Children, learning and play in the *Mengxue bao* (The Children’s Educator, 1897-1902)

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‘If you don’t learn while you are young, you will grow up to be ugly’. This is the opening line of a poem published in issue 3 (1897) of the *Mengxue bao* (*The Children’s Educator*, 1897-1906), an important but largely neglected children’s periodical established by Chinese reformers in the nineteenth century. The poem warns young readers about the dangers of ignorance by presenting vivid imagery about how their physical appearance will be affected if they don’t study diligently. The narrator states, ‘it is like someone with a diseased body with bad body odour, if you come across such a person, you will want to run away in fright’ (no. 3, 16-17). The lesson is clear: uneducated children will be shunned by society when they become adults because signs of their internal lack of knowledge will surface outwardly, in the form of an unattractive face and malodourous body. In the illustration accompanying the poem, captioned ‘*ben bi chou nü* [Fleeing from the smelly female]’, the three people on the left are lifting their sleeves across their noses and turning their heads to stare at the woman whose mouth is half open in surprise. The word ‘*ben* [flee]’ in the caption suggests a sense of urgency, reinforcing the warning that if you don’t study, you will become repulsive. The poem’s message is bleak, but not without hope: a non-learned adult will become an outcast because nobody would be able to tolerate them, but young readers still have a chance to learn and be educated. While contemporary readers will probably consider this poem politically incorrect, it highlights the sense of urgency that many Chinese intellectuals felt about the importance of changing traditional education for children to ensure China’s survival in the late Qing (1644-1911) and early Republican era (1912-1949).

*The Children’s Educator* was launched by the *Mengxue gonghui* (Society for Enlightenment Education, also translated as Association of Children’s Education) in 1897, a time when Chinese intellectuals began to reinterpret traditional views of children and
question dominant educational practices (Bai, *Shaping* 175). It was the first children’s magazine established by Chinese editors. The periodical can be regarded as a generic chimera because it features a mixture of fiction and non-fiction, poetry and prose, ‘lessons’ characteristic of traditional children’s primers, but also a newer form of literature that featured amusing narratives, often in translation. Influenced by Western and Japanese trends, the editors and contributors to the magazine sought to provide new literature for children even though the Chinese term *ertong wenxue* (children’s literature) was not coined until the May Fourth era (c 1916 -1924) (Xu 223). *The Children’s Educator* not only reflects changing concepts of childhood in the early twentieth century, it is also a rich site for uncovering educational debates and anxieties about Chinese youth and China’s future during this period of uncertainty and political unrest in Chinese history. The magazine can be considered an example of Chinese children’s literature at the crossroads.

While previous studies of *The Children's Educator* focus mainly on how the magazine resembles a textbook, this article examines the image of the child and play in the periodical. It highlights the ways some of *The Children's Educator* articles illustrate the importance of learning to cultivate ethical behaviour and stimulate resourcefulness through play. Since the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE), children were encouraged to behave like little adults and exemplary children were characterised by a ‘dislike of play’ (Bai, ‘Children at Play’ 11). Young people were expected to be serious, refined, subdued and cautious (Saari 46). Limin Bai has demonstrated that primers in late imperial China presented virtuous children who acted like adults and practiced Confucianism in their daily lives. As Bai points out, ‘in Confucian theory, the relationship between play and education did not focus on educating children through play, but on the influence of play and environment on children’ (‘Children at Play’ 14). In other words, surroundings affect what children played. Bai also points out that many Confucian texts ‘seemed to represent a hostile attitude to children and playing’
Children at Play’ 27). While The Children’s Educator retains formulaic stories about children displaying ‘proper’ behaviour that is often found in primers, its articles, particularly those translated from Western and Japanese sources, do not reflect hostility towards children and play. Children are depicted playing with dolls, toy boats, kites and kaleidoscopes. They engage in role play games and are encouraged to play. Before analysing these articles in detail, I will trace the origins of The Children’s Educator and outline the socio-historical context in which it was produced.

