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INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE AND MORAL:
CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF
TWO TIMELESS VIETNAMESE COLONIAL TEXTBOOKS

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Indigenous Language and Moral are two series of textbooks implemented in Franco-Vietnamese elementary schools during the early twentieth century, when the territory of today's Vietnam was in part a French colony and in part French protectorates. The historical, cultural, and educational conditions in which the books were created have long become obscure, yet the books themselves have not. Instead, they have left the classroom walls to enter the twenty-first century publishing industry as children's literature, despite their textbook format. This study examines the publisher's reasons for their repeated republications during the 2000s and 2010s and systematically categorizes their moral topics in an attempt to understand their educational and cultural relevance in modern Vietnamese society. Findings suggest that the books' moral themes are in fact more compatible with the values upheld by the modern society than with the modern education program offered by the national curriculum. Although this thesis might be the first English-language study that took interest in the phenomenon of these books' seemingly timeless survival, it is my hope that it will not be the last, but rather an inspiration for further, more comprehensive research into said phenomenon.

Keywords

children's books, children's literature, colonial education, colonial legacy, Indigenous Language Textbook, Moral Textbook, moral content, moral education, moral values, post-colonial, textbook analysis, Trần Trọng Kim, Vietnam

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Introduction

Moral Education

It is evident in the rich body of prior research and academic discussions that moral education, also termed “character education” or “values education”, has been a major interest shared by educational thinkers across several cultures since ancient time. International communication on moral education dated back as early as the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an important moment of which was the first International Moral Education Congress in London (Wright, 2008).

Theories on morality, on the moral development of a person in general, and that of a child in particular, are abundant. Cain (2005), for example, defended Aristotle’s “neglect of a systematic account of moral development” in favour of “more complex expressions of character-building, such as learning to expose oneself to proper desires, feelings, pleasures and pains” which would be “better illustrated through drama or literature than through philosophy”. Taoism promoted ideas of “ecological sensibility” that are still relevant in today’s endeavour to foster environmental awareness (Weili Zhao & Sun, 2017). Kınalızade, a moralist of the Ottoman Empire, wrote extensively about “the issue of the education of children”, expressing “strong views on the role of parents in the process of educating children” (Uysal, 2007). The 1600s-1700s French archbishop and pedagogue François Fénelon “suggested the need to educate all children, irrespective of gender or social status, in order to obtain the best possible social behavior and to cultivate good characters” (Ioannou & Malafantis, 2020). Kim & Sankey (2009) challenged popular perspectives on children’s moral development and asserted that “the notion of moral development is fully justified, though it does not occur via invariant stages” but “each child is an emergent self-organising organism in which development is highly variable, dynamic and often non-linear”. D’Olimpio (2019) recognized “the importance of teaching children moral standards, even while taking seriously the fact that reasonable people disagree about morality”, for “there are universal moral values based on the kind of beings humans are”, with which O’Sullivan (2004) concurred: “From the ancient Greek to the Boy Scouts, the enduring core values we live by are very similar and widely accepted”. D’Olimpio (2019) also drew attention to “the cultivation of virtues and rational emotions such as compassion” which is “vital in accounting for the emotional aspect of morality”.

There is, nonetheless, a consensus on the significant role of adults’ influence in a child’s moral development. While Kınalızade, for example, emphasized the role of parents, especially mothers (Uysal, 2007), more recent perspectives have been interested in the role of schools and teachers.

Formulating the novel concept of “soul-filled teaching”, Bockern (2006) argued that “success is more than teaching to the intelligence quotient (IQ) and emotional quotient (EQ), but we also must attend to the soul quotient (SQ)”, indicating “many traditional practices in schools” that “‘stomp on [*sic*] souls’ of students”. Parks & Oslick (n.d.) also advocated for the incorporation of character education “as an experience in the primary classroom” by promoting character traits that “help students grow and promote a positive classroom and school experience”, which could be an effective means to integrate the two goals teachers simultaneously pursued: to design “content-based, meaningful lessons” and to look after the safety and well-being of their students.

Another concern in the matter of moral education is the quest for appropriate pedagogies. While many educational traditions treat moral education as a distinct subject with explicit themes and topics, Toomey & Lovat (2009) rejected this model in favour of “a new pedagogy that affects the entire curriculum and the way it is taught”, for it would provide “a greater capacity to produce the type of citizenry that can deal effectively with the major global issues of our day”. Bockern (2006) went even further by arguing that “calculated soul-filled lesson plans are doomed for failure”, for it is “‘in the moment’ that we experience the depth of our longings, our desires, and our being”; instead of planning lessons in such a manner, he asserted, teachers “need to find ways to nourish their own spirits”.

Moral Instruction Materials

Moral instructions can be found in various types of materials used in formal education. Textbooks especially dedicated for moral education as a distinct subject are more frequently studied in eastern cultures such as Turkey (e.g., Alabaş, 2019; Yinilmez Akagündüz, 2020), Malaysia (e.g., Tan et al., 2018), China (e.g., Weiju Zhao et al., 2017; Weili Zhao & Sun, 2017), and Japan (e.g., Suzuki, 2001), to name a few. Other subjects embodying moral themes include, but are not limited to, reading (e.g., Doolin, 1968; Patterson et al., 2012), native language (e.g., Weng, 2010), foreign language (e.g., Feng, 2019), religion-related courses (e.g., Ozhiganova, 2019), and community-organized religious education programs (e.g., Mogra, 2007). An interesting case is the French archbishop and pedagogue François Fénelon’s “pedagogical books”, which dated back to the 1600s-1700s and were used in the context of private tutoring provided to the crown prince. Though it is unclear whether they were considered materials for literary studies, moral studies, or an undistinguished subject matter, they were written as literary works with “codified” moral instructions (Ioannou & Malafantis, 2020). Research on moral instruction materials has also covered several historical periods, from as early as the 1500s (e.g., Patterson et al., 2012) to this date.

One major theme among inquiries into the content of moral instruction materials is the values they teach. Some studies simply identified these values (e.g., Alabaş, 2019) while others further sought to categorize them (e.g., Doolin, 1968; Feng, 2019). Besides conventional categorization methods, researchers have attempted to explore the types of identities, e.g. “civic, religious, and gender” identities said values constructed (Ozhiganova, 2019) or the role models they promoted (Doolin & P., 1968; Tan et al., 2018; Weng, 2010). Numerous studies explored the implied meaning of the moral concepts addressed by the materials (e.g, Alabaş, 2019; Yinilmez Akagündüz, 2020) and examined the values they taught in light of their contemporary social-political conditions (e.g., Ozhiganova, 2019; Suzuki, 2001; Weng, 2010).

Much research has discussed moral education materials, or moral education curricula in general, as a device for ideological promulgation. Suzuki (2001), for instance, conducted a detailed analysis of the “ideological pronouncements” in the Japanese wartime textbook *The Cardinal Principles of the National Entity of Japan*. Recognizing ideological pronouncement as “a kind of rhetoric that undermines and limits the possibility of critical discussion among target audiences, as an enemy of sound argumentation”, the author argued that the “publication of the *Cardinal Principles* should be viewed as part of a larger scheme to construct imperial nationalism rather than as an independent event in Japan’s wartime history” (Suzuki, 2001). Such politics-oriented analyses are common in this research area and are not limited to historical materials. One example is Tan et al. (2018)’s probe into the 2010s Malaysian educational curriculum to discover how it promoted moral values “for political legitimacy and forging national unity” in the multi-ethnic society of Malaysia.

A few studies have also examined the didactics employed in moral instruction materials. Mogra (2007), for instance, concluded about the material used in the *makatib* of the UK, where children of Muslim background received their out-of-school religious education:

It is not an add-on, hidden component, delivered intermittently; rather, it is explicit and an essential part of regular lessons conceived to reflect the core values of Islam, the sources of which are found in the Qur’an and *hadith* literature, but which also permeate many stories, poems and other writing across the centuries. It aims to present a world view that is not solely materialistic and seeks both to inculcate and encourage children’s understanding of moral principles in Islam. (p. 397)

Also conducted in a Muslim cultural context, but in Muslim-majority Turkey in the early twentieth century, Alabaş (2019)’s study found that the *Lectures on Morality* textbooks “adopted a moral approach based on [*sic*] ‘sense of duty’, and explains that a moral person needs first and foremost ‘religious morality’ which is instrumental in the foundation and strengthening of moral values”.

Additionally, attention has been paid to the didactical progress in moral education textbooks. Weng (2010) investigated two sets of Shanghai primary school textbooks from the 1990s and the 2000s respectively and identified a shift in the “political and ideological value socialization processes” of children from an explicit approach to an implicit one. Likewise, Weili Zhao & Sun (2017) observed the change of discourses in the ecological theme of “co-being with” in Chinese moral education textbook between 2001 and 2016:

[...] the post-2001 textbook discourses embody an instrumental trope and a subject vs object binary style of reasoning, which possibly makes egoistic rather than ethical children. The 2016 textbook discourses, especially those on the theme of co-being with, however, constrain the above instrumentality and envision cultivating ethical children. [Abstract] (p. 1195)

Another well-researched aspect of textbook didactics is the materials’ compatibility with the contemporary educational principles. Weiju Zhao et al. (2017), for example, confirmed the reflection of “the basic ‘student oriented’ idea of the new curriculum concept” and a “sense of comprehensiveness” in the *Family* section of 2010s elementary social studies textbooks in China.

Despite their essential role, textbooks are not the only source of moral instruction content children are exposed to. The next section discusses children’s books, a genre often encompassing both major arenas of a child’s life: the formal education setting and their leisure time.

Children's Books and Moral Education

Much research has examined the use of children’s books in fostering children’s moral development. “Children’s books” in this context refers to books whose target audiences are pre-adolescent age groups and written for the purpose of leisure reading rather than aiding formal teaching, although in many cases they are also selected to serve the latter. Two prominent types of children’s books that have been well studied are children’s literature (e.g., Court & Rosental, 2007; Freeman, 2014; O’Sullivan, 2004; Parks & Oslick, 2016; Pesonen, 2013) and picture books (e.g., Helterbran, 2009; Işıtan, 2016).

The moral instruction value of children’s books has been widely recognized. Barry et al. (2013) appraised children’s books as “viable tools for addressing character education”. On a more particular note, Helterbran (2009) contended that children’s picture books “provided an ideal genre to integrate values education for global understanding”. Similarly, Freeman (2014) found the use of children’s literature in combination with character education activities beneficial in helping children “develop a better understanding of bullying characteristics and strategies for dealing with bullying behaviors”.

