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Instructing Adults, Attracting Children: Toy Displays in Republican China

*Instruire les adultes, plaire aux enfants : les expositions de jouets en Chine
républicaine*

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Instructing Adults, Attracting Children: Toy Displays in Republican China

Instruire les adultes, plaire aux enfants : les expositions de jouets en Chine républicaine

Valentina Boretti

Introduction

- 1 Exhibitions, argued a periodical in 1922, would instruct visitors and offer them a chance to see the progress of “material civilisation”, which in turn could inspire them to pursue “civilisation” (*wenming*).¹ An ubiquitous and plastic catchword, *wenming* pertained to spiritual-cum-material improvement and advancement;² since the early 1900s, material civilisation had been declared crucial to spiritual civilisation: corrupt materiality could and would not beget the “recovery of the spirit”³ that China allegedly needed. In the Republican era (1912-1949), specimens of tangible and intangible advancement regularly went on display in state-, school- or commercially-sponsored events, for exhibition was yet another buzzword. Whether illustrating the benefits of updated education⁴ or promoting the consumption of national products, exhibitions were intended to raise awareness, convey “interpretations of material culture”,⁵ and concurrently “transform the masses into citizens”.⁶
- 2 These were also among the purposes of toy displays, which have so far attracted little attention. This article begins to address this gap: discussing large- and medium-scale exhibitions staged by educational and governmental agencies in the 1920s and 1930s, it examines efforts to shift the public perception of toys, and their inclusion among the icons of *wenming*, amidst the interplay of commercial and citizen-building motives. In particular, it signals how the interpretation of playthings that displays sought to circulate carried prescriptions for ideal adulthood – current and prospective. Associating toys with education and material/spiritual advancement, exhibitions

indicated that they could not be manufactured, acquired or used casually. If children were to learn patriotic consumption and judicious play, parents, producers and teachers ought to appreciate that playthings were no inconsequential gadgets, but formative and transformative tools⁷ to be handled with competence and awareness. Only improved adults, in sum, could craft and supply appropriate toys, which in turn would shape improved children.

- 3 Neither childhood nor the discourses of production, nor even the specifics of toys are the focus of this discussion, which is instead centred on how the redefinition of toys was staged for audiences wider than readers of advice literature, and deploys exhibitions to illuminate the role of playthings in the making of children and adults alike. In doing so, it builds on the increasingly rich scholarship on late imperial and Republican conceptions of childhood, education, and children's culture,⁸ while seeking to highlight a point that deserves further attention. Namely, that the discourse of childhood was ultimately about current adulthood,⁹ because the pivotal role ascribed to the young in renewing China made them a lever for prompting adults to shape up *hic et nunc*. Children were thus crucial not only as prospective models of novel citizenship, but also as instruments to awaken¹⁰ allegedly benighted adults and turn them into competent citizens, cognizant of youngsters' importance, and prepared to adopt the vision of childhood and education propounded by experts. Speaking for the sake of the child, experts thus placed other adults in the learner, child position, dismissing their knowledge and practices as inadequate. Toys provide a good angle to appreciate how the making of children was concurrently a re-making of adults, because the Republican discourse reframed them as signifiers of trans-generational competence, as the next section will discuss.

The Republican toy culture

- 4 Decades of domestic turmoil, foreign demands on the Qing empire, and military defeats – including an especially bitter one against Japan – led many in the late nineteenth century to fear that China was faltering. According to reformers disillusioned with tradition, which they construed as largely inadequate, the predicament called for a thorough re-making of personhood, starting with children. Having framed the young as the rescuers of China, reformers and intellectuals, soon joined by pedagogues, cultural brokers and office-holders educated in China and abroad (all termed here experts), disseminated prescriptions on how to shape them in accordance with their vision – the ideal child being a patriotic and group-minded citizen, vigorous, industrious, and equipped with a scientific outlook.¹¹
- 5 A discourse of childhood thus emerged at the turn of the century that rapidly became mainstream (though a few dissenting voices existed) and long-lasting, since angst about the condition of China did not settle in the Republican era. This *soi-disant* new outlook distanced itself from the Chinese tradition while actually drawing heavily on some of its tenets, such as the importance of early education, and the influence of the material environment on a child's nature. At the same time, it appropriated some foreign views, acquired in the 1890s-1900s from Japan and, beginning in the late 1910s, chiefly from Anglo-American discourse. The role of foreign influences should not, however, be overstated, for they often served to lend a “modern” aura,¹² or to emphasise distance from tradition.

