

# The Evolution and Breakthrough of American Children Mental Health History

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**Abstract:** In 1960s, the “bio- psycho-social” model was established, which made a new breakthrough in the history of American child mental health in the trend of new social history and became an integral part of medical social history. A survey of the history of American child mental health will help to demonstrate the process of social and organic psychosis developing from medical history to medical social history. The study of American child mental health history combs the development of child mental health history based on three themes: child psychohistory, psychiatry and medical social history, which reflects the examples and epitome of the cross-cutting, integration, innovation and development of medicine, history and psychology under the new social history framework. The study of American child mental health history reveals that the mental health problem of American children has become a social rather than a purely medical problem, which also promotes the change of the treatment concept of American child psychosis. Therefore, the study should follow the characteristics and laws of mental disease in investigating both the pathological and social factors. Thus, the study of American child mental health history from the perspective of medical social history is a breakthrough and also meets the needs of the times. The research in this field in western countries shows the trend of coordinated development of interdisciplinary and holistic, while the related research in China has just started. Therefore, combing the process of American child mental health history is helpful to provide reference and enlightenment for the research of Chinese medical social history.

## 1. Introduction

The new social history that emerged in the 1960s is a research trend of integrating human daily life into the overall history. Under the path of the new social history, historians began to pay attention to the ordinary people and the vulnerable groups in the society, and such “little people” as children have also become the research objects of the new social history, because they also have mental health problems as well as complicated psychological, pathological and social reasons as adults. The social factors causing child mental health problems were investigated with the ideas and methods of new social history, which provided new impetus for child health history. The study on the history of American child mental health has been deepening since the rise of child history in 1960, with fruitful results. Although some achievements have been made in China’s medical social history, the research on child health history mainly focuses on issues related to child physical health. However, a systematic review of the history of American children’s mental health makes it clear that psychiatric treatment is no longer confined to the medical field, but extended to the whole society. In this paper, by combing the latest research results of psychohistory, the history of psychiatry and the history of medical society, the author explores the concept and model of psychiatric treatment of children in the United States, and believes that it is essential to rely on and make use of social factors and forces to prevent and treat mental diseases. The historical rules and lessons in the history of American child mental health have promoted people’s correct understanding of mental diseases.

## 2. A Prelude to the Study on the History of American Child Mental Health: Psychohistory for Children

Psychohistory for children is the foundation and prelude of child mental health history. Philippe Aries, a French historian, published *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* in 1960, which is generally regarded as the world's first book on children's history. The English version was published in 1962 and widely spread in the field of children's history in Europe and the United States. [1] However, the concept of children put forward in the first history of children has been criticized by psychohistorians who didn't agree with Aries' method of inferring the concept of children, and argued that his method of discussing the concept of children with the change of western society's emotional attitude towards children lacks psychological presupposition. In 1964, Jean Louis Flandrin, a French psychohistory, criticized that Aries defined the concept of children in a controversial and vague psychological category, which made "traditional psychological stereotypes make great concessions". Alain Besancon proposed that "the children's history is not only about clothing, games, schools, or even a concept, because children are human beings, which are developed, which is a history reconstructed by psychologists." In 1970, David Hunt pointed out from the perspective of self-social psychological development theory that Aries' research lacked the knowledge of modern psychology and did not think deeply that children would go through an important and complicated psychological stage before the age of 7. [2]

The above-mentioned views of the psychohistorians can prove that the children historians represented by Aries didn't have a comprehensive understanding of children, because they paid too much attention to child body and exterior, defined children from the perspective of adults and social preferences, and lacked the interpretation of children's inner world. In this context, child physical health is regarded as the whole of child health, and the body has become the content of political history, social history and cultural history, that is, the physical history has been included in the research category of medical social history. In contrast, the child mental health history still stays in the field of medical history and fails to be further connected with other branches of history.

