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Volume 13, no. 2; Fall/Winter 2015-16 • ISSN 2167-1699 • Published April 12, 2016.
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Citation:

Boretti, Valentina. "Small Things of Great Importance: Toy Advertising in China, 1910s-1930s." *Asia Pacific Perspectives*, Vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 5-48.

Abstract:

From the turn of the twentieth century, playthings acquired a key role within the Chinese childrearing discourse as tools to train children, the prospective rescuers of China from its perceived decline. As a possibly unintended result, both children and toys acquired a marketing value: advertising employed them as icons to publicize a wide array of products. At the same time, the nascent toy industry "poached" the new discourse to brand its playthings as symbols of (made-in-China) educated progress, seeking to convince the affluent to reject things foreign, and to attract those who wished, through consumption, to participate in an enlightened community. In the reality devised by advertising, playthings would reveal, or construe, parents' affectionate yet progressive competence, whilst children would be shaped into ideal citizens. Drawing on advertisements placed in periodicals for adults and children by Chinese and foreign producers between the 1910s and the 1930s, this study explores the ways in which children and toys were marketed as testimonials and catalysts of cognizant modernity.

Keywords:

Toys; Republican China; Advertising; Children; Marketing; Modernity.

Small Things of Great Importance: Toy Advertising in China, 1910s-1930s

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Toys may be small things, but their relevance is great, argued a Chinese toy advertisement in 1931.¹ Indeed, from the turn of the century, playthings had acquired a very significant role within the Chinese childrearing discourse as tools to shape children, the prospective rescuers of the nation. As a possibly unintended result, both children and toys acquired a marketing value: advertising thus employed them as icons to publicize a wide array of products. At the same time, the nascent toy industry, and some foreign producers, “poached”² the new discourse to brand playthings as testimonials and catalysts of what is termed here cognizant modernity.

This term is introduced here to cover a flexibly normative construct that, it is contended, was both the suggested outcome of purchase and the assumed premise of promotional messages. Cognizantly modern personae were those who did not inanely yearn for the fashionable or novel *per se*, but judiciously pursued the *improved* and *improving*, with a view to elevating themselves and the nation concurrently – through children, in this case. Neither connoisseurship nor consumerism, their consumption revealed and confirmed awareness, which legitimated it. Consciousness likewise legitimated toy production or sale, whose purported main rationales were education, patriotism and competence, which should equally inform consumption. Cognizantly modern adults should appreciate the relevance of childhood and invest in it; children should be aware of the tasks that awaited them, and eager for instructive, state-of-the-art entertainment preparatory to achievement.

Remade playthings were among the tools for remaking China. Their re-manipulation was partly material, through new renditions of old items or replicas of modern objects (trains, planes), and chiefly immaterial since toys acquired new labels. These “biographies”³ construed them into makers and revealers of immaterial (cognizant) modernity, as much as of tangible progress – markers of lifestyle and attitude simultaneously. Improvement, in a word, underpinned the marketing of toys.

Drawing on advertisements placed in periodicals for children and adults, this study explores the promotion of playthings between the 1910s and the 1930s in China. After a brief overview of the child and toy

discourse, it looks at how children and playthings were used as marketing levers – since this, too, signals their symbolic role – to then map the contents of toy advertising as exemplified by several cases, so as to illustrate the pervasiveness and composition of the marketing approach.

Small things of great importance: Toys and children in discourse and advertising

In 1873, the foreign firm L. Moore & Co. advertised in the *Shanghai News* the sale of various mobile toys, including steamboats and puppets, all very “suitable as presents for children” for the coming “Western winter solstice.”⁴ Mechanical “toys,” namely leisure objects for adults, had been advertised before, but this was the first time children were mentioned as the final consumers of “toys.” From the late 1870s, the young seem to have become a promising market niche: “toy guns for youngsters” and “foreign little boys” appeared for sale;⁵ advertisements began to speak of “children’s playthings.”⁶ None of these toys were Chinese; neither did these short listings attempt to construe them as endowed with any particular capacity, bar ingenuity.

Yet, in the early 1900s, when foreign dolls were still among the exotic gadgets advertised as presents for the winter solstice,⁷ Chinese producers began to publicize their own toys by underscoring their alleged pedagogic, moral, and nation-building facets, which made them suitable gifts. Flashcards and blocks first, then vehicles, military toys, dolls, animals, kitchen sets, and balls all came to be presented as tools, rather than gadgets – namely, as more utilitarian than ludic.⁸ Playthings that were very similar had been donned entirely different significations, because Chinese entrepreneurs appropriated and commodified a new discourse: toys were instruments to mold children, the buds of the nation.

1. “New” children and their toys

By the time intellectuals and Momilk advertisements alike proclaimed in the mid 1920s that “in order to strengthen the nation, it is necessary to first strengthen the people; in order to strengthen the people, it is necessary to first strengthen the children,”⁹ the narrative of re-making China through children already had a history of about three decades.¹⁰

Its emergence is in fact to be situated against the backdrop of late nineteenth-century apprehension over the state and fate of China, when turmoil, increasing foreign pressure on the Qing empire, and military debacles accentuated the conviction that change was urgently required in order to save China from humiliation and annihilation. Reformers, such as the influential Liang Qichao,¹¹ identified the young – and children in particular – as a key cornerstone of national rejuvenation. Like women, children were symbols; like them, they had to be liberated. Once freed from the fetters of traditional upbringing and education – (mis)construed

as unaware of childhood's characteristics¹² and bound to generate inadequate subjects – and once properly cultivated, children would become the improved, “fit” new citizens who would rescue the nation from its alleged decline.

The concern with children had, therefore, little to do with them, and plenty with adults. This “public meaning”¹³ and politically charged role of children and childhood was by no means unique to China,¹⁴ neither was the linkage between children and renewal unknown to the Chinese tradition; nor was this vision entirely new, despite claims to the contrary, since it did draw upon the time-honored prominence of education and early instruction. Yet, the sense of urgency was remarkable.

The spotlight placed on children as national rather than family assets spawned from the early 1900s the development of a discourse of childhood and childrearing, which by the 1910s had already become pervasive, since preoccupations over the fate of China did not diminish with the establishment of the Republic. Through media, events and schooling, intellectuals and pedagogues instructed parents, educators, and youngsters themselves on how to properly cultivate, or be, good citizens, aware of their present and prospective duty to reconstruct and protect the nation. Although the ideal child notion featured nuances, and many did criticize the imposition of adult concerns on youngsters, the main model consolidated by the late 1920s construed “new children,” often coded masculine but encompassing both genders, as robust, patriotic, ingeniously laborious, knowledgeable, science-oriented, militant, and – increasingly in the 1930s – committed to the collective.¹⁵

Fortified by references to education, science, psychology, and selectively appropriated foreign childrearing discourse, experts affirmed that parenthood, too, was to be reformed: old customs would not beget new citizens. Rational affection, closeness and appreciation of children's needs were to be the norm: “backward” families had to comprehend the relevance of play and toys, so far allegedly overlooked due to incognizance. Proper play with suitable toys, whose correctness was primarily for professionals to define, was repositioned as a crucial instrument for instructing and improving. No longer gadgets seldom associated with learning,¹⁶ playthings were proclaimed more influential than books, or even the most important thing in children's life.

Since toys were essential, they had to be used, chosen and produced judiciously. Consistent with the long-standing belief in the shaping power of the environment,¹⁷ the power of the material was repeatedly emphasized.¹⁸ Proper toys, in the opinion of most, ought to be educational, scientific, enjoyable, safe, attractive, well-manufactured but not over-ingenuous, made in China, and true to life – artist Feng Zikai being among the few to argue that realistic toys left no room to imagination and implied “adultification” of children. Unqualified amusement was not the purpose of a

good plaything,¹⁹ that should instead stimulate the intellect, nurture the character, or train the body. With some notable exceptions, Chinese toys old and new were, apparently, not up to the task.

Many “traditional” toys like glass trumpets, clay and sugar figurines, or masks, were deplored as pointless, crudely made, hazardous, non-educational, superstitious, and conservative. Unbefitting for new children, they should be replaced by “modern” playthings – many of which (animals, boats, balls) had in fact been current in China for centuries, albeit without “educational” tags.²⁰ Condemnation was accompanied by pleas for the improvement of toy-making, fundamental also for reducing the consumption of foreign toys which were, as we shall see, a spiritual and monetary threat. Mechanization and rationalization of toy-making would produce the much-needed intelligent national tools for instructing children: state-of-the-art materiality was construed as the marker, and producer, of superior immateriality. Yet, according to experts, most entrepreneurs failed to rise to the occasion.

Whilst this criticism was not encouraging, other components of the discourse of toys were even more critical for producers. For theorists, consumption should be regulated, and primarily serve the moral interests of the nation rather than the business interests of the industry: hence they condemned the purchase of too many playthings, lest children become superficial. Even more fatal was the strand that devalued industrial toys as dull and pricey items that youngsters did not really like, and should possess only as a stimulus to create their own – home-making toys being a much-advocated activity.²¹ Toy advertising, however, devised ways to utilize the most marketable discursive claims and sidestep inconvenient ones. For indeed – as has long been pointed out²² – the spotlight placed on children by nation-strengthening agendas attracted commercial interests.