A number of studies focused exclusively on the late 1990s – early 2000s phenomenal series *Harry Potter* by J.K. Rowling, exploring the value it offers to the moral learning of its audience. Having been appreciated by children worldwide ever since its first publication, the series, as (Binnendyk & Schonert-Reichl (2002) noted, “possess a multifarious richness and depth that far transcend the discussion of morality” and “can be utilised for both understanding children and identifying ways in which to foster their development”.

Since the majority of children’s books with moral content offer fictional stories, they inevitably offer what the act of storytelling itself has been offering since the dawn of humankind: transmitting social values. Good fictional stories, at least in the artistic taste of our era, are implicative and often unintentional in their moral function, as Pesonen (2013) maintained: “Heavily accentuated moral lessons often become counterproductive”. In his discussion dedicated to the *Harry Potter* series, Glanzer (2008) regarded positively its unique approach to the question of moral judgement, contending that “children need more than a set of virtues to emulate, values to choose, or higher forms of moral reasoning to attain” and that they “long to be caught up in a larger struggle between good and evil”. In agreement with (Cain, 2005), Barry et al. (2013) “found a key benefit of our process to be the messy self-examination, the inward look at one’s own values, beliefs, and behaviors, and the subsequent interaction and collaboration that either validated or challenged those beliefs”.

The implicit nature of moral messages in children’s books appears to have inspired numerous studies to systematically explore their moral content. While most research sought to understand the whole moral picture of a book or book collection, often through investigating embedded values, others are centred on specific themes such as global understanding (Helterbran, 2009), anti-racist strategies (Pesonen, 2013), or bullying (Freeman, 2014). In their inquiry into the values embodied in a set of Israeli children’s literature, Court & Rosental (2007) also unexpectedly discovered a pattern of “structural devices through which values are transmitted” such as “speech patterns, story structure, artistic methods”. Another area of interest is how such moral content changed over time, often in light of socio-political changes or educational reforms (e.g., Işitan, 2016).

Along with increased attention to the role of schools and teachers in facilitating children’s moral growth, the use of children’s books for this purpose has also been extensively discussed. O’Sullivan (2004) and Parks & Oslick (2016), for instance, delineated approaches to incorporate character education into the curriculum by means of children’s books. Barry et al. (2013) recommended adopting books with “potential for character education” in building “a literacy-rich social studies classroom”. Freeman (2014), as mentioned earlier, found demonstrable benefits in developing preschool children’s bullying awareness through employing picture books in conjunction with

character education activities. In his examination of the *Harry Potter* series' complex moral world, Glanzer (2008) contended that public schools can help children “clarify, identify, and understand the details of the metaphysical tournament of narratives, without ‘taking sides’”. Many studies established criteria of books' appropriateness for moral education in school (e.g., Helterbran, 2009; O'Sullivan, 2004) and/or provided a specific recommended bibliography (e.g., Barry et al., 2013; Freeman, 2014).

The Moral and Indigenous Language Textbooks: From Colonial Classrooms to The Modern Market

The previous section demonstrated that the adoption of children's leisure readers for didactical use in the classroom has been a longstanding practice while the reversed phenomenon of formal textbooks becoming leisure readers is less common. One of such rare cases in the literature is the aforementioned François Fénelon's pedagogical books, whose “moral value and didactic spirit” have “influenced the European philosophical and pedagogical thinking”, “contributed to the cultivation of moral values among young people”, and “are classical references for the achievement of children's well-being” (Ioannou & Malafantis, 2020). The books' influence has lasted well beyond their time, as evident in the modern republications still available for sale on online bookstores today.

A similar but distinct case exists in Vietnam. In the early twentieth century, when the country was part of the French Indochina colony, the Indochina Directorate of Public Instruction (*la Direction de l'Instruction Publique en Indochine*) published a collection of textbooks for use in the indigenous elementary school system (*écoles élémentaires indigènes*), also known as Franco-Vietnamese schools. Titled *School Textbooks Collection* (*Collection des Livres Classiques* or *Collection des Manuels Scolaires*), the collection served three grade levels: “Children's Course” (*Cours Infantin*), “Preparatory Course” (*Cours Préparatoire*), and “Elementary Course” (*Cours Élémentaire*) (Trần et al., 1933), equivalent to the first, second and third grades respectively. Written mostly in Vietnamese Romanized script (*quốc ngữ*), they covered twelve subject matters: indigenous language (i.e. Vietnamese), morality, mathematics, natural sciences, geography, history, French language, Han script (the Chinese writing system traditionally taught before French rule), hygiene, farming, sports, and drawing (Trần et al., 1933). After a century of turbulent political and social changes, most of the collection are now historical artifacts, except for two particular titles: *Moral* and *Indigenous Language*, each of which consist of three books for three grade levels. Although there exist no official reprinting records, a search in the Vietnamese Institute of Social Sciences Information's database showed that a commercial publisher, the Tre Publishing House, had reprinted *Moral* at least twice

and *Indigenous Language* at least four times during the 2000s-2010s. In 2001 and 2003, only *Indigenous Language* was republished. In 2007 and 2014, both titles were republished together as a series. Contrary to the original versions, each title was reprinted as one book combining all three grade levels. In the publisher's *Introduction* section, it was indicated that certain content that "bears clear political imprints of the French colonial period" (Trần et al., 2007) was excluded. Tre Publishing House's website classified these republications under *Education*, a category for educative non-fiction works, most of which aim at children readers (Tre Publishing House, n.d.).

A few studies have examined *Indigenous Language* in terms of their Vietnamese language didactics (e.g., Lê, 2005) and their "time-tested educational value" (e.g., Tôn, 2016); but *Moral* have never been addressed. Nonetheless, the survival of both titles into the twenty-first century when the Vietnamese culture, educational system, language, and sense of morality have all undergone major changes, deserves an investigation. Their transfer from the formal education realm to the leisure reading market signifies a continuation of influence and legacy, though to a lesser extent, similar to that of François Fénelon's works.

This thesis seeks to explore the moral content in the *Moral* and *Indigenous Language* textbooks and their recent republications. To do so, an understanding of the contexts in which they were popularized is essential. The following sections will discuss the general history of Vietnamese education and elaborate on the moral education landscapes in said contexts: the 1920s-1940s and the 2000s-2010s.

History of Vietnamese education

The Vietnamese nation-state prides itself on a long history "dating back to the first ... kingdom of Van Lang (2879 B.C.)", during which its "culture and society is characterized by both persistence and change" (Pham & Fry, 2004). This pattern of "persistence and change" going hand in hand is arguably the result of the local population's responses to varying degrees of continual foreign interferences, from "local people's criticism, contextualization, nationalism, and patriotism in the imperial and colonial regimes" to "national reforms and internationalization policies for higher education, such as outbound academic mobility, institutional mobility, model borrowing, and curriculum importation for the past decades of the 21st Century" (Trinh, 2018). These responses, Trinh (2018) contended, "hold complex hybridity resulting from a mixture of imperialism and colonialism over the centuries". One interesting instance of said contextualization, namely the transformation of foreign influences to meet the Vietnamese "indigenous identities and socio-cultural settings" (Trinh, 2018), is the case of "the first published Vietnamese Francophone novel, *Le roman*

de mademoiselle Lys (1921)”, in which the author Nguyen Phan Long used “French syntax as a rhetorical means of disciplining Vietnamese women in French Indochina” by employing “French literary traditions of novelistic and fictionalized diary-writing” to “impose Confucian ideals on Vietnamese women” (So, 2020).

Literature on Vietnam’s educational history, on the other hand, has generally neglected to estimate the genesis of its formal education. The thousands of years between the formation of the Van Lang Kingdom and the outset of French colonial rule at the end of the nineteenth century is often regarded as one period in which the Chinese educational system and content were adopted with a certain degree of localization (Pham & Fry, 2004; Trinh, 2018). Trần (1971, pp. 42–43) briefly discussed a Chinese colonial governor named Sĩ Nhiếp (187-226), who was often credited for establishing the Vietnamese literary tradition. However, Trần (1971, p. 43) argued that the 300 years before Sĩ Nhiếp’s governance in Vietnam had already seen Vietnamese students succeeding in the Chinese imperial examinations. This implies that Vietnamese formal education could have begun anywhere between 111 B.C., when the country first fell under Chinese rule, to the late first century – early second century, when Sĩ Nhiếp lived and ruled. Nevertheless, it is obvious that Vietnamese formal education has a long history lasting more than two thousand years thus far. While Pham & Fry (2004) analysed how education had “affected social and political persistence and change”, Trinh (2018) recognized the reversed effect of “social, political, cultural and economic structure” on education. In both studies, the researchers acknowledged that “the Vietnamese education system has been subjugated and internationally oriented for centuries” (Trinh, 2018) under “Chinese Confucian influences, French colonial influences, Soviet and US influences during the Cold War, and more contemporary international global influences as Vietnam has become part of the global economy and international regimes” (Pham & Fry, 2004).

Academic discussions often divide the educational history of Vietnam into five periods: the pre-French period as mentioned earlier; the French colonial period from late nineteenth century to mid-twentieth century; the postcolonial-Vietnam War period from mid-1940s to mid-1970s; the post-Vietnam War period from mid-1970s to 1986; and the post-*Innovation* period from 1986 to date.

Before French colonization, “the program of study centered on Confucian classics, Chinese history, Vietnamese history, ancient poetry, and military tactics”; “the language of instruction was Chinese, and formal training was culminated by a series of rigorous competitive examinations” (Aikman, 1970). It is worth noting, however, that Chinese was mainly employed as a writing system with its vocabulary and grammar. Instructions were given in spoken Vietnamese, and even Chinese texts were articulated with a distinct Vietnamese system of pronunciation (Trinh, 2018). To this date, this fusion

of Chinese vocabulary and Vietnamese pronunciation, termed “Sino-Vietnamese” (*Hán-Việt*), still functions as an integral part of the Vietnamese language itself, much like the role Latin vocabulary plays in many European languages.

