

# **A Study of Gender Ideology in Taiwan Elementary School Textbooks: Perspectives from Textbook Editors and Reviewers**

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## **Abstract**

Gender is a product of cultural construction, and gender bias and stereotypes are an intricate part of societies, cultures, and power structures. Since the late 1980s, driven by international trends and the lifting of martial law domestically, the women's movement in Taiwan began to flourish. Many scholars and feminists concerned with gender equality have analyzed the repression of women from political, social, economic, cultural, and teaching perspectives and sought ways to liberate them. Their efforts have achieved considerable results, especially in the area of gender bias in textbooks.

Textbooks are a primary resource for school curriculum and a tool for reaching the aims of education. Textbooks convey not only knowledge, but also values and attitudes. According to "Today's Textbooks, Tomorrow's Minds", it is self-evident that textbooks mold children's minds and play an important role in the development of a country's future. The question is, however, "Whose knowledge do they teach?" Michael W. Apple claims that curriculum planning/design and textbook editing/production involve knowledge selection, process which are not value neutral. The selection and allocation of a certain bit of knowledge is the result of interactions among class, political, economic, and cultural power. It is a clear product with potential for value conflict.

The process of developing elementary school textbooks in Taiwan includes such steps as curriculum planning, textbook editing, review, publishing, selection, and use. Of these, textbook editing and review lie at the core and consist textbook publishers editing textbooks in accordance with course outlines and government agencies reviewing the textbooks. The two phases overlap each other. Nearly 20 years of comprehensive studies in gender ideology in Taiwan elementary school textbooks found that most studies are concerned with content analysis of gender bias implied in textbooks. Studies of gender ideology during the processes of textbook publication are obviously insufficient. This study used semi-structured interviews with elementary textbook editors and reviewers to understand the power structure and dynamic correlation between factors shaping textbook ideology in textbook production. This study offers suggestions on textbook editing, the composition and interaction of textbook review and approval committee members, committee operations to serve as reference for the government in the promotion of gender equality programs and textbook policy parameters.

## **A Study of Gender Ideology in Taiwan Elementary School Textbooks: Perspectives from Textbook Editors and Reviewers**

Distorted interpretation and bias exists in the concept that men and women are different from each other because of all theories that human behavior and phenomenon are constructed on a single, male-centered perspective. Women are positioned as others to men. From the perspective of power, assuming a dichotomy—mainstream / non-mainstream, male / female, continues dualistic thinking which is implicit hierarchy to superiority/ inferiority. With social change, human rights such as freedom and equality become universal values; especially, gender equality has been one of the important social issues. Among waves of female self-awareness, the educational process becomes the focus. Therefore, for educators it is an important task to raise gender awareness of teachers and students through education and to rethink the constructed social system and gender roles in order to build a harmonious society with mutual respect. This task cannot be ignored; hence, this paper puts the emphasis on the content of textbooks about gender-biased.

### **Textbook and gender ideology**

The textbook is like a window, which frames our vision to view the world with certain perspectives provided by the textbook and might inhibit us from understanding how knowledge is organized and chosen. On a microcosmic level, for teachers, the textbook is a primary resource and a tool to achieve objectives; it dominates the teaching and the practice of life and influences the conversion of knowledge, values, and attitudes. Also, the textbook is the main source of knowledge for students and the most important medium for students and parents to picture school curriculum. On a macrocosmic level, the textbook is the intersection of culture, teaching, publishing, and social media; it is consumer goods, the medium of academic knowledge, the guide of ideology and culture; it reflects the current social, cultural, political and economic formation and also the country's future vision (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991; Mikk, 2000). According to "Today's Textbooks, Tomorrow's Minds", it is self-evident that textbooks mold children's minds and play an important role in the development of a country's future. The question is, however, "Whose knowledge do they teach?". Michael W. Apple claims that curriculum planning/design and textbook editing/production involve knowledge selection and process which are not value neutral. The process of writing a textbook is selective input and output. The selection and allocation of certain knowledge is the result of interactions among class, political, economic, and cultural power. Undoubtedly, the textbook is completed through filters of different national social ideology, and it is a product with the potential for value conflict.

