



Theatre for the very young(“Baby Drama”): Another happy-family-friendly Policy Jackie E. Chang

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According to Global Agewatch 2015, Japan is the 8th country in the world in Aging index while Switzerland takes the 1st. Among 1st to 10th Japan is the only Asian country and the others are all European. In Japan, 24.0%, the proportion of the under 14 yrs of the whole population of 1970s fell to 12.6% in 2015 and is expected to be fallen to 9.7% in 2050. The population of the over 65 yrs (38.8%) will be almost 4 times more than of under 14 yrs at the time. (Almanac of data on Japanese children 2017. P.35) Among fewer than 1 million births of Japan in 2016 鳥取県, 徳島県 and 高知県 show the lowest population of 0-4 yrs olds which is almost the 1/17 of 東京都 and 1/12 of 神奈川県. (p.42)

Comparing to 1970s nowadays you cannot come across very young babies often. Long period of watching(or observing as the third) or having intimate relationship with babies becomes a kind of rare things! You can have smarter countermove 対応策 toward to what you have data more; It means you know better. The very young child abuse is one of less smart behaviors toward what you do not know well, caused by misunderstanding: of adult (her/him)self and of the children. The calling to Child Support Center in 2000 was less than 10,000 cases but increased to 120,000 in 2016. (Tokyo Newspaper Aug. 17, 2017) The less babies were born the more child abuse occurs. And the increasing volume catches our eyes.

The stress of believing she/he “didn’t know what to do, wasn’t a perfect mother/father” easily compounds with depression; believing “nobody understands me, nobody helps me, this baby just try to make me difficult” (from mothers & fathers confessions in Korea & US) Raising a child is difficult and world widely, women has more responsibility to take care of babies under 3yrs. Here is English mothers data which shows how much physical and concrete challenges they have. 3/4 of them expressed motherhood had been much more challenging than they have ever imagined. Generally speaking it is keeping eyes on a child 24hours/7days but high rankings are;

1. Sleepless nights/sleep deprivation
2. Tantrums
3. Having patience
4. Keeping on top of the household chores
5. Getting children to eat the right foods
6. Potty training
7. Sibling rivalry
8. Juggling childcare
9. Give your child what they want without spoiling them
10. Getting children to clean their teeth properly
11. Dealing with an ill child
12. Leaving your baby for the first time
13. Getting a baby to sleep through the night
14. Getting a baby/child to sleep at night
15. Not constantly worrying and wrapping your child in cotton wool

(TOP 50 CHALLENGES FACED BY PARENTS (AS TOLD BY MOTHERS), 29 August 2012)

To know the very youngs better you need information; not only about what they are like but how others feel and react toward them. If mothers of the very young can talk to each other it can happen very naturally. That exactly is what I have experienced with the ‘confused-self doubting-newly becoming- mothers’ after watching theatre for the very young. Because mothers and babies know same contents(the theatre) mothers have chance to watch their babies’ reaction which is different from that of they assumed. “ when I saw my baby laughing and responding I felt like he is also a human being who I can communicate with. Oh my god, I don’t know what I am feeling now but NOW, I have a confidence that I can raise him for the first time. And when I see other moms around me I felt like I am not alone and I am not the only stupid. It consoled me a lot.”

‘wa 和’ is a very important philosophy of Japan. Babies need to experience ‘wa’ from their parents and people around them. The earlier the better. Babies need to have a chance to be gathered to share their experience, neuropsychologically speaking, their ‘sensations and perceptions’ . Theatre for the very young can provide them with sufficient experiential environment which happens rare at home; 1) various people(including other babies and their parents)? s physical movement 2) various sensations and perceptions through theatrical art 3) Experience of being together and responding together. When mothers smile together or breathing out “wow” babies turn their heads to mothers and the TWO laugh TOGETHER.

France has family-friendly policies since 1870s, Switzerland, Germany and Scandinavian countries even have ‘state feminism’ but birth rates have decreased much faster than Japan. Family support policy needs to aim the early timing of huge change of life style because it brings up many unknown challenges. Parenting is difficult and new. Parents need social time with a very specific common subject which is about ‘unknown experience of child caring’ . But it should not evoke guilty feeling or inferiority of parents. Theatre for the very young which aims the babies under 3 yrs can be a good opportunity for parents to share their experiences without feeling low because the objective of the meeting is Not ?parenting? itself. And parents can be relaxed more under the atmosphere of art. Now it is the time for Family friendly policy can be also artistic!