

# **Education for Flourishing: Perspective and Practice in Well-being Assessment**

---

Maggie Zhao

President, International Positive Psychology Association Education Division

Director, Teaching and Learning Evaluation and Measurement Unit, The University of Hong Kong

**What do you most want for your children?**

“Well-being is every child’ birthright.”  
Martin Seligman

### **Positive education: positive psychology and classroom interventions**

Martin E. P. Seligman<sup>a\*</sup>, Randal M. Ernst<sup>b</sup>, Jane Gillham<sup>c</sup>,  
Karen Reivich<sup>a</sup> and Mark Linkins<sup>d</sup>

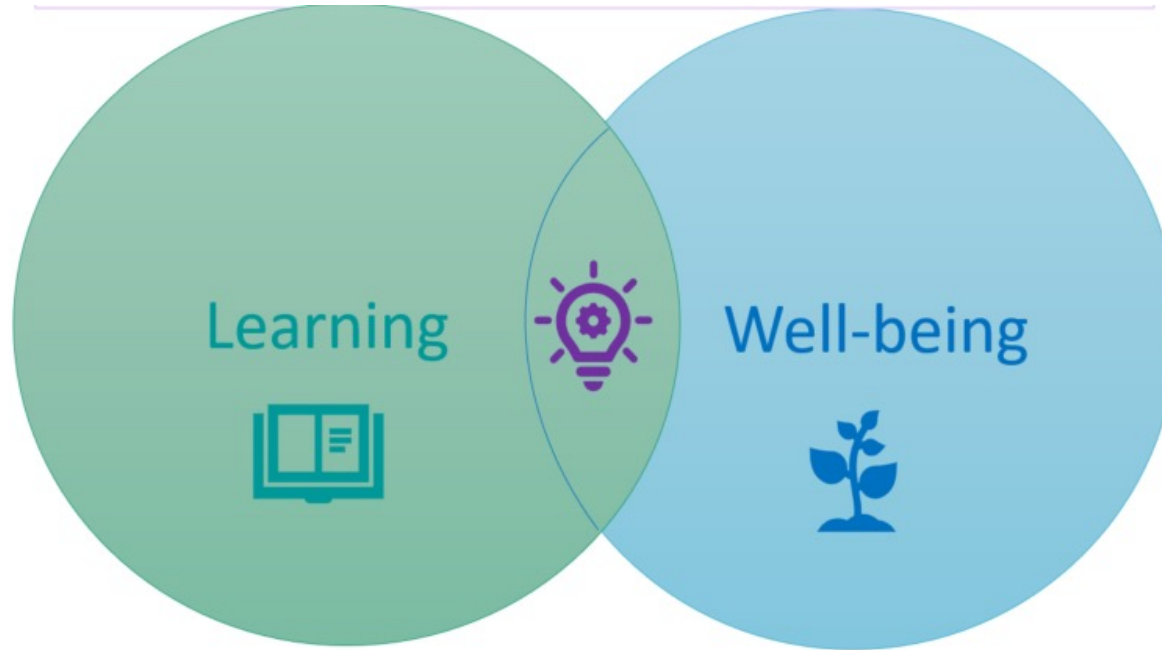
<sup>a</sup>University of Pennsylvania; <sup>b</sup>Lincoln (Nebraska) Public Schools; <sup>c</sup>Swarthmore College  
and University of Pennsylvania; <sup>d</sup>Wallingford-Swarthmore (Pennsylvania) Public Schools,  
USA

Positive education is defined as education for both traditional skills and for happiness. The high prevalence worldwide of depression among young people, the small rise in life satisfaction, and the synergy between learning and positive emotion all argue that the skills for happiness should be taught in school. There is substantial evidence from well controlled studies that skills that increase resilience, positive emotion, engagement and meaning can be taught to schoolchildren. We present the story of teaching these skills to an entire school—Geelong Grammar School—in Australia, and we speculate that positive education will form the basis of a ‘new prosperity’, a politics that values both wealth *and* well-being.