**The Children’s Educator: Origins and Historical Context**

The Children’s Educator was first published in 1897, the year Germany seized Jiaozhou Bay and two years after China signed the Treaty of Shimonoseki (1895) after a devastating defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-95), an event that heightened anxieties about China’s future. This war was preceded by severe losses in the two Opium Wars (1839-42; 1856-60) and the Sino-French War (1884-85), despite attempts during the Self-Strengthening Movement (c. 1861–95) to modernize the China. While the Movement focused mostly on improving China’s technology and military capabilities, the Sino-Japanese War raised awareness of how changes needed to be made in other areas such as politics, economics, culture and education (Qian 5). It was in this context that the Society for Enlightenment Education was established by Wang Kangnian, Ye Han, Zeng Guangquan, and Wang Zhonglin in Shanghai, an important centre of print culture in the late nineteenth century. The Society had several aims, including to enlighten the masses, open up their eyes to the world, eliminate weakness, develop talent, unite people and empower China (Li 18; Zhao 705; Bai, ‘Confucianism’ 113).

Reformers and intellectuals such as influential writer Liang Qichao, who had close ties with the Society for Enlightenment Education, argued that if China was to progress and
resist colonising forces, the education system needed to be changed and new textbooks should be written (Bai, ‘Children as Hope’ 214). According to Liang, the main reason China was behind other nations was because of the problematic Chinese education system, which forced children to stifle their creativity by emphasising rote memorisation. These memorisation exercises were designed to prepare boys for the civil service examinations, which were taken by young men across the country who aspired to become high-ranking officials. However, reformers argued that learning by mechanical memorisation was harmful to children because they did not understand what they were regurgitating.

This view was shared by Western missionaries such as John MacGowan, who describes a typical day in a Chinese school in the early twentieth century:

The whole day, therefore, is spent in acquiring the sounds and the look of each particular word, without having the remotest idea what they mean. He [The student] comes the next day and the same grinding goes on. The spring passes into summer and summer into autumn, and one day is like another in its weary monotony, and the sounds in growing numbers clang and ring within his brain, and the weird little pictures are hung up in the picture gallery of his mind, but they tell him no story, neither do they suggest the poetry and romance that often lie hidden within so many of them. (255)

The words ‘grinding’ and ‘monotony’ suggest that the methods of instruction lacked creativity and made lessons boring and meaningless. MacGowan’s critique of traditional Chinese education laments that children would not learn to appreciate the beauty of Chinese language and literature if they recited words without understanding their meaning, but Liang went further to assert that if China wanted to survive, children’s brain power needed to be developed. He proposed a systematic approach to teaching children in ‘Lun youxue [On
the Education of Children]’. Liang advocated for a synthesis of Chinese and Western learning. Reformers like Liang, who spent many years in Japan after 1898, also wanted to learn from Japan because they had witnessed its many achievements since the Meiji restoration (1868-1912) and were curious about how this small country won the 1895 war against China. In their minds, Japan was able to draw upon western learning without losing Confucianism (Bai, ‘Confucianism ’ 110). Therefore, China should emulate the Japanese education system. The founding editors of The Children’s Educator, brothers Ye Han and Ye Lan, were eager to promote Liang Qichao’s ideas of educational reform by producing a periodical that aimed to educate Chinese children so that they could contribute to making China a powerful country when they became adults. The content of this periodical is closely linked with the politics of the era and focuses on the socialising effects of children’s literature rather than its aesthetic qualities.

In an essay entitled ‘The Origins of The Children’s Educator’ published in the first issue (1897), Ye Lan, following Liang’s ideas, criticizes the education system and advocates adopting Japanese and Western teaching methods. Ye, who was heavily involved in education reform, explains that these foreign education methods are more efficient and involve a step-by-step process to help children first learn words, then sentences and finally progress to writing compositions. He also criticizes the traditional education method of punishing students by slapping them across the face, forcing them to kneel, and denying them food, claiming that because of these punishments, some children became mischievous and shameless, while others became shy and timid. In the essay, Ye views childhood as a unique stage of life because children are more flexible than adults and are less influenced by biased notions. The assumption that children are innocent and should be protected is also evident.

