

The Disappearance of Nursery Rhymes—An Exploration of the Alienation of Children's Songs in the New Media Era

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Abstract: *Under the influence of new media and communication platforms, Chinese children's songs in the 21st century have undergone significant alienation. Adult-oriented, pop-music-like, and media-driven audiovisual performances have replaced traditional children's songs, becoming a popular online cultural phenomenon and social problem among teenagers. This divergence from traditional children's musical aesthetics is increasingly controlled by the algorithms and big data of information dissemination platforms in family, school, and social settings. This not only distorts children's nature but also turns teenagers into free entertainment laborers for the platform industry through various motivational online participation. The alienation of children's songs, the alienation of educational dissemination, and the alienation of children's roles must be taken seriously. The disappearance of children's songs is a warning of the disappearance of Chinese children's childhood, which is not only detrimental to the aesthetic education and mental and physical health of teenagers but also to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the realization of the Chinese Dream.*

Keywords: Children's songs; New media; Alienation.

1. INTRODUCTION

2025 marks the 80th anniversary of the victory in the War of Resistance Against Japan and the World Anti-Fascist War. The critically acclaimed film *Nanjing Photo Studio* borrowed from the "City Gate Ballads" popular in the Yangtze River Delta, Sichuan-Chongqing, and Yunnan regions, creating a powerful and memorable artistic impact. However, in contrast, children's songs, especially those with traditional, ethnic, and folk characteristics, are increasingly distant from the daily lives of contemporary Chinese children, becoming unfamiliar texts distorted within films, music textbooks, and literary works. Simultaneously, millions of netizens and organizations, empowered by technology, are disseminating short videos featuring children singing on social media platforms like Douyin, Weibo, Bilibili, and other short video platforms, driven by their own motives and purposes. However, these widely shared, liked, and commented-on performances are not centered on children's songs or nursery rhymes; instead, they are overwhelmingly adult-oriented, pop-music-influenced, and media-driven audiovisual entertainment. At a time when relevant national departments are emphasizing aesthetic education for youth, this new media cultural phenomenon undoubtedly warrants vigilance and timely research.

In his influential media criticism trilogy—*The Disappearance of Childhood* (1982/2015), *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985/2011), and *Technopoly: Culture Surrenders to Technology* (1992/2007)—Neil Postman revealed the all-encompassing erosion of human culture and daily life by media, particularly television, which he so vehemently abhorred in his time. The result is a clear distinction and separation between adults and children in the commercial sphere within the practice of mass and ubiquitous entertainment, exemplified by film rating systems. Society's protection of children and the media's distortion of them not only led to the disappearance of childhood but also to the development from a "culture of tool use" and a "culture of technological domination" to a "culture of technological monopoly." If we place Neil Postman's thoughts and concerns within the context of the current era where new media, smartphones, communication technologies, and mobile networks more comprehensively dominate individual and collective life, the question of how new media and platform industries have altered human society's understanding of nursery rhymes urgently needs research and critique. This is because the disappearance of nursery rhymes serves as a serious warning about the erosion of childhood for Chinese children. Therefore, this article will, under the logic of critiquing platform capitalism, explore how nursery rhymes in the new media era have been forced to surrender to technology and offer possible coping strategies, examining their discovery, alienation, and disappearance.

2. THE DISCOVERY OF NURSERY RHYMES

Nursery rhymes are not a cultural form or art style that arose naturally in human society. Like the concept of children, they are historical facts that were conceptualized in the process of human civilization. For example, Neil Postman pointed out the invention of the concept of children in the context of Western society:

"Children are the living message we send to an era we cannot see... Culture can certainly survive without the social concept of child. Childhood, unlike infancy, is a social product, not a biological one... We must not confuse social facts with social concepts. The concept of childhood is one of the great inventions of the Renaissance, perhaps its most humane one. Childhood, as a social structure and psychological condition, emerged around the 16th century, along with science, the independent nation-state, and religious freedom, and has been refined and nurtured to this day." (2009: 162-163)

Echoing Neil Postman's interpretation, scholars both at home and abroad have reached a consensus on the construction of the concept of children in the Chinese context—the discovery of children. This means that the concept of children in China is not a result of historical evolution and accumulation from ancient times to the present, but rather a discovery and emergence of the cultural concept of children within China during the 20th-century New Culture Movement, influenced by Western modern literature, culture, ideas, and social practices. Modern Chinese literature played a crucial role in this concept construction process (Wang Lijun, 2009; Xu Lanjun & Andrew Jones, 2011; Wang Hao, 2012; Fang Lijuan, 2015, etc.).

