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## History, entertainment, education and jiaoyü

A Western Australian perspective on Australian children's  
media and some Chinese alternatives\*

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There are big differences between films in China and films in Australia. Chinese films have a variety of subject themes, stories from history, from myths, folklore, legend and so on. Australian films tend to be close to 'everyday life' (*shenghuo hua*). They have no history, perhaps that is the reason. Not like China, it has thousands of years of history. (male respondent, aged 40)<sup>i</sup>

This comment was made by a Mainland Chinese Australian man, who arrived in Australia from the People's Republic of China sometime between 1985 and 1999. His description of the differences between Australian and Chinese children's film and television programming indicates one of the core perceptions of the respondents to a recent questionnaire and focus group program conducted in Western Australia (hereafter WA). Whilst recognising the educational drive of domestic programming in Australia, mainland Chinese parents questioned the concept of education at work in these productions. Did they have an underlying morality? Were they suitable for their children's development? How could they, as parents, share in them, and so help their children unpick what values were at their heart? Were they perhaps, ultimately, without meaning? To quote the parents: 'Australian cartoons are direct and entertaining but have no real educational value (*jiaoyù*)', 'Australian cartoons are without purpose', 'Chinese films have more meaning', or a positive compromise: 'One emphasises good morals, culture and history. The other is self-expression. Both are vital to balance a child's development'

The research to which these parents contributed is concerned with just that issue. How do a child and her parents balance their affective relationships to culture and history when living in a first generation migrant household in Australia? What are their concerns, and how might they touch on our collective understanding of the difficulties of settlement in an avowedly multicultural society? How important, for example, is a shared sense of history across the generations of a migrant family group, and to what extent does nostalgia form the contours of the remembered histories of homeland?

### **Multiculture(s)**

Recent theoretical work on the concept of multiculturalism in Australia suggests that a policy-oriented association of ethnicity and culture can be damaging in the long term to the development of a non-racist and democratic society.<sup>ii</sup> Laksiri Jayasuriya has argued that multicultural policy in Australia has been significantly weighted towards 'cultural pluralism' since its inception in the late 1970s.<sup>iii</sup> That is, a particular version of 'culture' has been privileged over politics, economics and other forms of public interest in definitions of 'difference' within society. There are three problems with this.

First, so-called 'ethnic' cultures are reduced to a marginal position in the public sphere.<sup>iv</sup> They tend to be narrowly understood as continuing and unchanging products of previous lives and places of origin. This emphasis arguably downplays the socio-political characteristics and developing needs of newly forming Australian communities.<sup>v</sup> Kenan Malik has further described, in the British context, how difference and pluralism may become a structural excuse for inequality, 'Like racial theory, plural theory provided an apology for social inequalities, portraying them as the inevitable result, not of natural variations, but of cultural differences.'<sup>vi</sup> This argument has been substantiated in the Australian case in the work of Ghassan Hage, whose anecdotes of difference and incommensurability underpin his analysis of Australianness as a family problem in the 'White Nation'.<sup>vii</sup>

Second, new cultural technologies, particularly the broadcast media and the Internet, are not generally or necessarily deliverers of non-dominant cultural material. Important policy initiatives, particularly the Special Broadcasting Service (many of the station's broadcasts are in languages other than English), have had to operate in a context of benevolent assimilation, remaining outside the national mainstream.<sup>viii</sup> Third, the experiences of first, second, and third generation migrants are hard to account for in a model of 'normative multiculturalism',<sup>ix</sup> particularly when children are negotiating an identity between a dominant society and their parents' memories and sense of self. There is, arguably, nothing easy about acknowledging the settled country's ways of thinking history (National Remembrance Days, ANZAC day, Australia day), whilst one's parents have modelled their lives and their refusals, including migration, on an entirely different set of

historical knowledge and experiences. Where is the point of normativity in cultural multiculturalism, when the historical content of culture is invisible in the mainstream of daily public life?

This project in WA seeks to identify the limitations and possibilities inherent in the practice of Australian multiculturalism, by describing the boundaries between emergent and residual cultural practice in new population groups. First-generation Mainland-Chinese migrants represent a newly forming population in Western Australia. Due to policy changes and crises in their place of origin, the migration flow has been concentrated in the last fifteen years. Many of the new migrants are people with young families. Their children are Australians, and describe themselves as such, but most of the parents still classify themselves as Mainland Chinese – with that specific reference to place of origin. These adults share strong memories of childhoods in the People's Republic of China (PRC). They have in those memories an identifiable alternative model of childhood and media to that used and inhabited by their children.