# Education for Flourishing




# Education for Flourishing



 Non-cognitive factors

 Evidence-based approaches

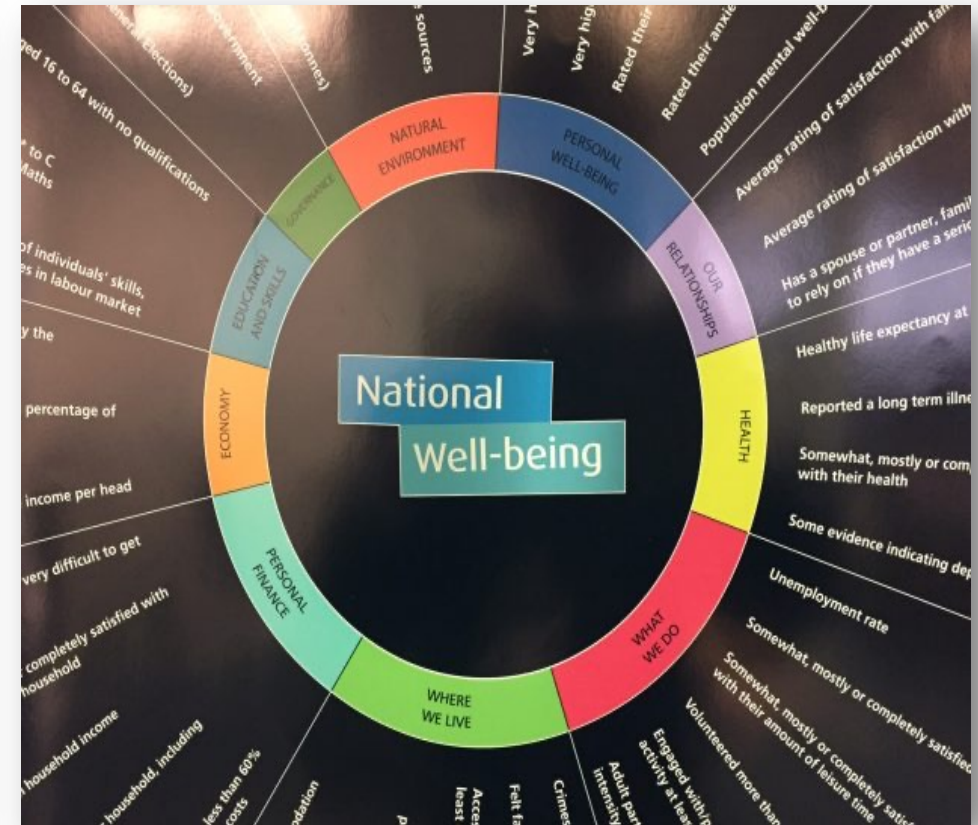
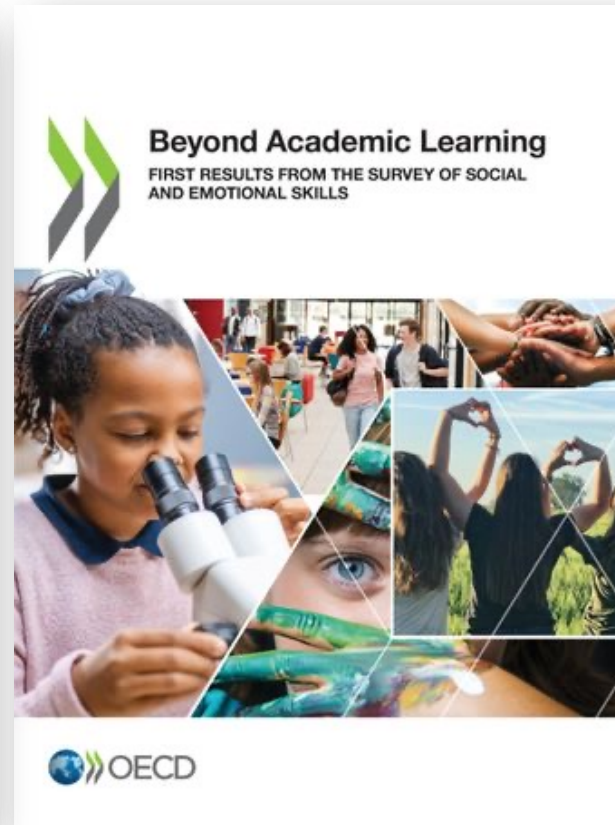
 Strengths-based perspective

