

# Re-memorying McDull: Childhood, Adulthood and Hongkongness

Vivien Ying Tung Chan and Sing Cheung

Chinese University of Hong Kong ; University of Cambridge, UK

## Abstract

This study concerns the issue of implied dual audience as an increasingly prevalent topic in children's literature studies. Building on Katherine Rundell's (2019) view that great children's literary works are much more than representing "children [as] sweet or gentle", we use the *McDull* animated film series—produced and popularized locally in Hong Kong—as an exemplar to reconsider the question of target audience of children's texts. Adults might reread children's texts out of nostalgia or escapism, but certainly they would re-engage with these impactful childhood texts—which are read and construed differently as grown-ups.

A hugely popular mascot in 2000s Hong Kong, McDull—an anthropomorphized pig—has featured in comic strips, television programmes and films. Having entertained Hong Kong children of the 00s with its emblematic childlike characters, profuse Cantonese wordplay and loony depictions of daily trivialities, the film series also touched the hearts of many by its realistic portrayal of the struggle faced by grassroots citizens in Hong Kong: their anxiety of underachievement, bottom-line mentality at work and forced optimism in the face of deprivations.

This paper deploys what children's literature scholar Alison Waller (2017) terms "re-memorying" to re-nuance adults' relationship with *McDull*. This model illuminates the significance of childhood reading in identity formation throughout one's lifespan. Through recalling the experience of reading a particular children's book and rereading it as an adult, one may compare their current bodily and affective responses to the text with that in the past. While Waller's monograph discusses the adult's memories and reinterpretations of children's *books*, we believe that her approach is also helpful for exploring how adults reread children's visual texts. We therefore carried out a pilot study of Hong Kong adults re-memorying the *McDull* films which they watched in childhood. In semi-structured interviews, disparities are found between participants' childhood memories and their current perceptions of the films. While they asserted that, as children, they were amused by *McDull*'s representation of childhood, they now rediscovered the films' potential to evoke the hardship of living as adults in Hong Kong. We conclude that *McDull* instantiates how children's texts interact with individuals and allow for renegotiations of local identities.

**Keyword: adults reading children's literature, re-memorying, McDull, Hongkongness, affective responses, childhood memories**