The material cornerstones of these memories are still current in the PRC. Family films and children's media in late revolutionary China, 1960-1980 are still available on video disk, video and through television repeats. The products are not necessarily accessed by young people in China any more than in Australia, but they are not out of range of their influence. Australian respondents have therefore been invited (through public screenings and discussions) to re-visit key texts of their youth and adolescence, this time watching them with their own children in Australia. The argument that emerges from their subsequent discussions tends to support the related premises that dominant concepts of childhood are significant markers of the character of multiculturalism in the public sphere, and of political cultural hierarchies in the media.

#### **Gender and Settlement: The Ownership of Historical Nostalgia**

The finding that informs this essay is that many parents prioritised history (*lishi*) in their descriptions of culture and education (*jiaoyu*). The term cropped up in discussions and on questionnaires as a way of delineating the difference between what was Australian and what was Chinese. History was set up as 'different' from entertainment, and from skills-based educational material, such as is found on, say, *Hi-5*, *The Tweenies*, or *Sesame Street*<sup>8</sup>. Embedded cultural content was not recognised as such in these types of show, mainly because of the perceived absence of history. The term was used as a back up to the notion of culture, a necessary ingredient to being educated as a Chinese subject, if not citizen. Parallel research, carried out in Beijing in the same year, produced statements about the nation (*guojia*), and culture (*wenhua*), but history was not mentioned as a pillar of cultural meaning. When brought specifically into the conversation, respondents in China acknowledged its importance to national sensibility, and the difficulties of keeping the younger generation informed. There was not, however, the sense of urgency that was articulated in the work in Australia.

There is a suggestion therefore, that, once the homeland has been left behind, the valorisation of historical knowledge emerges as a crucial indicator of nostalgic trauma for parents. It is also feasible to argue that, given the strength of Chinese nationalism in the PRC, migrants feel unable to articulate loss through the word 'nation' (*guojia*), and must resort to the less pugnacious term, 'history'. There is poignancy in this usage, which admits to a loss of ownership of the homeland as a national space for self-expression and explanation. In place of the national space, there is an appeal to a shared historical sensibility, which is not available to their children either through being in China, or through the media products available to them.

These responses were also susceptible to gendered experience, however. Female respondents were on the whole not ungenerous in their estimations of Australianness as broadcast on the ABC.<sup>xi</sup> They remarked on the educational and entertainment values of Australian television 'their content is also educational but they put entertainment values first'. One woman suggested that the educational value in Western texts was more deeply embedded and philosophical than in the Chinese, which 'just instil meanings into children'. Another felt that the problem lay in the lifestyle of Australian children who had too much free time and *did not watch enough* educational programming – although it was there for them.

Male respondents did not give Western / Australian product so much credit. They placed these 'Australian' values in a category opposed to the desired *jiaoyü* element, which they expected from Chinese cultural products (*jiaoyü* translates as educational but was used in ways that separated culturally saturated *jiaoyü* from 'early learning'). This opposition is rather different from the education versus entertainment dichotomy posed by Western critics of children's TV, although in some ways it supports the advocates of (especially pre-school) programming which claims that it achieves education *through* entertainment. (as in the *Hi-5* publicity brochure 1999). Women respondents were also quick to point out that the Australian programs caught their children's attention, were 'more direct', 'more focussed on stimulating children's emotion' and 'immediately understood by small children'. It would be profoundly disturbing to the programmers, to discover that the male parents also opposed the entertainment and educational values of Australian TV (which includes programming from the US, Japan and the UK) to the very concept of culture. 'Here, films tend to use local things, cats and dogs to make a narrative, they don't produce films from the perspective of cultural background'.<sup>xii</sup>

The gendered responses may give some clue to the priorities of male and female parents in this sample. Women are more amenable to the different approaches of educational children's prime time than the men. More research needs to be done before second-guessing the structural reasons for these attitudes, although it is reasonable to assume that mothers at home with preschool children are also 'negotiating' with the host culture as they watch shows together. Common across genders, however, is the perception that Australian values, as encapsulated in children's TV, are emphatically *not cultural* and are therefore also *not educational* in the full sense of *jiaoyü*. In a telling exchange during one discussion, a partial exception is made for the Disney film *Mulan* (1998) (these parents saw the Western version with their children in local cinemas and on video – not the Chinese version (*Hua Mulan*) re-dubbed for the Mainland and overseas Chinese market):

(Female 1): Yes, the characterisation is good, the story is good, the subject theme is good, it has educational value, and the way of expression is good, the music is good and the colours are good.