2. Children and toys as marketing levers

Advertising does not mirror reality. Nonetheless, being conceived to persuade, it shows situations that are thought intriguing, or desirable in terms of aspiration or identification. In the pseudo-reality staged in 1920s-1930s Chinese periodicals targeting an adult readership, children and playthings occupied a prominent place – though not as much as women – as marketed concepts and marketing levers.²³

As time-honored symbols of propitiousness and renewal, and now also icons of modernity, well-groomed children were likely to attract attention. Hence native and foreign companies included them in their advertisements, to substantiate claims ranging from the solidity of banks to the benefits of toothpaste.²⁴ The young personified the prospect of a bright future: yet such possibility, by its very nature, entailed the risk of not materializing. The preoccupation over children’s present and prospective nation-rescuing endeavors was indeed capitalized upon in

advertisements, playing the card of physico-spiritual strength, apparently marketable for domestic and imported commodities alike, despite the National Goods Campaigns that urged Chinese nationals to consume only domestic products.²⁵ Thus, for instance, the “future society leaders,” nourished with oats to ensure that their brains and body were up to the task, should be given the right clothes that, allowing movement and play and deterring weakness, would permit them to accomplish their duties as the “future masters” of China – as they were called, appropriating theorists’ parlance.²⁶

In the company of children, or occasionally on their own, playthings were also part of the promotional paraphernalia deployed in advertisements. Depictions of children at play in paintings, prints, wares or textiles had long been part of pre-modern visual imagery. Not unlike twentieth-century representations, their focus was not on children but rather on the metaphors they stood for. Youngsters, and often also the toys they were portrayed with, were auspicious symbols of harmony, happiness, fertility, wealth and success.²⁷ Building on children’s role as emblems, as well as on the iconography of play and toys as attributes of propitious children, modern advertising appropriated and developed the motif, inserting playthings even when there was no depiction of play, and when the promoted products had no relation with children.²⁸

Toys that accompanied children were mostly those recommended by the childrearing discourse: balls, pull-along toys, dolls, animals, blocks. Aspirational items like luxury toy cars and rocking horses also appeared, as did occasionally pistols and some objects classified as “traditional,” like whipping tops, rattles or old-style puppets. Far from cannibalizing the commodity publicized, playthings became its testimonials and helped create an attractive setting for it, in basic compound advertisements that used illustrations to convey a “total impression” and enhance the persuasive power of copy.²⁹ Rather than purely providing product information, this advertising aimed at letting viewers taste a dream of comfort, modernity, novelty, health and success – peddling an ideal lifestyle in which toys were now relevant icons.

Goods as diverse as heating outfits, grape juice, children’s garments, rubber shoes, medicines for women and cigarettes could all be promoted by literally “toying” with the feel of serenity, health or affluence conveyed by the presence of plaything-equipped children, that included boys holding cute dolls.³⁰ Dolls also helped relay significations of “civilized” hygienic domesticity, with a slight touch of gender essentialization: girls who washed dolls’ clothes endorsed soap, while mothers and old dolls equally looked younger with a touch of powder.³¹ Advertising popularized the idea that a toyless child was not complete or, conversely, that healthy and fit youngsters would use toys. Time and again, in adverts for medicines or foodstuffs, nourished and healed children appeared in the

company of attractive, often upmarket playthings. Ill health, parents were told, was indeed the only possible explanation for lack of interest in play.³²

The plaything hence became a *commercial* attribute, or addendum, of the child, and both were used to elicit interest, so much so that they could be deployed by evocation, namely without necessarily appearing. Materiality thus became quasi-immaterial, as shown by the usages of the “gift” concept. The notion of “gift” (*enwu* 恩物), which had become current – via Japan – at the turn of the century to indicate Froebelian kindergarten toys,³³ was pressed into service to advertise Chinese and foreign commodities that had little to do with its factual meaning. These included apricot toffee, “the gift for modern children;”³⁴ talcum powder, a “summer gift for children;”³⁵ and even the phonograph, a “gift” for the new household.³⁶ Apparently the concept of “gift” functioned to convey the notion of uplifting, modern items, conducive to a “civilized,” genteel new lifestyle and family leisure that was, incidentally, much advocated in advice manuals.³⁷

Children’s leisure, too, was supposed to be uplifting. An advertisement for Kodak Brownie cameras, duly labeled as a “children’s gift,” claimed that youngsters “wish[ed] for beneficial games” that could increase intelligence and develop thought.³⁸ Kodak cameras could be given by fathers to sons as an inspiring, meaningful game, possibly to be shared with other boys.³⁹ This was precisely the predominant vision of normative play construed by the childrearing discourse. And the notion of cognizant “beneficial” play with “appropriate” toys lay at the heart of the promotion of playthings *per se*.

Play – but not childish: The messages of toy advertising

Commercial forces quickly capitalized on discourse. From the 1910s, a number of industrial companies appeared – some short-lived, others lasting well into the 1940s – that manufactured “new” playthings as a side or core product. Implicitly or explicitly, they often claimed their primary goal to reside in educating children and helping China decrease the economic losses caused by imports.⁴⁰ The largest of them had to compete with posh foreign goods, but also against artisan toy-makers who, besides updating their traditional creations, produced cheap imitations of “modern” playthings.

These (rarely) big–and medium-scale companies, active mostly in Shanghai, engaged actively in promotion, deploying different strategies: the less affluent were reached by means of displays and events, while advertising targeted better-off customers, those who could buy and read magazines. Advertisements were placed in children’s periodicals, and more frequently in media that catered to an adult readership: newspapers; magazines for women, educators and parents; general interest periodicals; and trade journals. Most of these publications, incidentally, were also disseminating the discourse of toys. Consistently, print advertising positioned

playthings as instructive, scientifically conceived and affordable objects, testimonials of a made-in-China cognizant material/immaterial modernity, thus seeking to convince the affluent to reject things foreign, and to attract those who wished, through consumption, to participate in an enlightened “imagined community.”

1. A non-child-centered approach

The branding⁴¹ of playthings drew on several facets of the recently developed discourse of toys and childrearing, which advertisements exploited without exerting much apparent influence on it.⁴² Producers and advertisers deployed significations⁴³ that encompassed education and modernity, nationalism and performance of citizenship, affectionate and competent parenthood, intelligence, and style. These associations were made explicit by appealing mainly to the mind of readers, using a language that repackaged pedagogical and political speech. “Appropriate,” “beneficial,” “instructive,” “new,” “patriotic,” and “scientific” were key terms, paired with verbs like “develop,” “enlighten,” “cultivate,” “facilitate,” “nurture,” “arouse” the intellectual, moral and physical growth of children. Concern with quality was strong: toys were claimed to be solid, ingeniously (and industrially) manufactured, vivacious, and safe (probably as a reaction to criticism against domestic goods). Aesthetic appeal and reasonable price did count: the new plaything was to be attractive and affordable.

Advertisements were largely of the simple or basic compound genre, featuring an image of one or several toys with children, habitually coupled with a copy that provided a modicum of product information, and a lot of persuasion through descriptions of benefits or lifestyle. Rarely were playthings shown unaccompanied or in detail, and at times they did not appear at all. Despite the purported maieutic power of well-made objects, they acquired meaning chiefly through association: with words, and with people whom they validated in turn.

Illustrations occasionally portrayed slightly foreign-looking children, perhaps as providers of cosmopolitan standing, or possibly because advertisers drew inspiration from overseas models.⁴⁴ Typically, however, the protagonists were “modern” Chinese boys and girls, often holding a toy – for viewers to appreciate both commodities – but seldom engaging with it passionately: pleased enjoyment featured more than animated romping. Except for toy kitchens and airguns, both genders were depicted as the target market for most playthings including dolls (see figures 1-2), probably because these signified up-to-dateness, especially if made of celluloid.⁴⁵

Rarely did images alone attempt to convey a total impression. Exceptions include a few atypical 1910s Commercial Press copy-less adverts in *Children’s Educational Pictorial*: one publicizes flashcards by relaying

affectionate and educated motherhood; the other one (see figure 3) promotes “toddlers’ toys” showing an elegant yet quite static play scene, with children as if awed by the classy toy vehicles. Some 1930s Great China Celluloid adverts were almost copy-less, too, showing stills of stylish and tranquil family or play life. One such advert, placed in *Children’s World*, features children surrounded by a multitude of toys (see figure 4). Captioned with references to the attractive novelty and solidity of the commodities, the scene also includes a sketch of the factory, and even a mention of the company’s tax facilitations, whose appeal to young viewers may be debatable.⁴⁶

Text was paramount – understandably, given the intended audience.⁴⁷ Many advertisements, especially up to the late 1920s, read like miniature treatises. This was particularly – though not exclusively – true for Commercial Press adverts which, with some relevant exceptions,⁴⁸ tended to contain seriously didactic copy, or even mere price lists preceded only by a claim. As possibly the earliest Chinese advertiser of industrial playthings, and controller of much media, the Press was perhaps little interested in entertaining its construed target of adult and child cognoscenti.⁴⁹ Albeit not immune from the copy-as-treatise inclination, entrepreneurs with slighter pretense to illuminate minds more frequently adopted a less grave approach. Though appearing in publications for adults, and often conveying un-childish messages, their advertisements did use parables, slogans, dialogues, and pseudo-children’s songs, such as the one about an ever-smiling celluloid doll that needed no food.⁵⁰

