Introduction

Learning Morality in a Taiwan Village

To Divide an Orange

When we look at the apparently simple actions in children's world, we see even the most abstract concepts of human morality emerging from such concrete, seemingly trivial experiences. One example for children in the Taiwanese village Xia Xizhou, well documented in the Wolf Archive, is the scene of dividing an orange. In this impoverished community where families scrambled to feed multiple children, oranges were a pleasant treat for many youngsters. With some pocket money they got after persistent whining toward mothers or grandparents, children were excited to visit the little stores in the village to buy oranges, among other snacks. On a February evening, six-year-old girl Wang Shu-yu, an adopted daughter, offered to "help" her little sister, two-year-old Wang Shu-lan:[1]

Shu-yu walked out of her house, holding her little sister Shu-lan's hand. Shu-lan had an orange.

Shu-yu asked Shu-lan: "Let sister open the orange for you [break it up for you]." Shu-lan didn't say anything. Shu-yu took it and broke it up into six

[1] CO #685, 2/7/1960. Throughout this book, each episode of fieldnotes, an observation, an interview, or a projective test transcript is indexed by the initials of its data type, followed by its unique ID assigned to each episode within that data type. All unique IDs were generated in Python programming environment and therefore begin with #0. For example, "CO" refers to the data type "Child Observation."

pieces and kept two pieces [sections] for herself. Shu-lan didn't comment. She walked over to the adults who were gambling in front of her house and watched them.

When Shu-yu finished the orange [the two pieces], she went back to Shu-lan and said: "Let me divide it for you." Shu-lan let her and Shu-yu kept one piece. Shu-yu went back over to watch the gamblers.

Shu-yu finished the orange and went back to little sister. Her little sister had only three pieces [of orange] left. Shu-yu: "Let me divide it." She took the orange from Shu-lan and Shu-lan whined and said: "No! No!"

Shu-yu broke it and kept a piece. Shu-lan whined and said: "No!"

Shu-yu: "Never mind." She stuck the piece in her mouth [anyway].

During the tedious process of transcribing fieldnotes one page after another, I burst out laughing when I noticed this episode. My eyes lit up in moments like this. Gathering clues to identify individual personalities from countless fragments of random observations, I was intrigued by this episode. Shu-yu's maneuver blurred the boundaries of the most basic moral categories, care, fairness, and reciprocity[2] on the one hand, and selfishness, dominance, and aggression on the other hand. Her successful maneuver depends on her perceptive analysis of the social situation.

Another episode of dividing an orange introduces yet more puzzles:[3]

Huang Ah-fu (six-year-old boy) and his younger brother Huang Hsin-yu (three years old) ran into the store to buy an orange. Ah-fu wanted to peel the orange and Hsin-yu wanted to do that too. Ah-fu wouldn't give it to him. Hsin-yu started to cry and ran home, saying: "I'm going to tell somebody, I'm going to tell somebody!" He ran to the corner and Ah-fu said: "I'm not going to give you any."

Hsin-yu ran back, whining: "I want to peel the skin. I want to peel the skin."

Ah-fu: "What does it matter whether you peel it or I peel it? You can't eat the skin. Do you want to eat the skin?"

[2] Reciprocity in the sense that Shu-yu might have thought herself entitled to getting part of the orange as fair reward for "helping" her little sister.

[3] CO #382, 12/07/1959.

Hsin-yu: "Alright, you peel half and I'll peel the other half."

Ah-fu: "Alright." Hsin-yu watched. Ah-fu peeled until there was only a little left.

Hsin-yu jumped up and down: "Let me peel that! Let me peel that!" Ah-fu gave it [the orange] to him. Hsin-yu peeled it and gave it back to Ah-fu.

Ah-fu: "Each one gets half." He was counting the sections over and over again.

Hsin-yu to Ah-fu: "Don't let Sister Chen see."

Huang Shu-feng, a boy from another family, had come up and they [all the children who were present at the store] huddled around.

Ah-fu: "Aiyo! [Oh!]" He shoved them away.

Ah-fu: "What is so much fun to look at?" They all laughed. Ah-fu slowly and carefully divided the orange in half. They walked away.

