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

by Valentina Boretti, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

Toys may be small things, but their relevance is great, argued a Chinese toy advertisement in 1931. 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” 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” 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
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.” 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; advertisements began to speak of “children’s playthings.” 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, 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. 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,” the narrative of re-making China through children already had a history of about three decades.

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, 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 characteristics 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” and politically charged role of children and childhood was by no means unique to China, 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.

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, 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, the power of the material was repeatedly emphasized. Proper toys, in the opinion of most, ought to be educational, scientific, enjoyable, safe, attractive, well-manufactured but not over-ingenious, 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,\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{21} Toy advertising, however, devised ways to utilize the most marketable discursive claims and sidestep inconvenient ones. For indeed – as has long been pointed out\textsuperscript{22} – the spotlight placed on children by nation-strengthening agendas attracted commercial interests.

\section*{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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. 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.

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. 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.

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. 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. 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. 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.\textsuperscript{32}

The plaything hence became a \textit{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. Material-
ality thus became quasi-immaterial, as shown by the usages of the “gift”
concept. The notion of “gift” (\textit{enwu} 恩物), which had become current – via
Japan – at the turn of the century to indicate Froebelian kindergarten
toys,\textsuperscript{33} was pressed into service to advertise Chinese and foreign commod-
ities that had little to do with its factual meaning. These included apricot
toffee, “the gift for modern children;”\textsuperscript{34} talcum powder, a “summer gift for
children;”\textsuperscript{35} and even the phonograph, a “gift” for the new household.\textsuperscript{36}
Apparently the concept of “gift” functioned to convey the notion of uplift-
ing, modern items, conducive to a “civilized,” genteel new lifestyle and
family leisure that was, incidentally, much advocated in advice manuals.\textsuperscript{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 intel-
ligence and develop thought.\textsuperscript{38} Kodak cameras could be given by fathers
to sons as an inspiring, meaningful game, possibly to be shared with
other boys.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{per se}.

\textbf{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.\textsuperscript{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 dissem-
inating 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 branding 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. Producers and advertisers deployed significations 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. 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.

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.

Text was paramount – understandably, given the intended audience. 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, 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. 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.

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; the joys of ball-playing (see figure 5); the role of celluloid toys and baby-dolls as harbingers of daily bliss for toddlers who would cry or not sleep without them.

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!”), 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.

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. The “social” value of playthings thus came full circle. Expanding on the earlier tendency to commercialize holidays, which itself built on the time-honored tradition of festive toy purchase, 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. 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. Tricycles were “a gift that modern children really can not lack.” “New-style households” would be accessorized and adorned by celluloid toys manufactured to “suit modern children’s needs.” 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. Allegedly, 99 children out of 100 loved celluloid playthings. 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.” 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. (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. Appropriating pedagogues’ parlance, playthings were defined as “children’s unique close friends and most ideal teachers,” whose very presence would immediately liven up youngsters, but in a wholesome way, causing good behavior.

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. (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 carefully – and they should keep in mind that playthings influenced children’s character. 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.

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,” 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 1910s 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. 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. 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.”

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, while parents learned that images of first president of the Republic Sun Yatsen, panharmonicons, dolls and grape fairies were “educational gifts.” Likewise, Zhongying 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.” 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.

Even time-honored edible playthings – despised by theorists on the grounds that toys should be for playing and not for eating – 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).

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” and to developing robust self-reliance, the Chinese were told that “a martial spirit is indispensable, and it must be cultivated from childhood.” 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.” Copy wavered between stating that the Daisy could not be considered a plaything, but rather an essential item for education, and defining it instead a “beneficial toy,” or even “the most valuable children’s toy.”

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.” Although opinions on military toys were ambivalent until the late 1920s, 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, while wooden airguns were among the “school prizes.” Military toys, the Press claimed, nurtured “the habit of militant citizenship” and gave children some knowledge of the military; 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, while the Chung Hwa Book Company and China Educational Tools Manufacture, purveyors of toys that “combined education
with play,” marketed in 1937 wooden model airplanes to children as “emergency educational toys.” 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.”

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.