Most people seem to agree that ideology refers to some sort of system of ideas, beliefs, fundamental commitments, or values about social reality (Apple, 1979). Post-structuralist theorists argue that ideology is formed by the process of discourse. The political implications of the educational system are to retain or change the exposition of discourse which exclusive knowledge or authority is intertwined in. From this point of view, ideology not only distorts reality also justifies some form of "truth". Hence, ideology cannot be simplified as a set of beliefs about the truth. Ideology is the basic ingredient of any culture; it is the base for the practice of fostering autonomy. Ideology has a positive and negative role; it also contains a utopian level in which guides us towards a better lifestyle (Chuang, 2012).

It is worthwhile to invest more attention through the textbook discourse analysis of gender equality issues. Because the content knowledge of the textbook frames children's concept of gender equality, the textbook shoulders the production and reproduction of gender mechanisms. Since the late 1980s, driven by international trends and the lifting of martial law domestically, the women's movement in Taiwan began to flourish. Many scholars and feminists concerned with gender equality have analyzed the repression of women from political, social, economic, cultural, and teaching perspectives and sought ways to liberate

them. Their efforts have achieved considerable results, especially in the area of gender bias in textbooks.

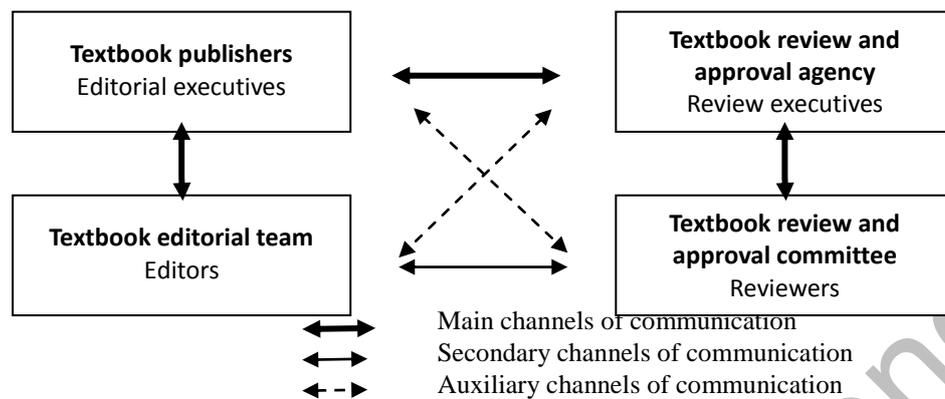
A review of gender ideology in Taiwan elementary school publicly and privately compiled textbooks developed according to curriculum standards in 1975, 1993 has found that there exists a great proportion of men to women in the graphic content of the textbooks. For example, the male characters are diverse, high rank; however, the female characters are low status in society and represented only as the role of wife and mother doing housework. In other words, the material provided in the textbooks teaches stereotype about men and women in traditional society, for women which has biased the career outlook and prejudiced the transformation of modern marriage ethics. Nearly 20 years of comprehensive studies in gender ideology in Taiwan elementary school textbooks found that most studies are concerned with content analysis of gender bias implied in textbooks, including sexist language, gender stereotype, invisible women, deviation and imbalances in representing gender roles, breach of fact, fragment thought as well as dominant patriarchal ideology. With an open, pluralistic society, gender stereotype and bias in textbooks has improved, but the textbooks still lack multi-gender discourse, mostly confined to certainly hetero-centered consciousness; multi-gender and sexual minority issues are avoided (Chou, 2005; Lan, 2006, 2010). It is worth noting that viewing gender ideology in the textbook avoids reproducing gender stereotype and bias, but this act is unable to form a "gender-bias free curriculum text"(Chuang, 2004, 2012). From literature review we know that gender ideology is mostly found in social studies and language textbooks; most studies are concerned with content analysis of gender bias implied in textbooks. Studies of gender ideology during the process of textbook publication are obviously insufficient. Lan (2010) examined the four stages—the elementary and high school education curriculum planning, textbook editing, textbook review and marketing, the use of textbooks and discussed relevant factors in the formation of textbook ideology. However, the formation of gender ideology and influencing factors of the process of textbook publication are worthy of further exploration.

