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## **The Weight of a Backpack: A Phenomenological Analysis of Typical Chinese Children's Songs**

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### Abstract

**Purpose**—The purpose of this paper is to explore the experience of the weight of a backpack as represented in typical Chinese children's songs through a kind of phenomenological approach.

**Design/Approach/Methods**—The core issue pertaining to Chinese children's songs about backpacks is how the weight sense of backpacks is generated and developed in the field of song phenomenology.

**Findings**—The "whatness" of a backpack in typical songs has varied over the past six decades, meanwhile, the backpack and its songs conceal not only the secrets of childhood but also those of China's educational system.

**Originality/Value**—The originality of this paper embodies the unique perspective to provide a new insight into the current scholarship of the micro-politics of song-singing and the weight sense of backpack.

### Keywords

Backpack; weight; phenomenological analysis; Chinese children's songs

*In-being is the constitution of the sense of being, in which every particular mode of being finds its source and ground. (van Manen, 2007, p. 13)*

## **Introduction**

In the context of current examination-oriented schooling, students seem to bear a heavy academic burden. However, is this an authentic condition based on scientific evidence or merely an illusion triggered by unilateral experience judgement? Several attempts have been made to answer this question through academic logic in recent decades. Moreover, the education bureau and schools themselves have undertaken extensive reforms to reduce the pressure on students, including limiting backpack weight. Unfortunately, many people remain dissatisfied because they perceive that students' burden has been increasing rather than decreasing. These educational phenomena have provoked many pedagogists to reflect on the authenticity of the burden problem from various methodological perspectives, in multidisciplinary or transdisciplinary manners.

Phenomenological analysis, a developing field that avoids answering ontological questions such as those regarding what a thing is and focuses on how a thing is represented to consciousness, is highly suitable for examining academic problems such as psychological pressure and study burden. Traditional phenomenology involves the study of "phenomena"—that which is apparent, that which is "given". It seeks to explore this given, "the thing itself" that can be consciously perceived (Lyotard, 1991, p. 32). Nevertheless, phenomenologists after Husserl failed to resolve the ambiguity of "seeing the thing itself" until the development of body phenomenology, which was termed neophenomenology by Hermann Schemitz and perceptual phenomenology by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. According to body phenomenology, "the atmosphere is part of a situation in which meaning is dissolved in chaotic manifoldness. Sensing an atmosphere is a function of the lived body as opposed to phenomena that are mediated by the senses" (Langewitz, 2007, p. 323). The innovation of neophenomenology mainly lies in its grounding in the bodily experience instead of pure consciousness, as well as in corporeality in place of intentionality.

After clarifying the theoretical underpinning of this paper, we will

reconsider the weight of a backpack and its metaphor of academic burden. Any backpack owns its “thingness” hidden in special existential contexts with regard to the carriers. The weight of a thing is commonly understood to be caused by gravity, based on the theoretical framework of physical positivism. However, the experience of weight may be relative, varying according to the subject’s relationship with a particular thing. The theory of relativity provides methodological enlightenment, namely that the weight of a thing is closely connected to the circumstances in which it is situated. Likewise, the lived weight of a thing constantly sustains formative accountability because the conditionality of the thing is the origin of the weight sense of a specific subject. To take school backpacks as an example, the weight of a backpack is decided by historical factors, social environment, cultural background, and even personal emotions. The thingness of a backpack encompasses a complex relationality that is jointly constructed by the many things and people around it.

Any backpack, for any pupil, is less an abstract, transcendental object than a concrete, experienced, quotidian thing. The backpack inevitably embodies various anthropological characteristics: ethical, aesthetic, and communal, and so on. A pupil’s backpack is an instrument for containing textbooks, stationery, and small personal items. Its pedagogical meaning lies not only in its instrumentality, but also in its cultural and aesthetic attributes. Pessimistically, we might notice that in a contemporary context, everyday items such as backpacks are mainly contemplated in terms of their practicability, with little attention paid to their use from cultural, artistic, and existential perspectives.