- 6 Central to the discourse of childhood was the construct that youngsters had been failed by traditional childrearing and education, said to be insensible to the peculiarities of children – a charge that scholarship has shown to be largely fabricated.¹³ Besides maiming children into inept adults, this purported insensitivity had engendered inattentiveness towards toys, that were therefore allegedly poor, for the most part. The approach advocated by experts would, instead, ostensibly cherish children’s interests and “instincts”; play was found to be one such instinct; and toys, that enlivened play, were defined as necessary in the life of children, from infancy to well after ten or twelve. Not only did playthings turn out to be necessary, but also they were ascribed a role that they seldom had had in the imperial era: they became tools for moral, intellectual, physical and aesthetic education – and therein resided their value, rather than in the provision of simple fun which experts tended to disparage. This approach was, in fact, quite utilitarian: mostly, toys (and indeed children, as scholars have noted¹⁴) were not valued *per se*, but rather for the contributions they could make to national goals.
- 7 No child disliked toys, experts posited, pronouncing moreover that their influence on the young was outstanding, because they could imperceptibly shape and instruct from early infancy. Therefore, toys must be appropriate, namely educational, scientific, verisimilar, safe and durable, ideally new and made in China. Imported toys, spanning upscale European goods and inexpensive Japanese articles, were in fact judged dangerous, as was the case for example in France:¹⁵ they apparently endangered children’s patriotism and Chinese-ness by conveying foreign knowledge and spawning a love for things foreign.¹⁶ Due to increasing Japanese pressure on China from the 1910s, which climaxed in the 1931 occupation of Manchuria and the outbreak of war in 1937, Japanese playthings were especially stigmatised, although widely imported well into the mid 1930s.
- 8 Entrepreneurs were quick to jump on the bandwagon. From the 1910s, several small- and medium-scale companies began to manufacture industrial playthings as core or side products, often appropriating the discourse of toys to brand themselves as enlightened providers of novel and educational items. Significant players in the 1920s and 1930s included the Patriotic Toy Co. (*Aiguo wanju zhiguanchang*); the Great China Celluloid Factory (*Da Zhonghua sailuluo zhizaochang*); the Yonghe Industrial Company (*Yonghe shiye gongsi*); the Chen Jiageng Rubber Goods Manufactory (*Chen Jiageng xiangpi gongsi*); the China Can from 1934 (*Kangyuan zhiguanchang*); and the publishing houses-cum-cultural industries Commercial Press (*Shangwu yinshuguan*) and Chung Hwa Book Company (*Zhonghua shuju*), which incidentally were also involved in popularising the toy discourse.¹⁷ Spanning blocks, rubber balls, metal and wood transport toys, clockwork animals and celluloid dolls, their products often were but restyled versions of age-old playthings, their novelty largely residing in some of their materials, like rubber or celluloid, and in the tags affixed to them. Elusive is, in fact, the conceptual originality of boats, pull-along toys, hobbyhorses, animals and the ball, which had all been current in China for centuries¹⁸ and were therefore as traditional as kites or figurines. Airplanes, motorcars or European-style dolls were instead new – and as such swiftly reproduced by savvy craftspeople. Thus, street makers/peddlers added modern vehicles to their classic stock of kites, tops, shuttlecocks and figurines, while long-established clay artisans added students, soldiers and “modern girls” to their characteristic output of auspicious babies and opera characters.¹⁹ Far from declining,

Republican-era handicrafts coexisted with industrial production,²⁰ and the toy market was no exception, providing a diverse supply that catered to many pockets.

- 9 Yet experts were not after diverse market choice: they intended to shift the perception of toys, and improve those who made and chose them. For the crucial problem, in their opinion, resided in the benighted attitude of adults, who misconstrued toys as bagatelles, gadgets of no consequence to entertain youngsters with. Adults failed, in sum, to understand that toys were pivotal formative and transformative tools which, if appropriate, would help create the robust, science-bent and labour-loving children that China needed, but if unfit would do extraordinary harm, affecting a child's entire life and the fate of China consequently. This misconception, experts claimed, led some to forbid toys as hindrances to education, and others to casual or vanity purchases. Hence, went the narrative, children were often presented with dangerous goods that threatened their health; or they received character-spoiling toys: flimsy objects that spawned carelessness, or over-elaborate contrivances that induced extravagance and passivity; or they were exposed to ugly, non-lifelike toys that damaged their mind and senses, conveying an erroneous impression of reality.