Xu Lanjun (2011) meticulously traced the historical construction background of Europe, America and Japan. For example, Karatani Kōjin proposed in "The Origin of Modern Japanese Literature" that "the so-called child is not a substantial existence, but a methodological concept" (2006:124). Carolyn Steedman (1998) emphasized in "Strange Misplacement: Childhood and the Concept of the Human Mind, 1780-1930" that children are discovered and created for the individual to have "history" and "depth". In particular, Freud created concepts such as childhood and the unconscious for the discovery of individual subjectivity. In her book **Configuration: Children, Bodies, and the World** (2002), Claudia Castaneda (2002) "takes the premise that children are a discourse system of various cultural constructions, and examines the construction process of the concept of children within a major, transnational cultural and political power network ... The formation of the concept of children is the site where numerous value systems come into play: as an existence that is always in a state of 'becoming,' 'children' can become a reflection or re-creation of the adult world. 'Children are adults in the process of becoming,' not yet complete but with the potential to become 'adults.' It is this intermediateness, mutability, and potentiality that becomes the source of the cultural value of the concept of 'children.' She connects cultural and regional 'child constructions' with the 'circuits of exchange' of globalization, and therefore frequently uses a spatiotemporal coordinate such as 'local-global' to discuss various child constructions in her analysis." (Xu Lanjun's summary of Claudia Castaneda's views, 2011:2-3)

Wang Hao elaborated on his views regarding the discovery of Chinese children in light of the New Culture Movement and literary phenomena:

"The 'discovery of children' is a multi-dimensional and three-dimensional concept... The specific views on children included in the 'discovery of children' are that children are independent individuals, completely individual; children have independent personalities, thoughts, and feelings... More importantly and fundamentally, the 'discovery of children' is a historical and cultural phenomenon, as well as a social trend with a certain influence... The views on children generated by the 'discovery of children' are a product of modern civilized society. To a certain extent, these relatively scientific insights or understandings of children are also a manifestation of China's modernization process. Because modernization, most fundamentally, is the modernization of people's concepts, and the modernization of children's concepts is the most essential and thorough manifestation of modernization... The 'discovery of children' as a manifestation of children's concepts and as a historical, cultural phenomenon and a social trend are all unified." (2012:16)

Therefore, the emergence, construction, and formation of the concept of "children" represent new insights and phenomena regarding young children in human society, including Chinese society, during the modernization process. It is a product of the evolution of human civilization and social culture. So, what about children's songs? Are they also a similar cultural phenomenon and social trend discovered during the modernization movement? The answer is yes—children's songs were also discovered by the New Culture Movement and subsequently invented by modern musical aesthetics, performance styles, and art forms. Zhao Jingshen, Che Xilun, and He Zhikang clearly stated this in their 1963 work, **Materials on Ancient Children's Songs**:

"The term 'children's song' only became widely used after the start of the folk song movement during the May Fourth Movement. In ancient China, it was generally called 'nursery rhyme.' In some historical documents, other names have appeared, such as 'children's song,' 'baby rhyme,' 'children's song,' 'little children's rhyme,' 'children's language,' 'children's language,' and 'children's song.' The ancient term 'nursery rhyme' refers to folk songs sung by children, which is essentially the same as the definition of 'children's song' we use today. The earliest records of children's songs collected and recorded in ancient China can be found in historical works from the Warring States period more than two thousand years ago, such as 'Zuo Zhuan' and 'Strategies of the Warring States.' The first collection of children's songs compiled and adapted by an individual, 'Yan Xiao Er Yu' (1593, compiled by Lü Kun), appeared in the Ming Dynasty. Reformists and bourgeois revolutionaries in the late Qing Dynasty also used children's songs as a political propaganda weapon, creating many 'nursery rhymes' and 'primary school songs.' (1963: 1-3)