An authentic thing and its thingness are never seen. What can be represented to the human eye is always a pseudomorph. For example, I am looking at a backpack. “The [backpack] has so many properties and some, but not all, of these are part of my perceptual phenomenology at this moment” (Nanay, 2012, p. 235). A backpack as a spiritual thing, despite being unsurprisingly inadequate, connects with the subject’s context of being. The existential feeling cannot be deduced from particular observations. The backpack as observed by the phenomenological researcher is not the same as encountered by its owner in everyday situations, especially in terms of bodily perception. Psychological cognition that is strongly based on scientific reasoning differs from meaning, value, culture, aesthetics, and other humanistic factors. For example, the physical weight of the pupil’s backpack is often defined according to a quantitative standard, namely not surpassing

10% of its carrier's weight. This standard was devised according to multidisciplinary scientific rationales, including physiology, medicine, athletics, and dynamics. However, these scientific parameters might not be able to provide a sufficient understanding of how the weight of a backpack is experienced by the pupil carrying it.

To overcome the limits of positivism and calculative science in explaining and understanding the weight of a backpack, we might resort to a humanistic approach in which the truth and secrecy of the backpack can be explored. The phenomenology of practice, as a humanistic methodology, "is an ethical corrective of the technological and calculative modalities of contemporary life" (van Manen, 2007, p. 11). In its depiction of humans' existential states, music takes precedence over rational language. Therefore, this paper focuses on the depiction of backpacks in children's songs in various eras. In this sense, children's songs created by adults and teenagers can be regarded as a method of describing pupils' everyday life. Moreover, phenomenological exploration of the experience of the weight sense of backpacks in typical children's songs can serve as a fruitful area of study in humanistic pedagogy.

In China, many children's songs regarding backpacks have been written over the past six decades. These songs, as valuable source material for phenomenological research, possess a unique advantage; namely, the weight of a backpack can be cubically represented through lyrics and musicology. Moreover, these songs seem to more effectively document the history of the weight of a backpack and its formative mechanism than any archival records of school backpacks can. It is for this reason that the present paper analyzes typical children's songs as an academic niche of phenomenological analysis.

In addition to physical weight, lived weight is an outcome of phenomenological experience. The aforementioned children's songs, which function to describe the inner experience of weight through a combination of lyrics, melody, rhythm, and sound, may reconstitute the lived weight of things by expressing children's experiences of them. By contrast, language usually plays a flat role in describing in-depth experience. Thus, lived weight can neither be fully represented by a structured language nor physically assessed, but can be grasped intuitively through music. Unlike weight as measured through physical or mathematical methods, phenomenological weight can be depicted by songs as a representation of lived experience. As such, these depictions are neither true nor false, and approach a level of authenticity—rather than the accuracy signified by a scale—in depicting

spiritual conditions. “Music restores our human powers of conception, perception, sensation, emotion, and action to their original state of unity, dissolving the obnoxious dualisms in which we are forced to live our nonmusical lives” (Bowman, 2002, p. 59).

For the theoretical framework of the following detailed analysis, I have selected a few typical Chinese children’s songs and classified them into three types: the cheerful-and-lively type from the 1950s to the 1970s, the deep-and-emotional type from the 1980s to the turn of the century, and the Internet-parody type from the past decade. These types of children’s songs reflect the relationships between backpacks and lived burdens, as well as provide a window into changes in the Chinese educational system.

I will begin by differentiating the three types of weight sense regarding backpacks in children’s songs through specific examples. Subsequently, I will further explore the phenomenological meanings contained therein and their genetic mechanisms. The successive sections will reveal the fluid nature of the weight sense of backpacks in these songs.

