

“Gu Li” – Blooming on the Stage —*Narrative Research on the Living World of Child J*

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Abstract

This thesis takes the current situation and experience of children, as well as its occurrence circumstance, as the content and narrative frame of children’s life-world, and uses the very frame to conduct narrative research on the life-world of child J. The research finds that during the life and associations in kindergarten, although J has many problems and finds herself at a “disadvantageous” position, she is still able to demonstrate her confidence and calm, gaining recognition from her companions and being well-received. All of these are benefit from her special family and her mother’s inculcation. The inspiration lies in two parts: the first part is to accept and trust your children unconditionally; and the second part is to inculcate your children conditionally and wisely.

Keywords: children’s life-world, current situation and experience, occurrence circumstance, narrative research

1. Introduction

J is a 5-year old girl (Note 1).

22nd June 2013, in Beibei District, upon the Jinyun Mountain, the graduation party of Senior Class E is being held. J is dancing mellowly to the lovely music, like a beautiful flower, stretching out gorgeously and gracefully. She is telling the touching story to the audience: Many girls are called Gu Li (Note 2) /I don’t know you are the Gu Li I have met/Why do you have such a flowery name/Are all the Gu Li more beautiful than flower...

As soon as the author enters Senior Class E, a special mother comes into picture: she takes her daughter to kindergarten every day and stays until 9 o’clock; in kindergarten, she not only takes care of her child, but also helps teachers with various regular activities. Gradually, the author finds out that she is exactly J’s mother. Start with the concern of J’s mother, the author becomes greatly interested in J’s living world as well...

Applying the method of narrative research, taking the situation and experience of J in the kindergarten as entry points, as well as tracing back to the occurrence circumstance, this research makes an attempt to reproduce the education life of J.

2. The Current Situation and Experience of Child J

In the author’s opinion, the behaviors of J in the kindergarten are of many troubles, which lead J to a “disadvantageous” position. However, J is still able to demonstrate her confidence and calm, gaining recognition from her companions and being well-received.

2.1 J’s “Problems” in the Kindergarten and Her Disadvantageous Position

2.1.1 Expressions That Can Easily Cause Conflicts

Soon after the author enters Senior Class E, J is found to be in a conflict with her classmate C (a little boy in the class):

On 15th March, C hits J with the rope end in the morning exercise. J cries out loud immediately, bursts into tears, and then goes to her mother for consolation. The author then turns to C for the reason why he hits J. C says that J called him ‘dumbass’ and provoked him to chase her during rope skipping, which enraged

him to hit her with the rope end. J's mother asks J: "Did you say that anyway?" J answers negatively. Then J's mother turns to other children for answer: two children suggest that J did not say so, while one child insists that J did say so...

It is unable to find out whether J indeed humiliates C with such offensive expression or not in this event. Nevertheless, as far as the author knows, during her associations with other children, J always uses such offensive expressions. Although J may probably have no ill intentions towards others, such offensive expressions are of certain influence on her associations in the kindergarten — the other children always go to teachers to complain about her behaviors, which leads to the outcome of many criticisms from the teacher.

2.1.2 Preference for "Action" Expressions

Except for her preference for expressions that can easily cause conflicts, J also prefers to express herself with "action". This method of expression is also "misunderstood" by the other children easily:

On 20th May, the flag-raising ceremony of S kindergarten is in progress. Standing in the line, J frequently pats her classmate R (a little boy in the class) on his head and shoulder. R begins to think that J is a pain in the neck, so he glares at J, stirring up his arm. Yet J doesn't mind it at all, instead, she keeps smiling at R.

...

After the flag-raising ceremony, children are all going back to classroom. At the request of the teacher, J leans on the table quietly, whereas this quiet fails to last long. J reaches out to her classmate Z (a little girl in the class), and pats Z with hands. Of course, Z immediately pats J back. They keep patting each other for a while, until the teacher shouts at them to stop behaving like this. J leans on the table again, looks at Z and giggles, while Z is in displeasure.

