

The Concepts of Childhood and the Development of Children's Literature

A Reflection on the West and Taiwan

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Abstract

Philippe Aries (1962) was the first sociologist to claim that the concept of childhood was invented, and that it did not exist until the 17th century. Since then many scholars began to discuss the concepts of childhood. This study is to examine the relationship between the concepts of childhood and the development of children's literature through a historical review both in the West and in Taiwan. It is found that the concepts of childhood and children's literature have been closely related to each other. Basically the concepts of childhood have effected the development of children's literature; however, in Taiwan the children's literature introduced from the West gave quite an influence to the development of the views of childhood. On the other hand, the Chinese traditional pragmatic value toward childhood also hinders children's literature from growing brilliantly. Consequently children's literature packed with didacticism finds its way to develop in Taiwan.

**Key Words : children, the concept of childhood, children's literature,
historical review, Chinese traditional concepts of childhood,
children's literature in Taiwan**

童年概念與兒童文學發展之關係 ——對西方與台灣的省思

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摘 要

Aries (1962)是第一位主張童年是人類發明出來的概念的社會學家，他也認為在西方世界到了十七世紀才有童年的概念。但是有許多人持以不同的看法。本研究目的在檢驗西方世界與台灣的童年概念與兒童文學發展的關係。結果發現童年概念與兒童文學的發展有密切的關係。基本上童年的概念對兒童文學的發展頗有影響；但是在台灣卻正好相反，從西方引進了兒童文學，同時也匯入西方童年的概念；但是另一方面，傳統中國的實用的價值觀也影響了童年概念，並阻礙了兒童文學的發展空間。兒童文學須假以教育的包裝才得以發展。

關鍵詞：兒童、童年概念、兒童文學、歷史回顧、台灣兒童文學、中國童年

Introduction

Biologically childhood is a state of being a child, the period of time in which persons are children, and the state between infancy and puberty. Except being taken in the category of biology, childhood can be also taken in a social construction. Concepts of childhood are reflected in the ways children are treated. They cannot be studied without being taken in the social context; they are historically and culturally conditioned.

Philippe Aries (1962) was the first sociologist who claimed that childhood was invented and did not exist until the seventeenth century. In his view, childhood is a very new concept. He thinks that childhood did not exist at all in the Medieval period. It began to grow into existence in the upper classes in the 16th and 17th centuries, solidified itself somewhat more fully in the 18th century upper classes, and finally mushroomed on the scene of the 20th century in both the upper and lower classes. Before that, the Medieval world was assumed that there was no childhood, and young people were treated accordingly. Young people behaved as they were expected. The children were not seen as children. The cultures they lived in lacked the concept of childhood. Aries' idealized childhood is that there should be a longish period of preparation of children for adulthood. We should treat young people as children accordingly, and they act as children accordingly, too. Childhood did not really penetrate the great masses of the lower and lower-middle classes until very late 19th and early 20th centuries. Today there are truly children, in Aries' criterion.

His idea has been questioned and argued because the concept of childhood he used as a criterion to exam the whole history's childhood is actually based upon the contemporary ideology. Perry Nodelman (1996) thinks that ideas about children and childhood are part of a society's ideology. He quotes Shulamith Shahar's (1990) words: "Child-raising practices and educational methods as well as parent-child relations are determined not solely by biological laws but are also culturally constructed". Indeed, it is hard to say that there was not a conception of childhood in some old times; instead we should say that childhood then was not what it is for us now. Nodelman means that a different conception of childhood operated during that time, and that conception probably required no special literature. He concluded that those children, therefore, didn't need such a literature. Both the children and the adults in their lives thought of themselves in a very significant way from the way we think of children now. Using today's conception of childhood to infer that childhood did not exist in some old times seems inadequate. However, there are still some clues to trace when examining the relationship between the development of the concepts of childhood and children's literature.

It is generally agreed that the concept of childhood and the development of children's literature are closely related. Before children's literature could be produced, childhood itself had to come into existence and receive recognition and legitimacy as a distinct period of time in the individual's life. Children are the readers of children's books, and those books are made because of children's need. Take Townsend's idea (1997) as an example. He asserts that before there could be children's books, there had to be children,

who were accepted as beings with their own particular needs and interests. Let's use this idea to examine the concept of childhood and children's literature in some historical stages.