Children’s curiosity, imagination or interests, extolled in theory, had little room in toy adverts; neither were the tropes of childhood magic or innocence exploited. Seldom do we find references to sheer fun. Some exceptions, many of which appeared in periodicals for adults, include the delight of two brothers in building things out of their blocks and picture cubes;⁵¹ the joys of ball-playing (see figure 5);⁵² the role of celluloid toys and baby-dolls as harbingers of daily bliss for toddlers who would cry or not sleep without them.⁵³

Toy advertising was to please chiefly the grown-ups. Letters or essays published in periodicals do mention children’s requests or interest for specific toys and, according to discourse, their peculiarities were to be considered when choosing playthings. Yet most of that very same discourse adultified youngsters. Likewise, promotion focused on adult concerns and ambitions. For the most part, content was not diversified according to age and target. Thus the relatively few toy advertisements in children’s magazines frequently reproduced claims and copy used for adults, or read like instruction manuals: possibly because they were to be shown a parent who supposedly held the power of decision and purchase, but in practice assuming children to be eager for edutainment or highly concerned with rescuing China. Although youngsters were occasionally

addressed directly, and childishly, in both claim and copy (“Boys! Girls! Do you want toys?” or: “You are welcome to choose, children!”),⁵⁴ the majority of advertisements spoke to parents who by means of (play)things would or should convey messages to their children, their social milieu, or themselves.

2. Competent parenthood and stylish modernity

The main target audience of advertising were the relatively affluent and “modernized” who could consume ideas by means of goods. They were not only Shanghai urbanites, for periodicals were received and read throughout China, as shown by letters and photos sent by readers, and several companies practiced long distance sale or had branch shops in various localities. Toys were to reveal, or construe, parents’ affectionate yet progressive competence – and shape youngsters into achievers: prospective rescuers of the nation, or debonair children like those portrayed in many magazines driving their toy car or clutching a dernier cri doll.⁵⁵

In order to belong to the “civilized” community, families were urged to provide “new” playthings, which were presented not as a luxury but as a key step on the ladder toward a modern (made-in-China) lifestyle. The plaything was marketed as an aspirational symbol and catalyst: of style, or acculturation, or social advancement, or patriotism, depending on the promotional choices of producers – but always it was positioned as a transformational (and confirmatory) tool. Implicitly, moreover, it did function as a tool to socialize children to a life of consumption, in the face of recommendations for thrift that were part and parcel of the discourse of toys.

Already in 1920, visitors to “civilized Shanghai” were advised to keep up with sophisticated modernity by choosing the right presents to bring back home. Rather than crude and perishable food gifts, they should select “civilized items,” including “educational toys” which would delight children and please their parents.⁵⁶ The “social” value of playthings thus came full circle.⁵⁷ Expanding on the earlier tendency to commercialize holidays, which itself built on the time-honored tradition of festive toy purchase,⁵⁸ Chinese and Western festivities were from the 1910s advertised by the Commercial Press as especially opportune moments to give toys, namely “presents for children” that “must” be made available – showing occasionally a Santa Claus, perhaps to garnish the message with an exotic veneer.⁵⁹ Other entrepreneurs soon followed suit, expanding, especially in the 1930s, on notions of affection and cognizant sophistication.

(National) toys, it was repeatedly claimed, were bound to be a success with children, as “the most welcome” gift, or – in a less superlative mode – “very suitable” presents.⁶⁰ Tricycles were “a gift that modern children really can not lack.”⁶¹ “New-style households” would be accessorized and adorned by celluloid toys manufactured to “suit modern children’s needs.”⁶² A girl who wanted to be “stylish” would (should?) patronize

celluloid products, discarding wooden and clay toys (see figure 1). The latter, indeed, belonged to “backward times,” and they were claimed to exert no attraction on children, who would on the contrary vie with each other for celluloid dolls and animals that ostensibly embodied “progress” in the toy scene.⁶³ Allegedly, 99 children out of 100 loved celluloid playthings.⁶⁴ In passing, this dismissive advertising involuntarily suggests that “backward” playthings still enjoyed a good measure of popularity, even among the relatively prosperous.

Toys were promoted also as markers of sentiments, for “those who love children.”⁶⁵ Advertisements declared that if all children liked dolls, and if all parents loved children, then as a parent one “must” acquire a doll for their child.⁶⁶ (Discerning) love was thus to be demonstrated by giving (proper) things material, construed as symbols of the non-material. Exploiting the new discourse of playthings while ignoring the anti-industrial toy strand that often pervaded it, producers made *their* playthings into a primary need, a legitimate necessity. Toy-less children were thus compared to famine victims, and children without good toys to students without a teacher.⁶⁷ Appropriating pedagogues’ parlance, playthings were defined as “children’s unique close friends and most ideal teachers,”⁶⁸ whose very presence would immediately liven up youngsters, but in a wholesome way, causing good behavior.⁶⁹

Toy-giving was construed as the way to show style, care, and awareness of the fact that children had rights and personality – but it must be reformed in compliance with the new toy culture. Advertisements in adult publications hinted, or obliquely threatened, that children were in the know: textbooks and periodicals had alerted them that exercise was necessary, and that the ball was the best sport tool.⁷⁰ (Infantilized) parents ought therefore to be guided: not only had they to display patriotism in their purchases, as we shall see below, but also they could not simply pick any play-thing, for toys were no trinkets. “What child does not like toys?” they were asked, to be then informed that their role required choosing carefully⁷¹ – and they should keep in mind that playthings influenced children’s character.⁷² Most of all, ever since the early 1910s, parents (and children) were urged to ensure that their presents be instructive: proper New Year and summer gifts should enable one to cultivate character and intellect while playing.⁷³

3. Learn to play, play to learn

Given the discursive connections created between toys and education, and the long-standing respect that education enjoyed in Chinese culture, “educational” was the ultimate publicity catchword – possibly the most legitimating one. Parents were prompted to stimulate learning through children’s “natural” desire to play, aided by instructive toys; youngsters, too, should become aware of correct leisure.

This kind of promotion was initiated in the late 1900s by the Commercial Press, and it referred to “educational play items” that were in fact aids to home or school education: most notably flashcards for learning to read, write and count, advertised in adult and children’s magazines as suitable for children’s inclinations, and able to attract their interest.⁷⁴ From the early 1910s, Commercial Press picture cards and games (“games for citizens”) began to be promoted to adults and youngsters as “beneficial play items” that prevented children from spending idle summer vacations or engaging in “harmful” pastimes such as “gambling” – which may have hinted at traditional games, since Press games were eventually advertised as entirely different from promotion games. These entertaining yet instructive “toys and games,” instead, ostensibly allowed prospective citizens to enhance their civic awareness, learning while playing.⁷⁵ Indeed, a 1920 advertorial urged readers of the *Youth’s Magazine* to be judicious with their leisure: indulging in “pernicious” amusements was “shameful.” Rather, “new citizens” should engage only in “beneficial” new year recreation with the “reformed” toys and games created by the Press, which increased “new knowledge” and prepared one for great undertakings.⁷⁶ Up to the late 1910s, the very same products – including flashcards, puzzles, charts, games, blocks, vehicles and soldiers – could be promoted by the Commercial Press as “school prizes” or “toys for students,” and “family playthings” or “children’s toys,” with a mere variation of the accompanying claim/copy or illustration to signal the distinction.⁷⁷ Seldom did the Press advertise playthings without connecting them to education or “beneficial” gift-giving, one significant exception being the unusual advert shown in figure 3, that does however brand its pull-along toy trams and cars (elsewhere called “school prizes”) as “toddlers’ toys,” employing the word *youzhi* (幼稚), then usually associated with preschool children.⁷⁸

Play was thus positioned and legitimized as edifying edutainment, with toys peddled as tools for learning. The usage of education as a marketing claim soon led to applying the “educational” label to items that one would hardly classify as such. Throughout the decades, building blocks and flashcards, picture cubes, dolls, animals, musical toys, trains, cars, as well as soldiers, tanks and armored vehicles, would be advertised by the Press to adults and children under the “educational playthings” heading (see figures 6-8). Allegedly endowed with instructive and scientific content, these extraordinary toys were claimed to suit children’s inclinations, and possess the ability to enlighten their intellect, strengthen their body, and increase their intelligence. Youngsters, or parents perusing their magazines, should look forward to owning vivacious, solid playthings that could expand their knowledge and liven up their mood, preventing “all bad habits.”⁷⁹

Commercial Press building blocks may have nurtured industrial knowledge,⁸⁰ while its trains, trams and motor cars could ostensibly

“broaden children’s experience,”⁸¹ but they were not alone. Because the Press’ early publicity messages, and above all the discourse of toys, made it hardly affordable – ever since the 1910s⁸² and increasingly from the 1920s – for other producers to avoid the momentous “educational” buzzword in their advertising campaigns.

