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Construction and disruption of hegemonic power in picturebooks: An analysis of “best behaviour” picturebooks in China

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Abstract

“Best behaviour” picturebooks, also known as “making good habits” or “teaching good manners” picturebooks, have explicit educational intentions that imply a culturally hegemonic voice. Despite this problematic characteristic, these picturebooks are welcomed by both parents and the market in China. Using extant picturebook theory of picture-text relationships, narratological, paratextual analyses and translation theory, this article seeks a better understanding of how this hegemonic voice is formed, resolved or consolidated via a critical reading of three best-selling “best behaviour” picturebook series available in the Chinese market. One is the original Chinese-language WaiWaiTu-ZiKongLi series (Little Bunny series). The second series is the translated United States series, Hands Are Not For Hitting, now a Chinese best behaviour publication. The third series is a translated rendition of Pete the Cat series, which did not serve any evident educational purpose in its original English-market form but has been identified to cultivate good character on the Chinese covers. These publications commonly present straightforward picture-text relationships of two-dimensional stories and characters. Most importantly, adults hold power in these best behaviour children’s books. We argue that both the construction and disruption of hegemonic thinking co-exist in these picturebooks, reflecting the nature of adult power plays. At the same time, these best behaviour picturebooks serve as a good example of how hegemonic notions work within specific cultural and pedagogical contexts.

Keywords

“Best behaviour” picturebooks; paratext; peritext; series

The popularity of “Best behaviour” picturebooks

“Best behaviour” picturebooks have explicit educational intentions while applying a hegemonic voice that holds adults as the dominant group and denotes children being educated by adults on how to behave and what proper behaviours are. Hegemonic power exists among adults and children, and it is being consolidated when a child takes part in reinforcing the power structure and a social norm; for example, through an adult reading a picturebook to a child. Unfortunately, these structures and norms are designed to silence those without access to power. Best behaviour picturebooks are key delivery vehicles for this



hegemonic power drive. However, contemporary best behaviour picturebooks have received little scholarly attention. Such books are those with a strong educational tendency, whose intent is to teach children good manners, socialise them and build their positive characters or social emotions through picturebooks. While best behaviour is a term for this book corpus, drawing on the typical publisher's marketing label, other terms for these books include "making good habits", "teaching good manners", and "character-building". The boundaries of what qualifies as a best behaviour picturebook are fluid. All such books share common pedagogical characteristics or functions with educational picturebooks and early concept picturebooks; nevertheless, they do not entirely fit these common scholarly picturebook categories (Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2018).

Best behaviour picturebooks are welcomed by parents, evidenced by the many examples of best-selling picturebooks in the Chinese book market. Extant scholarship has focused on the early periods of the 18th and 19th centuries. Notably, recent investigations are scarce, probably because "read for pleasure" and entertainment have gradually replaced education and indoctrination motivations after the 20th century (Rudd, 2004). These best behaviour picturebooks are controversial and do not occupy the most celebrated categories in picturebook research because of their hegemonic and didactic voice. The genre has sometimes been critiqued as having poor taste while lacking aesthetic quality (Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2018). Hence picturebook scholars tend to turn their eyes on other "quality" writing (Beauvais, 2021, p. 123). Such attitudes have hampered serious scholarly investigations, exacerbating the issue discussed in this article. Considering their prominence in some markets, more research is needed to illuminate this contemporary picturebook corpus.

This article presents a critical reading of three best-selling best behaviour picturebook series in the Chinese market. One is an original Chinese-language series, *WaiWaiTu-ZiKongLi* (Little Bunny series). The second is a translated educational picturebook series from United States entitled *Hands Are Not For Hitting*, which is labelled as a best behaviour series in China. The third is a translated rendition of *Pete the Cat* series, which seemingly did not serve any evident educational purpose in its original English-market form but has been labelled with "cultivate good character" on the Chinese cover. Moreover, the explicit reference to cultivating "good character" in the Chinese guidebook inside the picturebook represents a clear editorial effort to harness an educational function to the story. This article investigates how moral messages and the hegemonic voice work in these series through an analysis of the main texts and editorial and paratextual additions. A comprehensive understanding of best behaviour picturebooks requires an interdisciplinary approach. Therefore, this article seeks to understand how the hegemonic voice is formed in these education-oriented picturebooks using extant picturebook theory of picture-text relationships, narratological and the paratextual analyses and the hegemonic power play involved in translation. Furthermore, this article seeks to examine how this voice is resolved or consolidated.