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In the ancient world (50 BC to 500 AD), based on historical accounts, it appears that the early Greeks largely ignored children, but statues, vase artwork and other artifacts in the some exhibits tell another story. Potty chairs, pull toys, games, feeders, rattles and other items, very similar to the items in modern nursery rooms, were found in some art works. Some horse-pull toys, attached with some wheels on the horse feet, found in some art crafts, apparently were the idea inspired from the Trojan War. Therefore, Jennifer Neils (2003) claims that Greek civilization already recognized stages in childhood development and see youths as not merely miniature adults. Whether childhood literally existed is not the concern in this paper; one thing can be sure is that in the ancient world there was not such genre as children's literature. No books were written particularly for children. Legends and tales were composed not to be read, but to be heard. Children borrowed stories they enjoyed from those adults told; they listened to poems of *Homer*, the *Iliad*, the *Trojan War*, and the *Odyssey*.

Classical Greek writers rarely mentioned children in their texts, and there were few books composed for children. Even for Aesop's

Fables, which have been circulated for the longest time, we are not still sure that they were told originally for children. Plato (427 - 347 BC) once discussed his idea about what education is to be in *Republic*. He says that people should invent a system for the cultivation of the mind and body. He further asserts that we shall begin with the mind, before starting physical training. Under the head will come two kinds of stories: the true stories and fictions. Plato believes that children should begin their education with the fictitious stories because they contain some truth. However, those stories, including fables and legends, shall subject to philosophers' supervision. Some ugly, immoral or false stories should not be given to child because he cannot "distinguish the allegorical sense from the literal, and the ideas he takes in that age are likely to become indelibly fixed; hence the great importance of seeing that the first stories he hears shall be designed to produce the best possible effect on his character." The dialog shows clearly that even during the ancient time, children and what children should read were a great concern among people. Children's books carried a responsibility for molding children's character. Although the genre such as children's literature was not born in the ancient world yet, the need for good children's literature, based upon the contemporary social value, was strongly urged.

In the Middle Ages (500 BC to 1500 AD) childhood was generally ignored and kept as short as possible. According to David Newman (2002), the notion that children deserve special protection and treatment did not exist at this time. Fatal disease in the Middle Ages was quite prevalent, and infant mortality rates were extremely high. Young children were not expected to live for very long. People commonly believed, therefore, that if they wanted

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only a few children, they should have many more in order to “hedge their bets”. Parents couldn’t allow themselves to get too emotionally attached to something that was seen as a probable loss. At that time, the death of a baby was probably not the emotional tragedy as it is today. A genre such as children’s literature had to wait for some more centuries. During that time, children had to share with adult’s literary works which contained some interest for them, such as *The Epics of Beowulf* (725AD), *Song of Roland* (about 1090 AD), and the romances of *King Arthur and His Knights*, (540 AD). There were also some animal stories, biblical stories, and local legends; however, because few children could read, little was written for them.

Children’s literature began to actively develop in the period of the European Renaissance (1500-1650 AD) because of several factors: First, of course, there should have been the concept of childhood which had got matured. Second, the technology made printing books in quantities at lower cost and with less labor became possible because of the invention of movable type printing press. Third, literacy has been increased, education grown, and knowledge advanced because of the rise of the middle class. The middle class, largely consisting of merchants, had a strong demand of literacy for their children and consequently helped with the budding of children’s books. Prior to then, books had been rarely created specifically for children, and children’s reading had been generally confined to those books intended for children’s education and moral edification rather than for their enjoyment. Religious works, grammar books, and courtesy books had been virtually directed at children. Meanwhile, in these books, illustration had played a relatively minor role; most illustrators were anonymous. When the ear-

liest children's illustrated book, Comenius's *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (*The Visible World in Pictures*, first published in Nuremberg in 1658, translated into English in 1659) — was made, children were delighted with his pictures. This book is regarded as a forerunner of the illustrated schoolbook; it remained popular in Europe for two centuries and was published in numerous languages and editions. His book was also innovative in its recognition that there were fundamental differences between adults and children's needs.

New attitudes toward children and their education began to develop in the late seventeenth century; childhood began to take on new importance. Many educators appealed for greater consideration of children's distinctive need. The notion of pleasure blending into learning was becoming more widely accepted. Most indicative of these innovative ideas were the writings of philosophers John Locke (1632-1704) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78). In his work *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) John Locke claimed that children were born like a white blank tablet waiting to be written on. Children should be well-educated, and they should be treated as rational creatures. This theory places more responsibility for a child's behavior on the parents. Rousseau's ideas (1762), which were published soon after Locke's treatise on childhood, regarded that children were born with an innate sense of right and wrong and an innate plan for healthy and orderly growth. He thought that childhood was a state distinct from adulthood, and therefore the central goal of education should be to preserve the child's original nature. Children should live in nature without any adult's intervention. According to his idea, if a child "went bad", it was because something was wrong in the environment that meddled with the child's natural morality. As the concepts of childhood took root, parents,

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especially middle class parents, began to ponder what way they were raising their children. As a result, their concept of childhood made them to think that childhood was a separate, delicate stage of development, and they began to extend the time of childhood and to alter children's daily routines, not mentioning the need and the content of children's reading material.

