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Critical Analysis of the Interwoven Ideologies Embedded in American Picture Books About Taiwanese Children

Abstract:

As children's worldview is shaped through books, the ideologies embedded in readings influence young readers' values and beliefs. There are very limited representations of Taiwanese protagonists and their culture in the mainstream book market of the United States. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to examine the portrayal of Taiwanese children and culture in five picture books published in the US: Livia Blackburne's *I Dream of Popo* (2021), Alan Woo's *Maggie's Chopsticks* (2015), Belle Yang's *Hannah is My Name* (2008), Grace Lin's *The Ugly Vegetables* (1999), and Yi Ling Hsu's *Typhoon Holidays* (2015). To deeply analyse the textual and non-textual content of these picture books, the paper employs the theoretical framework of ideology and Orientalism, which is detailed in such patterns as characters, relationships, interactions, conflicts, and problem solutions in the stories. The authors of the study argue that the interwoven ideologies of gender roles, capitalism, and patriarchy implicitly exercise power over the young protagonists of the works examined. Moreover, the child characters are treated as 'obedient others' by the adults and dominant Western culture.

Key words:

children's literature, ideology, Orientalism, picture books, Taiwanese children, Taiwanese culture

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Krytyczna analiza splecionych ideologii w amerykańskich książkach obrazkowych o tajwańskich dzieciach

Abstrakt:

Jako że światopogląd dziecka kształtowany jest przez książki, ideologie zawarte w lekturach wpływają na wartości i przekonania młodych czytelników. Na amerykańskim rynku książki głównego nurtu istnieje bardzo niewiele reprezentacji tajwańskich bohaterów i ich kultury. Celem niniejszego opracowania jest zatem zbadanie portretu tajwańskich dzieci i tajwańskiej kultury w pięciu książkach obrazkowych wydanych w USA: *I Dream of Popo* [Śnię o Popo] Livii Blackburne (2021), *Maggie's Chopsticks* [Pałeczki Maggie] Alana Woo (2015), Hannah is My Name [Mam na imię Hannah] Belle Yang (2008), The Ugly Vegetables [Brzydkie warzywa] Grace Lin (1999) oraz *Typhoon Holidays* [Wakacje pod tajfunem] Yi Ling Hsu (2015). Aby dogłębnie przeanalizować tekstowe i pozatekstowe treści tych książek obrazkowych, w tekście zastosowano teoretyczne ramy ideologii i orientalizmu, wyszczególnione w takich schematach jak postacie, relacje, interakcje, konflikty i rozwiązania problemów w tych opowieściach. Według autorek niniejszego studium splecione ideologie ról płciowych, kapitalizmu i patriarchatu pośrednio sprawują władzę nad młodymi bohaterami analizowanych dzieł. Co więcej, dziecięce postaci są traktowane przez dorosłych pojawiających się w książkach i przez dominującą kulturę zachodnią jako „posłuszni inni".

Słowa kluczowe:

literatura dziecięca, ideologia, orientalizm, książki obrazkowe, tajwańskie dzieci, kultura tajwańska

Introduction

Most children can now easily access books about diverse cultures. Interacting with the content of these books gives them a chance to learn more about themselves and people from different cultures (Bishop, 1990). Since children's knowledge and understanding of the world and their own culture are also influenced and shaped by adults, many picture books commonly used at home and in classrooms are not free from ideology (McCallum & Stephens, 2011). In other words, readers can unwittingly accept the authors' implicit assumptions, ideologies, values, and beliefs communicated through textual narrative and visual discourse. As two readers of Taiwanese and Korean cultural backgrounds, we would like to take a closer look at underlying ideological messages in multicultural children's literature.

When it comes to multicultural picture books in the book market of the United States, the Cooperative Children's Book Center (2019) states that there is a growing gap between the number of books portraying Asian versus White protagonists (a ratio of 1 to 5), therefore representations of the multitude of Asian cultures are very limited. Shwu-Yi Leu (2001) finds that over 70 percent of children's books about Asian cultures depict almost exclusively China, Korea, and Japan. A decade later, not much had changed, as noted by Eun Hye Son and Yoo Kyung Sung (2013). The trend in publications has continued to reflect "the mainstream Asian cultures that dominate the overall image of Asia in children's books" (p. 71). One of the factors Hui-Ling Huang (2019) finds to make it difficult for Taiwanese books to be published in the global book market is their specific local content. Due to this limited global preference, Taiwanese protagonists and their culture are underrepresented and books that portray them are less accessible.

