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Lauri Johnson, in her foreword to *Children's Literature from Asia in Today's Classrooms: Toward Culturally Authentic Interpretations*, points out that “today’s classrooms in New York City (and other major cities across the United States) are even more diverse with first- and second-generation Asian and Asian American students one [sic] of the fastest growing student populations” (ix). She adds that although this is the case, teachers and educators of pre-service teachers barely demonstrate an expansion of their literary lists to include texts that mirror the experiences of the Asian and Asian American students in their classrooms. This anthology, edited by Yukari Takimoto Amos and Daniel Miles Amos, is targeted towards PK-16 educators in an effort to help them understand why it is necessary to use children’s literature from Asia in their classrooms and how to utilize them in order to cultivate students’ empathy and work towards educational equity.

In the Preface by Yukari Takimoto Amos, titled “Globalization and Teacher Education,” the author expands on the point made by Johnson in the foreword about the need for using diverse youth literature in response to globalization and the changes in the landscape of education in the U.S. Amos provides an overview of the studies that have been conducted in relation to teacher education programs and coursework featuring global/international content. She highlights the gap by noting that “it is not uncommon to witness teacher candidates who are profoundly ignorant about other countries, in particular Asia, the Middle East, and Africa” (xi). Amos goes on to present the work of scholars such as Geneva Gay; Susan A. Colby and Anna F. Lyon; Kathy Escamilla and Sally Nathenson-Mejía; and Mingshui Cai in order to illustrate that teacher-education programs that lack training in international and multicultural pedagogy result in teachers who do not embody such inclusive pedagogical practices in their own classrooms. The preface concludes with a short section on the challenges of using international youth

literature in PK-16 classrooms. Some of the concerns listed by Amos include the difficulty to gain access to high-quality, English-language translations of international children's books; the risk of readers "misreading and misinterpreting the stories" from countries that lie outside their cultural understandings; and a phenomenon termed by Anna O. Soter as "aesthetic restriction," which causes "the reader [to] dismiss the work out of hand because of elements in the text that they find unacceptable" (Amos xiv). According to Amos, one way through which these challenges can be addressed is by aiding teachers to "authentically interpret stories that originate from countries that speak different languages, believe in different religions, and hold different values" (xv). It is with this goal in mind that the author and her co-editor put together this volume on children's literature in Asia.

Divided into two parts, the collection consists of six chapters focusing on literature set in, or from India, Thailand, China, Japan, Indonesia, Taiwan, Philippines and South Korea. Part I is titled "Classroom Applications," and it contains five essays that take up a story (or a set of stories) each, provide its summary, explain its cultural relevance, and discuss how the recommended texts can be taken up in classrooms. Part II: "Annotated Bibliographies of International Children's Literature from Selected Asian Countries" is quite similar to Part I but it comprises shorter descriptions of stories and paragraph-length summaries of how the cultural significance of these tales can be understood and subsequently taught to children. The contributors of this anthology range from an Indian media professional to an academic and teacher from Bangkok; an educator and early learning coordinator from Washington state in the U.S. to a scholar of Chinese linguistics and second language acquisition from Hong Kong; an ELL educator from Taiwan to a lecturer and researcher based in Indonesia. One of the editors, Daniel Miles Amos, who has also contributed two chapters to the volume, has been affiliated

with institutions in Asia, and Yukari Takimoto Amos, who hails from Japan, has worked on topics pertaining to international students from Asia, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) teacher candidates, and English as Second Language (ESL)/Japanese as a Second Language (JSL).