The writings of Locke and Rousseau made a great influence in Europe. The adults began to recognize the special needs of children, including their need of reading. Their ideas ultimately led to a more humane approach to education in which enjoyment was considered an aid to learning. Besides Locke's intellectual work, the rise of Puritanism also brought a heightened sense of special needs of the children, emphasizing individual's need to tend to his/her own salvation. The books for children were mostly within the traditional pedagogic or educational frame of reference in the 18th century. Although *Tales of Mother Goose* (1729), retold by Charles Perrault, was under the guise of strongly pedagogic and educational goals, some adults still felt them unsuitable for children as they contained so many adult themes, alarming frankness and violence, and lacking of moral messages. The idea of protecting children's soul and mind was already emerged.

The late 18th and early 19th centuries-children's literature had a didacticism trend as lacking a sense of urgency. Margaret Nancy Cutt (1979) criticizes that its rational approach and dependence upon logical argument in the overworked form of dialogue precluded activity and humor. The point of view in all this literature was that of the parent or mentor. Reason was too much exalted; emotion and imagination were either discouraged or directed into approved

channels.

Not until the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1902), children's literature first bloomed under the influence of the Romantic Movement which idealized childhood and led to a great interest in children. Since then the didacticism began to fade gradually. With the new trend, more first-rate authors and illustrators began to take their places applying their talents on children's books. In fantasies, there were Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), Kinsley's *The Water Babies* (1863), MacDonald's *The Princes and the Goblin* (1872), Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* (1900), and Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908); in the adventure stories, there were Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883), Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), and etc. During the Victorian period there was an increasing awareness of children's needs. Domestic stories for girls concerning family life, such as Alcott's *Little Women* (1868), in which children's daily life was described, and Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), in which a strong female role model with independent spirit and quirky imagination was blended to the heroin. These literary works show that the view of their childhood generally became united, and they further predicted the writers and publishers of the next century that literature was for pleasure rather than for teaching. Therefore, fantasy has remain the highest form of writing.

By the end of the 19th century, the idea of child-center as a key focus for policy development had firmly taken root, paving the way for the 20th century, which could be described as "the century of the children". The average number of children per family was declining; therefore more attention and effort could be devoted to individual child. The development and gradual extension of com-

pulsory schooling also changed children's status. The welfare of children is not only the responsibility of family, but also the responsibility of the nation, which can intervene in their education, their health, their diet and their upbringing in ways designed to improve the national well-being by developing its future citizens. (Clarke, 2004)

The New Childhood and Children's Literature in the West

After the golden age of children's literature (1860s-1930s), the concept of childhood has been more developed, the progressing governmental policy concerning children has forwarded, and advanced technology of printing has attracted more children. Children's literature finally came to the post golden-age at the 21st century. In 1994, out of his worries, Neil Postman denounces the decline of innocence in American culture in his book *The Disappearance of Childhood*. He vividly describes our society has been overflowing with doubletalk: We adore our children; yet we insist on embracing a popular culture that is hostile and even damaging to them. Parents happily immerse themselves in the movies, TV shows, billboards, music, computer games and other pop influences that destroy the enchantment that childhood once held. What's happening, he says, is that adults are becoming more childish in these pop pursuits and that children, with the sharing of all the "secrets" of adulthood, are becoming more adult.

"Electronic media find it impossible to withhold any secrets," Postman complains. Without secrets, the distinctive division be-

tween adults and children disappears, and such thing as childhood vanishes. He warns that the electronic media pose a challenge both onto the authority of adults and to the curiosity of children. Children's curiosity is replaced by cynicism and arrogance. Because the distinction between the adult and children was no longer existing, adults are left with children who are given answers to questions they have never asked, such as violence and sex. Children are not innocent children any more; they are only miniature adult sharing the same world with adults. While television revealed so much reality to children, an increasing number of children's books of realism were offered to children, too. Some issues, which used to be a taboo, such as violence, young adult sex, alcohol, and divorce, became popular topics. Hollindale and Sutherland (1995) call this stage as being free of ideology, since "no story ever written was born into a value-sterilized environment and was usually free of pressures to promote approved conformities." Although realism has been the main mode of writing, some writers combining realistic and fantasy elements have found quite a lot of readers turning their heads toward them, and there has been a continuing thread of fantasy, some even high fantasy. Susan Cooper's "*Dark is Rising*" quintet (1965, 1973, 1974, 1975, and 1977 respectively) and Ursula Le Guin's (1968, 1971, 1972, and 1990 respectively) are among all those fantasy books.