# The Case of Hong Kong

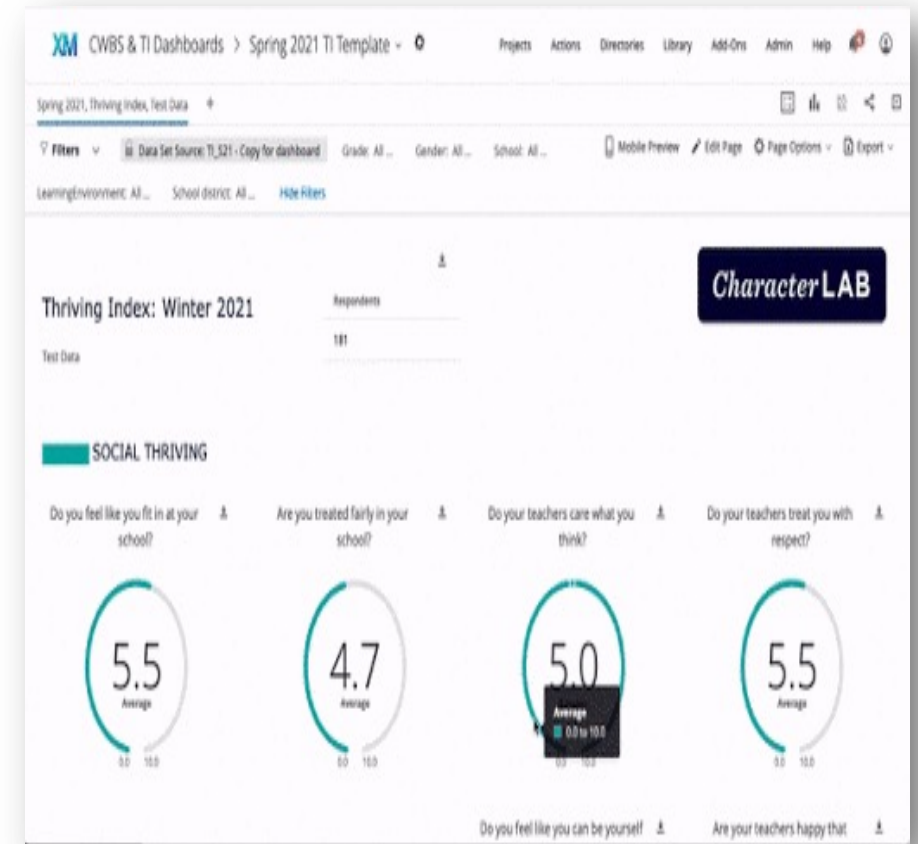
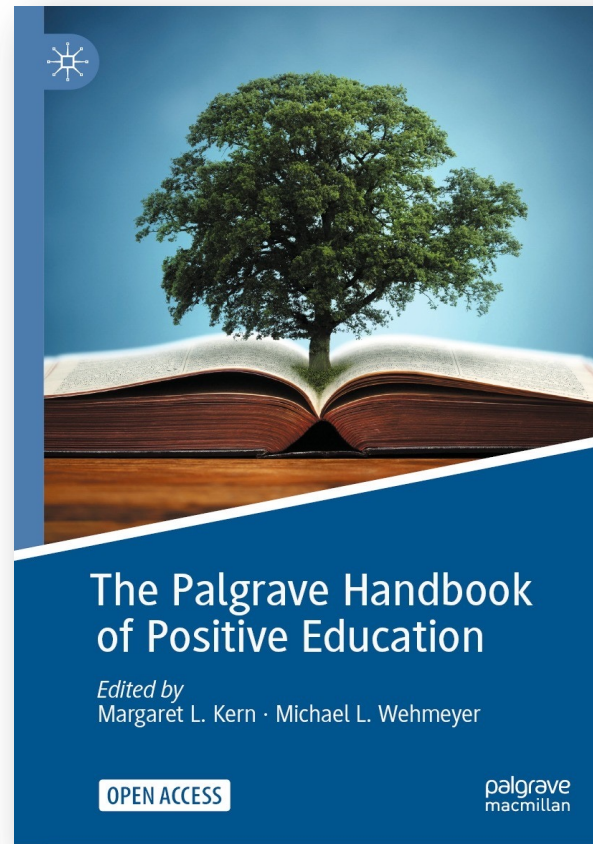
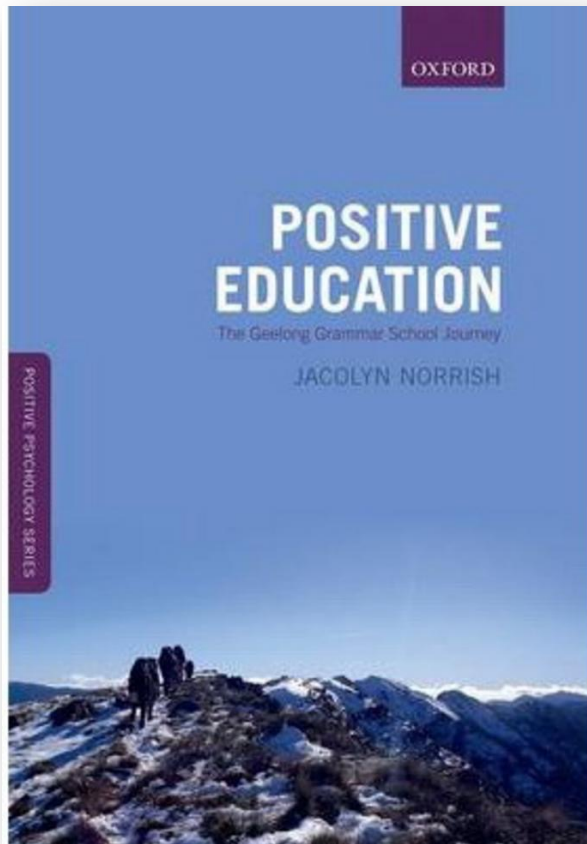