(General agreement)

(Male 1) I think cartoon films are important in directing children's morality. I think that the most important thing in educating children is to educate their morality, children need to be educated on morality from a very young age.

(Male 2) Yes, that is Chinese, but western programs are, basically, almost, have no moral educational values. At least they are very rare.

In the course of this exchange the status of the named exceptions (*Mulan* and *The Lion King*) is subordinated to a general feeling that there is scarcely any morality in the educational value ascribed to programming and films for children in Australia. The praise is rather for their stimulation of a child's imagination, creativity and independence (qualities which a delighted Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) would claim as core Australian cultural values). The two products that are named are, however, internationally distributed USA made titles. The ABA, which requires a quota of 'C' children's Australian product, explicitly for cultural reasons – although the supposed nature of that culture is not at all clear in the policy rubric – would be disappointed in these parents' account.<sup>xiii</sup>

Whilst the span of comments indicates a gender split between the approval and disapproval of non-Chinese programming, there is overall agreement that Australian shows (and by implication UK and US programs which are screened there) are ungrounded in culture. The opening quote linked the concept of culture and of attendant appropriate moral education to a sense of history. The speaker claimed that China has a great deal of history and is therefore deeply cultural, Australia has no history and is therefore without culture or morality. In fact, Australia has several histories and many cultures, but the respondent is right in one respect. The domestic history of modern, settler Australia is extremely nasty, particularly in terms of Indigenous experience, but also in relation to the White Australia Policy of the early and mid- twentieth century.<sup>xiv</sup> The increasing public awareness of that has produced, in the short term at least, an uneasy semi-silence around the past. Although debate is happening in the adult media sphere, there is still a sense that the past is unspeakable

in front of the children just because of the multiple and often bloody histories of Indigenous suppression and the marginalisation of non-White settler groups.

How *does* a television program start to turn the hardly acknowledged history of enslavement, genocide and child theft into a cultural and moral narrative for the nation's children? This observation lays open one of the major problems for multicultural Australia in general and children's programming in this particular. The regulations for multiculturalism are in place, but they remain 'meaningless' until they are grounded in an acceptable version of history that accounts for all Australians. This is a paradoxically impossible task in the politico-cultural climate of contemporary Australia. The current Anglo version of culture and history can only survive morally by keeping quiet about history, and hoping it goes away. My contention here is that newly arrived migrants notice the quietness and attribute it to a meaninglessness at the centre of Australian cultural production [for children].

### **Memories and Anxiety**

Research into childhood and its place in a social imaginary involves conceptual requirements that perversely threaten the research subject in and of itself: that is, the child/ and the world as inhabited by the figure of the child in the terms of the research question. The circularity into which the researcher is drawn is symptomatic of the ambivalence associated with children's place in the enunciated world, the world of culture, materiality and publicness. Children are daughters and sons of the parents, school pupils, potential citizens, the demographic balance for future national survival, the repository of nostalgia, the emotional focus of adult sentiment, and sentimentality, and the ever present butt of adult anxiety in regards to the unknown future, and the regretted past. For some, children are already lost, the death of childhood is proclaimed by many, and children live alongside and in despite of the wailings of their disappearance.<sup>xv</sup> To this researcher's relief, none of the parent -respondents with whom I have been working betrayed any fear that childhood had disappeared, although many understood that it may be characterised by different cultural competencies, aggravations, and pressures than those they had themselves known as children. There were also, however, some concerns which were not acknowledged by parents in terms of generation, but were attributed to their knowledge or their children's ignorance of culture, as defined by a sense of history.

First, then, one must always deal with the anxiety of the adult world. Second, one must acknowledge and investigate the enunciation of this anxiety in the very organisation of culture, and specifically the culture of childhood. Third, one needs to look at the figure of the child as something distinct but complicit with the experience of childhood as lived in particular times and places. This last is the most difficult, and it is the conundrum which is traceable through the attitudes to media by different generations.