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, 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). Until the early 1920s, the company was also selling foreign items, but this was construed as a temporary necessity, or an expedient means to cultivate competent characters/bodies. 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 raisons 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 countering 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 sailulu advertisement, *Jilian huikan* no. 14 (1930): 25.
Figure 2. Zhongxing sailulu advertisement, *Jilian huikan* no. 94 (1934): 44.
Figure 3. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisement, Erlong jiaoyu hua no. 80 (1917): n.p.
Figure 4. Da Zhonghua sailulu advertisement, *Erlong shijie* 30, no. 7 (1933): n.p.
Figure 5. Yonghe shiye gongsi advertisement, Shenbao 18.05.1933: 14.
Figure 6. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisement, *Funü zazhi* 4, no. 11 (1918): n.p.
Figure 7. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisement, Shaonian zazhi 12, no. 9 (1922): n.p.
Figure 8. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisement, *Ertong shijie* 30, no. 9 (1933): n.p.
Figure 9. Guanshengyuan gongsi advertisement, *Xiandai fumu* 1, no. 1 (1933): n.p.
Notes

4. Shenbao 20.11.1873: 5.
5. Xin’an tai advertisements in Shenbao 07.03.1878: 7, Shenbao 15.03.1878: 6. Yang xiaonian (洋小男) were apparently the precursors to baby dolls (yang nannan 洋囡囡).
11. Liang 1897, 1900.
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; Qu 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.
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 Yiqian 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.
25. See Pan 1998; Cochran 1999b; Gerth 2003; Zanasi 2006; Tsai 2010.
28. For a similar process with the representation of women, see Dal Lago 2000.
34. Guanshengyuan shipin gongsi advertisement in Xiandai fumu 2, no. 1 (1934): 41.
36. Victrola advertisement in Funü zazhi 16, no. 10 (1930): 52.
37. See Xu 1926; Lu 1935; Ma and Zhang 1936; Shanghai chubanshe 1939.
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.
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.
45. Aiguo advertisement in Jilian huikan no. 21 (1930): 22; Zhongxing sailuluo chang advertisement in Jilian huikan no. 94 (1934): 44.
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 Drege 1978, Lee 1999, 47-64; Reed 2004, chaps. 4 and 5.

51. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisements in Ertong shijie, no. 5 (1926): n.p.; and Funü zazhi, 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.


55. See “Tongnian quwei” 1927; “Bangjia zhi ji” 1935.

56. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisement in Dongfang zazhi, no. 16 (1920): n.p.

57. On the social and cultural role of goods and consumption, see Appadurai 1986, 31; Money 2007, 356.


59. Shangwu yinshuguan advertisements in Funü zazhi, no. 11 (1918): n.p.; Jiaoyu zazhi 12, no. 10 (1926): n.p. These ads are quite unusual in claim and copy, which is a sort of children’s rhyme.
Small Things of Great Importance / Boretti  •  34
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.
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.
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.
106. Kangyuan advertisement in Yong’an yuekan no. 1 (1939): n.p. The well-established Kangyuan zhiyuanchang entered toy production in 1934, setting up a large-scale manufacture of mechanical playthings in Shanghai: see Shanghai jizhi 1935, 52-58; Guohuo shiju 1935b, 75-76; Chen 1957: 1, 615-617.
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.


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.


123. On literary (*wen*) and military (*wu*) values within Chinese notions of masculinity, see Louie 2002.


References

Primary sources
Ding Xilun 丁锡纶. 1920. “Duiyu ertong wanju de yijian” 对于儿童玩具的意见 (Opinions...

*Dongfang zazhi* 东方杂志 (The Eastern Miscellany). Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan.

*Ertong jiaoyu* 儿童教育 (Children’s Education). Shanghai: Ertong shuju.

*Ertong jiaoyu hua* 儿童教育画 (Children’s Educational Pictorial). Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan.

*Ertong shijie* 儿童世界 (Children’s World). Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan.


Gu Zhuo 顾倬 (comp.). 1907. *You’er baoyu fa* 幼儿保育法 (Early Childcare). n.a.: Zhongguo tushu gongsi.


Jilian huikan 机联会刊 (Bulletin of the National Goods Manufacturers’ Association).