These concerns regarding children’s important role in China’s survival and the ideology of nation-building are reflected in the contents of the periodical. For example, one
story in no. 6 (1897) begins with a crane feeling hungry as he walks along the beach. Seeing a clam, he makes fun of its wide round mouth, while the clam mocks his long beak. As the clam is laughing, the crane puts his beak inside the clam, attempting to eat it. The clam clamps his mouth shut. Unable to escape its clutch, the crane tries to flap his wings to fly away but the weight of the clam causes him to sink into the ocean. The crane drowns and the clam smiles, telling the reader that the small are not necessarily weak and that big lions and large birds should learn a lesson from the story (24-25). Modifying the familiar story of ‘The Snipe, the Clam and the Fisherman’ from the Warring States Period (c 476 – 203 BCE), the narrator suggests that China may be small and weak now but the strong countries must be careful. This article reflects anxiety about China’s weak state but also the editor’s optimism in training child readers to absorb the ideologies of ‘survival of the fittest’. An earlier story from no. 4 features a cat who was supposed to guard the kitchen against mice but ends up drunk after finishing a whole bottle of wine a mouse deliberately knocks over. This is clearly a cautionary tale about the consequences of temptation and abandoning one’s responsibilities (1897, no. 4, 24-25). The text reminds readers about the importance of always being on alert, which reflects the overarching editorial policy of publishing content that would help young Chinese become responsible citizens who would concentrate their efforts on countering encroaching foreign powers.

Format and circulation

Each issue of The Children’s Educator is approximately 50 to 60 pages with many lithographed illustrations. The weekly (later published every ten days) periodical was modelled on Protestant missionary J.M.W. Farnham’s magazine Xiaohai yuebao (The Child’s Paper, 1875-1915), without the religious content (Hanan 77). In the first issue, Ye Lan states that the periodical would consist of six main columns, including language and literature, history and events, geography, natural science, mathematics, and ethics. Each column was
further divided into sub-topics suitable for different age groups: 3-4, 5-7, 8-12, and above 13. This division changed from no. 8, where each issue was divided into two sections: one for 5-8 year-olds and one for 9-13 year-olds, and afterwards some columns were for ages 7-10, which disrupted the previous categories. These changes suggest that there were differences in understanding about the developmental stages of childhood during the production of the periodical. Considering that most boys entered school at the age of seven or eight, it is important to note that *The Children’s Educator* catered to younger children who were not yet able to attend school (Pine and Yu 83). The periodical inspired a burgeoning group of writers and educators, such as poet, author and professor Wu Mi (1894-1978) who recalls reading the periodical when he was nine years old (46-47). Educator Yu Ziyi (1886-1970) also read the periodical as a child and learned math from it (434).

Not only was *The Children’s Educator* sold in Shanghai, it was circulated in over thirty different Chinese cities, including Hong Kong. In 1898, there were 1525 copies sold outside of Shanghai. It reached an average monthly circulation of 2000 nationwide (No. 33). The periodical was pirated by printers, suggesting there was a demand for it, and in April 1898 the editors issued a notice warning on the cover of No. 19 for the unscrupulous culprits not to engage in illegal printing. Because of lack of funding, publication stopped in 1899 after no. 42 but it was restarted again in 1901 with reissues of old content plus some new work. In 1901 Wang Zhonglin claimed that each issue of *The Children's Educator* sold 3000 to 4000 copies (8). These circulation numbers are small compared to the ancient classics children were asked to recite, such as the *Three Character Classic* (thirteenth century), *Thousand Character Classic* (sixth century) and *One Hundred Surnames* (tenth century), which were used as literacy primers and an introduction to ‘an ethical, social, and cosmological order’ (Jones 74).
What distinguishes this periodical from other children’s reading materials at the time was that instead of presenting content solely in classical Chinese (wenyan), it frequently used vernacular Chinese (baihua). The choice to use baihua coincides with the reformers’ ideas to unify the written and spoken language (Kaske 273). The language is easier to understand compared to the Confucian classics. While Confucian values were upheld in the periodical, two of the Four Books (classic Chinese texts that expound Confucianism) were regarded as too difficult for children. According to an article in No. 2 (1897), children should stop reading Daxue (Great Learning) and Zhongyong (The Doctrine of the Mean) because these were too profound. Instead, the author proposes that China should develop new books for children and begin with some translations (‘Zhou’ 1897, no. 2).

