

## A Survey of Themes of Children's Picture Storybooks in Chinese Translation

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### Abstract

Agreed with others about the importance of promoting international children's literature in translation and making good quality translations, the researcher of this study also strongly believes that the stories themselves deserve considerable attention as well and are worth studying. Driven by a sense of curiosity and motivated by the strong interests in picture storybooks in Chinese translation and in knowing what picture storybooks our children had been reading in the childhood and which picture storybooks had gained favor with publishers at a time, the researcher made an effort to present a research survey utilizing content analysis to investigate themes of

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picture storybooks that were translated from English to Chinese and were published in Taiwan in the year 2001. The study included 276 children's storybooks in Chinese translation as the subject under examination, and the result of the study reported that a wide range of themes were presented in these 276 children's books. Totally, 15 predominating categories of themes had been identified, and families, life experience, character traits, friendship, behavior, humor and emotions, were the seven most significant themes.

**Keywords :** themes or subjects of storybooks, translated children's books, picture storybooks, children's books publication

## INTRODUCTION

Children's literature sparks imagination, curiosity and delight in readers, as well as reflects the values of our societies and transmits those values to children. As Huck (1989) has expressed:

Through literature, children can begin to develop a sense of their humanness; they can develop new insights into the behavior of others and themselves. Literature can add a new dimension to life and create a new awareness, a greater sensitivity to people and surroundings. It can educate the heart as well as the head. (p. 262)

Besides providing children with good local literature, parents, teachers, and librarians around the world are aware of the importance of making international children's literature available to their children. Thus, children's books from other countries written in the languages of those countries are published to bring good stories from other cultures, to enrich the lives of children, and to promote and raise awareness of cultural diversity. Usually, international children's books are presented in the form of translation because of language restrictions.

It is reasonable to say that translated children's literature plays a significant role in promoting child reading and creating prosperity in

children's books publication industry in Taiwan. Moreover, to children readers in Taiwan, children's books in translation holds an important place because it consists of a large proportion of children's books that children and adolescents read in Taiwan. In recent decade, Taiwan educators and people who work and pursue research in the field of children's literature have shown great interests in exploring this subject and have encouraged more research studies to be done and more papers to be presented and written on translated children's books and their translations. Also, children's literature in translation has often been listed as one of the research options proposed by conferences that specified their themes on children's literature or related research fields.

Moreover, in the past two decades, picture books as a literature and reading genre has received considerable attention and has gained popularity among public readers in Taiwan. Liu (2003) noted, "The thriving situation that Taiwan displayed in the publication of picture books since 90's confirms a fact that picture books has reached a climax in its development in the past 60 years, and thus the development of children's literature of Taiwan has moved to a new stage that places the focus on picture books" (p. 1, in translation). Although picture storybooks written and illustrated by local Taiwanese people as well as translated picture storybooks are published by Taiwanese publishers, publishers nevertheless in Taiwan remain in favor of publishing translated picture storybooks (Liu, 2003). Compared to more than two hundred translated picture books being published every year in Taiwan, the average number of picture books written by local Taiwanese people and published in Taiwan in roughly the

same period, according to the data information collected by professor Lin, Wen-Bao (2000), is less than fifty books. In fact, publishers in Taiwan especially like to publish picture storybooks by famous authors or of award-winning books.

Agreed with others about the importance of promoting international children's literature in translation and making good quality translations, the researcher of this study also strongly believes that the stories themselves deserve considerable attention as well and are worth studying. What children read would have made great impacts on them, so it is necessary to know what books and stories our children are reading, and on what subjects they are reading. It is not for the purpose of censoring, but for the sakes of knowing what we can do more to provide better reading lists to children and to make more constructive suggestions to publishers for publishing books in translation for children.

Acted on these premises and inspired by the conference held in November 2000, the researcher made an effort to elaborate on this subject matter and to present a research survey that utilized content analysis to investigate themes of 276 picture storybooks that were translated from English to Chinese and were published in Taiwan in the year 2001. The main goal of this study was to identify the major themes presented in those translated picture storybooks.

