



# Research on the Preschool Children's Audiovisual Programming in China: Current Status, Problems and Development Strategies

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**Abstract.** Preschool children aged 3–5 interact with audiovisual programs due to their unique cognitive traits. At present, there are many problems in the production of audio-visual programs for preschool children in China: the content of the programs is “overage”, the quantity is relatively small, and the form is single. Based on the interpretation of the current situation of audio-visual programs for preschool children in China, this study has conducted some in-depth analyses from the aspects of program production content orientation, diversified form innovation, platform operation transformation, program regulation, etc., in order to provide effective countermeasures and suggestions for the production of preschool children's programs in China.

**Keywords:** Preschool children · Audiovisual programs · Production strategy

## 1 Introduction

In 2007, CCTV urgently banned the broadcast of “The Legend of the Rainbow Cat, Blue Rabbit, and Seven Heroes”, which had once achieved a miracle in domestic animated film ratings in China, due to some of its plot being full of violence, intimidation, and other negative content. In 2013, a young child imitated the scene of “Roasted Sheep” in “Happy Sheep and Big Wolf” and severely burned two playmates. In recent years, incidents of injuries caused by children watching and imitating inappropriate program content have repeatedly appeared in the newspapers. As an important branch of children's television programs, preschool children's television programs are facing severe challenges in their development. The core of this article is to explore the current situation, problems, and development strategies of domestic preschool children's TV programs in China, which are so criticized.

## **2 Exploring Problems from the Current Situation: The “Internal and External Problems” Faced by Preschool Children’s Programs in China**

### **2.1 Preschool Children are Enjoying “Overage” Domestic Animation**

3–5 year old children are in a critical period of psychological and physiological development, and their cognition of external things is not yet mature. Once they exceed their cognitive scope, it is difficult to effectively promote their correct understanding of external things. Observations have found that many preschool children in China are watching domestic animated films that are not suitable for their age group. For example, the domestically produced animated film “The Adventures of Bears” is highly popular among Chinese children, and “fun” and “funny” are the most direct reasons for attracting children. However, some experts suggest that children over 10 years old should only watch. The reason for this is firstly manifested as a large amount of violent content. According to incomplete statistics, the film appeared more than 20 uncivilized languages within 10 min [1]. The tone is vulgar and often accompanied by retaliatory and offensive language, such as “stinky bear” and “I will chop you to death”. Secondly, the program orientation is imbalanced. Although the original intention of the film is to protect the forest and protect the natural environment, it is only a direction. The mental intelligence of 3–5 year old children cannot reach the level of understanding this advanced direction. They obtain intuitive cognition of things through graphics, colors, music, etc. The abstract meaning is difficult for them to understand. This type of “over age” domestic animation is far from in line with the cognitive habits of preschool children in terms of content arrangement, form details, and other aspects. There are also reasons why young children like to watch it: happy and humorous character positioning, relaxed and humorous story atmosphere, and fresh and exciting plot content always make them laugh heartily. At present, this type of “entertainment” rather than “educational” animated film is increasingly occupying the domestic animated film market. The “humor and comical” that preschool children see in an environment without parental guidance is likely to become “violence and ridicule” due to their lack of cognitive ability to distinguish. Although it is not denied that ‘entertainment is a rigid need for children’s programs’, when this ‘entertainment component’ is speculated from an adult perspective, the creator of this ‘entertainment principle ‘is adults, and this’ negative entertainment component’ erodes children with an irresistible attraction, it seems that ‘this changed taste’ of ‘entertainment’ needs to be reconsidered.

### **2.2 The Limited Number and Single Variety of Programs for School-Age Children and Their Underlying Reasons**

At present, the production quantity of TV dramas in China ranks first in the world, but there is a shortage of TV programs specifically provided for preschool children to watch. Because there is no special platform, the programs watched by preschool children often need to “share” resources with the programs of their brothers and sisters. For example, in the Children’s Channel of CCTV, only three educational programs, namely, “Wisdom Tree”, “Little Wisdom Tree”, and “tangram”, have been specifically targeted for preschool children to watch, elaborately creating educational programs for

preschool children, such as teaching children to recognize shapes and colors through games [2], Strictly follow the cognitive characteristics of children aged 3–5. Subsequently, provincial-level satellite TV also launched corresponding puzzle programs, such as Hunan Golden Eagle Cartoon TV's "Flying Children's Paradise". Despite the high quality of the programs, their popularity and popularity among young children are not satisfactory.