Anxieties, or whatever best characterises parents' thoughts on media consumed by their children, do not have a single formative source. Arguably, the figure of the child focuses in the parents an amalgam of desires and psychic residues (something more than memory), as well as the actual worries of the day to day. Those may not be inconsiderable. All parents have some investment in their children's futures. The investment is likely to be emotional, financial, cultural, political, and place-bound. For first generation migrant parents, of whatever ethnicity, the investment is complicated by the insecure grasp that they themselves have on the cultural capital and competencies of the place of residency and/ or citizenship.

For, despite the multiculturalism espoused in national political rhetoric, there is little sense of direct political access or effect amongst newcomers who are not of English speaking backgrounds. As Jayasuriya has cogently argued, the Australian brand of multiculturalism is specifically *not* concerned with altering the political status quo, but rather with maintaining cultural pluralism at the expense of political difference and democratic agonism.<sup>xvi</sup> The public status of these parents is therefore in some respects less than the public visibility of their children, who attend Childcare Centres and schools, where they are usually expected to speak English and to learn according to Australian English educational expectations. As we see from some of the responses, these expectations are considered by some parents to be inadequate, although there is not a

commensurate sense of power in the sense of changing those expectations either locally or through mainstream political action.

Rather, parents enter their children into Saturday morning Chinese language schools, run by the local Chungwah Association, as a precaution against a total loss of Chinese language and culturally specific skills. Or, they take up all opportunities to expose their children to Chinese cultural material; hence we had an unexpectedly large turnout for each of our free screenings of Chinese cartoons and feature films. Other research indicates that teenage children are themselves likely to gather culturally specific knowledge through high level interest in Hong Kong pop culture.<sup>xvii</sup> This may not be quite what the parents are aiming for in Mandarin classes, but it is a significant choice for these young Australians to make. It is arguable that, for these particular parents, children act as a negotiating vanguard between themselves, as children of Chinese parents, and mainstream Australian life. This institutes a palpable sense of impotence in the face of children's choices in the zones of culture and media. This response betrays a sense of absence in the socio-political sphere, which plays out in the family as an area of parental frustration. This was manifested in the questionnaires by spontaneous reference to Australian scheduling of children's TV. On commercial stations cartoons start at 6am and run till at least 9am, on the more favoured public broadcaster the ABC shows start at 7am – both thus grabbing the pre-schoolers as well as the pre - school day viewers.

Comments made reference to scheduling as a way in which their parental authority was undermined, day after day. Parents seemed to have relinquished agency in the face of Australian timing. It were as if the children's headstart into the mainstream validated their desire to watch, even though the parents felt strongly that it was detrimental to their highly valued education:

(Male respondent): In China, television stations broadcast cartoons between 6 and 7 after children have finished school [*author's note – actually CCTV has broadcasts between 3-5 and 7-9pm*]. But in Australia, maybe because adults want to sleep in the morning ... early morning is the best time for study, children should use that time for study ... but when you turn on the television, there is a cartoon. It doesn't matter how hard you try to force your children to study, they won't.

(Male 2) It's true, it's because the early morning schedule suits adults.

(Male 1) My son starts watching at 6am, and he has to leave for school at 8.30. School starts at 9. I think his head must be full of cartoons on the way to school.

...

(Female) I agree, scheduling times in Australia are terrible

(Male 1) This may not be easy to change, I think this is the difference between the West and the East.

...

(Interviewer: Does China have a similar problem?)

(Male) no, look at the children, including Anglo children, they are no good at spelling. It is because they have no time to study, they are watching television all morning, this includes my son. I ask him to memorise new words. If I do the exercise with him, it's okay. If I start doing something else, then nothing gets done.

In a written response there was a similar point of view expressed: A respondent starts by admiring the American and Japanese cartoons for their focus on the future and science, suggesting that these fast paced stories would stimulate the imagination - but then the writer adds:

'the tempo is fast, especially the films that are broadcast at 7 or 8 in the morning, which get the children all excited early in the day. I do not know what children can be thinking about in class at 9'

In addition, and in connection to the daily invisibility of the first generation Chinese Australian political subject, there are anxiety inducing problems of social status: not all first generation migrants are poor, and not all have residency threats, but some are and some do. Not all migrants consider themselves as exiled, although that is more likely to be the case for Mainland Chinese migrants than many others in Australia, given the

political variables under which they entered or stayed. In some cases exile is not so much political as economic – it just is not possible for people to make as many trips to see relatives as they would like – and in that very ordinary but poignant sense exile is imposed by the fact of migration.

