
In the same boat: National Identity and Taiwanese Picture Books

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Diakiw (1997) argues that national literatures articulate cultural and national identities constructed over time. The study of how children's literature examines and reveals identity and shared values is not unusual as seen in the work of Bainbridge and Thistleton-Martin (2001), Meek (2001), Bradford (1995), and others. When a country is still struggling with its identity, the challenges facing children's publishers domestically and internationally tend to mirror the difficulties encountered on a national scale. This is particularly the case for a small country like Taiwan, an island which 23 million people call home.

Those who know Taiwan's ambiguous political situation might think that Taiwan seems to invite ridicule by trying to establish a national identity while only a handful of countries around the world recognise its political independence. On the other hand, Taiwan's dynamic and substantial economic influence in the world and its democratic development seem to justify its claims to identity. Because of this unique situation, Taiwan offers an interesting context in which to investigate the relationship between national identity and children's books by comparing this obstinate island's identity crisis with the agendas of Taiwanese publishers and the books they have produced.

I will first outline the political tensions and identity struggles Taiwan has been facing, foregrounding strategies for international recognition such as globalisation and the construction of a new identity through multiculturalism. Then, I will look at the context of the publication and marketing of picture books in Taiwan by examining the effects of globalisation in the publishing industry and considering whether multiculturalism is reflected in picture books provided for young readers. Building my analysis on the theoretical insights of critical multiculturalism and post-modern multiculturalism, I will discuss three Taiwanese picture books and how they approach national identity: *The Mouse Bride* (Chang & Liu, 1994); *Guji Guj* (Chen, 2004a, b.); and *Cherry Blossom Fairies* (Yan & Chang, 2003). The last of these involves the representation of modern Taiwanese aboriginal cultures.

The Triangular Tension of Globalisation, National Identity, and Multiculturalism

In her study of Taiwan's globalised culture, Shih (2003) indicates that Taiwan has been in a marginalised situation politically and academically; the situation would have been different and Taiwan would have received more attention from the international community in scholarly studies of colonialism, empirical political analysis, and even Sinology or Chinese studies had it belonged to the countries colonised by Western powers. Unfortunately, Taiwan is 'too small, too marginal, too ambiguous, and thus too insignificant' (p. 144). Despite this neglect, Taiwan has been striving to be heard, seen, and included internationally through its economic partnerships around the world and the 'survival strategy' of so-called globalisation (p. 146).

Its longstanding conflict with China forces Taiwan to choose between China and the Western world. As Taiwan leans to Western nations in hope of their support when facing the threat of potential war with China, it seeks to achieve globalisation, or to be more precise, Westernisation. The pervasive assumption is that if Taiwanese culture can blend into Western culture, the differences the Western world sees in Taiwan will be diminished; and concurrently, if Taiwan knows more about Western cultures, Taiwanese people will have the key to the benefits and privileges of the Western world.

To further break away from China, a new multicultural Taiwanese identity was proposed in the 'Ethnicity and Cultural Policies' developed in 1992 by the then opposition Democratic Progressive Party. These policies highlighted aboriginal cultures and Taiwan's past colonial history including the influences of Spain, Holland, and Japan (Wang, 2004). Meanwhile, each ethnic or minority group is encouraged by the government to seek 'transnational networks' for international support and recognition as a step towards globalisation.

The new national identity of multicultural Taiwan faces more challenges because its social structure becomes even more diversified as foreign brides (about 350,000 from the official statistics of 2005) and immigrant workers enter the country from South-East Asia (Hsia, 2003). With the migration of these new groups, 'multicultural Taiwan' is

not just a slogan to propagandise a national identity; it is a practical issue that tests governmental policies for cultural, social, and political equity. In short, Taiwan is facing a triangular tension between globalisation, national identity construction, and the multiculturalism of different ethnic groups including aboriginal cultures and new immigrants.

Critical Multiculturalism and Cultural Identities

The new identity of multicultural Taiwan is not a development particular to this country. Being multicultural is a worldwide movement and in fact very few countries nowadays in the world can claim to be monocultural or homogenous. Many multicultural countries such as America, Canada, and Australia are familiar with and have experienced the process of developing cultural diversity and equity to form their political regimes. The issue of cultural identity in fact stimulates debates and discussions of multiculturalism throughout the modern world. Critical multiculturalism from poststructuralist and postmodernist contexts direct us to examine how social and political power shape the construction of cultural difference.