"Moral or not moral?": The context of the three best behaviour picturebook series

The series *Little Bunny*, *Hands Are Not For Hitting* and *Pete the Cat* were chosen because they have similar themes and are best-selling children's picturebooks in the Chinese market. The *Little Bunny* series is only available in Chinese and all books in the series employ the same characters—*Little Bunny*, *Little Lamb* and *Little Dragon*. They depict events happening in the forest, centring on the discovery of *Little Bunny*'s shortcomings and all the other animal characters who help her to overcome them. For example, one book in this series, *Little Bunny: Goal and Plan Management* (Xu & Yu, 2016b) discusses a rope-jumping contest. All of the characters except *Little Bunny* have a plan for winning; she learns from others that in order to succeed, one must plan. *Little Bunny* does so and finally wins the contest.¹ Other episodes discuss developing responsibility, avoiding negative language, dealing with pressure, and setting and sticking to goals. They all share a similar structure and flavour: *Little Bunny* identifies a shortcoming and overcomes it; a third-person didactic narrative voice; and the use of a similar watercolour style of illustration.

The Hands Are Not For Hitting series is different from the Little Bunny series, as the characters vary in each book, and there is no single protagonist. However, books in the series are connected by similar themes and style: children are told what to do and what not to do. The book *Hands Are Not For Hitting* (Agassi & Heinlen, 2006a), for example, acknowledges that children may want to use their hands to hit people sometimes but emphasises that hands are best used for other purposes. The book suggests using hands to say “hello”, play games, help others and take care of oneself. Other stories in this series encourage children not to bite, kick or insult others. The Chinese version (*ShouBuShiYongLaiDaRenDe*, Agassi & Heinlen, 2018) is a literal translation of the original English version.

The English-market version of the Pete the Cat series is not a typical best behaviour series, although the text of *Pete the Cat: I Love My White Shoes* indicates “the moral of Pete’s story is: no matter what you step in, keep walking along and singing your song” (Litwin & Dean, 2014, p. 30). Considering the anti-didactic narrative voice in other parts of the book, the phrase “the moral of this story is” in the English version could be interpreted as irony, deliberately playing with language to create an intertextuality with traditional fables or moral picturebooks to make fun of the word “moral”. In the English version of *Pete the Cat: I Love My White Shoes*, Pete proudly wears his white shoes for an outing, during which he steps into mud, strawberries, blueberries and water and his shoes turn different colours. Then he says, “Keep walking along and singing your song, because it is all good” (Litwin & Dean, 2014, pp. 30–32). This cheerful narrative voice carries no overt didactic voice. However, the Chinese version (*PiTeMao—WoAiWoDeZangXieZi*, Litwin & Dean, 2018) adds an explicit best behaviour label on the cover and in an additional guidebook for adults, which is not included in the English version. The guidebook includes expert interpretation and recommended activities with themes according to the content. Furthermore, other stories and themes labelled by the Chinese version include school life (sharing), delivering presents at Christmas (self-confidence), playing baseball (trying hard) and so forth.

Best behaviour picturebooks come in a series to reinforce the hegemonic voice

Best behaviour picturebooks share some common characteristics with the series picturebooks in that they take full advantage of repetition to reinforce hegemonic voices. Firstly, in the realm of best behaviour picturebooks, series are relatively popular, due not only to publishers’ promotion strategies for economic success, but also because the hegemonic voice is accumulated over many instalments. This phenomenon of repetition appears to reflect the common adult mindset that children must be educated repeatedly and comprehensively. If one checks the popular online website, Dangdang.com, for best behaviour picturebooks, most are published in series. Series of picturebooks typically comprise books sharing a common narrative structure or pattern (Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2018). In this vein, series raise certain expectations of the reader about the narrative elements of setting, character, plot, theme and narrative voice. Readers expect all books in the series to present these elements consistently, which fits adults’ expectations on best behaviour picturebooks.