After persisting for centuries, this Chinese-Confucian education tradition was abruptly overturned under French colonial rule (1862-1945):

The introduction of Western learning and the abolition of the mandarin examinations... paved the way for the decline of Confucian education, first in Southern Viet Nam, then in the northern and central parts of the country. In the meantime formal French education was established to train Vietnamese youth for the lower ranks of the colonial administration. A standard educational system was organized, characterized by a syllabus for all schools and highly selective examinations at the end of each cycle of studies. Studies were mainly literary, for technical education was almost non-existent. Under the colonial policy of obscurantism, most children received no schooling. In 1938, for example, in all French Indochina-Cambodia, Laos, and Viet Nam-there were only 406,699 elementary school pupils, less than 20 per cent of that age group. The number of students in secondary and university levels was far smaller since education was enjoyed by only a very small minority living in the cities. (Nguyen, 1967, as cited in Aikman, 1970, p. 77)

Nguyen (1967, as cited in Aikman, 1970, p. 77)’s account of technical education, or rather the lack thereof, contradicts the presence of technical textbooks in the *School Textbooks Collection*. Though only occupying a small part of the curriculum as reflected in the book list (Trần et al., 1933), at least farming and drawing could be considered technical subjects. Nguyen (1967, as cited in Aikman, 1970, p. 77) might be referring to the minor curriculum proportion dedicated to these subjects, or the fact that these subjects themselves might not have been properly implemented in reality, if at all.

In agreement with Nguyen (1967, as cited in Aikman, 1970, p. 77), Kelly (1979, 1982, 1977) was a prominent critic of colonial education and particularly French colonial education in Indochina. The colonial schools, she argued, “were designed to thwart the development of Vietnamese autonomous educational institutions, both traditional and modern, which the French clearly associated with anti-colonialism. Not only were the schools established to substitute for autonomous educational institutions, they were also set up to keep the Vietnamese from obtaining modern education of any kind, including French education” (Kelly, 1977). Furthermore, she regarded these schools’ “adaptation to local needs” as a disguise for “perpetuated inequalities between [*sic*] coloniser and colonised, both on individual as well as national bases” (Kelly, 1979). Specifically, in her analysis of British, French, and German colonial versus metropolitan schools, she asserted that the relation

between the two systems “was one of separate, unequal and related institutions within a single education hierarchy” (Kelly, 1979). However, unlike Nguyen (1967, as cited in Aikman, 1970, p. 77), she did not recognize the French colonial school system in Vietnam as unified and standardized but rather multiple systems existing in parallel:

Differentiation, rather, may often be such that what may appear a national school system, is in reality different school systems which transmit their own distinct curricula, provide distinct types of educational experiences, teach in different language mediums, and impart particular social values to defined social strata and ethnic groups. (Kelly, 1982, p. 176).

Kelly (1982) provided a chronological narrative of how these parallel systems developed. During what she termed “the pre-1917 educational chaos”, “several educational systems evolved, which were by and large regionally based”:

In Annam, educational development was designed to bolster the discredited monarchy and its retainers; in Cochinchina the schools took a different form in response to the demands of the monied and urban strata who had little stake in the monarchy; in Tonkin, the school system reflected the conflicting demands of the monarchy/mandarin elite, the urban colonial civil servants, and the ever-threatened *colon* community. (Kelly, 1982, p. 179)

In 1917-1918, French Indochina Governor-General Albert Sarraut “attempted to create a unitary educational system for all Vietnamese, using the Cochinchinese Franco-indigeneous school as the educational model for the three Vietnamese territories” (Kelly, 1982). With the exemption of “French schools, serving *colons* and under the control of the metropolitan Minister of Education”, all other schooling was “declared ‘private’; their continued existence depended on strict adherence to the curriculum and standards of the Franco-indigeneous (under the reforms, ‘Franco-Vietnamese’) schools” (Kelly, 1982). This reform, (Kelly, 1982) argued, was introduced to further restrict the Vietnamese’s access to French education and marginalize “any variant of indigenous education” of which the French had had to rely on “the Court and its mandarins” for “information about the quality and content”.

Though carefully devised in legislation, this uniformed system failed to be realized, for “by 1924 differentiation occurred along regional and class lines”, resulting again in different parallel systems with distinct “instructional media and educational content” (Kelly, 1982). The primary level, for instance, was initially intended to last five years and use French as the language of instruction, but due to a shortage of sufficiently trained teaching staff, in 1920, a new system of three-year elementary schools using Vietnamese language for instruction was established to serve the rural population

(Kelly, 1982). This divergence of language media means that those who attended these elementary schools had little to no opportunity to continue their education beyond the first three years (Kelly, 1982). The mentioned *School Textbooks Collection*, specifically written for use in said elementary schools, hence would have, whether so intended by the authors or not, provided all the formal education their pupils would ever receive.

Despite all the drawbacks, French colonial education did leave a heritage beloved by at least certain groups of the local population. In 1945, after half a century under French rule and a long period of resistance war, Vietnam declared independence. However, this event was soon followed by the North-South division of the country that eventually led to the decades-long Vietnam War. During this time, the North established a Communist educational system and culture much influenced by the Soviet Union, while the South witnessed a struggle between the remaining loyalty to “an educational system that mixed the Confucian and the French academic traditions” and the reform efforts introduced by the USA (Nguyen, 2014):

From 1955 to 1975, the French and the Americans were both active in the educational field in South Vietnam, but their objectives were different. The French were concerned with preserving their influence with the Vietnamese elites... The Americans wanted to improve the level of education of the population and strived to reform the Vietnamese administration in order to make South Vietnam a nation strong enough to bar the advance of communism... The battle between those two cultural traditions was waged by their Vietnamese supporters, with long-time Francophiles on one side and US-trained educators and administrators on the other. (p. 27)

This struggle confirmed the pattern of “persistence and change” indicated by Pham & Fry (2004). Assuming the American good intention did manifest as claimed in their reform proposals, it is interesting that “substantial resistance” would occur from the Vietnamese side. Said resistance could have resulted from such factors as nostalgic sentiments, unwarranted admiration towards the French colonial educational system, or unrecognized values said system indeed provided to the people it served. It is worth noting here that Confucian education, which was “in the mix” as mentioned above, emphasizes learning from the past over exploring the future, which could have strengthened the hypothetical nostalgia. With regards to the survival of the *Moral* and *Indigenous Language* textbooks until today, any of these speculated factors could similarly play a role apart from the value offered by the books themselves.

The end of the Vietnam War in 1973 and reunification of the country in 1975 induced another time of chaos in the Vietnamese educational history “resulting from complexities in integrating different

types of educational systems such as that of the South, that of the North, and the former liberation areas, into a new unified system”. This chaos, nonetheless, did not last long:

Despite lacking facilities and teachers, the general education system was extended to a 12-year program for everyone and Vietnam established a unified system of education in two years during 1976 and 1977. It also carried out another major educational reform in the period, 1979–1980. (Pham & Fry, 2004, p. 207)

The reform, however, “came to naught” due to a post-war economic crisis which, accompanied by “a serious and dramatic deterioration of local education”, persisted until the *Innovation (Đổi Mới)* policy in 1986 (Pham & Fry, 2004).

The year 1986 saw Vietnam “moved into a new era of [post- *Innovation*] market-oriented socialism” (Pham & Fry, 2004) that has remain until today. Along with drastic changes in economic policies, after 1990:

[...] a new Education Law was approved by the National Assembly, which has become a legal basis for developing the education system and strengthening the state management and coordination of educational activities. The education sector has formed a new management structure for diversification, socialization, and democratization of education and integration into the regional and international education systems. A new structure of national education was established, which is comprehensive, clear, and unanimously approved for implementation throughout the country. In addition, the types of schools have been diversified as well as methods of education, with the school network expanding all over the country. (Pham & Fry, 2004, pp. 209–210)

On Pham & Fry (2004)’s account, Vietnamese education post-*Innovation* has been an expansion of the post-Vietnam War endeavour. It is apparent that access to education and the national harmony of the system was now advanced compared to those under French colonial rule. This then poses the question whether said advancement applies to the educational content, particularly that of the moral education and Vietnamese language subjects in the beginning of primary school, for readers today are still embracing the equivalent century-old schoolbooks created to serve a system founded upon colonial “obscurism” (Nguyen, 1967, as cited in Aikman, 1970).

Moral education in Vietnam

According to Doan (2005), morality in Vietnam is concerned with how an individual views and behaves in his or her relationships to “other persons, groups and organisations”. However, other studies such as Nguyen (2016) also cited principles pertaining mostly to oneself, e.g. fondness of

learning, and one's worldview, e.g. belief in karma. Much like other aspects of the Vietnamese society, the Vietnamese sense of morality has been developing over the course of history and involves various forces of foreign domination. Nguyen (2016) identified five layers of values influencing Vietnamese morality: traditional values, Confucian and Taoist values, Buddhist values, western values and socialist values. Despite Nguyen (2016)'s portrayal of these five layers as equal contributors to what morality means for Vietnamese people, existing literature tended to recognize Confucianism as the most influential and longstanding, especially in the educational realm. It is an expected outcome given the several centuries when formal education in Vietnam was concerned exclusively with studying Confucian texts, and mastery of Confucian teachings was the sole path towards the most honoured kind of personal success: academic success.

Though often falsely perceived as an established set of rigid ideas bordering on religious doctrines, Confucianism “was never a monolith and included, over time, a widening array of perspectives that often led to internal disagreement and debate” (Goldin, 2015). That being said, Goldin (2015) identified the “basic convictions” shared by Confucian thinkers: the possibility, the obligation and the urgency of personal moral development, at the center of which is self-cultivation. In Vietnam, it is near universal for the motto “*Tiên học lễ, Hậu học văn*” (*After building a fine character comes the input of knowledge*) to be inscribed on the fronts of school buildings and classroom walls. These two purposes of schooling in such order of priority have been upheld throughout Vietnamese history. Today, moral cultivation is present in the curricula of all educational levels, from the first grade of primary school to post-graduate programs.

The most recently introduced national curriculum for general education (primary, lower secondary and upper secondary levels) was issued in 2018 and first implemented in the academic year 2021-2022. However, this thesis is concerned with its immediately preceding version, one that was in effect during the 2000s-2010s, for two reasons. First, this period coincides with most of the existing *Moral and Indigenous Language*'s republications. Second, the 2021-2022 curriculum has yet to have time to receive teachers' feedback and be studied by researchers in the manner its preceding version did (Doan, 2005).