Critical multiculturalism indicates that 'signs are part of an ideological struggle that attempts to create a particular regime of representation that serves to legitimate a certain cultural reality' (McLaren 1994, p 55). Thus in the search of social justice, we need not only to destructure the representations of signs and meaning-making by which dominant cultures stereotype or marginalise certain race, class, gender, and culture, but also to 'transform the social, cultural, and institutional relations in which meanings are generated' (McLaren, 1994, p. 53). Critical multiculturalism recognises the 'incommensurable differences' among different cultures and stresses that critical attention is needed to examine the historically and socially constructed differences that cause social injustice among groups. This notion can be applied to view Taiwan's tangled political relationship with China if we extend the 'historically and socially constructed differences' to the 'historically and socially constructed sameness' that China claims in order to assimilate Taiwan. When China asks the world to stay out of the China-Taiwan issue, it always argues that this is China's domestic issue, and if there is to be a war, it will be

a civil war analogous to the way in which a father disciplines his rebellious offspring. This assimilative strategy is built on the historical tie between Taiwan and China regardless of the more than forty years of separation and the hostile standoff between the two countries after Chiang Kei-Shek and his nationalists retreated to Taiwan in 1949. The new identity of multicultural Taiwan obviously is a strategy to defy China's assimilation and claim difference from China, yet Taiwan still lacks the capacity to act as a free agent in order to form a different or self-chosen identity that departs from what China would like to see, if China still claims to have the 'ownership' of this island.

If we examine contemporary children's picture books in Taiwan through the lens of critical multiculturalism, a lack of critical perspective is evident in the dominance of imported foreign books in the market; local writers and artists are marginalised to the corners of the market. The under-representation of minority groups mirrors the weak policy of social equity under an idealised idea of multiculturalism, and in a manner similar to the political constraints faced by Taiwan, the changes made to Taiwanese books when they travel to international markets underline the sensitive issue of Taiwan's national identity. In the following section, I take a closer look at these issues.

Picture Books in Taiwan: Lost in Globalisation?

With the appeal of cross-cultural visual communication and simple storylines, picture books tend to have easier access to international market than other genres. A number of publishers in Taiwan are keen to engage in global marketing of picture books; they first open up the local market for foreign picture books and when the local standards are equal to world-class standards, they successfully launch into the international market with some local books. However, a skewed distribution of the two is found with the dominance of foreign books over Taiwan-produced books in the Taiwanese market.

Foreign picture books found in Taiwan are predominantly imported or translated stories from the US, England, and Japan (Bradbury & Liu, 2003, Lin, 2005). Those imported books are mostly award-winning or notable books by famous writers and illustrators. One particular

phenomenon, which may be exclusive to Taiwan, is the popularity of illustrated abridged stories of literary classics or biographies of historical great names such as Shakespeare, Mark Twain, Ghandi, Dalai Lama, Captain Cook and so on. Published by a local publisher (Grimm Press), these stories have a sophisticated design and are artistically illustrated by artists recruited from around the world. Over 90% of these books are Western classics and biographies of famous Westerners.

Based on my own observation and research, a marketing strategy commonly used for imported books and the category of abridged works is an appeal to elitism, which is built on constructions of cultural supremacy. The assumption is that if children are provided with the best works from around the world and their minds are nurtured by these masterpieces, they will be (as their parents wish) future elites and will be globally competitive. The fallacy here is that elitism is equated with global power, and that the award winners represent cultural supremacy. Clearly, the sense of urgency to enter a globalised world is reflected in this strategy, and it is the promise of global power and authority that persuades parents to purchase these books.

Despite the popularity of imported books, the prolonged dominance of foreign picture books and the slow development of locally produced books for children have aroused doubts from some parents and educators as they start to question the psychological influence of these foreign books on Taiwanese young readers (Lin, 2005). The cultural gaps between texts and readers and issues of subjectivity arise, as John Stephens (1992) discusses in his book *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*. When Taiwanese children read these picture books from foreign cultures with characters and settings so alien from theirs, they will always be outsiders. Their lack of experience may even prevent them from effectively negotiating meanings.

What worries me is that Taiwanese culture is silenced or marginalised in children's experience of reading picture books, compared to the cultural supremacy they perceive in Western or Japanese books; thus, a sense of the inferiority of their native culture may unconsciously and implicitly

develop. It seems that Taiwan is self-colonising through its views about cultural supremacy and assumes the absorption of foreign cultures as the means to globalisation. The idea of cultural cringe (Head & Walker, 1988) identified in the Australian context seems to fit the Taiwanese context as well, in that it is assumed that works produced in Taiwan cannot have the prestige or quality of works produced in metropolitan centres such as London or New York.