Just like buildings that required solid foundations, future talents ought to be nurtured by means of education, for which toys were key: hence, claimed the Zhenyi Educational Children’s Toy Factory, its ingenious and instructive tinfoil warships, cars, locomotives, trumpets and dinner sets.⁸³ Proclaiming playthings to be internationally recognized as “efficient tools to arouse children’s knowledge,” the Patriotic Toy Company proceeded to praise the “educational value,” “scientific interest,” cleverness and attractiveness of its vehicles, dolls and animals, a real must for parents who wished to educate their offspring.⁸⁴ Toy trains and cars sold by the upscale Sincere department store were certainly “pleasing to the eye and spirit” but also, again, “efficient tools to enhance children’s knowledge.”⁸⁵

Great China Celluloid baby-dolls, animals and dolls, with their bright colors and clever designs, were devised fully in accordance with (unspecified) educational principles, as children were told,⁸⁶ while parents learned that images of first president of the Republic Sun Yatsen, panharmonicons, dolls and grape fairies were “educational gifts.”⁸⁷ Likewise, Zhongxing Celluloid “new and original toys,” namely quite mature movable figurines, dolls and animals, were claimed to cultivate children’s good character and enhance their thinking abilities, therefore “modern schools and new-style families must provide them.”⁸⁸ Some toys were said to be more beneficial than others: while dolls were merely ornamental, ball-playing could train the body and please the spirit – as unsurprisingly claimed by the rubber ball producer Yonghe Industrial Company, who also informed adults that the “ideal child” indulged in no strenuous exercise after school, but would rather bounce her ball and read a book.⁸⁹

Even time-honored edible playthings – despised by theorists on the grounds that toys should be for playing and not for eating⁹⁰ – became educational, perhaps in a bid for modern respectability. Produced by the Guanshengyuan Food Company, they consisted of candy and biscuits in shapes that included car, carriage, pistol, and tank. These “gifts” were advertised from the late 1920s as accessories to children’s education, able to “instill culture” and combine education with play and nourishment. Parents were informed that tank shaped candy could raise children to be militant citizens; on eating it, one would “not forget national crisis” (see figure 9).⁹¹

While some of these items may not fit the standard notion of educational toy, they do dovetail with a vision of education as conducive to any knowledge, skill or attitude that can be useful for nation and society. Education as deployed in toy adverts could indeed have a wide gamut of components, including patriotic mobilization.

4. Protect the nation

Toys were marketed also as weapons to defend China: spiritually, through the patriotic activism that they would instill; and commercially, by means of patriotic consumption.

“China is about to become a strong nation! China has hope!” announced a 1920 advertisement for the American Daisy Air Rifle, motivating such claims with the rationale that Chinese children, too, could use the Daisy. Showing a boy holding the rifle, the advert appeared with identical copy in periodicals for children and adults. While on the American market the Daisy was presented as conducive to learning “the manly art of shooting”⁹² and to developing robust self-reliance, the Chinese were told that “a martial spirit is indispensable, and it must be cultivated from childhood.”⁹³ A few years later the Daisy was again promoted, still without age-differentiation and still showing boys, occasionally in the company of fathers. Besides safety and verisimilitude, its virtues included (as in the United States) the capacity to train sight and arm strength, thus nurturing “robust citizens.”⁹⁴ Copy wavered between stating that the Daisy could not be considered a plaything, but rather an essential item for education,⁹⁵ and defining it instead a “beneficial toy,”⁹⁶ or even “the most valuable children’s toy.”⁹⁷

With their localization, these adverts highlight the strategies used in China to peddle playthings to adults and adultified children. They also underscore the blurred contours of the “toy” concept; the breadth of the “educational” tag; and the selling power of child/toy-propelled nation-strengthening. Fostering robustness and a martial spirit had been put forward since the early 1900s by intellectuals as an urgent matter, related to national “survival.”⁹⁸ Although opinions on military toys were ambivalent until the late 1920s,⁹⁹ producers were from the 1910s quick to exploit mobilization in order to sell, appealing to military toys’ alleged nation-strengthening and educational capacities.

Commercial Press military-themed picture cards and games were thus marketed to youngsters and adults as “games for citizens” capable of cultivating a martial spirit,¹⁰⁰ while wooden airguns were among the “school prizes.”¹⁰¹ Military toys, the Press claimed, nurtured “the habit of militant citizenship” and gave children some knowledge of the military;¹⁰² they were indeed labeled “educational,” by the Press and other producers, throughout the 1920s.

This branding intensified in the 1930s, in conjunction with growing prominence of militant nationalism – and looming conflict, with the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and the outbreak of war against Japan in 1937. The inspiringly named China Educational Toy Factory chose metal cars and equally “educational” cannon to promote itself in 1933,¹⁰³ while the Chung Hwa Book Company and China Educational Tools Manufacture, purveyors of toys that “combined education

with play,"¹⁰⁴ marketed in 1937 wooden model airplanes to children as "emergency educational toys."¹⁰⁵ The China Can, on its part, advertised in 1939 its mechanical toys by portraying a boy with an elephant and a tank, which ostensibly could "inspire children's scientific thought; arouse children's national (*minzu* 民族) consciousness."¹⁰⁶

Patriotism was a catchword, so much so that it was appropriated to market even foreign products. Yet, in China as in other countries, consuming foreign playthings was not deemed patriotic. The fear was widespread among intellectuals and pedagogues that the foreign toy could corrupt the national child and disrupt the national economy, thus weakening the country in all respects. From the early 1910s, a connection was made between toys and power: strong countries would produce superior toys, striving moreover to export them. Incidentally, China's own toy exports, albeit limited, were tendentially overlooked, perhaps because their existence did not suit the construct of failure. Playthings being attributed the capacity to nurture children in ways that would never be forgotten, the influence of wrong toys could be fatal to the spirit of the rescuers of the nation, obliterating – from the start – their ability to accomplish their duty. The core issue did not concern quality, but rather the possibility that foreign playthings beget foreignness, relaying alien attributes and knowledge. Though some conceded that the supposedly low value of Chinese toys explained the consumption of imports, the general opinion was that foreign items should not be acquired.¹⁰⁷

Unsurprisingly, local producers seized the opportunity. An array of advertising claims, deploying quality, affordability, nationalism and fear, were thus devised to convince consumers to reject foreign toys – or to cultivate children's patriotism by means of toys sometimes marketed as specifically suitable for Chinese children,¹⁰⁸ yet showing no evident difference from their imported counterparts. Beginning in the late 1910s, advertising consistently attempted to instill in consumers a sense of urgency, related to "national salvation." If until the late 1920s concern pertained chiefly to undermined Chinese-ness and economic losses caused by imported toys in general, a noticeable change took place in the 1930s, when even the physical wellbeing of children was claimed to be threatened by foreign toys, most notably by "enemy" ones – namely Japanese, as Japan had been the ultimate enemy since the invasion of Manchuria in 1931.

The Commercial Press, that often urged customers to "use national goods," repeatedly claimed its playthings to be fully national products, manufactured so well that they could perfectly keep pace with imported goods, albeit at a cheaper price (some parents found them expensive, however).¹⁰⁹ Until the early 1920s, the company was also selling foreign items,¹¹⁰ but this was construed as a temporary necessity, or an expedient means to cultivate competent characters/bodies.¹¹¹ The Zhenyi explained how it had entered the business to provide necessary commodities – toys

– that had been thus far imported: recovery of China’s economic rights and support for education, through clever yet affordable playthings, were ostensibly its *raison d’être*.¹¹² The Patriotic Toy Co. claimed that its inexpensive toys’ very brand nurtured patriotism, whose name and concept would be impressed in children’s minds during play. “Patriotic compatriots” should buy national playthings: alien toys, or “foreign poison,” produced foreign children, and parents who purchased them did not cherish the life of their offspring.¹¹³

Recasting baby-dolls or ping pong balls as potent producers of patriotism, both the Zhongxing Celluloid and the Great China Celluloid alerted parents that providing native toys would foster patriotism from infancy. In particular, the Great China explained that the truly “permanent method” to rescue the nation consisted in cultivating children’s habit to use Chinese goods, starting from (its own cheap and ingenious) playthings.¹¹⁴ Pragmatically, the China Can suggested that children should inform their parents that the price of its clever yet robust mechanical toys was only a third of foreign playthings.¹¹⁵ “Enemy” balls could provoke tuberculosis, thundered the Yonghe: if parents loved their offspring, they should purchase a safe “national” ball, since conscience-less consumers of foreign or, worse, “enemy goods” were bound to regret their negligence.¹¹⁶

None of these levers appear to have proved very persuasive. Despite campaigns to be and buy patriotic, imports seemingly continued to soar until at least the mid 1930s.¹¹⁷ Parents, especially mothers, could well be berated for their superficial attitude, but foreign toys had enduring appeal. Cheap Japanese items were widely purchased well into the 1930s;¹¹⁸ and upmarket European playthings had the allure of novelty, exoticism, quality, fashion, and status.¹¹⁹ In fact, they could be a promotional lever. In 1930, for instance, a complimentary gift of “exquisite Western toys” awaited Chinese customers of the Tianjin branch of White-away Laidlaw who bought enough children’s goods.¹²⁰ Likewise, in 1931 Colgate Palmolive publicized a limited-time premium: “rare and beautiful children’s toys,” namely American airship-shaped balloons.¹²¹

Consumers, in sum, chose actively and pragmatically, although the image discursively disseminated was one of China passively enduring economic and cultural invasion. On the other hand, if toys were transformational tools, and one’s improvement was also the nation’s, then perhaps it mattered little to some whether a plaything was domestic or foreign.

