

A Probe into the Profile of Tom Sawyer in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*

Shuqin Li

Qingdao University of Science & Technology, Qingdao, China

Abstract—*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is one of the Mark Twain's magnum opuses, who was an outstanding representative of critical realism literature in the late 19th century in America. From the perspective of a naughty child Tom Sawyer, he ruthlessly castigated and ridiculed the boring life, the ridiculous hypocrisy and the backward and deformed education system in the south area of America in the 1850s and 1860s. The rebellious image of Tom Sawyer achieved something in common with the critical tendency in this work. This paper firstly expounds the relationship between the changes of the outlooks on children and the historical development of the image of naughty children from the angle of outlooks on children. Then some theoretical issues concerned with naughty children are discussed from the perspective of naughty children and playing spirit. Finally, the significance of Tom Sawyer who was created as a naughty child is explored.

Index Terms—Tom Sawyer, naughty children, theoretical study

I. INTRODUCTION

Naughty children have become one of the important themes in world children literature with its special charm. Naughty children are depicted from the aspect of children themselves and are usually free from any restraints, which are filled with naive fantasy and indulgency. Works of naughty children are most appealing to young readers and have a strong spiritual impact on adults, who are usually restricted by various rules and social norms. Works of naughty children are truly created from the perspective of children themselves.

From Tom Sawyer in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* to Huckleberry Finn in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, from Peter Pan in *Peter Pan* to Nicolas in *Le Petit Nicolas*, from Pippi in *Pippi Longstocking* to Emil in *Emil Lönneberga*, a group of elves are brought to the world. On the one hand, they are full of vitality, challenging the existing social norms and education system without any scruples. On the other hand, they are brave and kind-hearted, full of sense of justice. They create a new life and a new world that are filled with vibrant passion and vigor. Children love them and long to become Hercules or adventurers, catching thieves, taking adventures and playing truant. They are little heroes in kids' eyes. They are naughty children.

The love of and interest in naughty children has become the greatest motivation of my further research. The initial worry is it lacks new ideas, but my supervisor encourages me and gives me generous help in the structure of my paper. Later in the phase of opening report, the subject is also approved by other professors, which provides me with great motivation and confidence.

II. CHAPTER 1 EXPLORING THE BACKGROUND OF "NAUGHTY CHILDREN" LITERATURE--THE CHANGES OF CHILDREN VIEW

From Tom Sawyer in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* to Huckleberry Finn in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, from Peter Pan in *Peter Pan* to Nicolas in *Le Petit Nicolas*, from Pippi in *Pippi Longstocking* to Emil in *Emil Lönneberga*, a group of elves are brought to the world. On the one hand, they are full of vitality, challenging the existing social norms and education system without any scruples. On the other hand, they are brave and kind-hearted, full of sense of justice. They created a new life and a new world that are filled with vibrant passion and vigor. Children love them, longing to become Hercules or adventurers, catching thieves, taking adventures and playing truant. They are little heroes in kids' eyes. They are naughty children.

In the history of British and American children's literature, there are two opposite trends in children's literature writing. The *Britannica Concise Encyclopedia* categorized them into two major types: one type's purpose is self-improvement or knowledge accumulation, and the way of writing is realistic and rational; the other's purpose is entertainment and edifying, the way of writing is imaginative. The former emphasizes the education value of children's literature and the latter focuses on inspiring and satisfying children's nature of imagination. The former can be regarded education-oriented and the latter children-centered, so the first type tends to take education as the ultimate purpose of children's literature writing and the style is didactic, while the second type takes children as the center of writing, valuing their life appeal. In education-oriented literature, most of the protagonists are obedient and disciplined, behaving like a grown-up. However, in children-centered literature, most of the heroes are naughty and rebellious (Yi Lexiang, 2007). From the respect of literature history, naughty children did not exist in children literature from the very

beginning. This theme has undergone historical development.

The Puritans in Britain in Middle Ages believed that the nature of human is evil and children are born sinful, so any nature of children needs to be restrained and children should be educated and lessoned. This wrong and ignorant view is still accepted in the 19th century. For example, psychologist Sigmund Freud in the 19th century thought that children are “a warehouse storing all kinds of instincts and desires”, they are “full of seething lusts” and “the inner self of a child is evil”. For people holding didacticism and education doctrine, naughty children who are full of “seething instincts and desires” and “the seeds of blind impulse” are undoubtedly very dangerous so they need to be reformed. Only the obedient good children who are educated and grow up with adults’ dominant supervision will become ideal successors of the future society. The results of this kind of education and reforming will be just as Rousseau (1978) pointed out, “they will lead to some premature fruits which are neither plump nor sweet, and will soon rot. They will become young doctors and senile children”.