Discover many problems in programs that children enjoy. Firstly, there is a lack of precise age positioning. Due to the physiological and psychological differences among children of different age groups, it is unscientific to not clearly distinguish the programs they watch. There is currently a shortage of domestic animated films for children aged 3–5, especially those that are not suitable in terms of content and format. Secondly, there is a lack of excellent "educational entertainment" programs. Many excellent foreign programs and themes revolve around people or objects that young children often come into contact with, allowing them to unconsciously learn knowledge, and are generally popular among parents and children. For example, the content of origami plane" in "Peppa Pig" can bring laughter and education to children. However, domestic programs tend to depict heroic plots and have weak educational significance. The theme of maintaining justice and peace is more educational for preschool children aged 3–5 than they can accept. Once again, excellent original children's cartoons urgently need to be developed. The success of excellent foreign programs can provide learning and reference for domestic programs, but the original content cannot be blindly copied. For example, when the "Dora Who Loves Adventures" series of cartoons became popular worldwide, there were multiple cartoons in China with themes similar to "Little Girls Learning Language on Adventures". The production of children's programs in our country should be combined with the national conditions, conform to the characteristics of our children, and establish animation brands with local characteristics. For example, 'Big Head Son and Little Head Dad' is an excellent domestic animation that conforms to China's national conditions and depicts interesting stories about a family of three. It uses humorous techniques to teach young children to learn common life knowledge. Animations are the favorite program for preschool children to watch, but unfortunately, domestic animated films cannot meet the needs of this audience.

Tracing back to the source is related to the market operation behind the program. On the one hand, the production of preschool programs has put forward higher requirements for China's cultural soft power. Its production needs to be based on mastering the psychological cognitive laws of young children, and on the research of experts in various fields such as psychology and education. It emphasizes professionalism and high quality, and requires high-level and specialized talents who have a better understanding of the international and domestic markets for children's television program production. On the other hand, it is necessary to meet the economic strength and operational mechanism of high-quality production and high-cost production. Preschool children's television in China is a typical category of social welfare television [3], facing a group of young children who have no consumption ability. Due to the immaturity of China's children's television program market, the operation of most children's programs only stays in the "production broadcast" stage and has not entered the derivative development stage. Moreover, it is difficult for developers to bring substantial returns in the short term through their

initial investment. Furthermore, due to the single theme and simple content of preschool programs, investors are unwilling to invest due to concerns about no returns, resulting in a vicious cycle of some preschool program producers catering to the vulgar market in terms of program content and form in pursuit of economic benefits. Therefore, the transformation of institutional mechanisms is a more urgent objective requirement for the development of television production for preschool children in China.

### **2.3 New Media Bringing “Foreign Brands” to Impact China’s Preschool Audience Market**

Faced with the serious shortage of television programs for preschool children in China, the scarcity of high-quality programs, and the efficient and convenient dissemination of information in the era of all media, most parents have started using new media mobile terminals to play foreign preschool education audio-visual products as “companions” for their children’s enlightenment. In this era full of video games and iPads, this program suitable for young children has jumped out of the media category of “television” and become more diverse and actionable. Compared to the scarcity and weakness of domestic children’s homemade TV programs in China, most popular early childhood education products abroad combine entertainment and education, allowing children to learn knowledge through games, implementing the concept of “education through entertainment” throughout the program, designing program content based on children’s cognitive characteristics, avoiding content that is not suitable for children to watch, and unleashing their learning potential within the cognitive range that children can accept. And under the guidance of experts in multiple fields, we will form a comprehensive professional development path, create excellent brands, and expand our influence, which is precisely the scarcity of preschool audio-visual products in China. At present, popular preschool education programs in the early childhood audiovisual market include “Teletubbies” launched by the BBC’s CBeebies preschool education channel; “Little Einstein” launched by Disney Children’s Channel in the United States; The Penguin Family produced in Switzerland, among others; Czechoslovakia’s “The Story of the Mole” and others. When China’s children’s audiovisual products cannot meet the viewing needs of children and parents, these excellent “foreign products” ride on the “train” of new media mobile terminals and turn the attention of Chinese parents to these high-quality children’s programs, whose influence has far exceeded that of China’s self-made children’s TV programs.