In 1974, American psychological historians also criticized the inadequacy of Aries' research results. Lloyd DeMause, the representative figure, was one of the founders of psychohistory in the United States. He was the first to include the history of childhood in psychohistory's investigation, and criticized the psychological presupposition in Aries' children's history, believing that his viewpoint that the children of the past were happy simply did not hold water. "The history of childhood is a nightmare that has not been awakened. The longer history goes back, the less care children receive and the more likely they are to be abused, beaten, intimidated and sexually abused." [3] Through *The History of Children and On Writing Childhood History*, DeMause strengthened the psychological hypothesis of children's history research, systematically introduced the writing method of children's history from the perspective of psychohistory, which laid the foundation for the development of American children psychohistory. He is good at giving play to psychohistory's presupposition, so as to trace the emotional roots of child group in the past and modern social behavior of the country. In his books *Jimmy Carter and American Fantasy: Psychohistorical Explorations* and *Reagan's America*, he demonstrated the correlation between American presidents' childhood mental journey and their political ideas. [4] His research results reflect the development and characteristics of child psychohistory in the second half of the 20th century.

Another important contribution of DeMause was the founding of *The Journal of Psychohistory*, which set up a broad stage for the development of children psychohistory, on which Frederick Leboyer, Arthur Janov, Stanislav Grof and others agreed with DeMause's view that childhood experience is important in psychological development. [5] Some scholars held that DeMause's viewpoint does not represent the whole field of child psychohistory, and his *Children's History* should be called *History of Child Abuse*. Jerry Piven argued that the widespread and terrible child abuse recorded by DeMause in human history did not exist, and did not believe that so many parents would do terrible things to their children. [6]

The continuous development of psychohistory in the United States has widened its academic perspective, and psychohistorians have begun to examine social actions related to children. Joseph

M. Hawes discussed the role of social work and child psychology, and the influence of standardized psychological tests on the formation of a new view of children. [7] Gitta Sereny, a child welfare worker and psychohistorian, analyzed the psychology of children who committed violent crimes in history, and believed that “our social service system for children” disappoints children every day, despite the different efforts of many well-intentioned people. [8] Although the United States already has advanced testing technology to determine the causes of child psychosis, American society can’t find a better way to help children who commit crimes than going to jail because they haven’t entered the inner world of children. James Gilligan revealed the impact of childhood trauma on their future life path, and believed that the relationship between childhood abuse and adult violent crime was as clear as the relationship between smoking and lung cancer. Violent criminals have shown violent tendencies since early childhood. [9] James C. Duffy tried to use psychohistory to understand the war and examine the motive of the war, but once the motive of the war was studied deeply, it would stimulate “group-fantasies” and reproduce the trauma of childhood. Therefore, few people are willing to do the necessary treatment to accept the unfortunate experiences in their early life. [10] In the face of their own reluctance to face the tragic past, the psychohistorians have no way to establish the connection between social factors and child psychology.

From the research results of DeMause and others, the children psychohistorians has realized that the study of children’s history can’t only focus on their daily food, clothing, housing and transportation on the surface, but also need to go into children’s inner world, understand their experiences to analyze the impact of unfortunate experiences on their psychology. children psychohistorians’ action to consider the influence of social factors and to compete for the right to speak on children’s history shows that the study of American child mental health history has begun, but still with obvious deficiencies. Although the researchers have paid attention to the social, cultural and environmental effects on child psychology, they have not established the relationship between social and cultural factors and child psychology, but only put forward “hypotheses” or limited the scope of research to the childhood psychology of political elites, lacking a grand vision of historical investigation that closely links child psychology with social culture.

