Research Article

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Historical Perceptions about Children and Film: Case Studies of the British Board of Film Censors, the British Film Institute, and the Children's Film Foundation from the 1910s to the 1950s

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Abstract: This article explores how ideas regarding children and film were shaped and shifted from the 1910s to the 1950s by consulting three critical moments and key institutions: the British Board of Film Censors in the 1910s, the British Film Institute in the 1930s, and the Children's Film Foundation in the 1950s. By doing so, the article elucidates how discourse and ideas about children's films and audiences have transformed, resulting in policy shifts from restrictive to encouraging approaches that appreciate children's tastes and the entertainment value of children's cinema. Based on comparative historical research, this article empirically reveals that perceptions of children's cinema have changed throughout history and that the policy documents offer significant materials to explain this.

Keywords: cultural policy, film culture, British film, children's cinema, comparative historical research

1 Introduction

Since the early history of British film in the twentieth century, child audiences have been a significant theme for both film industry workers and policymakers. The policy discussions regarding children as audiences have been diverse and constantly changing. Particularly in the first half of the twentieth century, opinions regarding children and cinema significantly transformed among the stakeholders who were discussing film policies from educational and cultural perspectives. This article reveals the shift in views on children and film in different periods using historical resources. To explore British film policy and film culture with regard to children, this article examines case studies regarding the creation and early development of three institutions: the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) in the 1910s, the British Film Institute (BFI) in the 1930s, and the Children's Film Foundation (CFF) in the 1950s.[1] Adding to existing scholarship on these institutions and the preceding historiography of British film,[2] this article employs a comparative historical perspective to explore

1 Hunnings (1967), Lamberti (2012), Mathews (1994), Robertson (1989), Rock (2017), Smith (2003), and Trevelyan (1973) for the history of the BBFC; Butler (1971), Dupin (2006), Nowell-Smith and Dupin (2012), and Paterson (2017) for the BFI; and Agajanian (1998), Brown (2013), Roberts (2017), Shail (2016), Smith (2003), and Staples (1997) for the history of the CFF.

2 The preceding historiography of British film provides important overviews and analyses of the history of British film policy. The first generation of research on film policy was published from 1945 to the 1980s (Butler, 1971; Dickinson, 1983; Dickinson & Street,

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how the BBFC, the BFI, and the CFF shaped diverse views on children and cinema and examine their similarities and differences. By doing so, this article aims to illuminate and illustrate shifting attitudes towards children's film and film culture from a long-term historical viewpoint.

This article consults diverse historical resources, including reports of inquiries conducted by semi-public committees, such as the Cinema Commission of Inquiry in the Commission on Educational and Cultural Films (1932), the Departmental Committee on Children and the Cinema (1950), and the National Council of Public Morals (1917). In these inquiries, the views of various witnesses and commentators were documented and reflected in the discussions and recommendations of the reports. Therefore, these publications are pivotal references, exhibiting the common opinions regarding children and film when they were published. The report from the Cinema Commission of Inquiry by the National Council of Public Morals (NCPM) was a crucial milestone in the pre-war period. The NCPM was a private institution created in 1904 to monitor public morals and national culture by launching a series of research projects. The NCPM committed to the investigation of the cinema since the film industry organisations asked it to establish the Cinema Commission of Inquiry to explore "the physical, social, moral, and educational influence of the cinema, with special reference to young people" (National Council of Public Morals, 1917, p. vii). The Cinema Commission published a report, The Cinema: Its Present Position and Future Possibilities (1917), on the moral and social influences of the cinema (Section I), cinema's impact on the education and criminality of children (Section II), the eye strain caused by the cinema (Section III), and the history and conditions of the BBFC (Section IV). The *Film in National Life* report, published in May 1932 by the Commission on Educational and Cultural Films (hereinafter, "the Commission"), was a pivotal publication for film policy in the interwar period. The Commission originated at a conference of the British Institute of Adult Education, a charity that sought to support adult education, to discuss the use of film to promote British national culture and function as a pedagogical instrument. Examining the political and economic contexts and the relevant authorities surrounding British film, including the BBFC, the report concluded that a national film institute should be established to promote the educational and cultural value of film. In post-war Britain, the Home Office established the Committee on Children and the Cinema to investigate children's films and published the *Children and the Cinema* report in 1950 (Departmental Committee on Children and the Cinema, 1950). It praised both the children's film production campaigns, including the plot type of the CFF by the Rank Organisation, and insisted on a Constitution of the National Board, which would support and advise the production of children's films. This report was crucial because it addressed the sincere appreciation of the children's film business and recommended further engagement from the public sector.