It is an irony that the flowering time of children's literature in the 1970s arrived at the very same time as electronic media was newly threatening to usurp the children's literature in its claims of leisure time. Peter Hunt (1995) found that fewer authors of obvious gifts appeared after 1970s, and some of those who produced such distinguished work in the 1950s and 1960s, while continuing

to write, failed to match their earlier achievements. Is the social and literary condition of the time hospitable or hostile to children's books? It deserves a deep thinking.

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The concepts of childhood have contributed to the development of children's literature in the West. While children's literature is flourishing prolifically in the West, it is a good time to examine if children's literature in Taiwan is also growing because of the concepts of children and childhood.

According to Hsuing (Hsuing 熊秉真, 2000), story books written particularly for children were found in Mid-Ming Dynasty. Those books were not only applied in private home schooling, but were also adopted to attract children audience by storytellers. From Ming to Ching Dynasty, stories for young children schooling had been continually created and edited. The demand for children's books was increasing; and most of those books were for didactic purpose, in other words, for textbooks. Most children's books were used for literacy training rather than literary enjoyment. If children's literature is defined as books specially written for children, then the history of children's literature seems to be comparatively short. Those books mentioned above are not a part of children's literature. Sutherland (1997) claims that children's textbook (except for a language arts anthology), comic books, the adult science fiction book borrowed from a parent, are not a part of children's literature. Even

young adult literature is not the same thing as children's literature, although the line dividing the two is hazy, and is at times crossed in either direction. Although so far there are no rigid or absolute definitions for children's literature, most authorities in the field agree that children's literature consists of books that are not only read and enjoyed by children, but also written for children, and most important, they meet high literary and artistic standards.

Childhood is not simply a biological stage of development. Rather it is a social category that implies the attitudes, beliefs, and values of particular societies at particular points of time, subject to changing views and expectations. Parental attitude toward children, therefore, is less a function of individual instinct than a function of how parents in a particular culture or historical era perceive their responsibilities toward their children. In Chinese cultural society, parents do their best to help with their children's education while students make try very hard to meet their parents' demands and expectations for doing well academically. A philosophy of classic realism has been emphasizing a social hierarchy by education, one of the jumping boards to official ranks, or in a more contemporary sense, to success. It is believed that a good education will eventually offer a good living; thus, parents put immense pressure on their children to strive for academic excellence. Education has been highly valued; therefore, reading activities were strongly encouraged. Children's reading interest, however, has been put in the second place. All the reading activities were for the use of preparing children to be successful adults in the future. In the pragmatic and realistic social value demanding for didacticism-oriented reading materials, of course, a highly developed children's literature, emphasizing aesthetic, artistic, and literary perceptions, seems harder

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to acquire than in the West.

With a very different view of childhood from the West, the task of examining the development of children's literature in Taiwan will be different, too. We cannot say that because in Chinese history there have not been any great children's book writers, such as Brothers Grimm or Hans Andersen, so that the heritage of children's literature in Taiwan is empty. Efforts have literally been made since the end of Imperial China and the beginning of new China although there was still not such a genre as children's literature. During the 1910s, the May-Fourth Movement era, the theories of Western children's literature and the importance of education were generously introduced into China with various new philosophical trends. In the 1930s, Kai-ming Bookstore in Shanghai began to systematically introduce children's literature classics from around the world. In Taiwan the domestic children's literature writers also began to produce books for children in the 1940s in Taiwan, including fairy tales, children's poems, nursery rhymes and folk tales (Chiu 邱各容, 2003). Unfortunately the literary books for children mentioned above were written in Japanese because Taiwan was under the ruling of Japanese colonization then.

From 1949 to 1975, there were only two children's book fairs in Taiwan, the first one in 1957 and the second in 1964. It seemed that not only the society but also the publishers paid not much attention to children's books. The situation kept unchanged until two children's book fairs were held in American Culture Center in Taipei in 1975 and 1979 respectively. These book fairs were arranged by the United States Information Services (美國新聞處). The books displayed were delicately selected according to their cover designing, illustration, printing, binding, and paper quality. People,

not only the children's literature author, illustrators, but also the publishers, were impressed and amazed with these two book fairs. (Chiu 邱各容 2001) These book fairs first opened a window to the Western children's literature for Taiwan.