As well as the marketing advantages offered by series formats, the reason best behaviour books usually come in series is that the same characters can help children repetitively form schemas and scripts as a social scaffolding (Nikolajeva, 2003; Watson, 2004). Stephens (2011) confirmed that schemas provide the framework for conceptual understanding. The schemas and scripts in the best behaviour picturebooks therefore consolidate ideas of social ideology, which support hegemonic power structures. Moreover, general best behaviour series are slightly different from mainstream picturebooks series in that, rather than having the same protagonist or pattern, they instead connect them with theme or narrative voice. Some best behaviour picturebooks are written by different authors and leverage different characters. Most are episodic, meaning that each book can be read on its own. For example, the books in the Hands Are Not for Hitting series are not written by the same author; however, the same person illustrated them all. Nevertheless, these books are still recognised as a series, owing to the franchise

titling of “Not for” and a similar narrative voice. More importantly, the pedagogical purpose of educating children connects them. This practice suggests that the moral message is more important than the characters and the narrative.

Series are often regarded as inferior to standalone works (Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2018), and this applies equally to best behaviour picturebooks. Both picturebook categories have been critiqued as being of inferior aesthetic quality and narrative complexity (Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2018), pertaining to the fact that the characters in most series are two-dimensional and do not grow up or change in significant ways. Unlike many novels, the characters in picturebooks series do not develop during the course of the narrative. Notably, the names of the author and illustrator are difficult to find on the covers of the Little Bunny series; they are placed on the top right in miniscule print. In contrast, the names of the series planner and publishing team are noticeable. This again denotes that the authors are less important than the themes and marketing strategy.

Children’s agency is neglected in best behaviour picturebooks

The privileged status of pictures in storytelling has led to exciting developments in the picturebook genre in recent decades, resulting in innovative modern and postmodern picturebooks. The dual semiotic mode—the picture and the words in picturebooks—is particularly powerful owing to their interplay, and this relationship is at the core of the genre, differentiating it from other children’s literature genres. Word descriptions of picture-word relationship like “composite” and “musical score” (Schwarcz, 1982, p. 14), “polysystemy” (Lewis, 1996, p. 105) and “transmediation” (Sipe, 2011, p. 242) are not enough to show the complex but dynamic picture-word relationship. Nikolajeva and Scott (2001) offer an elaborated typology of this relationship as “symmetrical, complementary, expanding or enhancing, counterpointing, and sylleptic” (p. 12), which is a useful when analysing such relationships in picturebooks.

However, the picture-word relationship in best behaviour books tends to be one dimensional, leaving little imagination and limiting alternative interpretations for children. Instead, the moral message is clearly telegraphed. In *Hands Are Not For Hitting*, for example, the illustrations symmetrically mirror the information presented by the words. For example, the first verse indicates: “Hands come in all shapes, sizes, and colours. There are lots of things your hands are meant to do” (Agassi & Heinlen, 2006a, pp. 2–3), and the picture shows hands in different sizes and colours, including one animal paw. These pictures occupy roughly 80 percent of the page area; hence little room remains for the narrative, and this pattern continues to the end of the book. According to Nikolajeva and Scott’s (2001) typology, the main picture-text relationship in this book is “symmetrical” (p. 12), meaning that pictures strictly illustrate the content of the words. Little space is left for children to engage with the pictures and the story; indicating that children should accept the moral message without interpretation. In *Little Bunny is Late* (Xu & Yu, 2016c), the words in the first verse are very rich:

The winter was coming, the leaves were falling and the window was shaking; the bell rang and woke up Little Bunny; ‘I want to sleep more’ Little Bunny said; Little Bunny didn’t open her eyes and stopped the bell; Little Bunny continued to sleep. (pp. 2–3)

Although the picture is unable to present the dialogue verbatim, it does show the leaves falling and Little Bunny sleeping on the bed. The picture is quiet and calm and only presents one of the scenes offered in the words; therefore, the words offer considerably more information. The text-picture relationship is “narrative text with occasional illustrations” (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001, p. 12), meaning the pictures illustrate some words and the words tell the story from a dominant position. The Little Bunny series was mostly conceived textually, with the images serving only as illustrations. The dominant position of the words suggests that the implied audience of this book series is indeed an adult,

rather than a child lacking reading skills. Consequently, adults control the reading process, as children are passive listeners of the moral message.