Additionally, I reviewed publications from the general media, including daily newspapers (*The Times*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Guardian*, and *The Observer*), political authorities, members of civil society, as well as the periodicals addressing public readership and trade papers published by the film-industry organisations, including the *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly* (1989–1907), which was later renamed *The Kinematograph Weekly* (1907–1971), the *Bioscope* (1908–1932), the *Close Up* (1927–1933), the *Daily Film Renter* (1927–1957), and the *Monthly Film Bulletin* (1934–1991). In several cases, editors and readers replied to these articles and discussed why and how British film should be promoted or regulated. The national newspapers provided

1985; Hartog, 1983; Low, 1950, 1979a,b, 1985) and aimed to provide an overview of film policy over a broad period and describe its long-term trends. The two most characteristic works of this era are *Cinema and State: The British Film Industry and the British Government 1927–1984* by Dickinson and Street (1985) and *The History of British Cinema* series by Low (1950, 1979a,b, 1985). In addition to these works, Butler (1971) published a monograph focusing on the development of the BFI, which highlighted the importance of scholarly attention to this organisation. Researchers subsequently presented detailed examinations of British film policy by focusing on case studies of specific historical moments (Drazin, 2017; Fenwick, 2017; Glancy, 2000; Gruner, 2012; McIntyre, 1996; Porter, 2001; Stubbs, 2009). Edited volumes such as *The Routledge Companion to British Cinema History* (Hunter et al. 2017) and *The British Cinema Book* (Murphy, 2009) highlight significant milestones and cover a wide range of issues. Although these volumes allocated more pages to describing the film industry and film culture than to analysing film policy, they nevertheless provided further information concerning British film policies through detailed case studies. A key characteristic of this type of research is a focus on specific time periods and institutions, which contrasts starkly with preceding historiographies addressing broader periods and aiming to present the full history of British cinema.

platforms in which stakeholders representing different sectors exchanged their opinions and showcased the process of policy discussion by those authors.

2 Restricting Children's Access to Film: The BBFC in the 1910s

Film emerged as a popular recreation during the 1910s; however, there were certain concerns about the negative impacts of cinema on audiences and society overall, resulting in restrictive film policies. These were exemplified by Britain's film censorship agency, the BBFC. The BBFC was established in 1912 as a private organisation created by film industry organisations and funded by film producers seeking censorship/classification certificates for their films. The members of the BBFC included anonymous censors who examined all submitted films and its governing members, including the presidents. The censored film would be certified as universally accessible or only accessible for adults. The creation of the BBFC by the film industry was a defensive response to the emergence of independent and random censorship by local municipalities and concerns regarding the moral harm of the film as a then new cultural activity and medium. Although launched by the film industry, the BBFC was more than an instrument of commercial business. It involved the public, business, and civic sectors in highly intricate manners, which brought about the growth of the BBFC as a gatekeeper of British film content until the present.