(1918-1925) led by Peking University played a significant role in the discovery, shaping, and birth of Chinese children's songs. The inaugural address published in the first issue of the weekly magazine **Folk Songs** clearly stated the academic principles regarding the collection and research of folk songs: "Our association collects folk songs for two purposes: one academic, and one literary ... Folk songs are an important source of folklore. Our first purpose is to compile them for specialized research ... From this academic material, we will then select from it through the lens of literary criticism to compile an anthology of the national voice. This work not only highlights the hidden brilliance of the present but also inspires the future development of national poetry—this is the second purpose." Scholars led by Liu Bannong, Shen Yinmo, Qian Xuanton, Shen Jianshi, Zhou Zuoren, and Gu Jiegang participated in the collection and compilation of folk songs. By August 1926, a total of 13,908 folk songs from various regions had been collected, resulting in the publication of extremely valuable academic documents and folk materials, such as Gu Jiegang's **Collection of Wu Songs, Volume A**, Chang Hui's **Beijing Folk Songs** and **One Thousand Mountain Songs**, Liu Jing'an's **Hebei Folk Songs**, Bai Qiming's **Nanyang Folk Songs**, Tai Jingnong's **Huainan Folk Songs**, and Sun Shaoxian's **Kunming Folk Songs**. For example, the first volume of **Collection of Wu Songs, Volume A** contains 50 children's songs, making an immeasurable contribution to the inheritance and preservation of Chinese children's songs.

While the Peking University folk song movement was dedicated to academic research, Li Jinhui, known as the "Father of Chinese Popular Music," also held the title of "Father of Chinese Children's Songs and Dances," "discovering" and "inventing" Chinese children's songs through commercial practices in the music industry and products. Just as Li Jinhui's first Chinese popular song, "Drizzling Rain," was a fusion of traditional Chinese folk tunes and Western jazz, his classic children's song and dance dramas, such as "The Sparrow and the Child," "The Grape Fairy," and "Poor Qiu Xiang," while opposing traditional feudal ideas and learning Western compositional styles, insisted on incorporating local Chinese music into the creation of children's songs. For example, "Springtime Joy" was created by combining Hunan flower drum opera tunes with Western march rhythms. "Tiger Knocking at the Door," created in 1920 in "Fairy Sister," underwent various versions before finally settling into the classic children's song "Little Rabbit, Be Good," which is very familiar to the Chinese people. In this sense, it can be determined that the contemporary concept of children's songs is not a natural result of the centuries-old inheritance of traditional Chinese nursery rhymes, but rather a newly discovered form of children's songs in the early 20th century. This discovery was supported by three paths: internationalization's pursuit of modernity, academic pursuit of theoretical exploration, and folkloricization's demand for national identity. Driven by audiovisual and print media, Chinese children's songs were successfully "discovered." However, a century later, new forms of cultural dissemination brought about by new media have once again "discovered" "new" children's songs using new technologies. This "newness" has not brought positive and innovative paths to music and aesthetic education for Chinese children; instead, it has further blurred the differences in musical aesthetics between adults and children, distorting not only children's songs but also the ethical relationships between children and adults, society, and technology in the 21st century.

3. THE ALIENATION OF NURSERY RHYMES

Regardless of the academic perspective—whether from Hegel's idealist philosophy, Feuerbach's critique of religion, Marx's theory of alienation of labor, Lukács's theory of reification, or the Frankfurt School's perspective on technological rationality and popular culture—the core of alienation theory generally explores how the products of human creation (such as culture, technology, social structures, and labor) in turn dominate and oppress humans, leading to alienation and antagonism between humans and their own essence, with others, and with the world. Marx's theory of alienation focuses on the alienation of four relationships: the worker and the product of labor, the worker and the labor process, the worker and the species-essence of humanity, and the relationship

between people. Placed in the present, we can see that the social phenomenon of alienation still exists widely, and the technological progress, social changes, and accelerated pace of life brought about by information dissemination technology have given rise to new forms of alienation (Chinese Historical Materialism Research Association, 1983; Adam Schaff, 2015; Hartmut Rosa, 2018; Zhang Yibing, 2024; Kostas Axelos, 2024). By combining the concept of alienation with the development of Chinese children's songs over the past century and the current transformation of children's songs by information dissemination technology and platform industries, we can see the trend of alienation in children's songs in at least three aspects: the alienation of children's song works, the alienation of educational dissemination, and the alienation of children's roles.