In contrast, the English Pete the Cat series is atypical of best behaviour picturebooks, and the picture-text relationship is more dynamic. The first verse of *Pete the Cat: I Love My White Shoes* reads, “What colour does it turn his shoes?” (Litwin & Dean, 2014, p. 7). The picture provides rich information and gives clues to readers to answer the question. The typical text-picture relationship in this series is “complementary” (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001, p. 12), which encourages children to link visual information and verbal information. Hence messages from both images and words serve as the communicators of information; sometimes the text is reserved for explanatory functions.

Pictures in picturebooks also express figurative meanings. In many modern or post-modern picturebooks, pictures not only document or illustrate facts but also visually organise and interpret them, thereby doing more than merely enhancing and amplifying the text. However, best behaviour picturebooks do not often display an intricate text-picture relationship, nor do they contain exciting stories, which are typical features of many modern and post-modern picturebooks targeted at children. Complicated and dynamic relationships, such as the ironic interplay identified by Nodelman (1988), are seldom seen in best behaviour picturebooks. The “gap” between pictures and words in these books is not large; therefore, they do not create significant cognitive challenge for and aesthetic demands on readers (Beauvais, 2015). Therefore, the potential agency of children is ignored, as the best behaviour picturebooks encourage them to remain in a passive position and endure the hegemonic power structure.

Alongside the absorption of pictures and words, page-turning is a potent classical aspect of the narrative flow of picturebook storytelling. It can also be used to convey narrative meaning. Temporality is a narrative strategy “as the positioning of depicted objects, repetition, rhythm, and the choice and sequencing of presented events, which give special significance to page turning” (Kovač, 2018, p. 413). An excellent example of how this works is presented in the *Pete the Cat: I Love My White Shoes* (Litwin & Dean, 2014), where, for example, at the end of each page, the narrator asks: “What colour does it turn his shoes?” (p. 6, 12, 18, 24), encouraging readers to turn the page and find out if their guess is correct. Books in the other two series featured in this article, however, do not tend to use the function of page turning to create more exciting and playful stories. Therefore, the interaction with young children is further neglected in these two series of best behaviour picturebooks.

Best behaviour picturebooks under a narratological lens

Picturebook research benefits from narratological investigation because this theory is well suited to clarifying the specific multimodal configurations and offers a theoretical framework for explaining their unique and manifold structures. Under the narratological lens, children’s literature is often accused of presenting static events and two-dimensional characters (Nikolajeva, 2002) compared with general literature. These criticisms are easy to support when looking at best behaviour picturebooks. The reason why best behaviour picturebooks and children’s literature in general are often said to have simple plots and superficial characterisation (Nikolajeva, 2004) is probably that children’s literature is in origin oriented towards moral education and the impulse to act as an “educational implement” (p. 168). Some best behaviour picturebooks can be categorised somewhere between narrative and non-narrative, between fiction and non-fiction, because moral education—but not storytelling—is their primary purpose. The narrative is overshadowed by the moral message. Some best behaviour picturebooks, such as *Hands Are Not For Hitting* (Agassi & Heinlen, 2006a), lack standard narrative story elements while comprising segmented messages.

Nikolajeva and Scott (2001) explain that a story’s setting is conveyed by words that describe spaces and pictures that render the setting “non-narrated” (p. 62), categorising settings as minimal or reduced, symmetrical and duplicative, enhanced and expanded, and complex. In picturebooks, visual settings can

be particularly rich in detail. However, the setting is minimal or reduced in best behaviour picturebooks. *Hands Are Not For Hitting* (Agassi & Heinlen, 2006a), for example, enters straight into the main text without any development of setting: “Hands come in all shapes” (p. 2); the Little Bunny series similarly begin with a description of Little Bunny’s latest problem.

In terms of characterisation, characters in best behaviour picturebooks are normally typified by external focalisation and minimal characterisation, meaning there are few descriptions of characters’ psychological status. Furthermore, emotions are hardly ever revealed and characters do not undergo a developmental process (Nikolajeva, 2004).

