

PROGRAM

February 6th, 2025

Across Cultures and Pages: The Landscape of Children's Literature in East Asia Online Symposium

3:00 PM ~ 3:05 PM

Introduction

3:05 PM ~ 3:35 PM

***Tonghua* in Transition: The Chinese Fairy Tale without Fairies**

Xiaofei Shi

(Associate Dean, Professor, School of Foreign Languages, Soochow University)

3:35 PM ~ 4:05 PM

Taiwanese Picturebooks as “World Literature”: *Guji Guji* and *The Orange Horse*

Andrea Mei-Ying Wu

(Director, Chinese Language Center; Distinguished Professor, Department of Taiwanese Literature, National Cheng Kung University)

4:05 PM ~ 4:10 PM

Break

4:10 PM ~ 4:40 PM

Korean Picturebook Studies and Contemporary Views of Children

Hejeong Yoon

(Research Fellow, Graduate School of Language and Society, Hitotsubashi University)

4:40 PM ~ 5:10 PM

Pictorial History and Poetry: Different Traditions in Japanese and English Children's Literature

Dominic Cheetham

(Professor, Department of English Literature, Sophia University)

5:10 PM ~ 5:15 PM

Break

5:15 PM ~ 5:45 PM

Discussion and Q&A

***Tonghua* in Transition: The Chinese Fairy Tale without Fairies**

Xiaofei Shi

Professor, School of Foreign Languages,
Soochow University

This talk explores the evolution of the Chinese fairy tale and its social relevance since its emergence in the early twentieth century. Through the analysis of representative literary works and relevant documents—both academic and popular—I examine how these tales have developed over time. The first three decades of the twentieth century are identified as a critical period for concept formation, during which the three foundational categories for interpreting “*tonghua*” (the Chinese equivalent of fairy tale) took shape. The three basic interpretations include *tonghua* as a synonym for children’s literature, as folktales that contribute to children’s literature, and as fantastic stories for children. From the 1940s to the present, I observe a dynamic process in which interpretations shift between categories or blend different ones, influenced by various social, historical, and cultural forces.

Overall, the centenary development of the Chinese fairy tale illustrates a trend towards emphasizing the educational value of these texts, guiding young readers to engage with the realistic concerns of society and the nation. This approach fosters down-to-earth individuals whose imagination serves practical purposes, as opposed to mere daydreaming. However, this is not to suggest that the Chinese fairy tale is less imaginative or fails to encourage imaginative engagement from its young readers. Instead, it works to anchor them in a reality that many will soon recognize, avoiding the sense of being misled or lied to by fanciful narratives. This approach may facilitate children’s acculturation and socialization, helping them adapt to societal norms and expectations. This rather “thick” realism stands in stark contrast to the thin veneer of realism often found in Western fairy tales, where it tends to dissolve amidst fanciful adventures in whimsical settings, such as Lewis Carroll’s underground wonderland or Charles Kingsley’s underwater world.

The distinctive feature of a more serious realistic orientation in the Chinese fairy tale further blurs the lines between it and other genres of children’s literature, making it dominant representation of children’s literature within the Chinese context. The concept of “*tonghua*” and the discussions surrounding it preceded the establishment of children’s literature as a legitimate academic field. “*Tonghua*” is not only a distinctive Chinese genre but also represents a pattern or model of the Chinese “inherited realism,” embodying a perspective that has contributed significantly to the establishment of the field of children’s literature. In essence, it serves as both a genre and a paradigm.

By examining the “Chineseness” of the Chinese fairy tale, this talk sheds light on a significant yet hitherto overlooked dimension of international fairy tale studies, illuminating how local and global traditions may interact and cross-fertilize.

Taiwanese Picturebooks as “World Literature”: *Guji Guji* and *The Orange Horse*

Andrea Mei-Ying Wu

Distinguished Professor, Department of Taiwanese Literature
National Cheng Kung University

Picturebooks have notably emerged as a popular mode of literary creation in Taiwan since the late 20th and early 21st century. Characterized by a narrative form that prioritizes images over words, picturebooks often transcend linguistic, cultural, and political barriers, crossing national boundaries and achieving wide circulation abroad. In this talk, I will explore the unique phenomenon of the global circulation of Taiwanese picturebooks, focusing specifically on Chih-Yuan Chen’s *Guji-Guji* (2003) and Hsu-Kung Liu’s *The Orange Horse* (2015).

Drawing on theories of “world literature” articulated by David Damrosch and Pheng Cheah, among others, I aim to examine how these two Taiwanese picturebooks, mediated and shaped by diverse cultural mechanisms, navigate toward “the world” and further reshape the imagination of “world literature.” My main focus will be to analyze how these works, originating in Taiwan, circulate globally through independent and transnational publishers via translation and reproduction. Additionally, I will explore how international awards, theatrical adaptations, and other remakes have given rise to their rebirth in various forms across different geographical regions and cultural contexts, making them accessible to (child) readers in diverse settings.