Since then, several children's literature prizes have been awarded, newspapers and magazines for children established, conferences of children's literature hold, workshops of children's literature writing given; not mentioning many books for children have been published. During the 1980s and 1990s, the economy in Taiwan has dramatically grown up, and a large number of middle-class citizens with potential finance emerged simultaneously. Many parents were able to offer their children various kinds of expensive reading materials, including children's literary books. The number of children's books rose steadily during this period. There are over 30 leading publishing companies producing children's books in Taiwan (Chiu, 邱各容 2003). In general, the books translated from foreign countries have been more than the ones created by local writers. The more open-minded concepts of childhood were brought into Taiwan with children's books.

Lin (林文寶, 2000), the former chairperson of Children's Literature Department at Taitung University, thinks that the year of 1987 was a critical year for the development of children's literature in Taiwan. In this year Taiwan authority announced the lifting of her 38-year martial law and began initiating political liberalization and democratization. The year is said to be the landmark of Taiwan's saying good-bye to the old society and is the era of the reconstruction of social system. The deconstruction of the old system and the re-establishment of the new value caused the liberation in economy, education, environment, and local ethnic awareness.

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In the development children's literature became more diversified in types of content; in publishing media, with the electronic books winning some readers' favor; in genre, especially in picture books, which have been the mainstream genre in the 2000s; in magazine types, which included more audio and video elements; and in source, having more literary works introduced from foreign countries.

The liberation of society caused the liberation of the concept of childhood. The society's perception on children became more open-minded and more child-centered. For example, in 1992, one year after Dr. Seuss' death, the ROC Children's Literature Association (中華民國兒童文學會), Yuan-Liu Publishing Company (遠流出版公司), and Eslite Bookstore (誠品書店) hold a seminar discussing about Dr. Seuss' works; nineteen among those were translated into Chinese and published by Yuan-Liu Publishing Company. A very important message was given in the seminar: Books can be fun and can be served as toys for children to play with. Parents in Taiwan adopt the liberal message that childhood should be fun and that children should be allowed to enjoy it. It was in this atmosphere that children's literature found its earth to root, to bud, and to bloom. The most significant achievement was the blooming of children's picture books. A large quantity and high quality of pictures have been translated into Chinese. Some local picture book authors and artists have also joined in this prolific field.

Besides the growth in picture books, young adult literature has also grown significantly. Many fictions, of realism and fantasy, have been translated into Chinese. Xiao-lu Publishing Company (小魯出版公司) has even systematically translated the works of Newbery winners. Realistic fiction, an imaginative writing that ac-

curately reflects life, provides children with a world similar to the natural physical one that children can experience the pain, joy, frustration, and success that the characters encounter in the fiction. On the other hand, fantasy provides stories in which impossible happenings are made to appear quite plausible. Reading assists children to grow. The process of growth is a way that a child, through the outer world such as nature, society, and human, gains a self-realization in his/her inner world.

Introducing a large quantity of children's literature from the West consequently introduces the concept of childhood from the West. An idealized and liberal concept of childhood is forming against the traditional value in Taiwan.

A Close Look at the Childhood Phenomena In Taiwan

Is it also the same situation in Taiwan that the concept of childhood has been developed before children's literature? Hsuing (熊秉真, 2000) said that it is inadequate to implant the theory stiffly into Chinese society because she has a different developing pattern from the West. (P. 336) However, it can be sure that the introduction of children's literature from the West plays an important role in shaping the concept of childhood in Taiwan. The relationship between Taiwanese parents and children has been changing. Many parents have begun to change their concepts toward children and childhood. They gradually conceive the "happy childhood" as one of children's rights; therefore, children's literature has found its garden to grow.