Translation was regarded as key to ‘learning from the West’ and an official translation agency had been set up by Qing officials in the 1860s to engage in systematic translation projects. Many scholars have pointed out the important role translation played in the development of an indigenous Chinese children’s literature (Xu 223). The content of The Children’s Educator includes translations from unidentified Western sources by Society for Enlightenment Education member Zeng Guangquan (1871-1940), grandson of the renowned General Zeng Guofan as well as translations from Japanese texts, mostly from Shonen sekai (The Adolescents World), by Teikichi Kojo (1866-1949), who also worked for the Liang’s newspaper Shiwu bao [Current Affairs]. Both fiction and non-fiction was translated. The decision to include translations was not an innovation, because since the mid-nineteenth century, children’s texts such as Aesop’s Fables and Victorian evangelical novels such as Jessica’s First Prayer had been translated into Chinese, mostly by missionaries. The first few issues of The Children’s Educator have more translations compared to later issues, which feature more original stories written by Chinese authors as well as simplified adaptations of
classic Chinese tales. Bound volumes of some of the columns were sold separately after 1899, indicating a market for these texts.

The Children’s Educator had a dual implied audience. Young readers were meant to emulate exemplary children who demonstrated positive traits such as kindness (no. 7), humbleness (no. 4), faithfulness (no. 3), and frugality (no. 7). They listen to elders (no. 8) and exhibit filial piety, the most important quality a person could have. The magazine targeted not only children but teachers and parents as well, as evidenced by the articles on pedagogy and the education system in Japan and other countries as well as the essays on motherhood. The periodical also emphasised the importance of women’s education. Articles introduced readers to characteristics of American girls and Chinese girls’ schools in Japan (1903 no. 1, 100-101). Considering that the majority of female children in China were not sent to school in the early twentieth-century, this was an important set of essays that echoed the 1897-1898 Shanghai campaign for women’s education (Qian 13-14). Because the periodical consists of a compilation of translations from Japanese and English sources as well as original Chinese articles, the writing styles vary a great deal. Some of the visual images also differed in style.

Children, illustrations, and play

The distinctive illustrations in The Children’s Educator reflect the editors’ desire to shift attitudes about children and childhood. Illustrated books were popular in the Ming dynasty (1297-1369) (Pine and Yu 88). However, those that existed in the late Qing dynasty targeted ‘lower-middle-class youth who would learn vocabulary for practical use in daily life as well as in farming, commerce, craftsmanship, etc., as opposed to pursuing the career of a Confucian civil servant’ (Chen, Sino-Japanese np). The assumption that children like pictures is reflected in the first issue of The Children’s Educator, which includes a note that the editors hired Ye Yaoyuan to illustrate some of the translated content that did not originally
have pictures to clarify the meaning for the child reader. Editor Ye Lan remarks that children confused the names for plants and animals due to the lack of accompanying pictures in previous publications (1897, no. 1). Therefore, *The Children’s Educator* columns on natural science are full of illustrations. The presence of these images makes the periodical more visually appealing for the young audience.

The illustrations in the periodical reflect its chimeric quality. Based on the hairstyles and clothing of the boys in the images, three types of children can be found in the periodical. As can be seen in Figure 1, the Chinese boys have a partially shaved head and queues (a symbol of subjection to the Manchus) while in Figure 2, the boys have a full head of hair and wear Victorian-style jackets. Figure 2 depicts two Caucasian children because in the story, their English names, Jack and Ben, are included after their transliterated Chinese equivalent. This illustration is most likely a reproduction, because according to the editor’s statement in issue 1, if the Western-language sources the editorial team translated included pictures, these would be meticulously reproduced (1897, no. 1). In earlier issues there were illustrations of Japanese people (Figure 3) that accompanied translated articles, but in response to readers who objected to the pictures due to Chinese animosity towards Japan after the Sino-Japanese War, the editors decided not to replicate the originals and instead included new illustrations featuring Chinese children (Li 39). While the original editorial policy indicated the importance of considering image and text as a dialectic whole, the later changes demonstrate the concern for appeasing readers and keeping them happy. This change also points to ambivalent and often conflicting attitudes towards Japan as both an enemy and a role model for China (Bai, ‘Confucianism’ 119).