During the 2000s-2010s, in primary school (age 6-10), the subject of “Moral Education” (*Đạo Đức*) focused on “(1) matters relating to self, character and personality; (2) relationship of self to other people; (3) matters relating to nature; (4) matters relating to national identity and love for nation; and (5) matters related to community and society” (Doan, 2005). In the following four years of lower secondary school (age 11-14), moral education was implemented through the subject of “Citizenship Education” (*Giáo Dục Công Dân*), which still majorly covered the same moral content as “Moral

Education” besides addressing citizens’ basic rights and duties (Doan, 2005). In upper-secondary schools (age 15-17), “Citizenship Education” continued with “basic areas of social policy, such as existing laws and socio-economic policy” while placing “an overall emphasis on introducing philosophy and principles of Marxism and Leninism” where “[T]he notion of developing a ‘socialist citizen’ is strongly highlighted” (Doan, 2005). As such, extensive instructions on socialist morality started in upper-secondary school and continued into higher education as “political education” subjects. These subjects occupied a substantial part of the curriculum, e.g. 12% study hours in undergraduate programs (Doan, 2005). Though to a much lesser degree, socialist values such as labour and respect to and appreciation of Uncle Ho Chi Minh, the revered first leader of the socialist regime in Vietnam, were also included in the primary school moral education curriculum (Doan, 2005).

Despite the significant position granted to moral education in the national curriculum, (Doan, 2005) argued that “its impact on children’s personality and character development is very limited”. Doan (2005) discussed several factors leading to this limitation, many among which pertain to the educational content:

[...] unit topics that are widely criticised by teachers as plain and narrow are taught repeatedly in different grades... In addition, the quality of reading texts used in textbooks for moral and citizenship education is far lower than the texts used in literature textbooks, therefore they fail to draw children’s attention and interest... Above all, the objectives of moral education for primary and secondary schools, as mentioned above, are actually unclear and unfocused (SRV MOET, 2004b, p. 23). The teaching content, therefore, is not deep enough to cultivate in children essential virtues, proper manners and a high sense of responsibility for self-development or for the progress of the community. (Doan, 2005, p. 455)

Given the importance attributed to moral education in both the Vietnamese society and its formal education system, said limitation was certainly a cause for concern. This concern can partially explain the public’s nostalgic interest in *Moral and Indigenous Language*.

Research Questions

This study seeks to explore the relevance of *Indigenous Language* and *Moral* in Vietnamese society today by examining their moral content from four angles: the publisher's decision to revive them after almost a century, the original content that had been omitted from the republications, and the republications' compatibility with the modern moral education curriculum and modern Vietnamese moral culture. "Moral content" refers to the full content of *Moral* and the moral-themed lessons in *Indigenous Language*.

The inquiry will thus be guided by four research questions:

1. For what reasons did Tre Publishing House republish *Indigenous Language* and *Moral* for sale in the 2000s-2010s as indicated in the books' *Introduction* sections?
2. What original topics were excluded from the republications?
3. What are the similarities and differences between the republications' moral content and the 2000s-2010s primary school moral education curriculum?
4. How does the republications' moral content reflect modern Vietnamese social values?

Research Method

Content analysis is a popular method for studying moral textbooks and moral content in children's books. This study takes the same path, employing both inductive and deductive approaches. The deductive analyses use the findings of Doan (2005) and Nguyen (2016) as analytical frameworks. The following sections will describe the data and elaborate on said analytical frameworks.

Data

Each research question requires a particular composition of data, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Data Compositions

Research Questions	Data
1	Publisher's <i>Introduction</i> section in <i>Moral and Indigenous Language</i> republications
2	Moral and Indigenous Language republications Moral and Indigenous Language original textbooks
3 & 4	Moral and Indigenous Language republications

An attempt was made to obtain the latest republications (2014) and all six original textbooks from the Institute of Social Sciences Information, but due to limited library availability and services, the Institute could only provide the second latest republications from 2007 and five original textbooks belonging to four different editions spreading from 1927 to 1948; the first grade's *Indigenous Language* original textbook was missing. Since geographical distance did not allow for acquiring the materials in print, they were instead scanned page by page by the librarian and shared via a cloud storage service. Publishing details of the acquired materials are shown in Table 2.

Table 2***Data Set***

Publishing Year	Original Vietnamese Titles	Original French Titles	Translated English Titles	Hereafter referred to as
(missing data)	Quốc Văn Giáo Khoa Thư – Lớp Đồng Ấu		Indigenous Language Textbook – Children’s Course	Indigenous Language 1
1948	Quốc Văn Giáo Khoa Thư – Lớp Dự Bị	Lecture (Cours Préparatoire)	Indigenous Language Textbook – Preparatory Course	Indigenous Language 2
1948	Quốc Văn Giáo Khoa Thư – Lớp Sơ Đẳng	Lecture (Cours Élémentaire)	Indigenous Language Textbook – Elementary Course	Indigenous Language 3
1933	Luân Lý Giáo Khoa Thư – Lớp Đồng Ấu	Manuel de Morale (Cours Enfantin)	Moral Textbook – Children’s Course	Moral 1
1935	Luân Lý Giáo Khoa Thư – Lớp Dự Bị	Manuel de Morale (Cours Préparatoire)	Moral Textbook – Preparatory Course	Moral 2
1927	Luân Lý Giáo Khoa Thư – Phụ thêm Chính trị - Phong tục - Đơn từ, thư khế – Lớp Sơ Đẳng	Manuel de Morale et Notions élémentaires administratives et de droit indigène – Cours Élémentaire	Moral Textbook – Supplemented with Politics - Custom - Applications/Requests, Contracts/Agreements – Elementary Course	Moral 3
2007	Quốc Văn Giáo Khoa Thư		Indigenous Language Textbook	Indigenous Language (republished)
2007	Luân Lý Giáo Khoa Thư		Moral Textbook	Moral (republished)

Note. Due to minor inconsistencies between Vietnamese and French titles, English titles were translated from the Vietnamese ones. The phrase “indigenous language” was chosen based on the list of *School Textbooks Collection* (Trần et al., 1933), where the subject was termed “*langue indigène*”. The Vietnamese term “*quốc văn*” can be translated as “*national language*”, but “indigenous language” better reflects the colonial context.

Analytical Frameworks

Research Question 1

An inductive approach will be used to examine the publisher's *Introduction* section in the 2007 republications. The section is identical in both books and addresses both titles. The analysis will identify the books' characteristics indicated by the publisher as justifications for republishing them. These characteristics will then be grouped into categories where appropriate.

Research Question 2

This analysis will compare the original books and republications to identify the lessons considered to "bear clear political imprints of the French colonial period" (Trần et al., 2007) and further categorize them by moral topics as needed.

Research Question 3

Official documents for the 2000s-2010s national curriculum are no longer accessible through the Ministry of Education's Information Portal, hence the categorizational matrix for this analysis (Table 2) is based upon Doan (2005, pp. 455–457)'s summary of the major themes and lesson topics in primary school moral education. Moral-themed lessons in *Indigenous Language (republished)* and all lessons in *Moral (republished)* will be categorized according to their moral topics. Comparisons will then be made in terms of curriculum-compatible and curriculum-incompatible topics as well as the weight given to each topic and theme.

Table 2

Categorizational Matrix for Research Question 3

Curriculum Themes and Topics	Lesson Count
<hr/>	
Major theme 1: Self, character and personality	
1.1. Being neat and tidy	
1.2. Being punctual (x2)	
1.3. Recognizing mistakes and correcting mistakes	
1.4. Increasing interest in doing housework	
1.5. Being polite while talking, making suggestions and requests	
1.6. Keeping promises (x2)	
1.7. Working independently	
1.8. Being studious	
1.9. Active participation in teamwork	
1.10. Never telling lies	
1.11. Saving money and time	
1.12. Sincerity in study and work	
1.13. Unlisted topics	
<hr/>	
Major theme 2: Relationship with other people	
2.1. Nourishing family love	
2.2. Being respectful and obedient to teachers	
2.3. Being cooperative with friends	
2.4. Saying thanks and apologies	
2.5. Caring for friends	
2.6. Helping neighbours (x2)	
2.7. Respecting other people's confidential matters	
2.8. Helping teachers	
2.9. Taking care of grandparents	
2.10. Cooperative attitude in study and work	
2.11. Respecting former teachers	
2.12. Sharing emotions with friends	
2.13. Making grandparents and parents happy	
2.14. Respecting the elderly	
2.15. Unlisted topics	
<hr/>	

Major theme 3: Nature

- 3.1. Protecting plants and trees in public places
- 3.2. Protecting animals
- 3.3. Saving water resources
- 3.4. Unlisted topics

Major theme 4: National identity and love for the nation

- 4.1. Showing respect to Uncle Ho Chi Minh
- 4.2. Appreciating veterans and soldiers (x2)
- 4.3. Being appreciative of Uncle Ho Chi Minh
- 4.4. Unlisted topics

Major theme 5: Community and society

- 5.1. Helping the disabled
- 5.2. Respecting international visitors (x2)
- 5.3. Helping bullied children
- 5.4. Helping the young
- 5.5. Giving consolation to unlucky people
- 5.6. Helping the police
- 5.7. Respecting well-known people
- 5.8. Unlisted topics

Others

Note. Topics that are repeated in different grade levels are marked with the number of repetitions (e.g., “x2”). The “Unlisted topics” sub-category under each major theme is reserved for lessons falling under that theme but do not correspond to any of its listed topics. The “Other Themes” category is reserved for lessons that do not belong to any of the five named major themes.

It is necessary to clarify the differences between topics 1.9 and 2.10. Topic 1.9 “Active participation in teamwork” advises against being passive and unwilling to share team responsibilities, a common problem among Vietnamese students at the time (the 2000s-2010s) due to the novelty of teamwork as a learning activity. Meanwhile, topic 2.10. “Cooperative in study and work” likely refers to conducts such as inappropriate competitiveness or failing to compromise for the group’s interests.

Research Question 4

Based on Nguyen (2016)'s model of the Vietnamese social values system, a categorizational matrix was established for this analysis (Table 3). Moral-themed lessons in *Indigenous Language (republished)* and all lessons in *Moral (republished)* will be grouped according to the values they teach. The number of lessons in each category will also be recorded.

Table 3

Categorizational Matrix for Research Question 4

Values	Lesson Count
<hr/>	
Layer 1: Vietnamese traditional values	
1.1.Patriotism	
1.2.National self-strengthening spirit	
1.3.Diligence	
1.4.Optimism	
<hr/>	
Layer 2: Confucian and Taoist values	
2.1.Studiousness	
2.2.Obligations to one's family	
2.3.Desire for reputation	
2.4.Respect towards others	
2.5.Harmony	
<hr/>	
Layer 3: Buddhist values	
3.1.Karmic worldview	
3.2.Sympathy	
3.3.Tolerance	
3.4.Benevolence	
3.5.Compassion*	
<hr/>	
Layer 4: Western values	
4.1.Individualism	
4.2.Equality	
<hr/>	
Layer 5: Socialist values	
5.1.Independence	
5.2.Happiness	
5.3.Justice	
5.4.Civilization	
<hr/>	

Overlapping Western/Socialist values

6.1.Liberty/Freedom

6.2.Democracy

Unlisted values

Note. Value 3.5 was mistranslated in Nguyen (2016) as “heartedness” and was corrected into “compassion” based on my personal knowledge of Buddhism.