Shanghai: Shanghai Jizhi guohuo gongchang lianhehui.


Nüzi shijie 女子世界, no. 14, pp. 33-41.


Funü zazhi 妇女杂志, vol. 9, no. 4, pp. 121-124.


Jilian huikan 机联会刊 (Bulletin of the National Goods Manufacturers’ Association).

Shanghai: Shanghai Jizhi guohuo gongchang lianhehui.


Nüzi shijie 女子世界, no. 14, pp. 33-41.


Nüzi shijie 女子世界, no. 14, pp. 33-41.

Jiaoyu zazhi 教育杂志, vol. 10, no. 7, pp. 31-34.


Jilian huikan 机联会刊 (Bulletin of the National Goods Manufacturers’ Association).

Shanghai: Shanghai Jizhi guohuo gongchang lianhehui.

Jiaoyu zazhi 教育杂志, vol. 10, no. 7, pp. 31-34.


Jilian huikan 机联会刊 (Bulletin of the National Goods Manufacturers’ Association).

Shanghai: Shanghai Jizhi guohuo gongchang lianhehui.


Jilian huikan 机联会刊 (Bulletin of the National Goods Manufacturers’ Association).

Shanghai: Shanghai Jizhi guohuo gongchang lianhehui.


Shao Mingjiu 邵鸣九. 1943. Wo yu ertong 我与儿童 (Children and I). n.a.: Zhongguo ertong jiaoyu xiehui 中国儿童教育学会.

Small Things of Great Importance / Boretti • 40


Xiao pengyou 小朋友 (Little Ones). Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju.
Xiao pengyou huabao 小朋友画报 (Little Ones’ Pictorial). Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju.
Xianbaiyan 冼百言. 1922. Ertong de shehuihua 儿童的社会化 (The Socialization of Children). Funü shibao 妇女时报, no. 9, pp. 24-27.
Xuesheng zazhi 学生杂志 (The Students’ Magazine). Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan.
Small Things of Great Importance / Boretti • 42

Shanghai: Beixin shuju.
Yang Xilei 杨锡类. 1925. “Xinnian yu ertong” 新年与儿童 (The New Year and Children).
Ye Gongxiong 叶公戛. 1920. “Kaocha Riben jiaoyu wanju ganxiang” 考察日本教育玩具感
12, no. 11, pp. 7-10.
Yong'an yuekan 永安月刊 (Wing On Monthly). Shanghai: Shanghai Yong'an gongsi.
“Youxi zhi weisheng shang jiazhi” 游戏之卫生上价值 (The Value of Play for Health). 1910.
Yu Ji 余寄. 1917. “Jiaoyu shang wanju zhi jiazhi” 教育上玩具之价值 (The Value of Toys in
Education). Zhonghua jiaoyu jie 中华教育界, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 1-5.
Yu Jifan 俞寄凡. 1933. Wanju yu jiaoyu 玩具与教育 (Toys and Education). Shanghai:
Zhonghua shuju.
Yu Shumin 郁树敏. 1931. “Xiaoxue ertong xingqu zhi diaocha yu yanjiu” 小学儿童兴趣
之调查与研究 (Survey and Analysis of Elementary School Children’s Interests). Jiaoyu
Zhang Jiuru, Zhou Zhuqing 张九如, 周翥青. 1924. “Dule quanguo ertong wanju zhanhan-
huai shencha baogao hou de jinji dongyi” 读了全国玩具展览展览会审查报告后的紧急
动议 (Urgent Motion on Reading the National Toy Exhibition Survey Report). Jiaoyu
Zhang Yucai 章育才. 1935. “Xiandai jiating yu ertong jiaoyang” 现代家庭与儿童教养
(Modern Families and Childrearing). Dongfang zazhi 东方杂志, vol. 32, no. 11, pp. 91-97.
Zhang Zonglin 张宗麟. 1926. “Diaocha Jiang Zhe youzhi jiaoyu hou de ganxiang” 调查江
浙幼稚教育后的感想 (Reflections after a Survey of Preschool Education in Jiangsu and
Zhao Yuan 赵嫒. 1911. “Jiating jiaoyu lun” 家庭教育论 (On Family Education). Funü
shibao 妇女时报, no. 1, pp. 6-11.
Zhong Fuyuan 钟富元. 1935. “Wanju zai ertong jiaoyu shang de jiazhi ji qi xuanze” 玩具
在儿童教育上的价值及其选择 (The Value of Toys in Children’s Education and their
Zhonghua guohuo weichihui 中华国货维持会 (ed.). 1923. Guohuo diaocha lu: diliu qi 国货
Zhonghua xuesheng jie 中华学生界 (Chung Hwa Students’ Magazine). Shanghai: Zhonghua
shuju.
Zong Liang 宗良 (tr. from the Ladies Home Journal). 1916. “Ertong zhi wanju jiaoyu” 儿童