In the accompanying story to Figure 2, Jack looks through a kaleidoscope, but his younger brother Ben wants to borrow it. Jack teaches him how to use it, asking him what he sees. Ben replies, ‘I see many beautiful colours’ and they laugh together (no. 33, 10-11).
story comes from a column called ertong huaxue (learning through pictures). Even though the column is targeted at 11-13 year olds, the content is usually simple and straightforward with a moral lesson embedded in it. For example, as the story of Ben and Jack demonstrates, it is important to share one’s toys and be kind to younger siblings.

[Insert Figure 1 to 3 here]

Ben and Jack’s story is just one of several texts that combine ‘instruction’ with ‘amusement’ in featuring children learning life lessons through play. In another story (no. 31, p. 28) from the ertong huaxue column, readers are taught to be honest and own up to their mistakes. Frederick makes a kite and paints a green dragon with red eyes on it. Charlie cannot resist touching it, even though he promised not to, and accidentally tears the paper. He keeps it a secret, but suffers insomnia that night so he decides to confess. The next day he mends the kite with his father’s help, restoring it to its original state. This is another story that features Western children at play. They are child-like in their desire to hide the truth, unlike the precocious exemplary children in The Twenty-four Examples of Filial Piety, a popular book at the time which aims to instil Confucian values in readers that is still given to children today (Mo and Shen).

Other texts involving children’s play include a story about a boy who made a small boat and a girl who had a doll given to her by her mother. They decide to place the doll into the boat and float the vessel on the pond. However, water begins to seep into the boat and the girl cries, ‘Help, the doll is drowning!’ To rescue the doll, the boy uses a stick to hit the water until the boat returns to shore (no. 5). Although the didacticism is evident in the stories, the children are depicted engaging in activities associated with children’s play such as flying a kite, riding a bicycle or playing with toys. These children are not depicted as miniature adults.
who dislike playing but ordinary boys and girls who are active and engage in leisurely activities.

Another example of a different kind of play is found in No. 2 (1897). ‘Ertong yaobin [Glorious child soldiers]’ features six children playing different roles in the army, from the captain to the foot soldiers to the military band. It highlights children’s play as well as pointing out the importance of self-strengthening. This article reflects the ideology of reformers who wanted children to mature intellectually and train physically to help ‘save’ China. Because the children are depicted as having fun pretending to be soldiers, the message is less overt, but clear nonetheless: there is a threat of more war and conflict in the future, so children should train to become fighters for China.

An important theme reflected in these stories about children at play is the harmonious relationships between siblings. In issue 7 (1898), a story translated from Japanese depicts siblings who go out to play during the New Year; although the article is ‘dixong tong chu you’ (literal translation: brothers go out to play), it is about a brother who flies a kite and a sister plays with a ball. The girl accidentally drops the ball into the water and starts crying. Her brother fetches it out of the water for her. Then a sudden gust of wind tangles up the string of the brother’s kite and the sister helps to untangle it. The illustration that accompanies it is incongruous: there an Asian-looking woman in a loose-fitting Chinese-style dress but the two children are dressed in Western-style clothing. The boy is in breeches and a cap while the girl wears a blouse and skirt (Figure 4). Because the Japanese began adopting Western dress during the Meiji restoration, it is possible that this is a reproduction of the original illustration accompanying the Japanese story.

