

CHAPTER 6 SUMMARY

Why do children start to show certain socio-cultural characteristics in their graphic presentation at a certain age? Why do children show a universality in their graphic presentation in their drawings regardless of socio-cultural differences? Some researchers say that we already start to be influenced by a particular culture right after we are born through parents, brothers and sisters, since people themselves are assumed to be a part of culture. We cannot be alone and we cannot be free from culture as long as we are born into society.

Regardless of the culture, the development of perception is never qualitatively different from either person to person or culture to culture, although the development might be quantitatively different from person to person. Physical growth is also qualitatively equal regardless of cultural differences. As a result, because children's artistic abilities are supported by cognitive development and the development of motor skills, children's artistic development in graphic presentation basically shows a universal direction from simple to complex, at early ages before going to school (approximately 2 - 6 years old).

For example, it is well known that all infants start to draw from a scribble; however, the scribble does not have any referential meaning and it is just a pleasure that infants accidentally find through playful activity with their hands. Then, the scribble changes to make a certain graphic shape, which is a circle, because of the limitation of their motor skills, which is a matter of physical construction (Arnheim, 1954, 1974). For younger children, creating geometric shapes of squares and triangles is an incredibly difficult task since they cannot control straight lines well. By using circles, children express everything that they want to. Even though the circles that children draw look like just a circle which does not have any meaning, each circle has a particular meaning for children: mother, father, dog, cat, sun, flower, and so on (Arnheim, 1954, 1974). Likewise, such a universal tendency in graphic presentation develops from the simple to more complex patterns with cognitive and physical development until children start to be exposed to strong socio-cultural factors, approximately before elementary school (Golomb, 1992).

Depending on the interpretation of the definition and the realm of social-cultural factors, many researchers would argue for earlier peer influences and the possibility of social-cultural influences appearing in children's early artworks. This would suggest that there is no universal tendency in children's artistic development even before in elementary school. However, I would also argue for the possibility of strong social-cultural influences appearing early in children's drawings since elementary school is the first society where children are socialized systematically, but these influences are probably not felt earlier. Even though younger children could possibly be exposed to social-cultural factors before starting compulsory education, the chance is lower than those of elementary children. There are still some universal patterns which exist in young children's graphic representation before elementary school.

In spatial presentation in children's drawings, there is also a universal tendency in certain periods until their works of art start to be dominated by particular socio-cultural factors by which children are surrounded. First, children seemingly do not have any concept of space when they draw; as a result, figures are often just floating in their drawings. In other words, it is difficult to see the concept of space in children's drawings since figures are often randomly floating in their drawings without systematically standing on something. Secondly, children start to use the bottom edge of the paper as a ground line and all figures are depicted standing on the line. Next, children invent a horizon line in the drawing to solve the problem of creating space in it and all figures and others are still standing on the line. With the emergence of the horizon line in children's drawings, their creativity rapidly develops and they start to express the three-dimensional world on a two-dimensional surface. When children find the effect of overlapping by themselves or from peers, artistic ability naturally reaches a certain peak. Whether children can find other effective factors to create a realistic three dimensional world on two dimensional surfaces, such as relative position, size, density, and linear perspectives depends on children's backgrounds. Depending on whether children are exposed to particular strong socio-cultural factors, the manner of spatial treatment in their drawings will differ. If children are not influenced by any factors in a culture, their ability will not develop naturally. However, when children have many chances to be influenced by socio-cultural factors, the influence will appear in their drawings and it will lead to unique ways of spatial presentation that other cultures seldom show.

In conclusion, on the one hand, regardless of socio-cultural differences, human beings develop their artistic ability from simple to complex graphic presentation, reflecting their cognitive development (cognitive and perceptual abilities) and physical growth (motor skills). This means that there is a universality in the pattern of graphic presentation during a certain period regardless of cultural differences, although the universal stage theory does not exist in children's artistic development.

On the other hand, children start to show cultural characteristics in their drawings at a certain time period since they are exposed to strong factors in each culture, although we may not be able to precisely define the main factors. This indicates that children's artistic development in graphic presentation is not always a linear development, but often shows a circular development. Although children generally show a pattern from simple to complex in their graphic representation with age, some children show another tendency to create a new technique in their presentation after reaching the period of complexity, which may be called advanced simplicity. In the daring simple composition, we will see advanced techniques and higher cognition, which is different from the simplicity of composition in the early period due to the lack of children's skills and their performance problems.

As a result, children's graphic presentation develops differently from person to person. Furthermore, children who are strongly influenced by particular socio-cultural factors start to show their original creativity in their graphic presentation, and

characteristics become the particular socio-cultural differences which may be called cultural originalities.

In this study, Japanese children's drawings of "Me and my friends playing in the school yard" show the children's unique ways of creating space although they also started to draw and create space in their drawings with the same kinds of techniques at their early ages as U.S. children do. In a certain period of their growth, Japanese children started to show their own creative ways in spatial presentation due to strong socio-cultural influences. There are mainly four socio-cultural factors: 1) the educational factor, 2) the environmental factor, 3) the traditional aesthetic factor, and 4) the popular culture factor. In addition, these factors are sometimes combined and influence children's artistic ability.

Bruner (1996) says that development is undoubtedly not free from culture. Nevertheless, Cole (1996) argues that there is no theory which explains how a particular culture affects cognitive development in a particular direction. This may be true since it is very difficult to define what socio-cultural factor causes a particular direction in children's cognitive development. A conclusion cannot easily be reached because the process of cultural development is not simple at all. However, it is also true that it is relatively easy to find some socio-cultural characteristics which appear in children's artistic development in a particular culture. The problem is that we cannot determine what the main socio-cultural influences that cause such characteristics are.

The purpose of my research is to challenge Cole's argument. One of my research goals is to find what particular cultural factors cause such characteristics to appear in Japanese children's techniques in spatial treatment in their drawings that the U.S. children seldom use. In addition, I am interested in determining how the particular cultural influence may possibly expand to other children who belong to different cultures in other Asian countries. I am eager to try to construct a "map" of cultural expansion to see whether the characteristics of Japanese children will be like characteristics in children in other Asian countries. If Feldman's hypothesis (1980) is true (that human cognition tends to develop in a circular causality over a long time span from a cultural specificity to a universality and vice versa), the same phenomenon will appear in children's drawings in other Asian countries which are strongly influenced by the manga of Japanese culture. If I can find a clue to the map of cultural expansion based on my research on spatial treatment in children's drawings, it may be possible to predict how a particular cultural factor tends to spread to other cultures. Also, this might lead to the creation of proper art educational curricula to support and encourage children's cognitive and artistic development as well as their interests and preferences.