3.1 The Alienation of Children's Songs

20th-century Chinese children's songs are abundant and diverse in style. Although after the founding of the People's Republic of China, the creation, selection, education, and dissemination of children's songs were quickly dominated by academics, and children's songs became an artistic creation model and practice for adults targeting children, a practice that continues to this day, as seen in works such as Fan Zuyin's (1990) **An Introduction to Children's Song Writing**, the Ministry of Education's Department of Physical Education, Health and Art Education's (2000/2001) **Children's Song Creation**, and Lei Weimo's (2014) **Children's Song Writing**. However, just as Pan Zhensheng, who won the title of "King of Children's Songs," emphasized that children's song creation must start from the child's perspective, Fan Zuyin expressed a similar view:

"In general, children's songs should have the following characteristics: (1) short and concise, lively and vivid; (2) rich in knowledge, imagery, action and fun; (3) rich in vivid environmental sense, profound artistic conception and warm emotion; (4) colloquial, nationalistic, easy to sing and remember, etc. Life is the only source of art. To write good children's songs, one must understand and be familiar with the lives of children and make friends with them. First of all, one must deeply love them in thought. One must be good at observing and analyzing their daily life and psychological state, and good at discovering and grasping the essence from ordinary and sporadic little things in life, giving them association and sublimation, so as to become useful creative material." (1990:12)

From the perspectives of adults as creators and children as the subjects of creation, countless classic works have emerged in the 100-year development of Chinese children's songs, such as "The Newspaper Boy's Song," "Wahaha," "Listen to Mom Tell the Story of the Past," "Let Us Row Our Boats," "We Are the Successors of Communism," "I'm in Tiananmen Square in Beijing," and "Where is Spring?" These popular children's songs are not only individual memories of childhood for generations but also collective cultural memories of different eras in Chinese society. The publication and distribution of song collections such as "The 1954 Award-Winning Children's Songs Collection," "The 1958 Children's Song Selection," and "The 1982-1986 National Children's Song Competition Award-Winning Songs Collection" have played an immeasurable role in shaping the collective consciousness and identity of Chinese children as important musical media and cultural elements. However, the development and changes of Chinese children's songs over this century also reveal their outcomes. On the one hand, after a century of development, local and regional nursery rhymes have largely given way to nationally unified children's songs. While actively strengthening the sense of community among Chinese children, this has weakened the national and folk characteristics of nursery rhyme culture. On the other hand, with the rapid innovation of media technology, media is also changing its role and function. In particular, the traditional media's role as "gatekeeper" has been greatly weakened in the new media era, and the social education of culture has also shifted in the game of multiple industrial powers and multi-directional communication forms. Regarding children's songs as a specific cultural form, new media has replaced family and school education in shaping the culture of new children's songs, becoming a powerful driving force overlapping the real and virtual worlds. This has not only driven the development of homogeneity in children's songs, but also, more importantly, the disastrous situation where the dissemination hegemony and capital hegemony of platform media have driven children into new entertainment laborers in the new media audiovisual era requires careful consideration.

Entering the 21st century, taking the songs included in Volume 4 (2000-2015) of "A Century of Classic Chinese Children's Songs" edited by You Jingbo (2018) as an example, children's songs such as "Snail," "Listen to Mom," "The Auspicious Three Treasures," "Invisible Wings," "Balala the Fairies," "Everyone's Happy Sheep," and "Where's Dad?" form a stark contrast in theme, content, form, and style with children's songs of the 20th century. Even compared with children's songs from the 1980s after the reform and opening up, such as "Mom's Kiss," "The Smurfs," "Little Grass," "Calabash Brothers," "Black Cat Detective," and "Songs and Smiles," it is clear that children's songs have undergone a significant transformation. The driving force behind this transformation is the result of the cross-industry integration and development of cultural and creative industries, entertainment

industries, and information dissemination industries, leading to new interpretations and positioning of children's songs. Over the course of a century, Chinese children's songs have shifted from their themes and functions of revolutionary tradition, patriotism, and ideological education to those of market commodities, cultural consumption, and platform entertainment. Not only have adult pop music been transformed into new children's songs, such as "The Lone Warrior," "The Most Dazzling Ethnic Style," and "Little Apple," but children have also been transformed into new child laborers for entertainment through the collusion of new media, social media, platform capital, and the traffic economy. Short video fragmented song and dance performances such as "Digging and Digging," "Learning to Meow," "Seaweed Dance," and "Love Like Fire" have become the most popular form of children's musical entertainment.