From the author's observations, J often holds the classmate next to her by the shoulder, or turns to talk with the children behind her, or even stands up and walks around the classroom without leave in group activities...

Inevitably, J's "actions" often receive unfavorable responses from teachers, which not only get herself but also the classmate next to her into troubles. Whenever the teacher scolds them for their behaviors, the classmate next to her will always say things like "J touches me first" and looks innocent. J, on the other hand, still persists her old ways, as if nothing had happened.

2.1.3 Preference for "tricks"

On 26th June, as soon as the author enters the classroom in the morning, Y (a little girl in the class) comes to complain that J has lied to W (a little girl in the class) and her.

The author: "How did she lie to you?"

Y: "She told us that she would bring us a peacock egg, but she only brought us an ant."

W: "She was lying. Peacock egg is only collected in the park, and it costs a lot of money."

Later on, the author asks J about this matter, and J says "peacock egg" is actually a book. We will never know whether the "peacock egg" that promised by J is an actual egg or a book. Nevertheless, concerning her behaviors, the author doubts that J is not an honest child. There is indeed one thing that can support and verify the author's doubt:

On 27th May, after finishing their breakfast in the morning, children in Senior Class E begin to make plans for their area activities, and then stick their name tags on the clipboard in accordance with their own plan. On that very morning, many children want to go to the art area, because of which, someone substitutes other child's name tag with his or her name tag. Some children suggest that J is the one who substitutes the name tag, while J strenuously denies...According to what the author has seen, on the clipboard of the art area, J's name tag comes in the last (where the substituted name tag should be). If someone do substitute other child's the name tag with his or her name tag, it could probably be J.

From the events listed above, J seems to have many "disadvantages" in class: prefer to use expressions that can easily cause conflicts, tend to express herself with actions, behave dishonestly...However, these "disadvantages" do not have much influence on J's associations with her companions. Confronted with the scolds and criticisms from children and teachers, J still acts confidently and calmly, being well-received by the other children. During the semester, the author has experienced four different birthday events (Note 3) in the kindergarten, three of which invites J to the stage as a good friend. On one occasion, when a little boy is having his birthday event, J even becomes the only girl who has been invited to the stage.

2.2 What Is the Source of Her Confidence and Calm?

2.2.1 “Master” in Sports

One of the hobbies of J is roller skating. To the author’s knowledge, J’s proficiency of roller skating excels any other children in Senior Class E, even in the whole kindergarten. Besides, J also excels at various sports activities held by the class.

When it comes to the athletic ability of J, in the view of J’s mother, J’s “native” talent of sports has something to do with her early training. The author also learns that “J is perfectly coordinated with sports. Although she is just a little young girl, she dares to conduct and participate in many physical exercises, and gets great results.” from J’s teacher. Therefore, she begins to gain confidence in sports activities and physical exercises, as well as in sports events such as morning exercise, roller skating and taekwondo. J shows her advantages of kinesthetic intelligence in all these aspects, being recognized by teachers and children. Moreover, J is gradually making progress in other fields as well, such as the field of language expression” from J’s teacher.

2.2.2 “Master” in Dance

J also “masters” in dance. As mentioned, in the graduation party of Senior Class E, J has presented a wonderful dance — Gu Li to the class. Not only the movement arrangements but also the costume design is so artistic and rational that only beats from the audience and the dance music can be heard in the performance, which is not common during the event of that day. It is such a dancing ability that increases J’s value to other children in the class, and provides J with confidence and calmness during her associations with classmates.

2.2.3 “Master” in Painting

Except for the outstanding performance of sports and dance, J is also a “master” in painting.