An important factor to note about the omission of Taiwanese culture is that people tend to view it as part of Chinese culture, thereby blurring the boundary between the two. It is true that there is an overlap between them because some Taiwanese originally moved from China. People called Waishengren used to reside in China and fled to Taiwan after the Kuomingtang government's retreat in 1949. At the time, Waishengren were one of the majority groups in Taiwan's population; however, contemporary Taiwan has developed its own unique culture (Huang, 2020). Despite its uniqueness, Taiwanese culture remains misrepresented. As Rebecca Wei Hsieh (2020), a Taiwanese American writer and actor, states: "[F]or most of my life, the closest thing to Taiwanese representation that I could find was actually Chinese […]. But is it really?" Although there are fewer than 24 million people in Taiwan, their diverse voices deserve to be heard as Taiwanese culture is distinct from the one of mainland China.

When searching for children's literature about Taiwanese culture published in the United States, we found that there is a very subtle distinction between Taiwan and China represented in children's books. This difference may be too subtle to be easily recognised since Taiwanese culture is mostly portrayed as inclusive of Chinese culture. None of the books in this collection seem to emphasise the uniqueness of Taiwanese people or culture. However, we still felt it was important to examine their representation. In this paper, we seek to identify picture books about Taiwanese protagonists and explore how the experiences and lives of Taiwanese children are portrayed in these works. Using the theoretical framework of ideology and Orientalism, we analysed the ideological messages in the portrayal of Taiwanese children and their experiences in children's books.

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Theoretical Framework

"Ideologies are the systems of beliefs shared and used by a society to make sense of the world […] and form the basis of the social representations and practices of group members"' (McCallum & Stephens, 2011, p. 370). Ideology manifests itself in various forms and can be interconnected with universal themes or specific issues in certain cultural or social contexts. Karín Lesnik-Oberstein (1994) views representations of child and childhood not as essential, but as constructed by certain narratives and ideologies. The author-centered power dominates the content of books, which leads to the dismission of the reader's perspective – stories are loaded with meanings that meet the interests of authors, illustrators, editors, publishers, and markets (Keyes & McGillicuddy, 2014). Thus, narrative inevitably carries specific ideology since language contains meanings that were socially determined (Stephens, 1992).

Following Annbritt Palo and Lena Manderstedt (2019), who claim that an individual's activity tends to be influenced by the interaction of multiple components of power, we adopted a cross-sectoral approach to examine how characters are affected by the interconnections between ideologies. For example, Cathy Wang (2020) studies the depictions of female characters in Chinese children's fantasy novels and finds that they are portrayed to meet patriarchal expectations rooted in Confucian ideology. Their actions and roles in the family and society are shaped by patriarchal and cultural ideologies. The cross-sectoral approach in this study has allowed us to uncover gender, Confucian, and patriarchal ideologies embedded in the books reviewed herein.

Since all the main characters in the books are females, we examined how gender ideology is embedded in their portrayal using Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI – Bem, 1974). It has been one of the most widely used tools to analyse gender roles by measuring 20 masculine, 20 feminine, and 20 neutral traits. Jie Zhang et al. (2001) adjusted the BSRI to include 8 female-oriented and 8 male-oriented characteristics respectively, as applied to Chinese culture. As the selected picture books mainly portray Taiwanese characters, this study employed Zhang and others' version of the BSRI to examine characters' traits indicative of gender roles. We analysed how patriarchal ideology structures representations of female characters and their relationship with other characters. For the purposes of this study, we adopted Michele Barrett's (1980) definition of patriarchy, which refers to male dominance in institutions including society and family. There exists a systematic, patriarchal structure in which males possess privilege and power over women. Yuli Dewi's (2019) study of the patriarchal system in Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales suggests that males' power is

supported by the patriarchal system that exerts control over disadvantaged family members and women. Having examined the collections that commonly portray children's interactions in family as an essential unit of patriarchy (Millett, 1969), we found that family is the place where patriarchal ideology exercises its power by instilling patriarchal principles into young generations to maintain male privilege.

Another cultural belief system that often impacts the characters in the selected picture books is Confucianism. What lies at the core of Confucianism is harmony, which leads an individual to conform to respective norms of the country, society, and family. Children are obliged to learn to live by Confucian dogmas without questioning, and to show filial piety to their parents (Ke, 2015). In Confucianism, the concept of *bie* expects males and females to conform to gender roles in family, where a father has authority over other family members and is in charge of Confucian principles, while a mother is responsible for taking care of children (I. H. Hsieh, 2018). In order to understand the impact of Confucianism, it is essential to explore how Taiwanese children's experiences are situated in culture.