Results

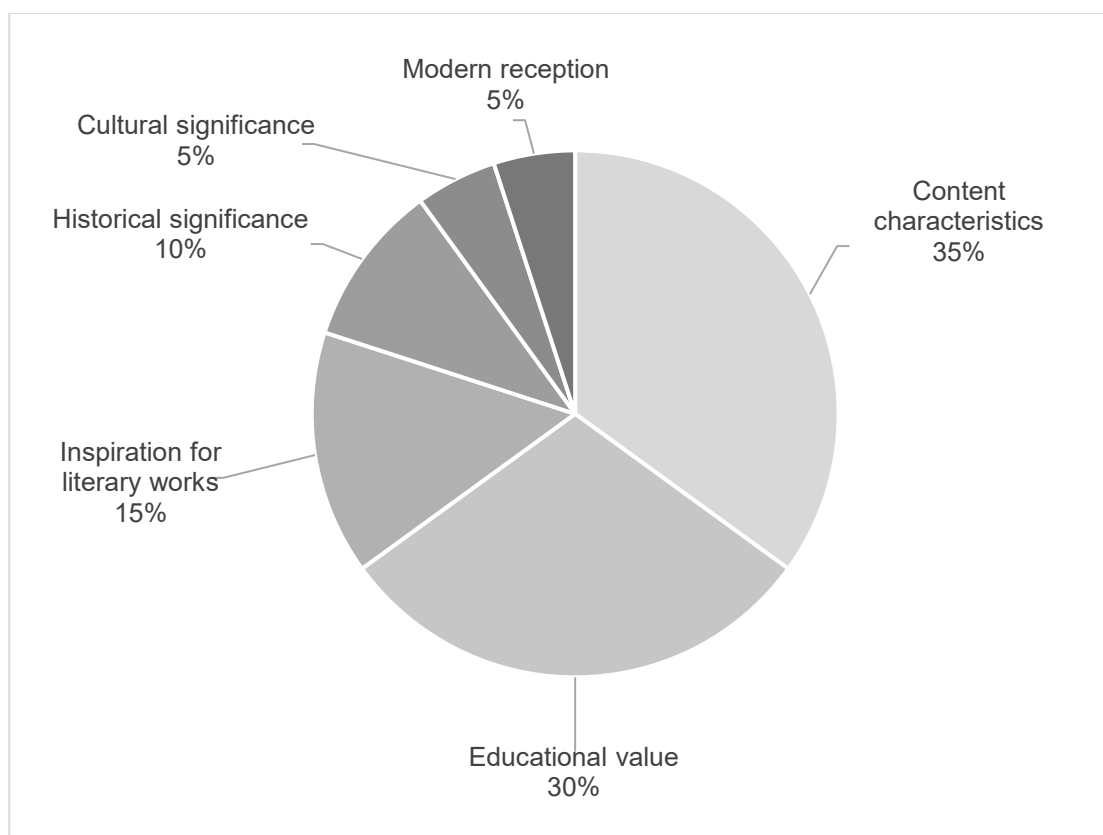
Publisher's Reasons for Republication

In the *Introduction* section, the publisher did not only recognize the original books' merits but also acknowledge their shortcomings; however, the merits were deemed to far surpass the shortcomings. For instance, according to the publisher, the books' language style might be outdated, but the books' educational value outweighs that.

The analysis found that the publisher mentioned a total of 20 merits and only 2 shortcomings. Both shortcomings pertain to the books' traits that the publisher considered inappropriate in today's society (outdated language style and certain lesson topics). The merits, on the other hand, are multi-faceted, encompassing six aspects of quality and significance. Figure 1 visualizes the weight of each component in the books' merits by percentage of mentions (N=20).

Figure 1

Components of the Books' Merits by Percentage of Mentions (N=20)



More details on the results of this analysis can be seen in Appendix A. Overall, receiving the leading number of mentions (35%) are the books' content characteristics: succinctness, lifelong

memorability, literary quality, clarity, comprehensibility, emotiveness, and convincingness. Coming second (30%) is their educational value embodied in pedagogical quality, “effectiveness in the education of children's souls”, “incomparable imprint in the history of Vietnamese textbooks”, “initiatory power”, timeless moral values, and the preservation and continuation of national traditions.

Two merits in the category of “Educational value” – “effectiveness in the education of children's souls” and “initiatory power” – may seem awkward in their English translations, yet they were so chosen to most authentically convey two ingrained concepts in Vietnamese educational traditions. Firstly, Vietnamese teachers have often been culturally referred to as “engineers of the souls”, emphasizing their primary role as shapers of personalities and nurturers of humanity for the young. Thus, the “souls” are a common receiver of education in Vietnamese narratives. Secondly, the phrase “Initiatory power” was translated from “*sức khai tâm*”. The concept of “*khai tâm*” (literally “open the soul”) dated back to the era of Confucian education. In the narrow sense, “*khai tâm*” was a formal ritual that took place when a Confucian teacher received a new student, in most cases a male child. The practice of this ritual discontinued with the perish of the Confucian educational system in the late nineteenth - early twentieth century. In broad definition, “*khai tâm*” is the action of exposing a person (also most often a male child) to his or her very first experiences with literary education, which is considered the gateway into the intellectual and moral growth of, again, the soul (“*tâm*”). Therefore, “initiatory power” (“*sức khai tâm*”) implies that the original textbooks had proved to be appropriate and efficient as part of their pupils’ earliest formal education experiences.

Ranking third is how the original *Indigenous Language* textbooks had inspired several literary works by its former pupils. To illustrate this, two specific sources were cited. The full texts of these two sources, a poem and a short story, were provided as appendices to *Indigenous Language (republished)*. The poem expresses the poet’s affection to his childhood memories in his home village, part of which involve the textbooks in question. In contrast, the short story revolves around the textbooks themselves, praising them from an adult’s perspective. Other sources of the same nature were also vaguely referred to without examples. All these literary works were claimed to have been created during the writers’ adulthood, and in many cases even in their old age.

The fourth merit attests to the original textbooks’ historical significance. The authors were prominent intellects of their time; today, their names are still familiar to those interested in Vietnamese early modern history. The chief author Trần Trọng Kim was one of the best-known members of a contemporary social class named “reformed Confucian scholars”. This group involved men who were highly educated in the Confucian system, only to face the collapse of said system at the turn of the nineteenth century. Caught in the struggle between the old and the new, they chose to embrace both,

enriching themselves with western knowledge and skills brought by the French without detaching from the foundation of their former education. The books, authored during the same struggle, were claimed to have established the orientation for all the educational progress that followed.

The fifth merit appraised the books as “a precious item in the treasure of national culture”; and the last, yet logically most relevant, was the “enthusiastic reception” of the republications by today’s readers (Tre Publishing House, 2007, p. 8).

Topics Omitted from Republications

Since the publisher claimed to have excluded topics that are “inappropriate for today’s society and educational views”, it was expected that all lessons with these topics would be fully absent from the 2007 republications. For instance, if there are many lessons with the topic of “Personal obligations in school” across the six original books, and one of them were left out, it would be logical to expect that *all* lessons addressing “Personal obligations in school” were left out. Likewise, if there is one or more lessons on “Proper dressing and manners” in the republications, it means this topic was deemed appropriate, hence *all* lessons dealing with “dressing and manners” would be included.

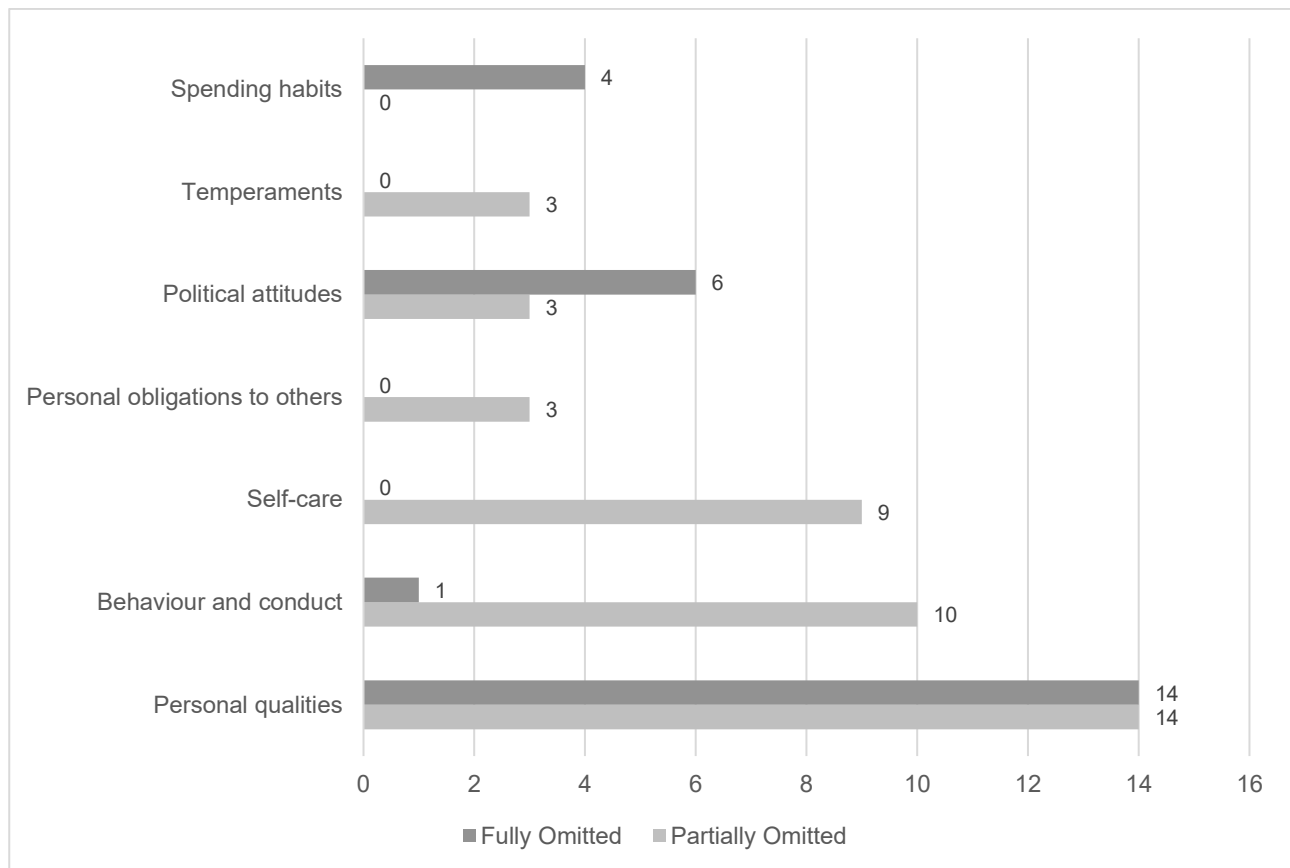
However, as the analysis revealed, this was not the case. *Moral (republished)* consists of only content from *Moral 1* and *Moral 3* while *Moral 2* was left out in its entirety, but most lessons in *Moral 2* are of the same topics as many lessons included in *Moral (republished)*. Therefore, in light of the publisher’s own justification, it is hard to see their rationale in choosing to leave out one third of the original *Moral* series.

