

TOWARDS A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL MODEL FOR THE STUDY OF  
READER RESPONSE TO MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE

DISSERTATION

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By

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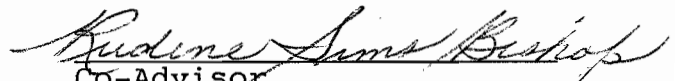
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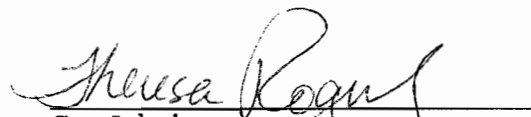
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To my wife, Jianrong Zhang and my son, Shuofeng Cai

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	ii
VITA.....	iii
List OF TABLES.....	vi
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii
CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Multicultural Education and Literature.....	1
Clarifying the Concept of Multicultural Literature.....	3
Cross-Cultural Perspective on the Comprehension of Texts.....	4
Reader Response Theories.....	5
Developing a Multi-Dimensional Model.....	6
Empirical Studies.....	7
II. CLARIFYING THE CONCEPT OF MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE....	9
The Pedagogical Definition.....	10
The Literary Definition.....	15
Cross-Cultural Literature.....	17
Three Categories of Multicultural Literature.....	21
III. BEYOND SCHEMA THEORY.....	28
Schema Theory.....	29
Cultural Schemata and Reader Response.....	31
Broadening the Field of Research.....	38
IV. READER RESPONSE THEORY AND THE POLITICS OF MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE.....	42
Uniaction, Interaction and Transaction.....	43
The Real Author and the Implied Author.....	50



V. THE MULTI-DIMENSIONAL MODEL FOR THE STUDY OF READER RESPONSE TO MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE.....	57
The Eclectic Nature of the Model.....	57
The Multiple Dimensions of the Model.....	58
Cognitive-Developmental.....	59
Affective-Attitudinal.....	62
Social-Political.....	65
Conclusion.....	70
VI. THREE EMPIRICAL STUDIES.....	72
Empirical Study I.....	73
Method.....	74
Subjects.....	74
Materials.....	74
Procedure.....	78
Results and Discussion.....	79
Response to Thematic Meaning.....	79
Response to Style.....	83
Response to Characterization.....	86
Empirical Study II.....	90
Method.....	90
Subjects.....	90
Materials.....	91
Procedure.....	92
Results.....	94
Performance on Free Response.....	94
Performance on Recall Task.....	98
Performance on Probe Task.....	99
Discussion of the Results.....	100
Empirical Study III.....	103
Method.....	103
Subjects.....	103
Materials.....	104
Procedure.....	105
Results.....	106
Affective Response.....	106
Sensitivity to Bias.....	107
Performance on Probe Task.....	110
Discussion of the Results.....	111
Implications and Limitations.....	114
Theoretical Implications.....	115
Instructional Implications.....	121
Limitations.....	123
VII. CONCLUSION.....	125
The Dialectics of Multicultural Literature.....	125
The Difficulty of Studying Variation in Commonality.....	127

Responding to the Challenge of Reality.....	130
APPENDICES	
A. Quesionnaire for Response to Thematic Meaning.....	132
B. Qestionnaire for Response to Characterizatin.....	134
C. Questionnaire for Response to Style.....	136
D. Probe Statements for Empirical Study II.....	138
E. Probe Statements for Empirical Study III.....	141
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	143

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
1. Summary of "Natural Father".....	75
2. Summary of "The Shrewd Daughter-In-Law".....	76
3. Mean Scores on Response to Probe Statments Concerning Relationships between Opposite Sexes.....	80
4. Frequency of Response to the Relationship Between the Main Characters.....	81
5. Frequency of Response to Questions on Style.....	84
6. Frequency and Percentage of Response to Characterization of the Shrewd Daughter-In-Law.....	86
7. Summary of Text Used in Study II.....	92
8. Categories and Examples of Reading Strategies.....	94
9. Percentage of Response Units in Each Strategy by Person.....	97
10. Means and Percentage of Culture-Oriented and Non-Culture-Oriented Response Units by Person.....	97
11. Total and Means of Culturally Different Idea Units Recalled in Each Group.....	99
12. Mean Scores on Probe Task.....	99
13. Summary of Text used in Study III.....	106
14. Mean Scores Assigned to Affective Response Statements.....	107
15. Percentage of Ratings for Response T-Units.....	109
16. Proportion of Each Category Within the Total Idea Units.....	110
17. Total Scores on Probe Task.....	111

## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	PAGE
1. The Multi-Dimensional Model.....	70

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This study presents an attempt to develop a multi-dimensional model for the study of reader responses to multicultural literature. It will try to provide both a theoretical basis and empirical support for the establishment of the model. The theoretical explication will deal with all the dimensions of the model, while the experimental investigation will explore three aspects of it. To investigate all the aspects in depth would take a series of lengthy studies; therefore the overall orientation, of this study is intended to be more theoretical than experimental. The experiments serve, in a sense, as pilot studies for further inquiries.

#### **Multicultural Education and Literature**

In the United States, as the ratio of ethnic groups increases relative to the population of the whole country, multicultural education has an increasingly important part to play in preparing the younger generation for a culturally diverse society. More and more people in schools and in

society at large are aware of its importance and concerned with how the education system reflects cultural diversity in its curriculum planning and materials of instruction. As William Hunter (cited in Austin and Jenkins, 1983) stresses in Multicultural Education:

It is therefore apparent, if education in the United States is to meet the needs of its people, that it must have a life blood of multicultural content in order to be sociologically relevant, philosophically germane, psychologically material, and pedagogically apropos.  
(p.1)

Literature from any culture is usually a comprehensive reflection of that culture's customs, beliefs, attitudes, values, traditions and other aspects. David Dorsey notes in "Minority Literature in the Service of Cultural Pluralism" (1977), "contrastive literature offers the best if not the only material for addressing" the problem of intercultural communication, "because literature expresses the most cogent propositions by implication," that lead students to "examine their own values and perceptions" and learn to "comprehend and respect alternatives" (p.26).