This is exacerbated at the present time by visa policies, which actively discriminate against Mainland University students, suggesting that – as a group – they are likely to 'overstay'. The policy emphasises to the new Mainland migrant that their homeland is considered by the Australian Government as a place that one would wish to leave. Whether or not they are exiles in diaspora, the Government of the day implicitly categorises them as such<sup>xviii</sup>.

The lack of respect for origins, betrayed by Australian immigration policy, surely militates against the success of a politically and historically grounded multiculturalism in practice. At the least, the emphasis on family values in Australian and Chinese political life foregrounds the experience of parenthood as fundamental to the experience of adequacy in the public sphere.<sup>xix</sup> The formation of adult anxiety is common to the experience of aging, and of taking the role of parent in a society which requires responsible family structures as a microcosmic ally of the State. That anxiety will be deepened with any attendant pressures on the subjective formation of parenthood within that relationship. The nature of these families and the attendant responsibilities may be confined to a national space, a class (or social level), ethnicity, a religious ethos, and always cross-referenced to a particular period in time. It is important then to note that the anxieties charted here may have disappeared within a generation, but that the impact on a life or cluster of lives is no less significant for that. A painful, albeit passing, stage of settlement, which goes unremarked and unacknowledged, will have deleterious effects on longer-term inter-ethnic relationships in the political sphere.

In contrast to this picture of instability at the subjective and pragmatic levels, work on Chinese population groups from SE Asia, Hong Kong and Taiwan has suggested that many migrants are assuredly cosmopolitan and/or confidently Australian. This is partly due to financial security, and is also contingent on a local history of multiple migration and a small or non-existent attachment to a particular homeland. For these Australian residents and citizens, the transnational expectations of crossing national boundaries both physically and via media product arguably affords an experience of parenthood that is not quite so bound to a sense of political displacement. For all groups it is likely that the experience of migration and residency in a dominantly Anglo-Celtic political `society (Anglo-fragment society), has a bearing on the ways in which childhood, and particularly children's culture – as well as the culture of childhood is understood.

### **Political Literacy and the Value of Time**

So, what do the present respondents have in common? Whatever their differences in class status, personal history and contemporary socio-economic situations, the responses of adults share the following subjective grounds: The participants in the focus groups defined themselves as originally from the PRC. They speak Chinese (mostly Mandarin) at home.

Some of the other respondents were from other places of origin, or could not define a place of origin. All the children described themselves as Australian. All are parents of children aged between 0-15 years. These children were born in Australia. Those in the focus groups migrated from the PRC in the past 20 years (more than 50% in the past ten years). There was a fairly equal mix of men and women in the sample, slightly more males than females amongst the children. As Mainland migrants, these people have had first-hand experience of childhood in the PRC, some experience of the reform era, and many have left China as part of the leaving the country fever (*chuguore*) after 1989.<sup>xx</sup> For three years (1997-1999), all Asian Australians witnessed and suffered the abuse of Hansonism, and the attendant realisation of the depth of expressed and latent racism in the White Australian political psyche. These shared characteristics produce competency in the adaptation to new social demands, a willingness to let their children negotiate with the Australian mainstream, but also a sense of alienation from the cultural competencies assumed in Australian public life.

In the context of the screenings and the focus groups the experience of a past life in the Mainland was important to the respondents. *Sange Heshang* (*Three Monks*, 1980) was widely enjoyed. This is a twenty minute

animated film, which describes the exploits of three Buddhist monks. One monk manages well on his own, fetching water for his own use and for the flower vase in front of the Bodhisattva. Another arrives and they cooperate grudgingly but without warmth. When the third monk arrives, the temple loses all its serenity. The monks feud with one another about water carrying until there is none left to drink. Finally, a crisis – a temple fire – brings them together and they develop a pulley system for carrying water without anyone putting in too much effort. The piece is without dialogue, and has a repetitive sequence of theme tunes for each character. Many children (and parents on their behalf) wrote positive comments:

'It was great', 'It was very nice', 'My child loves it', 'like' 'It is funny and I like it', 'Though there is no dialogue children can still understand', 'A bit old and the drawings aren't great, but it is still entertaining, like South Park'.