The Renaissance in the 16th century eulogizes human value and dignity. This enlightened new outlook of life gave the view of “children are born sinful” a heavy blow. In the 17th century the western capitalist society entered a rational Age of Enlightenment. British educator John Locke proposed famous “theory of blank slate” in his book *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. He believed that children’s spiritual world is a white slate when born into the world, which gave a further heavy blow to the “original sin theory”. French Enlightenment thinker Rousseau in the 18th century pointed out: “we regard it as indisputable truth, that is, the initial impulse of human’s nature has been always correct, because there is no innate evil in human mind. We can figure out how and from where an evil enters people’s minds.” Rousseau believed that children have naturally endowed impulse since born and this impulse is not evil. He advocated natural educating, acknowledging the independent value when children are at their childhood period. Rousseau is hailed as the first person of “reading children”. In the 19th century, famous educators such as Froebel also expressed similar viewpoints. German educator Froebel used to appeal: “Mother, develop children’s ability of playing games. Father, defend and guide children’s games”. He also advocated educating children in a natural way. Influenced and guided by this progressive view of children, the education-oriented view in European children literature gradually declined from the early 19th century to the 1870s. In the 20th century, American educator John Dewey put forward children-centered view in a more clear way. He compared students as sun, suggesting teachers turning around students and education being conducted on the basis of following children’s natural instincts. It is in the 20th century that “naughty children” literature began to emerge in large numbers.

It can be seen, naughty children literature is closely related with the children view in that age. Knowing, understanding, appreciating and praising children’s naughty nature is entirely different from the view of repressing and destroying children’s naughty nature. The former is a progressive and modern view of children, but what are reflected from the latter is deep-rooted disdain, ignorance and diaphragm to children’s values and inner world. The flourishing of naughty children literature in the 20th century is an essential reflection of the rise of the modern view of children.

III. CHAPTER 2 EXPLORING THE NAUGHTY CHILDREN CULTURE: SOME THEORETICAL ISSUES RELATED WITH NAUGHTY CHILDREN

A. *Wild Growing: The Naughty Children in My Eyes*

“Let children grow like wild flowers” –Bing Xin

“When children are too young to cause damage, we should follow his natural instinct and allow them to live a life that the barbaric ancestors lived in the far ancient time in their imaginary realms.”— [United Kingdom] Bertrand Russell

The ancient and modern philosophers, educators and psychologists home and abroad brought a lively and wild child image in front of us. For instance, French Enlightenment thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the 18th century pointed out that “children are not evil or ignorant, instead, they are perfect forms representing human potential”. In the 20th century Italian preschool educator Maria Montessori believed that a child had “instincts of creation, active potential and he can construct a spiritual world based on his environment”. It is the “children’s secrets” that were found by him. In the Ming Dynasty in China, Wang Yangming considered that “the natural instincts of children were preferring playing to being restrained”. And Lu Xun wrote that “a child is adorable, he may think of the space out of the star and the moon, the underground situations, the usage of flowers, the languages of insects, flying to the sky and diving into the ants’ nest...” In a word, one of the core characteristics of children culture is their naughty nature, which coexists with children. The spiritual features of naughty children are as follows: vibrant, energetic, enjoying themselves to their hearts’ content

The games of children are spontaneous and free. Naughty children are children who are fond of playing. Children grow up healthy and strong day after day in the games. Their abilities to think, to act and to coordinate the hands and the eyes gradually develop. They grow up little by little in their life of playing games and get to know themselves and the world.

- Curiosity, being fond of taking risks and craving for knowledge

Naughty children have their own philosophy. They are full of sense of freshness, curiosity and confusion towards this world. In terms of naughty children’s natural instincts, they are probers who are filled with the spirit of exploring and they are the discoverers of the world.

- Having sense of justice, being sympathetic and against injustice

Naughty children who are seemingly trouble-makers are actually full of real sense of justice and are sympathetic to and concerned with others.

- Resisting the existing rules made by schools, society even families

The essence is their courage to break the existing unreasonable rules and establish a new world. Naughty children are the rebels. Various rules and pressures from families, schools and societies such as what must be done, what must not be done, no fighting noisily, being polite and behaving themselves often greatly oppress naughty children. But the free imagination and creativity in the natural instincts of naughty children always try to break away from this restraint, wanting to pursue their own sky in their childhood. They do not want to become obedient premature children under the wings of adults. They long to be naughty in a justified way.