The year 2001 was chosen because the study was done through 2002 and 2003. By presenting the results of the study and making it available to the public readers, the researcher proposed an intention to share the study with readers who generate interests in children's books in translation

and at the same time hoped to arouse people's attention and interests in children's book publication in a full-scale way.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

As Freeman and Lehman (2001) discussed, translated children's literature with a global perspective offers some unique benefits for children.

Children in the elementary years are open to learning about the world around them. They are rapidly developing in all areas: cognitively, socially, and morally. Elementary children are in a constant process of constructing their understanding of the physical, social, and cultural aspects of the world in which they live. Exposure to international children's literature can support all aspects of children's development. (p. 12-13)

Carus (1980) spoke of translated children's literature as a means to make cultural exchange between the countries in the world and to provide children with the very best literature of the world that adults can find. He holds the belief that if children have more chances to be exposed to one or several cultures in their early lives, those children may later become more open-minded. They may thus generate interests and tastes in acquiring knowledge about other countries and different languages.

The idea that children deserve to read the best children's literature from other countries is also shared by other scholars. Louie and Louie (1999) expressed, "children should not be denied the stories of brilliant authors in other parts of the world simply because of a language barrier" (p. 34). Freeman and Lehman (2001) stressed that literature from other cultures and countries supports children's language development in two ways. One aspect is that children, through reading translated literary texts, can enlarge and enrich their vocabulary in their native languages that relate to concepts from other cultures. The example they gave was when American children read a Korean story, *My Freedom Trip* by Park and Park (1998), they will learn words such as rice paddies, pagoda roofs and barley tea, which are words related to Korean culture.

Secondly, because these books often incorporate the vocabulary of another language or sometimes are published in the juxtaposition of two languages, children are thus exposed to another written language through reading translated books. Therefore, translated children's books "serve as a springboard for a comparative mini-unit on the written symbols that represent different language" and support children's language development as to assist them to "construct knowledge about the structures of other language, the distinctive sounds of languages, and the unique vocabulary" (Freeman & Lehman : 2001, p. 13).

Through reading stories of people from other cultures and nations, children learn about people, places and events in the world in various aspects and levels. Such learning can increase international understanding and respect for cultural plurality. Hazel Rochman (1993) explained:

A good book can help to break down these barriers. Books can make a difference in dispelling prejudice and building community; not with role models and literal recipes, not with noble messages about the human family, but with enthralling stories that make us imagine the lives of others. A good story lets you know people as individuals in all their particularity and conflict; and once you see someone as a person-flawed, complex, striving-then you've reached beyond stereotype. Stories, writing them, telling them, sharing them, transforming them, enrich us and connect us and help us know each other. (p.19)

Therefore, what becomes critical in the eyes of Meacham and Carroll (1987) is teaching children to handle information and discriminate among information and its sources. After children build a sense of information awareness, it may further help to remove barriers or stereotype among people (Rochman, 1993).

Among all types and genres of translated children's books, publishers in Taiwan place their major emphasis on publishing Chinese translated picture storybooks. In *Children's Books in Children's Hands* (Temple, Martinez, Yokota & Naylor, 2010), one of the reputed textbooks by renowned scholars with expertise in children's literature, it lists traditional literature, poetry, modern fantasy, science fiction, realistic fiction, historical fiction, picture books, informational books and biography as the recognized genres of children's literature. Picture book, among all the



listed genres, is identified as a “curious category” (p. 26) that can fit into any of the other genres. According to Temple, Martinez, Yokota & Naylor (2010), picture storybook is one kind of picture book, and it can take three different forms: a wordless book, an illustrated book, or a picture storybook. With different purposes, picture books can be classified into four groups: (1) early childhood books, including toy books mother goose and nursery rhymes, concept books alphabet books or counting books; (2) wordless books; (3) beginning readers' books, including predictable books and easy readers; (4) picture storybooks. They further stressed that in picture books, illustrations and text amplify each other to create a unified whole. “Text and illustrations do not merely reflect each other-combined, they tell a story that goes beyond what one tells alone” (p.181).

Huck, Hepler & Hickman (2009) on the other hand defined picture storybook as a book that tells a tale “through two media, the art of illustrating and the art of writing” (p. 240). “In a picture storybook, pictures must help to tell the story, showing the actions and expressions of the characters, the changing settings, and the development of the plot” (p. 240). In short, a picture storybook is a book of fiction in which both text and illustrations play significant roles in telling its story.