Both narrative and discourse are important in storytelling (Chatman, 1979). The narrative comprises events, characters and settings, while the discourse involves the transmission and expression of the narrative. According to Nikolajeva (2003), “the narrative is manipulated through an interaction of the author’s, the narrator’s, the character’s, and the reader’s points of view” (p. 10). Nodelman (1988) suggests that picturebooks have the “advantage of the relative objectivity of pictures and the relative subjectivity of words” (p. 229). Nikolajeva and Scott (2001) further summarised that the function of pictures is to describe or represent, whereas the function of words is to narrate. They point out that for a picturebook, “we should probably treat the words as primarily conveying the narrative voice, and pictures as primarily conveying the point of view” (p. 117). In *Pete the Cat: I Love My White Shoes* (Litwin & Dean, 2014), two narrators establish a heterodiegetic relationship by using words and pictures. The verbal narrator focalises narration through the character of Pete (who does not see the danger of stepping into coloured substances), and the visual narrator offers zero focalisation, presenting the entire situation. Nodelman (1991) summarised this approach in this way: the differences between “the subjectivity of a first-person narrator and the distanced objectivity of third-person pictures” (p. 29) are being utilised. However, in typical best behaviour picturebooks, the relative subjectivity of children’s (or animal characters’) perspectives is missing, resulting in the presentation of a doubled objective third-person narrative voice through the words and pictures. There is rarely a first-person child protagonist in typical best behaviour picturebooks. Consequently, the child character’s point of view is rarely conveyed. The perspective of words and pictures is offered through third-person omniscient narration, which may alienate children and force them to distance themselves from the narrative, preventing them from sympathising with the main character.

The single voice in best behaviour picturebooks

Although Hunt (1994) suggests that all books “must teach something” (p. 3) and Joy (2019) points out that “children’s literature is inherently, but regrettably, didactic” (p. 6), best behaviour picturebooks are one literature corpus that has overtly educational intentions with hegemonic messages formed by the use of the didactic narrative voice. Joy (2019) further points out that didactic texts tend to carry a single message or voice in a way that makes the addressee unable to respond with criticism. That means children are unable to engage critically, as little room is left for alternative interpretations. For example, authoritarian language in most best behaviour picturebooks constrains children’s ability to respond.

In *Hands Are Not For Hitting* (Agassi & Heinlen, 2006a), the word “not” in the title clearly indicates the function of this book. Other books in this series include *Germes Are Not For Sharing* (Agassi & Heinlen, 2006b), *Tails Are Not For Pulling* (Agassi & Heinlen, 2006c), and *Voices Are Not For Yelling* (Agassi & Heinlen, 2006d), clearly showing how readers should interpret the scenes in the book. Each series examined in this article is also labelled with a series name, such as the “Self-Control Series” label applied to the Little Bunny books, as well as a precisely recommended age range. The authority of the interpretation represented by such labels is reinforced with the “PhD” title after the author’s name and in the paratext. The covers of the Chinese versions of the Pete the Cat series include the labels “Best Behaviour Series” and “for 3- to 6-years-olds”, which do not appear on the covers of

the original English versions. Furthermore, a guidebook or letter for parents is included, telling them how to use these books while interacting with children. For example, the Pete the Cat books are interpreted as offering knowledge about colours and numbers in the guidebook of the Chinese version. By doing this, the publishers of the Chinese version have changed this picturebook into a best behaviour book and have imposed a “right” interpretation and use. As mentioned before, due to the one-dimensional, straightforward picture-text relationship in these best behaviour books (except for the English version of *Pete the Cat*), little cognitive and aesthetic challenge is offered to children. The gap between words and pictures is narrow, again reinforcing the single voice and leaving little room for alternative interpretations.

The limited “right” interpretation relates to ideological dimensions and connotations, which constitute the desirable behaviour of individuals, sidestepping the actual “theme” of the text. Social practice is built upon a complex of norms, values and goals that constitute an ideal balance of suffering and comfort. These books encourage audiences to internalise these norms. Hollindale (1988) categorised ideology into three types: surface, passive and embedded in a bigger world. An example of the overt “surface ideology” can be found in the socialising purposes underpinning the Little Bunny series, while the more subtle embedded-in-a-bigger-world form is seen in the Pete the Cat series. The Little Bunny series expresses an overt, albeit limited, ideology that directly tells children what is good and bad. In many cases, however, the line between implicitly and overtly articulated ideologies seems indistinct. The English versions of the Pete the Cat series may not be characterised by surface ideology, but they embody an Anglophone concept of the world permeated by an ideology of building healthy self-awareness, which is largely culture-bound. For example, both Pete the Cat series and the Hands Are Not For Hitting series focus on personal feelings and show readers how to build self-consciousness and selfhood, thus involving self-perception rather than altruism, while the Little Bunny series emphasises getting along well with other people—in other words, how to be accepted in society or so called “collectivism” (Zhang & Morrison, 2010, p. 9); which fits for the ideologies promoted by the different cultures. As Stephens (2018) indicates, “the affirmation of a set of social and moral concerns that shape elements such as identity, self-perception, and world view in order to produce altruistic and empathic subjects, points to a core ideology in picturebooks” (p. 142). Furthermore, series like Hands Are Not For Hitting are published by independent publishers Free Spirit Publishing which suggests such moral books are not a mainstream choice in the original market; while in contrast, Little Bunny is published by a mainstream publisher in China, and such titles are very popular in the market, which reflects the difference in mainstream choices among different cultures.