- 10 A large-scale assessment of playthings sponsored by the Ministry of Education, for instance, classified a clay dove as "inferior" (*lie*) because of its "unrealistic" colours, "stiff" shape and lack of verisimilitude, which all gave it scant educational value. Criticism did not target solely handicraft toys, though some of them – like clay figurines and animals – were often singled out as the ultimate embodiment of failure. The same report, often quite benign towards Commercial Press products, rated their wooden cavalry blocks "medium" (*zhong*) because of "clumsy" manufacture and deficient realism which would "confuse" children.²¹ Alleged incompetence, in fact, marked both consumers and producers. According to the expert discourse of inadequacy, the mis-interpretation of playthings had long caused toy-making to be an activity disdained by the gifted: therefore, the conception and manufacture of such decisive tools had been, and still was for the most part, relinquished to the hands of ignoramuses, be they subsistence-seeking peddlers or avid entrepreneurs. Issuing from makers largely unconcerned with education and technique, most toys were crude, harmful or meaningless. Construed as a mark of national weakness, since first-rank toys were apparently among the marks of a "strong"²² country, the purported inferiority of Chinese playthings was charged not only with damaging children, but also with furthering foreign intrusion and monetary losses, because it increased the appeal of imported goods.

- 11 Experts pleaded for the mechanisation and standardisation of production, yet they only infrequently manifested enthusiasm for current industrial toys. This is not necessarily a contradiction. On the one hand, most industrial playthings were in their view not educational enough; on the other hand, full endorsement of entrepreneurs' (or parents') competence would have nullified their *raison d'être*: if everyone became a proper adult who manufactured and acquired appropriate toys, didacticism would be unnecessary. Therefore, conceding that a measure of improvement was under way, or commending some industrial and handicraft products, did not entail major shifts in expert discourse – in the same way as defining as appropriate many playthings that were integral to the Chinese tradition did not deter experts from censoring Chinese toys as a category. For it was from toys' (and adults') supposed lingering inadequacy that experts drew legitimation, since they knew how to remedy it. Playthings, in sum,

were certainly among the tools deployed to shape new children, but they equally served as instruments for adult tutelage.

- 12 If the discourse of toys sought to domesticate children's leisure, it equally sought to impinge on adult practices of childrearing, education, production and consumption. Competent youngsters knew how to draw from playthings scientific instruction, patriotic awareness and a habit of labour. Competent parents and teachers, aware of children's importance and peculiarities, and of toys' role in cultivating them, did not consider playthings as negligible gadgets or hindrances to education but instead provided them judiciously. Competent makers likewise appreciated toys' decisive relevance to children and to the nation, and manufactured them with care and skill. Thus, playthings signified trans-generational competence, and made proper adults and children alike.
- 13 To disseminate the vision of toys propounded by experts, a substantial amount of advice literature appeared, for parents, teachers, makers, and children. Whilst manuals, textbooks and periodicals reached the better educated, exhibitions popularised the same message to larger audiences.

Staging the redefined toy

- 14 If exhibitions generally were spectacles of "modernity",²³ toy displays can be characterised as didactic spectacles of competences exemplary and foreshadowed: the competence of organisers, who manifested their knowledge or commitment to fostering advancement; that of producers of toys judged good; and the expected competence of visitors, once awakened to the (prescribed) meaning and standing of playthings. To these we can add the marketing competence of entrepreneurs who, even at the risk of having their products graded negatively by experts,²⁴ used exhibitions to enhance their profits and prestige, corroborating a corporate image of patriotic purveyors of state-of-the-art products that helped shape new children and reduce the economic losses caused by imports.
- 15 Besides seeking to harness leisure and consumption to nation-building, a regular trope in the Republican era,²⁵ exhibitions meant to shift the public perception of toys. If, as experts claimed, those who overlooked playthings did not know what playthings actually were,²⁶ then exhibitions enlightened them. Toys, displays communicated, were essential and decisive tools: therefore, they must be made well and made in China. The exhibitions examined here were not solely devoted to playthings, but featured them in spectacles of educational or industrial progress. This inclusion illuminates the intention to promote and circulate the notion of toys as icons and agents of advancement, rather than entertaining gadgets of little consequence. Associating playthings with education and techno-scientific achievement positioned them as citizen- and nation-building tools that ought to be manufactured rationally, chosen wisely, and used properly.
- 16 This in turn conveyed prescriptions for proper personhood, since a call for awareness was issued to families, teachers and makers, who ought to dispel their supposed misconceptions and, having improved, engage in producing and providing better, appropriate toys that would then shape improved children. Young visitors, for their part, should take the chance to appreciate the difference between good and bad toys, and learn to reject foreign goods. Improving production and encouraging appreciation

