (Bateman & Schmidt, 2012, p. 2). Therefore, this paper proposes a social semiotic model to elucidate how moral values are related to the broader social context on the one hand (i.e., the curriculum guide), and how they are realized through various semiotic resources on the other hand. Such a social semiotic framework provides not only an explicit metalanguage for moral education, but also theoretical tools for cultivating critical thinking. In what follows, I will first elucidate moral values as a semantic category within the Appraisal system (Martin & White, 2005), and then elucidate the semiotic resources and discursive strategies that are used in the construction of moral messages.

Martin and White (2005) developed a sophisticated system of Attitude, which includes values of emotional response (Affect), values by which human behavior is socially assessed (Judgement) and values about the aesthetic qualities of objects and entities (Appreciation). As this study focuses on social values, we mainly work with the framework of Judgement<sup>1</sup>. Judgement is concerned with the assessment of human behavior according to social sanction and social esteem. Judgement of social esteem involves sub-categories of normality (how usual someone is), capacity (how capable someone is) and tenacity (how resolute someone is). Judgement of social sanction is concerned with veracity (how truthful someone is) and propriety (how ethical someone is). In the present paper, propriety is used as a cover term for ethics related Judgements, and we distinguish between personal propriety (e.g., habits of personal hygiene) and social propriety (e.g., altruistic concern for others).

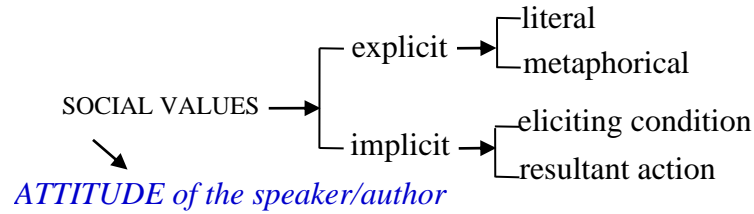
Social values are represented as attitudes towards different behaviors according to social standards (i.e. Judgement in the Appraisal system). To elucidate how Judgement is constructed, we propose the three-stage model which includes Eliciting Condition, the Judgement and Resultant Action, as illustrated in Figure 1. Eliciting condition refers to the behavior that causes the Judgement (as in 'she donated all her money to the poor'), the Judgement refers to the inner attitude toward the behavior which is expressed through attitudinal lexis (as in 'she is kind'), and the resultant action refers to verbal or nonverbal actions motivated by the Judgement (as in 'we all need to learn from her'). Among the three stages, the second one is classified as an 'explicit' representation, and the other two as 'implicit' representations.

Eliciting condition  $\Rightarrow$  Judgement  $\Rightarrow$  Resultant action

**Figure 1.** The three-stage model of Judgement

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<sup>1</sup> The spelling of 'Judgement' is used when referring to the terminology in Martin & White (2005), and 'judgment' is used in other cases.



**Figure 2.** The representation of social values

Based on the model, the resources for constructing Judgement are shown in Figure 2. The primary linguistic resource of explicit Judgement is naturally attitudinal lexis, which inscribes Judgement in the most direct way, such as the words ‘generous’, ‘kind’, and others. For example, in *Primary Longman Express* (Primary henceforth) 2B, there is a unit on ‘Good Children’ which provides a list of positive and negative values, namely ‘polite’, ‘honest’, ‘helpful’, ‘hardworking’, and ‘tidy’ exhibited by the character Bo Lee, and ‘rude’, ‘dishonest’, ‘unhelpful’, ‘lazy’, and ‘untidy’ exhibited by Mo Lee. In Primary 5A, there is a text titled ‘Our Heroes’, which uses attitudinal lexis such as ‘famous’, ‘brave’, and ‘tireless’ to evaluate the doctor Joseph Sung in terms of his capacity and tenacity (see Text 1).

