

# THE GENDERED VISUALISATION OF IDEAL CHILD CITIZENS, 1912-1916

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## Background

In the early 1910s, the reformers and politicians in China sought to reform the education system and attach significance to civic education as a means to cope with the national crisis. Particular emphasis was placed on “militant citizenry”(军国民教育, Jūnguómín Jiàoyù). In 1912, Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培), the Head of Ministry of Education, formally proposed five new education approaches for the new generation citizens. He argued that “in the Qing Dynasty, education that belonged to politics was called ‘militant citizenry’ in the mouth of educators”.<sup>1</sup> Due to persecution by powerful neighbouring countries, in order to defend itself the new Republican China had to continue this ideological trend, which it had inherited from the late Imperial Era.<sup>2</sup>

To reach the goal of shaping modern citizens, educators published images through the print media. This was an intuitive and child-friendly way to spread the concept and connotation of good citizens. The new style of civic education requires more practical guidance instead of merely repeating old-style book acquisition. Illustrations are useful in practical education and this highly visible channel magnifies the different way of being citizens for boys and girls within the context of military imagery. For example, in the images from children's textbooks and magazines, boys were generally seen wearing military uniforms, while girls were shown accompanying and taking care of the boys as well as doing household chores.

Because precision in the collection and analysis of original data is of the utmost importance for this study, I will rely primarily upon two sources for illustrative material. The first one is the *the New Republican Self-Cultivation* (共和国新修身教科书, *Gongheguo xinxiushen jiaokeshu*, NRSC), the predecessor of the civic textbooks of Republican China, which published by the Commercial Press from 1912 to 1916. The second major source is the children's magazines. I chose two of them, *Children's Educational Pictorial* (儿童教育画 *Ertong jiaoyu hua*, CEP) and *The Youth's Magazine* (少年杂志 *Shaonian zazhi*, TYM). Both types of materials engaged with dominant ideas of civic education in the early Republic and presented numerous visible models of ideal children's citizens in their content.

## Methods:

- This study draws on **political citizenship and cultural citizenship for its theoretical framework**. The two dimensions come from Robert Culp's “Synthesizing Citizenship” theory of modern China.<sup>3</sup> Culp argued that political leaders in the Republican China preferred civil republicanism which highlighted the citizen's individual contribution to local community then to benefit the public welfare of a nation rather than “liberal representative government”.<sup>4</sup> Without exception, children, who are being the raw material of future citizens of the nation, were encouraged to participate in collective activities and games by schoolteachers. Children's primers often set concrete tasks to ensure they may become members of larger political association in the future. These specific political practices were implemented in children's daily lives and were displayed through various cultural performances and semiotic languages. They were especially visible in the print media. Culp asserted that the cultural citizenship framework consists, at least in part, of the cultural performance of political ideas, such as costumes, rituals and consumption ways.<sup>5</sup> Further, Culp points out that the highly visibility of cultural citizenship magnifies the differences in the performance of citizenship between men and women.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the formulation of political citizenship invites a series of questions: Who is required and in what way to participate in the public services? Regardless of gender or class, do these citizens participate in the same services for the public?
- Regarding visual analysis, I will adopt **the methodology of semiology** which consists in close analysis of “analytical terminology” to interpret the concrete meaning of symbols and the imbrication of politics with culture.<sup>7</sup> Through decoding various emblems, this method can investigate of the citizenship construction of boys and girls and how the civic education lures children into active public services through the visual representation of ideal child citizen. **By decoding the visual symbols according to three themes - garment, games, and rituals – we may better understand how the grassroots political mobilization permeate through the everyday performance of children and engender the differing visual representation of boys and girls in the mass media.**

## Results: “Little Soldier-Citizens” and “Future Mothers of Citizens”

### Wearing Ideology: Fashioning Children's Bodies

#### Reformation of Boy's School Uniforms in 1910s: The Renunciation of Casual Wear

- The style of boys' suits resembled a **military uniform** which resonates with the conception of “militant citizenry”. Echoed the edict passed by the Central Education Conference: “Schoolchildren should all wear military uniforms, so that they will respect for the concept of the martial spirit in their hearts and feel anxious and alarmed about past weakness”.<sup>8</sup>
- I state that through the constant reproduction of the images of boys who are in military-uniform, especially in martial-type situations, such as war games and gymnastics, boys come to identify as **“soldier-citizens”**.