of the importance of toys were in fact the reasons why experts repeatedly declared exhibitions necessary.²⁷ Providing venues for educationists and manufacturers to connect – they argued – displays could foster research on playthings, ostensibly thriving abroad and lacking in China; at the same time, they would stimulate competition and emulation of prize-winning products.

- 17 That toys belonged with education was the message conveyed to families and teachers by the July 1924 “National Exhibition on Education” (*Quanguo jiaoyu zhanlanhui*) [Ill. 1], a massive event that the National Association for the Advancement of Education (*Zhonghua jiaoyu gaijinshu*) organised in cooperation with other educational societies. Here, the very placement of playthings in the section devoted to preschool and primary education made it clear that they were an integral part of education. A hierarchy of value was moreover staged for visitors, who were to grasp the importance of judicious toy selection. Playthings, in fact, were grouped according to their assessed value, from “best-class” (*youdeng*), which apparently comprised many Commercial Press products, to “medium-class” (*zhongdeng*), and “low-class” (*xiadeng* or *liedeng*), reportedly neither well made nor endowed with educational meaning. Ushers were present to provide further explanations – if we assume that thousands of people paid an entrance fee to be instructed. The above evaluations had been envisioned according to the definitions of good and bad toys later published by educationist Chen Heqin in his report on the toy section which he had contributed to organising. Good toys, he argued, were durable, attractive and safe; they were versatile like the ball, or stimulated sympathy and imagination like dolls and blocks. Bad toys instead were unhygienic, like fur items that became receptacles of dirt, or they were flimsy and unsightly, like figurines and animals made of clay and paper. Equally bad were the playthings, like vehicles, that did not encourage manipulation and active engagement: thus the expensive toy car (see Illustration 1) did not “have much value”, as opposed to the wheelbarrow and pull-along swan, which allowed for movement and fun.²⁸



Illustration 1: Toys at the “National Exhibition on Education”, Nanjing 1924. Source: *Xin jiaoyu*, vol. 9, n° 5, 1924, n.p.