Another tool we employed to thoroughly examine how the dominant Western culture represents obedient characters is Orientalism. Although the colonial period is in the past, colonial discourses (e.g. norms and values determined by dominant cultures) are still embedded in children's literature (Bradford, 2010). Edward W. Said (1994) argues that the understanding of the Orient is constructed, imagined, defined, and spoken by the dominant Western culture. Orientalism can be discussed and analysed as a corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – "dealing with it by making statements about it, authorising views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it; in short, Orientalism is manifested as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (p. 11).

Orientalism has also proved useful for understanding the concept of 'the other.' Perry Nodelman (1992) applies it to children's literature to examine literary representations of children's obedience. He argues that children are subservient to adults who decide what elements, values, and beliefs form children's childhood. Child protagonists' perceptions of social tenets, family norms, and life values are constructed by adults. Children are allowed to express their feelings and thoughts, but their stories are controlled and reproduced by adults' expectations. Olga Nieuwenhuys (2013) describes the child and childhood as shaped by Eurocentric narratives and notes that postcolonialism manages to not only empower children to subvert dominant norms, but also to reinvent their childhoods. Katie Ishizuka and Ramón Stephens (2019)

utilise Orientalism to study the well-known children's books by Dr. Seuss and argue that most characters of colour are portrayed there in a subordinate way. The images of Asian people in these books are full of Western depictions of what people from Asian cultures look like. Also, Jiaxiu Chen and Xinxia Rong examine the representations of Chinese people in the novel *Dragonwings* by Laurence Yep (1975) using the concepts of Orientalism (Hui, 2020). Both scholars conclude that the author of the novel subconsciously presents White superiority when constructing the image of the Chinese characters. Rong argues that the Chinese characters are depicted as less-educated and narrow-minded as opposed to the White characters who are portrayed as well-educated and caring (pp. 51–52). In this study, we employed Orientalism to discuss the power imbalance between the superiors (i.e. Western culture and adults) and the oppressed ones (i.e. Taiwanese culture and children) represented in the selected children's picture books. To question the existing representations of childhood as constructed by adults and the dominant Western culture, it is crucial to look into how these powers penetrate children's literature and manipulate their lives.

Based on these theoretical frameworks, we sought to examine how Taiwanese children are represented in terms of gender roles, cultural expectations, and interactions with adults. We believe it is important to analyse and understand how ideologies are embedded in the representations of Taiwanese protagonists, as we argue that readers exposed to these images subconsciously internalise them.

Book Selection and Analysis

We developed the following criteria for selecting picture books: (1) realistic fiction books that (2) reflect Taiwanese children's lives and (3) were published in the United States. For the purpose of the study, the selection of the picture books excluded non-fiction, fantasy, autobiographies, folktales, and informational books, such as mathematics, science, and language learning. In order to locate the picture books about Taiwanese children and their culture, we used the Children's Literature Comprehensive Database and Novelist K-8 Plus, but did not find books that meet the criteria presented in our study. Therefore, we turned to Google and Amazon with such keywords as 'Taiwanese culture picture books' and 'Taiwan culture and children's books.' Based on the books we found in Amazon and Google, we also searched for children's authors and illustrators who have Taiwanese cultural background or published books rooted in Taiwanese culture. To examine the portrayal of Taiwanese culture, we chose

five picture books with clear depictions from authors and illustrators, including landmarks, settings of street vendors, home furnishings, language, and so forth. To distinguish Taiwanese culture from Chinese culture, we examined the detailed information contained in the illustrations and texts to determine if they represent Taiwanese culture accurately and authentically. For instance, we excluded *Sam and the Lucky Money* (Chinn, 1995) since the scene of weighing vegetables presented in the story reveals that it is not set in Taiwan: Taiwan uses the catty (or kati) as a unit of weight instead of the pound indicated in the story.

Based on the above-mentioned criteria, we narrowed the material down to the following five picture books: *I Dream of Popo* by Livia Blackburne (2021), *Maggie's Chopsticks* by Alan Woo (2015), *Hannah is My Name* by Belle Yang (2008), *The Ugly Vegetables* by Grace Lin (1999), and *Typhoon Holidays* by Yi Ling Hsu (2015). In order to thoroughly examine these five books, we employed multiple layers of analysis. First, we read each book and recorded our initial responses to visual and non-visual elements, which generated broad themes about kinship and Taiwanese culture. Then, we closely studied storylines, characters, and contexts. Literary analysis allowed us to capture recurring patterns that emerged from the initial responses. Finally, we re-analysed the texts along with illustrations and examined the problems and their solutions in the stories. This layer of the analysis highlights the protagonists' inner and interpersonal conflicts, which reflect the impact of cross-cultural adjustments, cultural norms, and social expectations. Thinking along these lines, we employed our theoretical constructs of ideologies and Orientalism to uncover the power relations embedded in the interactions between children and family members and perceptions of Taiwanese culture in Western society.