Through studying multicultural literature, children of ethnic groups can develop a sense of their cultural identity and heritage, whereas children of the dominant group can learn to embrace other cultures. For this reason, literature is often used as a vehicle to foster understanding, acceptance, and constructive relations among people of different cultures,

and therefore constitutes an indispensable component of the multicultural education curriculum and teaching materials of literature.

### **Clarifying the Concept of Multicultural Literature**

Although multicultural literature occupies a unique place in a culturally pluralistic curriculum, there is no consensus on its definition. The lack of a unified definition reflects conceptual confusion in this field. The past decade has seen a new flood of books bearing the fashionable label of multicultural literature. These books range from translations from other countries to literature about different ethnic groups in the United States. As it is currently used by researchers and educators, "multicultural literature" is a pedagogical term rather than a literary term that designates a genre. To sort out the bulky mass of multicultural literature, a new taxonomy is needed. Three categories of literary works are classified under the rubric of multicultural literature: world literature, minority literature, and cross-cultural literature. The characteristics and values of multicultural literary works in these categories are different from each other. For the purpose of multicultural education, minority literature should be drawn upon as the primary source of reading material.

### **Cross-Cultural Perspective on the Comprehension of Texts**

Literary texts are complex and ill-structured by nature (Spiro, Vispoel, Schmitz, Samarapunguan & Boerger, 1987). The text of a literary work from another culture is even more complicated for the reader. How does the reader respond to such a text? This is a key question with great implications for the instruction of multicultural literature. Yet, we know very little about the process of literary interpretation (Rogers, 1991), and even less about the process of interpreting multicultural literature.

In the recent past some research has been undertaken to investigate the comprehension of texts from a cross-cultural perspective. The findings of this research indicate that a reader's cultural background affects comprehension and interpretation of written texts (Spiro, 1980; Anderson, Reynolds, Shallert and Goetz, 1977). Most studies, however, did not use literary texts as experimental reading material and were restricted to the cognitive aspects of reading, neglecting its affective, social, and literary aspects, which are so important to response to literature.

To handle more comprehensively the theoretical and pedagogical problems in the study of reader response to multicultural literature, a model is needed that goes beyond schema theory to incorporate other current reader response theories.



### Reader Response Theories

Reader response theorists approach the subject of literary interpretation from various perspectives: cognitive-psychological, phenomenological, sociological, semiotic, transactional, pragmatic, structuralist, subjectivist, and feminist. Diverse as their perspectives are, their theoretical trajectories intercept at one point: all acknowledge the reader's role in the process of reading. One controversy centers around the extent the text, and by extension, the author, influences the reader's interpretation and appreciation of a literary text.

The interaction or transaction between the reader and text (author) has been a major concern of studies of multicultural literature. The perspective of the author as embodied or implied in the text is a factor that affects the reading as much as the reader's cultural background. The concord or discord between the author's and the reader's point of view often figures prominently in the reader's response to multicultural literature and generates a great deal of discussion about cultural authenticity and distortion, truthful portrayal and stereotyping, sympathy and prejudice in critical studies of multicultural literature and in reviews of multicultural books for pedagogical purposes.

The survey of reader-response theory will focus on positions of different theories regarding this central problem

pertaining to the study of reader response to multicultural literature.

### **Developing a Multi-Dimensional Model**

In an effort to formulate some guiding principles for studying reader response to multicultural literature, perspectives taken from various theories will be stranded together to develop a multi-dimensional model. As Purves (1985, cited in Rogers 1991) argues, a comprehensive model is needed to reconcile conflicting theories of interpretation and to conduct meaningful research in response to literature. Since it does not adhere to a single theory, the model is eclectic and pragmatic by nature, developed with a view to opening up new avenues in the investigation of reader response to multicultural literature and to providing guidance to the instruction of this kind of literature in school settings.

This model conceptualizes the act of reading as both a cognitive and social process. Besides cultural background knowledge, it takes into consideration the reader's affect, stance, and beliefs that influence his/her transaction with the text. It explores the collective inquiry of the multicultural interpretive community as "a thought collective" (Bleich, 1986), conventions for reading multicultural literature, and the development of the reader's "literary competence" (Culler, 1975) to deal with cross-cultural gaps in multicultural literature. In sum, this model regards the

reading of multicultural literature as a complicated event that involves many factors. These factors are also present in the reading of literature in general, but they stand out more prominently in the reading of multicultural literature.

### **Empirical Studies**

The validity and feasibility of this multi-dimensional model needs to be tested in empirical studies. Limited by time and resources, the empirical section of this study explores only three aspects of the multi-dimensional model for response to multicultural literature: 1) the reader's responses to literary features; 2) the reader's stances toward the text; 3) the reader's affective response to the text.

Three experiments were conducted to test the following hypotheses: 1) readers of different cultural backgrounds respond to features of a literary work differently; 2) different stances readers adopt toward the text will affect their focus of attention and use of reading strategies to deal with cultural gaps; 3) readers will affectively interact with the implied author in ways consistent with their cultural backgrounds.

These experiments have yielded some positive results that provide empirical support for the model. However, they have a number of limitations. More extensive and in-depth research is needed to further develop the model.

Chapter II attempts to clarify the concept of multicultural literature. In Chapter III, a review of literature assesses the achievements and limitations of previous studies based on schemata theory. Chapter IV presents a survey of various schools of reader response theory regarding the issues in multicultural literature. Chapter V discuss the proposed multi-dimensional model. Chapter VI presents the three experiments respectively. In the final chapter (VII), theoretical conclusions are drawn, and implications for future research and for instruction are suggested.

## CHAPTER II

### CLARIFYING THE CONCEPT OF MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE

Multicultural literature has been proposed and taught as a component part of multicultural education. The term seems to be also derived from the concept of multicultural education. It would be difficult to pinpoint the origin of the term, but it may be safe to assume that the term multicultural literature came after the advent of multicultural education movement in the 1960's (Banks, 1979). It is interesting to note that, among the many components of multicultural education, only literature has the epithet "multicultural" attached to it. Such subjects as social studies and history do not have the privilege. There are, at least presently, no "multicultural social studies" or "multicultural history" labels in the curriculum.