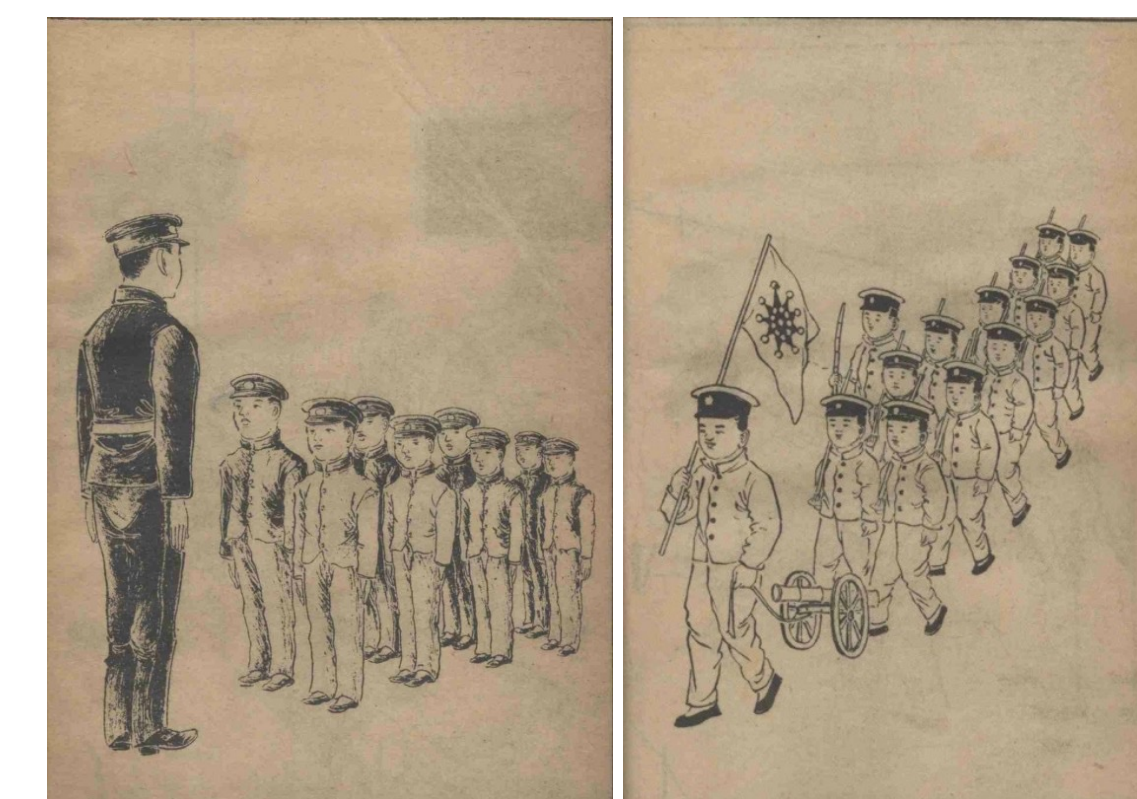


Figure 1 “Playground Rules”(Caochang guize, 操场规则), NRSC, vol.1, 1912  
Figure 2 “Martial”(Shangwu 尚武), NRSC, vol.2, 1912

#### Reformation of Girls' School Uniforms in 1910s: The Incorporation of Daily Clothes

- In 1912, the Ministry of Education of the Republic stipulated that girls should wear regular daily clothing in school,<sup>9</sup> which was a sign that the **family education** was brought within the scope of the new civic education and became a political goal.
- The different ways of updating uniforms underlines a fundamentally different model of girl citizenship from that of boys. It was **to be intelligent mothers who can raise a new generation of citizens**. Girls wear ordinary clothes to school to learn how to be a good mother and then return to their families in the same way. In this light, girls seemed to perform the same activities as boys in a “fair” public space, but they were actually learning how to be **wise mothers and wives** who can raise good citizens in modern families.