#### Text 1

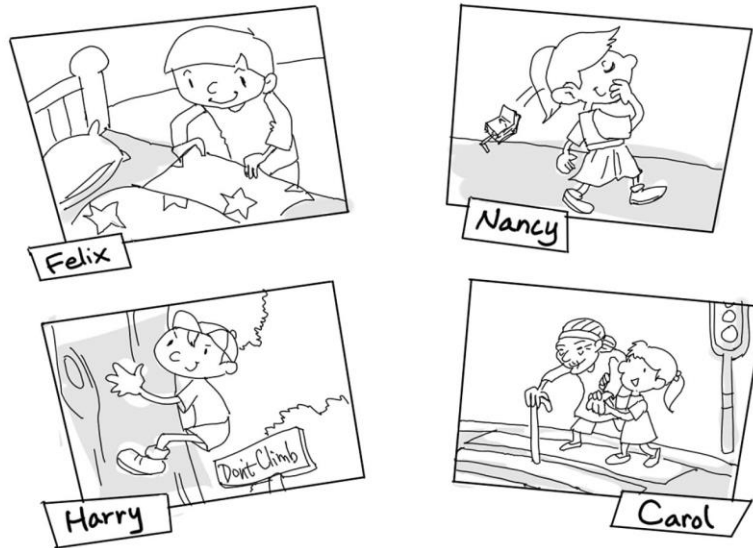
Joseph Sung is one of Hong Kong’s most *famous* doctors because of his *brave* and *tireless* working during the SARS period in 2003. Dr Sung worked more than 16 hours a day at the Prince of Wales Hospital. He visited SARS patients everyday and supported them. (Primary 5A, p. 61. Emphasis added)

Aside from literal attitude expressions, there is a more complex way of encoding judgement concepts, that is, through metaphors. Metaphors make language a more powerful tool for encoding abstract concepts, as is advocated by conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). However, no instance of metaphorical expression of social values is found in our data. We argue that as metaphor is one of the main routes through which socio-cultural norms are appropriated, textbooks should gradually build in metaphors to foster students’ ‘metaphor competence’ (e.g. Cameron, 1996).

Indirect Judgement can be expressed in two ways, by recounting or depicting events that elicit the Judgement or by saying/doing things that are motivated by the Judgement. In the example above, the expression ‘she donated all her money to the orphanage’ represents the eliciting condition that invokes positive Judgement of morality. In Text 1 above, ‘working more than 16 hours a day’ and ‘visiting SARS patients everyday’ are the events that elicit the Judgement of ‘tireless’ and ‘brave’ respectively. In Text 2, a crocodile makes a negative Judgement of men’s propriety by recounting what they have done. When social values implicitly represented by recounting the eliciting condition, teachers should guide students in recognizing the intended moral messages, so that they understand which social actions are commended and admired, as well as which are criticized and despised.

#### Text 2

‘I hate men’, growled the crocodile, ‘people like using our skin for shoes and handbags so they kill us. They also like eating our meat.’ (Primary 6B, p. 34)



**Figure 3.** Social values in visual depiction (Drawing after textbook image in Primary 2B, p. 9)

Eliciting condition can also be represented visually, by depicting the event or behavior (e.g., a picture of someone littering). A typical example is shown in Figure 3. The images depict the behaviors of making one’s bed, littering, climbing, and helping an old lady to cross the road, which invoke respective attitudes. Visual depictions are more implicit than verbal recounting, as the editors are not articulating their attitude, and the values are embodied by the characters themselves. That is to say, in visual depictions, the characters become more autonomous and assume more moral responsibility than in verbal descriptions (consider also how in a video recording of, for example, littering, the character would be even more autonomous and the attitude of the person who recorded it becomes more backgrounded). Due to their vivid depiction of real life activities, visual images are essential carriers of social values. However, the structure of the images throughout the textbooks is relatively simple, without incorporating the complex features of visual design (e.g. the use of camera, color, layout, cf. Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). From the perspective of visual literacy, textbook designers may use more authentic images (e.g. advertisements, newspaper images) to enhance students’ competence in recognizing social values from the complex features of visual design.