With the advance of multiculturalism in the past decade, multicultural literature has flourished. There has been a flood of multicultural books published. On the publishers' lists of "multicultural" books, the category ranges from translations from other countries to books about ethnic groups in the United States. They are so varied that one wonders what their commonalities are. What is multicultural literature

after all? In some studies, the term is used as an interchangeable equivalent of "multiethnic literature" (Austin & Jenkins, 1983). But what is multiethnic literature? Is it a genre? What are its defining characteristics as compared with other categories or genres of literature?

### **The Pedagogical Definition**

Since multicultural literature occupies a unique place in multicultural education, it is vital to clarify its concept and define its nature. Some researchers express concern with the conceptual confusion within the multicultural education movement. Banks (1979) points out that "If the multicultural movement is to spearhead effective educational change, concepts such as racism, sexism, culture, ethnicity must be delineated and educational reforms must be precisely targeted." In Banks' statement, the emphasis on the linkage between conceptual issues and practical issues makes it clear that to clarify the concepts is not a luxurious intellectual game with terms; it is to serve the cause of educational reforms.

In fact, the concept of "multicultural literature" as it is usually conceived is contingent on the purpose it is supposed to serve. Literature has the privileged epithet "multicultural" attached to it because it has a unique role to play in a curriculum that seeks to foster acceptance and

understanding of cultural diversity. In a school setting, the most effective way to cultivate an understanding of a culture may be to read literature of that culture and about that culture (More will be said about this distinction). Children have easier access to books than to other means of reaching another culture. And literature has long been believed to have function to delight and instruct. This is especially true of its role in multicultural education. David Dorsey (1977) has made some insightful comments on the function of literature, as compared to sociology and anthropology, in overcoming barriers between cultures: "Sociology and anthropology never seek this end [of transcending a particular culture's limitations]. Their function is to rationalize alien social structures without disturbing the student's commitment to his own. Literature seeks and attains a deeper empathy with the alien, an empathy which challenges one's own most basic presuppositions." Perhaps this is why literature is given the special epithet "multicultural."

Many (e.g. Norton, 1983; Austin and Jenkins, 1983) who are committed to using literature as a means of furthering the cause of multicultural education share Dorsey's views. They give long lists of the values of "multicultural literature." There seems to be no controversy over the important function of literature in multicultural education. What is more complicated is the problem of definition. This also has to do with the purpose of countering hegemony of the dominant ✂

culture in education. When we conceive the concept of multicultural literature in terms of the purpose it might serve in an educational program, we are approaching the theoretical problem from an educator's perspective. We are concerned more with the function than with the nature of literature. In this sense "multicultural literature" is a pedagogical classification, not a classification for literary criticism. It is like the term "world literature" in the English Department, in that it designates a course or an area of study.

In one study, "multicultural literature" is used to refer to "books other than those of the dominant culture" (Jenkins, 1973). In another, the term denotes literature centering on "people of color" (Krause and Horning, 1990). Definitions of this kind imply that these books may serve the purpose of breaking down the hegemony of the mainstream culture. The body of books outside of the dominant culture are huge in number and various in nature. They may be from other countries with different cultures or from other ethnic cultures within the United States. It is impossible to define the nature of these books in terms of literary features, such as theme, structure, language, style. Unlike minority literature or feminist literature, multicultural literature as defined by Jenkins does not have defining features within itself. The similarities in the books lie only in their difference from the dominant literature. So when referring to "books other



than those of the dominant culture, the term "multicultural literature" does not designate a unifying literary nature (multiplicity is the only nature) of those literatures lumped together under the rubric, but suggests a goal of expanding the curriculum to include literature from other cultures. It sounds like a slogan to challenge the domination of WASP literature.

This recalls the controversy over the classic canon in the academic literary community. Viewed in the global context, the controversy is between countries over what constitutes the world canon of classics. Within the United States or other English-speaking countries, the controversy is between the dominant culture and ethnic cultures. The question raised is: should the literary works of the best minority writers also be included in the canon of American literature and taught in the English departments? Multicultural literature programs can be seen as a continuation or duplication in schools of the efforts to include ethnic literatures into the curriculum in colleges. The difference is that in the English department there are no multicultural or multiethnic courses. There are world literature or minority literature courses.

In the strictly literal sense of the term, multicultural literature should include WASP literature, just as world literature should include American literature. Taken in its literal sense, both multicultural literature and world literature are identical with literature per se--the literary

creation of humanity. The significance of the two denominations lies in their indication of the multiplicity of the cultural components of literature and thus of the rationale for including literatures from other countries or ethnic groups in the curriculum.

That this is so can be seen in a definition of multiethnic literature by Carlson (1972) and accepted by Norton (1987): "Multiethnic literature is the literature about a minority ethnic group with values and characteristics different from the typical white Anglo-Saxon middle-class values and characteristics of persons living in the United States." This definition sounds self-contradictory. If multicultural literature is the literature about a minority ethnic group, why is it called "multicultural"? How is it different from minority literature? Obviously, "multicultural" does not designate the nature of a literary work, but that of a category of literature which contains literature about various minority ethnic groups. In the third edition of Through the Eyes of a Child, Norton (1991) changes Carson's definition to: Multicultural literature is literature about racial or ethnic minority groups that are culturally and socially different from white Anglo-Saxon majority in the U.S. . . . Since a so-called multicultural literary work usually focuses on the experience of one ethnic minority group, multicultural literature therefore refers to a category of literary works.

As we have noted, multicultural literature as it is usually used in educational studies is an educator's term defined in the sense of its pedagogical function. The term does not indicate the multicultural nature of a work but of a group of works. It subsumes all minority literatures under the same name. We may want to ask: Why do we bother to invent a new term instead of continuing to use the more familiar term "minority literature"? Perhaps because 1) the epithet "minority" has a connotation of inferiority and does not imply a challenge to the dominant culture and 2) the term does not encompass literature from other countries.