The process of developing elementary school textbooks in Taiwan includes such steps as curriculum planning, textbook editing, review, publishing, selection, and use. Of these steps, textbook editing and review lie at the core, which includes textbook publishers editing textbooks in accordance with course outlines and government agencies reviewing the textbooks. This study aims to understand the power structure and dynamic correlation between factors shaping textbook ideology in textbook production.

### **The operation mechanism of textbook editorial review of Grade 1-9 Curriculum**

Grade 1-9 curriculum began since 2001 and included gender education as one of the major issues, which was integrated into the languages, health and physical education, arts and humanities, science and technology, social studies, mathematics and integrative activities. Gender equality in education has become legitimate official knowledge in Taiwan. Since the implementation of the nine-year curriculum, elementary school textbooks in Taiwan have been opened to private-sector publishers editing textbooks in accordance with course outlines, reviewed by government agencies and then chosen by schools through the approval issued by the authority. Textbook reviewing consists mainly of editing textbooks and examining the interaction of the two main operations, including (1) textbook editorial representatives—textbook publishing industry and its editorial team and the representatives of textbook publishers; (2) the validation authority and its review and approval committee. Textbook publishers and the validation authority play the key roles on interaction and communication between the textbook screening practice and pipeline; but the textbook editing team and review and approval committee exert the real impact on textbook quality. Editors operate between textbook publishers and editorial teams and take marketing and business interests into consideration; on behalf of government authority, reviewers enhance textbook quality for

the purpose of guarding the learning interests of students. Operation of the course can be said is the compromise between the two sides seeking the common ground, during the interactive process, referring to the diagram (Lan, 2006).



The operation mechanism of textbook editorial review (Lan, 2006)

## Method

This study used semi-structured interviews with elementary textbook editors and reviewers to understand the power structure and dynamic correlation between factors shaping textbook ideology in textbook production. According to the research purpose and literature review, interview guidelines were set out to collect data. The questions included gender ideology in textbooks; the influence on textbook ideology among individual editor and the structure and operation of editorial team; individual reviewer as well as the structure and operation of textbook review and approval committee members. Also the effects of the textbook editorial review stages on textbooks ideology were compared. Eight interview subjects includes four textbook editors (different textbook publishers, in different fields); four textbook reviewers (in different areas). Then, all verbal information and situations were transcribed word by word. Next, according to the relevance of the theme and content of transcription, the authors screened the significant key phrase, built analysis items, coded and analyzed them and then fit them into categories by re-reading and carefully viewing and comparing similarities and differences. The categories help the authors to understand the relationship between different respondents' answers and the research topics as well as the likely implications of interpretation.

## Results

### 1. Textbooks implied gender ideology

All interviewees said it is inevitable that the contents of textbooks have intentionally, or unintentionally hidden ideology. In recent years, due to the gradual strengthening of gender awareness, textbook gender bias or stereotype began to fade. Ostensibly, the analysis of the number and characteristics of gender is less likely to become a problem, but only those who are more thorough, more esoteric with keen awareness will see through the problem. According to the disciplines, textbook gender ideology is the most evident in the social studies and Mandarin; less obvious, followed by comprehensive activities, arts and humanities, mathematical and natural sciences.

In elementary school textbooks which, in general, women remain silent, even if there is mention of their contribution, are also complementary nature of the other, not women as the main discourse. (Editor 2)

People editing textbooks have been able to recognize the importance of gender affirmation, so try to avoid gender bias. As for ideology, it will exist, more or less, just saying it has really improved. (Reviewer 4)

## **2. The tug of war between the real world and utopia**

Genuine concern for the publishing industry is about marketing and market share. To avoid controversy and speed up the review procedure, publishers tend to hire conservative editors to write textbooks and try to eclectically adopt less controversial topic. Textbooks become deliberately screened without ostensibly controversial content. This act leads to negative effects: students may lose the chance to view things with different viewpoints, do not understand the true meaning of the conflict and are unable to cultivate critical thinking.