Figure 1. The one who does not fall asleep in the middle of night



Figure 2. I begin to study in Senior Class

Figure 1 is painted in October 2012, when J just turns 5 years old. The picture demonstrates a diversity of colors, characters and shapes. Meanwhile, this picture also grasps the common sense of life accurately—People such as police, sanitation worker and ER physician are still awake in the middle of night. This is once in a blue moon for a 5-year old child. What’s more, the most excellent part, to my mind, is that J uses two round eyes to represent “does not fall asleep”, which shows the thinking characteristics and children's simplicity of this age.

Figure 2 is painted in September 2012. J regards “serving as a flag raiser” as the symbol of “begin to study in Senior Class”. The text on the picture is: “I begin to study in Senior Class, and I want to be a flag raiser.” The whole painting is brilliant and colorful, reflecting J’s delight and desire for growing up.

According to the people in the following picture (Picture 3), this painting is drawn a little bit later than the above two pictures. It is J who sits in the left side of the picture (name is withheld). We can see from the picture that J has mastered the theory of focus perspective in a certain degree, drawing a rough image of everyone’s profile preliminarily and differentiating front from back. Because of the shelter, the overall picture is rich in layers. All of these are of more advance comparing with most of the preschoolers who merely demonstrate the characteristics of “transparence” and viewpoint migration (Li Jing, 2007). At the same time, J has a well grasp of detail in her brushwork. Different reflections related to the details of the costumes, as well as different depictions related to haircuts and accessories have been painted discreetly and carefully to demonstrate the easiness and delight of companionship.



Figure 3. Our group

As for these three paintings, J has painted us different pictures of the reality of life, the desire for growing up, and the harmonious relationships between group members, narrating her easiness and joviality to us softly. It is such painting ability that enables J to receive credit from the teachers and children, increasing J's self-confidence and calmness.

Although J is in a "disadvantageous" position, she is still able to gain confidence and calmness from her associations with the teachers and companions, which arouses the author's interest to find out what is behind J.

3. Occurrence Circumstance of J's Current Situation as Well as Experience

J's situation and experience is closely related to her special family structure as well as the inculcation of her mother.

3.1 Special Family Structure

There are four people in J's family. Her father is a taxi driver, and her mother is a housewife. Moreover, J has an elder brother who is in grade eight. Obviously, J's family is special, mainly because that J has an elder brother except for her father and mother in the family of four. She is the one and only one who has an elder brother in the class.

3.1.1 J and Her Elder Brother

J has an elder brother, who studies in Grade 8 of Chaoyang Middle School. In J's mind, her elder brother is skinny, and often teases her, even seizes her face. When being asked the question of "do you like your elder brother", J says "occasionally". Nevertheless, what leads J have a hard feeling most for her elder brother is that "when my brother was in my age, he had been to too many places, more than 100 places I assumes. He had been to Hainan, and even Shanxi, where I didn't have the chance to go at all." What J wants to do most is travelling to Hainan, because "my elder brother has been to Hainan anyway, I want to go to Hainan as well. And I have never flown before." Sometimes, J's elder brother will seize J's face, take out some money, and say to J that "this is for you to go to Hainan." Every time J's elder brother does this to her, J will get mad, and become crazier and crazier for Hainan. Occasionally, when J has her eyes on a beautiful dress, she will speak to her mother: "Mom, I love that beautiful dress." Looking at her mother's unhappy face, J will reword her statement: "I don't want to buy it, for I must save money to experience the sea in Hainan."

In families with many children, in addition to the conflicts, there are comfort and imitation among children. Elder children have already become influential role models during their siblings' socialization process. (qtd in Berk, 2002) If a family has more than one child, they need to share not only matters but also parental love with children. Therefore, there will be a competitive relation between children in some degree—children will compete with each other to obtain matters or win over parental love. We can imagine that: in order to obtain some kinds of matters or love from the family, J will play some "tricks" to entertain or cater to her parents; in addition, J is much younger than her elder brother, being protected by her parents, she may be able to develop some kinds of "behavioral" expressions during the associations with her elder brother; or, when the parents are absent, the elder brother might also play some "tricks" on J, which conducts an intensive function to J's tricky behaviors... In this regard, we can infer the reason why J always uses "unsuitable" expressions, tends to express herself with "actions" and prefers to play "tricks" on other children to some degree.