### **Three Types of Weight Sense Regarding Backpacks in Children’s Songs**

A backpack can symbolize the identity of a student as an instrument can symbolize that of a musician. Therefore, songs depicting school life tend to mention the backpack as an element of pupils’ everyday, collective experience at school. Among Chinese children’s songs mentioning backpacks in the past 60 years, the item’s weight sense has three main descriptions. A diverse range of lyrics, notes, rhythms, melodies, and instruments allow the backpack to present diverse phenomenal flavors. I delineate the aforementioned three types through two examples.<sup>1</sup>

#### ***The Cheerful-and-Lively Type***

In many representative songs from the 1950s to the 1970s, the backpack is depicted as small, light, and having a simple shape. Under the influence of the revolutionary narrative, artistic works including music, paintings, and literature contained cheerful and relaxed themes on popular life. Children’s songs were no exception. I will employ phenomenology to examine two

typical songs from this era that describe the weight sense of backpacks: *The School Boy* and *The School-Going Song*<sup>2</sup>.

*Little, little school boy  
Carrying a backpack to school  
Afraid of neither the hot sunshine  
Nor of stormy weather  
I'm only afraid of teachers scolding me for being lazy  
And of feeling ashamed to face my parents  
For having learned so little*

This children's song contrasts the meteorological environment and the inner feelings of a schoolboy. Even if the weather is tough on the way to school, the boy jumps, bounces, and rushes to school with a small, light backpack. The smallness and lightness of the backpack are manifested through a cheerful and lively melody and lyrics, counteracting the descriptions of poor weather. The song has been popular in elementary and secondary schools since the 1950s. It invites the singers to dance or move in a cheerful way. These continuous movements conveyed in the lyrics maintain harmony with children's inner feelings, and the music conversely represents and witnesses a pupil's existential state. This is a two-way dialogue between singer and song, child and sound, "as the sound constitutes a trace of one's own actions" (Kanellopoulos, 2007, p. 128).

The weight sense of the backpack was created by the adult composer and lyricist. Therefore, the weight sense understood by the musicians is not the same as that understood by the singers. From the perspective of hermeneutical phenomenology, the musicians act as the hermeneuts or interpreters of weight sense. When a schoolchild sings this song, a type of intersubjectivity with the musician adult emerges alongside the weight sense in the child's pure consciousness. Thus, I provide another typical song to illustrate this:

*The sun shines in the sky  
The flowers smile at me  
The little bird says to me  
Good morning, good morning  
Why are you carrying a little backpack on your shoulders  
I am going to school  
On time every day*

*I love to study, love to labor  
I will serve the people once I grow up*

*The School-Going Song* was coauthored in the early 1950s, reflecting the attitudes of the collective unconscious toward the relationship between individual destiny and school education in the early post-liberation period of the People's Republic of China. The "I" who serves as the narrator of the song has the freedom and right to attend school, as do numerous other pupils. The backpack is depicted as small, light, and full of happiness. On the way to school, the sun, flowers, and bird jointly witness "my" phenomenological feeling regarding the shape and weight of the backpack. The agile, lively melody and the succinct, poetic lyrics evoke a unique phenomenological atmosphere. The corporeal intentionality plays a fundamental role in the constitution of the weight sense of the backpack in that the object can be perceived as a part of "my" body. In the moment the song creates, the backpack is not a thing, but a natural extension of "my" body which seems to possess blood, flesh, bone, and even spiritual qualities. The shining sun brings warmth to "me"; the fact that the flower is smiling may imply that "I" am smiling at it; whatever the little bird seemingly says is what "my" ears would hear. The body has corporeal unity with the lyrics and melody. In its ability to capture the purity of sensory experience by describing corporeality and temporality, music is more vivid than other forms of language. In particular, because of the illegibility and abstractness of artistic expression, music can authentically express the life of feeling in a way that prose cannot.

### ***The Deep-and-Emotional Type***

This type of song can cause listeners to sink deep into thought, developing serious associations, ethical awakenings, and emotions regarding their life history. The Reform and Opening-Up policy instated in the early 1980s resulted in an increasing emphasis on modernization in foundational schooling. The examination-oriented education system made students feel more pressured, as if they were carrying a heavy burden, and campus songs with slow, deep, and emotional rhythms documented this change in school life. The song *Mother*<sup>3</sup> belongs to this type.

