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Exclusions and Inclusions: Multiculturalism in Contemporary Taiwanese and Australian Picture Books

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The term ‘multiculturalism’ might on the surface appear to refer to a readily-identifiable set of meanings pertaining to policies, ideals and practices which ensure that citizens of diverse ethnic backgrounds enjoy harmony and mutual respect. However, concepts of multiculturalism are inflected by historical and cultural contexts and by shifts and tensions within national settings. Our aims in this essay are to consider recent picture books from Australia and Taiwan, both of which claim to be multicultural nations, and to identify the ideologies and values implied and promoted in these texts. Our assumption is that children’s texts respond to ideologies and values promoted in political and educational institutions, both because textual production is motivated, at least implicitly, by socialising agendas, and also because texts are very often mediated and received within institutional settings such as schools and libraries and are incorporated into processes of teaching and learning.

Australia and Taiwan have in common histories of colonisation and immigration. Australia was claimed as a British colony in 1788, and its population has been substantially diversified by waves of migrants since the end of World War II. Taiwan has experienced colonisation at the hands of the Dutch, the Spanish and the Japanese, who ruled the island from 1895 to 1945, and its population is of mixed ancestry: Hakka

(descended from migrants from Guangdong province in China), Fulo (descendants of early immigrants from Fujian province in China), Austronesian-speaking aborigines, who consist of 13 major tribes with a total population of 458,000, and Chinese mainlanders who moved to Taiwan after 1948. When the Chinese Communists under Mao Tse-tung took control of mainland China, Chiang Kai-shek and his forces occupied Taiwan and it was not until 1987 that martial law ended. In both nations, Indigenous populations were dominated by colonising powers; in both, questions of identity and independence have dominated popular and political life. The principal contrast between the two nations is that while Australia is a sovereign and independent nation (though not yet a republic), the political status of Taiwan is shadowed by the fact that the People's Republic of China claims Taiwan as part of China, despite the social, political and cultural tensions which have developed during more than four decades of military standoff between the two countries.

Although both nations now espouse policies of multiculturalism, notions of national identity do not always sit comfortably with principles of cultural diversity. In Australia the Whitlam government introduced policies of multiculturalism in 1973, replacing the assimilationist models which dominated political discourses until this time. In recent years, however, a backlash against multiculturalism has taken various forms: the popularity of the anti-migrant politician Pauline Hanson during the late 1990s; a resurgence of racism and anti-Muslim sentiment in the wake of September 11; and an increasing tendency, both from the right and from the intellectual left, to blame the practices and policies of multiculturalism itself for any perceived problems in social and cultural relations.

In Taiwan, state policies of multiculturalism were introduced with a proposal, 'Ethnicity and Cultural Policies', advocated in 1992 by the then opposition Democratic Progressive Party, which is now in government (Wang, 2004). Councils of aboriginal peoples and Hakka were established in 1996 and 2001 respectively to replace the previous Nationalists' assimilation policies with principles of cultural diversity. Unlike the Indigenous people of Canada or Australia, who as the original inhabitants of these nations do not regard themselves as belonging to the immigrant populations to whom the term 'multiculturalism' refers, multiculturalism in Taiwan in fact evolves from aboriginal cultures. However, the sharply increasing number of immigrants from South East Asia through marriage (about 350 thousands foreign brides according to official statistics for 2005) or work contracts since the 1990s exposes the exclusiveness and discrimination of policies directed at heterogenous incomers (Hsia, 2004). Current multicultural policies and programs are centred on legitimising the political, social and cultural rights of previously oppressed ethnic and minority groups. As for newcomers such as brides and foreign workers, they remain mostly unheard and unrepresented.

In a 1990 essay on multiculturalism and Australian children's literature, John Stephens points out that in texts of the 1970s and 1980s texts, examinations of multicultural issues are conducted within a relatively conservative set of paradigms where views of cultures other than Anglo-Celtic are filtered through the perspectives of Anglo-Celtic, middle-class characters, and where multiculturalism is valued insofar as it is seen to contribute to the wellbeing (economic and psychological) of the dominant culture. In an essay published a decade later, 'Continuity, Fissure, or Dysfunction? From Settler Society to Multicultural Society in Australian Fiction' (2000), Stephens argues

that by the mid 1990s, following the emergence of Pauline Hanson's far-right nationalism and the Howard government's promotion of an essentialised Australian identity based on Britishness, there was evidence that a 'more skeptical view' (56) of a multicultural Australia was beginning to inform children's literature. As we will argue, recent Australian picture books take this tendency further, engaging more directly in contemporary debates around questions of ethnicity and race.

