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BOOK REVIEWS

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The Anthropology of Childhood. Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings (second edition). By David F. Lancy

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The Anthropology of Childhood. Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings (second edition). By DAVID F. LANCY. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2015. 533 pp, £25.99 (paperback). ISBN 978-1-107-42098-4.

In his book, *The Anthropology of Childhood. Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings*, David F. Lancy has undertaken the Herculean task of synthesising an impressive expanse of literature from ethnographic, historical, archaeological and other sources to address the study of children and childhood in a cross-cultural and holistic way. He successfully challenges conventional Euro-American wisdom regarding child development and childrearing and draws a much-needed dichotomy between our own culture-bound conception of children as 'precious, innocent, and preternaturally cute *cherubs*' and 'societies, indeed entire periods in history, where children are viewed as unwanted, inconvenient *changelings* or as desired but pragmatically commoditized *chattels*' (p. xii). Furthermore, his insightful creation of a polemical contrast between societies characterised by neotocracy ('in which children have authority – lording over their valet parents – but little freedom and no responsibility' p. 72) and traditional agrarian ones dominated by gerontocracy (where 'it is for the elder man to rule and for the younger to submit', as already described by Plato in *The Republic*, pp. 70–4, 405–10) highlights how children's relative value may be appreciated and continually recalibrated through the hierarchy they live in.

In addition to the study of children's value, Lancy highlights in an exemplary way the interplay of biology and culture into how childhood happens – from reproduction decisions, pregnancy and childbirth to parenting practices in a range of cultures and times. The message that Lancy sends through regarding the expectations of parents (in particular mothers) is that 'So parenting in contemporary society is at least somewhat like physics, as it is tough to ensure the child's future success and a close, lasting filial relationship. But, ultimately, we come full circle in that, as long as a reasonably competent and caring individual is in charge, the more loving, intelligent and dedicated helpers surrounding the nest, the better off the twenty-first-century child will be' (p. 163). This book opens new avenues into the omnipresent discussions of how children are (or should be) raised; family structures and the adult expectations of children; the adult-centric meanings of childhood; when a child becomes a child; when and how children make the transition into adulthood; make-believe play and socialisation; formal schooling versus learning through observation and imitation; stimulation and instruction and child labour and the economic contribution of children.

This revised edition contains a broad, and unparalleled in breath and scope, overview of the findings of over 100 years research on the anthropology of childhood and adolescence, informed by thought-provoking essays on a wide range of emerging topics on children's experiences in different cultures from a variety of eras, and by anecdotes from ethnography and the daily media. It provides the arena to reflect upon past and modern attitudes towards children and childhood from a cross-disciplinary perspective, whether, for example, sociocultural anthropology, field ethnography, history and archaeology or education, sociology, psychology, primatology and evolutionary biology.

Through a comparative and inductive approach Lancy lends a strong voice to children and their experiences in different cultures, past and present. Certainly this is a book of exceptional scholarly quality and breadth, highly recommended for all libraries, scholars and students interested in the study of children and childhood. The author is to be warmly congratulated for his astonishing effort.