



**Globalizing Diversity and Tolerance through Children's Books:
A Case Study of Japanese Picture Books Loved by Many Readers¹**

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Abstract: The “Amendment to the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act” (1990) in Japan has led to an increase in the number of registered foreigners. Japan is now being transformed into a multiracial and multicultural society. We have many children’s picture books dealing with diversity and tolerance. I will analyze the publication while comparing the increasing number of foreign residents in Japan with the reaction to this phenomenon by the Japanese people, and will clarify the characteristics and importance of these picture books in present-day multiracial and multicultural Japanese society.

Key words: diversity, tolerance, multiracial, multicultural, coexistence

In Japan, the “Amendment to the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act” (1990) has led to an increase in the number of registered foreigners. According to the statistics provided by the Immigration Bureau at the Ministry of Justice, 2,217,426 foreigners lived in Japan at the end of 2008. This represents 1.74% of the population. These statistics show that they are from 190 countries, the main ones being China (including Taiwan and Hong Kong) with 655,377 people (29.6%), Korea 589,239 (26.6%), Brazil 312,582 (14.1%), the Philippines 210,617 (9.5%), Peru 59,723 (2.7%), the U.S.A. 52,683 (2.4%), etc. After the reform of the Migration Law in 1990, many foreigners live in the cities and towns where manufacturing is highly concentrated. The statistics for Oizumi town in Gunma Prefecture show that in May 2006 foreigners made up 15.8% of its population. At the same time there are cities and towns with fewer foreigners than the average 1.74%. This means that Japan is now being transformed into a multiracial and multicultural society.

Our study entitled “Faces of multicultural coexistence: case studies of Latin America and Nikkei (Japanese descendants) societies in Japan” from 2006 to 2009, an investigation project of the Latin American Area Studies Center of Nanzan University coordinated by Asaka, makes the following facts clear (Asaka, 2009a). For intercultural understanding, it is very important to take into account the three aspects of culture, economy and politics. Unfortunately, we cannot have a fair and correct view of the

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situation in our evaluation of different cultures, because economic and political factors influence our acceptance of other cultures.

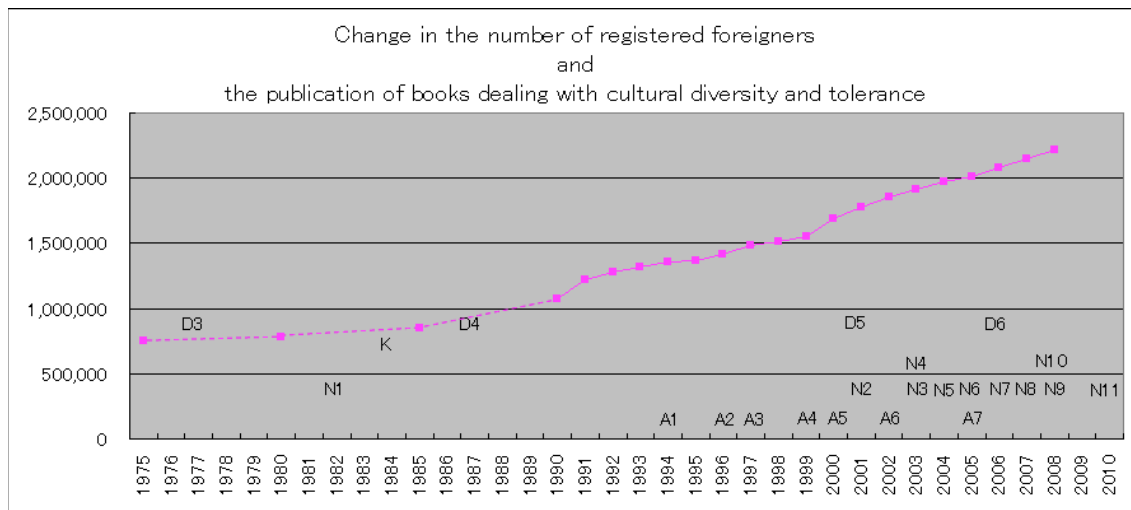
For example, we have a tendency to think that the culture of a powerful nation-state is superior to that of less powerful nation-states. We therefore need to respect the country from which the migrant people come, as well as their pride in their identity and their own language, the language with which children and parents communicate with each other, and with which they create and think profoundly with other native speakers. Also foreign people live under the guidance of their relatives or in surroundings where they can easily live and preserve their own culture.