### **The Literary Definition**

Besides its extrinsic functional definition, multicultural literature can also be defined in terms of its intrinsic nature. Dasenbrock (1987) offers a definition of this kind: multicultural literature is literature that is "explicitly about multicultural societies" or literature that is "implicitly multicultural in the sense of inscribing readers from other cultures inside their own textual dynamics" (p.10). The word "societies" in the first kind of multicultural literature refers to societies in the English-speaking world, which use the same language but have diverse cultural heritages. But what is a "multicultural society?" Does it refer to the whole country with multicultural cultures

or an ethnic group caught between bi- or multi-cultures? Dasenbrock does not define it. By the second definition, multicultural literature would include almost all literature that is written in English. The first type is subsumed with the second: "the explicitly multicultural is also implicitly multicultural." The linguistic medium is the defining element. Dasenbrock states that "literature in English has become increasingly cross- or multicultural, as writing about a given culture--because of its language, English, and its place of publication, usually London or New York--to have readers of many cultures" (p.10). The four books he analyzes as typical examples are by writers from divergent cultures and areas: R. K. Narayan (Neginian), Maxine Hong Kingston (Chinese American), Rudolfo Anaya (Mexican American), and Witi Ihimaera (Maori). Although these are minority or third world writers, multicultural literature, by Desenbrock's definition, may include texts about the majority culture with reference to minority or with minority readers as its intended audience. From the educator's perspective, this kind of multicultural literature may not be in tune with multicultural education, for some literary works by writers of the mainstream culture either in the English-speaking world in general or in the United States in particular may "inscribe" minority readers "inside their own textual dynamics" for the purpose of indoctrinating them with mainstream cultural values. In fact, many literary works, including such classics as Shakespeare's

Merchant of Venice or Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn, may fit Desenbrock's definition but exhibit racial prejudices.

### Cross-Cultural Literature

Advocates of multicultural education are well aware of the fact that some multicultural literature may be tainted by racial prejudice, as most obviously shown in stereotyping minorities and presenting ethnocentric perspectives. The criteria they set up for selecting multicultural literature invariably include "avoiding stereotypes" and "presenting minority perspectives" (e.g. Huck, 1987; Austin & Jenkins; Norton 1987). Here we see the conflict between the pedagogical and literary definitions of multicultural literature. However, since the pedagogical definition is already widely circulated in educational institutions and serves as a banner of multicultural education, many may want to hold on to it. One way to circumscribe the conflict is to narrow the conceptual boundary of Desenbrock's definition to include only literary works explicitly about interrelations between cultures without apparent focus on the unique experience of any one of them and those about a given culture by a writer from another culture. We may term these kinds of literary works as "cross-cultural literature." This label suggests that there exist cultural gaps in the world which need to be crossed and, more importantly, that there may be gaps between the author's

cultural perspective embodied in the literary work and the cultural perspective of the people his/her work portrays.

In children's literature, we have a large number of books which fall into the first category of cross-cultural literature. They vary in depth and scope in dealing with issues of cross-cultural interrelation. Their intention seems to be to inculcate acceptance of cultural diversity or to build constructive intercultural (or interracial) relationships. Yet, whether they have produced the intended effects of intercultural harmony or whether they are counterproductive is up to the reader or critic to decide. An example of the most superficial is a picture book entitled This is the Way We Go to School: A Book About Children Around the World by Baer (1990). It compares the different ways of children going to school in 22 countries. The subject is interesting and the illustrations appealing to young children. This book is informative about cultural differences but does not touch the heart. A more touching book of this category is How My Parents Learned to Eat by Friedman (1984). It tells how a child's American father, a sailor, met her Japanese mother, a schoolgirl, in Japan and overcame the barrier of cultural difference to get married. But the difference, the center of the plot conflict, is only reflected in the ways of eating--with chopsticks or with a knife and fork. Unlike the above-mentioned two books, some other books deal with cross-cultural issues in the United States, such as the difficulties

a minority child encounter in adjusting to a new cultural environment, or serious interracial tension, such as racial discrimination in communities or schools. An example of the former is Michele Surat's Angel Child, Dragon Child, which is about a Vietnamese girl's difficulties associating with her classmates after her family moved to the United States. Typical of the latter is The Empty Schoolhouse (Carlson, 1965), a story about desegregation.

The second category of cross-cultural Children's literature, for the most part, contains works by white writers about the experience of minorities. They do not simply center around interrelation between cultures. They attempt to depict the unique experience of a minority by getting inside the consciousness and sensibility of the minorities. For example, How Many Miles to Babylon (Fox, 1967) depicts a Black boy's adventurous experience in the crime-ridden streets of Brooklyn and his longing for his "real country" across the Pacific. Another example is the picture book, I Hate English (Levine, 1989), which portrays a Chinese girl's attitude towards the English language when she moved to the United States from Hong Kong with her family. Both stories are told from the minority characters' perspective and try to delineate their thoughts and feelings as well as their experiences. The defining feature of this category is the author's attempt to look at the minority's experience from their own perspective. How far they have succeeded is another question. In I Hate English, we

seem to hear a false note of oversimplifying the theme of identity. In the British colony, English is the instructional language in most schools. The girl seems to have learned the language quite well. In How Many Miles to Babylon, the boy's dream about the land of his ancestors seems to be only a cultural tag tied to an adventure that could happen to any children from any other ethnic background.

In her landmark study of Afro-American experience in Children's books, Shadow and Substance, Rudine Sims Bishop (Sims, 1982) classifies the surveyed books into three categories: social conscience books, melting pot books, and culturally conscious books. Her classification is based on three factors: intended audience, concept of Afro-American experience, and social-cultural perspective, which define a hierarchy of values. If we look at the three categories in terms of their focus alone, the social conscience books (which mainly deal with Black-White conflicts) and melting pot books (which present the characters as culturally homogeneous) would fall into the first category of cross-cultural literature, and the culturally conscious books (which try to capture Afro-Americans' unique experience) by white writers would belong to the second category. In Sims' survey, the social conscience books and melting pot books are all marred by ignorance or prejudice. The cultural conscious books by white writers, especially the longer ones, betray some gap between the author's perspective and the Afro-American perspective. Sims'



clear-cut classification and incisive analysis provide a guide for investigating not just books of Children's books about Afro-American experience but also books about other minorities. Her study reveals that many works of cross-cultural literature may not serve the purpose of multicultural education, for instead of dispelling, as they claim, they may reinforce racial ignorance and prejudice.