- Having their own judgments, being courageous enough to face problems and solve them, actively exploring and thinking about the outside world

"Experience is not to undergo some things statically. Its motivation is endless curiosity. By virtue of fearless courage, its process is to interfere the orders of external things personally, observe if the results are different from the original expectation and then to interfere and observe again until coming up with concrete conclusions or further setting up new rules. That is how scientists create and invent, and also how sages live their life. But it is children who most practice this in-depth experience by themselves fearlessly and endlessly". (Huang Wuxiong, 2009, p66)

Vibrant and energetic naughty children like experiencing and exploring the world and themselves by themselves. But it is castigated by some adults as mischievous, disobedient, naughty and trouble-makers, which is a great misunderstanding. With the vital bodies of development, naughty children need to experience and explore the world by themselves. When we really understand the true features of human being, the pattern and process of children's growing up and the natural instincts of children's courage to experience life, we will treat the so-called naughtiness and mischief of naughty children with open and tolerant minds.

A paragraph in Taiwan writer Huang Wuxiong's book *Childhood and Liberty* may provide reasonable explanations to the rationality of naughty children's spiritual features: "The true features of human being is the need to grow up and develop and the primitive creativity to meet the need. There is neither Kant nor Chomsky, neither good nor wickedness. Everything is waiting for developing and everything is for developing. All things on earth are developed and human beings are developed too. The relationship between human beings and all things on earth is developed and so is the relationship between people. There is no inherent good or evil, nor innate wisdom or fool. Each individual child is endowed with invaluable creativity which is waiting for growing up and being developed. These specialties facilitate the boundlessly vital and continuous interactions between human beings and all things on earth, and between people and people. By discerning situational characteristics, experiencing fearlessly and endlessly, closely observing and interacting with everything on the world, people get to know themselves and the world and further develop the world and themselves. These are the true features of human being. Humanistic education should return to these simple natures, save and exert the original creative natures of children so that children could enter the human society with a high degree of autonomy to transfuse critical intelligence and vitality which are full of creativity into human civilization."⁶ Naughty children are vital bodies for development. The shortcomings such as "loving playing, being naughty, obedient, making trouble" etc. are nothing but a part of the developing process, which are the most natural for naughty children and have nothing to do with good or evil. Only by developing autonomously, can naughty children grow naturally and independently in this period and get to know and develop themselves and the world.

To sum up, the author believes that the spiritual features of "naughty children" have essentially reflected the spiritual philosophy of children, which are inherent and a natural release and indulgency of children's disposition. It is a reflection of the original vitality and creativity had by children and has essentially reflected the life and spiritual features of children. The most prominent feature of children is to break the social norms set by adults with their creativity and to reverse the existing traditional daily life rules in order to actively and independently pursue their dreamed life ideals and establish their own spiritual world that is rich in individualities. This kind of growing will facilitate individuals to grow healthy and strong spiritually and become optimistic, confident, imaginative, creative and independent persons so that they can march towards the future world with light-hearted attitudes, carefree courage and generous confidence when faced with difficulties in their life.

B. *Naughty Children Children Loving Playing: Naughty Children and Playing Spirit*

Games are children's entire life. Games are pure life and life is pure games. Games have become the focus of naughty children's life when they are in a period that is the closest to nature and the most carefree stage of life.

- Playing spirit is to let kids play. When one year old children just learned to walk, they would walk around the room or even circle around, and then smile. They would take out the TV remote control carefully from the basket and give it to you, and then take it away from you and put it back into the basket. They would drag the small stool just bought by mum and constantly walk back and forth in the room without feeling tired, and they are very attentive to their walking, just like a porter's serious attitude to his work. When 3-year-old children play in the park, they would use the little forklift bought by mums to shovel sands into it, and then pour out the sands from the forklift and begin another round. When adults accompanying them feel so bored about it, they still enjoy themselves. Children would also like to throw

the tumbler on the ground once and again to see if it would fall down finally. Children would lie on their stomach to blow the frog folded by paper time and time again to see how far they can blow it. Even when children are old enough to go to school, they still enjoy playing at their will without any restraint. They prefer playing at school and after school. The best thing for them is to have holidays every day. Playing is their entire life. In their spiritual world, playing is what they are supposed to do and what children are willing to do. Perhaps it is human being's instinct, that is everything originates from playing games.

Children grow up every day robustly while playing games. Children's abilities to think, to act and to coordinate hands and eyes are slowly developing. They grow up day after day while playing games, getting to know themselves and this world. The only requirement of the world for them is to play games to their hearts' content. This may be a bestowment given to human beings by God, which allows human beings to play as much as they like in their childhood. The significance of games for children is just "Game is a kind of development activity executed by an individual to spontaneously exploit their own potential. It is the externalization of subconscious activities of the individuals who are in the detached state. Life is active; children spontaneously assume the job to explore their innate resources when there is no any external pressure, external or utilitarian purpose—this is game."⁷ Naughty children love playing, enjoy playing; they play in a naive and unrestricted way. In a great degree, naughty children are children who are fond of playing. Letting go of children to play is undoubtedly more in favor of the growing-up of children.