Behind these excellent foreign children’s audio-visual programs lies the “covetous eye” of international media groups. Taking the example of “Dora Who Loves Adventure” launched by Nick Kid Channel in the United States, Nick Rodin is a subsidiary of Viacom’s “media giant”. Since its launch in 1995, “Dora Who Loves Adventure” launched by Nick Kid Channel has quickly become popular worldwide, and has been introduced and broadcasted by Oriental TV Children’s Channel in China. At this point, “Dora” is no longer a little girl with dark skin and lively personality, but a character image that carries American culture and English teaching, cultivating American parent-child relationships. Accompanied by the global popularity of the early childhood education animated film “Dora Who Loves Adventures”, not only has its story, characters, plot, American English, and other content deeply rooted in people’s hearts, but its toys, books,

and other derivatives have also earned a lot of money worldwide. If we don't magnify this success, we may not realize that "cultural imperialism" is rampant, which is a silent competition, and its audience is young children, who are at a critical age of understanding the external world and forming their own values.

### **3 From the Perspective of Content - Taking Language Education Children's Animation Products as an Example**

Below are five domestic children's language education programs, including "Chinese Pinyin Series for Children"; "Happy Paradise Children Learning Pinyin", "Harry Learning Pinyin (Legend of the Dragon Knight)", "The Adventures of the Strange Pinyin of the Bear Child", and "Pinyin Happy House", to explore the problems in China's children's television programs.

#### **3.1 Is 'Learning Knowledge 'Equivalent to' Preaching'?**

Playing is the most interesting thing for preschool children, and foreign excellent children's programs incorporate education into the content of programs mainly focused on playing, truly achieving the program production concept of "integrating education with entertainment". For preschool children, the dullness of language learning in language related programs makes it difficult for them to accept. At this point, it is necessary to amplify the appearance of "play" programs and weaken the dullness of language learning through joyful and humorous entertainment. Among the five selected animated films for early childhood language education, there are three that are dull in form and have low interest in content, including "Happy Paradise Children Learning Pinyin", "Children Learning Chinese Pinyin Series", and "Pinyin Happy House". These three animated films lack storytelling and have obvious preaching connotations. For example, in "Pinyin Happy House", the image of the little girl 'Lili Sister' is portrayed as a teacher, and children recognize Pinyin syllables under her guidance. Although background music and object images are used to help children deepen their understanding of each syllable, the entire program format is typical of "teaching" and "learning". For example, in the animated series "Children Learning Chinese Pinyin Series", children are also taught in the image of children as teachers. Although nursery rhymes and images are used to guide children to recognize syllables, there is still a preaching tone, often appearing as "What are you waiting for? Let's learn together. Although this type of children's animation incorporates techniques such as music and repetition, it has a strong teaching significance and lacks the most popular entertainment for young children, making it difficult to keep them interested in watching.

#### **3.2 Can You Understand Adult Language Usage?**

The study on "Sesame Street" concluded that language design in preschool children's programs should be as close as possible to the true speaking style and state of young children, manifested by the use of "babyish" speech style, which includes the use of

short sentences, simple colloquial vocabulary, dialogue that best reflects the true speaking voice of young children, frequent use of repetition and questioning, etc. [45]. For example, in “Teletubbies”, the dialogue between the characters of “Teletubbies” also extensively uses reduplicated words, modal particles, etc., to maximize the expression of the true speaking state of young children. The dialogue designer of “Sesame Street” also explicitly stated that using rigorous and serious language can make it difficult for young children to understand the story, and even intentionally strengthen nonverbal communication between characters, using slogans, visual humor, sound effects, and facial expressions to weaken the seriousness and professionalism of language [5]. However, in these five domestic animated films, adult vocabulary can often be found, such as the words “activating energy” appearing in “Harry’s Pinyin Learning (Dragon Knight Legend)”. For example, in “The Adventures of the Bear Child’s Strange Pinyin”, words such as “detection” have appeared, and the frequency of occurrence is relatively high in the plot with strong story content. Little does it know that young children’s understanding of these complex terms is seriously lagging behind.