*When you go to school  
Someone will bring a new backpack for you*

*When you are in the rain  
 Somebody will hold a colorful umbrella for you  
 When you feel wronged  
 Somebody will wipe your tears for you  
 That person is your mother*

In this song, the backpack, as well as the umbrella and tears, symbolize the relationship between parents and children. In China, the mother commonly plays the dominant caring role in a child's everyday life, such as by accompanying her child to school and holding their hand while carrying their backpack for them. The backpack is thereby transformed as a relational object connecting the parent-child relationship and bodily experience, not merely as a means of carrying textbooks and stationery. The slow rhythm, deep melody, and singers' serious countenance highlight the heaviness of the backpack. The weight sense of the backpack clearly has nothing to do with children's academic burden at school, but is instead a response to their mothers' care and love. The song has the potential to evoke a deep reflection on the parent-child relationship. Another song, named *My Backpack*<sup>4</sup>, has the same theme:

*My backpack looks small  
 But there is enough in it  
 Father's warning, mother's nagging  
 Teachers' expectations, and classmates' mirth  
 Tomorrow's goodness, the future's prospects  
 Its weight is heavy  
 Lots of hopes jump into it  
 My backpack makes me cry and smile  
 Who can tell me why*

Here, the lyricist deliberately employs a contrast between the physical size and perceived weight of the backpack. The weight sense of the backpack represents "my" interpersonal relationships with people around "me": "my" father, mother, teachers, and classmates. As such, "my" feelings incorporate all of these relationships. Moreover, the backpack invokes "my" future potential and makes "me" both cry and smile. The slow, plaintive tune creates a sense of heaviness. The backpack is heavy not only because of the textbooks, exercise books, or stationery in it, but also because of the care, encouragement, and expectations of the parents and teachers that it

represents. The promise of a beautiful future seems to beckon “me”, a pupil, to accept the adults’ worldly perspectives. In this sense, it is an adult-style children’s song. The weightiness of the backpack is primarily related not to its concrete materiality but to intentionality on the level of virtue ethics, such as hopes, prospects, destiny, and cares, all of which contribute to “my” whole corporeal perception as described in the song.

### ***The Internet-Parody Type***

Since the 1990s, as academic burden has increased, some so-called “bad” pupils have complained about the examination-oriented school system. This phenomenon has been reflected in children’s songs, particularly in those popularized on the Internet. Some of these purposely distort classic children’s songs to reflect the singer’s mood. I select two Internet songs to illustrate this trend. The first is *The School-Bombing Song*<sup>5</sup>.

*The sun shines in the sky  
The corpse smiles at me  
It says good morning and asks  
Why are you carrying dynamite on your back  
I want to bomb the school  
The teachers don’t know  
It’s painful to go to school  
The backpack gives me a hunchback  
Sleeping so late, getting up so early  
The homework never ends*

This song borrows the lyrics and melody of *The School-Going Song* and twists them for sardonic effect. It describes going to school as a distressing experience, because “I” must stay up late and get up early; endless homework causes “my” back to bend; the sun fades, the flowers wither, and the birds stop singing, because they see that “I” carry a dynamite package instead of a schoolbag on “my” back. The phenomenological intentionality in *The School-Bombing Song* resembles a musical version of Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*<sup>6</sup>. With the help of supernatural elements and magical realism, this song reflects students’ complex feelings about their backpacks and school life. The composer and singer express their hidden bitterness by parodying a mainstream song and rendering it absurd. This

type of song, with their humorous lyrics, fast speed, and rap and jazz stylings, deconstruct or subvert the traditional identity, function, and value of pupils' backpacks.

The second song I will describe, *To Make a Backpack Lose Weight*<sup>7</sup>, is likewise highly popular on the Internet. In "my" lived experience portrayed in this song, "my" study condition is compared with adults' or teachers' demands because the heavy backpack bends "me." "I" am constantly dreaming that "I" can fly freely like a bird. The dream represents what "I" really experience at school.