Unlike the mischievous Shu-yu, big brother Ah-fu acted in a fair manner, dividing the orange in half. We might be baffled by Hsin-yu's wining though: What is there to fight about in peeling the orange skin? Was it about fairness, whatever you do, I need to do it too ("You peel half and I'll peel the other half")? Was it also about having fun, a kind of joy that our adult minds cannot fathom? Or on the little brother's part, besides fairness and joy, there was yawning for a sense of autonomy and agency? Simple vignettes of dividing an orange point to profound mysteries of learning morality. It is unlikely that parents explicitly taught their children how they ought to divide an orange. Even if parents did so, in reality some children violated the normative prescription, or manipulated it to their own advantage. It is even more unlikely that parents had any moral instructions or opinions on peeling the orange skin.

So how do children acquire moral motivations and sensibilities? This is the primary theme of my book. The book title, *"Unruly" Children*, captures my main argument: From an adult perspective, I see disobedient children defying parental commands and not deterred by punishment. This points to the limits of parenting and socialization, the conventional framework through which we understand the project of learning morality. But shifting to the vantage point of a developing child and zooming

into their own world, I see the opposite of "unruly": Children navigate cooperation, conflict, and the gray areas in between, creatively negotiating their own rules, with complex moral reasoning, emotions, and gendered expressions taking shape in a specific historical context. I trace how children learn morality through playing with other children, including their siblings, and highlight peer learning in moral development.

Han Chinese societies are particularly interesting places to study how children become moral persons. Moral cultivation, or *zuo ren* ("becoming human"), has long been a central concern of Chinese philosophy (Jiang 2021), at the nexus between ethical thoughts, family values, and educational traditions (Bai 2005; Cline 2015; Kinney 1995). Although the imagery of "the child" has assumed a symbolic significance in understanding Chinese morality and family, children themselves are often rendered invisible in actual studies. By bringing to light the story of these "unruly" children from the shadow of classic works in sinological anthropology,[4] this book unsettles prior assumptions about "the traditional Chinese family." For example, children's defiance and maneuvers challenge some entrenched discourses in the academy and beyond: The idea of "the innocent child" in Chinese studies and the stereotype of obedient, docile Asian children – especially girls – in Euro–American popular imagination.

The secondary theme of this book is fieldnotes, from the making of fieldnotes through ethnographic encounters with children to reconstructing an ethnography of children through making sense of historical fieldnotes. I did not have first-person fieldwork experience to orient myself. I was not present at these hilarious scenes of dividing an orange. As an ethnographer, I couldn't help but wonder about the

[4] See James L. Watson's explanation of this term: "'Sinological anthropology' is a term of convenience; it is generally used to designate all anthropologists who work in the field of Chinese studies" (Watson 1976: 355). Many of the foundational studies in sinological anthropology, including Watson's own research, were conducted outside mainland China.

original experience *in the field*. Six decades ago, did the observer on the spot also laugh out loud, when she saw Shu-yu "helping" her little sister to break an orange? Was the observer also baffled, in an amusing way, when she saw the little brother Hsin-yu insisting on peeling the orange skin? The person who observed these children and took notes was Arthur Wolf's research assistant, a Taiwanese teenage girl recorded as MC, who became children's trusted "Older Sister Chen" (MC is shorthand for "Miss Chen"). How did children feel about being observed during intimate moments of their social life, for example, sibling disputes?

As these vignettes show, children are acutely attuned to their social partners' behaviors and intentions. They are also keenly sensitive to what others might think of them: Hsin-yu did not want the observer MC to see what they were doing. Ah-fu shooed other children away from the scene. They might feel embarrassed. They care about reputation. These little gestures, the most human experience, prompt us to reflect on the nature of ethnographic knowledge, knowledge based on concrete social encounters and psychological inferences. Anthropology has ignored the theoretical significance of childhood learning (Blum 2019; Hirschfeld 2002). I would add that studying children can also offer methodological and epistemological insights to our discipline. We should learn *from* children. Perhaps we should also strive to learn *like* children.

These two themes intersect at children's social cognition, a broad set of mental processes and skills that enable individuals to make sense of and respond to the social world, including emotional situations. Therefore, the analytical approach of this book differs from mainstream works in anthropology and Chinese studies: Instead of centering adult social life, as in most ethnographies, I take children's developing minds as a point of departure. For the study of morality, I switched the question from learned patterns of social norms and moral values to the very process of learning. For those interested in childhood, contrary to the conventional perspective of "childrearing" in Chinese studies, which emphasizes how parents and educators shape the moral personhood of youngsters, my

book focuses on children's active learning. Due to the unconventional nature of this book, a reanalysis of other anthropologists' fieldnotes, I can only rely on textual records, for the most part, to reconstruct children's lives. Based on ethnographic close reading, I use computational "distant reading," which has become increasingly popular across social sciences and humanities, to systematically examine these texts. I also interpret the meaning of textual patterns through the lens of children's developing social cognition. Taken together, a new look at the Wolf Archive can address three questions: The question of learning morality in childhood; the place of children in the study of Chinese culture and society; and the contributions of new methodologies to anthropological knowledge.