The explanation of the lesson is longer than the story itself. The editor addresses the readers directly: ‘Congratulations students, you are a year older. In the first month of the new
year, you should make the most of your time off school to play’ (no. 7, 12-13). The editor mentions to the young readers that half of the ‘things of the world’ are brought about from children’s playing. This commentary acknowledges children’s agency and highlights the importance and usefulness of play in stimulating creative ideas. Playing has a greater purpose. Through play, children may be able to invent or produce something that would benefit humanity. This message is a departure from traditional Chinese ideas of children having to obey and imitate adults at all times. The editor emphasises to the readers that it is important to work together and to combine the brain power of many minds in order to succeed. He admonishes the child reader to know ‘zuorenbenfen’, which means to act like a decent human being. He explains that young readers should first help those closest to them: their brothers and sisters. Then they need to extend this assistance to all the people of the world, because we are all the same. This idea of the universality of humanity removes the distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’, which is unusual for the time. In these stories, editor’s voice is friendly and informal, suggesting an avuncular persona. This type of direct address suggests the editor’s attempt to engage with the implied child readers to bridge the distance between the adult authority figure and the young audience. After issue 14, there are some scattered examples in the column ‘Higher level Chinese reading’ of this kind editor addressing readers directly as ‘you students’, telling them the lessons they should be taking away from the stories.

[Insert Figure 4 here]

Creative children

While the stories that feature children at play are still mostly didactic from a contemporary point of view, there is one section in no. 6 (1897) entitled ‘Xuetang qihua [Strange Words in School]’, which is translated from an unidentified Japanese source, that
reflects a different image of childhood compared to other parts of the periodical. Instead of being passive recipients of knowledge, the students in the text are not afraid to question their teachers (18-19). For example, a student asks, ‘Which is bigger, ri (sun) or yue (moon)?’ The teacher replies that the sun is bigger, but the student responds with, ‘but how do you explain the fact that 31 ri (days) makes up a yue (month)?’ The clever play on words shows the child’s perceptiveness and attention to the nuances of language. Another student asks the teacher if he could drink elephant’s milk because he wants to grow, but the teacher replies that nobody drinks elephant’s milk. The child states, ‘but what do baby elephants drink to grow up then’? In another exchange, the teacher explains, ‘The principle should be to start from the base (bottom), that is, the lowest part, then work upward to the highest, which is what you should do when writing or telling a story’. The pupil responds, ‘How about when digging a well? Where do you start?’ This student could see the flaw in the adult’s logic and was not afraid to challenge the teacher’s authority. The playful humour of the students’ response is uncharacteristic of student-teacher relationships in China at the time, because the teacher was regarded as the absolute authority who should be ‘worshiped alongside heaven and earth’ (Tang 111). The majority of students reading the article would probably not have dared to challenge the teachers’ answers. The inclusion of these dialogues demonstrates the acknowledgement of children as inquisitive beings who are curious about the world and their place within it and implies a change is needed for Chinese teacher-student relationships to become more like the model presented in this column. Content like this encouraged children’s independent thinking and some of the other stories illustrate how young people solve problems creatively.

One example, about two brothers and a persimmon tree, inspires children not to give up but find a way to solve their problems. In this story, the older brother Wang Da [Big Wang] climbs up the tree, picks the fruit and throws it down to his younger brother Wang Er
[Second Wang]. At first Wang Er has trouble catching all the fruit, causing some to drop to the ground. However, he thinks of an idea to use his hat to catch the persimmons and manages to hold on to all of them. They bring the fruit back for their parents, showing their filial piety (1898, no. 8, 10). Although the ending of the story is reminiscent of the tale of six-year-old Lu Chin, who sets aside two oranges for his mother in *The Twenty-four Examples of Filial Piety*, the detail about how the second brother quickly finds a way to convert his hat into a basket presents children as inventive and resourceful.

**Conclusion**

Seeing children as malleable, education reformers in the late-nineteenth century, concerned about the weakening Qing dynasty, published *The Children’s Educator* with a very strong motive—to train the future leaders of China so they could save the country from foreign aggressors. Children were regarded as China’s hope for resisting colonial powers and overcoming the country’s crisis. The editors of the periodical believed that the main issue with children’s learning was that they were taught to memorise classics and recite them but did not understand their meaning. Children’s literature was regarded as an educational tool for a new type of education system that promoted developmental learning. As well as utilising examples that children could understand, the editors include articles related to daily life and divided the columns according to the age of their target audience, noting the development of a child’s comprehension skills.