*The adults call me "kid"*  
*But I've become a hunchback*  
*The backpack on my back looks so heavy*  
*Oh, oh ... I feel so tired*  
*All the teachers say the outside world is charming*  
*But I can only see it in my dreams*  
*Oh, oh ... who can make my backpack lose weight*  
*Let me fly freely like a bird*

In its lyrics, the song constructs two conflicting existential circumstances centered in realism and romanticism. The heaviness of the backpack and tiredness as an authentic state intermingle in "my" bodily experience. The hunchback, here, emerges not from a physiological diagnosis but from a phenomenological experience. The dream "I" have is not about a charming world imposed by adults as the "other", but about carrying a lighter backpack that would allow "me" to fly like a bird, which serves as a synthetical and phenomenological symbol of "my" body and spirit.

Regarding its musical aspects, this song is distinguished by its combination of spoken and sung lyrics, revealing an inner world experienced through bodily sensation. Each singer can improvise according to his or her school experiences. Like *The School-Bombing Song*, it adopts a jazz style. Songs in this genre are seldom finished, because their lyrics and melody are subject to ceaseless modifications and reinterpretations involving various instruments. For a jazz singer, phenomenological expression is the same as singing or speaking the lyrics of a song. As Trevor Thwaites notes on the relationship of jazz and Heidegger's thought, saying-as-showing is an appropriation that gives us the being of jazz, and the ultimate compliment for a jazz musician is to tell them they are "saying something" (Thwaites, 2013, p. 122).

## **Genetic Mechanism of the Weight Sense of the Backpack**

As children's health conditions have worsened, parents and guardians have collectively complained about the heaviness of their children's backpacks, the excessiveness of their homework, and the long duration of their school days. In response to these complaints, administrative officials have considered how to reduce schoolchildren's burden by establishing so-called scientific standards for backpack weights. Backpacks gained excessive focus as objects of educational management, with the measurable weight of backpacks being regarded as a key index for judging pupils' academic burden. To ensure that this problem is resolved in a scientific manner, officials from the education bureau in charge of lessening pupils' burden have focused on scientific parameters that can explain pupils' backpack weight, their health conditions, and even their psychological problems. Therefore, an objectified backpack and its physical weight, as well as its physiological underpinnings, have often been employed as a reasonable basis of administrative management.

However, physical and physiological theories are insufficient for describing the hidden relationship between the body and mind, as well as that between the physical weight and weight sense of a backpack, especially the phenomenological relationality between them. Weight measured on a scale clearly differs from lived weight, namely a sense of inner value gained from the backpack wearer's existential context. The perception of weight involves multiple elements from various fields, such as gravity from physics, bodily dynamics from physiology, emotion from psychology and psychoanalysis, sentiment from aesthetics, happiness or sadness from ethics, and rhythm from musicology. Ultimately, these elements form an organic whole centered on the core concept of corporeity. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception is highly applicable here, in that corporeality itself is the world. In children's songs, the music, the pupils' body, and the backpack are symbiotically attuned to one another, each affecting the other as parts of a unified whole that collectively demonstrates the property of the mind. As Mattens (2009) writes:

The human body is not a physical object that is used to transpose its own spatial properties, felt from within, to the objective spatial properties of other objects. [...] Rather, the human body is an organ; it has a functional contribution to the process of perception that is essentially different from the contents of experience. Perception contents are interpreted in light of the body's conditions. (p. 104)

On the way to and from school, according to Husserlian's phenomenological philosophy, the pupil as a subject constitutes the weight sense of their backpack, not as an object, but as a new, virtual, authentic reality in relation to the body. The inner body is not the object of representation in the brain; rather, it is built into the subjective perspective. Therefore, in this account, the subjective perspective loses its transparency and gains "interoceptive thickness" (Helena, 2007, p. 604). Thus, the subjectivity embodies the corporeality, and the corporeality promotes and consolidates a much broader and deeper foundation of existential meaning.

In the aforementioned children's songs, the weight sense of the backpack is derived from numerous complex factors, including aspects of physics, physiology, sociology, psychology, and ethics. The diverse mechanical vectors of the weight sense ultimately concentrate on one point—the temporality of overall perception. Accordingly, the pedagogical meaning of the backpack is captured by the subject, namely, the backpack's owner. Perception is bodily involvement in the world; it forms a medium through which meaning is discovered. This does not imply that "perception alone provides access to truth" (Steeves, 2001, p. 374). The songs invite us to feel the backpack as part of the pupil's body, not only by presenting the wholeness of lyrics, rhythm, melody, and instruments, but also by conveying the authentic existential states of the singers and their audience.