Encouragingly, governmental intervention in the publication of illustrated books as reading materials for primary readers has been sustained since 1990s (Lin, 2005). Books produced for these purposes are created to highlight Taiwanese cultures or for specific educational goals. However, without market pressure and professional scrutiny to ensure quality, the standard and popularity of these books may not be as competitive as that of commercial books.

Lost in translation?

Besides importing large numbers of Western and Japanese picture books, Taiwan's publishers also strive for international recognition by participating in international contests and they have enjoyed initial success with a number of picture books. The two main types of book that have attracted international attention are the books that (1) render exotic or recognisable Chinese cultural heritage such as traditional stories with folkloric motifs, and (2) hold universal themes and appeals that conform to Western narrative conventions. Chang and Liu's *The Mouse Bride*, a winner of the 1992 Catalonia Best Illustrator Award, is a successful example of the first type, while Chen, Chih-Yuan's *Guji Guji*, an ALA Notable Children's Book in 2005 which has been translated into English, French, Japanese, Korean and Hebrew, belongs to the second type.

Nevertheless, when marketed globally, texts originally in Chinese have to be translated or retold in English or other languages, and in the process of translation or retelling, compromises and changes are made linguistically, culturally, and ideologically to meet the interests of the foreign market. As Bin Hu (1997) indicates in his comparative study of the original Chinese Cinderella story and two English versions, when a Chinese story is retold in

English, it is often remoulded by Western metanarratives. A similar phenomenon is evident in *The Mouse Bride* (Chang & Liu, 1994) and *Guji Guji* (Chen, 2004 a, b) when they are repackaged for the international market.

The Mouse Bride story is a Taiwanese folktale that has been passed down for generations in the form of a folk rhyme, which is chanted particularly during the Chinese New Year. The story is a cumulative tale about a Father mouse who wants to find the strongest creature in the world to marry his daughter. He visits the sun who is covered by the cloud when boasting about how strong he is. Then the cloud is chased away by the wind. The story continues until he realises that mice are the strongest creatures and thus he marries his daughter to a mouse. This book enjoys international success to the extent that 7 bilingual versions of English and another language are published. The main changes found in the English version of the Mouse Bride story are the addition of the subtitle “A Chinese Folktale” on the cover and the elimination of the Taiwanese rhyme, upon which the story is based. The deletion of the rhyme is understandable since the translation may not preserve the musical effects or word play of the original language and the storyline is still comprehensible without the rhyme.

However, while the addition of the subtitle, *A Chinese Folktale*, does not interfere with the story in any way, this interpolation reveals the dilemma, relating to issues of identity, which concerns Taiwanese publishers or their foreign agents when they market this Taiwanese picture book internationally.

In this case, although on the first page the translation faithfully indicates that Taiwan is the place where the story originates, the subtitle on the cover confuses the sources. If the story occurs in Taiwan but belongs to the category of Chinese folktales, readers may be led to believe that Taiwan is part of China, particularly when the story is set in the past and the illustration presents recognisable Chinese features. The dominant colours (Chinese red and Chinese blue), the men’s pig-tail hair style from the Chin dynasty, and the wedding ceremony, among other details, represent the setting of the old time when Taiwan was still part of China. The subtitle in fact denotes an unbreakable and undeniable historical tie between Taiwan and China.

The tie used to be a bond, but now is an obstacle that only makes the establishment of national identity even more complicated.

For this book, which is supposed to be the pride of Taiwan, does not project itself as Taiwanese when it is marketed internationally. It stands instead as a testimony to the complication of pursuing a national identity for Taiwan. However, for some Taiwanese who believe that Taiwan should be independent from China it could be a puzzle and concern, and maybe a shame. I do not know why the subtitle was added or whether the sales would be affected if the book was subtitled ‘A Taiwanese Folktale’. However, I also question whether the label ‘Chinese’ should take the credit for its international success.

The international marketing of Chen’s story, *Guji Guji* is a far more complicated case because the part that is modified in translation represents more than a confusion of identities but demonstrates the loss of autonomy in making identity choices. The book is translated into English and published in the US, targeting readers of four to eight years of age. The story is about a crocodile called Guji Guji, who is hatched by a preoccupied mother duck as her own egg and treated like a duck until one day, when three crocodiles come to him and make him realise that he is a crocodile. They persuade him to help them catch the fat juicy ducks because now he belongs to their group. The crocodile decides to be on the side of the ducks and drives away the three mean crocodiles with a clever trick.