At the same time, Japanese society is so varied that each community, town, and city can choose in their policy of immigration control what kind of person should come as a future citizen if both sides agree, or whether “circular migration”(first coming to Japan, but then returning to their home country) would be preferred (Asaka, 2010: 1-13).

A very curious phenomenon seems to be occurring. The increasing number of foreign residents has made many Japanese become fearful of an increase in the number of crimes, but simultaneously we have become interested in the various cultures which those migrant people bring with them. We also expect the creation of new businesses and an increase in the number of inexpensive goods imported from abroad.

These are the reasons which have led me to examine the relation between the increase in the number of foreigners and the increase in the publication of children’s picture books which describe making enemies into friends.

In this slide, we see the correlation between the increasing number of foreigners and the number of picture books published which deal with diversity and tolerance.



Press Release Data on July 2001 and on July 2009, Immigration Bureau, Ministry of Justice.

Let's examine the "Neko-Zakana" Series:

N1. *Neko-Zakana: Cat-Fish* (1982)

Then, 19 years later:

N2. *Odoru Neko-Zakana: The Dancing Cat-Fish* (2001)

N3. *Neko-Zakana no Kurisumasu: The Cat-Fish's Christmas* (2003)

N4. *Nemuru Neko-Zakana: The Sleeping Cat-Fish* (2003)

N5. *Soratobu Neko-Zakana: The Flying Cat-Fish* (2004)

N6. *Dakko Dakko no Neko-Zakana: Hug hug, Cat-Fish* (2005)

N7. *Maigo no Neko-Zakana: The Stray Cat-Fish* (2006)

N8. *Neko-Zakana to Umi no Obake: The Cat-Fish and the Sea-Ghost* (2007)

N9. *Nigero! Neko-Zakana: Escape, Cat-Fish!* (2008)

N10. *Bangohan wa Neko-Zakana: Dinner is Cat-Fish* (2008)

N11. *Neko-Zakana no Tamago: Cat-Fish Eggs* (2010)

In Japan we have many children's picture books dealing with diversity and tolerance. The "Daruma-chan Series" (Kako, 1967) has been extremely popular, creative and educational, and even now the next generation continues to read this series with their children. According to the sales section at Fukuinkan, this series had published a total of 3,193,300 copies by April 2010 (Interview, 2010a).

The "Daruma-chan" Series



D1. *Daruma-chan to Tengu-chan: Little Dharma and Little Tengu, Supernatural Creatures* (1967)

D2. *Daruma-chan to Kaminari-chan: Little Dharma and Little God of Thunder* (1968)

D3. *Daruma-chan to Usagi-chan: Little Dharma and Little Rabbit* (1977)

D4. *Daruma-chan to Toranoko-chan: Little Dharma and Little Tiger* (1987)

D5. *Daruma-chan to Daikoku-chan: Little Dharma and Little God of Wealth* (2001)

D6. *Daruma-chan to Tenjin-chan: Little Dharma and Little Tenjin, Shinto Natural Spirit (god) of Scholarship* (2006)

At my university in a course entitled “Encounters with Different Cultures: the Acceptance of Different Cultures in Literature” we analyze popular children’s picture books in order to discover the characteristics of Japanese society from the viewpoint of creation with intercultural understanding. Almost all the students were once readers of this Daruma-chan series, and so they were very pleased and could easily remember their childhood when they saw this picture book again. The book describes how to make friends with someone from a different culture while at the same time satisfying one’s curiosity. The book challenges children to use their imaginations to invent new ways of playing as they benefit from the love their parents and grandparents provide them in a warm extended family setting.

The characters in this series live in Japan in their own territory, never invading the territory of others. This is what we call “sumi- wake” (coexistence) in Japanese: Kinji Imanishi, a Professor at Kyoto University found this peaceful coexistence in his research which showed unique results that go against Darwin’s theory of evolution. These picture books describe calm and peaceful relationships among different creatures. This series consequently presents a manner of coexistence between different cultures before the government passed the “Amendment to the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act” (1990). In such a situation, we are more easily able to accept different cultures without any worry about losing employment opportunities or about any increase in the number of crimes by certain foreign residents (Asaka, 1997).