Our value Judgement may result in various actions, including immediate material actions and more abstract verbal actions (speech acts, cf. Searle, 1969), which constitute the second way of implicit construction, namely, resultant action. Examples of resultant verbal actions include expressive speech acts (e.g., admiration, contempt), commissives (e.g., ‘I will learn from you’, ‘I will never do business with you again’), directives (e.g., ‘Mind your manners’, ‘Don’t beat the dog’), and so on. The use of resultant action is

prevalent in primary textbooks, which enables students to relate certain value Judgement to the appropriate behavior. It usually takes the form of imperatives and declaratives of obligation, indicating whether we should accept or reject the behavior/attribute. For example, in Text 3(a) the utterance ‘don’t disturb others’ implicitly judges ‘disturbing others’ as a negative attribute (e.g., rude) through the speech act motivated by the Judgement. Similarly, in Text 3(b), ‘jumping the queue’ is judged as negative through the speech act motivated by the Judgement (i.e., the use of the modal verb of obligation ‘should’). The implicit construction of social values through resultant actions is crucial for students to act appropriately after they recognize events/behaviors with certain attributes/values (e.g., from recognizing the behavior of jumping the queue as bad to stopping others/themselves from jumping the queue).

Text 3

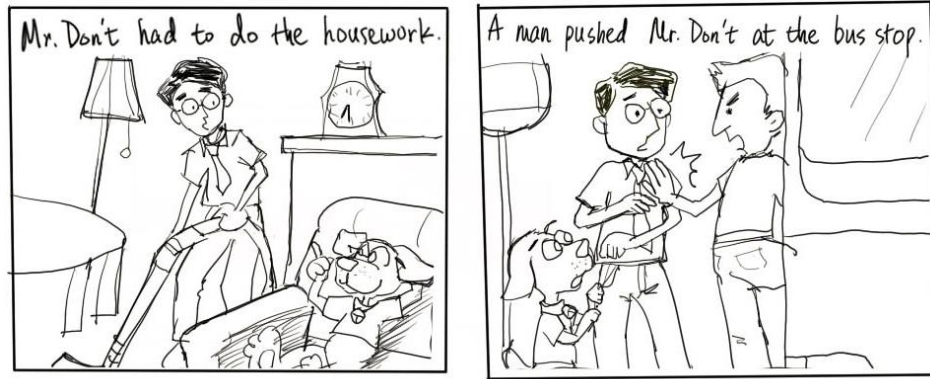
- (a) Don’t disturb others! Speak softly!
- (b) We should not jump the queue at the bus stop! We should wait in the queue! (Primary 5A, p. 6–7)

A salient feature of representing social values through Judgement is the coupling of attitudinal lexis and eliciting condition (visual and/or verbal). For example, in Text 1, the explicit Judgement of Joseph Sung is immediately followed by recounting the events (i.e. working more than 16 hours a day, visiting SARS patients everyday) that elicit the Judgement. Such coupling is prevalent across the primary school textbooks, especially in Key Stage 1 (Primary 1–3), and Text 4 is another typical example. This pattern enables children to relate the abstract social values to concrete social actions, which is essential for moral education. While such basic codes of behavior are important for young children, it could be argued that the directive speech acts can only serve to produce docile citizens who submit to the authoritative voice of the textbook writers. It is not considered effective moral education as it does not involve moral reasoning and critical thinking (Lipman, 1995; Nord & Haynes, 2000).

Text 4

Bob says ‘please’ and ‘thank you’. She is polite.  
Mo is rude. She pushes and she likes to fight. (Primary 2B, p.10)





**Come and help me!**  
**Don't be so \_\_\_\_\_!**

**Don't be \_\_\_\_\_!**  
**You'll hurt others!**

**Figure 4.** Example of Judgement coupling (drawing after textbook image in Primary 5A, p. 6)

At a later stage, such coupling is also constructed as learning tasks, which require students to interpret the behavior or make value Judgements. For example, in Figure 4, students need to fill in the blanks with attitudinal lexis (i.e., 'lazy' and 'rude' respectively) based on their interpretation of the eliciting event. Here the attitude of Mr Don't is not just articulated as Judgement (i.e., 'you are so lazy' and 'you are so rude'), but also as resultant action, that is, the speech act of directive. Therefore, the utterance not only describes the attributes of 'lazy' and 'rude', but also explicitly rejects the behavior. As a result, students do not only recognize the attributes, but also learn the desirable attitudinal orientation towards the attributes and the appropriate behavior under these conditions. In another example which reports the hardship and success of a junior pianist Rachel, the text provides the eliciting condition by recounting the achievements of Rachel, but the author does not make any explicit value Judgement of her. Instead, students are required to answer the question 'What kind of student do you think Rachel is?' after reading the text. Such an open question enables students to think critically and come up with a rational judgment of her attribute (cf. Lipman, 1995; Nord & Haynes, 2000). However, such questions are rare and most of the learning tasks are simple information gaps. There are normally correct answers to the tasks and students do not have the opportunity to discuss or analyze the moral issues involved.