### **3.3 Is There a “Violent” Element in Children’s Language Teaching Cartoons?**

Language or behavioral violence often occurs in these 5 animated films that teach young children Pinyin. This phenomenon is not simply an act or verbal offense, but a violent symbol that is imposed on people through the media through visual and auditory perception, and its audience is young children aged 3–5. Although its level of violence is far lower than the scenes of blood and brawl in adult film and television works, and the program content is mostly focused on pinyin learning, the unintentional display of violent details is impressive. For example, in an episode of “Happy Paradise Children Learning Pinyin”, it is described that various pinyin characters participate in a badminton game. In order to prevent the audience from making noise, one of the letter characters uses their racket to hit the audience and loudly scolds them to be quiet. For example, when the protagonist Pinyin Little Gardener in the film cannot recognize the Pinyin letters, other friends will hit him on the head and call him “stupid!”, and the program often uses sarcastic terms such as “stupid”. It is not difficult to see that the designer’s original intention is, on the one hand, to let young children relax and make them smile in the dull learning process; On the other hand, we want to use exaggerated body language of characters to effectively attract the visual attention of young children and enhance the attractiveness of the program. However, such detailed handling carries a clear violent color, and young children who are in the perceptual motor stage are prone to imitating their movements, which is extremely dangerous for their growth.

## **4 The Development Strategy of TV Programs for Preschool Children in China**

### **4.1 Grasp the Content Orientation and Knowledge Capacity of the Program**

Firstly, adhere to positive content guidance. We should make adhering to a positive orientation and emphasizing the responsibility of mainstream media the core of children’s broadcasting and television industry. Keeping up with the pulse of the times and the international trend, we will convey traditional culture such as history and traditional Chinese

culture to children in a fun and vivid way, promote their love and gradually establish cultural consciousness, and enable Chinese culture to be widely disseminated through popular and humorous media platforms. Through programs, we will convey positive and upward content, and artistically and personalized display of truth, goodness, and beauty. Secondly, adhere to the “child centered” orientation. As an important source of information for television, preschool children's programs in China should incorporate a “child centered” approach throughout the production and broadcasting of programs, emphasizing the enthusiasm, entertainment, education, and creativity of dissemination [6]. The program creation should conform to children's psychological and physiological characteristics, reflect children's positive mental attitude and emotion, and think and express in children's perspective and thinking mode to restore the most authentic ‘children's world’. Thirdly, ensure that the program content is clean and full. Since the 1980s, China has introduced multiple laws and regulations on the protection of minors' film and television content, but there is no scientific and strict regulation on the intake of educational information in children's programs. In order to return children's TV programs to a “pure land”, clear and specific requirements should be put forward. The program content should be designed in a way that is in line with children's cognitive and aesthetic characteristics, and the programming based on children's cognitive characteristics should be developed to accurately improve the communication power of TV programs to children.

#### **4.2 Diverse and Appropriate Performance Forms of the Program Are Distracting**

Enhance innovative program design and package children's programs with artistic forms of expression. The “artistic expression form” should highlight whether it allows children to hear and understand clearly, and whether it fits the unique cognitive characteristics of children. Firstly, ‘Play always outweighs education’. Playing is the first instinct of children. They enjoy creating happiness on their own, as well as with their parents and peers. Laughing and playing are their daily pleasures. It can be seen that children's television in China should return to instinct and bring their own joy to young children. As one of the creators of “Teletubbies”, Andrew Davenport found in his 5-year clinical research on children aged 0–5 that the process of connecting information in preschool children is not through specialized learning, but through imitation and accumulation, identification with social norms, laying a personality foundation, and preparing for future learning during the process of playing [6]. If we want to do a good job in China's preschool children's programs, we must break away from the conceptual framework of “teaching”, prioritize “play” before “education”, and strictly prevent preaching based education. Secondly, use a communication symbol system that is suitable for children. The development and production of programs should consciously cater to the cognitive characteristics of preschool children and adopt their “recognized” symbol system. Language symbols are generally manifested as the words of the program host and dialogue between program characters. It is easier to bring children closer to the audience by using children's language, and to use more familiar ways of speaking, such as short sentences, overlapping words, etc. Non linguistic symbols often refer to visual and auditory stimuli in a program. For example, screen colors, music, sound effects, etc. The visual display of these auditory symbols combined with visual symbols can form the most expressive form of the program.