Just as Anglo-Celtic perspectives dominated picture books up to the 1980s in Australia, so in Taiwan during the regime of Chinese Nationalism between 1949 and 1989 the content of most children's books mirrored the Chinese communists' political priority of regaining sovereignty over China. Thus, Chinese culture permeated children's reading materials with only a few scattered works on Taiwan and its local culture. It was not until the 1990s, as the development of multicultural Taiwan started to take shape, that Taiwanese culture reasserted its position and cultural diversity was celebrated. Taiwanese and traditional aboriginal genres such as folktales, myths, idioms, or nostalgic old-time childhood stories started to emerge. Commissioned picture books funded by the government also highlighted local traditional cultures and festive customs. However, stories that depict contemporary aboriginal life are scarce.

The transformation of a multicultural Taiwan forged from migration has not so far been represented in children's stories; and narratives thematising conflict or cooperation among different ethnic groups are also rare, with some notable exceptions such as Bor-Leh Liu's *Black Village and White Village* (1994), which we discuss later in this essay. Many children's writers in Taiwan, like their Anglo-Australian peers, may lack the cross-cultural experience to voice different social realities. Moreover, under the influence of

globalisation, the picture book market in Taiwan has long been dominated by foreign picture books, mainly award winners from the US, UK, and Japan (Bradbury & Liu, 2003, Lin, 2005). Although local talents have recently begun to emerge, texts which address life in multicultural Taiwan are yet to emerge.

In Taiwan, as social groups previously marginalised seek justice through the practices and policies of multiculturalism, longstanding resentment at the authoritarian conduct of the nationalists has manifested in texts which examine the political conflicts and cultural clashes of the past: the silenced truth is uncovered and the stigmatisation of certain ethnic groups is gradually removed. For instance, the picture book *Rondo of Lalakusu* (Lu & Su, 2003) is a government-commissioned biographical work which outlines the life of Yi-Sheng Gou, the respectable educator and composer who became a county magistrate of the Tso people (an indigenous tribe) during the latter stage of Japanese colonisation. Gou continued these duties after Japan handed Taiwan over to China following the end of World War II. However, he was later persecuted as a rebel and murdered in jail. His musical legacy and contribution to his tribe had been silenced because of the incident. In the story, the implied narrator, Gou's son, attends a memorial concert for those persecuted, recalling the days when his father's music filled the family and the tribe with love and spiritual meaning. He also remembers the days when his father was arrested and the family survived the discrimination by listening to his father's music and by reading his letters from jail (appendixed in the book). After 40 years of waiting, the time of justice finally arrives and Gou's sons are able to inscribe Gou's name on his tomb, play his favourite music (Beethoven's Fifth Symphony), enjoy his favourite drink, beer, and cry out to the valley, 'Amo (father), we are all safe and well!' The

unsung hero is finally recognised. For indigenous people, this story also helps eradicate stereotypical images that represent them negatively as primitive and savage. Gou's expertise in music and scholarship represents not only his individual achievements but also the capacity of aboriginal people to take on and enjoy new cultural forms.

Lingering resentment against the authoritarian regime of the Nationalists sometimes transmutes into tensions between ethnic groups as politicians and others assert that cultural difference produces social instability. That is, certain individuals seek to gain power by appealing to notions of a Taiwanese national culture which excludes ethnic minorities. Bor-Leh Liu's *Black Village and White Village* (1994) expresses concern at this trend and demonstrates how ethnic differences are manipulated to produce social segregation and conflict. In the story, White Village is white because people produce cassava starch that is scattered over the village and causes it to look white, while Black Village relies on the mining of coal, which stains everything. Although they are neighbours, both villages identify only with their own colours, which are deliberately carried over to the food that they eat and even the gods that they worship. They show distaste for each other's colour and fear that intermarriage between the two villages will produce zebra-like offspring. As the two villages unite to pray for rain during a drought, the rain washes away these colours and reveals the sameness of the villagers. The story ridicules how race-based divisions produce distinctions between self and others, and exposes the ignorant and stereotypical conceptions that obstruct cross-cultural communication.

As Taiwan is establishing a new national identity built on multiculturalism as its main strategy, its historical ties and social and economic relationships with China

complicate the issue and create a dilemma that all Taiwanese people have to face when choosing their identity: whether Taiwanese or Chinese. *Guji Guji* (Chen, 2004), a Taiwanese picture book that enjoys international success, is a story that reflects this national identity crisis. 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, three crocodiles encounter him and convince him that he is a crocodile. They persuade him to help them catch the fat juicy ducks because now he belongs to their group. As Guji Guji realises that he does not and will not fit his new identity, he decides to call himself a crocoduck and to align himself with the ducks. The story ends with the three mean crocodiles driven away by the crocoduck's clever trick. Similar to Guji Guji who resolves his identity crisis by claiming a new, hybrid identity, that of the crocoduck, Taiwanese people in fact recognise the transforming and hybrid nature of their national identity. However, unlike Guji Guji whose hybridity is legitimated as a new identity, Taiwan's new identity is still without a voice in the international arena because it lacks independent sovereignty.