After its creation, the BBFC actively examined and classified a substantial number of films. The organisation divided films into two categories: films that could be universally presented were designated with a "U," while an "A" was used for films restricted to adult audiences. Originally, the U category was intended to identify the film as being particularly suitable for children. However, in 1916, the emphasis shifted, and U films were defined as "permitted" rather than "recommended" for child audiences (Hunnings, 1967). To classify the films, the board appointed four anonymous examiners who gathered in the same space to view films submitted to the BBFC and whose names were kept secret even after their retirements. Two examiners watched one film while the others watched another. When the examiners identified a problematic film, all four examiners watched it and discussed their collective decision. Reflecting on the BBFC's actions to restrict children's access to the cinema, The NCPM report, including statements from educational and religious figures, demonstrates that, in the 1910s, there were few comments revealing ideas and beliefs that films should be recommended for children or that children could be positively influenced by the exhibited films. For instance, the comments from the witnesses in the Cinema Commission of Inquiry by the NCPMs rarely referred to the educational and cultural value of film for children. Rather, the comments included several concerns regarding the negative impacts of the film. The Headmaster of Eton, for example, remarked that "the influence on adults is not good, but on children it is positively bad" (The National Council of Public Morals, 1917, p. liii). The Executive of the National Union of Teachers also declared: "I do not think that there is any educational value in the film worth mentioning at present" (p. lv).

3 Educating Children Through Instructive Films: The BFI in the 1930s

From the pre-war to the interwar period, British film policy shifted from a restrictive to an encouraging approach, as exemplified by the BFI established in 1933. The BFI's policies were motivated by shared beliefs about the educational and cultural value of cinema spotlighted in this period. The BFI was established in response to the recommendations of a committee of educationalists belonging to the British Institute of Adult Education. The BFI was formulated as a response to recommendations by a committee of educationalists belonging to the British Institute of Adult Education.[3] The BFI was established with the cooperation of

3 The British Institute of Adult Education was a charity organisation established in 1921 to promote adult education. For a brief overview of the Institute and its connection with the BFI.

educationalists in the committee and representatives of the film industry and was later expanded with the involvement of public authorities. The BFI has been central to implementing British film policies, including the National Film Library, the BFI's theatres, and funding for experimental film.

The Conference on Films for Children, organised by the BFI on 20–21 November, 1936, is one clear example of children's film policy then.[4] The conference involved key educational associations, public authorities, and figures from industry, leading to proposals for expanding the production and exhibition of children's films. Simon Rowson (President of the British Kinematograph Society and Chairman of the Entertainment Panel of the BFI) was a key figure representing the interests of the film industry and leading discussions at the conference. Drawing on statistics related to children's cinema and the size of child audiences, he cautioned that it was impossible to suddenly increase the supply of children's films, as advocates from the educational side had suggested. He noted that "so long as the producer earnings per subject were not appreciably more than 3,000 pounds each, it was impossible to contemplate special productions exclusively adapted for this market. At present, such possible revenues are not in sight" (BFI, 1936, p. 9). However, Rowson was supportive of advancing the supply and circulation of superior children's films:

> [I]t is obvious, therefore, that if means could be found for inducing the school children to attend one special performance per week, there would be an appreciable addition to the total attendances, and probably also the box-office receipts. In the interests of exhibitors, scarcely less than in the interests of the children themselves, such a source of revenue merits further examination.
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> [T]he narrow limits within which any practical plans for providing cinema entertainment for children must be drawn. Even those restricted plans can, however, be made to serve a national good, providing healthy pleasure for children and a by no means negligible income to the various branches of the trade. (BFI, 1936, p. 9)

Significantly, conference participants from civil society positively appraised the leadership and commitment of the film industry in expanding the market for children's films. The Hon. Eleanor Plumber, member of the BFI Advisory Council and representative of the National Council of Women, commented:

> There was a growing realisation amongst social workers of the influence of the cinema and this brought growing anxiety that it should be used for the best possible development of children. The cinema trade had solved many difficult problems in attempting to provide healthy and satisfactory entertainment, and she hoped to provide healthy and satisfactory entertainment, and she hoped that there was no reason why it should not save this problem too. (BFI, 1936, p. 20)