Both verbal and visual text express the ideology in a picturebook (Bradford, 1998). For example, the little bunny is soft and gentle, and the watercolour illustrations suggest a romantic atmosphere. This child-like animal suggests a feeling of being well protected, implying young children’s innocence and carefreeness. Hands Are Not For Hitting presents images of children of different colours, emphasising cultural diversity. The interaction of dual semiotic codes produces an ideological conjunction, either because a reader’s action in filling the gaps between visual and verbal discourses or in instantiating a third meaning prompted by the interaction will have an ideological effect, or because where the interaction is ironic, the ideological effect will be more marked.

The characters in the Little Bunny series are classified as having either “bad” or “good” behaviour, and “bad” behaviours are associated with immediate consequences, even if some might be acceptable in other children’s books. These books emphasise a pattern of consequence. For example, when Little Bunny was late, nobody played with her; when Little Bunny did not want to put on her shoes, she fell down; when Little Bunny could not control herself, she had no friends; and when she ate too much candy, she became toothless (Xu & Yu, 2016a, b, c). “Shameful” is another keyword used in these books. Often promoted “good” behaviours or characteristics include perseverance, kindness, gratitude, honesty and obedience, and “bad” behaviours include envy, dependence and a failure to concentrate or

wait (Xu & Yu, 2016a, b, c). In this way, these books transmit cultural values to readers, often via a hegemonic voice, and reflect the dominant identities and cultures of the current time. When the perspective is made overt, viewers are positioned ambiguously; they are offered a particular point of view, literally and conceptually. The *Hands Are Not For Hitting* series, for example, provide children with alternatives to hurtful behaviours, guiding them to more compassionate behaviours while discussing the positive things hands can do. It also attempts to relate to child readers by offering sympathy and talking about why children sometimes want to hit other people. This, in some ways, reduces the didactic voice to ease message delivery to children.

The neglected child reader in best behaviour picturebooks

From a reader-response approach, the book, the child, the adult reader and the reading event comprise the reading process. Reader response theory prioritises the role of reader and reading event when examining how readers respond to the text and what their experiences bring to the text (Johnston, 2011). Reading events make the picturebook meaningful, which conveys the significance of the materiality and narrative nature and reading experience. However, empirical studies are still needed to investigate children's direct responses to best behaviour picturebooks.

First, there is a general agreement that the polyphony and the multimodality of a picturebook make the reader active. Affect in a picturebook is largely the product of how its dual semiotic system organises information to enable reader inferences and attributions. Empirical studies have revealed that children read picturebooks by focusing on images while adults focus on the words (Evans & Saint-Aubin, 2005). The relatively straightforward images in best behaviour series limit children's interactions.

Second, in children's literature research, the implied reader is usually understood either as a child or a dual audience (Beckett, 2013). The English version of *Pete the Cat: I Love My White Shoes* (Litwin & Dean, 2014) provides an example. Space is left for interaction, and the author speaks directly to the child reader by asking them questions like "what colour did it turn his shoes?" (p. 7). When a character or a narrator directly addresses the real reader, they cross the borderline between authors and readers and activate a child's attention. In best behaviour picturebooks, however, the author speaks directly to the adult reader displayed in the letter, paratext or guidebook, and the child reader is constrained within this adult gaze.