In Australia, too, debates about national identity are prone to test ideals of multiculturalism. These debates occur within the context of the 'war on terrorism' conducted by the United States and strongly supported by the Australian government. The rhetorics of 'border control' and 'national security' draw upon racialised distinctions between white and non-white citizens, and between Islam and Christianity, and multiculturalism is seen by its opponents as affording a context within which non-white Australians are encouraged to maintain allegiance to cultures and nations outside

Australia instead of adhering to a set of core 'Australian' values identified with the nation's Anglo-Celtic origins.

Picture books of the 1990s tended to locate depictions of multiculturalism within the domain of everyday life, showing how growing individuals are gradually introduced to a wider world of social and cultural interaction, with potential for conflict as well as personal growth. Mem Fox and Leslie Staub's *Whoever You Are* (1997) emphasises 'universal' human values, showing children of different ethnicities and cultures who are said to experience the same emotions: 'Pain is the same, and blood is the same' (29). Sally Rippin's *Fang Fang's Chinese New Year* (1996) examines the effects of migration, resettlement and cultural negotiation on an individual, Fang Fang, who was born in China but came to Australia as a baby. The narrative says 'Now she is Australian' (3), but then goes on to show that Fang Fang is uneasy about exposing her 'Chineseness' to her Anglo friend Lisa, who is invited to celebrate Chinese New Year with Fang Fang and her family. When Lisa shows her pleasure in the food she is offered, in learning to use chopsticks and in watching the dragon parade, Fang Fang is reassured as to the value of the cultural practices of her family.

Australian picture books published in the last few years reflect a climate in which cultural diversity is a cause of unease rather than of celebration. Rather than emphasising what people of different cultures have in common, like *Whoever You Are*, or showing children developing cross-cultural friendships, like *Fang Fang's Chinese New Year*, recent Australian picture books draw readers' attention to processes and rhetorics which marginalise those regarded as different. But these texts typically address ideas of cultural

difference obliquely and by way of analogies, rather than through the realist representations of *Whoever You Are* and *Fang Fang's Chinese New Year*.

In line with this tendency, Shaun Tan's *The Lost Thing* (2000) and Narelle Oliver's *Dancing the Boom Cha Cha Boogie* (2005) draw on metaphor and allegory to comment on neo-liberal tendencies toward uniformity and intolerance. In *The Lost Thing*, a young boy, Pete, finds the eponymous 'lost thing' at the beach and realises that this 'thing' does not fit within Pete's ordered world. Debra Dudek's essay on *The Lost Thing* and other Australian texts reads the lost thing as 'a racialised subject, who challenges and makes visible some of the ways in which people and institutions cannot embody the racialised other into the unified (read homogenised) body politic' (7).

Just as the 'lost thing' defines itself as alien to the ordered and bureaucratic setting in which it finds itself, so in *Dancing the Boom-Cha-Cha Boogie*, Oliver establishes a contrast between the Murmels, who 'did not have a worry in the world, except for the whirligigs', (4) and the Snigs, who survive under a repressive and regimented regime. Three young Murmels are caught up in a whirligig and are marooned on the shore of the Grand Snigdom. Here they are at once consigned to a prison whose isolated position in a desert landscape alludes to the detention centres in which refugees to Australia have been imprisoned as they wait to see if they will be granted refugee status. But a young snig befriends the murmels, who introduce her to new foods, teach her how to play hopsplotch and leap-murmel, show her how to dance 'the jitter-murmel and the boom-cha-cha boogie' (25). When the Boss Snig threatens to banish the murmels, their dancing of the boom-cha-cha-boogie demonstrates a mode of being in the world which privileges joy and spontaneity over the uniformity and rigidity of the Grand

Snigdom. The utopian closure of the narrative, in which the prison is transformed into a children's playground, promotes a vision of new world orders in which difference is welcomed rather than regarded as a cause of anxiety and alarm.

As we have shown, picture books, like children's literature in general, are peculiarly responsive to shifts and tensions in social and political life. In Taiwan, the adoption of policies of multiculturalism is a relatively recent development, despite the nation's long history of cultural and ethnic diversity, and picture books are only now beginning to address national politics. In Australia, where multiculturalism has been enshrined in national policies since the 1970s, debates on national identity continue to hinge upon notions of belonging, affiliation and loyalty. Many of the recent picture books we discuss lean toward allegorical rather than realistic treatments of cross-cultural relations. Perhaps this is an indication that in Australia and Taiwan, questions about who is included and excluded in the nation remain contentious.

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