### **Three Categories of Multicultural Literature**

Now we have three categories of literature for multicultural literature programs: world literature (e.g. folktale, fictions, etc. from other cultures outside of the United States, including adaptations by American writers), minority literature, and cross-cultural literature. By Carson's or Norton's definition, multicultural literature does not include literature from other countries, which, by Jenkin's or Kruse and Horning's definition, is included in the category. As far as ethnic groups are concerned, however, Kruse and Horning's definition narrows down the category to literature about "people of color" and thus excludes literature about such ethnic groups as Jewish and Appalachian people. Only Jenkin's definition covers all the three categories of multicultural literature listed here.

The values of each category in multicultural education may vary, depending on how educators perceive the focus and

objective of multicultural education. The classification of three categories, by setting minority literature apart, recognizes its values and unique place in the multicultural literature program. Minority literature is written by minority writers to represent minority experience, consciousness, and self-image. Like language and art, literature is an essential part of a minority's cultural heritage. In this sense, minority literature is the literature of a minority. "Outsiders" may write about a minority, but their works do not belong to the minority literature unless they have been accepted into the minority culture as members of that ethnic group. A history of a minority literature will not include those works by "outsiders." We distinguish national literatures in a similar way. Can a successful book about American culture by a Australian writer be considered American Literature? Of course not. The controversy around insider/outsider difference that haunts children's literature is not so prominent in adult literature. How many white writers have ever entered the annals of an American minority literature?

The second category of cross-cultural literature is distinguished from the literature of a culture or a minority by the author's alien ethnic identity and often also by varying degrees of the author's alienation from the perspective of the native culture he/she writes about. A culture's perspective is its world outlook, shaped by the

culture's shared experience, "collective memories and frame of reference" (Blauner, cited in Sims, 1982). A literary work is inevitably informed and infused with the author's perspective, reflected in "the choice of detail to include, the descriptions of things and people, the things that are emphasized or de-emphasized" (Sims, 1984). This perspective is not easy to define in abstract terms, because it is not only registered in apparent values, beliefs, and attitudes, but also embodied in subtle perceptions, feelings, emotions, gestures, and behaviors. A perspective in this sense can not be learned only from books about that culture; it can be acquired only from experience, from immersion in that culture.

Banks (1979) proposed a hierarchical typology of cross-cultural competency, i.e. "skills and understandings necessary to function cross-culturally." We may use this typology to evaluate a writer's cross-cultural competence and see if he/she is able to represent a culture from its unique perspective. There are four levels of competence: 1) "The individual experiences superficial and brief cross-cultural interaction"; 2) "the individual begins to assimilate some of the symbols and characteristics of the 'outside' ethnic group; 3) "the individual is thoroughly bicultural; 4) "the individual is completely assimilated into the new ethnic culture." The fourth level represents the ultimate cross-cultural competence. It occurs only "when the primordial individual has been almost completely resocialized " and

becomes one with the "host culture in terms of behavior, attitude, and perceptions." The acquisition of the cultural perspective, as we understand it, marks the attainment of this level. Banks' typology was designed to set up goals of cross-cultural competence for students, yet we may wonder who among the white writers writing about minority experience can claim he/she has attained that level?

The author's level of cross-cultural competency usually is not clearly shown in picture books or shorter books. The test lies in the longer books, which cover a wider range of experiences. The author often betrays his/her alien perspective in small details, the representation of which requires a native's (often unconscious) sensibility more than acquired knowledge. It is also on these subtle details a white author's ethnocentric attitude reveals itself, in spite of his/her good intentions. For example, as Thompson and Woodard (1985) point out, in The Empty Schoolhouse, there are some remarks by the narrator about skin and hair that betray, "the subtle and probably unconscious perspective which presents a young black girl in terms of self-hatred and a feeling that white is preferable to dark." Emma Royall says: "Her [Lullah's] skin is like coffee and cream mixed together and she has wavy hair to her shoulders. Me, I'm dark as Daddy Jobe and my hair never grew out much longer than he wears his." That this comparison implies appraisal is footnoted by her comment on her brother: "Little Jobe looks like me and Daddy

Jobe, but he's a handsome little boy all the same." What sounds like appreciation of her little brother's features is in fact racial self-deprecation.

To stress the difficulty in acquiring a culture's perspective does not mean to deny an outsider his/her right to portray that culture. It is meant to emphasize the need for an outsider to fill in the cultural gap him/herself before he can close it for others, and also to point to the fact that minority literature has a unique role to play in multicultural literature programs, because minority writers best represent their own culture. To promote understanding of ethnic cultures and to help minority students develop a sense of cultural identity and value their cultural heritage, we should first choose works from minority literature. Well-intended and well-written cross-culture books will also help, but they must be chosen with caution. The value of minority literature should be appreciated in the social context of the United States. Multicultural education was introduced as an answer to the challenges of a culturally diverse society. According to Banks (1979), the movement "emerged in response to the ethnic revitalization of the 1960's and 1970's. From a global perspective, multicultural education may promote cultural awareness and appreciation among young people of the world, including the United States. But the more immediate concern for this country is interracial relationships. Multiethnic education, which is an essential part, if not the total global

concept of multicultural education (Banks, 1979), should be given the top priority. The focus of the program should be kept on these objectives: 1) "to eliminate ethnic illiteracy;" 2) "to increase communication between various ethnic groups"; 3) "to understand the life-styles, values, and customs of a variety of ethnic groups" (Austins & Jenkins, 1983). With its truthful reflection of reality and its immediate relevance to the social issues, minority literature would contribute greatly to the realization of its objectives. If "literature is the language of the heart (Dorsey, 1977), minority literature opens an ethnic group's heart to the reading public, showing their joy and grief, love and hatred, hope and despair, expectations and frustration, and mostly importantly, the trauma of racial discrimination. The voice coming from the heart, once heard, will change hearts. For the author's voice to be heard, the silent words on the pages need to be read and responded to by the reader. The ultimate test of multicultural literature lies in the reader's response. In all three categories, quality and value vary from work to work; there is a wide range of discrepancy from excellence to mediocrity. To select books for a multicultural literature program or to compile an anthology of multicultural literature, it is wise to test the works out in readers rather than merely relying on the comments of some reviewers or critics. When there is dispute over whether a book shows racial prejudice, we may call a truce to the verbal fight and listen to what the

readers have to say. A truly good book about a culture will be able to engage and generate strong response in readers of that cultural background. A mediocre or prejudiced cross-cultural book about the experience will be rejected by readers from that group.