Adults also enjoyed it, and some wrote quite detailed responses to it, emphasising that it had a traditional message of cooperation that reached deep into Chinese self-understanding and self-criticism:

'The film is very educational. It expresses that people will only make progress and be cooperative after they have suffered'  
'I like the humanisation of the Buddha: her sadness at seeing the monks fighting and her happiness when they are united'  
'*Three Monks* is based on a traditional Chinese folktale. I think that the theme of the film is trying to teach people to unite for power. Being dis-united is a Chinese shortcoming. People often say that if a Chinese fights a Japanese, the Chinese will win. If two Chinese fight two Japanese it will be an equal match. If three Chinese fight three Japanese, then the Japanese will win. People also say that Chinese prefer chess as it is a one on one game, but Japanese prefer bridge because it is played in pairs. What this all means is that the Chinese are not united. If China and Taiwan unite, America and Japan will not dare to interfere in Chinese affairs.'

The respondent moves from a claim on the film's peculiarly Chinese perspective on cooperation to a complaint against current relations between China and Taiwan (the interview was taken a few weeks before the Taiwan's elections in 2000). He also incorporates a general rejection of American and Japanese interference in Chinese affairs. His reading of a fairly open story is not just culturally coded but politically explicit, and marks his ownership of the film as a subject of the Motherland. To this viewer, the film cannot and should not be politically innocent, as it is a film made in 1980 in the PRC. It must speak to a Chinese political agenda through the medium of Chinese traditional morality and cultural self-description. The film gives him what the top children's program in Australia, *Bananas in Pyjamas* and the ubiquitous *Pokemon* do not – a confidence in his description of the film's meaning, which amounts to a statement of public political literacy. In explaining it he becomes articulate, and therefore visible in a particular version of public politics.

Of course, this is a visibility that is not valorised in Australian politics and that cannot easily be translated into cultural or political capital in mediation between family and society at large. Moreover, the complication of migration is again articulated when adults in the focus groups bemoan the lack of available repetition. It is not enough for the meaning to be articulated once, it must be repeated and re-articulated time after time, if they are to be able to communicate this different publicness to their children:

'Children don't understand the meaning of Zhangga's courage and justice, and the meaning of 'being united' in *Sange Heshang*. If these films have been watched many times and with our interpretation to guide them, then we would achieve a result, Just watching it once, like today, won't get the result.'

On the other hand, a young Chinese Australian boy's response is rather horrified - 'I think this film insults Buddhism. Buddhists are taught to be kind and loving. These three monks do not act like Buddhists at all'. His encounter with the film is literal and iconographic rather than symbolic. Here are monks misbehaving, and it offends him. The boy does not access the film through the same lens of history as the older man. These

contrasting readings of the film, one as a highly charged political moral tale, based in traditional Chinese folk history, the other as a morally suspect story about naughty monks remind us that Chinese Australians also bring multiple histories to bear on present spectatorship. The boy is perhaps more traditional than is the man. His ignorance of PRC historical perspective takes him directly to the subject matter, although it does not allow him to enjoy it. As Stephan Tanaka pointed out in a response to an early version of this essay, time is sometimes more cogent than space. His observation seems appropriate here, when so many migrants have moved in space, but articulate their sense of shifting through an appeal to history – the organisation of time. When the father speaks of Chinese political affairs, he does so in regard to an old film that can nonetheless, for him, encapsulate past and present truths of foreign relations. His ‘being in Australia’ is less vibrant than the mediation of the cartoon across time, which affords him the political space for political literacy and articulation.

Whilst the boy did not enjoy the film for its cultural-historical meanings, he did have the pleasure of unequivocal indignation at its religious faux pas. By contrast, access to the past and the present gave some parents mixed feelings when they revisited old films. With *Sange Heshang* they recognised, or remembered the film's value as a moral tale and applauded that. In fact, that was why they had come to the screening at all – in the hope of exposing their children to a morality different from the *Pokemon* phenomenon (which many singled out as something they particularly hated (‘too materialistic’, ‘too violent’). Although enjoying it themselves, however, they also realised that it did not have contemporary production values. It was clever and witty but lacked pace, and, frankly, they were uneasy in case their children did not enjoy it at all (surprisingly quite a few children did -- not bad for a twenty minute animated story with no words and with Buddhist monks as the main players). Many parents will recognise such unease as the familiar, powerful fear that children will not enjoy crucial aspects of parental identity, exacerbated in this case by the already powerful status of their children's Australian selves.