- 18 Patriotic awareness was the focus of industry-oriented exhibitions, which sought to showcase and elicit advancement in production, and to champion the consumption of domestic goods. A large spectacle of (hopeful) national-cum-economic might was the “Ministry of Industry and Commerce’s Exhibition of Chinese National Products” (*Gongshangbu Zhonghua guohuo zhanlanhui*), which took place in Shanghai in 1928, when the Guomindang had installed a central government in Nanjing, having militarily achieved control of parts of China. Toy-making was an integral part of the show’s content and iconography: commemorative objects distributed to visitors included a medallion designed by the Patriotic Toy Co. that portrayed soldiers advancing with rifles in hand.²⁹ Other producers of industrial playthings present at the exhibition included the newly-established Great China Celluloid, with its animals and dolls of celluloid, the modern material *par excellence*. So outstanding apparently was the ability to manufacture fully Chinese celluloid toys that the Chung Hwa Book Company ran a story about it, in the issue of its weekly *Kids* (*Xiao pengyou*) devoted to promoting the exhibition and patriotic consumption. Why buy Japanese toys – children were told – when Chinese ones were so advanced?³⁰ Industrial companies received accolades for their playthings, but the roll of good products also included fur and clay handicraft toys.³¹ This probably reflected the government’s intention to encourage artisans who attempted to (in then-current parlance) improve their artefacts, yet it also slightly countered the frequent discursive criticism of fur and clay toys. Likewise in 1929, at the massive Hangzhou “West Lake Exhibition” (*Xihu bolanhui*), Great China Celluloid toys – which visitors could purchase at a conveniently established temporary shop³² – attracted high praise, but some handicraft playthings also fared well.³³ At the same time, the exhibition featured a didactic display put up by educationists for the benefit of parents and children, with explanations on toy characteristics and purposes, as well as examples of good and bad items: the latter included clay playthings.³⁴
- 19 That toys were a basic necessity was the message conveyed by the 1932 “Exhibition of Children’s Gifts” (*Ertong enwu zhanlanhui*), which the Zhejiang Provincial Mass Education Institute (*Zhejiang shengli minzhong jiaoyuguan*) organised as part of Children’s Day celebrations. Established to promote adult commitment to children and children’s commitment to the nation,³⁵ and first held in 1932, Children’s Day (*ertong jie*) also saw the mingling of commercial and citizen-building motives, as this event illuminates. The display sought to edutain children whilst instructing adults on the importance of “gifts” (*enwu*) to nourish youngsters’ mind and body. Introduced via Japan in the early 1900s, this term referred to the kindergarten toys developed by Froebel, but it was eventually used also to indicate appropriate goods for children. Here, gifts consisted of toys, books and foodstuff: collected from shops, educational establishments and companies, they came with a tag that explained their usage, producer and value. As children interacted with the exhibits at their leisure, adults had to learn their lesson: namely, that toys were on an equal standing with books and food – indispensable and educational. In fact, slogans prepared for the exhibition hall included: “Do you hope for your darling to be happy? Do not forget gifts!”, “Aside from mother’s milk, nothing is more important to children than gifts!”, “Gifts are production tools. To produce what? Your darling’s thinking, intelligence, and sympathy!”³⁶ Albeit probably unintentional, the commercial implications of this didactic show are apparent, and they were not lost on local businesses and larger players like Chen Jiageng Rubber and Chung Hwa, who gladly supplied toys and reading materials. Visitors seemingly appreciated the

educational intent, but diverse were their opinions on the showcased playthings, which included handicraft and industrial products as well as items created by pupils at school. Some (presumably adult) visitors warned that clay toys were “inappropriate” because their colours were toxic, or they called clay and wood items flimsy and clumsy; according to others, instead, the many overpriced shop goods present compared unfavourably with the affordable creations of peddlers, and with home-made toys that stimulated creativity.³⁷

- 20 Competence was the focus of the Nanjing 1936 “National Exhibition of Children’s Teaching Aids and Toys” (*Quanguo ertong jiaoju wanju zhanlanhui*), whose very name formally sanctioned that toys belonged with education. Organised by governmental and educational agencies chaired by the Minister of Education, this highly publicised event was part of the celebrations of Children’s Year (*ertong nian*).³⁸ According to the organisers,³⁹ progress had been made in the production of toys and teaching aids, but not enough: imported goods still dominated the market; makers were cavalier and users casual. Quality and awareness were instead to be the rule: this the exhibition intended to promote by showcasing and grading Chinese products, supplemented by foreign goods for reference, as was often the case in expositions. Foreign toys largely came from the Soviet Union and Japan, with a few German, British and American items.⁴⁰ Exposing manufacturers and schools to this spectacle could, in the organisers’ intentions, inspire them to improve existing products and devise new ones, perhaps even for export. Families, in turn, would hopefully come to value toys, instead of neglecting them. Entertaining children was not a declared goal, though the toy display itself probably proved engaging. Thousands of industrial, handicraft and school-made playthings had been collected according to their suitable characteristics, namely national manufacture, durability, attractiveness and safety, and their instructive function for children’s character, mind and body. They were eventually arranged over several rooms in a way that conveyed prescriptions on both toys and the children they were to help shape. After “defence toys”, namely military playthings meant to “arouse national consciousness”, came toys for encouraging exercise, like the ball or kites, and toys for moulding temperament, like dolls, animals and musical items; then there were construction, intelligence and transport toys for cultivating creativity and thought. Many toys were displayed in dioramas, spanning a sports-ground for movement toys, and a menagerie for animals. As *Kids* signalled to its readers, and unsurprisingly given the Japanese encroachment, the most significant set was supposed to be the “defence” one, with weapons, ships and planes positioned in an “ideal defence plan”.⁴¹ The exhibition attracted visitors in the hundreds of thousands,⁴² some of whom may have purchased toys in the temporary shop established in the hall. Opinions on the display varied: some underscored the educational relevance of toys; others called for the establishment of large factories to produce suitable and affordable playthings.⁴³ But an expert was unimpressed, on the grounds that many playthings were made of frail, dangerous or unhygienic materials like clay, tin and fur, and the workmanship of some wood items left much to be desired.⁴⁴ Amidst these adult voices, we get to know the view of a child, overheard declaring: “Japanese goods are really fine!”⁴⁵