### **3. In-depth Study on the History of American Child Mental Health: Historiography of Child Psychiatry**

Compared with the psychohistory for children, American historiography of child psychiatry, as a further study of American child mental health history, began to establish contact with social culture. There are both connections and differences between the historiography of child psychiatry and child mental health history. In the late 20th century, many branches of psychology have been formed, among which abnormal psychology and psychiatry share the same research object, both of which study people’s abnormal behavior. The former focuses on explaining the characteristics of abnormal behavior and psychological response to the living environment, while the latter focuses on the diagnosis and treatment of abnormal behavior and the prevention of psychosis. Before 1950s, the historiography of child psychiatry in the west belonged to the traditional medical history category, and the historical records were mainly written by doctors. The research followed closely the development of medical theory and medical technology, focusing on the discovery, cognition and treatment of pathological factors. Since the 1950s, under the influence of new science of history, American historians have carried out multi-disciplinary cooperative historiography research, which has extended to the field of medicine and begun to pay attention to social pathogenic factors. The writing paradigm of historiography of child psychiatry in the United States, whether by medical scientists or historians, revolves around “treatment”, and the social factors related to family, school and government are only auxiliary treatment means. Although the historiography of child psychiatry is an in-depth study of the American historiography of child psychiatry mental health history, it underestimates the role and significance of social factors on historiography of child psychiatry mental health problems.

The collision between the pathological and cultural phenomena of mental disease has drawn the attention of European and American historians to the social factors of child mental disease. In 1950s,

western psychiatrists broadened their horizons to other countries, investigated the symptoms and incidence of psychosis in different cultural backgrounds, and put forward the concept of “cross-cultural psychiatry”. From the 1950s to the 1970s, American psychiatrists had been overcoming the problem of different diagnostic criteria for mental diseases and began to take social culture as one of the pathogenic factors. Professor Arthur Kleinman of Harvard University, an outstanding scholar in cultural psychiatry, criticized the view that western psychiatry is applicable to any society, and advocated that targeted diagnosis and treatment methods should be adopted according to different societies and cultures. [11] The journal *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, which he founded in 1977, provides an exchange platform for cross-cultural psychiatry. Since then, scholars who hold the view of “culture relativism” have formed a “new cross-cultural school of psychiatry”, arguing with scholars of “cultural identity”. With the development of the debate, the sociocultural factors of child psychiatry have entered the research field of the new cross-cultural psychiatry school. Richard A. Shweder believed that children can express specific emotions before they learn language, and emotional inducing factors have universality and cultural particularity, and history of child psychiatry emotions are obviously influenced by cultural particularity. [12] In addition, Michel Foucault, a famous French intellectual historian, pointed out in the English version of *Madness and Civilization* in 1964 that “madness is not a natural phenomenon, but a product of civilization.” [13] The “Anti-psychiatry Movement” initiated by Foucault and others is an important historical event that opposes violent treatment and hopes to give more humanistic care to patients. Clearly, the history of child psychiatry in the United States has been theoretically supported in the 1970s, and there are a number of cross-cultural psychiatry researchers who support cultural relativity and have built a bridge between pathology and social culture.

Since 1980s, child psychiatric treatment has accelerated the pace of integrating social and cultural factors in the context of cultural psychiatry. In the historical research on the diagnosis and treatment of child psychosis, Matthew Smith took ADHD as an example and discussed its diagnosis history with social culture and medical environment. He also held that ADHD was a mental illness in another book, *Putting Hyperactivity in its Place: Cold War Politics, the Brain Race, and the Origins of Hyperactivity in the United States, 1957-1968*, which was influenced by the school education system and the competitive pressure from the United States and the Soviet Union. [14-15] Rick Mayes and other scholars focused on the institutional change, and believed that this change affects and reflects the prevalence, treatment and end of ADHD. [16] The psychiatric cases in the above historical research results show that psychosis is influenced by social culture and reflects the characteristics of the times, which however are not enough to be the direct pathogenic factors.

Driven by the anti-psychiatric movement, Robert Whitaker investigated how pharmaceutical companies distorted their research in 1980s-1990s to prove that the new antipsychotics were more effective than the old ones, [17] which put the child psychopaths in crisis. After drug abuse had become a social hidden danger, people were increasingly worried that the addiction of psychoactive drugs will endanger child health, which can be demonstrated by David L. Herzberg in his *Happy Pills in America: From Miltown to Prozac* and Jonathan Metzl in *Mother's Little Helper: The Crisis of Psychoanalysis and the Miltown Resolution*. [18-19] American scholars also pay attention to the gradual decline of anti-drug abuse institutions. Alex Berenson believes that the National Alliance on Mental Illness weakens the harm of mental patients to society in propaganda, and downplays the grim fact that drug abuse will lead to mental illness and violent crime. [20] In the history circle of the United States, people have reflected on the harm brought by psychotropic drugs, and the power to fight against the abuse of psychotropic drugs has been weakened, which makes people doubt the legitimacy of treating children only from a pathological point of view, and reflects people's desire to trace the cause of the disease comprehensively.