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However, the period of so-called “the happy childhood” seems much shorter than that of the West. How long is the childhood? Can those pre-teenagers (10-12- year-old youngsters), as well as teenagers, be regarded as children? There are a few different definitions of the age division about childhood. No matter what opinion is taken, children’s need reveals their status of developments, especially psychologically. By looking at most junior high school students indulging themselves in electronic games in their assumed leisure time, it can be sure that they should still be regarded as children, who need a lot of fun. Most Taiwanese parents begin to get more anxious about their children’s academic performance one or two years before their children go to junior high school at twelve. They begin to consider it necessary to send children to cram schools to reinforce their school work. The competition of adult world begins to be posed on children as early as about ten years old or even earlier. The reasons sending children to childcare and tutorial center is partly because both parents work. For others, childcare and tutorial centers provide service that helps children reinforcing their school work and somehow satisfy parents’ needs and anxiety. After school and cram school, children have little time left for themselves. According to a survey made by Chiu (邱定雄2001), 41.99 % of the children go to child-care and tutorial center, which means that almost one-half of our students stay out of home for more than 10 hours. The service that the childcare and tutorial center provides is mostly helping children with their course work. Children do too much rote learning and have too little time for themselves. With the decreasing time in reading “children’s books” and the increasing time in electronic media in their leisure time, children’s literature, especially pre-teen and young adult literature, finds itself little earth

to grow.

Hsu (許綺婷, 2002) also made a survey in her thesis which shows that 78.84 % of junior high school students go to cram school to reinforce their ability in math, English and natural science. Reading is not of their consideration, which means that although children have learned reading skills, they spend little time reading. More explicitly, children are not encouraged to read literary books once when they are thought that they have already grown up or have acquired their reading skills. Students' study time and leisure time should be confined to what is closely related to their academic performance. That is because children are not regarded as children anymore. They are treated as pre-adults instead of children. Although adulthood is waiting for them still far away, they have to work very hard toward becoming adults.

A survey on children's pain index administered by Zheng (鄭婉妮, 2002) obtained some regretful results: 52.1% of children feel that the school work make them miserable; 29.1 % of children feel unhappy at home because of being blamed and scolded; 53.9% of children are not happy because their parents do not agree with their ideas; 42.2% of children think it unbearable because they are forbidden to do what they want to do; 39.6 % of children find themselves most painful when they are required to go to cram schools or talent-classes. In fact, 76.2% of children attend cram schools and talent classes. 53.5% of children think examination is the most loathing, and 45.3 % of children hate examination because they do not like to be punished if they do not do well. It seems that what most parents do is against the idealized concept of childhood. One should suspect that if our society is kind and friendly to children.

There are still some children engaged in reading, of course. For those reading population, a survey administered by Taiwan Council for Culture Affairs (文建會) in 1997 shows that literature books were 57.73% of all the children's books published while the scientific genre was only 23.58 %. Taking a further analysis, there were 366 fairy tale books published, which was 53.59 % among all, while novels took a place of 16.25 %. The survey indicated that young adult books were receiving less attention (probably because the young adults have heavier load in their course work), and fantasy books are more welcome than realistic stories (which was only 14.06 %) An optimistic conclusion can be made: The era of multi-trend children's literature has come. There is still a mainstream among the multi-trend world of published books, i.e., the adults' never decreasing consideration and attention to children. Adults have been still trying to offer the best to children. However, is what adults expect on children exactly what children need? Have children's needs been put into adults' thoughtful consideration? The parents' concept of childhood plays a critical role in formulating the trend. From the survey above, the children's pain index tells us the fact about the current childhood in Taiwan.

Conclusion

The Ministry of Education launched the "National Reading Campaign for Children (全國兒童閱讀運動)" in Taiwan in 2000. The rationale of the reading campaign is based upon a notion that reading is the foundation of learning. Children can gain knowledge, improve learning and development, obtain pleasure, and enrich their

lives through reading. It is expected that educational institutes and families to co-build a rich reading surrounding for children and solidify children's life-long reading habit and interest. It is also expected that the children's reading ability is cultivated that children will be able to blend what they read with their learning experience and living context. Children's critical reading, creativity, and thinking skill should be developed through reading. Finally, through reading activity it is hoped that parent-child relationship should be enhanced and a learning-oriented family is hence built.

The concept of childhood implied in the National Reading Campaign for Children shows its idealized concept with strong motivation of didacticism. In the reading campaign teachers were encouraged to use children's literature as a vehicle for achieving certain aims within the traditional pedagogic or educational frame of reference. Didacticism is not a crime as long as the literature works can afford to be less overt in their didacticism. In other words, didacticism needs to be packed with some kind of entertainment to please our children. Children are not only the family's assets, but also the nation's. The government's helping policy and measure should be applauded. Although this children's literature approach has been criticized that children's literature is placed in an inferior status with the literary poly-system, and it has not been accepted by high-brow society as having a status equal to that of adult literature (Shavit, 1989), it is believed that most children's literature authors would not mind being used to help our children grow.

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