The first chapter in Part I, “Gods, Heroes, Wisdom, and Wit in Children’s Stories” by Anita Balagopalan—a freelance scriptwriter and social media and communications specialist—deals with mythological stories and folk tales from India for children. Most of the chapter is devoted to the summary of a subplot from one of the great epics of India, the *Mahabharata*, and the last couple of pages recount the stories of the elephant-headed Hindu god, Ganesha, and the clever, quick-witted courtier and poet from South India, Tenali Rama. The chapter provides little in terms of how these stories can be used in classrooms and it ends up overwhelming a reader unfamiliar with Indian stories with too much information, especially about the *Mahabharata*. Two of the major points of criticism of Indian children’s literature are that it is overtly didactic (Superle) and that children are being fed a diet of recycled folktales and stories from the epics (Rao). This chapter not only reinforces these stereotypes about Indian children’s literature but it also shrouds the religious diversity of the country by discussing texts exclusively centered around Hinduism. Considering these reasons, it might have been worthwhile for the author of this chapter to have considered texts produced by contemporary Indian publishers instead of having relied on retold stories from Hindu culture to serve as representative of children’s literature from the subcontinent.

Kamolwan Fairee Jocuns’ chapter takes up an award-winning book from Thailand and describes the “Thai cultural references in the story that give a significant influence on how the characters make certain decisions” (17). Entitled “Thai Cultural References and Decision

Making in *The Happiness of Kati*,” this chapter briefly brings out the issues with translating a text from one language to another, and proceeds to discuss how the gaps formed during the translation process can be filled by an understanding of certain references relevant to Thai culture. Jocuns points out that the decisions made by the lead characters of the novel “are intimately related to subtle aspects of Thai culture that non-Thai readers may misinterpret or overlook. . . [and that] [i]t is important to recognize that small details [in the story] may actually have big impacts” (27). Her analysis of *The Happiness of Kati* in this essay distinctly makes visible the reasons influencing certain characters’ moral choices, some of which include animistic and syncretistic practices, supernatural beliefs, and cultural constructs of happiness.

“Chinese Children Stories, Confucianism, and the Family” by Haiyue (Fiona) Shan with Daniel Miles Amos is a relatively short chapter on how principles of Confucianism materialize in Chinese children’s literature. Separated into three sub-sections, this chapter introduces the readers to the popular Chinese stories, *River Snail Girl*, *Kong Rong Shares the Pear*, and *The Sigh of Father’s Back* and illustrates how Confucian thought is reflected in them through marital, hierarchical, and paternal relationships. The authors make it a point to highlight that although contemporary social relationships in China place a greater emphasis on equality, Confucian values—which are “strongly patriarchal [and] hierarchical”—find their way into children’s stories (29). They “are still readily used by Chinese people as a source of reference to explain and rationalize behavior” not only among family members and friends, but also amidst relationships in the larger socio-political setting of the country (Shan and Amos 35).

The fourth chapter, “The Monkey within [*sic*] You: *Journey to the West*, an Essential Text of Chinese Religion and Folk Cosmology,” which is also written by Daniel Miles Amos, shines a spotlight on one of the four classic Chinese novels. Partly autobiographical and partly

analytical, this chapter initially provides a lengthy outline of the plot of *The Journey to the West* and ends with a section on how this text can be used in classrooms at all levels. The author meanders in between through his discussion of temples dedicated to the Monkey King in Asia, and reflections on his experience with Shen Da boxing—a martial arts practice which involves the practitioners invoking the spirits of the Monkey King and other gods from the classic. This chapter will be a useful tool for teachers looking to use Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese* with their students. The context for the story and the synopsis provided by Amos will aid in getting a better understanding of the story of the Monkey King in Yang's renowned graphic novel. Additionally, Amos also suggests varied versions of the Monkey King's tale for children of different age ranges, and he recommends performing *The Journey to the West* as a play for students to get deeper insight into the novel.