Third, best behaviour picturebooks tend to ignore reading as an event with interactive elements like rhyme, humour, read-aloud elements and more. Picturebooks are usually directed towards children who cannot read by themselves, which makes it important to use words that roll off the aloud-reader's tongue. Reading aloud goes together with readability, which not only involves narrative factors such as story pattern, but also the word choices like rhyming words. The English *Pete the Cat: I Love My White Shoes* is suitable for reading aloud or singing along, and the cover suggests a website to access the musical adaptation of it. This clearly supports reading as an event. However, the Chinese version does not include the link. Compared with the rhymes and musicality of the English *Pete the Cat* series, in the other two best behaviour picturebook series explored in this article, this attention to the reading event is missing.

The evidence of adults' power in best behaviour picturebooks

Adults' power is evident in best behaviour picturebooks via the paratext (e.g., cover page, end notes, copyright page and publishing information) accompanying main text. Genette (1997a) defined paratext as an "undefined zone between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world's discourse about the text)" (p. 2). Nikolajeva and Scott (2001) point out that "almost nothing has been written about

the paratexts of picturebooks” (p. 241). Although Genette (1997b) describes the paratext as “only an assistant, only an accessory of the text” (p. 410); best behaviour picturebooks take full advantage of it to convey intended meanings. It is a zone strategically composed to influence a better reception and interpretation of the text by the public.

According to Genette (1997b), the paratext comprises two parts: the epitext and the peritext. The epitext exists outside the book: “Any paratextual element not materially appended to the text within the same volume but circulating, as it were, freely, in a virtually limitless physical and social space” (p. 344). The guidebooks included in some best behaviour books can be classified as epitexts, providing exhaustive information about how to read the book, as well as reading activities and reviews from recognisable reading promoters or children’s literature experts. These epitexts are designed to influence adults’ choices and young readers’ interpretations. Guidebooks include many pages of supplementary materials that are rarely seen in markets outside of China; they are normally written by influential educational experts or reading promoters, telling parents how to read the picturebook and why the book can be considered excellent, as well as instructing a correct reading style.

Peritext are the elements inside and around the book. The title is almost as important as the peritext, as the site where authorial attitude and intention become most intense and explicit. The title *Hands Are Not For Hitting*, for example, is purposeful and explains a lot about the book; the subtitles of books in the Little Bunny series are similar, including, for example, “manage the time”, “concentration management”, and “pressure management”. On the cover of the book *Hands Are Not For Hitting*, the title “PhD” is presented after the author’s name. The author is also introduced as a behavioural therapist, adding to the ethos of this book. This information is clearly provided for adults.

Notably, the author’s voice can be eliminated or altered in the peritext. The Chinese version of *Pete the Cat: I Love My White Shoes* is an example. In the English version, there are few overtly educational elements; however, the Chinese version is labelled a best behaviour series in the peritext. Generally, the information on the dust jacket or front cover of a book provides readers with their first impressions of the story. Doonan (1993) emphasises the front matter as “prelims” (p. 84) that can establish the tone of a book and foreshadow the plot, characters, setting, themes and atmosphere to entice the reader to begin the story and to guide readers with their engagement. The addition of these elements essentially transforms an entertainment-purposed English book into an education-oriented book in the Chinese version.

Translation is also a space in which adult power is displayed. Translating picturebooks involves different possibilities: the verbal, the visual and reading-aloud. Readability and performance are important elements that translators must consider. A translator’s choices are based on the norms and poetics prevailing in the target society (Chesterman, 1997; Oittinen, 2000). Moreover, a picturebook to be translated is interpreted in a certain context, in time, place, culture and ideology. Translators have to make choices between the relevant and the irrelevant. All these features make picturebooks a special field of translation.

All of the choices made by picturebook translators are guided by their ideologies about their image of childhood, as well as their understanding of the needs of the future reader (Oittinen, 2000). Different images of the child result in deletions, additions and even different morals in stories (Oittinen, 2018). For example, the theme of the English *Pete the Cat: I Love My White Shoes* is “all is good” (Litwin & Dean, 2014, p. 30), while the Chinese version emphasises the best behaviour and the imperative knowledge about colours that children must gain. Translators aim at creating an understandable story in the target language and for the read-aloud situation, which again is influenced by the ideology of the translator and their culture (Oittinen, 2000).