According to neophenomenology, the lived space from the sense of corporeal change exists in the three dimensions of length, breadth, and vector (Schemitz, 1997, p. 23). As illustrated by the six children's songs in this paper, the weight sense of a backpack originates from musicological elements that bring forth a chaotic bodily state, and is derived from social attributes such as ethics, pedagogical customs, and psychological structure. As the narrators of these songs carry their backpacks to school, their experienced spaces emerge. It is as if the listener is entering a broadly extended space that is both fluid and temporal (Berleant, 1999, p. 75). Students' existential senses can give rise to inner chaos, in particular through hearing or singing songs that describe the weight sense of their backpacks. This weight sense incorporates all of the aforementioned phenomenological factors. As for the chaoticity of music and its function of expressing existential states, Barbaric (2013) cited Paul Klee as follows, in a statement relevant to the interpretation of the genetic mechanism of the weight sense of the backpack in children's songs.

The source of the rhythmic movement [Paul Klee] recognizes as chaos, which he defines as the most elemental fact, which precedes the difference of being and becoming, of rest and movement, and with which the artist in each of its creative acts must first identify. (p. 405)

### **Fluid Weight Sense of the Backpack in Children's Songs**

The pupils' backpack, as a personal belonging, bears the weight of its owner's future, prospects, and destiny, and even that of their school, family, and society. The backpack, in the Chinese context, sustains the collective unconscious in various historical periods; thus, it can be deified as a magical thing, from which can be derived the signs, processes, and shadows of children's knowing, growing, and being. In this sense, the idiosyncratic backpack is imbued with a type of spirituality or humanity. The meaning of the backpack and the schooling of children are inevitably intertwined, mirroring each other.

The phenomenon of backpack weight is rooted in lived experience. In children's songs related to backpacks, a stealthy phenomenology of weight exists that enables exploration of the nature of weight sense and interpretation of the mechanism of its formation, in which students often deliberately mis-sing or mis-listen to lyrics. In Internet parodies such as *The School-Bombing Song*, these behaviors do not represent the inability to recognize commonly agreed-upon ideals. Rather, they serve as a means of expressing the truth of temporal existence. As Patrick Schmidt states in his argument for the musical decentralization of ideologically constructed sound, mis-listening is the capability to intentionally hear "wrong" (Schmidt, 2012, p. 13). Similarly, mis-singing is the capability to intentionally sing "wrong".

In the lyrics of the six songs analyzed in this paper, the weight sense of a backpack originates in the intermingling of objects and living beings. The backpack's weight sense embodies its corporeality. As Trigg (2013) explains:

Intersubjectivity is essentially an issue of intercorporeality [...], the necessary relation with others defines our thematic and affective experience of the world. Far from a formal connection with others, the

corporeal basis of intersubjectivity means that our lived experience of the world is mediated via our bodily relations with others. [...], body, other, and world are each intertwined in a single unity and cannot be considered apart. (p. 413)

These “others” are humans, animals, and inanimate objects, all of which possess the attributes of social anthropology. Likewise, the backpack in children’s songs also has the traits of school anthropology and body phenomenology. In short, the nature of the weight sense of a backpack is not exclusive or static; it depends on the synthetic conditions of time, space, history, culture, and art. The nature of weight sense is fluid, changing according to where and when the subject imbues their temporal experiences with the conviction of existence and significance.

## **An Open Conclusion**

A thing is a mirror of human existence, through which insight can be gained into people’s spiritual depth. To some extent, a person is what he or she uses in everyday life. As such, the backpack serves as a mirror of pupils’ existential situations. Chinese children’s songs about backpacks express the diverse experiences of pupils over the past six decades. These songs construct a phenomenology of the backpack, from which we can understand pupils’ states of being.