Overall, participants warmly welcomed the activities of the film industry. The chairman of the Conference stated that "from the addresses to be given that afternoon, the Conference would appreciate the efforts which the commercial section of the film industry had given to [children's film promotion]" (BFI, 1936, p. 24). Significantly, representatives of the film industry suggested that children's film exhibitions were meaningful from a managerial angle. Sidney L. Bernstein (a Director of the Bernstein Theatres, Ltd.) stated:

> Every intelligent theatre owner wants films of a better quality and knows that, if he does not give them, his public will desert him. He knows, too, that a demand from the public for better pictures will result in the production of better pictures. If he is wise, he will encourage children to start seeing films at an early age and will help to develop their critical faculties, in order that they may learn to know better films when they see them and voice their demand for better films. He wants not only to maintain his existing audiences but also to encourage the cinema-going habit in the 'coming generation.' He wants the habit to be ingrained in the young, like that of reading. (BFI, 1936, p. 24)

It was agreed that providing superior films for children and educating their tastes would result in the improvement of film production in Britain, producing commercial returns for the British film industry and bridging economic

4 This section heavily relies on the *Report of the Conference on Films For Children, November 20 and 21, 1936,* which is an official report on the conference published by the BFI because other media, including the trade journals or newspapers, did not mention the event, and the report is the only source available to understand the procedure, discussion, and outcomes of the conference.

and educational interests. Overall, the conference functioned as a platform in which both the film industry and other stakeholders appreciated the preceding efforts and welcomed a sociable and supportive atmosphere.

In this process, members of the film industry discussed their experiences of children's film exhibitions, the lessons learnt from them, and the antipathy they received from civil actors. For instance, a representative commented on how the industry was unfairly demonised regarding children's film exhibitions. He claimed that when children access undesirable books, parents or teachers are commonly criticised rather than bookstores or libraries. Thus, it was unreasonable, he claimed, that film exhibitors were denounced when children watched films intended for adult audiences. Related to this point, the Conference made a conclusive statement that, in addition to the unprofitability of the Saturday matinee, children's exhibitions, and the inadequate supply of children's films, the film industry received insufficient assistance from local education authorities, schoolteachers, and the official bodies of social workers.

Furthermore, conference participants from the film-industry organisations presented the film businesses' experimental projects to supply children's films and explained the challenges they faced. Driven to contribute to the educational and cultural use of film, Bernstein Theatre launched a special exhibition of films in 1928. However, the exhibition was unpopular with children and faced criticism from educationalists. At the conference, cinema exhibitors drew lessons from that experiment. First, the film industry representatives admitted that they "aimed a little high in the programmes" and were "too anxious to do the children good" (BFI, 1936, p. 12). In other words, the programme was too educational and lacked the entertainment aspect. One of the programme organisers stated that "at one of the children's performances at Willesden, a slide was shown announcing the special film for the following week Cinderella. A girl – not more than nine – who was sitting immediately in front of Miss Harvey, remarked with scorn: 'Cinderella? Pooh! What do they think we are? A bunch of kids?'" (BFI, 1936, p. 29). Here, the lesson was simple and universal: successful children's films must contain both instructional and entertainment value so that children can enjoy and appreciate the shows.[5]

After exchanging views and experiences and surveying preceding projects, the conference invited suggestions for advancing children's cinema. Most significantly, it encouraged the creation of a new agency with the support from the film industry that would "deal with the specialised booking of films for children's performances … [and that] would widely commend itself to the Trade" (BFI, 1936, p. 25). The conference confirmed that the collaboration with social and industrial associations was key:

> If social workers and institutions were willing to collaborate with the Trade … it would be possible to form a non-profit-making company to acquire a large library of suitable films, on condition that they were available only for non-commercial performances, after the ordinary bookings had been exhausted. (BFI, 1936, p. 27)

Resonating with the agreement to encourage the production of children's films, the participants from the film industry emphasised that the industry aimed to support such initiatives. "The trade – as we are called – with few exceptions – are willing helpers … if only there is co-operation and less suggestions that the cinema is a mental danger to the children and subversive of their morals" (BFI, 1936, p. 27).[6] The proposed new institution

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5 Even before the conference, the film industry occasionally complained that the exhibition of morally desirable films for children was not supported by the child audiences themselves and could not bring adequate financial returns to them.