The censorship makes textbook industry employ more conservative editors compiling textbooks, so the risk is relatively low; prospective editors are less likely to be hired. (Reviewer3)

Some ideology is being deliberately manipulated. For example, "In the morning, while my mother was making breakfast, dad was reading newspapers", which is described in most of the social phenomena or facts, but will be criticized as gender bias with a magnifying glass, microscope examination. (Editor4)

Perhaps there existed patriarchy before, now in order to emphasize gender equality, then deliberately emphasize gender, but which presents a bit overkill, not so natural. The textbook looks right, but untrue. (Editor3)

Like homosexual or same-sex marriage is the issue the textbook editors dare not to touch yet. After all, society is still very conservative, not ready to accept. (Reviewer1)

## **3. Editors' personal ideology and the structure and operation of the editorial team affecting textbook content**

### **3.1**

All interviewees believe that the textbook editor's personal ideology will affect the content of textbooks because the editor selects the content, and everyone would put his/her own ideas and values into the content of textbooks during the compiling process. The editor and writers have power over selecting the text, writing, or making a decision. The respondents have different views of power, which the editor or writers owns more. The decision of an editor convening the editorial team has more impact; if the job is subcontracted to different types of writers, writers may have a greater impact. Publishers hire editors mainly based on the academic background; the degree that editors' ideology has influence over contents of textbooks depends on the basic attitude of the publishers, as well as the interaction between operators and editors during the editing process. The editor is responsible for selecting textbooks, writing texts; either the industry respects the editor, or the editor is more opinionated; it is possible to show a strong sense of patterns.

The writer who actually writes is more influential, unless in the beginning the editor with a strong ideology leads the job, ignoring individual editors' insistence, even the chief editor's. (Editor3)

The presentation of certain ideology depends on the decision made by those with a great power: if the chief editor has more power than the individual editor, the ideology of the individual editor will not be so obvious. If not, the part of the individual will be to the fore. (Editor4)

### **3.2**

If members of the editorial team have some kind of ideological bias, textbooks are easily rendered to ideological connotation. Interviewees agree that the editorial team composed of

structurally diverse ideologies will positively affect the content of textbooks. If only one editor with extreme opinions, his/her views often be diluted out. The higher the homogeneity of the editorial staff is, the more likely they are accustomed to certain viewpoints. They often have difficulty detecting ideological connotations hidden behind the textbook text. In organizing a textbook editorial team, we should seek the diverse participants with different viewpoints to view the content of textbooks. In practice, for the editorial team composed of by private-sector publishers there are no norms: requiring the diversification of editors; it is hard to find talented editors. Diverse participation and coordination and cooperation of the editing process are very important. If those who are involved in the textbook publishing process allot more editing time, more discussion, or have external viewers, biased ideology is more likely to be identified so that the contents of textbooks would be a more open, pluralistic, objective.

Textbook editing process will try to avoid controversial content, unaware of hidden ideology. (Editor3)

The structure is more diversified and more professional, basically, the same ideological tendencies will be more easily avoided; diversely accommodated representatives have more opportunities to lower the individual subjectivity. (Editor1)

The diversity of the editorial team indeed has an impact. For the composition of the editors, the textbook publishers will generally find professionals with whom are familiar to publishers; sometimes, it is difficult to consider the issue of gender, ethnic background. (Editor2)

#### **4. Reviewers' personal ideology and the structure and operation of the committee affecting textbook content**

##### 4.1

All interviewees believe that personal ideology of the review committee will definitely affect the textbook content. According to the curriculum guidelines, textbook reviewers form their own standards after transformation and interpretations. The reviewers have their own professional, philosophy and values and would take these elements into the contents of textbooks through the review process. Basically the review committee should show moderate respect for editing philosophy or the philosophy of education of editors. The majority of interviewees believe that the influence of the review and approval committee chairperson will be greater than the individual members, but the actual operation of the various committees are very different. The real key to negotiating different opinions is an open dialogue mechanism within the commission, and then ideological gap will begin to narrow through dialogue and debate.