### **4.3 Transformation of Program Platform Operation and Diversified Development**

Currently, children's programs in China should focus on the "four transformations" and the development of technology and industrialization. The 'four transformations' refer to the transformation from audience to users, from channels to platforms, from programs to products, and from formats to ecology. Specifically, in the past, the creation of children's TV programs was based on traditional television media, only watched on fixed channels, resulting in a single viewing method and lack of influence for children's programs, leading to the entry of China's children's program market by foreign media groups. Today, with the rapid development of technological revolution such as the Internet and big data, children's TV programs broadcast on single channel and fixed channel in the past can no longer meet the development trend of financial media, which forces children's programs and children's channels to carry out an all media transformation, develop from a single channel to the establishment of a program production and broadcast platform, aim at the target age level, and become deeper, narrower and more accessible. Package programs into products that interest young children, operate online and offline activities, and develop new platforms for program production and dissemination on Weibo, WeChat, Wevideo, and client platforms. That is, viewing preschool children's programs as independent products and restoring the original intention of television media to provide 'audio-visual entertainment'. [6] The development of preschool children's television in China should take "how to make the characters and stories in the programs resonate off the screen" as one of the program design concepts. At the beginning of the program design, marketing preparations should be made, program derivatives should be vigorously developed, and the brand industry chain of preschool children's programs should be expanded, Add the potential value of toy manufacturing and other related industries that accompany the program content to the program production and broadcasting, actively carry out cooperation with brand institutions with appeal in the domestic early childhood market, extend the added effect of the industrial chain through agglomeration effect, establish a long-term win-win model for cooperation among all parties, achieve the maximization of brand benefits for early childhood TV programs, vigorously enhance program brand assets, and make early childhood programs and their derivatives become the sustenance of the early childhood life circle, Cultivate a large number of loyal audiences for domestic children's programs.

### **4.4 Socialization of Children's Use of Media and Environmental Construction**

Firstly, regulate children's television viewing. Non mandatory is the biggest characteristic that distinguishes children's television education from family education and institutional education (such as schools and kindergartens). Given the lack of children's self-discipline and control, it is necessary to impose restrictions on the broadcasting platforms of preschool children's television programs, and to broadcast educational programs suitable for children's cognitive development on specialized public service broadcasting and television platforms or in a relatively independent and undisturbed audio-visual environment. At the same time, develop and improve a television rating system for parents or adults. Secondly, develop prevention and intervention measures for preschool children. Elaborate the construction of children's media literacy courses,



teach children the scientific and safe use of television, enable children to have a positive attitude and values, and help children acquire knowledge and develop skills from a specific level in the entertainment and joyful TV program environment. Establish a public education system in China's social institutions to prevent media violence, and carry out early intervention in children's television violence, making the "world" of children's television in China a better place. Finally, accelerate social construction related to the use of children's media. Effectively managing the screen usage habits of preschool children should focus on addressing parents' negative media attitudes and behaviors. By increasing childcare leave and other means, we should popularize scientific education such as successful family education and child psychology at home and abroad, promote the comprehensive popularization of scientific parenting knowledge, and help parents better understand the media, understand their children, and use media scientifically. Alleviate the helplessness and confusion of parents who have no time to accompany children in using media, better cooperate with children's growth and care work, effectively prevent social hazards such as media violence, and form a new pattern of joint management by all sectors of society.

## 5 Conclusion

In summary, audio-visual programs for preschool children in China should adhere to the principles of integrity and innovation in content, promptly address issues such as "over age" in program content, and always adhere to a "child centered" approach throughout program production. This will enable preschool children to enhance their cognition through education and entertainment, construct diversified program forms of expression, and implement the transformation of program platform operation, diversified program development, socialization of children's media use, and corresponding environmental construction. Provide suggestions and strategies for the sustainable development of preschool children's television programs in China, in order to promote the production mechanism of audio-visual programs for preschool children.

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