Primary schools > **60%**  
Secondary schools > **40%**

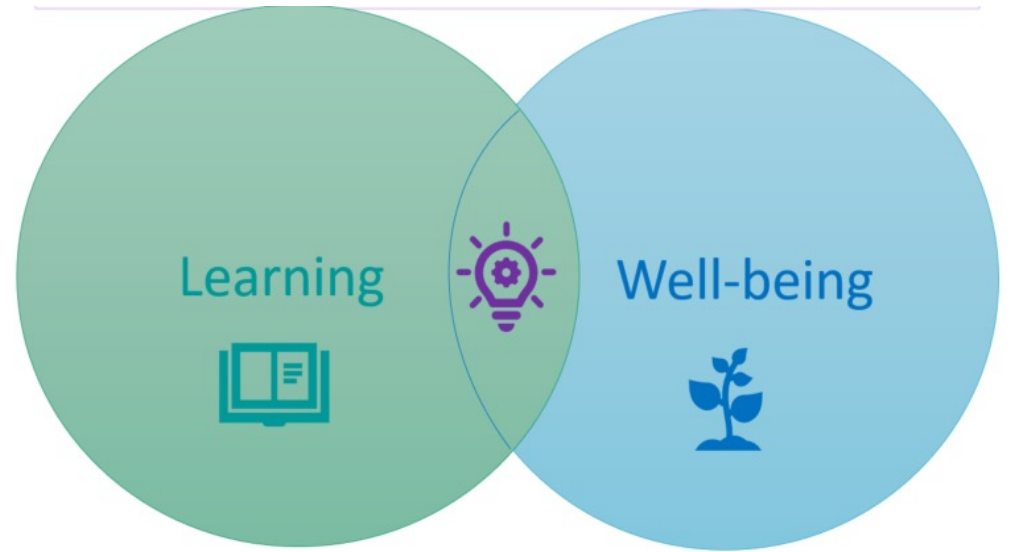
# Assessing Well-being: Global and National Examples