A pupil’s backpack bears many secrets regarding life transitions, children’s growth, and educational transformation. It provides inverted images of the pupils’ personhood and self-identity. If we want to understand their existential conditions, we should bend down to examine their backpacks; if we are willing to enter into their inner worlds, we should listen to popular children’s songs. The backpack and its songs conceal not only the secrets of childhood but also those of China’s educational system.

The core issue pertaining to Chinese children’s songs about backpacks is how the weight sense of backpacks is generated and developed in the field of song phenomenology. For pupils, these songs could evoke the most fundamental aspects of bodily experience: the perception of time, space, movement, and personal and social experience. Thus, the phenomenological sound approach to the inner emotional world is intimately bound with existential experience. Music does not produce

scientific truth, but rather expresses authentic emotions; lived experiences as embodied in songs do not strictly comply with the logic of discipline knowledge and rational inference, but instead serve as a momentary flash of insight into the subject's life. Sound production and structuring is a unified, natural process. Strict objective truths about the emotional nature of music may not be attainable, but nonetheless, for music to provide a type of ineffable knowledge regarding emotional experience is still possible (Packalen, 2008, p. 41).

It is necessary for teachers and parents to pay attention to what is expressed in schoolchildren's songs. They differ greatly from the pedagogy of epistemology. The meaning and significance of pedagogy are determined by what we do with what we hear when living with a child. According to van Manen (1982):

The phenomenological attitude reminds us that children are already or mundanely a pedagogic concern to us prior to any epistemological choice point. [...] Phenomenology bids to recover reflectively the grounds which, in a deep sense, provide for the possibility of our pedagogic concerns with children. (p. 298)

To end this paper, I will share a concrete example of a pupil's backpack. As a parent, I typically perform two tasks involving my son's heavy backpack on weekdays. First, I take it from his hands and carry it when he leaves the gates of his primary school in the afternoons. The exchange of backpacks at the school gate between parents and children is a nearly iconic school scene in China. Second, in the evenings I adjust and reorganize the messy backpack according to the next day's schedule. I have gradually realized that the consistency of the content and structure of pupils' backpacks with planned curricula is critical in examination-oriented education systems. Metaphorically, the backpack is a microcosmic form of pedagogy. Pupils must diligently study and master it, ensuring higher test scores and a greater likelihood of a promising future. In the near future, these experiences of the weight sense of backpacks might be written into children's songs, whether by musicians or students themselves. For me, however, as a father, professor, and education researcher, I feel mixed emotions when considering the school backpack inside and outside the context of children's songs.

## Notes

- 1 When preparing this paper, I collected and analyzed more than 20 children's songs. Because of space limitations, six of them are employed as representative samples for phenomenological analysis. This paper only shows the first paragraph or part of the lyrics of each song.
- 2 *The School-Going Song [Shang Xue Ge]* was collectively written and composed by the Beijing Primary School Song Teaching and Research Group in the early 1950s. Thus, detailed information on the composers and lyricists is unavailable.
- 3 *Mother [Mu Qin]* was written by Zhang Junyi and Che Hang and composed by Qi Jianbo in 2004. Numerous songs about mothers have been written in recent decades, but *Mother* is the only one mentioning a pupil's backpack.
- 4 *My Backpack [Wo De Shu Bao]* was the theme song of a CCTV play series on children's growth in 1998. The song was collectively written and composed by the show's production team.
- 5 *The School-Bombing Song [Zha Xue Ge]* is a popular anonymous Internet parody of *The School-Going Song*.
- 6 *The Metamorphosis* centers on a character named Gregor Samsa who has been transformed into an enormous beetle. The novel vividly describes his existential struggle. The Internet parody *The School-Bombing Song* has a similar mode of expression through music. However, the things that are transformed are not human, but rather they are the bird, flowers, and sun on the narrator's route to school. Essentially, it is a reflection on the narrator's existential state in terms of their school life.
- 7 *To Make a Backpack Lose Weight [Rang Shu Bao Jian Fei]* was written by Zhou Xiangjun and composed by Zhang Weidong in 2010.

## Note on Contributor

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