> "Mr. Sydney Lewis of the Birmingham Cinema Exhibitors' Association said that exhibitors would rather show films of a good type, but, unfortunately, these did not give the box-office return that they had the right to ask for. Their business was not to educate or to supply moral uplift…. He claimed that the cinema exhibitors are ready to offer cultivating and educational films when the children demand, but to set up such conditions, the solution should not be censorship but education. "Nothing can be done except by education. We shall continue to show the type of film the public comes to the box-office for." He assured the conference, however, of the sympathy of the exhibitors in their desire for a better type of film." (The Manchester Guardian, 1932, February 29, p. 9).

6 The supply of desirable films for children was also proposed as a solution to educate the younger generations on other occasions. For instance, in 1935, W. Lyon Blease, British Liberal Party Politician and Lecturer in the Law and Custom of the Constitution at Liverpool University, commented as follows:

> [T]he present film censorship was entirely inadequate for improving public taste, was amazingly illogical, and in some cases quite incomprehensible. The only way to fortify the minds of children against bad films was to teach them to be excited and delighted by good ones.

supplying films for children was not actualised during the interwar period, but a more immediate outcome of the conference was the publication of a list of 85 commercial films suitable for screening to children (BFI, 1936). Educational authorities and national newspapers broadly welcomed the publication of the commercial film list as a necessary instrument to initiate children's film exhibitions. This conference was a significant example of efforts to nurture a film culture for children by selecting desirable films for them, which will be continued as the post-war film production by the CFD/Children's Entertainment Film (CEF)/CFF discussed below.

4 Appreciating Children's Tastes: The CFF in the 1950s

New beliefs about children's cinema and child audiences emerged in post-war Britain. They resulted in a successful children's film production policy conducted by the CFF. Unlike the top-down and paternalistic approach of the BFI, CFF governors appreciated children's tastes and were motivated to make entertaining films for children. This was central to the CFF's innovative production policy in the 1940s and 1950s. In 1944, The Rank Organisation, then a major film production company, created the Children's Film Department (CFD) to commission and finance the production of children's films that would be circulated in special film programmes for children. The CFD pioneered the production of British domestic films made exclusively for children, which sought to instil educational and cultural values. In 1947, the CFD was renamed the CEFs, and it expanded the production and promotion of children's films by commissioning feature films for children. Although the CEF's achievements and contributions to British film culture were broadly acknowledged by the public and civic sectors, as well as the film industry, the Rank Organisation decided to dissolve the CEF in 1950 due to financial difficulties. The CFF, a non-profit organisation funded by the British Film Production Fund, better known as the Eady Levy – a tax on the film industry and collectively managed by trade associations – inherited and expanded the CEF's activities.

The CFD/CEF/CFF's pivotal policy for film production was to understand children's tastes and expectations. The CFF's first annual report defined its primary goal as being to supply entertaining films "that children will readily pay to see," stating that "it cannot be emphasised too strongly that the Foundation's aim is to produce entertainment films that children will enjoy" (Children's Film Foundation, 1952, p. 6). To produce films that can truly entertain children, the CFD/CEF/CFF had to study young audiences and improve research methods that resulted in the production of children's films that can attract and entertain children. Before the CEF's audience research, the *Children and Cinema* Report in 1950 claimed that educationalists knew surprisingly little about children's film and its audiences.