That personal ideology of the review committee has an impact on the textbooks depends on the operation of the committee. The committee may have a lot of people who do not support a member' views, but do not strongly oppose the inclusion of this opinion, which is the awareness of the review committee. The awareness will be affected. (Reviewer 3)

##### 4.2

The interview results show that whether the review process will affect the textbook ideology depends on the committee structure and operation patterns. All of the interviewees think that the composition of the review and approval committee will affect the ideological content of the textbooks. Therefore, while organizing the committee, we should seek those who are professional and representative, and thus would be more capable of dealing with the

issue of ideology. People with professional backgrounds are more important than those with representative qualities; the review committee should have an open mind, professional competence, conscientious attitude, communication skills and accommodate different views. That the members have different views, but can have rational discussion and reach a consensus is the ideal review process. At present, in accordance with the regulations, the pipeline talk helps both parties to communicate with each other.

If there are too many members with common beliefs, in fact, this review is very dangerous. That is why we place more emphasis on the organizational structure and diversity issues. (Reviewer 3)

### **5. The myth of the gender representation**

The examining authority would consider the ideological background the appointed members have; the main consideration is the professional and proportion. This is, in accordance with the law of gender equality, female members must have a ratio of 1/3, as well as urban and rural, regional schools, as well as discipline expertise. The more diversified the composition of the committee is, the more views from different angles will be heard, which would leave textbooks to present a wide range of ideologies. That members on behalf of women articulate is important; moreover, members with gender consciousness are far more important than gender representation. It runs the risk of gender representation in the form of number, rather than the gender awareness, even at the expense of basic professional.

To have gender awareness, professionals, traits, characteristics, efforts, abilities to communicate are more important than gender of reviewers. (Reviewer2)

### **6. The slightly bigger influence of the textbook editing on the ideology than that of the textbook review**

The guidelines of the nine-year curriculum use indicators of competence; textbook editors can have wide interpretation on the contents. Five interviewees believe that the influence of the ideology of the textbook editors is slightly bigger than that of the textbook reviewers; three interviewees believe that the ideology of textbook reviewers has a greater impact. Textbook censorship is basically conducting some level of control. The publishers usually will try to modify reviewers' comments to get a license. One interviewee said that the influence of the ideology of textbook editors or textbook reviewers on textbook review ideology is not clear-cut. Often something is subconsciously generated or differently interpreted during the negotiation process; it is difficult to say who has bigger influence. When reviewers never mind the ideology of editors, only deal with content correctness, textbook editors have more power for the editors are in the interpretation of this course. Conversely, if reviewers intervene in the formation of the editorial content, for example, the way of modifying the content of textbooks, then, reviewers' influence will be great.

Editorial review process puts interpretation on the course. If editors and reviewers have different ideologies, they would interpret materials differently. (Reviewer 2)

### **Conclusion**

That gender education issues integrated into the nine-year curriculum symbolizes the values of pluralism and differences; furthermore, which helps students develop an open mind and attitude, accept differences, and respect for diversity. Gender education aims to have the same opportunities to develop a sense of self at different gender during the educational process, especially, for vulnerable females. In addition, the curriculum reform of power relations were reviewed and we would reflect on "What knowledge is the most valuable?" to "Whose knowledge is the most valuable?" Then, we would ponder what to be conducive to the development of the different ethnic groups. The concept of gender equality induces us to

question and challenge male-centered culture as knowledge and regulation so that we are able to reflect on textbook gender ideology.