Arashi no Yoruni: One Stormy Night (Kimura and Abe, 1994) is a very unique book because many readers have encouraged the writers to continue the series. In this



book there is a goat called Mei. In Japanese, the bleating of a goat is rendered by the sound “mei, mei”. There is also a wolf called Gabu (the word “gabu” in Japanese describes a biting sound). These two animal characters become friends one stormy night although they are natural enemies, since wolves eat goats. But they discover that they have certain traits of character in common: they both fear thunder and neither of them has a good appetite. When they first met, they could not see each other in the dark, and were so afraid of the thunder that they ended up helping each other.

The “Arashi no Yoru ni” Series

- A1. *Arashi no Yoru ni: One Stormy Night* (1994) led to the following six books:
- A2. *Aru Hareta Hi ni: One Sunny Day* (1996)
- A3. *Kumo no Kirema ni: A Rift in the Clouds* (1997)
- A4. *Kiri no Nakade: In the Fog* (1999)
- A5. *Doshaburi no Hi ni: One Day in the Driving Rain* (2000)
- A6. *Hubuki no Ashita: Tomorrow in a Snowstorm* (2002)
- A7. *Mangetsu no Yoru ni: The Night of the Full Moon* (2005)

This series even includes a movie entitled *Arashi no Yoru ni: One Stormy Night* (2005). According to the sales section at the Kodansha Publishing Company, two million copies were published before the movie came out, but after the movie, an additional one million were printed (Interview, 2010b). A Nintendo game also makes use of the contents of this book. Why has this series not only been accepted by Japanese readers, but become so popular? Is there any relation between this theme and the increase in the number of foreigners in Japan?

We can find an interesting coincidence between the dates of publication and the increase in the number of foreigners. In 2005 when the movie came out, university students were also interested in the final outcome of this story, because in their childhood they had read this series, and had identified themselves with Mei and Gabu. Also 2005 was an epoch-making year in Japan. This is the year the decrease in the population began, and the number of foreign residents from 180 countries had reached over two million. In this sense, we Japanese share the common concern of how to overcome the problems arising from this multiracial and multicultural situation in our increasingly globalized society.

Even if they are natural enemies, like Mei and Gabu, they should try to become



good friends by overcoming the many difficulties arising from the fact that they are natural enemies. Whenever they see each other, they have to think about their situation and their relationship with each other in the light of their past history of conflict. They should make a sustained effort to develop a profound friendship until they think they can devote their lives to each other as true friends. This story consequently encourages us to create a new paradigm for multicultural and multiracial coexistence.

Making friends with one's enemies is not a new idea in Japanese children's picture books. We already have other titles with such themes: *Neko-Zakana: Cat-Fish* (Watanabe, 1982) is a unique example. According to the publisher Froebel-kan, 19 years later, therefore from the year 2001, ten new titles have been published totaling 217,000 copies (Interview, 2010c). The cat and the fish like each other and travel together in the sea while the cat is inside of the fish.

Kitsune no Okyakusama: Guests of a Fox (Aman and Futamata, 1984) has been published with a total of 49,000 copies and was also included in some school text books (Interview, 2010d). In this story, a fox wanted to eat a chick, a duck and a rabbit which were visiting him. But they believed what the fox told them so much that he changed his mind and began to love them. And finally, this fox died while fighting against a wolf which had attacked them.

These two books are very impressive and unique ones. But I think that in a certain sense they were published slightly too early considering the Japanese context. The two authors have a common experience: they were both born in multiracial and multicultural Manchuria. They tried to resolve this conflict in their writing by having their characters accept each other with tolerance in their full diversity. Fortunately, from the year 2001, the *Neko-Zakana* books began to be published as a new series.

In conclusion, we can analyze this story-book series by comparing the increasing number of foreign residents in Japan with the reaction to this phenomenon by the Japanese. We are able to clarify the characteristics and importance of these picture books in the context of present-day multiracial and multicultural Japanese society. Through reading these books as youngsters and as adults, we can have the same experiences as the characters who are enemies but become friends. These experiences will help us become accustomed to diversity and tolerance in the future. With such a paradigm of coexistence and mutual prosperity, we have to develop multicultural



policies aimed at attaining “win-win” situations on the level of nation-states, as well as “win-win” relationships on the level of individual citizens.

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