The Wolf Archive and Intellectual History

The Wolf Archive is a unique, unpublished set of fieldnotes that occupies a significant niche in multiple streams of intellectual history, at the intersection of anthropology and the study of Chinese and Taiwanese societies. In the 1950s and 60s, without access to mainland China, many anthropologists went to Taiwan or Hong Kong for fieldwork and used these sites as a proxy for understanding "Chinese society and culture." Arthur Wolf was among the first American anthropologists who did fieldwork in Taiwan. His first field trip to Taiwan marks a milestone in the "Golden Age" of sinological ethnography (Harrell 1999), as the works of Arthur and Margery Wolf and their students and associates made long-lasting contribution to the study of Chinese and Taiwanese kinship, family, women, gender, and religion. What became lost in this intellectual history, however, was the original intention of the Wolfs' Xia Xizhou field trip (1958–60).

In Arthur's own words, the purpose of this field research was to "add a Chinese case" to the Six Cultures Study of Socialization (SCS) (Wolf Unpublished manuscript:[5] 9). Based on comparative fieldwork in

[5] Hereafter "Wolf n.d."

six societies, Kenya, Okinawa, India, the Philippines, Mexico, and the United States,[6] the SCS was a landmark study in mid-twentieth century American anthropology and an unprecedented endeavor of field research on childhood in cultural contexts (LeVine 2010). Led by Beatrice and John Whiting, anthropologists at Harvard, Yale psychologist Irvin L. Child, and Cornell psychologist William W. Lambert, the SCS project focused on children between the age of three and eleven (with a total sample of 136 children from six sites). This large-scale, cross-cultural research utilized a standardized design that combined anthropological and psychological methods. It produced a series of theoretical, ethnographic, and methodological publications as well as documentaries on culture and child development.[7] A product of collaboration between anthropologists and psychologists, the SCS's legacy on psychocultural study of human development cannot be overstated (Amir and McAuliffe 2020; LeVine 2010).[8]

As an anthropology graduate student at Cornell University, Arthur Wolf became interested in psychology. Under the supervision of psychologist William Lambert and anthropologist Lauriston Sharp, Arthur started his dissertation fieldwork in Taiwan, intending to replicate and expand the SCS template. His project was the first anthropological research on Han Chinese and Taiwanese children. The research had a larger sample size and more complete data than any individual case in SCS. Yet the Wolfs never published any systematic analysis on childhood from this research. A main reason is that during the fieldwork,

[6] The six communities studied were the Nyansongo, a Gusii community in Kenya; the Rajputs of Khalapur, India; Taira, a village in Okinawa; the Mixtecans of Juxtlahuaca, Mexico; the Tarong in the Philippines; and New Englanders in Orchard Town in the United States (all pseudonyms).

[7] The most influential publications include B. Whiting (1983); B. Whiting, Whiting, and Longabaugh (1975); J. Whiting (1966); B. Whiting (1963); and B. Whiting and Edwards (1992).

[8] For a collection of articles on the legacy of the SCS, see a special issue in the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* (Lonner 2010).

Arthur discovered the institution of minor marriage, *sim-pu-a*, and his interest shifted to marriage norms and incest avoidance. Besides, at a time with no personal computers, it was hard to process such a large amount of data, which also delayed the analysis. But he always appreciated the unique value of this project that these data could generate "dramatically greater systematic knowledge about Chinese childhood than we have ever had before" (A. Wolf 1982: 4).

In his final stage of life, Arthur returned to this project, started writing a book manuscript, and left behind a couple of introductory draft chapters. He reflected on how his own thinking had evolved over the decades: "Had I written in the 1960s as intended, I would have focused on testing the hypotheses formulated by the Six Cultures Study. I now pay more attention to reporting as accurately as possible the data I collected" (A. Wolf n.d.: 36). The shift in attitude is related to his experience of revisiting the fieldsite in the 1990s – which is no longer the village Xia Xizhou but part of New Taipei city. He realized that his research could never be replicated, due to drastic changes in the community (Duryea 1999).