While analyzing the hidden gender ideology of textbook content contributes to the implementation of the education, further exploring the influencing factors of textbooks ideology will be more beneficial to accelerate the educational reform. For example, as for textbook editing, the textbook industry can create self-evaluation mechanism (i.e. have someone review gender ideology); for textbook censorship, the criteria for gender issues can be declared to provision of textbooks (Lan, 2006, 2010). In this study, the specific recommendations for the composition of and interaction between editors and reviewers, the structure and operation of the committee as following.

1. Carefully selecting textbook editors, reviewers with gender awareness, professional, pluralistic and representative

On the one hand, the personal ideology of textbook editors as well as the structure and operation of the editorial team will affect the ideology of textbooks. Therefore, to organize the editorial team, textbook publishers should consider professionals' academic backgrounds and practical experiences and moreover pay attention to their gender awareness of editors and pluralism. On the other hand, the personal ideology of textbook reviewers along with the composition and operation of the review committee will affect the ideology of textbooks. Hence, the textbook review committee should take into account the gender awareness, professional and representative (including teacher representatives, gender, ethnic, regional balance). In addition to the academic and professional background, scholars and experts with a strong sense of subjective consciousness should be avoided in order to prevent from unnecessary disputes, or overly biased ideological connotations presented in the textbooks. The review committee should clearly understand the nature and position of the textbook, with an open mind of tolerance as well as the capability of reflecting consciously, introspectively.

2. Strengthening editors' and reviewers' inter-subjectivity to validate communication mechanism

The textbook editorial review is a peer-to-peer interaction between reciprocity rather than domination or class relations; the textbook review process is involved in communication of the inter-subjectivity to achieve a reasonable consensus; everyone has an equal opportunity to participate in or be the main voice. Habermas proposed an ideal speech situation can develop the ability to communicate with each other. Their four basic conditions as follows: 1. Comprehensibility: the words of the speaker should be understood; further ability to communicate, it is necessary to clarify misunderstanding, to exemplify, to elaborate; 2. Sincerity: the speaker must be honest, the listener must trust the motives of the speaker; both sides should come through their actions to show their trust; 3. Fidelity: all message that can be achieved and mutually recognized must be speaking of authenticity. Explore all information as well as critically evaluate it; 4. Justifiability: statements must be seen by all participants to confirm the legitimacy or legality of the speaker. Critical inquiry is explicit guidelines and concerns about the value of the potential courses, beliefs, interests and attempt. The textbook review process should be democratic and rational and strengthen the pipeline communication mechanism to establish mutual trust and improve textbook quality.

3. Positively viewing textbook conflict issues and developing the ability to critical reflection of teaching and learning.

Textbooks used to present harmonious and equitable social relations and tried to avoid controversial issues, taking the status quo for granted. Selecting the textbook content with social conflict, changing society and the contrast idea or theme, which actually reflects the social reality, contributes to the learner's critical thinking and action-taking ability to deal with the prevailing diverse and complex society. Amending textbooks does not ensure that teachers and students use the textbook with gender sensitivity and cannot guarantee that

teachers and students have opportunities to discuss gender issues (Leach, 2003). Although teaching activities are primarily based on the textbook, the textbook is not the Bible, nor the only teaching material; the textbook content only reveals a part of curriculum ideas and is the starting point for teaching and learning. After we reflect on and discuss the ideology of the textbook, the content should be re-read, interpreted, and given meaning; teachers with learners must work hard. Teachers should be able to play a transformative intellectual: who have the ability to reflect on critical subjectivity practice, consider the differences, have empathy to understand, reflect on and deconstruct the ideology in textbooks, and then cultivate critical thinking students.

#### 4. Constructing gender equality meaning and value in textbooks through dialogue

The textbook is a social and cultural product. Inevitably, there exist some value judgments and ideological implications of biased textbooks. Through constant criticism, debate, discussion, improvement, and modification, improper ideology connotations may be reduced. What the value of the textbook is deserves an open dialogue through public discourse to listen to diverse voices. Participating in the creation of meaning and value re-creation can release male/ mainstream discourse framework, establish gender equality thinking to build educational theory, and put the growth of gender into educational practice.

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