The unease came from a small proportion in response to *Sange Heshang* but far more in relation to the one live action revolutionary clip:

In response to *Xiaobing zhangga* (Little Soldier, 1963), there was a strong feeling that it could only be understood historically and with the experience of growing up in a revolutionary era.<sup>xxi</sup> The film is a war film set in the nineteen thirties / forties. The plot revolves around an attractive, brave and wilful boy who slowly learns to put his own emotions aside in the fight against the Japanese.

*Xiaobing* was familiar to all the Mainland respondents. Some had seen it many times in their youth, and one claimed that he still knew the dialogue by heart. They remembered enjoying it very much when they were young, but now doubted whether it was suitable for children (their children) to view. Most felt that it was too violent, too concerned with a revolutionary experience which could be understood only by those who had experienced it first hand. The violence was not of the same order as the ‘noisy’ ‘meaningless’ violence of *Pokemon*. Rather, its problems lay in its excess of meaning and the story's reliance on revolutionary knowledge for the morality to emerge unscathed.

Suddenly, history became what we might term extra-cultural, and utterly bound by *place* (being there) and time (being there then). It could not be transmitted through traditional means but only through embodied memory. The parents could not share their own embodied memories, which they articulated as ‘history’, with their children. Some refused therefore to recognise that their children did actually enjoy the film, and its violence. A two year old girl shouted ‘*chong-er*’ (KILL!) as she charged around the screening room. and several of the boys over about 7 years wrote that it was ‘great’, the ‘best so far’. A teenage boy remarked that the boys in the film ‘knew nothing about fighting’. Their parents remained convinced that they did not understand it at all.

In these discussions, incommensurability between the migrant and the child emerged. Whereas the children enjoyed the media text for its kinetic energy and childhood-narrative values, they did not view it in the historical context of Chinese nationalism and individual bravery on the behalf of the collective. The parents

could not see how the film could be appreciated at all without that experience of the revolutionary era, and without at least some knowledge of the national interests that grounded the film. Whereas they suspected Australian films of having no cultural value and no historical grounding, they felt that this Chinese film had too much. They described a full circle. The violence and tempo of imported US and Japanese cartoons rendered them meaningless; likewise, the a-historicity of Australian programs. Nevertheless, the dramatic pace and violence of a historical family drama, *Xiaobing zhangga*, made it enjoyable but no longer suitable for their very Australian Chinese children.

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<sup>i</sup> All original translations of interview material by Yingchi Chu, with amendments by the author. The present author takes full responsibility for the work presented here.

<sup>ii</sup> There are different approaches to the problem, but recent scholarly and journalistic focuses of debate have been: Ghassan Hage *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a multicultural society*, (Annandale: Pluto Press, 1998), and Janeen Webb and Andrew Enstice, *Aliens and Savages: Fiction, Politics and Prejudice in Australia*, (Australia: Harper and Collins, 1998).

<sup>iii</sup> Laksiri Jayasuriya, 'Understanding Diversity and Pluralism for Education and Training', and 'Australian Multiculturalism and Citizenship', In L. Jayasuriya ed. *Immigration and Multiculturalism in Australia* (Perth: University of Western Australia 1999), 2, 6-7.

<sup>iv</sup> Although Habermas' version of the public sphere is the most common reference here, in so far as his early work supposed that there was a single public sphere which privileged a certain configuration of class, race and gender, the multiple public spheres suggested by Hartley indicate the need to acknowledge other politically effective groups and configurations. John Hartley, *The Politics of Pictures: The Creation of the Public in the Age of the Media* (London: Routledge, 1992), Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Massachusetts: MIT, 1989).

<sup>v</sup> Laksiri Jayasuriya, 'The Australian Experience of Multiculturalism: Dilemmas and Emerging Issues', In Ong Jin et al (eds), *Crossing Bridges*, (Singapore: Prentice Hall, 1995); Jayasuriya, 'State, Nation and Diversity in Australia', (1999), 39-48.