Before an international children's book is handed into the hands of a translator and is actually moved to the process of being translated and getting published, publishers and editors have already given many considerations to the business of selecting international books for translation and publication. Besides, the selection of literature for translation and the actual translation products, as indicated by Rudvin

(1994), Tomlinson (1998), and Louie and Louie (1999), are affected by economical, ideological and political concerns.

## METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to provide quantitative information of a survey of translated picture storybooks published in Taiwan in the year 2001. The survey aimed to investigate the theme of the translated picture storybooks under examination. The decision of applying content analysis was made for translated children's picture storybooks were the primary subject matter for examination and analysis. Content analysis served the needs of identifying and categorizing the major patterns that this study aimed to investigate.

### Research Question

There is only one research question being specified for investigation for this study. The research question is: What are the predominant themes presented in these books?

### Data Collection

The study was carried out through the year of 2002 to 2003. In order to produce a complete list of bibliography of translated picture storybooks published in Taiwan in 2001, the researcher first consulted a professional

magazine named *New Books Monthly* in National Central Library. *New Books Monthly* is a monthly journal published by National Central Library, and it lists recent and forthcoming publications in Taiwan in each month. After gaining publication information, the researcher then set criteria for data collection. The criteria for the books to get selected for this survey were that these books must (a) be Chinese translated picture storybooks that were originally published in a foreign language, (b) be published in Taiwan in the year 2001 and (c) be accessible.

The total number of books being identified to be published in 2001 was 325. However, after the actions of searching for books in bookstores, public libraries, and on virtual online bookstores and of getting accesses to as many books as possible had been taken into practice, the final number of books to be studied and covered in this survey cut down to 276. A number of books were excluded from this study because they were either out of print or could not be borrowed or purchased by any means.

## Data Analysis

When the researcher was reading the books and checking for bibliographical information, it had been detected that reading guides were attached in the end of picture storybooks in large quantities. In the reading guides, subjects and the main themes of the stories were briefly described and discussed. Since in most books the themes had already been revealed in the reading guides, it made the work of finding the theme of each story easier. However, one problem bothered the researcher in a great deal. The

theme identified in each individual reading guide sometimes focused on a specific aspect and reflected a certain interpretation or an interest of the author of the reading guide. To avoid being misled, themes assumed in the reading guides were used as reference only but were not necessarily fully adopted by the researcher.

The study intended to explore themes in a more general scope. The goal of this study was to look at themes of the Chinese translated picture storybooks to understand what subject matters were presented and displayed in the books that had been selected for translation. Therefore, what had to be noticed and stated in particular was that the researcher only identified general categories and used them as basis for grouping books. For example, when books were classified, *Little Tang* (a story about an orangutan by Grindley) and *Little Elephant Thunderfood* (a story about an elephant by Grindley) were put into the same category, Animals. Another example is that *Let's Talk About Laughing and Crying* (a story about bad temper by Vendrell), *Mean Soup* (a story about anger by Everitt) and *Je Veux Un Bisou* (a story about jealousy by Norac) were all placed under the category, Emotions.

Also, even though there were books which involve animal as main characters, the themes were differentiated by the motifs emphasized in the stories. Thus, it was the predominating concept that was taken into consideration for theme categories, not the functions and presentations of characters that work as criteria for theme identification. As for the categories of themes, the researcher also adopted categories developed in *The Appreciation and Application of Picture Books* (Lin, 2006), *The*

*Appreciation of Children's Picture Books* (Hsu, 2001) and *Children's Books is Children's Books* (Huang, 2003). Besides using categories adopted from the reference books, the researcher also established new categories based on the predominant subjects displayed in the stories.

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The study reported a result that a wide range of themes were identified in the 276 translated picture storybooks. Judging from the number of books listed under each major theme in Table 1, it was fair for the researcher to infer that families, life experiences, character traits, friendship, behavior, humor and emotions were the seven most significant themes. Of 276 books, 194 books (70.29 percent) were found in the categories of these seven themes. The remaining 82 books came from the categories of the other eight themes.