IV. CONCLUSION: FOREVER TOM SAWYER

Two types of outlooks on children are present ever since the ancient times: one is to look down children and consider them as innocent. So they must be educated and listen to adults unconditionally. The other is to admit the independent value of children. So they are allowed to grow up in their own spiritual world. It is our responsibility to know and discover children. Only with this children view can we become people who respect, cherish and even admire children. In their eyes, children are explorers, dreamers and adventures. Children can not be counted as children without games, curiosity, dreams, which are the entire life of children. Naughty children are the truest children. Every child has the period of naughtiness in their childhood.

Russel believes that reality is important, so are dreams. As long as children are materially content, they discover that dreams are funnier than reality. In their dreams, children have the authority of a king, while in reality, he has to obey many rules, such as going to bed on time, etc. Dreams are the liberation of children. Dreams help children freed from the restraints in reality. Naughty children bring their dreams into full play. Naughty children break away from the restraints of reality with their actions and show the freedom and imagination in their childhood life. On the behalf of naughty children, we should protect their dreams and encourage them to develop their dreams, so we will receive surprising results.

The paper is written from the children view. Children are seeds of vitality and they are works of nature. The growth of children can not be free from adults' education. But what is the nature of education? To accept their natural instincts and encourages their free development with individuality or to interfere with their growth and ask for agreement between adults and children. In fact, most adults follow the latter way of education. They assume that children should be disciplined strictly so they won't cause any so-called troubles. Naughty children are not welcome in their eyes. This is the reflection of "adult-centered" education. On the contrary, the paper is based on "children-centered" education. It welcomes the naughty children with admiration and appreciation. The whole essay discusses the connotations of naughty children and some theoretical aspects of naughty children, and then moves onto the emphasis of children view in the works of the *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* written by Mark Twain.

Mark Twain created the positive character of Tom Sawyer and his friends with love and care. Tom is growing up, who is naughty, plays tricks, but at the same time is generous and helpful. He hates the boring doctrine in Church, dislikes the uninteresting life at school. He hopes to become a pirate and leads a fresh exciting life. He stands out at the critical moment and behaves with a sense of justice, which is totally different from the cowardly good children. He is bored with the boring life in his family and at school, so he goes on adventures with his friends and decides to become leaders of pirates. His colorful life has won the envy of countless readers, who makes other boys whitewash for him with his wit and takes his friends on adventures. In this classical work, the liveliness of children is in sharp contrast against the boring old life. Huck is another image of naughty children, who never goes to school but owns a brave heart. The typical image of Tom is embodied with not only the historic value but also a reflection of the progressive children view.

Undoubtedly, naughty children are acceptable to our present social mainstream. As far as childhood is concerned, the existence of naughty children is reasonable.

In the preface to this book Mark Twain wrote that "Although this book is an entertainment reading mainly for boys and girls, I hope it will also be popular with adult men and women. Because one of my purposes of writing this book is to try hard to help adults happily recall their childhood life, their feelings, ideas, conversations and absurd things sometimes done by them." It can be said that *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is not only an excellent children novel, but also a prominent adult novel. The image of Tom Sawyer as a little American country naughty boy is loved by children and adults all over the world. His dynamic and natural vitality arouse resonance from children. Mark Twain presented his own childhood life with such a classic image and also expressed children's aspirations. He is on children's side, and

he is just a person who on the one hand has not grown up and is full of innocence and on the other hand keeps being critical to the reality.

Innocence forever seeks for dynamic and natural power of life and it will forever like Tom Sawyer, such a true image of naughty children. There are thousands of Tom Sawyers in the world. In each of our childhood, we are eager to take adventures, play tricks and become pirates with him. In this sense, Tom Sawyer is forever.

REFERENCES

- [1] Huang Wuxiong. (2009). *Childhood and Liberty*. Beijing: Capital Normal University Press.
- [2] Jean-Jacques Rousseau. (1978). *Emile Ou De L' Education*. Beijing: Commercial Press.
- [3] Liu Xiaodong. (2003). *Philosophy of Children's Mind*. Nanjing: Nanjing Normal University Press.
- [4] Wang Baoxing. (2008). *Twelve Lectures on Western Education*. Chongqing: Chongqing Press.
- [5] Bakhtin. (1998). *Rabelais and His World*. Shi Jiazhuang: Hebei Education Press.
- [6] Qian Zhongwen. (1998). *Collected Works of Bakhtin*. Shi Jiazhuang: Hebei Education Press.

Shuqin Li was born in DongZhi county, China in the year of 1977. She received her master degree in linguistics from China Ocean University, China in 2012.

She is currently a lecturer in the School of Foreign Languages, Qingdao University of Science and Technology, Qingdao, China. Her research interests include linguistics and literature.