A generic chimera, *The Children’s Educator* offered traditional Confucian texts in simplified format, stories that reflected the Confucian ideals of filial piety and fulfilling one’s duty towards the society and state, textbook-like columns that taught facts about animals, plants, mathematical principles, and other subjects, together with some new narratives, mostly in translation, that presented a more light-hearted image of childhood through depictions of tree-climbing, kite-flying, bike-riding and other activities. *The Children’s
Educator noted the importance of studying but also encouraged children to play. The recognition that play is critical to childhood marks an important change in attitudes towards Chinese children and their relationship with play. Although the content is mostly didactic, The Children’s Educator respected implied child readers by using colloquial language that was easier to understand, providing numerous illustrations to make the content more visually appealing, injecting humour into stories and introducing them to children’s texts from other countries.

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Notes

1. The word meng meant ‘dark, covered, confused, in childish ignorance’ (Farquhar 18). Xue means learn. Combined, the phrase could mean ‘learning to get rid of ignorance’. The phrase mengxue was also used to describe any introductory text to a field of knowledge/discipline (Xia 7). On some covers the English title was ‘THE CHILDRENS’ EDUCATOR’. There is some debate as to when the publication ceased. Some claim it ended in 1899, others 1902, while some believe it was 1906. I will be referring to the periodical as The Children’s Educator throughout because the Chinese name changed from Mengxue bao to Mengxue shubao in 1898 after issue 39 to Mengxue congshu in 1901/1902. There was another periodical with the same name established in 1913, which was edited by Cong Xu.

2. Minjie Chen has commented on in her blog post that The Children’s Educator is a ‘platypus’ (Chen, online).
3. The magazine is mentioned in passing in research on children’s publishing in Shanghai, Chinese translation of children’s literature and early children’s periodicals (see Lin; Cao; Zhang; Hu; Zhu, Li & Li). Li Yanli’s MA thesis praises the translations in the periodical but criticizes the works by Chinese authors because they treat the child reader as miniature adults and rehash old ideas. Zhao Lihua’s conference proceeding focuses more on the establishment of the Society for Enlightenment Education rather than a critical analysis of *The Children's Educator*. Chia-ling Mei’s book chapter on *The Children’s Educator* and the *Enlightenment Pictorial* examines and compares the types of knowledge and the way they were presented in the two periodicals, focusing on the pedagogical motivations publishing these articles, most of which are borrowed from a Japanese primary school policy guidelines. Innovations in content presentation include the use of storytelling to teach history and new geography lessons in The Children’s Educator, but some of the other columns contained traces of the old system of education. Mei’s research touches upon the literature column but only provides one example from a fable on the importance of cooperation. Chun-yip Tse’s PhD thesis has one chapter on *The Children’s Educator* which also emphasises its educational columns. In a short article on the concept of the child in China, Xie Yujie comments on the patriotic tone of the magazine, noting that the editors warned readers not to forget their national humiliation and that their concept of education was that of indoctrination and therefore not too different from traditional education methods. These adults, according to Xie, forced their child readers to accept their ideologies, not respecting children’s methods of acquiring knowledge and not considering child psychology. However, The Children’s Educator had a child psychology column that consisted of translations from Matsumoto
Kojiro’s book on the subject. Kojiro established the Child Studies association in Japan and a magazine called Kenfiyzi (The Study of Children).

4. For more information on the Xiaohai yuebao, see Chen, ‘To favourably impress’.

5. One interesting feature was a column that had the colloquial Chinese followed by the classical Chinese, suggesting the importance of understanding classical Chinese.

6. Zeng Guofan (1811-1872) was a statesman and military leader who was also a Confucian scholar.

7. The practice of not acknowledging sources was not uncommon in the nineteenth century. Australian magazines often republished content from American and British periodicals without identifying their sources. American periodicals also ‘borrowed’ texts from British ones.

8. Illustrations of boys appear more often than girls, although occasional images of girls reading appear (e.g. Luomei jingdu [A falling plum interrupts reading]. 1897, no. 2).

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