A New Look at the Wolf Archive: Theoretical Framework

Six decades after the original fieldwork, my reanalysis of the Wolf Archive has more than "documentary historical value" (Edwards 2000: 318).[9] This book is not just about recovering disappeared childhood and obscured intellectual history. It is also an attempt by a female Chinese anthropologist to establish a dialogue with Western specialists of an earlier generation. To animate this conversation, I brought in my own intellectual vision that cuts across anthropology, psychology, and Chinese studies, drawing from new conceptual interests and empirical findings. First, trained in cognitive anthropology and developmental psychology, I examine

[9] Edwards (2000), entitled "Children's Play in Cross-Cultural Perspective: A New Look at the Six Cultures Study," revisited SCS data on children's play.

everyday childhood learning through the perspective of children's developing social cognition in cultural contexts. This theoretical stance differs from the SCS' behaviorist paradigm that treats the human mind as a black box. It also goes beyond the "human nature versus learning" dichotomy that framed Arthur Wolf's vision when he resumed this project later in his life. Moreover, while the SCS and Arthur Wolf set out to study childhood and childrearing in a general sense, this book puts morality as an explicit focus and in light of a naturalistic perspective.

What Is Learning? From Behaviorism to Cognitive Anthropology

The SCS project, as ambitious and significant as it is by today's standard, was motivated by a behaviorist understanding of childhood learning. The SCS theorized learning as stimulus–response processes and emphasized external reward and punishment in shaping behavior. The SCS's behaviorist hypothesis was clearly stated in its "field guide": "reward by socializing agents for behavior of any given system will increase the habit strength of behavior in that system" (J. Whiting 1966: 11). Since the 1950s, however, the study of childhood learning has undergone significant paradigm shifts, the most prominent shift being the "cognitive revolution" (Miller 2003) and the interdisciplinary study of the mind. Scientists have accumulated a vast body of knowledge about children's developing minds: Young children have a much more complex mental capacity and richer emotional life than the behaviorists once assumed, and they are not mindlessly responding to environmental stimuli. Whereas behaviorists treated the human mind as a black box, cognitive scientists today consider how the mind works as central in any meaningful understanding of learning and behavior. In the case of studying children, this means taking cognitive development seriously. This especially matters for understanding social learning – learning from interacting with other people (Gweon 2021) as well as the transmission of human culture (Hirschfeld 2002; Tomasello 2016).

Arthur Wolf's own understanding of child development evolved, reflecting his ambivalent attitude toward the SCS theoretical paradigm: At the beginning, he intended to test the SCS hypotheses. The decades he spent studying incest avoidance and proving the Westermarck hypothesis[10] (A. Wolf 1995, 2014) changed what he wanted to know about children. As he recounted in his draft manuscript, he was still interested in explaining children's behavior, but his interest had drifted away from the earlier behaviorist paradigm and toward a nativist view: "It [my interest] simply shifted from what people learn to what they are born knowing. I now take more seriously than I once did the possibility that behavior is not very malleable. It might be that while human-beings learn quickly they do not modify their behavior as a result" (A. Wolf n.d.: 28–29). Without taking into consideration how the child's mind works (which is similar to the SCS framework), here my predecessor resorted to the strict dichotomy of learned versus inborn knowledge. In contrast, many cognitive anthropologists today have come to view this as ultimately a false dichotomy (Boyer 2018).[11]

I find the cognitive neuroscientist Stanislas Dehaene's book, entitled *How We Learn: Why Brains Learn Better than Any Machine … for Now*, helpful for understanding the basic concepts of nature and learning: "Pure learning, in the absence of any innate constraints, simply does not exist. Any learning algorithm contains, in one way or another, a set of assumptions about the domain to be learned" (Dehaene 2020: 24–25). Dehaene's definition of learning applies to multiple levels of empirical reality: "In cognitive science, we say that learning consists of forming an internal model of the world. Through learning, the raw data that strikes

[10] The Finnish anthropologist Edward Westermarck (1894, 1921) posited, in *The History of Human Marriage*, that siblings who have close physical proximity during childhood are expected to experience sexual indifference toward one another.

[11] The debate on innate and acquired characteristics of biological organisms has a long and complicated history; for a review, see Griffiths and Linquist (2022).