Conclusion

- 21 As visitors possibly looked for entertainment or novelty amidst didacticism, exhibitions served as a platform for varieties of expertise and motives to interplay and compete. Under the surface of an ostensibly shared commitment to children's and China's greater good, different actors sought legitimation: state agencies sought to avow their benevolence and dedication to bring about advancement; educationists sought to display their knowledge; and manufacturers sought publicity and sales. The latter were, however, among the targets of instruction: like other adults, they should learn that playthings did not mean profit, fun or status, but education. As tools that could make or break children, and China as a result, toys should not be regarded as insignificant objects that could be ugly, frail or foreign. Therefore, whether handicraft or industrial, they must be well made and judiciously chosen – as the adequate maker, parent or teacher should know. Hence as children theoretically learned appropriate toy consumption, adults were to shed their allegedly mistaken ways and acquire (hetero-defined) competence. The relevance of toys and childhood thus served to tutor them.
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NOTES

1. Xinyin, "Shehui jiaoyu de yanjiu", *Zhejiang jiaoyu zazhi*, n° 3, 1922, p. 62.
2. On *wenming* see Huang Xingtao, "The Formation of Modern Concepts of 'Civilization' and 'Culture' and Their Application During the Late Qing and Early Republican Times", *Journal of Modern Chinese History*, vol. 5, n° 1, 2011, p. 1-26.
3. Ann Anagnost, *National Past-Times: Narrative, Representation, and Power in Modern China*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1997, p. 83.
4. Qin Shao, *Culturing Modernity: The Nantong Model, 1890-1930*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2004, p. 160.
5. Karl Gerth, *China Made: Consumer Culture and the Creation of the Nation*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University East Asia Center, 2003, p. 204.
6. Madeleine Yue Dong, *Republican Beijing: The City and Its Histories*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003, p. 155.
7. On tools and gadgets see Jean Baudrillard (trans. Chris Turner), *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (1970), London, Sage, 1998, p. 113.
8. See for example Jon L. Saari, *Legacies of Childhood: Growing up Chinese in a Time of Crisis, 1890-1920*, Cambridge, MA, Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1990; Mary Ann Farquhar, *Children's Literature in China: From Lu Xun to Mao Zedong*, Armonk, Sharpe, 1999; Heike Frick, Mechthild Leutner, Nicola Spakowski (eds.), "Die Befreiung der Kinder": Konzepte von Kindheit im China der Republikzeit, Hamburg, LIT, 1999; Bai Limin, "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, n° 2, 2008, p. 210-231; Andrew F. Jones, *Developmental Fairy Tales: Evolutionary Thinking and Modern Chinese Culture*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2011; Shih-Wen Sue Chen, *Children's Literature and Transnational Knowledge in Modern China: Education, Religion, and Childhood*, Singapore, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