These inconsistencies were explored through an inductive analysis. First, the original books and the republications were compared by their tables of content. Lessons from the original books that are absent from the republications were identified. Then, they were coded by lesson topics. Finally, the topics that emerged from these absent lessons were compared to the topics present in the republications. This comparison revealed which topics were consistently and which were inconsistently left out.

Figure 2 below compares the lesson counts of these two groups within each topic category. “Partially Omitted Topics” refers to topics of whom only some lessons, but not others, were omitted from republication. “Fully Omitted Topics” refers to topics of whom all lessons were completely omitted.

Figure 2

Comparisons of Partially and Fully Omitted Topics by Lesson Counts (N=67)



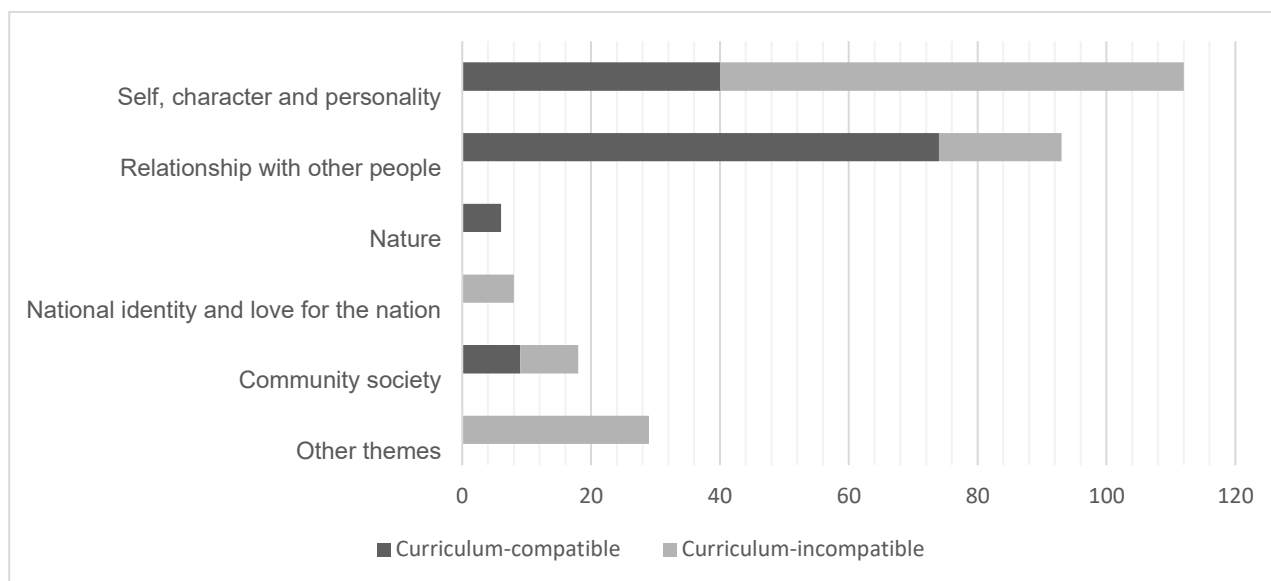
The only category that was completely omitted is “Spending habits”. All topics dealing with “Temperaments”, “Personal obligations to others” and “Self-care” are present in both omitted and republished content. The other three themes “Political attitudes”, “Behavior and conduct” and “Personal qualities” consist of both fully and partially excluded topics, with the respective lesson counts varying for each theme. Appendix B provides more details on the lesson counts of each omitted topic.

The Republications’ Compatibility to the 2005 Moral Education Curriculum

Of the 268 moral-themed lessons in *Indigenous Language (republished)* and *Moral (republished)*, 129 address topics compatible with the 2005 moral education curriculum (48%) and 137 address incompatible ones (52%). Figure 3 shows the distribution of these lessons among the curriculum major themes (N=268).

Figure 3

Distribution of Lessons among Curriculum Major Themes (N=268)



As can be seen, the vast majority of lessons are concerned with “Self, character and personality” and “Relationship with other people”, approximately 100 lessons each. However, the curriculum-compatibility of topics under these themes differs. For “Self, character and personality”, only 36% of the lessons (n=40) are compatible to the curriculum while 64% (n=72) are not. In contrast, “Relationship with other people” consists of 80% (n=74) lessons with compatible and only 20% (n=19) with incompatible topics.

The space allocated to the remaining major themes is drastically smaller, only under 20 lessons each. The theme “Community and society” strikes a perfect balance with half of the lessons (n=9) curriculum-compatible and the other half incompatible. All lessons in under the theme “Nature” are curriculum-compatible while all of those under “National identity and love for the nation” are not.

Lesson counts of curriculum-incompatible topics are presented in Appendix C. Hereafter is an elaboration on their distribution across the curriculum major themes. In “Self, character and personality”, lessons that endorse habits and practices for a healthy lifestyle received the most attention. In “Relationship with other people”, leading topics include “Treatment of servants”, “Harmony” and “Older siblings' authority and obligations”. In “National identity and love for the nation”, the top topic “Resistance against Chinese rule” consists of lessons telling the timeless legends of national heroes who had successfully overthrown Chinese rulers or stopped their invasion. In “Community and society”, most lessons were dedicated to the topic “Civilization”, through which pupils learnt about the new infrastructure and technologies that came with French colonization and were taught to embrace their benefits. The positive sentiment of these lessons might or might not

involves an explicit praise to the colonial government. Lastly, among topics belonging to none of the themes above, emphasis was on “Appreciation of the contemporary political system” and “Loyalty to the contemporary emperor and dynasty”. Lessons on the former explain different roles in the system and teach pupils to appreciate the work of the whole system. The later, on the other hand, appraises the historical figures across several dynasties who had practiced absolute loyalty to their own emperors and criticizes one particular rebel who overthrew his.

This form of loyalty is a virtue typical of Confucianism. Once a learned Confucian man had passed examinations to come into an emperor’s service, he should be exclusively loyal to that emperor and his successors. As dynasties inevitably rose and fell over the course of history, those who served during such times must always live and die for said loyalty rather than shifting their alliances to a new dynasty, even though the people and territories being ruled remained the same. This expectation was illustrated in the classic poetic novel *The Tale of Kiều* by Nguyễn Du, a nineteenth-century scholar and mandarin. Forced to shift alliance due to the political turbulence of his time, he expressed his shame and regret through the story of a young woman being forced into prostitution. The consensus of literary critics is that he considered himself much like a political prostitute. Interestingly, this expectation of loyalty did not seem to apply to Chinese emperors during the periods of Chinese rule but only between Vietnamese mandarins and their own Vietnamese emperors.

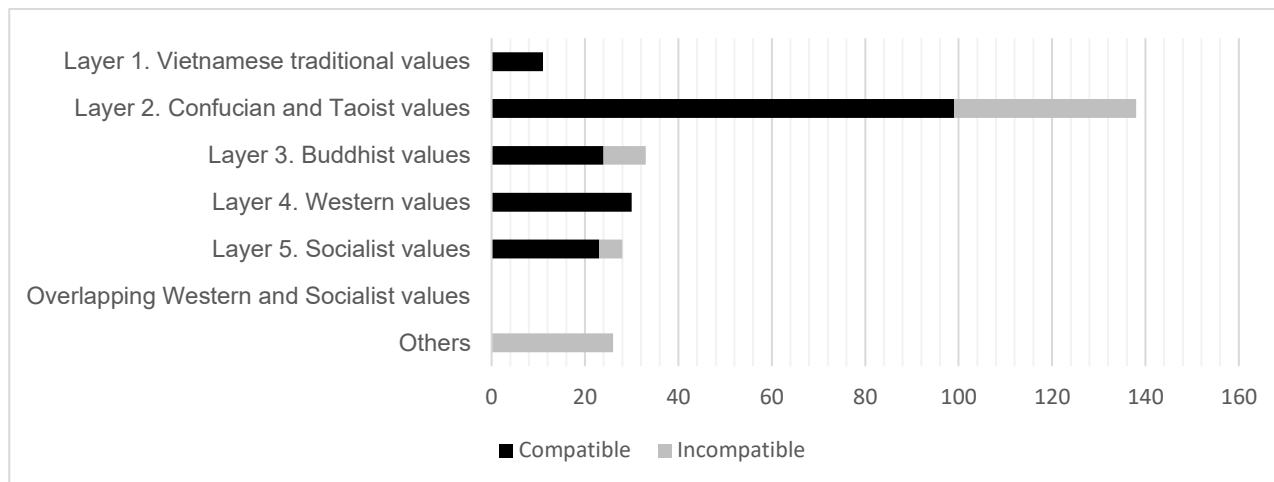
On the reverse, 61% of curriculum topics (n=19, N=31) are absent from the books, as listed on Appendix D. Noticeably, while the curriculum encourages pupils to be helpful in a broader array of relationships, the books focus solely on a child’s helpfulness in his or her closest relationships: parents (but not grandparents) and friends, including those being bullied (but not teachers or younger children). To other adults such as grandparents, teachers, neighbours, and village watchmen (the contemporary equivalent of the police), pupils were only expected to be appreciative, respectful, and well-behaved. In one reading passage where a stranger asked for directions in the village, the child is shown to have provided help and rejected monetary rewards, yet the lesson considers it a display of respect rather than helpfulness.

The Republications’ Moral Themes and Modern Vietnamese Culture

Pre-established categories in this framework are much broader than those in the 2005 moral education curriculum; consequently, the proportion of incompatible topics is much lower. Figure 4 demonstrates the distribution of lessons across five value layers.