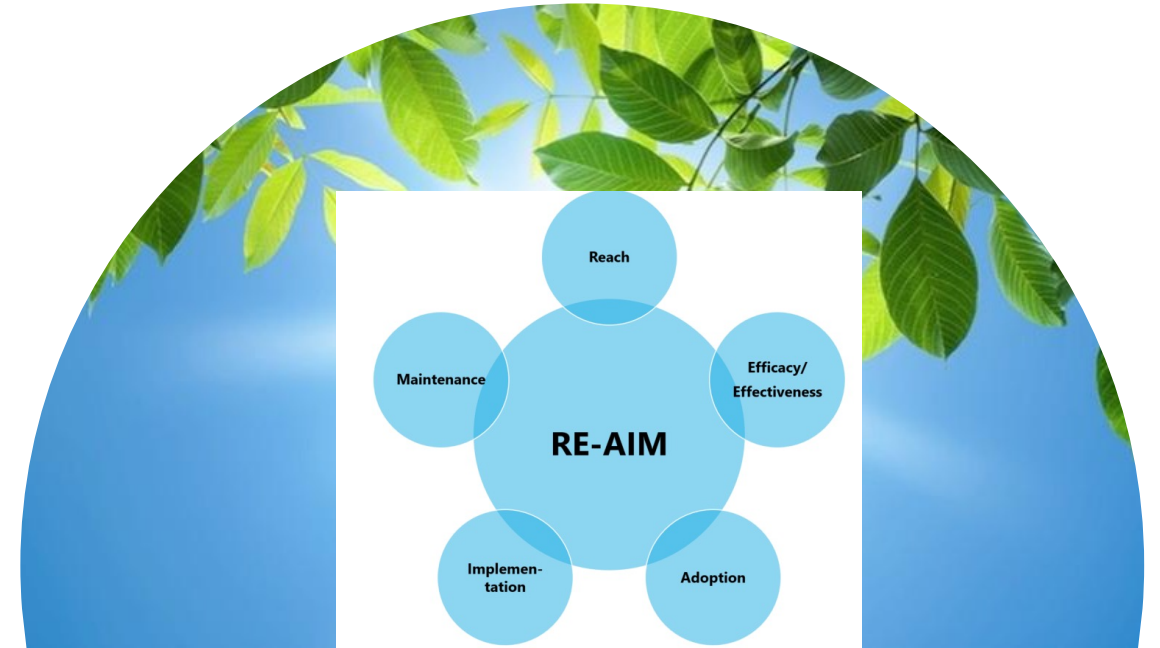
# Assessing Well-being in Schools: Examples







# **Recommendations for Good Practice of Well-being Assessment**



# 1. Structure a well-being assessment plan



## **2. Incorporate multiple indicators and methods of measurement**

# Measuring well-being and ill-being (Zhao & Tay, 2022)



“Mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO Constitution, 1948)

“Curing the negatives does not produce the positives”  
(Seligman, 2006)

# Multiple methods of measurement



Thriving is a process



Capture both student well-being and academic performance



### **3. Consider age-appropriate and culturally-sensitive measures**

## 4. Include multiple perspectives





## **5. Focus on meaningful change and practical significance**



## STUDENT WORK

**Target:** HKU Undergraduate students

**Personal experiences**  
Our own feelings and experiences in university inspired us to focus on improving young adults' well-being.

**Similarities in the community**  
We found that our hardships and struggles are somewhat similar to our friends, so there is a community.

**From living to thriving**  
Young adults need more guidance and support to spend their defining years at university.

**Initial Idea: School Life Monopoly**

START	Personal high expectations	12 classes/subjects for choice	Parents say	Competition in competition	Private university life	Christmas party
Real summer & the choice						School Open Day
School practices						Peer family orientation
Exchange						Peer class
Student academic results						Engage with friends
Being targeted by a teacher						Peer family orientation
DEFINITION	My friend said that's funny	Peer academic results	Engage with friends	Academic academic results	COVID-19	Peer tutoring

**Implementation**  
Positivity Psychology - Theory of Well-being

- Positive emotion**
  - Teach "Social Positivity"
  - Teachers "Clear Up Positivity"
  - Use happy, inclusive and 20 most commonly experienced positive emotions
  - Relate positive emotions to music
- Engagement**
  - Music is intrinsically enjoyable
  - Groupwork act as motivators for teachers' academic discussion
- Positive relationships**
  - In classes, "Clear Up Positivity" "Celebrating"
  - Relate interpersonal relationships to music
- Accomplishment**
  - Students were asked to post their "praise" notes before class
  - Everyone else can see, learn from theirs
  - Save their groupwork
- Meaning**
  - Due to their actions, we explored the role of their completion that compares can be
  - Recall positive memories through the songs

It's great that you're so excited about university!

You'll gonna have a blast making lots of unforgettable memories!  
Maybe even meet some amazing friends and professors along the way too!

Alright, let's go!