9. This point is mentioned with reference to Lu Xun in Isabelle Rabut, "Émergence de la littérature enfantine au début du XX^e siècle", in: Christine Nguyen Tri and Catherine Despeux (eds.), *Éducation et instruction en Chine – I. L'éducation élémentaire*, Paris, Peeters, 2003, p. 169.
10. On awakening and citizen-making see Paul J. Bailey, *Reform the People: Changing Attitudes Towards Popular Education in Early Twentieth-Century China*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1990; John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1996; Joshua A. Fogel, Peter G. Zarrow (eds.), *Imagining the People: Chinese Intellectuals and the Concept of Citizenship, 1890-1920*, Armonk, Sharpe, 1997; Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911-1929*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000.
11. This discussion on the discourse of children and toys is based on the primary sources listed in Valentina Boretti, "Small Things of Great Importance: Toy Advertising in China, 1910s-1930s", *Asia Pacific Perspectives*, vol. 13, n° 2, 2015-16, notes 15 and 21, p. 31 and note 107, p. 35.
12. C. Nguyen Tri and C. Despeux (eds.), *Éducation et instruction en Chine*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
13. Anne Behnke Kinney (ed.), *Chinese Views of Childhood*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 1995; Anne Behnke Kinney, *Representations of Childhood and Youth in Early China*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2004; Hsiung Ping-chen, *A Tender Voyage: Children and Childhood in Late Imperial China*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2005; Bai Limin, "Children at Play: A Childhood Beyond the Confucian Shadow", *Childhood*, vol. 12, n° 1, 2005, p. 9-32.
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15. See Michel Manson, *Jouets de toujours : de l'Antiquité à la Révolution*, Paris, Fayard, 2001, p. 323-324.
16. On Chinese-ness and toys see Susan R. Fernsebner, "A People's Playthings: Toys, Childhood, and Chinese Identity, 1909-1933", *Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 6, n° 3, 2003, p. 269-293.
17. On Chen Jiageng (aka Tan Kah Kee) see Éric Guerassimoff, *Chen Jiageng et l'éducation : stratégies d'un émigré pour la modernisation de l'enseignement en Chine (1913-1938)*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2003. On the other companies and their toys see V. Boretti, "Small Things", *op. cit.*, p. 16-19; and Marvin Chan, *Zhongguo xiao wanyi*, Hong Kong, Shangwu yinshuguan, 2017, chap. 2-3. On the publishing houses see Jean-Pierre Drège, *La Commercial Press de Shanghai, 1897-1949*, Paris, Collège de France, 1978; Christopher A. Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937*, Vancouver, UBC Press, 2004; Robert Culp, *The Power of Print in Modern China: Intellectuals and Industrial Publishing from the End of Empire to Maoist State Socialism*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2019.
18. See Guoli gugong bowuyuan bianji weiyuanhui (ed.), *Yingxi tu*, Taipei, Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 1990, p. 14, 18, 27, 33, 54; Wang Lianhai, *Wanju zhi lü*, Beijing, Zhongguo lüyou chubanshe, 2006, p. 107.
19. "Making Clay Figures at Hui Shan", *The Chinese Economic Monthly*, vol. 1, n° 5, 1924, p. 12; Chi Zehui, Lou Xuexi, Chen Wenxian, *Beiping shi gongshangye gaikuang*, Beijing, Beiping shi shehui ju, 1932, p. 122; "Wuxi zhi niren ye", *Gongshang banyuekan*, vol. 5, n° 10, 1933, p. 39-44; Shi Wanli, "Wuxi niren", *Liangyou*, n° 122, 1936, p. 40-41; Hedda Morrison, *A Photographer in Old Peking*, Hong Kong, Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 98.
20. See Thomas G. Rawski, *Economic Growth in Prewar China*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989, xxiv, p. 78; Frank Dikötter, *Things Modern: Material Culture and Everyday Life in China*, London, Hurst, 2007, p. 214, 227.