Trina Lanegan's "Reading *Sadako* with Third Graders," which concludes Part I of the collection, is different from the rest of the chapters because it deals with the way in which a Japanese story is taken up in a classroom with young children in a rural American school district. The essay begins with a call to use global and international literature with children as early and as regularly as possible. Lanegan suggests ways in which educators can plan to use literature from other cultures in their classrooms and stresses that "[i]ntentional planning is essential" if they want to integrate diverse stories as part of their classes (57). She then goes on to write about the picture book based on the life of Sadako Sasaki, a young Japanese girl who suffered from leukemia and eventually died due to the effects of the atom bomb that was dropped in Hiroshima in 1945. Subsequently, she describes how a group of third graders read and discussed *Sadako* under the guidance of their teacher. The goals were to "build literacy. . . [,] explore and introduce. . . the historical context of the Hiroshima bombing during World Word II. . . [and] to

expose students to broader story concepts. . . like illness and disease, friendship in the face of hardship, and war and peace” (Lanegan 58). In order to accomplish these, the students, along with their teacher, read, reviewed, discussed, created artwork, and wrote about the story of Sadako, and constructed a visual wall based on the words and themes they picked up from the book. Lanegan observes that over the course of a few weeks, the students learned not only about the Hiroshima bombing, but also gathered knowledge about cultural markers (such as origami cranes), their significance and their relevance to the people of Japan. Furthermore, Lanegan highlights how the children engage in conversations and written reflections about the concepts of war, peace, and even nationalism, all through the story of *Sadako*.

In Part II of this anthology, Miao Ying (Janet) Chen; Tati Lathipatud Durriyah; Yae Takimoto Hite and Katrina Manami Knight; Jordan Piano; Eun Yoo; and Kamolwan Fairee Jocuns present annotated bibliographies of children’s books set in/from China/Taiwan, Indonesia, Japan, Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand respectively. Each author writes about 3-4 texts, presents a short summary of them, and under the sub-sections, “Towards Authentic Interpretations” and “Classroom Applications,” offers ways for educators to understand the cultural significance of the stories and apply this knowledge while mediating these texts with their students. Considering that most of the books recommended in this section have been brought out by North American publishers, this list is a useful place from where teachers can begin the process of introducing their students to literature from Asia. However, it subscribes to what Cai refers to, in the context of “the tourist view of multiculturalism,” as the “four *f*’s: food, festival, fashion, and folklore” approach (278-9). In his essay titled “Multiple Definitions of Multicultural Literature: Is the Debate Really Just ‘Ivory Tower’ Bickering?” Cai encourages teachers and teacher educators to “move from informing to empowering in our curricular

experiences,” and adds that “[u]nless students empower themselves to deal with issues of social equity and justice, multicultural education stops short of its ultimate goal” (279). While PK-16 educators get a good overview of children’s literature from Asia from Amos and Amos’ edited collection, they also need to be aware of the fact that most of the texts suggested in this book offer opportunities for “informing” the audience but not as many for “empowering” them.

This anthology is a companion volume to Amos and Amos’ *(Mis)Reading Different Cultures: Interpreting International Children’s Literature from Asia*, which according to the publisher’s description “engages readers with comprehensive coverage on theories, concepts, pitfalls, and applications when endeavoring to use international children’s literature from Asia in classrooms. . . [and] teach[es] how interpretations/worldviews vary by cultures, and how power influences such interpretations/worldviews” (“(Mis)Reading Different Cultures”). While the collection under consideration for this review serves as a good starting point for educators looking to include stories about Asians in their classrooms, it does little in terms of working towards presenting a comprehensive account of children’s literature from the largest continent in the world. For instance, the text barely mentions literature for young children from Western Asia; neither does it discuss books from South Asian countries other than India. This volume is more or less centered around books about East Asian and South East Asian cultures, leaving the reader with an incomplete picture of which nations’ and cultures’ stories are included under the broad umbrella of “Asian children’s literature.” That said, Amos and Amos’ *Children’s Literature from Asia in Today’s Classrooms* can be used in conjunction with texts such as *Muslims in Story: Expanding Multicultural Understanding through Children’s and Young Adult Literature* in order to help establish a foundation for discussions surrounding children’s literature about Asians and Asian Americans.

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