It is argued that while *Guji-Guji* and *The Orange Horse* have taken different paths in their international circulation, both illustrate the effects of “double refraction” often involved in the making of world literature, as described by David Damrosch. They also exemplify what Pheng Cheah refers to as the normative power of world literature in its capacity for “world-opening” and “world-making.” Notably, the global circulation of Taiwanese picturebooks, as exemplified by these two works, is not confined to their “outward movement” from their point of origin to form “new life” in other countries and regions. What is even more noteworthy—and worthy of further investigation—is how, through foreign “refraction” and “remake,” these works “move back” or “return” to their original birthplace, becoming new literary imaginings and focal points of attention to local (Taiwanese) audiences.

While these two Taiwanese picturebooks follow different trajectories in their global circulation, they both demonstrate the dynamic formations of “world literature,” highlighting the features of hybridity and transculturality in the process of transnational connections and cross-cultural (re)productions.

Korean Picturebook Studies and Contemporary Views of Children

Hejeong Yoon

Research Fellow, Graduate School of Language and Society,
Hitotsubashi University

Modern picturebooks in Korea began with *Baekdusan Iyagi* (1988), the first Korean picturebook to be translated into Japanese two years later, in 1990. In May 1921, the word “child” was born as the Korean word “orini (어린이)” from the Chinese translation “兒童 (아동)” or “兒孩 (아해).” The father of children’s literature, Bang Jung-hwan, used the term to recognize children as personalities. A magazine called “Orini” was published mainly by Bang from 1923–1949, totaling 137 issues (first published in March 1923, published until the spring of 1935, and then ceased publication. After the war ended, the magazine was resumed in 1948 and published for one year).

The history of modern picturebooks in Korea is not long; however, many developments have occurred since 2000. Among them, I introduce *낙점반 (Yojihan)*, published in 2004 (the Japanese version was translated and published as *Yojihan Yojihan* by Fukuinkan Shoten in 2007). This picturebook is characterized by words that are children’s poems written by Yun Seok-jung in 1940 and illustrated by picturebook artist Lee Yong-kyung. The Korean version is a picturebook in which the “intersemiotic translation” is described in Román Jakobson (1973/2019). Since it contains various elements, the interaction between the word and image of the picturebook was analyzed by Nikolajeva and Scott (2000/2011). I chose this picturebook because the revised 20th-anniversary edition was published in August 2024.

As with picturebooks, the transition in children’s views was remarkable. Confucian thought is still strongly reflected in Korea, even more so in traditional Korean society. There was an order between adults and children; this order had to be observed. However, this may have led to the side effect that children are only controlled by adults. Therefore, from the 1920s onward, the term “orini” described the child as a personality. Today (1), instead of viewing children as small adults, we consider them to have different characteristics from adults based on medical and psychological knowledge. (2) We believe in the active view of children rather than their passive view. We believe that children are beings who imagine and create on their own. Therefore, we now see children as (3) independent personalities and (4) those to be favored and protected as the future of the family and the nation.

Pictorial History and Poetry: Different Traditions in Japanese and English Children's Literature

Dominic Cheetham
Professor, Department of English Literature,
Sophia University

A quick surface glance will often give the impression that English language children's literature and Japanese children's literature are very similar. Picturebooks have similar formats, often having the same sizes, shapes, and even the same reading directions. Books for younger children have high concentrations of illustration, and although Japanese children's literature, with the notable exception of Manga, rarely makes an appearance in English, English language work is translated so much into Japanese that many children in Japan read many of the same books as children in English speaking countries. The overlap, especially in Japan, appears very strong. However, in this presentation I should like to draw attention to two areas where the traditions of children's literature are very different and which I believe reveal powerful differences, and therefore opportunities for interaction and influence, between the two traditions. These areas are the status and use of pictures and of poetry in children's literature.

Japan has used pictures alongside words since antiquity. Some of the most ancient stories exist as scrolls of combined picture and written words: 'emakimono'. The tradition of combining these media has continued for both adult and child centred work, and has only been replaced in the modern adult novel which is in itself an import from Western narrative traditions. Illustration has maintained a high status in Japan and has never been seen as a predominantly childish thing. This has, ultimately, allowed Japanese manga and other visual media to blossom as narrative media for all ages.

In English, the earliest printed texts for children included poetry. This is something which has continued throughout the history of English language children's literature and has expanded to create new genres of text such as poetry picturebooks and poem novels, and to influence other kinds of texts at all ages. Indeed, the incidence of poetry in English children's literature is similar to the incidence of illustration, being very common in picturebooks and gradually reducing as the target ages increase. This is not the case in Japanese children's literature which, while it has plenty of illustration, has little poetry at any age. Even in translation, poetry often loses its power, or is even lost in the transition into Japanese. Even that most famous of poetic texts, *The Gruffalo* does not read as a poem in Japanese.

These different traditions continue, but narrative and cultural interactions between them offer new opportunities for the development of children's literature as they borrow and adapt from each other.