**Table 1: Categories of Major Themes**

| Theme            | Number of Books | Percentage |
|------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Animal           | 11              | 3.99%      |
| Art              | 5               | 1.81%      |
| Behavior         | 24              | 8.70%      |
| Celebrations     | 4               | 1.45%      |
| Character Traits | 31              | 11.23%     |
| Emotions         | 23              | 8.33%      |
| Families         | 33              | 11.96%     |
| Friendship       | 27              | 9.78%      |
| Humor            | 24              | 8.70%      |
| Imagination      | 19              | 6.89%      |
| Knowledge        | 13              | 4.71%      |
| Life Experiences | 32              | 11.59%     |
| Literacy         | 6               | 2.17%      |
| Others           | 17              | 6.16%      |
| Society          | 7               | 2.54%      |
| Total            | 276             |            |

Family was the largest group among the categories of themes in the group of these translated picture storybooks being studied. For young children, the major target readers of picture storybooks, family hold the most important significant role in their lives for it is the primary and possibly the only living surroundings and domain for them. In addition, it has been acknowledged and well known to the most countries in the world that family is of great value to people in Chinese culture. So, it was not surprising to see that publishers in Taiwan would tend to publish books on this theme. In this major category, family life and family relationship were two evident aspects in the books that belonged to this category. In the stories about family life, family events and experiences, such as birthdays, toilet training or moving, were described through story plots.

Half of the books in this category tell stories about family relationships including parent-children relationships, grandparent-grandchildren relationships, relationships between brothers and sisters, or relationships between other family members. When stories are told to describe relationships between parents and children or between grandparents and grandchildren, the focus is usually placed on parents' or grandparents' everlasting love to children. When stories talk about relationships between brothers and sisters, the message that the stories commonly convey is to remind elder children to be nice to their younger brothers or sisters and to establish close relationships with their siblings.

Divorce has become a serious social issue in Taiwan at present, and the divorce rate has been speedily rising in Taiwan through years. Since a decade ago, discussions and comments on this social issue made by educators and social and cultural phenomena observers have already been widely provoked. According to the statistical information reported by Ministry of the Interior of Taiwan, 1999~2003 was the period of time when the divorce rate reached its peak in Taiwan. Consequentially, it led to the result that publishers started publishing books on the subject of divorce. Thus divorce as the main theme had also appeared in children's books (Chou, 1998; Hsu & Cheng, 2000; Li, 2004), and many pieces of prose and short stories containing events and story plots about divorce were composed and published in that period of years. Surprisingly, the same trend did not seem to occur in the publication of picture storybooks. It looked like the year 2001 was just to be the year of the beginning, and only one story that talked about divorce was found in this study.

Life experience was the second largest group of category noted in this broad survey. Life is the best teacher, and children learn about life through experiencing it. For children, life is full of novelties, and many of their significant experiences happen in childhood. Translated picture storybooks that were published by Taiwanese publishers in 2001 under this category reflected various concepts about life experiences. Totally, there are 32 books about life experiences. Of the 32 books, 8 books tell stories about daily life experiences, including making phone calls and answering calls, washing hair, or brushing teeth. Seven books contained the theme of play, which was the second highest subcategory in this major theme. *Leo Et Popi-Le Manège* describes the first experience of a little boy sitting on a merry-go-round, and *A Day in the Luxembourg Garden* recounts an experience of a boy and his friend playing in the park.

In the category of life experience, 46.88 percent of books were from the subcategories of daily life experiences and play. Through reading stories of characters created by authors, children not only get to see the life experiences of these characters but also indirectly acquire the experiences from the characters. For instance, Leo in *Leo Et Popi-A La Garderie* by Clément shares his experience of going to school, and the little sheep in *When Sheep Cannot Sleep* by Kitamura describes the feeling of being unable to sleep during one night.

Character traits (31 books, or 11.23 percent) was the third largest category, and the sum of 14 traits were recognized in this category. As storylines continue to unfold, certain distinctive characteristics in behaviors or actions were demonstrated by the protagonists in order to



handle difficulties or improve situations. The three other subcategories under this major classification were self-confidence (9 books), cleverness (4 books) and courage (4 books). Nevertheless, when the researcher looked at all the subcategories that had been listed under the main category of character traits, it was clearly that most of the character traits reflected in the stories were considered to be positive and valued character traits, and many of them have been conventionally praised and appreciated in Chinese culture for centuries. Character traits, such as caring, courage, helpfulness, honesty, patience, and persistence, are deeply rooted in the minds of Chinese people when the concept of virtue cultivation is remarked. These character traits are also cultural virtues that a child in the Chinese society is expected to develop. Usually, they are taught and reminded constantly in the settings of family and school.