To summarize, this section provides a framework to explain *how* social values are represented as the Judgment of the speaker/author, which maps out the possible choices for expressing attitudes towards people's characters and behaviors. The three stages from the eliciting condition to the Judgment of abstract attribute/value, and then to corresponding resultant actions motivated by the Judgement describe the essential steps in moral education. First, students should be able to recognize the social values from everyday social actions. This is achieved by the coupling of eliciting condition and Judgement from an early stage, followed by learning tasks of interpreting the behaviors and making Judgements on their own in later stages. Second, going beyond the recognition of attributes such as 'rude' and 'kind', students should learn to take a stance

toward the attribute (i.e., to accept or reject) and take actions accordingly (e.g., stopping bad behavior through imperatives or the modal adverb ‘should’). The framework also enables us to see what is inadequate in the textbooks, that is, the opportunity provided for students to think critically and make moral judgments independently. In what follows, we move up to the semantic level and examine *what* values are selected at different levels of the school years.

### Result and discussion: the changing distribution of social values

In this section, we look at the distribution of different social values across the school years. Two research assistants were trained with the analytical framework and coded the values independently. Disagreements (<10%) were resolved through discussion with the author. A total of 968 tokens of social value were identified from the textbooks. Table 1 provides an overview of the distribution in each grade. To provide a clearer picture, in what follows, I will explain the patterns of distribution, in particular, the ontogenetic change in terms of the percentage of different categories in relation to The ELE Guide as well as Moral Stage Theory (MST) (e.g. Piaget, 1932; Kohlberg, 1981).

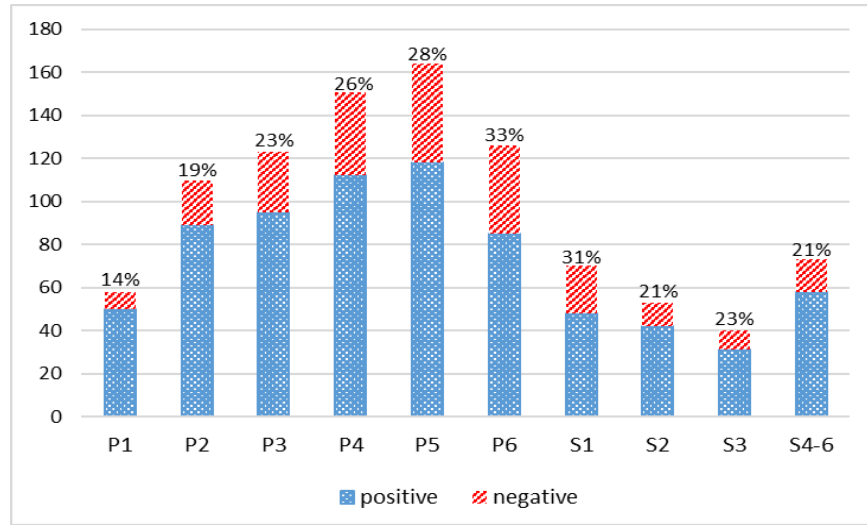
**Table 1.** Summary of the distribution of social values

Grade Classification		P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	S1	S2	S3	S4- 6
According to valence	Positive	50	89	95	112	118	85	48	42	31	58
	Negative	8	21	28	39	46	41	22	11	9	15
According to type	Capacity	16	20	27	35	29	22	17	6	5	12
	Tenacity	3	6	12	15	23	14	12	11	9	17
	Propriety personal	39	80	72	82	69	41	17	12	6	10
	Propriety social	0	4	12	19	43	49	24	24	20	34
<b>Total (968)</b>		58	110	123	151	164	126	70	53	40	73