## EFFECTIVENESS OF WETHRIVE

**Effectiveness of WeThrive**

Statement	Score (approx.)
The WeThrive programme was good value.	4.5
I would recommend the WeThrive programme to others.	4.5

**Level of Thriving**

Time Point	WeThrive Group (approx.)	Control Group (approx.)
Pre	5.5	5.5
Post	7.0	6.0
Follow-up	7.5	6.5

**STUDENT VOICE**

“There is real science, there are real life examples, and there are solutions. The organization is just perfect (splitting into rooms, virtual gallery...). I truly appreciate the work, heart and love! Thank you so much and the program really made my summer!”

“I am lucky to have been a part of it and would highly recommend this course to everyone! If I am given the opportunity to be a student ambassador again, I will definitely take it.” (from a student partner)

# WeThrive

Positive Psychology, Lifelong Resilience, Co-creation Community

Learn and Experience the Art and Science of Happiness

WeThrive is a university-wide learning programme designed to equip students with a set of intellectual, intrapersonal, and interpersonal capabilities for nurturing student positive strengths and holistic developments in the University and beyond.

Topics will, among others, cover:

What are ingredients to **happiness and productivity**?

What roles do positive and negative **emotions** play in a thriving life?

How to explore and utilize **character strengths** to overcome challenges?

How to foster **engagement** and make **healthy habits** stick?

How to avoid **thinking traps** and cultivate an **optimistic mindset**?

How to sharpen sense of **meaning** by setting and committing to **goals**?

How to strengthen **positive relationships**?

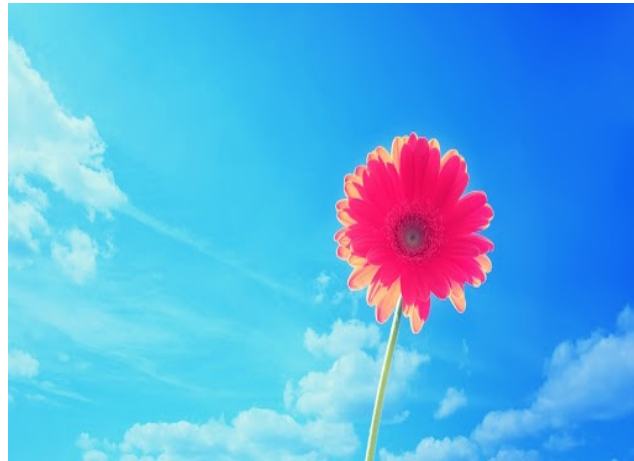
How to cope with stress through **mindfulness, self-compassion, cognitive restructuring** and more?

**Facilitator: Dr. Maggie Zhao**

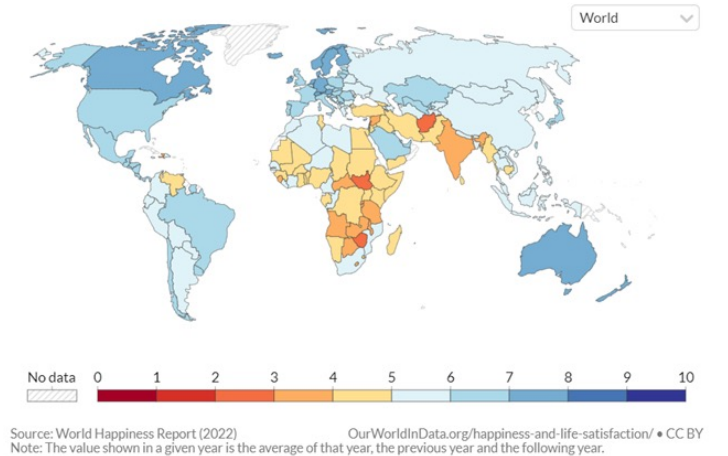
Dr. Maggie Zhao is currently Director of the Teaching and Learning Evaluation and Measurement Unit at HKU and President of International Positive Psychology Association Education Division. A positive psychologist studied from the founder of positive psychology, Professor Martin Seligman, Maggie is passionate about helping students thrive and enhancing their positive learning experience.

# Conclusion

Well-being matters



Well-being can be assessed



Well-being is affected by multiple factors  
(e.g., personal, school, community, and national factors)

---

# Thank You

Well-being matters more than ever under the pandemic. Thriving is not exclusive to those free from mental illness or absence of adversity. People who thrive let more **light** in.  
(Zhao, 2021)

[myzhao@hku.hk](mailto:myzhao@hku.hk)