Ideologies Embedded in the Picture Books About Taiwanese Culture

Having reviewed the five selected picture books, we found a lack of diversity in Taiwanese groups portrayed in the stories. This homogenised portrayal appears to reflect a broader historical context. The United States recruited high-skilled talents overseas during the 1960s and 1970s, which contributed to a large influx of Taiwanese immigrants. The selected books seem to focus on the first-generation immigrants and revolve around their attachment to home culture, immigration, and cultural identity, which are some key themes of multicultural children's literature (Cai, 1994; Chen & Wang, 2014). The female protagonists appear to embody the values of Taiwanese immigrants and their descendants from the 1960s and 1970s, who today are mainly Taiwanese Americans. Their

narratives became a mainstream voice of Taiwanese culture, which may be the reason why the stories told in these books reflect lives and values of a less diverse population.

We argue that the selected picture books, despite covering a range of topics, implicitly reveal stereotypical gender roles in the characters' actions, occupations, and interactions at home, workplace, and school. The characters' values reflect traditional gender roles embedded in patriarchal ideology intertwined with cultural conventions, which is in line with Wang's (2020) research on gendered and patriarchal ideology in Chinese children's fantasy. Having examined each plot with a focus on problems and resolutions, we recognised the interwoven ideologies of traditional gender roles and culture that influence the characters' reactions, way of thinking, behaviour, and actions within the storylines. The representations of the characters no longer reflect who they are and the authentic culture they belong to because "[…] narratives are usually focalized by members of the majority culture, and hence the privilege of narrative subjectivity is rarely bestowed upon minority groups" (Stephens, 1992, p. 181). The characters from the minority culture lose their subjectivity while maintaining their main ideological structures through the narrative. Based on selected examples from each book, the following sections will discuss how ideologies are communicated through characters, themes, and plot.

Characters Trapped in Traditional Gender and Cultural Ideologies

All the selected picture books feature Taiwanese female protagonists. We found that the books refer to stereotypically feminine topics such as desire for affection, homesickness, self-acceptance, and cultural values (Zhang, Norvilitis, & Jin, 2001). For example, *I Dream of Popo* shows the strong bond between a granddaughter and her grandmother. When the protagonist thinks of her late grandmother, the illustration shows them hugging each other surrounded by floating light-yellow flowers with the following text: "She says, I love you, too […]. A breeze brushes my face, rich with the scent of gui hua" (Blackburne, 2021; all picture books analysed herein are unpaged). To be more specific, their bond is symbolised by the flowers, *gui hua* [sweet osmanthus], which are related to feminine characteristics and are commonly found in Taiwanese proverbs and idioms featuring female beauty and gentleness. The protagonist in *Hannah Is My Name* also exhibits stereotypically feminine traits in reaction to her parents' tough situation after they immigrated to the United States. She is caring and sensitive to her parents' needs when her father purposely puts a dime on the floor to let her find it: "I know he's doing it, but I pretend to be surprised

because I don't want him to be disappointed" (Yang, 2008). When the mother of the protagonist loses her job, she tells her: "Don't worry, Mama. I don't need toys or new shoes." Another picture book, *Typhoon Holidays*, features a sympathetic and affectionate image of the protagonist tearing up when she thinks of her father: "Until the typhoon was over, I wouldn't be able to see my dad […]. On TV, Dad looked tired. He had been awake all night" (Hsu, 2015). Following the BSRI's female-oriented items, it might be said that the protagonist represents stereotypical female attributes such as thoughtfulness, kindness, and consideration.

Furthermore, stereotypical gender roles are represented and reinforced through the characters' occupations. Male occupations include an auditor, hotel manager, door man, and governmental officer, while female characters are housewives and school teachers. Cecilia Ridgeway (1997) claims that cultural stereotypes in work settings are cued by sex categorisations: male traits are recognised as more successful than female ones. Most male characters in the books are in charge of work associated with decision-making and supervising behaviour, while the female characters are categorised as caregivers who deal with parenting and household chores. The female characters are degraded and subjected to male-dominated spheres both inside and outside home.