Friendship was another popular theme that many Taiwanese publishers published books on in 2001. In this category, 7 different types of friendship were located in the stories. As being illustrated under the category of Friendship, friendship between personified animal characters covered the largest proportion (16 of the 27). The ratio of the number of books about friendship between animals to the number of books about human characters and animals, the second largest subcategory in this major category, was 3 to 1.

Around 8.70 percent of picture storybooks in Chinese translation were found to be related to behavior. Under this category, two more second-level subcategories were identified: social behavior and personal behavior. Stories that contained the theme of social behavior (20 of the 24 books) were

published five times more than stories that contained the theme of personal behavior (4 of the 24 books). As for the subject discussed in the stories that centered on personal behavior, all 4 stories built their plots to describe the misbehavior of the main children characters.

The title of the category and subcategories in behavior were borrowed from *Children's Books is Children's Books* (Huang, 2003), a professional book on themes and subjects of Chinese children's books. Social behavior by Huang's definition was interpreted as behaviors that a society expects an individual to acquire to become a member of that society. The difference between the category of behavior and the category of character traits was that in the stories about character traits, the characters in the stories already possess those character traits and demonstrate those character traits in occasions when dealing with difficulties or troublesome situations. However, in the stories about social behavior, characters eventually learn those social behavior through experiences or conflicts that happen to them. Similar to the finding discovered on character traits, the social behavior listed and found in this study were also all positive behaviors that are regarded the preferable and desired behaviors that the Chinese society expects from its citizens.

Twenty-four books about humor were selected for translation and publication. Tofan Corporation published a series of 8 books by a Japanese humor story writer, Yoshiwo Nakae, and 3&3 International Education Institute published five humorous stories from a French writer, Christel Desmoinaux. It was quite interesting to see books with this unique theme got published. Generally speaking, translation of humor is difficult and

complicated because many factors are involved in producing comic effects. It is also a kind of literary genre that many publishers consider it full of challenges and probably would avoid selecting for publication.

Twenty three books were listed under the category of emotions. Stories in the category of emotions all shared a common similarity in placing emphasis on dealing with emotions or being able to refrain from anger. The emotions expressed by the characters in the stories under this category were almost all negative ones, such as anger, fear, jealousy or loneliness. What usually happened in the stories was that characters in the stories experience all kinds of emotions and strive to find a way to deal with them properly.

Eleven stories centered their themes on different kinds of animals, and all of them talk about the lives of animals. Two publishers published two series of stories by two authors who wrote stories about dogs, elephants, koalas, orangutans, and pandas by using the voices of child narrators and adult narrators. The child narrators in the stories observe their pets and recount what their pets do both inside and outside the families. Other series of stories narrated by adults told stories about how animals live in nature and what their habitat looks like.

Most stories in the category of imagination were fantasies in which characters either were witches, monsters, fairies or characters with magic powers or who experience magic. Some stories set plots using one's imagination, and two stories referred to imaginary friends in particular.

Stories that were grouped under category of society reflect social issues that have aroused serious concerns in Taiwan. Environmental

protection has been a primary concern to people in Taiwan for many years because there is so much pollution in the cities. Pollution such as air pollution, noise pollution, water pollutions, and garbage pollution cause big troubles to people and damage the quality of people's lives. Stray dogs have been a big social problem for a long time too, and it has been reported on the news occasionally that children had been hurt by Stray dogs. Child sexual abuse and child kidnapping are increasing threats to parents in Taiwan. Those issues have stirred heated discussion and remain problems that people do not have solutions for.

The remaining categories of themes included knowledge, art, celebrations and others. Thirteen books were assigned under the theme of knowledge. The subcategories in knowledge included colors, counting, nature, presidents and world places. There are five books under category of art, and the stories in this category are about artists, creation, dancing or music. Four stories about Christmas, Easter and Valentine's Day were translated and published. As for the category of others, books were grouped in this category because they were in a small quantity, mostly one book only, and did not fit into any of categories discussed previously.