Conclusion

When toys were still gadgets, they were advertised as such; their acquired role of tools caused them to attain more labels. Ingenuity remained, albeit dolled up as state-of-the-art manufacture: celluloid and mechanical items in particular, but also colorful, attractive and bouncing

playthings – no matter if their shapes were actually age-old – embodied a mobile, enhanced China, as opposed to a motionless one. Ingenuity, or material modernity, was accompanied and bolstered by other immaterial tags: affection, patriotism, intelligent style, broadly understood education – that promised and simultaneously confirmed improvement. Tangibility was relevant, but what toys purported to represent and deliver was the real marketing lever.

The same, *mutatis mutandis*, was true to a significant extent for children. Comfortably clothed youngsters, free to move beside toys that bounced or sped along, nourished enough – perhaps with candy tanks – to grasp the educational and scientific principles that patriotic playthings conveyed to them, improved themselves and China prospectively. Thereby they corroborated their own cognizant modernity and that of their parents, relatives or educators, whose informed awareness had provided them with such genial tools.

Toy promotion developed out of negotiated appropriation and deployment of a “frame of reference,”¹²² whose shared understanding or acceptance reinforced the message. Honing a martial spirit, for one, may not have been a major selling point in the 1870s, whereas by the 1910s modified discourses of citizenship had turned it into a desirable asset.¹²³ Education, patriotism, science, were all very intelligible notions – and indeed they were inherent in the new toy discourse, itself part of the “frame of reference.” Advertising exploited its most marketable tenets (that toys be necessary, educational, modern and national), while counteracting the less convenient strands of parsimony and scorn for industrial toys precisely through the construct of cognizant modernity. Instead of superfluous luxuries, toys were marketed – as in Germany¹²⁴ – as indispensable tools for nation-building, learning and parenting. Purchasing many “educational,” “patriotic,” “ingenious” toys was therefore not unthrifty self-centeredness, but rather a judicious and legitimate venture (as was producing them), since playthings were efficacious instruments for building talents that could be shared and employed for strengthening China.

Toy consumption, however, may have been more leisure and pleasure than reason. Namely, adults and children were probably concerned with education or China’s fate, but equally they may have been interested in the novel, fashionable and ingenious *per se*. Or they may have purchased playthings out of impulse, curiosity, status, fun, love, and desire to please. None of these factors fit the cognizant fabrication, but some were exploited. Advertisements recast curiosity and status-seeking as educated, sophisticated pursuit of style and beneficial modernity, against backwardness; love became competent affection, entailing careful selection rather than indiscriminate acquisition; fun was legitimated by instructive outcomes. The cognizantly modern did not spend: they invested. They did not indulge in “harmful” or casual recreation: they played to improve.

While playthings were conveyed as agents, children and adults – ostensibly the cognizant protagonists – came across as rather subordinate subjects, lectured in a fairly didactic fashion. In most advertising as within discourse, play reflected adult concerns and children’s leisure was “domesticated.”¹²⁵ Childishness was quite remote – the oft-cited children’s rights seldom including, it seems, the right to be pointlessly puerile.

Figures



Figure 1. Da Zhonghua sailuluo advertisement, *Jilian huikan* no. 14 (1930): 25.

中興賽璐珞廠

廠址：上海南京路三號
電話：二四八

總經理：張五
經理：張五



中興牌，各種賽璐珞，精良
式樣新穎，花色繁多。
用作推廣贈品，用作餽送
經濟美觀，人人歡迎。

中興牌，各種賽璐珞，新穎
能養成兒童之優良個性，
能增進兒童之天賦思想。
現代學校，新式家庭，
必須購備。

中興牌，標準兵兵，
品質精良，重量均勻
是現代國民之強身運動。
是新式家庭之高尙娛樂，
家備一具，闔第康樂

中興牌，各種賽璐珞，裝飾
式樣新穎，花色繁多
是新式家庭之常備物，
是現代仕女之日用品。

Figure 2. Zhongxing sailuluo advertisement, *Jilian huikan* no. 94 (1934): 44.

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Figure 3. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisement, *Ertong jiaoyu hua* no. 80 (1917): n.p.



Figure 4. Da Zhonghua sailuluo advertisement, *Ertong shijie* 30, no. 7 (1933): n.p.

永字牌
橡皮球
彈力足
質地好
拍得高
小弟弟
小妹妹
白相相
樂陶陶

永和實業公司出品
發行所 上海老北門
門市部 江西路五馬路口



各處均有售

江粉

Figure 5. Yonghe shiye gongsi advertisement, *Shenbao* 18.05.1933: 14.

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商 務 印 書 館 精 製





中 西 年 節 贈 給 兒 童 最 為 有 益

本館自製各種玩具均備兒童之心理本教育之原則精心製造顏色鮮明物料堅固趣味深且無不含有粗淺之學理兒童玩弄日久足以發心思想健身體中西風俗每節必購備值良辰佳節物給與兒童今若以此等玩具購給兒童自必備受歡迎大有裨益為略列於下

- ① 建築類 分積木及構造木材兩種各有甲乙丙丁數具皆附建築模型圖俾兒童按圖逐一構造把玩既久即可自由應用變化百出矣
- ② 交通類 若電車火車摩托車等示以單節之模型足廣兒童之見識
- ③ 軍事類 將軍中砲隊步隊馬隊艦隊等製成各種玩具約有十餘種足以養成軍國民之風尚
- ④ 數學類 此種玩具於娛樂之外更可練習算術若九九數盤數字遊戲答數遊戲等共五六種
- ⑤ 英文類 此種玩具於遊戲之外復可練習英文有英文總字練習片英文字每種數種
- ⑥ 動物類 約有二十餘種非僅摹動物之狀態更能使其動作若活動犬活動虎活動馬活動雞活動兔等均能做出種種動作百玩不厭
- ⑦ 體操遊戲類 共有十餘種若單槓運動雙槓運動打鐵遊戲三人說走等兒童玩之尚武精神當能勃發又若棋板投球投球用器械板上投球跳繩等則能練習目力活潑體體
- ⑧ 手工類 若手工木材十色排板五色線球等皆足以增進兒童對於手工之興趣
- ⑨ 雜類 共有數十種之多若有興趣者意味足能強身啓蒙

共 百 餘 種 另 印 詳 目 錄 奉 贈

A (1643)

Figure 6. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisement, *Funü zazhi* 4, no. 11 (1918): n.p.

教育的玩具

上海商務印書館
自製發售



玩具為兒童的恩物，活潑兒童的情思，增進兒童的知識。
兒童有了玩具，就可免除一切壞的習慣了。

本館所製各種玩具，都寓有幼稚教育之意。各種式樣，
上海棋盤街本館發行所均有陳列，另印目錄，承索即寄。

Figure 7. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisement, *Shaonian zazhi* 12, no. 9 (1922): n.p.

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商務印書館發售

啟蒙玩具



名目繁多
 不及備載
 另印詳細價目單贈閱

本館發售適合兒童心理含有教育意味的
 各種玩具如積木、六面畫、賽路、珞製人物、動
 物、玩具車、中四、弈棋、動物模印、手工遊戲、及
 各色實心皮球、乒乓球、響球等百數十種、製作
 精瓦、售價低廉、頗受兒童歡迎、茲將名目略
 舉如左、敬請選購。

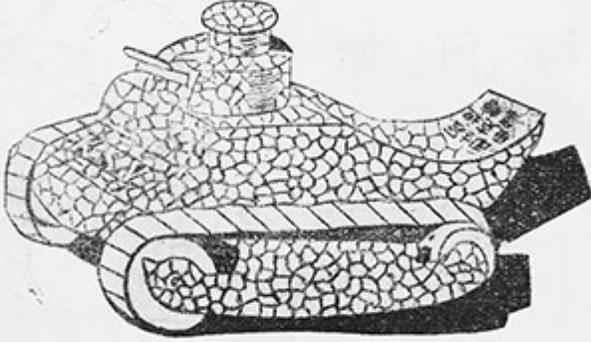
乒乓球	洋囡囡	坦克車	動物模印	英文彩色方木	足球戰棋	動物六面畫	構造木材
每個六分至 一角三分	每個一元四分 至三元五角	每個一元四角	每盒八角三分	每盒各六角	每盒四角	每盒各六角 大號每盒七角	每盒七角至 一元五角

Figure 8. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisement, *Ertong shijie* 30, no. 9 (1933): n.p.