> We have pointed out that comparatively few parents, teachers or members of licensing authorities see the films which are being shown to the children, and we have recommended that parents, teachers and others who are especially interested in the welfare of children should be admitted to the exhibitions. The films are seldom, if ever, advertised either in the ordinary cinema or at earlier children's performances. In our view, it is desirable that they should be. The mothers who were asked for their opinions of the children's clubs and matinees frequently said they would like to have more information about the films shown, though they assumed that only films suitable for children were shown, and indeed approved of children's exhibitions on this ground. Unfortunately, their assumption is far from being generally true (Departmental Committee on Children and the Cinema, 1950, p. 27).

The findings from the audience research were employed to tackle such ignorance and prejudice regarding children's films and their impacts on child audiences.

> He suggested that one of the city theatres should be turned into a municipal cinema where good films in which there was real beauty should be shown. Such a theatre should be part of the school training of every child, and when the children left school they would be proof against bad films and would not want to see them. (The Manchester Guardian, 1935, February 6, p. 18)

Here, encouraging desirable films and imposing restrictions through censorship were conceptualised as opposite sides of the same coin.

The CFD/CEF/CFF improved the methodology used to assess cinema's influence on children by developing new technologies and methods. The previous methodology relied mainly on questionnaires for children (the BFI children's film model) or on analyses of film texts (the BBFC model). In contrast to such techniques based on textual and content analysis, the philosophy of the CFD/CEF was to set up occasions for direct observations of children's responses to films. To achieve this, their governing members regularly attended children's film club screenings and interviewed the cinema managers. The findings were directly reflected in CFD/CEF film production through regular meetings between the council and CFD/CEF governors such as Rank and Field, as well as other members of the CFD/CEF. Later, the audience research methodology became further developed and sophisticated in the CFF from 1951. The empirical approach elaborated by Field was cautiously designed to identify what children wanted. In her experience at the CEF, she found that questionnaires were not necessarily a suitable approach for children. She argued that due to their restricted literacy, young children's written answers were unreliable. Field offered the example of one boy who answered that his favourite genre was Western film, despite the fact that he spent much more time enthusiastically watching documentaries. Based on that, Field developed a research methodology that involved directly recording and analysing the reactions of the audiences during the CFF film screenings. By acknowledging both children's spontaneous responses and their established tastes in films, the CFD/CEF aimed to balance entertainment and moral lessons. The 1948 report also articulated the goals of CEF films, claiming that it was difficult or almost impossible to draw a clear line between entertainment films and educational films (Advisory Council, 1948). Therefore, the CEF should produce films containing both educational messages and entertaining experiences. By offering such films and attracting children, the CEF can produce "intelligent and discriminating film-goers" who can distinguish and choose high-quality films from poor films (Advisory Council, 1948, p. 4). Ideal CEF films should be "entertainment films, suited to their age and capacity, that can evoke in children a feeling of wonder, enable them to satisfy vicariously their sense of adventure, and provide the necessary opportunities for healthy laughter" (Advisory Council, 1948, p. 4). Consequently, their audience research resulted in the improvement of children's film quality and fuelled its increasing popularity, which led to positive evaluations among diverse stakeholders that continue today. Field noted that it was by studying the reactions of children to the actors in the films that we were able to cast so much more successfully.

An official report published in 1967 inherited the same views and reflected on the achievements of the CFF. John Davis, Chairman and Chief Executive of the Rank Organisation and the chairman of the CFF since 1960 argued in defence of adapting to changes in children's tastes:

> Children today are a more sophisticated audience than they used to be and demand a high level of technical perfection as well as entertainment values. The films that are made for them may be different in tempo, but there can be no relaxation of the film making discipline. All of us have experienced the clear and critical perception of children in other walks of life. They are just as critical of any sign in films made for their enjoyment of "talking down" or "patronising". The skill with which these pitfalls are avoided in CFF productions never fails to fascinate me (forward by John Davis quoted in Children's Film Foundation, 1969, p. 4).