**Table 2: Subcategories of Each Major Theme**

| Art      | Number of Books |
|----------|-----------------|
| Artists  | 1               |
| Creation | 1               |
| Dancing  | 2               |
| Music    | 1               |
| Total    | 5               |

| <b>Animals</b> | <b>Number of Books</b> |
|----------------|------------------------|
| Bears          | 1                      |
| Dogs           | 2                      |
| Elephants      | 1                      |
| Insects        | 1                      |
| Koala          | 1                      |
| Lamb           | 1                      |
| Orangutan      | 1                      |
| Panda          | 2                      |
| Whales         | 1                      |
| Total          | 11                     |

| <b>Celebrations</b> | <b>Number of Books</b> |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| Christmas           | 1                      |
| Easter              | 2                      |
| Valentine's Day     | 1                      |
| Total               | 4                      |

| <b>Behavior</b>          | <b>Number of Books</b> |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| I. Social behavior       |                        |
| Acceptance               | 2                      |
| Cooperation              | 4                      |
| Relationship with others | 1                      |
| Respect                  | 2                      |
| Responsibility           | 3                      |
| Sharing                  | 6                      |
| Taking turns             | 1                      |
| Understanding            | 1                      |
| II. Personal Behavior    |                        |
| Misbehavior              | 4                      |
| Total                    | 24                     |

| Character Traits | Number of Books |
|------------------|-----------------|
| Appearance       | 2               |
| Caring           | 2               |
| Cleverness       | 4               |
| Courage          | 4               |
| Helpfulness      | 1               |
| Honesty          | 1               |
| Independence     | 1               |
| Patience         | 1               |
| Persistence      | 1               |
| Possessiveness   | 1               |
| Self-confidence  | 19              |
| Self-discovery   | 1               |
| Shyness          | 2               |
| Wisdom           | 1               |
| Total            | 31              |

| Emotions   | Number of Books |
|------------|-----------------|
| Anger      | 1               |
| Boredom    | 1               |
| Emotion    | 3               |
| Fear       | 9               |
| Grief      | 1               |
| Jealousy   | 2               |
| Laughter   | 1               |
| Loneliness | 1               |
| Love       | 1               |
| Temper     | 2               |
| Total      | 23              |

| Literacy | Number of Books |
|----------|-----------------|
| Reading  | 6               |
| Total    | 6               |

| <b>Friendship</b>                                               | <b>Number of Books</b> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Animal personified characters and animal personified characters | 16                     |
| Human characters and animals                                    | 5                      |
| Human characters and animal personified characters              | 2                      |
| Human characters and natural personified characters             | 1                      |
| Human characters and nature                                     | 1                      |
| Human characters and supernatural characters                    | 1                      |
| Human characters and human characters                           | 1                      |
| Total                                                           | 23                     |

| <b>Families</b> | <b>Number of Books</b> |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| Adoption        | 1                      |
| Baby sitters    | 1                      |
| Birthdays       | 5                      |
| Brothers        | 1                      |
| Childhood       | 3                      |
| Divorce         | 1                      |
| Fathers         | 3                      |
| Growing up      | 2                      |
| Grandparents    | 2                      |
| Home            | 1                      |
| Memories        | 1                      |
| Mothers         | 3                      |
| Moving          | 1                      |
| New-born baby   | 2                      |
| Siblings        | 2                      |
| Toilet training | 1                      |
| Work            | 3                      |
| Total           | 33                     |

| Imagination            | Number of Books |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| Dreams                 | 1               |
| Imaginary friends      | 2               |
| Imagination            | 8               |
| Imaginative characters | 4               |
| Magic                  | 1               |
| Monster                | 1               |
| Witches                | 2               |
| Total                  | 19              |

| Knowledge   | Number of Books |
|-------------|-----------------|
| Colors      | 1               |
| Counting    | 1               |
| Nature      | 7               |
| Presidents  | 1               |
| World place | 3               |
| Total       | 13              |

