

“Unruly” Children:

Re-discovering Arthur P. Wolf's
Taiwan Fieldnotes in a New Framework



Jing Xu (許晶)

Affiliate Assistant Professor of Anthropology
at the University of Washington and Wenner-Gren Hunt Fellow

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How do humans become moral? Centered on children's active learning, my book explores this question through re-discovering the late anthropologist Arthur P. Wolf's unpublished fieldnotes collected in Taiwan (1958-1960). Designed as an improved replication of the Six Cultures Study of Socialization (SCS), a landmark project in this history of anthropology, Wolf's project was the first systematic, ethnographic research on ethnic Han children. I analyzed these materials (interviews, observations and psychological tests) using a cognitive anthropology approach distinguished from SCS' behaviorist paradigm and a new methodology combining ethnographic interpretation, NLP (natural-language-processing) techniques, and SNA (social-network-analysis). Going beyond the trope of "obedience" and the "innocent child" imagery popular in Chinese studies, I discover "unruly" children who defy parental expectations and develop their own moral understandings. I highlight the role of peers (including siblings) in moral development, in contrast to prior focus on parenting. Moreover, I take inspiration from children to interrogate the nature of ethnography, fieldnotes and meaning interpretation more broadly. Taken together, this re-analysis invites us to reflect on a core question of knowledge production, how do we know what we know?

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