In addition to specialized psychiatric institutions, families and schools are important places for children's psychiatric treatment. Relevant research results have achieved a breakthrough in the development of children's psychiatric treatment from integrating into social factors to making use of social factors. In terms of the therapeutic role of family, Kathleen W. Jones believed that Americans at the end of 19th century began to realize that problem children are related to the

society and environment in which they grew up. In the first half of the 20th century, a “child guidance movement” was launched in American society in an attempt to play the role of the family in dealing with problem child. [21] John J. Schwab et al. believed that family therapy received too little support, which was a prominent problem in the treatment of mental diseases. [22] Craig W. LeCroy defined the upbringing of mentally ill children by family and parents as comprehensive mental health services that are managed and executed as a coordinated network to meet the needs of children with mental illness. [23] From the above point of view, American historians have realized the importance of and analyzed the shortcomings of family therapy, hoping to improve its effect on child psychosis from two aspects: obtaining support from the government and society and improving parents’ ability to take care of children.

In terms of playing the therapeutic role of schools, Sol Cohen reflected on the impact of psychoanalysis and psychiatry on American education, and believed that schools are strategic institutions for preventing, detecting and “adjusting” the development of children personality, and have the function of cultivating the values of mental health, and only by changing the attitudes of teachers, parents and children towards mental health can the success of education reform be achieved. [24] Richard A. Meckel, for his part, focused on urban public schools as potentially promising key sites for child health in the United States that can provide primary mental health care to urban schoolchildren and adolescents. The effect of setting up clinics in schools in the United States is obvious to all, but the school’s follow-up of the illness as a form of surveillance is controversial. [25] In addition, Kathleen W. Jones combed the situation of children with intellectual disabilities receiving corrective education in schools and families. [26] Although the research results of the above scholars have affirmed the strategic significance of schools in the treatment of child psychosis, they have also been criticized for their involvement in children privacy. Only by changing social and guardian attitudes can the idea of relying on schools to treat child psychosis be successfully implemented.

In contrast to child psychohistory, the history of child psychiatry advances the child mental health history in two ways. First, the history of child psychiatry is supported by the theory of cross-cultural psychosis, closely combined with social culture and showing the trend of crossing with other historical branches such as cultural history, educational history, urban history, etc., and has the characteristics of history of cultural psychiatry. Secondly, the treatment methods are diversified in line with the development of the times. Based on the increasing and expanding pathogenic factors of child psychosis, its treatment methods are no longer limited to clinical treatment, but become diverse and flexible. The treatment sites are expanded outside the hospital, with the aim of seeking opportunities to reach the patients' hearts and highlighting the role of family therapy and school therapy. In addition, there are still some shortcomings in the study of psychiatric history. Psychologists have neglected an important issue that social and pathological factors are equal, both of which may directly lead to mental diseases. The research results of history of child psychiatry do not correctly reflect the role played by social factors. Pathological factors always play a central role. All social factors serve the pathological factors, which makes the “treatment”-oriented research of history of child psychiatry too one-sided. It was not until the emergence of medical social history in 1980s that this unbalanced situation was repaired.