At the same time, the male characters work hard to meet the patriarchal cultural norms. As heads of the family, they are required to meet social expectations of masculine traits and act as primary breadwinners no matter how serious obstacles they face. They hardly show any sensitivity as displaying feminine traits would embarrass their patriarchal authority. Men exhibiting feminine qualities risk emasculation from other males (Migliaccio, 2001). Mohammad Idriss (2021) also notes that men have to fix misbehaviours inconsistent with patriarchal values by following cultural norms of masculinity in order not to be blamed in their community. The protagonist's father in *Typhoon Holidays* seems to be a silent victim of the patriarchal system. The male characters can neither express their emotions nor unwind to make time for their children. However, they still belong to the privileged group in the patriarchal system that allows them to overpower other family members. This patriarchal hierarchy is reflected in *Typhoon Holidays*, where the protagonist's father is the only one who can ease his family's concerns. Since the protagonist's and her mother's mood is influenced by the father, they cannot relieve their worries.

Similarly, *The Ugly Vegetables* reinforces stereotypical gender roles in terms of parenting. The protagonist's mother teaches her to grow plants and prepare ingredients for dinner in the kitchen. The protagonist's father sits and reads a newspaper on the porch. In *Maggie's Chopsticks*, traditional gender roles

and stereotypes are uncovered when Maggie's mother and grandmother teach her how to correctly use chopsticks. The female characters are responsible for domestic issues including taking care of children. At the same time, Maggie's father who sits at the same table gives a glance at the situation and continues enjoying his dinner. Barbara Welter (1966) claims that in the 19th century womanhood has become associated with submissiveness – women were to make the home a happy place. It was their workplace and their domestic pursuits included keeping a clean house and raising obedient children.

In addition to gender ideology, this story conveys Confucian values and norms. More than half of the book focuses on Maggie's relentless practice of using chopsticks. This theme is rooted in Confucianism where children need to abide by family rules, which are usually established by male elders who hold ultimate power over all family members. Confucianism gives priority to harmony based on the order of superiority in social stratifications including families (McDevitt, 2007). It is patriarchal ideology intertwined with Confucian principles that makes the young family member obedient. The protagonist's thoughts no longer belong to herself and are replaced with Confucian and patriarchal values.

In the above-discussed five picture books, all the protagonists are females, and the themes of the stories are associated with feminine traits which reflect gender stereotypes. In fact, gender roles are underpinned by patriarchal norms. As Anti Somech and Anat Drach-Zahavy (2016) claim, in gender role ideologies, individuals are not defined by one's traits but by sex; hence, the roles of men and women function as social expectations. Adopting this approach in our analysis, it can be said that the female protagonists learn from the other female family members how to be good daughters and mothers, and what roles and tasks they need to fulfill. The female characters are confined to the domestic sphere, doing household chores, and looking after children, while the male characters are responsible for livelihood.

Paternalistic Ideology and Orientalism Intertwined Within Plots, Themes, and Conflicts

The conflicts and problems presented in the plot are core elements of the story that keep readers engaged. The climax of the story is when the protagonist encounters the obstacles which might reinforce or undermine one's beliefs and ideologies. Our analysis of the selected picture books showed that the child protagonists usually face two sources of conflict: decisions of adults and the impact of Taiwanese culture. More specifically, the children encounter problems due

to the adults who decide to leave Taiwan and immigrate to the United States, where they plant 'Taiwaneese' vegetables, teach their child to use chopsticks, overwork themselves, and spend too little time with their family. We found that the occurrence of conflicts in these stories does not just reflect the struggle between adults and children but also reveals the prevailing belief system, which is grounded in the paternalistic ideology and Orientalism. The following section will discuss how the paternalistic ideology and Orientalism are embedded in the plot including themes and conflicts.

In the book *I Dream of Popo*, the protagonist leaves behind her grandmother and her comfort zone, Taiwan. The illustration depicts the character's heavy feelings of homesickness and disconnection from her home culture. After she learns a new word, 'home,' she writes down *home* next to the illustration of a building in Taiwan and *new house* on the other page with San Diego. The abstract concept of home carries stronger emotional connotations with the place the main character identifies with. The protagonist views the place she lived in Taiwan as a **real** home filled with irreplaceable memories of Popo, her grandmother. Her homesickness is communicated through the narrative starting with: "I dream with Popo…," "I sit with Popo…," "I think of Popo…," "I draw Popo…," "I eat with Popo…," "I pray for Popo…," "I dream of Popo…" (Blackburne, 2021). Moreover, the longer she was away from Popo, the more distant she grew from her mother tongue: "Now ni hao (hello) was what felt strange in my mouth. Other words, too, were hard to catch, like fish in a deep well." Since language is an integral part of culture, the gradual loss of native language implies that the protagonist becomes slowly detached from her home culture. On the one hand, the protagonist very much misses her grandmother, but on the other, she also feels disconnected from her home culture, asking: "Mama why I can't talk to Popo like before."