<sup>vi</sup> Kenan Malik, 'Race, Pluralism and the Meaning of Difference', *New Formations*, 33, (1998) 125-141, 132.

<sup>vii</sup> Hage, (*White Nation*, 228-229)

<sup>viii</sup> Andrew Jacobowicz and Kerie Newell, 'Which World? Whose / Who's Home?: Special Broadcasting in the Australian Communication Alphabet', In Jennifer Craik et al eds. *Public Voices, Private Interests: Australia's Media Policy*, (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1995) 130-146. The ABC

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report 'Media Watch' screened 24<sup>th</sup> April 2000 suggested that whilst Channel 9 and ABC were the broadcasters to the nation – only Channel 9 had the audience to prove it.

<sup>ix</sup> Jayasuriya, (*Immigration*, 1)

<sup>x</sup> These programs, from Australia, the UK and the USA respectively, are targeted at pre-schoolers, and Grades One's. They combine hi-octane fun with learning objectives (the alphabet, social skills and colours for example) All were broadcast in Australia in 2000.

<sup>xi</sup> ABC (Australian Broadcasting) produces P and C rated shows for pre-schoolers and school-age children, broadcast in the morning from 7am and in the afternoon from 3– 6pm. Commercial channels are also subject to regulation in regards to children's programming: The Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice, states '2.10 Material classified C or P must satisfy the requirements of the Australian Broadcasting Authority's Children Television Standards/ C and P classification zones are movable within bands laid down [...]. These zones overlap other classification zones and have precedence over them.' (April 1999) 11.

<sup>xii</sup> Recent program flagships are however, recognisably. 'Australian': *No Worries* (1994), *Ship to Shore II* (1996), *Ocean Girl* (1998).

<sup>xiii</sup> The stated objective of Children's Television Standards in Australia is that 'Children should have access to a variety of quality television programs made specifically for them, including Australian drama and non-drama programs.' However in the formal questionnaire whilst parents almost all placed books as the 'best' medium, many parents named Australian made pre-school TV programs; *Play school* and *Bananas in Pyjamas* as actual favourites.

<sup>xiv</sup> For a contemporary attack on the policy's traces see Mike Head, 'The new White Australia Policy', <http://www.wsws.org/articles/1999/jan1999/imm3-j26.shtml>. The Department of Multiculturalism and Immigration also provides a history of the policy on its web site, 'The Demise of the White Australia Policy', <http://www.immi.gov.au/facts/05policy.htm> both accessed 4<sup>th</sup> July 2000 A measured approach can be found in Tim Beal and Farib Sos, 'From White Australia Policy to Multiculturalism', *Astronauts from Taiwan: Taiwanese immigration to Australia and New Zealand*, (Asia Pacific Research Institute, 1999),112-115.

<sup>xv</sup> David Buckingham has effectively argued against such opportunistic pessimism, *After the Death of Childhood: Growing up in the Age of Electronic Media*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 21-40.

<sup>xvi</sup> Notes 1 and 5.

<sup>xvii</sup> John Sinclair et al, 2000, 'Chinese Cosmopolitanism and Media Use, in Stuart Cunningham and John Sinclair eds. *Floating Lives: The Media and Asian Diasporas: Negotiating Cultural Identity through Media*, (Brisbane: UQP, 2000), 35-90

<sup>xviii</sup> The Government Immigration and Multicultural Affairs web site emphasises its agreements with China to return illegal migrants and over-stayers (in press bulletin pages), but does not explicitly welcome migrants from the PRC (a 'non-gazetted country'), despite their economic contributions. More over-stayers come in fact from the United Kingdom than any other place of origin, yet it is PRC students, for example, who find difficulty in getting study visas in Australia.

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<http://www.immi.gov.au/facts/81boats.htm> and  
[http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media\\_releases/media00/r00051.htm](http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media_releases/media00/r00051.htm)

<sup>xix</sup> For further discussion of this point see Yingchi Chu, Stephanie H. Donald and Andrea Witcomb, 'Children and Publicness in the Media-sphere', paper given at ASAA 2000.

<sup>xx</sup> John Sinclair et al, ('Chinese Cosmopolitanism' 35-90).

<sup>xxi</sup> See also Stephanie Donald, *Public Secrets, Public Spaces: Cinema and Civility in China*, (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield 2000), Chapter 2.