#### **4. A New Way to Study the History of American Child Mental Health: Child Medical Social History**

Medical social history, which emerged in 1980s, is considered as a branch of historical disciplines formed by the transformation of medical history into cultural history as a part of social history. [27] The relationship between medical subjects reflected by it has expanded from the doctor-patient relationship to the relationship between medicine and society, and the social situation of medicine is regarded as the main object of attention. The research on child mental health problems from the perspective of medical social history is helpful to clarify that social factors are one of the pathogenic factors and reverse the marginalization of social factors in psychiatric treatment. Secondly, it demonstrates that the important role of social factors in child mental health is

not limited to “treatment” but reflected in the whole process of children’s illness. The author synthesizes the historical research results in the field of child mental health in the United States, and tries to explain the breakthrough in the field of child mental health in the medical social history in the United States from the government level, the folk level and the social level, as well as the multiple aspects and broad space for child mental health research.

#### **4.1 Countermeasures at the government level-American child mental health policy and legal history**

American social policy, as a manifestation of the will of the government, reflects the attitudes and views of American officials on child mental health in history. The research achievements in the history of mental health policy in the United States are rich and some breakthroughs have been made, mainly focusing on the history of social welfare intervention for children and their environment. The American welfare tradition originated from the construction of welfare state initiated by Roosevelt’s New Deal in 1935. According to the 1961 Statistical Abstract of the United States, child health and medical benefits programs have become major programs in American social welfare. [28]

The history of American child mental health policy has made it clear that social causes are one of the pathogenic factors of child psychosis, and effective social policies are the best way to treat social causes of child psychosis. Walter I. Trattner established the link between child welfare and public health, so that the problem of mental health impairment of children due to child abuse, child neglect and child vagrancy is included in the scope of child welfare policies. [29] Social causes are mainly caused by social problems. In other words, the process of children’s illness is a comprehensive reflection of social factors such as the background of the times, social structure, class contradictions and so on. The sick group includes vulnerable children such as abandoned children, poor children and street children. Wini Breines demonstrated that the mental state of American adolescent girls has been depressed since the 1850s through the complexity of their experiences. The United States government recruited psychiatrists and psychologists between 1940 and 1970 to develop public policies that allowed African-American adolescent girls, abortionists and lesbians to struggle to construct their identities. Alison Gray inspected the history of mental health reform in North Carolina and believed that the process of reform cannot be viewed in isolation. This is a subsidy model that is interwoven by federal, state and local policies, funds and actions. [30-31] The above research shows that the history of child mental health policy has taken specific measures for specific groups and different regions, and it is of high theoretical value and practical significance to examine child mental health policy from a micro perspective. In addition, Theresa R. Richardson, by comparing the child mental health campaigns in the United States and Canada, explained that the differences in personality of different nationalities are the reasons for the different mental health treatment policies. [32] Richardson’s research shows that cross-border research can compare the effect of mental health policy implementation under different social and cultural backgrounds, and reflect the academic significance of cross-border research on medical social history.

Laws on child mental health are the criteria for the U.S. government to implement relevant policies and solve social problems, which solve the criminal problems caused by children’s misconduct. Whether juvenile delinquency can be classified as mental health is a hot topic in American history circles. American child psychologist Hall G. Stanley established the relationship between children, spirit and crime for the first time, which caused heated public discussion and in-depth academic research. Subsequently, the definition of the age of juvenile delinquency delineates the characteristics that distinguish children from adults. In 1977, Joseph F. Kett analyzed the age limit for children to commit mental crimes, and named the development stage between childhood and adult as juvenile. [33,34] Good legal policies cannot ignore the experience of adolescence as a stage of human development. Kett’s argument attracted attention in the field of juvenile justice in the United States. *A Century of Juvenile Court*, compiled by David S. Tanenhaus and Paul Lerman and other famous American legal historians, discusses the prevention, trial and

correction of juvenile delinquency. David believed that the application of psychological and psychiatric methods to the prevention of juvenile delinquency and the shift of focus from teenagers to young child mental health make psychiatric clinics play an increasingly important role in juvenile courts. He also focused on the cases of juvenile court staff using psychology and psychiatry to deal with juvenile delinquency, including the analysis of juvenile delinquency files by doctors, psychologists and others. Paul Lorman analyzed in detail the operation of psychiatric hospitals, the evolution of private psychiatric hospitals, residential treatment centers and other service departments in American states, and found that the role of anti-drug abuse institutions is far less than that of mental health institutions and private correction institutions. [35-37] Moreover, the field of forensic medicine is also an important content in the history of law. Diane H. Schetky and Elissa P. Benedek reviewed the history of the field of child forensic medicine, and discussed the influence of parental evaluation, cross-racial and cross-cultural adoption, child pornography, sexual abuse of teenagers, childhood violence on neurodevelopment and tele-psychiatry, which reflected the frontier issues in the field of child forensic psychiatry. [38]