Borrowing from Marx's theory of alienation, we can reflect on the alienation of four relationships in Chinese children's songs from the perspective of the political economy of dissemination: children and children's songs, children and the creative process of children's songs, the essential nature of children's songs and children, and the relationship between children. Children's songs are no longer a conscious and beautiful creative act by humans, especially children themselves, but rather a controlled production under various social factors. The objectified production process of children's songs is distorted; even the traditional motivation of adults to create for children is placed under various purposes. The social and universal nature of children's songs is destroyed. The monotonous children's song and dance performances on new media are repetitive mechanical actions, lacking the childlike innocence that children and children's songs should possess, degenerating into big data driven by content and traffic economies. The innocent and adorable relationship that children should sing about in children's songs degenerates into a competitive relationship and economic interests in this alienated new media performance. The negative connotations of "internet celebrity" have not only been obscured, but also disseminated and educated through new media as a technological and instrumental rationality of "traffic equals justice." This is why countless individuals, families, and organizations hope that their children's song and dance performances on new media will become the next internet celebrity selected by big data.

3.2 The Alienation of Education

The social education function of media is one of its important values, but the dominance of new media and communication platforms has largely distorted the path and field of traditional education. Neil Postman's (1996) concerns about school education in **The End/Aims of Education** have been validated: driven by economic utilitarianism and technology worship, education has lost its inherent lofty and unified purpose—a shared belief or grand narrative that can unite society and imbue learning with a sense of sublimity. Pierre Bourdieu (1993) offers a more profound and forceful critique of education, focusing on core concepts such as cultural capital, habitus, field, and symbolic violence. Bourdieu argues that education is a dynamic and interwoven system of "social reproduction." Education is not a tool for eliminating social inequality, but rather the primary mechanism for replicating and legitimizing it. Family, school, and society/social field play different roles in this system, working together to complete this process. Pierre Bourdieu explains that family education is the initial source of cultural capital and habituation, school education is a seemingly neutral but actually biased converter, and social (field) education is the final stage for legitimization and reproduction. However, this process, which begins at home, is reinforced at school, and shaped by society, has had its logical order completely rearranged in today's new media era. It has become a reverse process: from the industrial behavior of social field education controlled by platform media algorithms, to the curriculum design of school education influenced by the lifestyle represented by media, to the cultural tastes promoted by the media influencing the daily life of family education. Nursery rhymes have been severely distorted and alienated under this platform capitalist industrial logic.

Platforms, platform media, and platform technologies have permeated everyone's lives. Big data and algorithms have made individual privacy an unadulterated raw material and resource for the information dissemination industry. Nick Srnicek (2016) points out that platforms are not a natural evolution of technology, but rather a new model of capital accumulation developed by capitalism to address a series of crises in the late 20th and early 21st centuries (especially declining profits). Their emergence is aimed at solving the problem of "how capital can continue to profit." Therefore, a platform is a digital infrastructure designed to facilitate interaction between two or more user groups. Its core business is data extraction, providing intermediary services, and leveraging network effects. However, the key issue is that local, national, and international commercial platforms at all levels are not primarily focused on serving the network needs of the public. Instead, in the process of data centralization and the move towards monopoly, platforms are becoming a new form of capitalism. Therefore, whether it is platform capitalism, digital capitalism (Christian Fuchs, 2021), or technological feudalism (Yanis Varoufakis, 2023), all of these concepts criticize the terrible hegemony of platforms that simultaneously exploit other industries and the

public.

The dominance of platform industries and technologies over other sectors is also evident in the evolution of the music industry. Since the 1980s, the international music industry has shrunk from the traditional top ten record companies to eight, five, and finally three (Universal, Sony, and Warner) through mergers and splits. Besides the profit-driven motives of the traditional music industry itself, the most crucial factor is that internet technology and dissemination methods, spearheaded by the internet, have fundamentally altered the production and consumption of music. New media and platform platforms have completely restructured the form and pathways of music over the past decade. A prime example is the near disappearance of traditional record companies from the musical lives of the Chinese public, such as China Record Corporation, Guangzhou Pacific Records, Guangzhou White Swan Records, Earth Records, and Taihe Rye Music. The only influential record company, Modern Sky, is known to artsy youth across the country primarily through its music festivals, while daily music consumption in China is almost entirely achieved through a few technological platforms like Tencent Music and NetEase Cloud Music. The collapse of Xiami Music, a subsidiary of Alibaba, illustrates the severity of competition in platform capitalism and demonstrates the economic value of music as a digital entertainment commodity on a platform.