Figure 4

Lesson Distribution across the Layers of Vietnamese Moral Values (N=266)



Lessons promoting Confucian and Taoist values overwhelmingly dominates the value system, occupying roughly half of all lessons (52%, n=138). The rest of the lessons are distributed rather equally among the Buddhist, Western and Socialist value layers and the group of values not included in the model (“Others”). Surprisingly, 11% of the lessons (n=28) coincide with socialist values, a layer yet to be present in the books’ original historical context. Overall, the majority of lessons fall within the value system (71%, n=187). Only three particular values were completely absent from the books: “Independence”, “Democracy”, and “Liberty and freedom”. “Independence” within the “Socialist values” layer refers to national sovereignty, not individual independence. However, the pre-established category of “Individualism” was addressed in the considerable number of 28 lessons, encompassing advice on healthy lifestyle practices and personal boundaries (e.g., being selective of who to befriend).

Appendix E provides more details on lesson topics outside the five-layer value system. Among these topics, the greatest emphasis was on “Respect, gratitude and obligations towards teachers”. The conducts portrayed in these lessons include being attentive to teachers’ instructions (in both academics and morality), obedience, and expression of gratitude on appropriate occasions (traditionally New Year Holiday, during which an entire day is dedicated to celebrating teachers). Obligations towards teachers were expected to be practiced in the students’ adulthood by paying visits to former teachers and when necessary, also provide for them as one would for their own parents. Nonetheless, of all the duties students owed to their teacher, they were not expected to be helpful to teachers while they were children, contrary to the topic of “Helping teachers” presented in the moral education curriculum.

Another topic noteworthy topic is “Ruling class ethics”. These lessons described the lives and works of past emperors and mandarins. These figures exemplified the Confucian expectations on the ruling class, encompassing both their personal life morals and ruling practices. The concept is rather similar to the European code of *Noblesse Obliges*, though much more specific and obligatory. Examples of the mandarins demonstrate the distinction between success and ethics: Some of them made historic contributions to the benefits of the nation; others were only humble government officials with no significant accomplishments. Nonetheless, what stood to be equally honoured was their life of righteousness.

“Ruling class ethics” was coded separately from “Personal moral cultivation”, which taught the morals of the commoners. While expectations on personal life conducts were similar for both social classes, the commoners’ morals did not include such matters as loyalty to the emperor, resistance against corruption or compassion towards one’s subjects. Although the male commoners were encouraged to ambitiously pursue education to become mandarins one day, they were also encouraged to settle with an ordinary life if personal abilities and circumstances did not permit said pursuit. Again, what stood to be honoured was commitment to their own moral growth regardless of academic or career success.

The five-layer model did not include “Greed” and “Gambling” under Buddhist values, perhaps because these two issues were much more specific than the generic values listed. “Greed” was one of the three basic toxins to the mind (greed, anger, and ignorance) which Buddhists seek to overcome. Buddhists also take on the minimum of five vows to regulate their personal life, the fifth of which is to avoid anything addictive, including gambling. It is worth mentioning here that “Gambling” might overlap with “Greed”, but from a Buddhist perspective, gambling also involves other factors such as the ignorance of its consequences; hence, the two issues were not coded as one.

“Appreciation of labour” associated with respect for the working class is a major socialist ideal that, under the socialist regime, has been promoted to the young through various channels: moral and civic lessons, literature and history lessons, and extracurricular activities. Its presence in the original textbooks is a coincidence, but it could have also reflected a shift in social attitude of the time. Confucianism upheld a clear distinction between intellectual and manual labour, and Confucian scholars would go to great lengths to display their detachment from manual work. Thus, the inclusion of this value in the original books could have stemmed from other value layers before being further promulgated by the socialist regime to come.

Discussion

Publisher's Perspective

The publisher seemed to largely regard *Indigenous Language* and *Moral (republished)* as children's literature. Their introduction places strong emphasis on the books' content characteristics pertaining to literary quality and their inspiration for other literary works. Many of the commended content characteristics are children-oriented, such as succinctness, clarity, and comprehensibility. However, the literary works they inspired were by adults and for adults. As such, it was implied that the books' influence extends beyond the age group they were intended for.

That being said, equally emphasized was their moral educative power. This power was deemed to manifest in three aspects: topic selection, content characteristics, and educational effectiveness. In other words, the publisher considered the books to be discussing what was worth discussion, in a fine manner, and have achieved the expected learning outcome.

Furthermore, the books' proclaimed merits are not limited to literary and educational value. The publisher also viewed them as markers of a critical turning point in Vietnamese history of education and culture. A century ago, they were a pioneering project conceived by pioneer thinkers. Today, they are a precious cultural heritage to be cherished and preserved by current generations.

Last but not least, "enthusiastic reader reception" was also mentioned. However, its weight in the entire *Introduction* text is minimal and far from comparable to the other themes. Thus, the text's narrative conveys a sentiment that the decision to repeatedly republish *Indigenous Language* and *Moral* was much more a cultural than a business one.

Inconsistencies in Topic Omission

The publisher's explanation for the omission of certain lessons, involving the complete exclusion of *Moral 2*, is poorly supported by evidence. Little pattern can be seen in the analysis result. Nonetheless, some of these inconsistencies are worth elaboration.

Firstly, the most obvious moral theme that would be deemed inappropriate is the appreciation of and submission to French colonization and the political system under colonial rule. However, inconsistencies prevail in these sub-categories. Practical submissive conducts towards government officials were bypassed, but general appreciation of their work was only partially so treated.

Cherishment and gratitude to the colonial state were off limits, but recognition of the benefits it brought to the local population was not entirely so. On the other hand, pro-China sentiments had absolutely no place in the republications, and generous space was allocated to the legends of heroic rebels against Chinese rule. Yet, one lesson of this topic was still omitted. Titled “Under Chinese Rule” in Trần et al. (2007a, p. 14), it bears no sentiments that would be disapproved in today’s society: It portrays Chinese invasion as unjust, Chinese governors as “all cruel and greedy”, successful rebellions as heroic, and the consequential national independence as glory. The surprise lies in both its presence in the colonial textbooks and omission from the modern republications, for such desire for national independence should logically be suppressed by a colonial government and promoted by a modern nation-state.

Secondly, as mentioned above, the original textbooks’ historical context indicates that for the majority of their pupils, three years of elementary school the books covered could have been the only formal education ever available. It is therefore understandable that the books would address certain topics more appropriate for adult life, such as work ethics (which is different from studiousness), spending habits and providence. However, spending habits were completely left out, work ethics were partially included, and encouragement of providence was present, but not the equivalent discouragement of improvidence.

Perhaps the most explainable inconsistency was found in the “Temperaments” category. Many of these lessons would be considered toxic positivity by twenty-first century standards. Oversentiveness and cheerfulness are no longer seen as moral choices but natural personal traits. The discussion on cheerfulness goes so far as encouraging children to always display a positive mood and hide their sadness from others’ sights. On the other hand, lessons on an unpleasant temperament (as in a child being prone to negative emotions rather than joy and satisfaction) and short/even tempers, though describing them as personal qualities that can be cultivated or eliminated at will, focus on teaching the management of behaviour rather than criticizing away undesirable feelings.

Compatibility with Modern Moral Education

It appears in the analysis result that educators from both the early twentieth and early twenty-first centuries do agree upon the most significant areas of moral development for elementary/primary school children: the self and its relationship to others. Attitudes and conduct towards nature have also remained roughly the same, but the concept of national identity and patriotism have changed.

Matters completely unaddressed by the modern curriculum are well justifiable. It was no longer relevant to teach children in the 2000s-2010s to appreciate the political regime of a century ago.

Additionally, Confucian values such as exclusive loyalty to a particular emperor, admiration of Confucian scholars, or Confucian expectations on the ruling class were of little concern for young children in a socialist republic state. Students would still gain knowledge of these matters through learning history and classical literature, but this type of content tended to be reserved for secondary levels.

In terms of content richness, *Indigenous Language (republished)* and *Moral (republished)* cover twice as many topics as the entire five-year moral education program in primary schools in the 2000s. While it would benefit the modern curriculum to expand its coverage to many of these topics, it was reasonable to leave out others. For instance, healthy lifestyle practices were no longer part of moral education but instead taught in the subject “Natural and Social Sciences”. Ancestor worship was once considered compulsory for any person with proper morals; though still practiced by the majority, it lost such status upon the arrival of the atheist-principled socialist education system. Similarly, the Confucian family order in which older children were partially responsible for the upbringing of their younger siblings was no longer intact.

A clear advantage the book had over the modern curriculum is the teaching of broader moral principles instead of too narrow behavioural topics. The broadest of all is the repeated reinforcement of Confucian ideals on personal moral cultivation. Lessons of this topic help children understand not only what and how to morally grow but also *why* this particular aspect of growth is important. Narrower but still comprehensive topics include rightful speech (e.g. awareness of the power of words, the wrongness of denigration, slander or backbiting...) as opposed to the curriculum topic of just “never telling lies”, appreciation of labour as opposed to simple interest in doing housework, benevolence in a wide range of thoughts and actions as opposed to the single act of consolidating the less fortunate, and a general caring and appreciative attitude in various relationship as opposed to only being helpful, to name a few.

On the reverse, certain matters relevant for children of the 2000s would have been unfamiliar topics in the early twentieth century. Children of the old times were taught to maintain harmony in relationships, but teamwork was not emphasized as a critical life skill. Sharing emotions with friends, as previously discussed, was not only unfamiliar but actively discouraged, showing a very different understanding of emotional well-being. Confidentiality was also a concept of the future with the arrival of “right to privacy”. Though the “Nature”-themed topic of protecting animals was addressed in both periods, modern urbanization and industrialization had added the necessity to consciously protect the urban landscape and natural resources. Last but not least, most topics pertaining to national identity and patriotism strongly bear the marks of the post-Vietnam War era. President Ho Chi Minh,

to be addressed as “Uncle Ho” by young citizens, only became a revered figure in North Vietnam in 1945 and eventually nationwide in 1975. The same timeline applies to teaching the appreciation of soldiers and veterans as a collective moral value rather than personal attitudes.

These arguments support the publisher’s assertion on the books’ timeless moral content despite certain outdated elements. As such, though would be a poor substitution for the modern moral education curriculum, they have much to offer as complimentary materials or a source of reference for curriculum improvements.