#### **4.2 Civilian assistance: the history of American child mental health assistance**

The adoption and foster care of children, as an important way for American people to participate in child assistance, has long been implemented among American people. It is fortunate that the abandoned, homeless and sick children can receive adoption assistance. However, historians spurn the adoption and foster care of children. In *Informal Adoption, Apprenticeship and Contracted Children in Colonial Times and the New Republic (1605-1850)*, Lori Askeland believed that African-Americans' upbringing methods rooted in African tradition and long-term shadow of slavery have a serious impact on the psychology and emotions of adopted children. Marilyn Holt discussed in *Adoption Reform, Orphan Train, and Child Assistance (1851-1929)* the Orphan Train program run by Charles L. Brace, founder of the New York Children Aid Society, which transported more than 200,000 abandoned and homeless children from coastal cities in the eastern United States to the Midwest for adoption, and most of them were reduced to slave labor. Charles believed that work, education, and strict and loving upbringing are ways to keep these children from corruption and poverty, but the great suffering and emotional suffering experienced by the children on the Train cannot be ignored. Dianne Creagh discussed the development of American child adoption policy in *Science, Social Work and Government Institutions: Adoption and Foster Care Develop with Caution (1930-1969)*, and elaborated how foster care and adoption came from behind to keep pace with orphanages, as well as the development of child rescue services towards more official status. She questioned the official trend of adoption and foster care, saying that this approach was not conducive to timely detection of children's physical and mental abnormalities and failed to allow children to receive timely assistance. [39-41] From the research results of the above scholars, the adoption and foster care of children, the adoption process and the experiences after adoption are extremely easy to cause psychological trauma and mental harm to children.

Apart from the ways of assistance, the role of American non-governmental charitable aid organizations should not be underestimated in child mental health assistance such as charitable foundations, religious charities and other non-governmental organizations as the main subjects of implementation. Margo Horn paid close attention to the American Foundation's aid program dedicated to solving the problem of juvenile delinquency, and believed that charitable intervention was a medical guidance program for children, which consolidated the values of the middle class, sought out the children most in need of help, and strengthened the professional hierarchical relationship among psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers who constituted the children's guidance movement. [42] A large number of private charitable foundations in the United States are important organizations involved in child mental health assistance in the United States. Although they are "private", they are guided by "public welfare" and have catalyzed major social reform movements in the United States. Among them, the history of assisting children with mental illness and working to improve the mental treatment environment is an important part of the history of children's mental health in the United States.

### **4.3 Pain points at the social level-A study of American child mental health problems and ethnic history**

As an immigrant country, the United States has a large number of minority children, and their social mental health problems are a collection of multiple social contradictions, involving such factors as race, class, democracy, human rights and the gap between the rich and the poor. An analysis from the perspective of ethnic history can provide a glimpse of the investigation of child mental health problems by American historians at the social level.

Gerald Grob argued that urbanization and market capitalism have fundamentally changed the state of mental illness, and many urban families are less able to take care of children with mental disorders than before. Yvette R. Harris and James A. Graham held that the external risk factors for mental illness in children of African descent came from the environment, while the internal factors were related to ethnic identity. Kedar Dwivedi examined the mental health needs of African-American children to prove that there is a direct or indirect relationship between mental illness and racial factors. [43-45] The above research focuses on the analysis of the social causes of mental illness of ethnic minority children, breaking through the shackles of their physical heredity and body disease, and bringing a large number of social and cultural factors, especially racial factors, into the scope of investigation.