3.1.2 J and Her Parents

In J's opinion, father is "lazier": "Dad never makes money, all he knows is to eat and to sleep. He even wanders in front of Mom and me when we are having breakfast instead of working." The author then asks: "Your mother says so?" and receives a positive answer from J. Referring to her mother, J tells the author: "Mom is busy with

cleaning all day long, meanwhile taking care of my elder brother and me. Mom is often awake when we fall asleep.”

However, at the very start, J approves her father very much. As far as J’s mother is concerned, she thinks that J agrees with her father simply because that J’s father accommodates himself to J “unconditionally” and meets every need of her; later on, she finds out that mother is the one who “truly” loves her, so she prefers her mother in return. Now, J always follows her mother’s arrangements, and “disapproves” her father gradually. Even when father calls her friends “doggy”, she can feel the scone from her father’s behavior. All of these make J’s mother gain the leadership status in the aspect of J’s education, which allows her to “shape J” in accordance with her own thoughts.

3.2 Mother’s Education towards J

3.2.1 Approval to the Teachers of the Kindergarten

When J enters Care Class for the first time, J’s mother has a lot of complaints about the teachers. Until J begins to study in Primary Class—which is the very class led by J’s current teachers—the attitude of J’s mother to the teachers has been improved. In the word of J’s mother: “child is childish, which is different from adults...Primary Class teachers will pay more attention to what I have said, and try to take good care of every child. Mentally or physiologically, she (the teacher of J) will be always able to discover your strong points, and make them become more outstanding.”

With the approval to the teacher, J’s mother often communicates with the teacher forwardly on the subject of education. What’s more, the author is also aware that J’s mother is be occupied in the business of Senior Class E, or even the whole kindergarten gratis. It is such an approval as well as gratuitous pay of J’s mother that exchanges the trust and approval from the teachers. In the word of the teacher of J, is that “J’s mother actually do well in the aspect of social contact, and she is considerate. When children need to go to interest-oriented classes, she will come and help us with its management on her own, as well as in dance class. All the teachers are willing to instruct her, and provide with advice. Then she is able to combine the situation of the children to conduct education. Children will make progress easily in this regard.”

The good relationship between J’s mother and the teachers is definitely creating an advantageous environment for J in the kindergarten: on one hand, the attitude of the teachers towards J will be influenced by this relationship consciously or unconsciously; on the other hand, J’s mother stays long in the kindergarten, and becomes familiar with almost all the teachers, which imperceptibly creates an “acquaintance” society in the kindergarten. The most important thing is that due to the long-time presence of J’s mother in the kindergarten, J will be thus supported and encouraged, which also lays a good foundation for J to cultivate her confidence and calmness in the kindergarten.

3.2.2 Purposeful Education Aiming at the Characteristics

At first, the reason of learning painting is that J’s mother wants to cultivate J’s concentration, and then increase her reading ability as well. Therefore, during the process of painting, the content of language training will be added consciously. Later on, J’s mother finds out that J tends to use gloomy color and fails to match many bright colors. Thus, J’s mother reaches out to the teachers actively to seek help. Afterwards, along with the improvement of J’s painting ability, J is gradually interested in drawing. In the word of J’s mother: “The teachers praise her, children like her, and her paintings become more and more beautiful, so her interests are cultivated gradually.”

As for the education of J’s sports, J’s mother appears to be more confidence. Except for the trust of J’s “native” talent of sports, the confidence of her athletic ability is one of the reasons as well. J’s mother always says that: “Sports is my strong points. We haven’t spent any money on the aspect of sports.” Even in dancing, which is different from sports, J’s mother still thinks that: “I am not a professional in dancing though, I still good at dance comparing to painting, because sports and dance provide people with a feeling of tall and straight in the aspect of shape.” Hence, except for her personal guidance of almost all kinds of sports, J’s mother mainly concentrates her efforts on J’s dancing. As a beginner of dance, J needs to put up with the physical pains. For instance, when it comes to body suppleness training like leg pressing, at first the body will be in great pains. For this reason, although J “doesn’t want to learn anymore”, she still hangs in there because of the companion from her mother. Then, J’s basic skills as well as cognition of dance have been developed, so that her movement also becomes more graceful.