The study of reader response to multicultural literature has great potentials in the evaluation and instruction of that literature. To explore and exploit those potentials, the study itself needs to be further developed by drawing upon more than one theory. The next chapter reviews previous research conducted from the perspective of schema theory.

### CHAPTER III

#### BEYOND SCHEMA THEORY

There have been a large number of research studies exploring the role of cultural schemata in reading comprehension (Anderson, Reynolds, Schallert, and Goetz, 1977; Johnson, 1981, 1982; Lipson, 1983; Reynolds, Taylor, Steffensen, Shirley & Anderson, 1982; Steffensen, Joag-Dev, & Anderson, 1979; Kintsch and Green, 1978; Malik 1990; Pritchard 1990). This kind of research may be seen as part of comparative reading research which approaches reading from a cross-cultural perspective "in order to achieve a better theoretical and practical understanding of the fundamental psychological processes of literacy behavior, both in their learning and in their developed function" (Downing, 1976, p.129). This tradition of research can be traced to Frederic Bartlett (1932), who studied educated English men's responses to a North American Indian folktale and concluded that a person reading a story from a foreign culture will comprehend it quite differently from a native reader. Actually, schema theory is in part derived from Bartlett's classic theory of remembering, which argues that people's prior knowledge and attitude affects their comprehension and recall of a complex



situation. It is Bartlett who invented the term "schemata." Before reviewing the literature of this research guided by schema theory, a brief look at the theory itself is in order.

### Schema Theory

Schemata is a theoretical construct of cognitive psychology. From the cognitive perspective, reading is a constructive process of making meaning from the written text (Adams & Collins, 1977; Rumelhart & Ortony, 1977; Anderson, Herbert, Scott, & wilkinson, 1984). The reader brings his/her prior knowledge to bear upon the print on the page, which serves as the blue print for the construction or reconstruction of meaning (Spiro, 1977). Comprehension is not determined by the text alone, but rather by an integration of the reader's prior knowledge and the information presented in the text.

The prior knowledge is stored in memory in schematic structures, or schemata. Like data structures in computer information processing, these schemata can be activated to aid in the processing of information from the text in the course of reading. Schemata are hierarchically organized for different generic concepts, such as situations, events, object, etc (Rumelhart, 1980). In literary interpretation, for example, we have story schema, which are internalized conventions of story structures.

According to some theorists of cognitive psychology, schemata are not rigid, prepackaged structures, but rather flexible structures" in which fragments of knowledge are moved about and assembled to fit the needs of a given context of application" (Spiro, Vispoel, Schmitz, Samarapungavan, & Boerger, 1987). This view suggests that in the process of reading, contextual stimuli may give rise to the reconfiguration of the reader's schemata for the purpose of making meaning. The open multi-level network of knowledge fragments can be mobilized and used "in different ways on different occasions for different purposes" (p.181.)

When we make inferences to interpret a text, we are activating and utilizing the schemata as an interpretive framework. Since the schematic structure is hierarchical, there can be various levels of inference. Adams and Collins (1977) posit four levels in cognitive processing of a text: word, syntactic, semantic, and interpretive. The interpretive level involves more complex inference and therefore is possibly higher. Purves (1977) distinguishes between first and higher orders of inference. He gives the description of a boy's physical characteristics as an example. A first-order inference could be that the boy is sick; by a higher-order inference, the sickness might be interpreted as symbolic of some other aspect of the boy. Others argue that the distinction between inference levels may not be as easy to make or important as some researchers think. "Instead,

inferences can be looked at in terms of the role they play in interpretive process" (Rogers, 1988, p.11).

Schemata vary from individual to individual. They are also culture specific, since one's background knowledge or experiences are influenced by the culture in which he/she lives. It would follow that a culturally familiar text will be easier to comprehend than an unfamiliar one. Cognitive psychologists and reader response researchers have been trying to explain the nature of such differences through the construct of schema theory. The following section will examine research studies that deal with the effects of cultural background or schemata on reading comprehension.

### **Cultural Schemata and Reader Response**

In his pioneering study, Bartlett had educated Englishmen read a North American Indian folk tale, The War of the Ghosts, and asked them to recall what they had read. The protocols produced by the Englishmen evidenced the impact of their cultural background on their comprehension: the folktale was modified or distorted in a manner consistent with the subjects' own culture. Bartlett explained that this "tendency to rationalize . . . gives to what is presented a setting and explanation" (1932, p.84).

Later researchers (e.g. Steffensen, Joag-Dev, Anderson, 1979; Anderson, 1983) followed this line of research,

investigating the extent to which a reader's cultural schemata influences his/her reading. The normal pattern in this type of research is to have the subjects read two passages reflecting different cultures, one with content familiar to the reader and one alien to him/her. This research is, in a sense, a replication of Bartlett's study, although the methodologies are more sophisticated. The findings similarly indicate that subjects usually comprehend the passage within a familiar cultural schemata better and recall more of the important propositions from it.

Kintsch and Greene (1978), for example, tried to prove that story schemata are culture specific with two experiments. In the first experiment, they had American college students read four stories from Boccaccio's Decameron and four stories from a collection of Alaskan Indian myths. The subjects wrote more informative summaries of Decameron stories, for which they had a familiar story schema. In Experiment II, a fairy tale from the Brothers Grimm and an Apache Indian tale were used as experimental materials. The subjects' recall of the former tale, which conforms to their story schema, contains more propositions than that of the latter, which deviates from their schema.

Steffensen et al. (1979) found Kintsch and Greene's study unsatisfactory, because their use of subjects from only one culture "can not rule out the possibility that the foreign material is inherently more difficult" (p.12). To make a

complete study, subjects from two cultures were used: Indians (natives of India) and Americans. Each group read two passages, one about a typical American wedding and one about a typical Indian wedding. Subjects read the culturally familiar passage more rapidly, recalled a larger amount of information from the passage, "produced more culturally appropriate elaborations of the native passage" and "more culturally based distortions of the foreign passage" (p.10). Again, these results show the pervasive influence of cultural background on comprehension and memory of texts.