The devastating impact of platform technology on music and culture is not only reflected in the monopoly and control of resources by a few giants in the information dissemination industry, but also in the alteration of music itself. The textual structure of music consists of four layers: lyrics, musical notes, visual text, and social text. However, with the intervention of short video platforms such as Douyin, Tencent Video, and YouTube in the music economy, as exemplified by Douyin's "See Music Project" slogan "See music, see you," the perception of music consumption has completely shifted from the traditional auditory experience of listening to the visual experience of watching and the physical perception of participating in new media performances. Visual text has become the sole core of music, music culture, and music consumption, relegating the psychological aesthetics and philosophical music of traditional Chinese music, as explained by Liang (1985), to the margins of the art and academic schools. The intrinsic connection between music and philosophy in the European context has also been fully analyzed in Nietzsche's (2009) discourse. Using the binary discourse of Apollonian and Dionysian, Apollonian and Dionysian spirits, and Apollonian and Dionysian impulses, Nietzsche argued that music is purely Dionysian art, emphasizing that true music is "completely without form," is "primitive pain itself and primordial echo," and is "the formless and conceptless representation of primordial pain." Regarding the connection between aesthetic appreciation and animality, Nietzsche (2009) linked it to the body and lust, emphasizing that bodily vitality is the driving force of art, and explaining the "induction of animalistic functions" and "animalistic pleasure and desire" in the aesthetic process. However, the animalistic vitality and unbridled nature that Nietzsche described is clearly not the wild and unrestrained musical performances on today's new media and social media, such as Yunnan Quan Mei's "Dinosaur Carrying a Wolf" or Lisu youth Cai Jinfeng's "I'm from Yunnan." What is more worrying is that such new media musical entertainment not only sweeps the adult world but also drags children into it, turning them into new child laborers in the traffic economy under the guise of new media and new children's songs.

3.3 Alienation of the Child's Role

In his critique of technological monopoly, Neil Postman (2007) points out that human culture has gone through three stages: from "tool-using culture" to "technocracy" and then to "technopoly." In the "technopoly" stage, technology ceases to be a tool serving culture; instead, it devours culture, redefines social order and human values, ultimately leading to the complete surrender of culture. Technology becomes a dictatorial ideology, brooking no questioning. Specifically in music, it has also gone through three stages: technology as a tool, technology as a style, and technology as a standard. The widely popular AI technology goes further; the emergence of AI nursery rhyme generation models means that the creation of nursery rhymes is not only constrained by the profit demands of the information dissemination industry but will also be forced to abandon the most basic and important humanity in music, allowing technology to simulate human spiritual needs and cultural tastes. Regarding the cultural relationship between children and nursery rhymes, we can see that the role of children has also undergone three stages of transformation: as a discovered child, as an educated child, and as an exploited child. Nursery rhymes have become a musical commodity striving to reach a wider market, with children, as playbours, falling into the traps of "microtasking" and "labour without labor." Phil Jones (2021) worries that in the pursuit of extreme exploitation and "infernalism," platform capitalism's "work without workers"—invisible ghost work—turns workers into temporary, disposable "data tools," whose labor is severely devalued and rendered invisible. Panos Kompatsiaris (2024) approaches the issue from the perspective of "curation," emphasizing that in the era of platform capitalism, "curation" has evolved from a niche cultural selection behavior into a core economic and

political activity. Platforms "curate" all aspects of public life through algorithms, interfaces, and business models, but this curation is essentially for the purpose of capital accumulation, reshaping the public's reality, desires, and social relationships. The activities of platforms in filtering, sorting, presenting, and assigning value to information, goods, people, and social relationships are all considered a form of "curation." The key point is that curation is no longer neutral. It has become a technology by which platforms exercise power, determining what is seen, what is hidden, what is given value, and what is marginalized. In short, children's song and dance performances and their widespread dissemination on new media are a kind of "curated" industrial practice and its consequences.