This emotional conflict and hopelessness are somewhat caused by the protagonist's parents who are hardly portrayed in the story. The illustration of parental hands that take the protagonist's hand when they board a plane to leave Taiwan indicates the hidden adult power dominating the child's actions. The invisible power of ideology is also shown in *Hannah Is My Name* when the titular character's family immigrates to the United States. The parents' decision to start a new life in the US without consulting the child protagonists implies the subordinate position of children. Nodelman (1992) states that children are treated as 'others,' and childhood is shaped and imaged by adults rather than children themselves. In this regard, the main character's childhood is colonised by her parents who do not give much thought whether their child is willing to leave her homeland and ignore her ability to provide input. One of the

arguments for moving to the United States is that their child "will learn and see many new things" (Yang, 2008). The process of learning about the world depends on the desires of adults, not the wants of the child, which makes children obedient listeners. Moreover, the adult characters determine the knowledge the protagonist should acquire based on what benefits them.

Maggie's Chopsticks shows another set of expectations imposed by the adult family members on the young protagonist. As they laugh at Maggie's awkward way of holding chopsticks, she struggles to keep up with family traditions by constantly practicing using chopsticks and praying to her ancestors. The family members make sure her manners are in line with paternalistic ideological norms. Her act of worshiping ancestors reflects the importance of filial duty and cultural norms. As Jacqueline Rose (1984) argues, "[i]t will not be an issue here of what the child wants, but of what the adult desires in the very act of construing the child as the object of its speech" (p. 59). Maggie herself becomes a tool that is used to serve the adults' narratives and to highlight the fulfillment of cultural norms maintained by the adults and the author. To this end, the author and the adults instill in the protagonist what cultural norms should be passed on and cultivated. In the process of becoming an obedient child, Maggie has no room to reflect on her preferences, as she struggles to please her family by mastering her chopstick skills to gain their recognition.

The child protagonist in *The Ugly Vegetables* faces a similar conflict. She is not satisfied with her mother doing all the planting without allowing her to plant her favourites. She asks her mother questions, which reveal her skepticism towards paternalistic beliefs, and the mother patiently answers why they grow ugly, weird plants while their neighbours plant flowers. Hence, the protagonist's questions seem to be rejected in the parent-dominated discourse. When the protagonist asks: "Why can't we grow flowers? The neighbours' plants look different," the mother responds: "These are better than flowers" (Lin, 1999). The illustration depicts the disappointed protagonist getting answers from her mom, implying that adult reasoning is the only answer to follow. This supports Nodelman's (1992) claim that adults develop and justify their knowledge of childhood that objectifies children as their own version of lives. In this story, the learning process is determined by the mother, who prioritises her preferences. The issue of planting vegetables and flowers also seems to be closely related to the protagonist's cultural identity. The protagonist shows her interest in planting flowers which is a common gardening practice in the United States; however, the mother dismisses her interests and promotes the benefits of growing common Taiwanese vegetables. The mother's persistence appears to shape the 'correct' cultural identity for the

child. In this example, the child's interests and identity are determined by the adult's will through the operation of paternalistic ideology.

In addition to paternalistic ideology, Orientalism is also implicitly embedded in the plot. While examining the conflict in *The Ugly Vegetables*, we wondered about the choice of the word 'ugly,' which involves a superior-inferior relationship between cultures. The neutral word 'vegetable' is degraded when modified by the word 'ugly.' The author of the story employs the dominant cultural values to judge and define Asian culture. Since the negative labeling of the other is so implicit, there is not any room left for young readers to recreate and redefine Taiwanese cultural elements. The unique and different Taiwanese culture is portrayed as 'ugly' and inferior to Western culture depicted in the text: "[…] I would feel sad that our garden wasn't as nice" (Lin, 1999). Despite the mother's explanation, the assumption of inferiority is already in place, which echoes Nodelman's (1992) assertion about the never-changing differences between the other and the oppressors.

A similar shadow of the other can be found in *Hannah Is My Name*. Before receiving their green cards, the protagonist and her parents live in fear because of the US government's unannounced possibility of repatriation if they did not meet the country's criteria. The narrative and illustrations depict immigrants' tough life and representation of the other. One illustration shows the frightened protagonist standing behind her mother in a cage-like elevator along with the text: "The elevator looks like a lion's cage […]. Still, I don't trust this man in uniform" (Yang, 2008). The elevator and the uniform seem to symbolise the oppressors' power that traps and degrades the others – the protagonist and her parents. Said (1978) parallels the other and lions by noting the other falls into a savage state and tends to be triggered. The protagonist and her parents are objectified and animalised as the tamed others and lose the autonomy of self-being. Now they see themselves through the lens of the dominant Western culture, which makes them take their degraded images for granted.