5 Changing Beliefs on Children and the Cinema

This article reveals that policymakers' views on children and the cinema significantly transformed in the first half of the twentieth century. The initial shift identified between the BBFC in the 1910s and the BFI in the 1930s was from restriction to encouragement. When the BBFC introduced the categories of censored film – the U category (universally accessible, including children) and the A category (adult only) – the Board aimed to classify films that could negatively impact children and inhibit children from watching them. In other words, the films the BBFC classified as U were merely those permitted for children rather than those recommended for them. Later, in the 1920s and the 1930s, when the BFI was proposed and established by the trade-educationalist coalition, the agenda for children's films shifted from "how to identify bad films for children" to "how to produce and promote good films for children." In 1932, the Commission on Educational and Cultural Films pointed out that the educationalists had not seriously considered the potential of film for educational purposes

but had only spotlighted its negative influences, commenting that teachers "who thought about film (with a few notable exceptions) were concerned almost exclusively with attempts to restrict the attendance of children at public cinemas" (Commission on Educational and Cultural Films, 1932, p. 59).[7] The Commission members, however, concluded that they should discuss the promotion rather than the restriction of film for children and proposed that a national film institute (later the BFI) be created to promote film for educational and cultural purposes. The Home Office also proposed the shift from restriction to promotion as a recommended policy for children's films in the interwar period. In its report on its conference on Films for Children (1936), the Home Office commented that censorship could exclude only undesirable or unsuitable content for children. Nonetheless, the Home Office did not intend for that statement to suggest that the remaining films classified as U were recommendable for children. Instead, the Home Office suggested that the cooperation between the educationalists and the film industry should be accelerated to supply more suitable films for children (BFI, 1936). These statements reflect the beliefs of the Home Office and the Commission that special films for children should be promoted, and the BBFC was unsatisfactory for that purpose because the exclusion of undesirable films for children did not necessarily improve the quality of the films.

In the post-war period, when children's film production was expanded by the Rank Organisation and the CFF, it became a commonplace that cinemagoing for children was a significant cultural activity and film's educational value was substantive. The Report of the Departmental Committee on Children and the Cinema (1950), for example, noted that children's cinema "has almost unrivalled power to enrich and delight the mind, and can be a great cultural medium as well as a source of fun and entertainment" (p. 8). The keyword in this statement was "entertainment," as the Committee's participants reiterated that the recommended children's films were not only instructive and educational but also entertaining and attractive. Based on such standards, the Committee examined the impact of film on children and concluded that the production of special films for children by the CEF in the Rank Organisation should be expanded and supported by public aid. Agreeing with the Committee's view, the CFF, the CEF, and its Advisory Council reiterated that children's films should be entertaining for children and that the foundation should produce what children wanted to see. At the same time, however, entertainment was not the only principle the CFF aimed to pursue. The Foundation aimed to combine both the educational and entertaining elements of film,[8] as the following production policy statement describes:

> While it has been repeatedly stated that the Foundation's first duty is to entertain its audience, it does not follow that the films made are only of the sort which the children say they like the best. With growing confidence that there is a knowledge and understanding of the audience, it is becoming possible to break away more and more decisively from "cops and robbers" and "chase stories".[9]
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> Since one of the objects must always be to maintain and improve the attendances at children's performances, the production programme concentrates on popular appeal; it does not, however, play for sensationalism or unhealthy excitement or vulgarity. (Children's Film Foundation, 1969, p. 6)

7 Kuhn (2002) illustrates how concerns about children's filmgoing were expressed at that time.

8 Resonating with that, the BFI in the interwar period also attempted to approach classroom films to make them more attractive. The BFI Governors expected that a partnership between commercial and educational interests could "have a humanising effect on education" (BFI, 1934). To achieve this goal, the BFI encouraged the involvement of private businesses in producing classroom or lecture films for educational purposes. To attract the production companies, the BFI was expected to realise "the building up of the new market" (The Kinematograph Weekly, 1933, January 5, p. 3). It is estimated that "every reputable film producer was anxious to make educational films and good films for entertainment, if he could be assured of a market for them" (The Kinematograph Weekly, 1933, March 23, p. 4). However, the commitment of the private business to the classroom film was not activated then because its market was not attractive and the BFI's promotion was suspended during the Second World War.