In response to this unfavorable situation, several targeted academic seminars have been held in recent years. The "Symposium on Promoting the Creation and Dissemination of Children's Songs in the New Era" in 2024 and the "Symposium on the Creation, Publication, and Dissemination of Children's Songs in the New Era" in 2025 offered suggestions on defining various problems and providing solutions from different perspectives. These included addressing issues such as the current state of children's song creation and publication failing to meet children's needs, establishing the creative concept that "children's songs are great literature," and reducing the dissemination of negative and vulgar children's songs. Scholars proposed that children's songs in the new era need innovation, especially in three key areas: first, upholding literary quality and avoiding turning children's songs into mere tools; second, emphasizing fun and incorporating a playful spirit; and third, focusing on linguistic interest and strengthening musicality. Furthermore, they advocated for the parallel development of traditional culture and contemporary characteristics. While contemporary children's songs interpret the inheritance of traditional cultural elements, they believe that while upholding the essence of tradition, children's song creation needs to keep pace with the times and innovate in terms of language, concepts, and artistic expression. Regarding the challenges brought by AI, scholars believe that AI technology still has significant limitations. However, these scholars' views overlook an important fact: the fundamental problem that needs to be addressed in children's song creation is not its theme, content, or form, but whether the traditional model of adults creating children's songs for children urgently needs to be adjusted to a new model in which children participate in the creation of children's songs, empowered by new media and AI technologies. Because, regardless of whether parents, teachers, and experts like it or not, today's teenagers' new media technology literacy far surpasses that of older generations. As long as teenagers cannot be physically isolated from smartphones, computers, and internet access, their new media entertainment creativity is an uncontrolled "savage" force, sufficient to counteract the education instilled in them by families, schools, and society, including children's music. Many scholars who criticize platform capitalism have repeatedly warned that if we are not vigilant against the pervasive control of platforms and new media over education, Neil Postman's (1996) lament about the end of education will no longer be just a warm and rational academic allegory, but a cruel and ruthless social reality.

4. THE DISAPPEARANCE OF NURSERY RHYMES

The disappearance of children's songs in the new media era is not the death of children's songs, but the isolation and alienation of musical works that align with the minds and artistic aesthetics of teenagers. Among the countless short videos and audiovisual works that families and schools, driven by their own motives and purposes, allow children to perform and share on new media platforms, parents and schools may have simply considered the social benefits of internet celebrities, traffic, and trending topics, failing to consider that teenagers are being transformed into new forms of child labor for entertainment, often with hidden work. This is because in the era of platform capitalism, actions like liking, donating coins, and forwarding—acts of "labor without labor"—possess economic value. Given the difficulty in changing the platforms and new media used for dissemination, for the long-term benefit of teenagers' aesthetic education and mental and physical health, the following issues need to be considered:

First, children need nursery rhymes that are appropriate for their age and mental development. This is not about deliberately isolating adult pop music from the lives of teenagers, which is practically impossible, but about striving to preserve a touch of childlike innocence in music for teenagers through education in families, schools, and society, rather than easily accepting the hegemony distorted by dissemination technology and media platforms.

Secondly, children's songs shouldn't be limited to a single model of adults creating for children; we should also explore co-creation between adults and teenagers. Many Chinese families have already provided teenagers with excellent music education, and teenagers are capable of participating and singing from their own perspective, thus reducing the alienation between children and children's songs.

Furthermore, regardless of their true intentions, the practice of parents, schools, and organizations using children as the focus of content dissemination is questionable. As a group requiring protection, the use of teenagers as new forms of child labor in entertainment on new media platforms needs to be clearly defined and explicitly prohibited, in order to resist the alienation of children's songs from their essential nature.

Furthermore, the critique of platform capitalism should not only target the platforms and technology themselves, but also include individuals and organizations that blindly exploit the platforms, clarifying the underlying motivations and mechanisms. As commercial organizations, platforms will only use various means to incentivize public participation, therefore relevant national departments need to formulate regulations to guide the boundaries that cannot be crossed in industrial practice and to supervise the social alienation of children and nursery rhyme production processes.

Finally, traditional local nursery rhymes and folk songs should be a requirement for local children's song education. New media has allowed popularized nursery rhymes, primarily from Europe and America, to transcend the boundaries of time and space and spread globally. This blurring of temporal and spatial dimensions has a certain negative impact on the real lives of young people. For the inheritance and promotion of traditional culture, local music, and national identity, it is necessary to help young people ground their music in local contexts, allowing relationships between children to flourish in the real world and resisting the alienation of these relationships by the online world.

In conclusion, the disappearance of children's songs is a serious social warning about the loss of childhood, which is highly detrimental to the building of a multi-ethnic and multicultural Chinese children's community. New media platforms and technologies should be tools to improve the lives of the public, including young people, and should not become weapons to further their own interests.

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