| Life Experiences       | Number of Books |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| Bad dreams             | 1               |
| Cloth                  | 2               |
| Curiosity              | 1               |
| Daily life experiences | 8               |
| Getting lost           | 1               |
| Going to school        | 2               |
| Hat                    | 1               |
| Injury                 | 1               |
| Insomnolence           | 1               |
| Quarrels               | 1               |
| Lost and found         | 1               |
| Play                   | 1               |
| Seeing doctor          | 7               |
| Sickness               | 1               |
| Snow day               | 2               |
| Trying new things      | 2               |
| Total                  | 32              |



| <b>Society</b>         | <b>Number of Books</b> |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| Child sexual abuse     | 1                      |
| Environment protection | 1                      |
| Gender                 | 3                      |
| Kidnapping             | 1                      |
| Stray dogs             | 1                      |
| Total                  | 7                      |

  

| <b>Others</b>                  | <b>Number of Books</b> |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| Adventure                      | 1                      |
| God                            | 4                      |
| Kiss                           | 2                      |
| Life                           | 1                      |
| Mental and physical challenges | 4                      |
| Names                          | 1                      |
| Perspective                    | 1                      |
| School life                    | 1                      |
| War                            | 2                      |
| Total                          | 17                     |

## DISCUSSION

As literary and illustration preferences differ from culture to culture and from country to country (Tomlinson, 1998), differences also exist in interests in themes and topics among cultures and countries (Freeman & Lehman, 2001). Each culture or nation develops its own ideology of literary conventions and reading interests. This ideology of literary conventions and reading interests then form a discursive structure (Mills, 2007), and members of the culture or nation are influenced by this

discursive structure when speaking of literature.

Publishers of a culture or nation are also influenced by its discursive structure of literature and then come to form another discursive structure regarding the business of publication. This discursive structure is shared by the members of the publication industry. What often happens in the industry of publishing translated books is that the decisions that publishers of certain cultures and countries make on selecting books for translation and publication are governed by the interests of their cultures and nations. The whole system of making decisions on which books to be selected and translated also falls into Gee's (2010) theory of "cultural model" because after all the cultural beliefs and values are strong forces that have great influence on the members of the culture.

The findings of the study in a sense revealed that the prevailing cultural characteristics of Chinese culture are indeed of crucial influences in the decision making process of book selection for translation and publication. It has been known to the world that Chinese culture puts great emphasis on family and considers family as the root and foundation of the Chinese society (Fong & Wu, 1996). So, it was not surprising to see that books on family took the largest proportion and accounted for 33 percent in the total number of published picture storybooks in translation. The result of the data analysis that presented life experiences and character traits to be the second and third large parts of books being selected to be translated and published in Chinese version revealed a common view that adults from Chinese culture hold toward children's literature.

Generally speaking, in the eyes of adults, the significance and

function that children's books hold and play in the lives of children are strongly associated with education. Books are meaningful and worthy spending time with because children learn something by reading them. The fact that books with themes on life experiences and character traits got selected to be translated and published in high percentages indicated that publishers assumed that parents prefer to buy books with these themes and believe that children will benefit from reading them. The result also indicated that in the minds of adults in Taiwan, life experiences and character traits are probably the two most important aspects for their children to develop and cultivate.

Personal qualities such as cleverness, wisdom, independence, self-confidence and self-discovery are highly valued and admired among children peers, and conventionally they are also fine qualities that parents and educators expect children to cultivate and possess (Chao, 1994). This finding that most character traits presented in the stories were positive, cultural-related, and somehow approved and desirable suggested that without consciously being well aware, publishers might have utilized Chinese cultural values and conventional views about educating and raising children as bases for the selection of international picture storybooks for translation and publication. Or, from another point of view, publishers might purposefully select international picture storybooks that contain virtues that correspond to Chinese culture values for the reason of marketability or educational purpose.

Besides publishing books with themes that were meaningful to Chinese culture, publishers in Taiwan in the year 2001 also published

books on themes with universal appeal (White, 1998). Books covered themes such as animal, friendship, imagination and emotions fitted to the description. Books with those themes are usually popular with children, and they are usually the types of books that parents like to and feel safe to purchase for their children for the purposes of filling psychological, emotional and educational needs of their children. There appeared a small number of books that contain serious topics or themes such as mental and physical disease, divorce, environment protection, child sexual abuse, and war, which were all social concerns that once had been attracting people's attentions and provoking discussions in the Taiwanese society at the time.