9 Here, the CFF problematises that the film production before the Foundation was based on simple and reiterated plots such as good polices chasing bad criminals without complicated dramas. The Foundation argued that such simple story and scenario came from the underestimations of children's tastes and capacities to understand complicated stories (CFF, 1969). The CFF challenged such preceding stereotypes of children audiences by actively implementing audience research and making films with more entertaining stories.

Table 1: Views on children's film and child audiences in Britain

	Views on children/film/audiences
Pre-war period (1910s)	• "Films are potentially harmful media" • "Children only have access to films under supervision"
Interwar period (1920/30s)	• "Children can learn moral lessons from and be educated by films" • "Educationalists and policymakers should choose appropriate films"
Post-war period (1950s)	• "Children are autonomous audiences with distinct tastes" • "Films for children should be entertaining for child audiences"

The Foundation's confidence in delivering entertaining films was based on audience research conducted by the CEF and the Advisory Council. Detailed analysis of this audience research prompted the production of more varied and complex stories for children. Moreover, the foundation's belief that children's films should be both entertaining and educational is derived from its confidence that children can distinguish between good and bad films. Moreover, based on audience research and communication with children attending the children's film programmes, it was determined that children can choose tasteful films with moral messages (Children's Film Foundation, 1960; Departmental Committee on Children and the Cinema, 1950).

The examined archival materials also indicate how these changing views both emerged and were broadly accepted due to the achievements of experimental film productions. When the committee reports commented that films should be promoted for children (in the 1930s) or that children's films should be entertaining (in the 1950s), they justified their views by referring to several examples of successful film productions. The Commission on Educational and Cultural Films, for example, chose several films as evidence that films can contain educational and cultural values.[10] The Committee on Children and the Cinema also referred to the quality of the CEF film programmes and the increase in children's cinema clubs and child audiences in the 1940s as evidence to support its view that children's films should be entertaining.

6 Conclusion

Based on comparative historical research on children's film policy in Britain, this article has traced how common understandings about child audiences and their desirable relationships with cinema have constantly evolved from the 1910s to the 1950s (Table 1). The comparative approach helps scholars identify distinctive and contrasting characters in different periods, summarised as a shift from restriction to encouragement with respect for the autonomous tastes of young filmgoers. The changes in ideas and approaches for children's films resonate with central ideas of post-war cultural policy: the democratisation of culture (broadening public access to cultural activities) as well as cultural democracy (appreciating free individual choices on what they prefer and enjoy) (Evrard, 1997). Thus, the findings in this article contribute to articulating the historical research on cultural policy and popular culture in Britain.

Furthermore, this article underscores the utility of policy documents, such as inquiry reports by semi-public committees and annual reports of public institutions, as invaluable resources for comprehending the evolving tastes and consensus surrounding the film and its audiences. It is essential to note that while the findings from the BBFC, the BFI, and the CFF offer substantial insights, they do not offer an exhaustive representation of cultural trends. Nevertheless, the discourse and methodologies introduced in this article can serve as a foundation for further exploration into comprehending societal, cultural, and political changes

10 For instance, the Commission on Educational and Cultural Films (1932) introduces desirable children's films produced until the 1930s, such as the US film *The Silent Enemy* (1930) shown by British Instructional Films Limited as "films of the right kind" (p. 74), and the Commission claimed that similarly attractive films could and should be produced in British countryside.

related to film culture and policy, a realm actively under investigation by diverse disciplines such as cultural policy studies and cultural studies.

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