Reynolds, Anderson, Steffensen, and Taylor (1982) narrowed down the scope of the cross-cultural study to subcultural groups in the United States. They attempted to determine whether, despite the large amount of cultural overlap, differences of sufficient magnitude exist among ethnic groups in the United States to have a significant influence on text interpretations. The subjects were randomly chosen black and white eighth-grade students. As in the study of Steffensen et al. (1979), they read a letter; but in this case, there was only one letter, that dealt with an instance of "sounding," a form of verbal ritual insult found predominantly in the black community. The results showed that black subjects tended to interpret the passage as being about verbal play, whereas white subjects tended to interpret it as about physical aggression. The authors of the study introduced two measures into their investigation: disambiguations and

intrusions. The former was defined as "a paraphrase of an idea that revealed the subject's underlying interpretation," and the latter referred to "a phrase or sentence included in the recall that was not directly related to any proposition in the passages."

Although the reading materials used in the above-mentioned studies were expanded to include stories, fairy tales, letters, etc., they did not include literary texts and did not look at reader response to literary features. Some researchers still use folktales for investigation as Bartlett did several decades ago. The reason for their choice of reading materials is obvious: folklore is usually culturally loaded.

Two recent cross-cultural studies of reading comprehension (Malik, 1990; Pritchard 1990) start to compare processing strategies for comprehension of culturally familiar and nonfamiliar texts. Malik's study investigated Iranian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) readers' comprehension of expository texts. His study includes three aspects of reading behavior: reading comprehension, comprehension process and strategies, and oral reading speed. The results of his study demonstrate that cultural schemata significantly affect the first two aspects.

Pritchard's study shifts completely from product-oriented comprehension to the processing strategies of comprehension. He developed a taxonomy of 22 processing strategies in five

categories and compared the use of the strategies by 30 11th graders from the United States and 30 11th graders from the Pacific island nation of Palau. The subjects were found to use some categories of strategies more often for the culturally familiar passages than for the nonfamiliar ones. His conclusion is that cultural schemata appear to influence readers' processing strategies.

Judging from the above review of the literature, the mainstream of cross-cultural studies of reading comprehension emanates from a schema-theoretic perspective. The focus of research is on the cognitive nature of reading comprehension. Comprehension is measured by success at the lower levels of inference and by reconstruction of the content. Some studies, however, do not follow this trodden route, although schema theory is still their theoretical signpost. Their major concern is literary interpretation and their approach is usually qualitative, investigating reader response through case study.

Bunbury and Tabbert (1989) collaborated in investigating Australian and German children's response to an Australian novel, Midnite, which presents an ironic portrayal of an Australian national hero. Drawing on Jauss's (1974) theory of identification of hero and audience, they found that children of both countries are capable of "ironic identification" as adults are, although to varying degrees. This accounts, in part, for the universal appeal of literature. The difference

between them is, the Australian children's response is culture specific, recognizing the hero as "a variation of the traditional image of the bushranger" (p.31), whereas German children's response is more general, identifying him as a variation from their notion of a hero or a robber.

Ho's (1990) study of Singaporean teenage readers' response to U.S. young adult fiction focuses on the conflict between the readers' values and the characters' values in the fiction. The discrepancy in cultural value affects the readers' preference and appreciation of the characters. The readers find the portrayal of some parent figures unreasonable, because by Singaporean standards they behaved cruelly to their children; they considered the unconforming behavior of some teenage characters irresponsible or inconsiderate; they admired some characters' defiance of parents because sometimes felt their parents imposed too many restrictions on them. "Their responses are unique," the author concludes, "because Singapore society and culture is unique" (p.257).

Both studies are by researchers outside of the United States. Perhaps there is some cultural difference between their approach and the prevalent approach in this country. By the academic standards here, their studies may be lacking in scientific rigor. Neither study discusses in detail its methodology or systematically analyzes the data. The researchers just quote the interviewees to support their own



analysis rather than draw conclusions from what the interviewees said. Ho's study in particular relies on many assumptions and predications about culture-specific responses Singapore readers may make.

An outstanding case study that was both broad in vision and rigorous in methodology was done by Sims in 1983. In the study she investigated a strong Black girl's preference to books. She concluded that the girl liked books that were related to her personal experiences and present characters with whom she could identify, characters who were strong, active, and clever like her. There were other elements that affected the girl's choice of books: plot, language, style, illustration, etc. For example, the girl unfavorably responded to books with predictable plot. The focus of the study is on the reader's affective response. The study does not limit its inquiry to response to the content of the books, but rather includes response to a variety of literary features. In addition to prior knowledge, the study looks into the reader's personal experiences and personality for factors that lead to her unique reaction and response. In short, it is a more comprehensive study that breaks away from the limited schema-theoretic approach.

### Broadening the field of Research

The research based on the assumptions of schema theory has so far demonstrated that readers' cultural backgrounds cause distinct differences in comprehension and interpretation of literary works. Eward Said (1983) defines culture as "all that which an individual possesses and which possesses an individual." He notes that "culture also designates a boundary by which the concept of what is extrinsic or intrinsic to that culture comes into forceful play" (pp.8-9). That cultural boundary has been drawn in the area of reader response to literary and nonliterary texts. No one can assert any more that a text means exactly the same thing to readers from all cultures or subcultures.

Yet, the dynamics of the cultural interaction are still to be fully displayed. Even within the framework of schema theory, many areas remain to be explored.

In order to expand the field of research, it is necessary to expand the concept of schemata. In the literature reviewed, the researchers used schemata to mean "prior knowledge." This is a limited notion of the concept. As Petrosky (1982) notes, "the term schemata is used by Bartlett to include both affective and cognitive frameworks, but it is often the case that people quoting him use it only to mean cognitive frameworks" (p.35).

Petrosky prefers a broader notion of what the reader brings to bear upon the text than the varied notion of what Bartlett meant by schemata. In lieu of "schemata," he used "models of reality" or "frames" (p.35), "which are mental configurations or maps built from prior knowledge, feelings, personality, and culture" (p.20). This broader notion better reflects the reality, especially in literary interpretation.

