

# What to Pass On: Adults' perspectives on Childhood Stories in Picturebooks

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## **Abstract**

Picturebook stories that depict childhood memories as early as the 1930s started to emerge in the 2000s in Taiwan. These books either chronologically present the changes of schooling, lifestyle, and landscape across different generations or tell fabricated stories with backmatter or notes to highlight the historical details in the illustrations. An intention to impart cultural memories to children is evident. However, the selected historical periods and events may deserve to be examined to reveal the key values and significant moments that constitute the cultural memories to pass on. To exam closely the extent the stories represent Taiwanese identity and the values to pass on to children, I conducted a qualitative inquiry based on the rationales of the reader's response to probe the reactions and perceptions of adult readers towards these picturebooks. Ten adult readers who belonged to the cohorts of the story characters born between the 1920s and 1970s were invited to participate in the study. Ten reading sessions were arranged to read ten selected books that depict childhood memory stories related to significant historical events that had changed Taiwan's economic, social, and political landscapes. Data obtained from 10 book discussions and two group interviews were collected for analysis. The results indicate that these stories stimulated zealous discussions and the recalls of their own childhood memories. The shared memories and what they perceived as an important heritage for children to remember about the past generations become lucid. However, criticisms about the picturebooks in reconstructing mainly the mainstream childhood also emerged. It could be a risk of trying to transform communicative memory into cultural memory when childhood is viewed as a collective experience rather than intimate and personal remembrance.

Keyword: Cultural memory, Taiwan, childhood stories, picturebooks, book discussion, Identity