Secondary sources
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
the 1898 Reform.” Late Imperial China, vol. 22, no. 2, December, pp. 124-155.
hood, vol. 12, no. 1, February, pp. 9-32.
Bai, Limin. 2008. “Children as the Youthful Hope of an Old Empire: Race, Nationalism,
and Elementary Education in China, 1895-1915.” Journal of the History of Childhood and
Youth, vol. 1, no. 2, Spring, pp. 210-231.
贴广告的源与流 (given English title: Chinese Traditional Advertisement: The Origin
and Development of Poster Advertising). Beijing: Taihai chubanshe.
Culp, Robert. 2007. Articulating Citizenship: Civic Education and Student Politics in
Southeastern China, 1912-1940. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center.
Cunningham, Hugh. 2005. *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500. Second
Woman?” *East Asian History*, no. 19, June, pp. 103-144.
Hiner (eds.). *Children in Historical and Comparative Perspective: An International Handbook
Christine Nguyen Tri and Catherine Despeux (eds.). *Éducation et instruction en Chine –
Hurst & Co.
Donald, Stephanie Hemelryk. 2005. *Little Friends: Children’s Film and Media Culture in
Chinese Affairs*, no. 4, July, pp. 61-84.
Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
Identity, 1909-1933.” *Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 6, no. 3, November, pp. 269-293.
Formanek-Brunell, Miriam. 1998. *Made to Play House: Dolls and the Commercialization of
Hudson.
Japan.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Frick, Heike, Mechthild Leutner, Nicola Spakowski (eds.). 1999. *Die Befreiung der Kinder:
Konzepte von Kindheit im China der Republikzeit.* Hamburg: LIT.
Gerth, Karl. 2003. *China Made: Consumer Culture and the Creation of the Nation.* Cambridge,
MA: Harvard University Asia Center.
Green, Colin. 2011. “Turning Bad Iron into Polished Steel: Whampoa and the Rehabilita-
tion of the Chinese Soldier.” In James Flath and Norman Smith (eds.). *Beyond Suffering:
shuxing de jiangou” 发现孩童与失去孩童: 论鲁迅对孩童属性的建构 (Discovering
Children and Losing Children: Lu Xun’s Construction of Children’s Identity). *Hanxue
yanjiu*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 301-325.
Hamilton, Gary G. 1977. “Chinese Consumption of Foreign Commodities: A Compara-
Hamilton Gary G. and Lai Chi-kong. 1989. “Consumerism without Capitalism:
Consumption and Brand Names in Late Imperial China.” In Henry J. Rutz and Benja-
min S. Orlove (eds.). *The Social Economy of Consumption*. Lanham: University Press of
America, pp. 253-279.
Hamlin, David D. 2007. *Work and Play: The Production and Consumption of Toys in Germany,
Lien, Ling-ling. 2009. “From the Retailing Revolution to the Consumer Revolution:
Department Stores in Modern Shanghai.” *Frontiers of History in China*, vol. 4, no. 3, September, pp. 358-389.


Reed, Christopher A. 2004. *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937*.
Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
Xu, Lanjun. 2007. *Save the Children: Problem Childhoods and Narrative Politics in*
Valentina Boretti is a Research Associate at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, Department of History, where she previously held a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship. She received her PhD in History from the University of London. She works on modern Chinese history: her interests include gender, material culture and childhood. Her research on the cultural history of toys in twentieth-century China explores citizen-building and mobilization under different regimes through the prism of playthings.