The year 2000 was titled as "Reading Year" by the Taiwanese government. In order to create a more pleasing atmosphere to promote reading in the society and engage people of all ages in Taiwan in acquiring the habit of reading and actually practicing this habit, the government held various activities related to reading in different settings. A large number of books in all sorts of genres were published in this year. Books that related to the concept of reading itself were also chosen to be published. In responding to this reading movement, Yuan-Liou publishing Co. Ltd. selected 6 children's picture storybooks on the theme of reading to be published in the Chinese translation in a series format.

Another significant point that is worthy being stated and illustrated was that the majority of the translated books that publishers in Taiwan published in 2001 were so called universal books rather than culturally specific books (Bishop, 1992). Universal books are explained as books that center on universal themes, and the characters and settings that are created

in the books are usually culturally generic. In other words, the text and illustrations do not place the characters within a specific cultural context and group. Culturally specific books also contain universal themes, but characters and settings in the books are within specific cultural contexts. The majority of the books under examination were stories that can happen to anyone in any place, not necessarily about certain groups of people from certain cultures. The problem that publishers chose to publish books on universal themes was that children in Taiwan were not given enough opportunities to learn about other cultural groups through their reading of picture storybooks in Chinese translation.

## IMPLICATINS AND SUGGESTIONS

Translating children's books is not as easy as most people think. For a long time in Taiwan, the translation of children's literature has been considered a job of no importance and is not appreciated in the same way as the translation of adult literature. The situation has improved but is still not satisfactory. The remuneration for the job of translating children's literature is still low, and many publishers prefer to hire university students of foreign languages rather than professional translators (Hsu, 1998).

Publishers in Taiwan should understand that not every person who knows other languages can handle the job of translating children's books. Translators of children's books must acquire knowledge about two languages, two cultures, children's literature, and, most important

of all, children. Besides, different genres of children's books demand different consideration and translating strategies. Picture storybooks, for instance, have distinctive features including the complexity and difficulty of language, language patterns, visual design, and text and illustration interaction. Publishers have to understand that translators are the second authors of translated books. The quality and the ability of translators determine whether or not the good intentions of the publishers to introduce good books to children in Taiwan can be accomplished, whether or not quality books still remain quality books after being translated, and whether or not the books sell well and are well-accepted.

Besides inviting professional translators to translate children's books, the publishers in Taiwan should build a system of translation review. Before moving to the step of printing, the publishers should have the translations reviewed by the editors or reviewers in case there are problems in the translations. Thus, proper training should be provided to in-service editors, or the publishers should hire people with professional knowledge in the translation and publication of children's books.

Since the purpose of importing international children's books for translation and publication is to introduce good literature and other cultures and nations to Taiwanese children, publishers should not only translate and publish children's books that are written by famous authors, illustrated by famous illustrators or have won awards but also translate and publish books that introduce and reflect other cultures. Publishers should develop an effectual and efficient approach for gathering information about children's books of other countries. With more information available,

the choice of selecting books for translation and publication will not be limited to books by famous authors or illustrators or to award-winning books, and children will be able to read books of variety.

When choosing picture storybooks about specific cultures to be translated and published, publishers should be aware of the issue of stereotyping. Publishers should avoid choosing books based on the stereotyped conceptions toward certain nation or culture.

Suggestions publishers might consider in deciding what books to select for translation and publication include:

- \* Select books that are translatable
- \* Select quality literature
- \* Select books with themes or topics that are missing in books published by local Taiwanese publishers
- \* Select books that depict other cultures with accurate cultural information
- \* Select the best books from award-winning or excellent authors and illustrators from other countries
- \* Select books whose contents are culturally acceptable to readers in Taiwan
- \* Avoiding selecting books with stereotyped images or conceptions about certain cultures
- \* Select books reflecting the diversity within each culture, rather than only those that reflect existing stereotypes

In addition, Taiwanese publishers can learn from the experiences of

publishing translated children's books and from the translated children's books themselves. Taiwanese publishers, authors and illustrators will gradually learn what makes a good picture storybook, how to make good storybook and develop a standard of evaluation for picture storybooks. They can also apply those techniques and skills in making local picture storybooks.



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