Compatibility with Modern Vietnamese Culture

Given the original books’ historical context and authors’ background, it is natural that Confucian and Taoist values dominate the lesson topics. Unexpectedly, the topic of patriotism was proudly present despite the country’s contemporary loss of sovereignty. Furthermore, while most of these lessons taught patriotism through anti-China historical legends, one particular lesson honoured a nineteenth-century mandarin, by the name of Phan Thanh Giản, who was determined to resist French invasion despite all odds (Trần et al., 2007a, p. 184). Failing the resistance, he stayed loyal to the consequential response expected of him by Confucian ideals: He committed suicide instead of surrendering. The French, on the other hand, displayed an unusual reaction: They organized his funeral according to French military honour. The lesson was meant to teach pupils that a person’s loyalty to their own morals would be respected by even his enemies. However, the tale seems highly unrealistic given how the French did not hesitate to arrest, imprison, and decapitate various other rebels with the same background and motives. Therefore, a historical case study is necessary to under the unique presence and narrative of this particular lesson.

More understandable is the absence of “Independence”, “Democracy”, and “Liberty and freedom” from the books. Lessons appraising the resistance against Chinese rule were coded under “Patriotism”; no other lessons particularly assert the universal right to national sovereignty. “Democracy” and “Liberty and freedom”, in addition, were also logically unfavoured by a colonial state.

While Western values received much less attention, their presence alone could be considered evidence of social progress and pioneering educational thoughts. This progress expands the Confucian morals of the soul to entail personal responsibilities to one’s well-being, an essentially individual-centered concept.

Last but not least, the analysis revealed that certain socialist values did not in fact freshly begin with the formation of the socialist state. One possible explanation is that they had been part of Vietnamese culture long before and are by chance also upheld by socialism; another is that they are the elements that made a fertile ground on which socialism could later grow. In any case, this result demonstrates that systems of social values are not necessarily mutually exclusive. It could be imagined that humanity as a whole have been constructing a vast body of such values, and they were grouped into ideologies in response to particular social, political, and historical circumstances.

Overall, *Indigenous* and *Moral* proved much more compatible to the present Vietnamese social values than they are to the moral education curriculum. This suggests a mismatch between the values taught by formal education and those actually held dear by the society outside the classroom walls. There is perhaps no simple interpretation of this difference. The curriculum might have been poorly developed and insufficiently informed by sociological research, or the educators in charge might be striving for progress by challenging the status quo. These are but two possible explanations. Notwithstanding, in the present reality of early twenty-first century, *Indigenous Language* and *Moral* are still speaking to the souls of many Vietnamese people.

Conclusion

It is certain that this study bears several shortcomings. The examination of moral topics revealed only a fraction of the historical, cultural, and educational elements still very much alive with the survival of these century-old textbooks. Language style, illustrations, demographic representations, moral reasoning, didactical approaches, to name a few, remain to be systematically explored. The analytical frameworks selected are only two of the several ways Vietnamese moral education and culture can be conceptualized. Furthermore, with this thesis being a one-person project, the coding process was inevitably limited by my own perspectives, understanding and interpretation.

The value this thesis hopes to contribute to the literature lies in the fact that, to the best of my knowledge, it is the first study of its kind: one that investigated the moral themes in both *Indigenous* and *Moral*, was built upon an international body of moral education and children's books research, and shed light on their relevance in today's Vietnamese society from different perspectives. Moreover, written in English, it made the phenomenon of the books' survival more accessible to international researchers.

That being said, a major obstacle for future studies would be the books' language. Sufficient comprehension to study their content requires a rather advanced level of Vietnamese, one that allows the researchers to grasp the rich nuances, old-fashioned vocabulary and grammar, as well as Confucian concepts so deeply ingrained in the culture that Vietnamese people often take for granted. Nonetheless, this obstacle is much less a problem for Vietnamese-speaking researchers who are familiar with historical materials. Should the topic of this thesis receive increased attention from historical, cultural, and educational researchers, among others, and future studies be reported in English, I believe *Indigenous Language* and *Moral* will no longer only speak to the Vietnamese souls but also speak *for* them to the world.

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Appendix A

Publisher's Reasons for Republication as Indicated in Publisher's Introduction

Categories	Mentions
The Books' Merits	20
<i>1. Content characteristics</i>	7
1.1. Succinctness	
1.2. Lifelong memorability	
1.3. Literary quality	
1.4. Clarity	
1.5. Comprehensibility	
1.6. Emotiveness	
1.7. Convincingness	
<i>2. Educational value</i>	6
2.1. Pedagogical value	
2.2. Effectiveness in the education of children's souls	
2.3. Incomparable imprint in the history of Vietnamese textbooks	
2.4. Initiatory power	
2.5. Timeless moral values	
2.6. Preservation and continuation of national traditions	
<i>3. Inspiration for literary works</i>	3
3.1. Poetry	
3.2. Short story	
3.3. Others	
<i>4. Historical significance</i>	2
4.1. Compilation by contemporarily reputed and trusted scholars, authors, and educators	
4.2. The path forward for the educational system	
5. Cultural significance	1
6. Modern reader reception	1
The Books' Shortcomings	2
1. Outdated language style	1
2. Some content inappropriate for current educational views	1

Appendix B

Topics Omitted from the Republications

Partially Omitted Topics	Lesson Counts (n=42)
Behaviour and conduct	10
Desirable	7
Behaviour towards the weak	1
Equal cultivation of intellectuality and morality	1
Proper dressing and manners	1
Work ethics	4
Devotion to one's work	3
Efficient organization of space and time	1
Undesirable	3
Harmful speech	2
Denigration	1
Slander	1
Disorganization (personal life)	1
Personal obligations to others	3
Personal obligations to outsiders	1
Personal obligations to the (immediate and extended) family	1
Personal obligations in school	1
Personal qualities	14
Desirable	10
Appreciation of labour	3
Appreciation of all labour	2
Appreciation of manual labour	1
Attentiveness	1
Commitment to justice	1
Charitableness	2
Determination	1
Politeness	2
Politeness towards the disabled	1
Politeness towards the elders	1
Undesirable	4
Cowardness	1

Greed	1
Laziness	1
Tardiness	1
<hr/>	
Self-care	9
Healthy eating	1
Moderate consumption	1
Hygiene	7
<hr/>	
Political attitudes	3
Appreciation of government officials	1
Recognition of benefits under French rule	1
Historical resistance to Chinese rule	1
<hr/>	
Temperaments	3
Unpleasant temperament	1
Short temper	2
<hr/>	
Fully Omitted Topics	Number of Lessons (n=25)
<hr/>	
Behaviour towards the miserable	1
<hr/>	
Personal qualities	14
Desirable	4
Generosity	1
Patience	1
Politeness towards strangers	1
Providence	1
Undesirable	4
Improvvidence	1
Gluttony	1
Selfishness	1
Unfairness	1
Temperaments	3
Over sensitiveness	1
Cheerfulness	2
Even temper	1
<hr/>	

Political attitudes	6
Appreciation of the contemporary political system	4
Attitudes towards government officials	2
Obedience to government officials	1
Respect and gratitude towards government officials	1
Cherishing and having gratitude towards the (French colonial) state	2
Pro-China sentiments	2
Recognition of benefits under Chinese rule	1
Recognition of the nation's Chinese origin	1

Spending habits	4
Frugality	2
Lavishness	1
Excessive frugality	1

Appendix C

Topics Incompatible with the 2005 Moral Education Curriculum

Major Themes	Topics	Lesson Counts (N=137)
<i>Major theme 1.</i>	Healthy lifestyle	25
Self, character and personality (n=72)	Personal moral cultivation	9
	Rightful speech	7
	Appreciation of labour	5
	Greed	4
	Humility	3
	Gambling	3
	Determination	2
	Courage	2
	Ancestor worship	2
	Manners	2
	Tolerance	1
	Ambition	1
	Content	1
	Jealousy	1
	Anger	1
	Malice	1
Benevolence	1	
Disinterest in flattery	1	
<i>Major theme 2.</i>	Treatment of servants	3
Relationship with other people (n=19)	Harmony	3
	Older siblings' authority and obligations	3
	Respecting others' properties	2
	Respecting others' right to life	1
	Respecting others' honour	1
	Being selective of friends	1
	Gratitude towards teachers	1
	Obedience towards parents	1
	Revenge	1

	Loyalty to friends	1
	Providing for parents in old age	1
<hr/>		
<i>Major theme 3.</i>	-	
Nature (n=0)		
<hr/>		
<i>Major theme 4.</i>	Resistance against Chinese rule	5
National identity and	Contribution to the nation	1
love for the nation	National self-strengthening spirit	1
(n=7)		
<hr/>		
<i>Major theme 5.</i>	Civilization	15
Community society	Respecting well-known people	3
(n=9)	Equal respect to all	2
	Service to society	1
<hr/>		
<i>Other themes (n=23)</i>	Appreciation of the contemporary political system	6
	Loyalty to the contemporary emperor and dynasty	5
	Appreciation of major Confucian scholars	1
	Ruling class ethics	5

Note. Moral instructions were conveyed through both positive and negative topics. For instance, lessons on “Greed” were meant to discourage the betrayal of morality for material gain, while those on “Humility” encourage humble self-perception and behavior.

Appendix D

Curriculum Topics Absent from the Republications

Topics	Topic Counts
Major theme 1. Self, character and personality	3
Active participation in teamwork	
Keeping promises (x2)	
Working independently	
Major theme 2. Relationship with other people	6
Helping neighbours (x2)	
Helping teachers	
Making grandparents and parents happy	
Respecting other people's confidential matters	
Saying thanks and apologies	
Sharing emotions with friends	
Major theme 3. Nature	2
Protecting plants and trees in public places	
Saving water resources	
Major theme 4. National identity and love for the nation	3
Showing respect to Uncle Ho Chi Minh	
Appreciating veterans and soldiers (x2)	
Being appreciative of Uncle Ho Chi Minh	
Major theme 5. Community and society	4
Helping the disabled	
Respecting international visitors (x2)	
Helping the young	
Helping the police	
Total	19

Appendix E

Lessons with Topics Outside the Five-Layer Value System

Value Layers	Lesson Counts (N=78)
<i>Confucian and Taoist values</i>	39
Respect, gratitude, and obligations towards teachers	9
Loyalty to the contemporary emperor and dynasty	5
Manners	5
Ruling class ethics	5
Commitment to personal morals	4
Appreciation of major Confucian scholars	3
Personal moral cultivation	3
Loyalty to friends	1
<i>Buddhist values</i>	7
Greed	4
Gambling	3
<i>Socialist values</i>	1
Appreciation of labour	1
<i>Other themes</i>	25
Honesty	8
Appreciation of the contemporary political system	6
Humility	3
Carefulness	3
Courage	2
Disinterest in flattery	1
Organization	1