

## Taiwan's 'spoiled children': survey

April 20, 2014 by Daniel J. Bauer

Taiwan media tend to be keenly interested in surveys, statistics, and just about any type of tool that measures opinions. I may be the smallest cog in the wheel of our local print scene, but that doesn't matter. I too like to ask questions and count answers.

This week my eyes perked up when I read of a survey the Children's Welfare League Foundation recently did with the help of children in those idyllic, formative years of grades 4, 5 and 6. That survey attempted to determine whether some of our youngest citizens are "spoiled."

Imagine: fourth, fifth and sixth grade. Oh boy. Just to recall the names of my teachers back then should put me on the short list for a Nobel Prize for Memory. Let's see. I had Mrs. Kaifas two years in a row. That was 4th and 5th grade. Call it an easy start. It was like "buy 1, get 1 free."

Then, talk about lucky, I get a free pass on the name of my 6th grade teacher! Her name was Ms. Kathleen Kennedy. What school child born a Catholic and carrying a book bag in the late 50s and early 60s could forget the name "Kennedy"? Besides that, she was slim, pert and pretty. Apparently I hadn't yet decided at age 10 to become a "shen-fu." (Sigh.)

But was I spoiled as a child? As *Candide* remarks to the Old Woman in Chapter 29, "It's a hard question."

The reporter on this spoilage issue did not tell us how many children participated in the survey, but said over 50 per cent show signs of being spoiled. Why do so many local reporters do this, by the way? Why write about a survey, but refuse to say how many took the survey? (This drives me bananas.)

I jotted down one statistic: 30 percent of the children termed borderline spoiled have never cleaned their room by themselves or "showed appreciation to their parents."

The information above appeared in a rival newspaper last Thursday. On the same day, the *China Post* ran a photo of the cutest pair of baby owls you ever saw. Those little tykes were so cute they made our baby panda Yuan Zai at the zoo seem like *The Big Bad Wolf*. The paper said the owls were called Indian Scops Owls.

The Indian Scops had fallen from their nest. A good Samaritan found them chirping and stumbling on the ground, placed them gingerly into a box, and dashed them to safety at the Agricultural Bureau for the Kaohsiung City Government.

We might expect a turn in the narrative here in the direction of "and they lived happily ever after." The article, however, ended ominously. Officials in Kaohsiung are concerned that "without their parents, the owlets may not be able to properly learn how to hunt for food."

Let us return to that little survey in which school children were under fire for being spoiled. Two of the criteria under consideration stick out there. Do these young friends more or less clean their rooms by themselves? Do they occasionally show a bit of appreciation to their parents for all they've given them in life? The values of independence and responsibility emerge from the first question, and the value of respect from the second.

Now, we are not yet finished with our pair of Indian Scops Owls. If those two little fellows can't get their ma and pa to teach them how to feed themselves, their futures look bleak. They've got to get the know-how. One day they simply must be independent. They'll need to take responsibility for themselves.

I shake my head in wonder whenever I hear university personnel speak of our college students as "xiao pengyo." "Xiao" of course means "small" or "little," and "pengyo," regardless of how we westernize it, means "friends." Some of us foreigners refuse to call our students "little friends." We feel the term fits children 9, 10 and 11 years old. This is not for us a mere manner of speaking or linguistic oddity.

Are too many of our children spoiled? I don't know. Do college instructors in Taiwan increasingly feel as if our educational structures are treating our students like children? The answer is yes.

So, when they're no longer in our nests, will our students win the fight to feed themselves, not only materially, but spiritually and psychologically?

Now and again I think of *Candide* when I ponder that question. "It's a hard question," I say. (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

## Talking points :

1. Perhaps the Chinese expression "xiao pengyo" [little friends] is so common in the mouths of Taiwan people that it does not make a mark on our local people. Foreigners who teach in universities however may find it impossible to use "xiao pengyo" to refer to college students. It does not seem to fit. Do you like being called "xiao pengyo" by persons older than you or in positions of authority over you?
2. This column relies on a survey about "children who are spoiled." One of the standards in the survey to measure "a spoiled child" was the question of whether a 4th, 5th or 6th grade child more or less cleans his or her room alone, and whether these children show thanks to their parents. Are these Qs fair? What was your experience as a child with cleaning duties in your home? Do you ever 'thank' your parents?
3. The writer suggests that universities and the Ministry of Education sometimes treat college students in Taiwan as if they are children. Do you ever feel this at Fu da?

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