Unlike *The Mouse Bride*, which distinguishes itself from Western picture books with its unique Chinese style, *Guji Guji* uses a Western style of illustration and storytelling. From its cartoon and modern style of illustration, its fable-style characterisation of the contrast and conflict between ducks and crocodiles, to its problem-solving narrative convention, this book can hardly strike Western readers as something foreign or exotic. In addition, the theme of the story may appeal to readers to reflect family values in modern society. Individual differences are embraced regardless of the physical or psychological or even racial differences as inter-racial marriages and adopted children from foreign lands with different racial or ethnic backgrounds are increasingly more common.

Although the global appeal of this story enabled its successful travel to the international market, a key point of the writer's original idea is missing in the English version of the story. As Stephens and McCallum (1998) point out, retellings are never as simple as replication because they 'always impose their own cultural presuppositions in the process of retelling' (p.4). As Chen's story is translated into English, the imposition of Western ideology is evident.

In his illustrations, the author-illustrator uses two different colours to distinguish the two conflicting groups, ducks and crocodiles, particularly in their beaks and snouts. The warm yellow colour represents the cuddly and vulnerable ducks while the cold greyish blue colour depicts the cruelty of the hostile crocodiles. The protagonist is positioned in the yellow group with the yellow snout, which demonstrates his hybrid identity even in the very beginning of the story. The revelation of Guji Guji's true identity marks the first drastic turn of the story and leads readers to see the production of the new identity.

In the part when the protagonist crocodile has to admit that he does not look like a duck at all, he quickly goes through the melancholy process of an identity crisis. The text says,

*Guji Guji was sad; he came to the lake,
'I'm not a duck; I'm a mean crocodile.'
Then, he looked into the lake and made a fearful
face.
He saw a reflection of a funny face.
Guji Guji laughed,
'I'm not a crocodile, and I'm not a duck. I am a
crocoduck.'
(My translation)*

The first part of the process comprises his feelings of loss when he has to admit his difference as his original identity shatters. The situation is all the more overwhelming for him because his new identity not only separates him from his loving family but also menaces them as his identity shifts from the prey to the predator. Then, self-deprecatingly, he tries to see if he can position himself in his biological group by acting out those fearful predatory features.

Unexpectedly, the funny face reflected in the lake amuses him and leads to a change of mood and a flash of insight enabling the resolution of the crisis. He realises that he does not and will not fit his new identity. His laughter expresses the relief of self-awareness but also a sign of self-assurance as he comfortably comes to the final part of the process and resolves his identity crisis by ascribing to himself a new identity, crocoduck, which of course is a hybrid of two identities, and is a voluntary identity which he does not resist.

Guji Guji's transformation in his identity construction exemplifies Bhabha's (1994) ideas about hybridity and the third space where 'the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences.... Hybrid hyphenisations emphasise the incommensurable elements as the basis of cultural identities' (p.218) As Guji Guji recognises the incommensurable features between the two species, the tension arises (his feelings of loss and struggle), but he negotiates between the differences in order to sustain his sense of self. Then, we see a hybrid identity derived from this inner negotiation.

This part of the story also fits perfectly with Hall's (1996) ideas of cultural identities as a production of positioning and becoming rather than the fixed essences. The discovery of his original identity does not prevent its transformation into something he likes to identify with. He positions himself in the 'third space' with a new name regardless of the natural restrictions. The readers witness the 'becoming' of his identity.

The English translation, however, takes away the 'positioning' with which the new identity emerges. The English translation for the same part of the story by the American publisher, Kane/Willer is as follows,

*Guji Guji felt terrible. He sat by the lake to
think.
'Is it true? Am I a bad crocodile too?'
He looked down into the lake and made a fierce
face.
Guji Guji laughed. He looked ridiculous.
'I'm not a bad crocodile. Of course, I'm not exactly
a duck either.'*

The English version prolongs his confusion and makes him linger over the question of who he really is. The portmanteau word 'crocoduck' is not shown until the very last line of the story as it concludes by saying: 'every day he became a stronger and happier "crocoduck".' The power to position the identity has been transferred to the narrator, the teller and the observer of his actions, who reasons that this is a proper name for Guji Guji and renders it in the very end of the story, as a clever closure. Ideologically, the English version does not recognise the value of self-positioning identity transformation, although the incommensurable features are noticed. It seems to transmit a message that if you perform your part well, you will be entitled to a proper name.