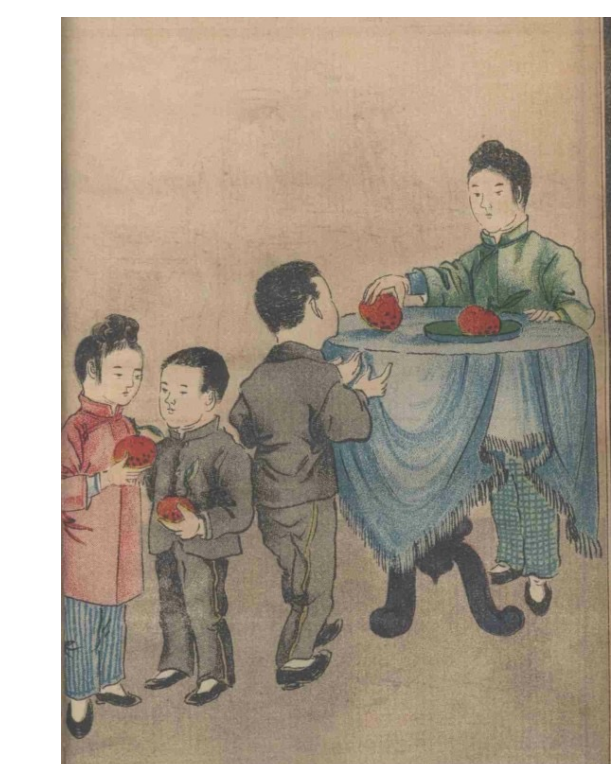


Figure 3 “Paly”(游戏 Youxi), CEP, no.40, 1914

### Making Citizenship Education Enjoyable: Children and Play

- In the early years of the Republic of China, games gradually became a significant method for child psychologists and educators to shape new citizens and provide us with a new perspective to observe gender identity in the construction of citizens.
- These games are typically based on the themes of **sports, war and sciences**, which suggest a “scientific turn”, differing conventional mode.
- They work to cultivate boys' consciousness of sacrifice and collectivism to be good soldier citizens who will fight for the nation. And they contribute to eliminate the fear of war and modern weapons for both boys and girls.
- However, girls were usually portrayed as the **“onlookers”, “favorers” and “iconic citizens”,** seeming less to be the direct participants in games. Educators aimed to cultivate new modern mothers from childhood who can impart martial, scientific, and technological knowledge as well as the ability to adapt to modern society to their children. This model replaced traditional maternal roles which were over-protective of children and involved imparting merely moral knowledge.



Figure 4 “Paly”(游戏 Youxi), CEP, no.40, 1914  
Figure 5 “Paly”(游戏 Youxi), CEP, no.44, 1914

### Performed Citizen in the Public Sphere, Ceremonies and Rituals

Civic rituals and ceremonies constitute a prominent template for cultural citizenship, which enacts citizens performing in the public sphere with “a highly visible way” by means of symbolic actions and performative utterances.<sup>10</sup> Children, especially at the school-age, are the vanguard participants in civic ceremonies since they are naive and easy to organize from school and deputise the young generation of nation. National Day (Double Tenth, 双十节 Shuangshijie) was the most important festival that aroused citizens' national sentiments in the first decade of Republican China.

Seen in the images below (Figure 6 and 7), National Day is formulated as new virtue in terms of child citizenship and performed as a large-scale and public cultural drama. In this performance, child citizens are both actors and audiences. They acted as national citizens with “public moral spirit” by wearing new styles of clothing and performing new Western rituals. These include eye-catching rituals rather than the old kneeling etiquette to the monarch, raising hats, hoisting the national flag, cheering, singing, and lantern processions.

However, the images of the girls do not appear in this carnival. I assume that the visual construction of rituals magnifies the male privilege and exposes underlying gender injustice. This turns the original “mass” carnival into a visible identity screening convention of citizens. Educators only coded boys into the privileged class in the images which supports to civic education within the scope of school education. This shares the political ritual grammar and symbols they should learn (Figure 8).



Figure 6 “Beijing National Day”(北京国庆大会 Beijing Guoqing Dahui), CEP, no.24, 1912  
Figure 7 “National Day 10 October”(国庆十月十日 Guoqing shiyue shi), CEP, no.46, 1914  
Figure 8 “Celebrating the Republic”(纪念共和 Jinian gonghe), *Children's Educational Pictorial*, No.38, 1914

## Main Argument:

This study argues that the establishment of different visual codes - school uniforms, role-playing, and the direct performance in new rituals – work to shape two types of civic images for children: “little soldier citizens” and “future mothers of citizens”. Those consolidate the androcentric construction of citizenship and promoted the family-centred ideas for female education in the 1910s.

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