

Mentor's introduction

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It is no secret that Taiwan has been in the midst of deep and often rapid change for more than a century. In the late 19th century they were colonized by the Japanese; after the Chinese civil war they were taken over by the defeated Han Chinese mainlanders led by Chiang Kai Chek; now they are being threatened and wooed by the Chinese communist government. Meantime, they have undergone rapid modernization and industrialization and have been significantly influenced by both Western and Japanese global cultures. No wonder that there is considerable discussion of issues regarding current Taiwanese identity, both cultural and national.

One of the sites of struggle for that identity is children's picturebooks, which tend to be marketed globally and heavily influenced by American value. Chien Hua Kuo, with her rich background in the area of picturebooks, brought these issues together in her dissertation. Two Taiwanese publishers recently issued three sets of children's picturebooks on Taiwanese themes, aiming at Taiwanese children. Chien Hua analyzed these books, focusing especially on their representation of Taiwanese culture and values and using ideas from postcolonial theories to do so. She found that the three sets of books tend to portray Taiwan as a largely agricultural society, with values coming from a largely aboriginal and older Han Chinese history. They largely ignore the much more mixed and conflicted history of the last century and more. Chien Hua makes suggestions for alternative cultural policies that have application for more than the editors of picturebooks and for more than the Taiwanese situation.