坦 克 車 糖 果

養 成 兒 童 為 軍 國 民

每輛四角半
冠生園公司啓



食坦克車糖：毋忘國難。

坦克車為歐洲大戰中之新式兵器，乃英國所創製
 • 坦克 TANK 本為水櫃之名，特假用之以欺敵人，其制為一武裝大摩托車，外包抵禦彈藥之金屬，內分雌雄二部；雌性部置小快砲數門，附屬於機關砲，發射小彈；雌性部裝機關砲數門，性極猛烈。步哨交戰時，以此為全隊之中心，猛力進攻。雖砲火叢集，不至受傷，保護步兵，效用甚大，一二八之役，日軍曾用坦克車攻吾忠勇衛國之十九路軍於上海，江灣，廟行等處。本公司製造此坦克車糖果，意在給予全國兒童，對軍事教育，有真確之認識，食此糖者，應毋忘國難！（此稿係本公司請汪仲賢先生所撰）

Figure 9. Guanshengyuan gongsi advertisement, *Xiandai fumu* 1, no. 1 (1933): n.p.

Notes

1. Aiguo wanju zhiguanchang advertisement in *Jilian huikan* no. 34 (1931): 23.
2. See Cochran 2006, 62-63.
3. See Kopytoff 1986, 67-68; Baudrillard 1970, 77.
4. *Shenbao* 20.11.1873: 5.
5. Xin'an tai advertisements in *Shenbao* 07.03.1878: 7, *Shenbao* 15.03.1878: 6. *Yang xiaonan* (洋小男) were apparently the precursors to baby dolls (*yang nannan* 洋囡囡).
6. Wilson & Company advertisement in *Shenbao* 11.01.1880: 6.
7. Funder & Company advertisements in *Shenbao* 15.12.1907: 7, and 11.12.1908: 7.
8. See Baudrillard 1970, 113.
9. Song 1925, 51; Momilk advertisement in *Liangyou* no. 10 (1926): n.p.; discussed in Lee 1999, 71.
10. See Saari 1990; Farquhar 1999; Bai 2001 and 2008; Borevskaya 2001; Rabut 2003; Culp 2007; Jones 2011.
11. Liang 1897, 1900.
12. On childhood in premodern China, see Lee 1984; Dardess 1991; Kinney 1995; Kinney 2004; Bai 2005; Hsiung 2005.
13. Wartella 1990, 174.
14. See Cunningham 2005, chaps. 6, 7; Kelly 2007; Jones 2010.
15. On the discourse of childhood, see Jing 1905; Zhao 1911; Zong 1916; Xie 1917, 179-199; Lu 1919; Chen Heqin 1921; Xian 1922; Chiang 1924; Song 1925; Feng 1927; Lin 1930; Mai 1930, 375-377; Shen 1932; Qiu 1933; Lu 1934; Qin 1934; Sun 1934; Ge 1935; Zhang 1935.
16. For early associations of toys with learning, see Hsiung 2005, 228; Leung 1994, 393 and n. 64, 412.
17. Consider the concept of fetal education: see Despeux 2003, 90-93.
18. Concern with the material environment's influence on children was not unique to China: see Forty 1986, 71-72.
19. Elsewhere, too, misgivings existed on merely amusing toys: see Miller 1987, 153; Cross 1997, 9, 33-34, and chap. 5; Chudacoff 2007, chaps. 2-3.
20. As shown by paintings and artifacts: see Guoli gugong bowuyuan 1991; Wicks 2002; Wang 2004.
21. On the discourse of toys, see Gu 1907; Jia 1912; Li 1912; Shen 1912; Xu Fuyuan 1913; Bao 1915; Wei 1917; Yu 1917; Li Wenquan 1918; Li Jinzao 1918; Jia 1919; Ding 1920; Guo Yiquan 1920; Ye 1920; Jiaoyu bu 1922; Xiao 1922; Xie 1922; "Ertong wanju" 1923; Chen Heqin 1924 and 1925; Zhang 1924; Chen Hua 1926; Chen Pinjuan 1927; Feng 1927; Sun 1927; Wang Muqing 1927; Feng 1929; Wang Huaiqi 1929; Xu Yasheng 1929; Chen Yongsheng 1931; Chen Jiyun 1933; Qing 1933; Wang Guoyuan 1933; Yang Su 1933; Yu Jifan 1933; Li De 1934; Lü 1934; Qian 1935; Yang Chenru 1935; Su 1935; Zhong 1935; Sun 1936. See also Fernsebner 2003. On debates about consumption and frugality, see Zanasi 2015.
22. On intersections between discourse and commercial interests, see Lee 1999, 55, 67-76; and Jones 2002: 717-723, who also discusses toy advertising.
23. On the history of advertising in China, see Cochran 1999; Yang 2006; Pan 2008, chap. 5. On newspaper advertising at the turn of the twentieth century, see Mittler 2013. For contemporary accounts of Republican era advertising, see Crow 1937; Billings-Yun, 121-154. On children on product labels, see Cahan 2006, 100-108.
24. Sihang chuxu hui advertisement in *Funü zazhi* 9, no. 12 (1923): n.p.; Colgate advertisement in *Funü zazhi* 11, no. 1 (1925): n.p.
25. See Pan 1998; Cochran 1999b; Gerth 2003; Zanasi 2006; Tsai 2010.
26. Quaker Oats advertisement in *Funü zazhi* 10, no. 10 (1924): n.p.; Sanyou shiye she advertisements in *Shenghuo zhoukan* 6, no. 30 (1931): 649, *Shenghuo zhoukan* 7, no. 25 (1932): 404.

27. See Guoli gugong bowuyuan 1991; Wang Lianhai 2004; Wang Shucun 1988, figs. 32 and 52; Wang Shucun 1991, 1: fig. 271, and 2: fig. 668; Wei 1987, 1-6; Barrott Wicks 2002.
28. For a similar process with the representation of women, see Dal Lago 2000.
29. On simple, compound and complex advertisements, see Dyer 1982, 89, 91.
30. Arcola advertisement in *Dongfang zazhi* 21, no. 19 (1924): n.p.; Welch's advertisement in *Dongfang zazhi* 22, no. 9 (1925): n.p.; Zhongguo neiyi gongsi advertisement in *Xiandai fumu* 2, no. 1 (1934): 25; Yisheng xiangpi zhiwu gongchang advertisement in *Jilian huikan* no. 78 (1933): 19; Wuzhou advertisement in *Jilian huikan* no. 111 (1935): 44. For cigarettes, see advertisements for Qiulin and Fengtian Taiyang cigarettes reproduced in Yi 1995, 69, and Pang 2007, 116-117; see also the posters reproduced in Bai 2003, 166 and Laing 2004, plate 36.
31. Wuzhou da yaofang advertisement in *Jilian huikan* no. 54 (1932): 11; Yonghe shiye gongsi advertisement in *Jilian huikan* no. 64 (1933): 27.
32. Quaker Oats advertisement in *Dongfang zazhi* 23, no. 7 (1926): n.p.; Lactogen advertisement in *Xiandai fumu* 1, no. 2 (1933): n.p.; Allenburys Milk Powder advertisement in *Dongfang zazhi* 34, no. 15 (1937): n.p.; Dr. Williams' advertisements in *Funü zazhi* 8, no. 2 (1922): n.p.; *Funü zazhi* 10, no. 2 (1924): n.p.; *Funü zazhi* 11, no. 11 (1925): n.p.; *Funü zazhi* 13, no. 5 (1927): n.p.; *Dongfang zazhi* 25, no. 24 (1928): n.p.; *Liangyou* no. 61 (1931): 48; *Dongfang zazhi* 32, no. 19 (1935): n.p. On the Dr. Williams' Medicine Company and its China marketing strategies, see Baum 2013.
33. See Seki 1903; Jing 1905: 39-41.
34. Guanshengyuan shipin gongsi advertisement in *Xiandai fumu* 2, no. 1 (1934): 41.
35. Jiating gongye she advertisement in *Jilian huikan* no. 14 (1930): 13.
36. Victrola advertisement in *Funü zazhi* 16, no. 10 (1930): 52.
37. See Xu 1926; Lu 1935; Ma and Zhang 1936; Shanghai chubanshe 1939.
38. Kodak advertisement in *Funü zazhi* 12, no. 11 (1926): n.p.
39. Kodak advertisements in *Dongfang zazhi* 23, no. 20 (1926): n.p.; *Dongfang zazhi* 24, no. 10 (1927): n.p. A sample of American advertisements shows that the Brownie was called an appropriate present, though not a "gift;" while 1900s ads peddled it as "more than a toy," or as a provider of "wholesome fun," from the 1910s the selling point was fun: see Vintage Ad Browser, <http://www.vintageadbrowser.com>, last accessed 10.09.2015.
40. On "moral" construction of business in America, see Cook 2004, 54-63.
41. See Davidson 1992, 10, 26, 28.
42. On the more dialogical relationship between advertising and childrearing discourse in the United States up to the 1940s, see Jacobson 1997: 590; Cross 2004: 185.
43. See Baudrillard 1970, 88.
44. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisement in *Funü zazhi* 9, no. 12 (1923): n.p.; Da Zhonghua advertisements in *Jilian huikan* no. 12 (1930): 47, *Jilian huikan* no. 15 (1930): 15; Aiguo advertisements in *Jilian huikan* no. 13 (1930): 39, *Jilian huikan* no. 18 (1930): 11. On Western appearance in adverts, see Ho 2005, 72-74.
45. Aiguo advertisement in *Jilian huikan* no. 21 (1930): 22; Zhongxing sailuluo chang advertisement in *Jilian huikan* no. 94 (1934): 44.
46. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisements in *Ertong jiaoyu hua* no. 17 (1914): n.p.; *Ertong jiaoyu hua* no. 80 (1917): n.p.; Da Zhonghua sailuluo advertisements in *Shenghuo zhoukan* 5, no. 28 (1930): 465, *Shenghuo zhoukan* 5, no. 34 (1930): 577, *Ertong shijie* 30, no. 7 (1933): n.p.
47. On text prominence in advertising, see Wu and Lien 2013; Tsai 2010, 27.
48. See figure 3 and note 51.
49. Established in Shanghai in 1897, the Shangwu Yinshuguan began with school primers, extending its output to encompass books, periodicals, stationery, musical instruments, sport equipment, and toys: see Drège 1978, Lee 1999, 47-64; Reed 2004, chaps. 4 and 5.