There are two main translation approaches: domestication and foreignisation. Foreignisation refers to an approach in which the original text is retained as much as possible; domestication, in contrast, trims texts to the linguistic and cultural custom in the target language or culture (Venuti, 1995). The

interplay of words and images is translated and produced a new iconotext in the target language. Pictures provide useful hints, and the translator conforms their verbal text to what they see in the pictures. One may forget that choosing books for translation forms an element of domestication: books are chosen that travel easily from one culture to another. Many best behaviour picturebooks that have been translated into Chinese reflect such cultural choices. The translator of *Pete the Cat: I Love My White Shoes*, Peng Yi, applied the translation strategy of domestication. For example, when he translates a sound like “squeak, squeak”, instead of describing the sound directly, he uses very childish words; when he translates the key sentence of the book, “Because all is good”, he translates it as “Never mind, as long as I am happy”; when he translates the sentence “Does he cry? No, he doesn’t”. Peng applies oral language and adds emotion to the sentence, which certainly adds to the pleasure and engagement.

Peng’s child-friendly translation style largely preserves the readability of this book and resolves issues raised by the didactic voice from the cover and guidebook. His language choices and translation strategy are child-centred and disrupt the hegemonic voice from cover, guidebook and peritexts, and it further illuminates the power play involved in textual and social exchanges during the translation process. However, the translator’s options are limited. To reduce costs, translation does not change the format and artwork of a book, and the cover page is normally out of the translator’s purview. Translation implies agreements and protocols, which implicitly and explicitly negotiate with the reader about how the characters are to be understood and evaluated and set down rules for the reader to follow. A translated picturebook may be depicted as “a polyphonic form of art with different voices”: those of the author, the illustrator, the translator, the editor, and the dual readership of children and adults (Oittinen, 2018, p. 463). In other words, the translator must stay inside the lines that other adults draw. Therefore, even when the translator makes efforts to reduce the hegemonic voice, it does not change the main moral theme applied to the Chinese version.

Picturebooks are written for children by adults, which brings with it a power hierarchy. In most situations, publishers are responsible for making paratexts and peritexts. Genette (1997b) describes the publisher’s peritext as “the whole zone [spatial and material] of the peritext that is the direct and principal (but not exclusive) responsibility of the publisher” (p. 16). Many adult narrators are also involved. The first narrator is found in the cover and endpapers from the publisher or/and author, and that narrator is responsible for highlighting the most attractive selling-point of the book; the second narrator is the implied author and the translator in the main text, who adopts a hegemonic voice in best behaviour picturebooks; the third narrator is found in the peritext of the book and presents the moral lessons; the fourth narrator is the parent or adult involved in the reading event; after internalising the information from other narrators, the adult ensures that the moral lessons desired by the hegemonic adult are delivered to the child. In this light, best behaviour picturebooks can be seen as an imposition rather than a sharing event. The adult narrators abide by a set of protocols used for encoding and decoding the stories, and it is clearly conveyed to the readers that there is a “proper” delivery style and message.

Consequently, the implied author, the implied reader and the intended audience of best behaviour picturebooks focus on adults. Adults’ power is evident, and their role is to correct children’s behaviours, rendering the characters in the stories unchild-like role models and surrogate adults. In this regard, best behaviour picturebooks are made by adults for adults, reflecting an intentional hegemonic power play.

Conclusion

The enlightenment motto “instruction and delight” remains valid for best behaviour picturebooks (Hunt, 2009). As discussed in this article, these books are made accessible through narrative stories, the musicality or readability of the words, childlike illustrations or characters, child-friendly translations, and sympathy or understanding for children, all of which partly disrupt the hegemonic voice. These elements may reduce this hegemony of didactic characteristics. Nevertheless, the construction and

disruption of hegemonic thinking co-exists in these picturebooks, reflecting the power play among adult voices. Often, the hegemonic voice dominates in best behaviour picturebooks, whereas children's voices are constrained. Understanding how the hegemonic voice is applied is critical to disrupting it during such books' creation, translations or readings.

This article offers insight into contemporary best behaviour series in China, which have been largely neglected in the realm of picturebook research. Notably, the picturebook corpus is still expanding in many contexts. Furthermore, "series", "paratext" and "peritext" have gone virtually unnoticed in picturebook research. Given the importance of these best behaviour books, in particular in publishing and distribution, this investigation is expected to enhance picturebook research.

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ⁱ The English translation of *Little Bunny* series was made by the authors of this article. The original English text of *Pete the Cat* and *Hands are Not for hitting* are used in this article, unless noted otherwise.