Similar to the loss of Guji Guji's autonomy for self-positioning in the translation, Taiwanese people simply do not have the liberty to position themselves under the current system of political divergence and ambivalence, even if they try. For they cannot avoid questions or challenges that require them to explain their positioning, from the very political such as 'You are from Taiwan? What about Taiwan's relationship with China? Do you consider yourself Chinese?' to extremely ignorant questions such as 'Is Taiwan Thailand?' always frustrate us, sometimes to the point of apathy. If you have to explain your identity all the time, that identity does not have any significant meaning. Maybe we do not have to choose between Taiwanese and Chinese, maybe we can name ourselves Taichinese or Chintaiwanese; yet, even this hybrid identity is still questionable without the capacity for autonomous identity-formation.

Lost in hybridity?

Despite their unique representation of Taiwanese culture, aboriginal cultures are under-represented in children's picture books, and among the handful of aboriginal stories in the market, *The Cherry Blossom Fairies* (Yan & Chang, 2003) may be a pioneering example that moves beyond the traditional framework and situates the story in modern time to reflect the issue of recuperation of culture and identity together with a thematic focus on environmental protection.

The story is about Ah-dee, an aboriginal boy of the Tsou tribe, who carrying a withered cherry blossom petal, takes a trip with his father back to his grandmother's tribal land, Mt. Ali, where the Cherry Blossom Festival is about to begin. The trip is intended to fulfil his grandmother's last wish before she dies: to attend the festival. However, the cheery blossoms are overdue. Following the blown cherry blossom petal, Ah-dee enters a fantasy world where all the animals talk like humans. They are worried about the lateness of the blossom fairy, who is supposed to wake up the Spring Spirit. Ah-dee then realises that the dried petal is the fairy itself who is withering away in his palms. A voice tells him to look for silvery pearls to revive the fairy, and at that moment all the collective memory of his tribe suddenly transfuses into him. He decides to look for the pearls. In the searching, Ah-dee witnesses the devastation of the land after years of cultivation and natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods. The land seems to be dying and so is his hope of finding the pearls. Worried and anxious, Ah-dee cries and his tears, which reflect the moonlight like silvery pearls, drop to the fairy and revive the little creature who in turn calls up the spring spirit and all of a sudden, the blossom blooms. All the animals and spirits rejoice and they dance under a cherry tree. Among them, Ah-dee finds his grandmother. The festival begins and he promises to return to Mt. Ali next year.

Ah-dee's journey, first of all, represents a reconnection to his cultural heritage. Many aboriginal people who have moved to the cities and mingle with Taiwanese have been estranged from their own cultures, which results in not only the gradual loss of their language but also of the feelings of belonging to their own groups, land and people. As described at the beginning of the story, Ah-dee 'finally gets to Mt. Ali the very first time of his life'. The text says:

The small train slowly climbed up, winding its way around the green forest, Ah-dee was finally back to his grandmother's hometown, Mt. Ali.

(My translation)

Apparently, it is not *his* place or *his* hometown that Ah-dee is returning to. With this perspective, his grandmother is other to Ah-dee, and his own culture and land become other as well. Nevertheless, this journey takes him back

to his tribal land where a mystical power infuses him with the history of this people. The bond is instantly created as he is now aware of where he is from and what he needs to do to carry on his culture.

Similar to Guji Guji's hybrid identity, both the illustrations and text of this story represent another case of the third space where incommensurable elements coexist and hybridity emerges. In spite of their intention to faithfully represent Tsou culture and the extended research of the writer and illustrator, who are not aboriginal themselves, a great deal of non-aboriginal elements are brought in to tell the story. First of all, the cherry blossom, for instance, is a very strong image of Japanese culture and spirit and is the national flower of Japan. It was the Japanese who built railroads to Mt. Ali to convey timbers, who exploited the land during the colonial period, and who planted cherry trees in great numbers on Mt. Ali, creating what is a tourist site in contemporary Taiwan (Chen & Chen, 2005). The cherry blossom festival itself is not a traditional practice of the Tsou but a recently developed tourist festival.

In the story, the colonial past has now been transformed as part of the cultural heritage. The cherry blossom is not perceived as a colonial stigma; it is attached to a new meaning of celebration (the revival of the earth) and the old belief (respect the land). Obviously, the historical trauma and victimisation of Tsou in the past are elided in the story and the cherry blossom is now a new symbol or a signifier but the signified is drastically different from what it was in the colonial time. This symbol-forming activity seems to assimilate the invaded culture and dissolve the foreign elements. It dissipates the violent past, conflicts, and struggles which I think should be remembered as valuable experiences to empower younger generations with a critical spirit to position themselves in modern multicultural society.