According to John C. Waller, “industrialization destroys a large number of Americans and steals their health.” [46] Urbanization has sent tens of thousands of ethnic minority children to boarding schools for education, breaking the familiar local cultural heritage of ethnic minority children, leaving thousands of minority children with unsatisfied emotional needs and falling into a painful, tragic and premature death situation. Jim Downs found that the abolitionist movement brought spiritual destruction to the freed blacks, because they migrated in large numbers and suffered serious medical disasters and mental stress during their journey to freedom. Marian J. Morton confirmed that black children suffered inhuman treatment and serious psychological harm because of their skin color differences in the children’s reformatory in Cleveland, USA after on-the-spot investigation. Psychological counselors believe that this is “one of the most urgent, unsafe and psychologically harmful facilities that people have ever visited.” Mhemooda Malek and Carol Joughin provided enlightening insights on specific measures to improve child mental health. [47-49] The above research results reflect that mental abuse is the main manifestation of mental illness of ethnic minority children.

## **5. Conclusions**

The above review of the achievements in the history of child mental health in the United States reveals its evolution from a medical history to a medical social history. The starting point of the history of child mental health in the United States is to bring mental disorders into the medical category and make it clear that mental disorders belong to diseases. Then, mental health problems are transformed from purely medical problems into social and cultural problems, and children-centered historical investigation is carried out by taking social factors as an important content of child mental health problems. Next, pathological factors and social factors are investigated at the same time to avoid one-sided understanding of child mental health history only from pathological factors. The research on the history of child mental health in the United States has the following characteristics worthy of reference:

Firstly, the history of child mental health has a profound disciplinary foundation centered on medicine, psychology and psychiatry that developed and matured in the second half of the 20th century, in which many scholars have made achievements. The trend of cross-discipline and interdisciplinary research provides an opportunity to break away from traditional single-disciplinary research. The investigation of natural science from the perspective of humanities adds some “temperature” to the relatively “solidified” and “cold” experiments, operations and technologies. The interdisciplinary research method not only broadens the research field of traditional disciplines, but also contributes to the deepening of traditional research.



Secondly, the history of child mental health has the potential of continuous development and the possibility of innovation and breakthrough after integrating social factors. Although common, children bear the hope of the future of the country and the nation. When child mental health problems are placed in different historical context, it will no longer be limited to the discussion at the national and social levels. The history of child mental health in the United States does not simply classify child mental health problems as medical history or social history, but rather establishes an interactive relationship between individuals, the state and society.

Finally, the issue of child mental health is a common concern of all countries in the world. The historical research on this issue in the United States is influenced by the research on transnational history, which has formed a new trend of international comparative research, such as *The Century of the Child: The Mental Hygiene Movement and Social Policy in the United States and Canada*, which was introduced earlier. Such studies exert the advantages of comparative studies and avoid the formation of “blind area” caused by the image of the United States as a big country by comparing the development trends in the field of child mental health between the United States and other countries. Sandra and Sheldon, two scholars, analyzed the economic development and the changes in the child poverty rate in the United States and other developed countries, and concluded that the child poverty rate in the United States is still higher than that in many developed economies. As child poverty is one of the most important social factors for child mental health problems, cross-border comparative study can avoid the tendency that poverty factor in the United States is neglected.

In summary, the in-depth and continuous development of child psychohistory, the history of psychiatry and the history of medical society have expanded the boundaries of the research on the history of American child mental health, making the child psychosis in the perspective of medical society no longer exist only as a history of diseases and medicine, but as a child disease bearing politics, society and culture. It is precisely because of the development of the new social history that child mental health problem is no longer a common phenomenon in grand narrative, and children are regarded as people with life, emotion tie with society as close as flesh and blood. Children’s spirit bears and reflects personal experiences in politics, culture, ethnicity, gender and other aspects. Finally, children’s small body can become the theme of historical research like a drop of water concealing the sea, prompting historians to reflect on children’s historical role that has always been taken for granted.

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