50. Da Zhonghua advertisement in *Jilian huikan* no. 16 (1930): 40; Yonghe advertisement in *Jilian huikan* no. 12 (1930): 25; Aiguo advertisement in *Jilian huikan* no. 26 (1931): 42.
51. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisements in *Ertong shijie* 17, no. 5 (1926): n.p.; and *Funü zazhi* 12, no. 10 (1926): n.p. These ads are quite unusual in claim and copy, which is a sort of children's rhyme.
52. Yonghe advertisements in *Shenbao* 18.05.1933: 14, *Jilian huikan* no. 80 (1933): 14.
53. Da Zhonghua advertisements in *Jilian huikan* no. 9 (1930): 26, *Jilian huikan* no. 10 (1930): 27.
54. Kangyuan zhiguanchang advertisement in *Guohuo shiye* 1935, n.p.; Zhonghua shuju advertisement in *Xiao pengyou huabao* no. 66 (1937): back cover.
55. See "Tongnian quwei" 1927; "Bangjia zhi ji" 1935.
56. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisement in *Dongfang zazhi* 17, no. 16 (1920): n.p.
57. On the social and cultural role of goods and consumption, see Appadurai 1986, 31; Money 2007, 356.
58. See Yi 2005, 17-24; Hang 1987, 238.
59. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisements in *Funü zazhi* 4, no. 2 (1918): n.p.; *Funü zazhi* 4, no. 11 (1918): n.p.; *Shaonian zazhi* 8, no. 12 (1918): n.p.; *Jiaoyu zazhi* 12, no. 1 (1920): n.p.; *Dongfang zazhi* 17, no. 2 (1920): n.p.; *Funü zazhi* 7, no. 12 (1921): n.p.; *Funü zazhi* 8, no. 1 (1922): n.p.; *Funü zazhi* 14, no. 9 (1928): n.p.; *Dongfang zazhi* 29, no. 8 (1932): n.p.
60. Aiguo advertisement in *Jilian huikan* no. 18 (1930): 11; Da Zhonghua advertisement in *Jilian huikan* no. 9 (1930): 26; Shangwu yinshuguan advertisements in *Funü zazhi* 4, no. 11 (1918): n.p.; *Jiaoyu zazhi* 13, no. 12 (1921): n.p.; *Funü zazhi* 11, no. 9 (1925): n.p.; *Dongfang zazhi* 24, no. 22 (1927): n.p.; *Ertong shijie* 27, no. 21 (1931): n.p.; *Ertong jiaoyu* 6, no. 6 (1934): 40.
61. Yangqi gongsi advertisement in *Guangzhou shi* 1932, n.p.
62. Zhongxing advertisement in *Shanghai jizhi* 1935, 70; Da Zhonghua advertisement reproduced in *Quanguo tushuguan* 2003, 7: 854.
63. Da Zhonghua advertisements in *Jilian huikan* no. 11 (1930): 8, *Jilian huikan* no. 13 (1930): 13, *Jilian huikan* no. 14 (1930): 25.
64. Da Zhonghua advertisement in *Jilian huikan* no. 15 (1930): 15.
65. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisement in *Funü zazhi* 5, no. 10 (1919): n.p.
66. Da Zhonghua advertisement in *Jilian huikan* no. 12 (1930): 47.
67. Aiguo advertisement in *Jilian huikan* no. 64 (1933): 11.
68. Da Zhonghua advertisement in *Quanguo tushuguan* 2003, 7: 854.
69. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisement in *Funü zazhi* 9, no. 12 (1923): n.p.; Aiguo advertisement in *Jilian huikan* no. 24 (1930): 9; Da Zhonghua advertisement in *Jilian huikan* no. 7 (1930): 13.
70. Yonghe advertisement in *Jilian huikan* no. 78 (1933): 52.
71. Da Zhonghua advertisement in *Jilian huikan* no. 7 (1930): 13.
72. Daisy Manufacturing Co. advertisement in *Funü zazhi* 10, no. 11 (1924): n.p.
73. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisements in *Jiaoyu zazhi* 4, no. 10 (1912): n.p.; *Xuesheng zazhi* 1, no. 5 (1914): n.p.; *Dongfang zazhi* 12, no. 7 (1915): n.p.
74. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisements in *Dongfang zazhi* 5, no. 6 (1908): n.p.; reprinted with updated illustration in *Ertong jiaoyu hua* no. 52 (1915): n.p.; *Jiaoyu zazhi* 1, no. 1 (1909): n.p.; *Xuesheng zazhi* 1, no. 1 (1914): n.p.; and the unusual ad in *Ertong jiaoyu hua* no. 17 (1914): n.p.
75. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisements in *Jiaoyu zazhi* 3, no. 5 (1911): n.p.; *Ertong jiaoyu hua* no. 48 (1914): n.p.; *Xuesheng zazhi* 1, no. 6 (1914): n.p.; and *Dongfang zazhi* 17, no. 1 (1920): n.p. on games as different from traditional ones. On promotion games, see Lo 2004.
76. Shangwu yinshuguan advertorial "Shuo xin nian youxi" in *Shaonian zazhi* 10, no. 2 (1920): n.p.
77. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisements in *Funü zazhi* 3, no. 5 (1917): n.p.; *Jiaoyu zazhi*

- 9, no. 6 (1917): n.p.; *Xuesheng zazhi* 4, no. 7 (1917): n.p.; *Funü zazhi* 4, no. 2 (1918): n.p.; *Funü zazhi* 5, no. 10 (1919): n.p.
78. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisements in *Ertong jiaoyu hua* no. 80 (1917): n.p.; *Jiaoyu zazhi* 10, no. 6 (1918): n.p.
79. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisements in *Jiaoyu zazhi* 10, no. 12 (1918): n.p.; *Funü zazhi* 4, no. 11 (1918), *Dongfang zazhi* 16, no. 7 (1919): n.p.; *Shaonian zazhi* 9, no. 11 (1919): n.p.; *Dongfang zazhi* 17, no. 2 (1920): n.p.; *Jiaoyu zazhi* 13, no. 12 (1921): n.p.; *Shaonian zazhi* 12, no. 9 (1922): n.p.; *Funü zazhi* 9, no. 9 (1923): n.p.; *Ertong shijie* 16, no. 2 (1925): n.p.; *Funü zazhi* 12, no. 10 (1926): n.p.; *Funü zazhi* 13, no. 5 (1927): n.p.; *Dongfang zazhi* 26, no. 20 (1929): n.p.; *Ertong shijie* 29, no. 5 (1932): n.p.; *Dongfang zazhi* 29, no. 7 (1932): n.p.; *Ertong shijie* 30, no. 9 (1933): n.p.; *Dongfang zazhi* 32, no. 21 (1935): n.p.
80. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisement in *Jiaoyu zazhi* 9, no. 9 (1917): n.p.
81. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisement in *Funü zazhi* 4, no. 11 (1918): n.p.
82. Already in 1915, the Zhonghua shuju advertised its games and charts as “educational” and able to stimulate the intellect: see *Zhonghua xuesheng jie* 1, no. 12 (1915): n.p. On the Zhonghua shuju, established in 1912, see Yu and Liu 2002; Reed 2004, chap. 5.
83. Zhenyi advertisements in *Guohuo yuebao* 1, no. 1 (1924): n.p.; *Guohuo yuebao* 1, no. 2 (1924): n.p. First established in 1916 in Shanghai, the Zhenyi jiaoyu ertong wanju chang resumed operations in the early 1920s and manufactured tinfoil toys: see Shanghai shi dang’anguan 1933-1942; Bureau 1933, 772.
84. Aiguo advertisements in *Guohuo yuebao* 1, no. 1 (1924): n.p.; *Jilian huikan* no. 13 (1930): 39. On the Aiguo wanju zhiguanchang, a Shanghai medium-scale toy manufacture established in 1919, see Shanghai shi dang’anguan 1933-1942; “Toy Manufacturers” 1926.
85. Advertisement for the Toy Department in Xianshi gongsi 1925, n.p. On the Sincere company, see Chan 1996; Lien 2009.
86. Da Zhonghua advertisement in *Ertong shijie* 31, no. 8 (1933): n.p. On the Da Zhonghua sailuluo zhizaochang, large-scale producer of celluloid goods and toys established in Shanghai in 1928, see Bureau 773; *Guohuo shiye* 1935b, 196-198.
87. Da Zhonghua advertisement in *Jilian huikan* no. 5 (1930): 17.
88. Zhongxing advertisement in *Jilian huikan* no. 92 (1934): 54. On the Zhongxing sailuluo chang, producer of celluloid goods and toys, established in 1933-34 in Shanghai, see Shanghai jizhi 1935, 65-69; *Guohuo shiye* 1935, part E: 34-35.
89. Yonghe advertisements in *Jilian huikan* no. 55 (1932): 41, *Jilian huikan* no. 69 (1933): 12. Established in 1918, the Yonghe shiye gongsi manufactured, inter alia, rubber toys: see Hebei sheng 1934, 462-463; Shanghai jizhi 1947, 46-48.
90. See Guo 1920, 12; Yang 1935: 26.
91. Guanshengyuan advertisements in *Funü zazhi* 14, no. 12 (1928): n.p.; *Funü zazhi* 17, no. 11 (1931): n.p.; *Xiandai fumu* 1, no. 1 (1933): n.p. See also their 1931 advert in *Shenbao* declaring opposition to “Japanese imperialism” and suggesting pistol candy as a “training to shoot”: quoted in Li 2013: 12.
92. Cross 1997, 111; see also 24, 112, and the reproduction of an American Daisy advert.
93. Daisy Manufacturing advertisements in *Shaonian zazhi* 10, no. 12 (1920): n.p.; *Dongfang zazhi* 17, no. 18 (1920): n.p. The airgun had been already advertised earlier (as a toy), focusing on its features and renown on the American market: see *Dongfang zazhi* 16, no. 9 (1919): n.p.
94. Daisy advertisements in *Funü zazhi* 11, no. 1 (1925): n.p.; *Ertong shijie* 12, no. 10 (1924): n.p. This promotion was quite akin to American claims that the rifle provided “lessons of manliness, self reliance, keenness of eye, and steadiness of hand and nerve that will reinforce [the boy] for the battle of life in later years”: quoted in Cross 1997, 111-112.
95. Daisy advertisements in *Funü zazhi* 10, no. 10 (1924): n.p.; *Ertong shijie* 11, no. 12 (1924): n.p.