According to Piaget (1932), children’s moral development follows a path from subjective egocentricity to rational, objective attitude towards moral issues in respect of moral law and driven by an altruistic concern for the good of others. Building on this theory, Kohlberg (1981) proposes three levels of moral development, namely, pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional, each of which is further divided into two stages. The pre-conventional level, which is from infancy to toddler years, begins with a socio-moral perspective that is egocentric and heteronomous (Stages 1 and 2) (Lapsley, 2006, p. 46). In contrast, conventional morality, approximately from 5–10 years old, is marked by the fact that self-interest is subordinated to the interests of shared relationships (Stage 3) and of the society itself (Stage 4) (p.47). In Stage 3, children learn to respect and conform to social standards and conventions as a result of approval/disapproval from others. In Stage 4 (authority and social order obedience driven), children learn to obey laws and social conventions because of their importance in

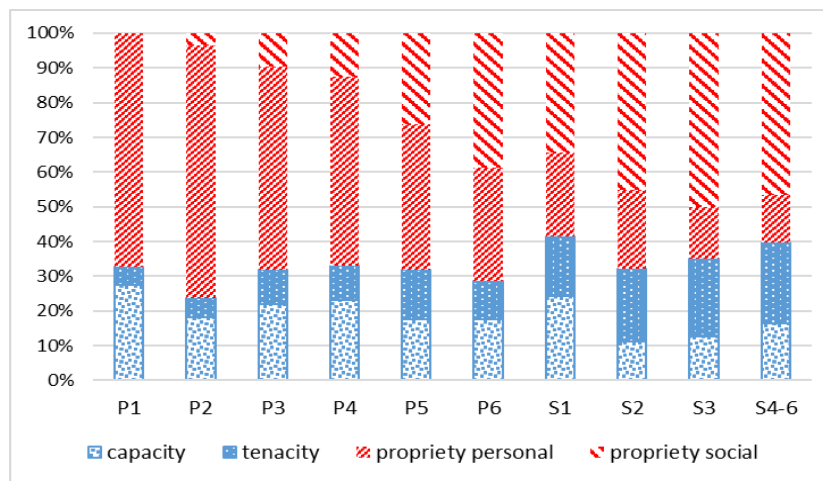
maintaining a functioning society, rather than because of the need for individual approval as in Stage 3. By Stage 4 (which is approximately Primary 5 or 6, but may well go to secondary levels), children become morally socialized when they accept the discipline and authority of the group, and they come to respect its rules and fear its sanctions (p. 42). At the post-conventional level, generally corresponding to the secondary school years, teenagers become more aware of and concerned with the larger society, and begin to reason more abstractly about 'right' and 'wrong'. By Stage 6, this perspective is formalized in terms of universal moral obligations, and the self-conscious use of procedural justice checks on the validity of one's moral deliberation.

Analysis shows that the design of social values in the textbooks is generally consistent with the path of moral development according to MST. Figure 5 represents the overall distribution of social values in the textbooks. It shows that social values increase from P1 and reach the peak at P5, corresponding to the end of Stage 4 in Kohlberg (1981), which is a key period for children to understand and obey social rules. This is in accordance with the primary concern of moral education in Hong Kong, which is to cultivate good citizens. Figure 5 also shows the percentage of positive and negative values (the percentage of negative values is marked at the top of each bar). Three observations can be made based on the result. First, the textbooks represent both positive and negative values, so that students learn to accept or engage in morally relevant conduct, and to reject or refrain from socially unacceptable conduct. It also reflects the requirement of The ELE Guide that students should be able to 'distinguish between positive and negative values' from P1 to P3 (CDC, 2002b, p. 70). Second, the textbooks represent more positive values than negative values, with the former ranging from 67% to 86%. From the perspective of MST, the school years mainly belong to the level of conventional morality when children learn to respect and conform to social standards and conventions. As imitation is one of the most basic means of change in child behavior according to social learning research, exposure to live or narrated role models and model behaviors is effective in shaping children's attitude and behavior (e.g. Bandura, 1991). Third, we can also see a steady increase of negative values from P1 to P6. In P1A, no negative values are found. Starting from P1B, negative behaviors and values are gradually represented, such as littering, poor hygiene and eating habits, jumping the queue, etc., and it reaches a peak at P6, which includes both behaviors and values, both personal and social values. At the secondary level, however, the number of negative values decreases, which is mainly due to the fact that very few personal behaviors are represented.