This story is based on the immigration experience of the author Belle Yang who notes on the back flap of the book: "It was a great privilege to come to the United States, and we didn't look back." Yang projects herself as the protagonist who becomes disconnected from her past and replaces her identity with a new one established by the dominant Western ideology. The whole process is encouraged by the dominant White culture, which reveals an ideological construction of nationhood. As Cuthbeth Tagwirei (2013) argues, "a blind follower of the dominant ideology earns one a place in the nation's family. Ideologies on nation and nationhood seek to homogenize subjects" (p. 52). In this regard, to find a sense of belonging, the protagonist subconsciously embraces dominant

values and accepts the new identity by saying: "We want to become Americans more than anything in the world. We want to be free" (Yang, 2008).

The girl's original name, Na-Li, is also ignored and discarded in favour of the new one, Hannah: "Hannah is my name in this new country. It doesn't sound like my Chinese name, Na-Li means beautiful […]. Mama and Baba think it's easy to learn because I don't know English yet" (Yang, 2008). Throughout the assimilation process, the protagonist internalises the ideology of nationhood and subjugates herself as the other. Tina Keller and Judith Franzak (2016) claim that the naming process of immigrant children in picture books is subject to the pressure from adults. The protagonist's acceptance of the new name reveals the unseen but influential power of her parents. The replacement of her original name with the Western one also emphasises the dominance of ideological nationhood as demonstrated by Robyn McCallum and John Stephens (2011). They argue that the process whereby an individual conforms their thoughts to social practices is informed by ideology, that is, a person subconsciously tries to meet the expectations of society. Accordingly, to conform to the norms of the dominant culture, Hannah has to deny who she is and forget her past.

Like Hannah, other characters also face the struggles of Taiwanese immigrants and Taiwanese Americans, such as language barriers, homesickness, name change, conflict between cultural identities and family values (Yi, 2014). The protagonist in *I Dream of Popo* is homesick and misses her grandmother in Taiwan. She is also afraid of losing her native language and connection with her heritage culture. The main character in Lin's book constantly negotiates and validates her cultural identity through the titular "ugly vegetables." She even learns the Chinese names for vegetables in her garden. However, she recognises the value of Chinese vegetables only after receiving positive feedback from her neighbours about the vegetable soup and seeing how they start growing Chinese vegetables in their gardens. In this story, the negotiation of the main character's cultural identity is influenced not only by her own attitude but also by her neighbours' recognition, which implies the influence of dominant culture when an immigrant attempts to understand and establish who they are in the new environment. In *Hannah Is My Name*, the protagonist has a difficult time getting used to a new environment, including school, language, name, and culture. After receiving her green card, she tries to reconcile the two parts of her cultural identity, Na-Li and Hannah, in order to construct a new identity in the United States.

Taiwanese Children – Obedient Others in the Problem-Solving Process

The problems and conflicts presented in the stories reflect ideologies related to gender, patriarchy, and cultures, as discussed in the previous section. We found a similar trend in the problem-solving process when we analysed how the characters resolve conflicts and cope with difficulties. While the adults often act as problem solvers, the young protagonists tend to follow ways that meet the adults' expectations. The intertwined ideologies resulted in adults exercising their power over children. The following section will discuss the problem-solving process, which specifies who has the power to solve the problems and how ideologies are embedded in this process.

The Ugly Vegetables portrays the protagonist's mother as a problem solver. The main character keeps asking her mother about why they cannot grow flowers as their neighbours do. Instead of trying to understand why her daughter asks these questions, the mother simply explains the benefits of growing Chinese vegetables. The conversation is dominated by the protagonist's mother who makes the final decision on what should be planted in her (not their) garden. Although the girl thoughts are expressed at the end of the story: "[…] when my mother was starting her garden, we planted some flowers next to Chinese vegetables (Lin, 1999)," her perspective is silenced throughout their conversation about gardening. It should also be noted that "my mother" is placed before "we" in this passage, which reveals the passive and obedient position of the protagonist. The adult assumes that the child is powerless in order to confirm their own authority (Nodelman, 2008). This motif is also explored by Sarah Sahn (2016), who found that the main character in Tamora Pierce's fantasy novel series *Song of the Lioness Quartet* (1983–1988) is confined to the discourse of adulthood and infantilised in order to keep her childlike and subservient. The protagonist is treated as a naive other, which is colonised and silenced by the adults.