21. Jiaoyu bu putong jiaoyu si (ed.), *Ertong wanju shencha baogao*, Beijing, Jiaoyu bu putong jiaoyu si, 1922, section 2, p. 40, 105.
22. Li Wenquan, "Zai shuo wanju", *Zhongguo shiye zazhi*, n° 1, 1918, p. 2.
23. Don Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1997, p. 15.
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25. See Peter Zarrow, "Introduction: New Discourses and Everyday Life in Modern China", in: P. Zarrow (ed.), *Creating Chinese Modernity: Knowledge and Everyday Life, 1900-1940*, New York, Peter Lang, 2006, p. 16-20.
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29. Gongshang bu Zhonghua guohuo zhanlanhui (ed.), *Gongshangbu Zhonghua guohuo zhanlanhui shilu*, n.a., Gongshang bu Zhonghua guohuo zhanlanhui, 1929, vol. II, n.p.
30. Boyou, "Ke'aide putao xianzi", *Xiao pengyou*, n° 332, 1928, p. 66-70.
31. Gongshang bu, *Gongshangbu Zhonghua guohuo zhanlanhui shilu*, *op. cit.*, vol. IV, p. 20b, 30, 33b, 40b. The 1928 and 1929 exhibitions are discussed in K. Gerth, *China Made*, *op. cit.*, chap. 6.
32. Commercial Press, Chung Hwa and Chen Jiageng Rubber likewise had temporary shops: see Xu Xudong, "Xihu bolanhui choubei zhi jingguo", *Dongfang zazhi*, vol. 26, n° 10, 1929, p. 47-48.
33. *Xihu bolanhui chupin geijiang yilan*, in: Quanguo tushuguan wenxian suowei fuzhi zhongxin (ed.), *Zhongguo zaoqi bolanhui ziliao huibian*, Beijing, Quanguo tushuguan wenxian suowei fuzhi zhongxin, vol. VII, p. 669, 680.
34. *Ibid.*, vol. VII, p. 30-31.
35. See Zhu Yanfu, *Ertong jie*, Shanghai, Zhonghua shuju, 1935.
36. Qian Gengxin (ed.), "Ershiyi nian ertong jie huodong baogao (yi xu)", *Zhejiang minzhong jiaoyu*, n° 2, 1932, p. 34.
37. "Ertongjie jinian jihua", *Zhejiang minzhong jiaoyu*, n° 1, 1932, p. 18-19, 26-27; Qian Gengxin (ed.), "Ershiyi nian ertong jie huodong baogao (er xu)", *Zhejiang minzhong jiaoyu*, n° 3, 1932, p. 62-68.
38. Children's Year ran from August 1935 to July 1936. It was meant to further increase awareness about the importance and duties of children.
39. Quanguo ertong nian shishi weiyuanhui, "Juxing quanguo ertong jiaoyu wanju zhanlanhui de zhiqiu", *Zhongyang ribao*, 17/05/1936, p. 4.
40. Quanguo ertong nian shishi weiyuanhui (ed.), *Quanguo ertongnian shishi weiyuanhui zong baogao*, n.a., Quanguo ertong nian shishi weiyuanhui, 1936, p. 254.
41. Xue Tianhan, "Quanguo ertong jiaoyu wanju zhanlanhui choubei jingguo", *Zhongyang ribao*, 16/05.1936, p. 4; Quanguo ertong nian, *Quanguo ertong nian shishi weiyuanhui zong baogao*, *op. cit.*, p. 243-274; "Nanjing kai quanguo ertong jiaoyu wanju zhanlanhui", *Xiao pengyou*, n° 723, 1936, p. 27; Jiang Shigang, "Canguan ertong wanju jiaoyu zhanlanhui jiyao", *Xiaoxue jiaoshi*, vol. 3, n° 21, 1936, p. 26-28.

42. "Jiaowanju zhanhui bimu", *Zhongyang ribao*, 30/05/1936, p. 4.
 43. Quanguo ertong nian, *Quanguo ertong nian*, p. 274-275.
 44. Ni Hanfang, "Canguan quanguo ertong jiaoju wanju zhanlanhui zhihou", *Jiao yu xue yuekan*, vol. 2, n° 3, 1936, p. 61-62.
 45. Lu Mingyuan, "Canguan shoudu ertong jiaoju wanju zhanlanhui hou ji", *Xin shaonian*, vol. 1, n° 11, 1936, p. 76.
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ABSTRACTS

From the early twentieth century, a discourse developed in China whereby children were assets for national rejuvenation, and toys were crucial to shaping them. The relevance of childhood and toys was however also deployed to tutor adults: the present article uses toy displays as an entry point to analyse this question. Discussing exhibitions staged by educational and governmental agencies in the 1920s and 1930s, it examines efforts to shift the perception of playthings from gadgets to essential formative tools that could not be manufactured, acquired or used casually. Not only were exhibitions a way to disseminate the discourse of toys as symbols and agents of improvement, but also they served to teach expert-defined competence to adults, most notably producers and parents.

Dès le début du xx^e siècle, un discours émergea en Chine qui voyait les enfants comme des atouts pour le rajeunissement national, et les jouets comme décisifs pour les éduquer. L'importance des enfants et des jouets était pourtant déployée aussi pour former les adultes : cette question est traitée ici à partir des expositions de jouets. Examinant plusieurs expositions organisées par des associations éducatives et des agences d'État dans les années 1920 et 1930, cette contribution analyse les efforts visant à modifier la perception du jouet qui devrait, selon le discours normatif, être considéré non pas comme un gadget mais comme un outil pédagogique essentiel, à ne pas produire, acheter ou utiliser nonchalamment. Les expositions n'étaient donc pas seulement un moyen de diffusion du discours sur le jouet en tant que symbole et agent d'amélioration, elles servaient aussi à transmettre aux adultes, notamment aux fabricants et aux parents, une série de compétences déterminée par les spécialistes.

INDEX

Mots-clés: jouet, histoire du jouet, éducation, entre-deux-guerres, consommation, culture matérielle

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