It is J’s mother who cultivates J with specific purposes, so that J has make great progress in the aspect of painting, sports and dance, becoming increasingly remarkable.

3.2.3 Be Patient with Children

What lies behind the cultivations of J's mother is her patient with child.

We can see from the above slice of life that J's mother is a woman with great patient. We can tell it more clearly from storybooks made mutually by J's mother and J, which is "the birthday of mother duck" and "little bear Abi" (Fig.4). In order to take care of every detail of these books, from story design, color blending, images selection to the final practice, it takes one year of them to accomplish.



Figure 4. Covers and back covers of these two storybooks

Besides, in the graduation party of Senior Class E, the dance of J named "Gu Li" also takes some pains for J's mother to prepare before the stage. When being asked "who teaches you this dance", J says that: "Mom, and a dance master. We begin from the video of the dance master, and learn it together. When Mom has learnt it well, she will teach me." The dream of J is to "dance on a greater stage". In accordance with the pays of J's mother, J, a beautiful "Gu Li", is able to dance on her own stage to her heart's full content—not for kitsch or flattery, but for a release of life energy.

There is no doubt that J has many disadvantages, which are associated with her special family. However, it is these disadvantages that make J become much more real and vivid. Under the care of J's mother, these disadvantages do not have a great influence on J's growing up, because J's mother always believes that her daughter is the best, and is willing to put efforts. This is more important than any other gifts!

4. Reflections and Inspirations: How to Make Our Own "Gu Li" Bloom?

For children's maturity and development, authoritative parents put forward reasonable demands and limits to their children, and they require children to comply with these demands and limits. Meanwhile, they also show their enthusiasm and love to children, and they have enough patience to listen to children's views and encourage them to participate in family decisions. Baumrind has found a child can gain good development under the authoritative style. Psychologists hint that children feel pleasant and happy, seem confident in the face of new challenges, and have enough self-control to suppress his destructive behaviors (qtd in Berk, 2002). Undoubtedly, J lives in such an authoritative family, and in her eyes, her mother is the authority. The situation of J is the result of the mother's forever love: the faith, trust and patient from J's mother to J light up the confidence of growing up of J. Although J is in the "disadvantageous" position, she is still able to keep her confidence and calmness in scenes of life.

The experience of children is special, and it is this special that forms their unique current situation and experience, thus forming different unique individuals. One of the special experiences of J is that her family has more than one child—she has an elder brother. Although this family cannot be claimed as a traditional "multiple-child family", it is still not common for the 00's (children who born in 2000 or later). As far as pedagogical meaning is concerned, multiple-child family provides children with more chances of growing up: First, J has a chance to associate with her peer at home. Children of the family will conduct their associations with each other from a family-centered perspective, which provides children with more opportunities to experience life contact. Secondly, children will obtain abundant chances for emotional experience. The brotherhood and sisterhood in multiple-child family is unique, which is unable for only child family to experience because only child family does not have such condition. Third, children will experience a more complicated association of family interpersonal communication. In multiple-child family, sibling rivalry between children, intervention of the parents or even the influence from the forefathers has offered children a chance to experience "complication". Therefore, in this sense, we are able to understand J's calmness in the kindergarten—she has experienced almost all these "things" at home; and it is also clear to us that why J is free

from the influence of the “complaints” from children and the criticisms from teachers—she has experienced these “things” at home as well.