96. Daisy advertisements in *Funü zazhi* 10, no. 12 (1924): n.p.; *Ertong shijie* 14, no. 1 (1925): n.p.
97. Daisy advertisements in *Funü zazhi* 10, no. 11 (1924): n.p.; *Ertong shijie* 15, no. 1 (1925): n.p.
98. For the most well-known view on this, see Liang 1903, 1: 615-621. On attitudes to the military, see Green 2011, 155-157.
99. See Bao 1915; Jia 1919; Jiaoyu bu 1922; Jing 1923; Chen Heqin 1924 and 1925; Boyou 1925.
100. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisements in *Jiaoyu zazhi* 3, no. 5 (1911): n.p.; *Ertong jiaoyu hua* no. 48 (1914): n.p.
101. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisement in *Jiaoyu zazhi* 10, no. 6 (1918): n.p. Toy rifles and swords were also promoted as “sport apparatuses”, since they could be used as props for school drills: see *Dongfang zazhi* 16, no. 8 (1919): n.p.; the *Zhonghua shuju* did likewise: see *Zhonghua jiaoyu jie* 3, no. 18 (1914): n.p.
102. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisements in *Funü zazhi* 4, no. 11 (1918): n.p.; *Shaonian zazhi* 8, no. 12 (1918): n.p.; *Dongfang zazhi* 16, no. 7 (1919): n.p.
103. *Zhongguo jiaoyu wanju chang* advertisement in *Jilian huikan* no. 75 (1933): 57. On the *Zhongguo jiaoyu wanju chang*, re-established in 1932 in Shanghai, see Shanghai shi dang’anguan 1933-1942.
104. *Zhonghua jiaoyu yongju zhizaochang/Zhonghua shuju* advertisement in *Xiao pengyou* no. 687 (1935): n.p. These toys were manufactured by the *Zhonghua jiaoyu yongju zhizaochang*, set up by the *Zhonghua shuju*: see Shanghai shi tongzhiguan 1936, section N, 35.
105. *Zhonghua jiaoyu yongju/Zhonghua shuju* advertisement in *Xiao pengyou* no. 758 (1937): n.p.
106. Kangyuan advertisement in *Yong’an yuekan* no. 1 (1939): n.p. The well-established Kangyuan zhiguanchang entered toy production in 1934, setting up a large-scale manufacture of mechanical playthings in Shanghai: see Shanghai jizhi 1935, 52-58; Guohuo shiye 1935b, 75-76; Chen 1957: 1, 615-617.
107. See Li 1912: 15-16; Li 1918: 3; Yang 1925; Zhang 1926: 2; Tao 1928, 108-110; Xu 1929: 16; He 1933; Huang 1933; Nai 1936. On toys and Chinese-ness, see Fernsebner 2003: 282-285; Jones 2011, chap. 4. On nationalism and advertising, see Cochran 1999b, 2000, 2006. On toy consumption and patriotism in America and Europe, see Margerum 1994, 340; Formanek-Brunell 1998, chap. 6; McGovern 1998; Manson 2001, 323-324.
108. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisements in *Dongfang zazhi* 25, no. 20 (1928): n.p.; *Dongfang zazhi* 26, no. 18 (1929): n.p.
109. Cheng 1920: 17; and Shangwu yinshuguan advertisements in *Dongfang zazhi* 16, no. 7 (1919): n.p.; *Funü zazhi* 5, no. 12 (1919): n.p.; *Jiaoyu zazhi* 11, no. 12 (1919): n.p.; *Jiaoyu zazhi* 12, no. 9 (1920): 8; *Funü zazhi* 6, no. 5 (1920): 14; *Dongfang zazhi* 18, no. 3 (1921): n.p.; *Funü zazhi* 11, no. 9 (1925): n.p.; *Funü zazhi* 14, no. 9 (1928): n.p.; *Dongfang zazhi* 26, no. 20 (1929): n.p.; *Dongfang zazhi* 29, no. 8 (1932): n.p.
110. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisement in *Funü zazhi* 9, no. 12 (1923): n.p.
111. “Not strong, then perish” was the Darwinist slogan used to promote sport equipment imported from America for strengthening Chinese students’ bodies: see advertisement in *Funü zazhi* 4, no. 5 (1918): n.p. The Press claimed that only the products that it still could not manufacture would be ordered from abroad: see advertisement for school equipment in *Jiaoyu zazhi* 11, no. 9 (1919): n.p.
112. Zhenyi advertisements in *Zhonghua guohuo weichihui* 1923, n.p.; *Guohuo yuebao* 1, no. 1 (1924): n.p.; *Guohuo yuebao* 1, no. 2 (1924): n.p.
113. Aiguo advertisements in *Guohuo yuebao* 1, no. 1 (1924): n.p.; *Jilian huikan* no. 21 (1930): 22, *Jilian huikan* no. 34 (1931): 23, *Jilian huikan* no. 64 (1933): 11.
114. *Zhongxing* advertisement in *Jilian huikan* no. 100 (1934): 65; Da *Zhonghua* advertisements in *Quanguo tushuguan* 2003, 7: 854, *Shenghuo zhoukan* 5, no. 40 (1930):

- 674, *Shenghuo zhoukan* 7, no. 3 (1932): 60, *Dongfang zazhi* 30, no. 7 (1933): n.p.
115. Kangyuan advertisement in *Guohuo shiye* 1935, n.p.
116. Yonghe advertisements in *Jilian huikan* no. 75 (1933): 6, *Jilian huikan* no. 79 (1933): 23.
117. As late as 1936, children were still alerted to the soaring of toy imports: see Nai 1936. Although customs statistics are problematic (see Hamilton 1977: 879), China's net imports of toys and games are reported to have increased remarkably from the 1900s to 1931, beginning to drop only after the mid 1930s: see Bell, Woodhead 1912, 128-129; China. The Maritime Customs 1932, I: 154-155; China. The Maritime Customs 1939, II: 610-611.
118. See "Tuzhi ertong" 1935; "Qunian de wanju" 1937.
119. This mood is well captured in Beiyang 1929, 3; Hosie 1929, 161; Ding 1933, 185; Lao 1934, 15; Qian 1947, 382.
120. Huiluo baihuo gongsi advertisement in *Beiyang huabao* 03.04.1930: 2-3.
121. Colgate Palmolive advertisement in *Funü zazhi* 17, no. 2 (1931): 6.
122. Dyer 1982, 13.
123. On literary (*wen*) and military (*wu*) values within Chinese notions of masculinity, see Louie 2002.
124. See Hamlin 2007, 34-36, 127, 143-146.
125. On the domestication of recreation, see Sutton-Smith 1986, 99, 127, 225.

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