**Figure 5.** The distribution of social values from P1 to S4–6 (the percentage refers to the ratio of negative values)

In terms of the type of social values, we distinguish between those related to social esteem (capacity and tenacity) and those related to social sanction (personal propriety and social propriety). Social values in the textbooks are annotated according to these categories and findings are shown in Figure 6 (social esteem is in blue and social sanction in red). It can be seen that tokens of social sanction significantly outnumber those of social esteem. This reflects the concern for the civic duties of citizens as social beings over personal qualities in the curriculum guide. From the perspective of MST, as noted previously, the school years mainly belong to the level of conventional morality when children learn various codes of behavior which conform to social standards and conventions.



**Figure 6.** The distribution of social esteem and social sanction

For social esteem, only tenacity and capacity are found in the textbooks. Figure 6 shows that the ratio of tenacity (white dots) steadily increases during the school years. In early primary school years, social esteem is mainly concerned with capacity, including the children's capability of taking care of themselves and learning different skills (e.g., playing piano). A typical example is the recurring character SuperBoy who manifests qualities of being smart, strong, healthy, and so on. Later, more complex and abstract qualities are gradually introduced, such as courage, carefulness, and in particular, perseverance. There is a slight increase of capacity in S4–6, but it is mainly concerned with professional or social competence, as compared to the capability of taking care of themselves and learning everyday life skills. The pattern of change is in accordance with the development of children's cognitive capacity from understanding values which are more concrete and related to their immediate childhood life to understanding those which are more abstract and related to the broader social context.

In analyzing social sanctions, we distinguish between personal propriety and social propriety, as previously explained. As shown in Figure 6 (red slanted lines), propriety values steadily change from the personal realm to the social realm. At the primary level, most values are about personal behavior, gradually changing to values in the interpersonal realm, but both are concerned with events in the immediate vicinity of the children (e.g., family, school, community). For example, in Primary 2B, there is a unit 'Good Children', which articulates behaviors such as don't litter, don't climb, keep quiet in the library, and so on; in Primary 6A, in the unit 'Thank You Messages', the values change to the interpersonal level, such as respect others, care for others, and be punctual. At the secondary level, it is more clearly about social and global issues. For example, in Secondary 3A, in the unit 'Lending a Hand', social issues such as animal abuse, drug addiction, poverty, and environment pollution are discussed. The change of propriety values from personal to social domains is consistent with the proposal of MST that children's moral concerns change from the egocentric self, through their relations with others and requirements from personal authorities and social rules, finally to more universal altruistic social concerns and moral obligations.

### **Critical reflection and conclusion**

Moral and civic education is proposed as one of the four key learning tasks of English language teaching in the ELE Curriculum Guide (CDC, 2002b). As EFL textbooks are the main source of input in ELE in Hong Kong, elucidating how social values are represented is of paramount importance for the effective execution of moral education. Addressing this need, this paper investigates the multimodal representation of social values (i.e., how are the values constructed) and their ontogenetic development (i.e., what values are selected) in EFL textbooks in Hong Kong. To address the 'how' and the 'what' questions, this paper proposes an explicit metalanguage for understanding and analyzing social values in EFL textbooks, followed by quantitative analysis of all Longman EFL textbooks from P1 to S4–6. Based on the findings, this section provides a critical reflection on the selection and design of social values in the textbooks, followed by concluding remarks on the significance and implications of the study.

In terms of the ‘how’ question, it is important to configure the inner quality with eliciting condition or resultant action, so that students can connect certain behaviors/events with moral Judgements. Analysis shows that the textbooks use coupling and learning tasks to achieve such configurations. However, in most cases, the moral values are prescribed for students (e.g., through explicit Judgements and imperative sentences) without inviting them to discuss and critically analyze the moral issues. As Lipman (1995) suggests, effective moral education should cultivate children’s ability to conduct critical and careful ethical inquiries. Therefore, rather than directly telling students what is right and what is wrong, textbooks could use real life situations (e.g. pictures or videos of queue jumping) and ask students to discuss or debate. In the Hong Kong context where task-based language teaching is promoted, textbooks can infuse relevant moral issues in different types of pedagogical tasks (e.g., with information gaps, reasoning gaps, and opinion gaps, cf. Prabhu, 1987). This is especially useful in dealing with moral dilemmas which require deliberation and analysis of real life issues. In this way, students not only learn to analyze social issues and think critically, but also come to accept the expected norms more willingly as these are not imposed on them, but are derived from their own reasoning. This point is aptly summarized by Tsui (2008):