Similarly, in *Maggie's Chopsticks*, the protagonist's father addresses her inner concerns, saying: "[…] you shouldn't worry what other people think. Everyone is different. Everyone is unique" (Woo, 2015). Patriarchal ideology is revealed when obstacles arise; the male character maintains the power to decide what attitude the other family members should adopt toward the issue. When Maggie fails to use chopsticks and is judged by her family, her father, the patriarchal dominator, allows for the oppression. Furthermore, the dominant position of the father as a problem solver is reflected in the illustration, which shows the family members with a content look on their faces along with the text: "You hold your chopsticks perfectly, Father whispers." Each member has no choice but to adopt a family manner that is tied to the will of the patriarch. This hierarchical

relationship between adults and children is also examined by Lin Gou and Eun Hye Son (2021) in their study of Chinese children's school experiences in picture books. The authors find that the Caucasian teachers are portrayed as superior and active rescuers who save their passive and helpless students.

However, there is one protagonist who contributes to the problem-solving process. In *I Dream of Popo,* the main character seems to have solved the problem since she tries her best to remember the time spent with her grandmother, keeps in touch with her, and visualises the memories of Taiwan. The illustrations depict items in Taiwan with the protagonist's handwritten words in both Taiwanese and English along with the text: "I draw Popo at my new school […]. I write 'My grandmother,' though it feels strange to call her that" (Blackburne, 2021). However, no matter how hard the protagonist tries to remember the time spent with her grandmother, she is not able to overcome the physical distance between them. The parents could have helped the girl deal with her problems, but rather focus on constructing and determining the protagonist's childhood without considering their daughter's opinions.

Sometimes, solving a problem is beyond the characters' capabilities, so they need to rely on a larger structure. In *Typhoon Holidays*, the protagonist's father seems to deal with the obstacle when the girl says: "While I was sleeping, a rough beard touched my face. Dad had come home!" (Hsu, 2015), which is shown in the illustration of the smiling protagonist cuddling her tired dad in bed. The sweet family time is like a charitable gift from the capitalist system. However, neither the protagonist's father nor his company can combat the culture of overwork since institutions like family, schools, and companies are integrated into the capitalist system. Similarly, in *Hannah Is My Name*, the main conflict is solved when the protagonist and her parents receive their green cards. It is the government of the United States that holds the ultimate power to ease their concerns. In this case, the government officials become heroes who represent privileged Westerners overpowering non-Westerners and immigrants. Although the protagonist's parents seem to be victims of the Eurocentric system, they could have avoided these difficulties and let the protagonist continue her care-free childhood in their home country. Unlike her parents, the young protagonist has no choice but to face the consequences and adjust to the difficult environment she found herself in as a result of the adults' decision to immigrate.

In conclusion, we argue that most of the female characters are situated within a discourse dominated by the combined ideologies of gender, patriarchy, and national culture. The interwoven ideologies leave the protagonists no choice but to satisfy the adults' desires by fulfilling traditional gender roles.

Moreover, paternalistic ideology and Orientalism embedded in the storylines imply the domination of adults over children. The protagonists' preferences and interests are neglected and replaced by the adults' decisions – their voices are not heard and their feelings are unseen. Instead, they are under the watchful eye of the adults who decide what values and beliefs form their childhood. The dominant Western influence can also be seen in the immigration process, which is romanticised by the adults – while they become legal residents, they also grow detached from their cultural roots. To sum it up, children and their childhood do not belong to themselves; instead, they are colonised by the interconnected ideologies and values of superior cultures.

Conclusions

This study offers a critical examination of how Taiwanese children's experiences are represented in five picture books with a special focus on unmasked ideologies that are embedded in the texts and illustrations. The stories we analysed do not merely offer aesthetic experience – they are also contained by the ideological assumptions of the authors, illustrators, and dominant culture about how society should work. We found that the intertwined ideologies of gender roles and patriarchy implicitly exercise power over the books' young protagonists. What is more, the child characters are treated as 'obedient others' by the adults and dominant Western culture.

We believe that it is important for readers to recognise and understand hidden ideologies when reading multicultural children's literature. They should be encouraged to read with a critical eye to capture implicit meanings in texts and illustrations. Without this awareness, multicultural literature would never fulfill the role of "critical pedagogy" (Gates & Mark, 2006, p. 5). Multicultural literature not only calls for the inclusion of cultural minority voices, but also informs a fair and authentic portrayal of diverse cultural groups. We hope that parents and educators help children uncover the underlying power that oppresses the other in stories. It is not easy to recognise existing and taken-for-granted values of ideologies in literature, as adults are not even aware of their privileged position over children. Hence, it is crucial for future studies to explore available resources and develop pedagogical practices that allow educators and caregivers to adopt a critical perspective on ideologies embedded in stories. Perhaps publishing more multicultural books for children and young adults will make a change.

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