Cultural hybridity is even more evident in the illustrations of *The Cherry Blossom Fairies*. The illustrations includes mythical animals and creatures from Tsou's traditional stories to suggest aboriginal narratives; yet, the artistic style the illustrator employs does not reflect that of Tsou people. As seen in Figure 1, in this doublespread painting, drawings that resemble cave painting, leather

puppet play, and wood sculpture spread from right to left in the background, rendering a sense of aboriginal arts. However, a strong contrast is made between these forms of art and the Renaissance style of painting in the left-hand front where a delicate lady figure lies sideways next to a hunter leaning back and holding an arrow. The lady's ivory skin tone and her prominent facial features and misty eyes resemble the famous portrait of Eleanora of Toledo and Her Son by Agnolo Bronzino around 1550. Similarly, on the right hand page, under the tree, a Western fairy is positioned, resembling a Greek or Roman marble sculpture. The patterns or decorations found in the clothing of protagonists probably resemble those of Tsou tradition; yet the colour hues and style do not.

The scene of the celebration dance under the cherry tree creates more exotic visual images (Figure 2). The supernatural creatures and human figures are reminiscent of Balinese or Hawaiian dancers and Thai culture because of their golden headwear, floral and fruit hats, grass skirts, decorations and accessories. They look exotic, foreign, and different from the familiar images people commonly perceive from aboriginal cultural villages. To me, this is not just a picture that shows the harmonious relationship of animals, spirits, and humans in celebration; it is a strong testimony to the complexity of cultural integration embodied in fantasy form.

Although it is becoming prevalent in Taiwan that non-aboriginal artistic techniques are used to present aboriginal stories in picture books, I am struck by the high degree of artistic hybridity and the dominance of Western style in the presentation of this aboriginal story. As my perception stubbornly looks for the traditional or perhaps the stereotypical aboriginal images that I am familiar with, I wonder how the Tsou perceive this new representation of their culture. I believe that despite the infinite ways of representing cultures in modern time, there is a need to preserve certain performative elements or expressive units of a culture in order to claim its uniqueness. As cultural hybridity emphasises the incommensurable elements to challenge the schema of cultural assimilation, I would like to see the uniqueness of the Tsou culture be articulated and depicted in a way that also challenges the influence of Western dominance.



Figure 1



Figure 2

The Future? An Open Ending

As one of the main forces that influence children's reading and help shape national identity by the books they provide, publishers are to be acknowledged for their endeavour of introducing so many outstanding children's picture books around the world to Taiwan; however, the call for nurturing local talent should be heard.

The notion of globalisation should include cross-cultural competence. To expect children to consume masterpieces of Western and Japanese literature does not automatically

develop that competence. In addition, I wonder, can a global view be established before children know who they are and the place they call their country? The impact of the current dominance of foreign picture books on the development of national or even international identity needs critical investigation. Additionally, the cultural clash in children's reading needs to be taken seriously instead of being smoothed away by claiming that access to books from other cultures provides an opportunity to know a different culture.

Surprisingly, a critical attitude in reading in terms of multiculturalism is rarely addressed, even by researchers in the field. Researchers seem to shy away from serious involvement in the discussion of national identity or multiculturalism in children's literature. In reviewing the abstracts of masters' theses published from 1999 to 2004 by The Graduate Institute of Children's Literature in Taiwan (http://www.nttu.edu.tw/ice/new/contents/chapter/chapter_list.asp), I found that among 144 entries, only 3 engage with the discussion of multiculturalism and identity issues in Children's Literature. Although anxiety is expressed by some scholars in this field about the dominance of English and Japanese books in influencing children's identity construction, the research has not yet responded to this anxiety in order to examine how these influences shape children's values.

The current political uncertainty about Taiwan's future may feed the avoidance of critical examinations of cultural and national identity in children's literature. One may argue that children's texts should not be political; they are merely interesting stories, and we should avoid political sensitivity or paranoia that could interfere with or ruin the enjoyment of reading, be it foreign dominance or local nationalism. We may not need to be over sensitive about the political issues in children's books; however, it would be more satisfying if Taiwanese children can enjoy more books that are set in the environments they are familiar with, and in which characters look like them, share similar backgrounds and points of view, face similar problems, and pose similar questions about who they are.



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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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