... when teachers empower their students by granting them the freedom of expression, honoring different views and, more importantly, avoiding any dogmatic preaching, they are sending a clear message to their students that ethics education is not about imposing a superior standard of morality, but about developing critical thinking and humanitarian values that help promote sensible decision-making and peaceful coexistence in pluralistic societies. (p. 97)

Analysis also shows that the use of visual images is limited. With the increasing importance of the visual mode in contemporary communication, it is suggested that textbooks increase the number of values embedded in authentic images with more complex visual designs and storytelling.

In terms of the ‘what’ question, analysis shows that the selection of social values is generally consistent with the Piagetian Moral Stage Theory, following a pattern of development from the personal domain (e.g. hygiene habits and healthy lifestyle), through the interpersonal domain (e.g. politeness and respect), to an altruistic concern for all mankind. Two issues can be raised for further critical examination. First, the very nature of the Piagetian stage theory is contested: the stages may be inaccurate or wrong (see e.g., Weiten, 1992). Moreover, whether the mode of moral development in Chinese contexts is the same as that of North American or European contexts needs to be questioned (e.g., Harkness et al., 1981). Thus, it might be argued that the textbook writers adopt a very conservative view and assume that children’s moral development follows a clear pattern as proposed in the MST, while it may be more effective to include a mixture of moral values at each stage (e.g., good hygiene, respect, and care for the underprivileged). Second, from the high ratio of social sanction (personal and social propriety), it can be seen that the textbooks more concerned with promoting civic duties than cultivating students’ characters, personality and critical thinking. This may lead to docile citizens who respect rules and authorities but lack other essential values and qualities. Therefore, some of the values need to be critically examined, especially for the contemporary Hong Kong society in the context of globalization and multiculturalism (cf. Curdt-Christiansen, 2008).

The analytical method and the findings of the study make a number of contributions to the field. First, developing an explicit choice system to model how social values are semiotically constructed in EFL textbooks provides a novel method to complement philosophical discussions and psychological methods in moral education research on the one hand, and addresses an unexplored area in critical textbook analysis on the other. Second, as the first comprehensive analysis of social values in EFL textbooks in Hong Kong, this study helps us understand what values are packaged in the textbooks (and why) throughout the primary and secondary school years. Such understanding has previously not been available in the field, and provides an empirical basis for further critical reflections on moral education and the cultural politics of education in English and other subjects in Hong Kong. Third, in terms of pedagogical implications, the systematic modeling of the patterns and the multimodal construction of social values in textbooks provides an explicit metalanguage for the understanding and critical analysis of moral values, which is essential for both textbook design and classroom teaching. In classroom teaching, on the one hand, teachers should provide overt instructions for students to recognize and understand the social values in the primary school years; on the other hand, students should be gradually guided to recognize social values, analyze them (including authors' implicit attitudes, ideological manipulations, etc.), and make independent moral judgments based on the represented event and behaviors. As most children and young people today have ready access to a host of consumer-driven media, print and online texts from a much wider range of sources than previous generations, 'teachers should provide necessary tools to facilitate critical thinking' (Mills, 2011, p. 50). Curdt-Christiansen (2008), addressing the need in the context of globalization and multiculturalism, similarly points out that 'we as educators want to provide a tool for the students to become critical readers of the world and the word' (p. 111). The analytical framework and findings of this paper precisely address this need. The outcome of teaching this metalanguage to practising teachers suggested that they were not only able to analyze social values systematically, but also able to infuse the values within their teaching syllabi and guide students to analyze them. For textbook design, the analysis and findings can inform textbook writers in terms of what values to include at different levels and how they should be constructed, such as the points discussed in the critical reflection above. The metalanguage also enables teachers to take a proactive role in evaluating textbooks and give informed feedback to publishers, instead of acting merely as passive end-users (Yuen, 2011). In the long run, teacher educators and discourse analysts, through developing analytical tools, should equip teachers with the knowledge not only to guide students to analyze social values critically in classroom teaching but also to shape the discourse of textbooks.

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