In the growing up of J, her family structure is non-copyable, but we can still obtain some inspirations from the education of J’s mother:

I don’t care who you are or what you look like, I will always love you. If oosperm is considered to be the seed from parents to build up the children’s body, this unconditional trust and acceptance will be called the root and driving force for the spiritual growth of the children. Only in this way can children be fearless and overcome all obstacles in their way of growth. This emotion could make miracles: the aware love through Helen Keller and her teacher Sullivan, the trust and insistence from the mother of Forrest Gump in his way of growth, the silent endurance and endless forgiveness from Shi Tiesheng’s mother when he is in deep trouble...All of these are the transcendence of human emotions to prejudice! It is this kind of emotion that makes children remember their root and their way back home (Note 4), no matter how far they’ve gone or what they’ve been through - They will never be afraid of becoming homeless wanderers! This is probably the “existence (Note 5)” mentioned by Heidegger, and also the foundation for human beings to live in the world poetically and obtain true freedom!

On the other hand, conditional and wise education should be conducted. If unconditional trust and acceptance provide children with “existence”—or reasons for “existent” to exist, then conditional and wise education is the tool for “existent” to realize “existence”—every “support” from family—people is a special existent (Wang Qingjie, 2004). “Existence” is like the soil, if a plantlet is planted without soil, then it will become nothingness. Plantlet is like the “existent” to “existence”, achieving “existence” with other “existents” in the soil. If we pull up seedlings to help them grow, dissociating “existence” from the plantlet, then it will die away and return to nothingness; we are worried that the villainous weather of the nature mother will do harm to the plantlet, and artificially put it in a cage, thus get in the way of the free stretch of “existence” related to “existent”, which will definitely lead to the outcome of atrophy for the plantlet.

5. Conclusion

In order to make our “Gu Li” bloom to the fullest and become more charming, we need to differentiate unconditional love with conditional love: unconditional love refers to the trust and acceptance to the children, while conditional love stands for the wise education. Only in the way of being established in a wide and solid earth can children be no prejudice and fearless; Once the children is boosted by wise education, they will be able to develop and flourish themselves, and create their own future — which is also a chapter of freedom to the destiny of all human beings!

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Notes

Note 1. From March 2013 to June 2013, the author conducts a 4-month investigation on the living world of Senior Class E of Kindergarten S. J is one of the most important subjects of the study. The story of example of this thesis are compiled from observation diaries, interview transcriptions, photos, videos and other data, the marked time of which, otherwise specially stipulated, is 2003. In order to prevent personal privacy from revealing, the names of students and classes are substituted with letters.

Note 2. “Gu Li” is a Uyгур word, which means flower. J enjoys performing a dance named “Gu Li”.

Note 3. Most of the children will be asked to bring a birthday cake to the kindergarten when he or she is in birthday to share with other children in the class. One of the steps in the birthday event is to invite good friends to the stage to keep the birthday character company for making a vow, blowing out candles and hugging. This is the most honorable thing for children to be invited.

Note 4. The original meaning of “The Promised Land” in the Bible refers to the place that God gives to Abraham and his descendants to live, which is also called Canaan. “Land” always stands for mother, being described as a place full of “milk and honey”. Milk is a symbol of love, as well as the token of care and acceptance. Honey stands for sweet life, representing the love for life and the happiness in the world. Most of the mothers on earth can offer “milk”, while only a few mothers can provide “honey” at the same time. In order to give honey to the children, mother should not only become a good mother, but also a woman of happiness—which is a distant goal for most of the people. Reference: [America] E. Fromm. *The Art of Love*. Translated by Geer Kang. Beijing: Huaxia Publishing House, 1987: 43-44.

Note 5. Heidegger divides presence into “existence” and “existent”. “Existent” is an individual and special “existence”; “existence” is the reason and gist for “existent”. Reference: [Germany] Martin Heidegger. *Presence and Time (Revised Version)*. Translated mutually by Chen Jiaying, Wang Qingjie. Beijing: Living, Reading, Awakening-Joint Publishing, 2006.

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