Rosenblatt (1985) also expresses reservations about the use of the term "prior knowledge" in the narrow sense. "In aesthetic reading," she says, "prior knowledge can not be limited simply to abstract information. 'Prior experience' is a better term." She stresses the "importance of the richness of the sensuous, personal and social experiences provided by the environment" in aesthetic reading as well as in early language development (pp. 42-43), for these experiences provide contexts for developing sensitivity to the nuances of literary writings.

In the case of response to multicultural literature, a broader concept of schemata is even more important. Affective frameworks have as great an impact on reader response as cognitive frameworks. Social experiences also condition or shape the reader's response to a large degree. Unfortunately, these factors have not been widely researched in the studies of reader response.

Understood in its narrow sense of prior knowledge, schemata should include knowledge of literary conventions.

Different cultures have different conventions or-- in the terminology of cognitive psychology--schemata, for example, the story schemata. How these conventions are applied and developed in the process of aesthetic reading is a major theoretical and pedagogical issue.

Here we have arrived at the boundary of cognitive psychology and literary theory in the study of reader response. From the perspective of cognitive psychology, researchers tend to use cultural schemata to account for the difference in validity of comprehension (usually measured by reconstruction or recall of the content of the text). In Kintch and Greene's study (1978), for instance, American readers' story schema are given as the key factor that affects their validity of comprehension in reading Decameron stories and Indian folktales. This kind of validity, however, is not the central concern of literary theorists. Rogers (1988) points out:

"Literary theorists are only peripherally concerned with reasoning operations involved in reading and hermeneutic issues of validity in interpretation. Literary theory is largely concerned with how interpretations were woven out of the fabric of information constructed during the transaction of reader and text. Issues of validity are seen less in terms of arriving at their right meaning and more in terms of what kinds of information are brought to bear . . . ." (p.11).

From this point of view, many of the cross-cultural studies reviewed in this chapter are essentially studies of reading comprehension rather than of literary interpretation. This is not to suggest that schema theory is less important than literary theory. On the contrary, they are equally important in the study of reader response to multicultural literature. We will return to this point in Chapter V.

In summary, the traditional schema-theoretic approach is inadequate to deal with the complex phenomenon of reader response to multicultural literature. Not only should the approach be broadened, but it is also imperative that other theories be incorporated into the research in this field. The next chapter discusses the current major reader response theories with regard to issues and controversies around multicultural literature.

CHAPTER IV  
READER RESPONSE THEORY AND  
THE POLITICS OF MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE

Reader response criticism "is not a conceptually unified critical position, but a term that has come to be associated with the work of critics who use the words 'reader,' 'reading process,' and 'response' to mark out an area for investigation" (Tompkins, 1980, ix). Most brands of reader response theory, however, do share a basic assumption, namely, that reading is an action, an event or an experience. The text is not a physical object, a container of message to be extracted like a nut with a core. Rather, it is an occasion for action on the part of the reader. On this point, reader response theories are in keeping with schema theory in that they all recognize the reader's contribution to the making of meaning.

Since different reader response theorists approach the phenomenon of literary study with different epistemological assumptions, there are bound to be controversies emanating from diverse philosophical orientations. The controversies center around the status of text in the process of making meaning. This issue is of special consequence for the study of

reader response to multicultural literature. In the discussion of multicultural literature, critics and educators often debate whether a work is an authentic reflection or distortion of ethnic experience; whether it presents truthful portraits or stereotypes of an ethnic group; whether it presents racist prejudices.

A closely related question is the role of the author. Contrary to the New Critical belief in the "death of the author," or the "banishment of the author" from interpretation, many hold that the author's perspective has tremendous impact on the outcome of his/her creation, and the author's ethnic identity, in turn, has great bearing on his/her perspective. Our classification of cross-cultural literature basically rests on the author's identity and perspective. This concern with the textual features and the author's influence on the text seems to run counter to the assumptions of reader response criticism. We need to clarify these issues theoretically before going on to discuss a model for studying reader response to multicultural literature.

### **Uniaction, Interaction and Transaction**

It is the position on the relation between text and reader in the process of making meaning that distinguishes reader response theory from its predecessor, New Criticism, and classifies the variants of reader response theory.

Positions on the relation between text and reader can be classified into three categories: uniactional, interactional, and transactional. The root "action" in the three terms can be operationally defined as the rendition of the agent (reader or text) to the making of meaning. The extreme uniactional view admits only the action of one of the two coordinates or elements, that is, either the text or the reader alone has a role to play in the making of meaning. New Criticism is uniactional, because it argues that a reader should approach the text with *tabula rasa* and passively receive its impact. Reader response theories depart from this position in varying degrees. The following briefly examines and classifies the most representative theories.

E. D. Hirsch's theory of validity (1967) is a variant of reader response theory in the sense that it accepts the fact of the text's openness, that the text can have different significations, yet his theory is uniactional-- very close to New Criticism, because it rejects the notion that there can be more than one valid interpretation for a text. For him, the only acceptable meaning of a text is the meaning the author encoded in the text. What the individual reader reads into the text is not meaning but "significance." Therefore, a text can have a constant "meaning," but shifting "significances" (p.213). Hirsch's theory in fact denies the reader's renditions in determining the meaning of the text.



Stanly Fish's theory (1980), which claims that all the meaning is supplied by the reader, is uniactional on the other extreme; it is actually a theory of reader action instead of reader response. Fish's theory claims that "the interpreters do not decode poems; they make them." The epistemological assumption beneath this assertion is: "It is not that the presence of poetic qualities compels a certain kind of attention but that the paying of a certain kind of attention results in the emergence of poetic qualities" (1980, p.326). As the author's text has become a non-entity, literature exists only in the reader. There seems to be no check against the reader's omnipotent interpretive strategies that can mold the text like plasticine into any desired shape. He even declares that a literary work can receive as many legitimate readings as there are readers (1983).

David Bleich's "subjective criticism" (1978) is also an uniactional model of reading. He considers the text as a series of symbols, the meaning of which entirely depends upon the reader's mental activity to construct. The reader becomes the independent self and the sole agent in the reading process. He rejects the "active nature of the text"--the guidance and constraints the text can give to the reader. "Only subjects [i.e. people] are capable of initiating action" (p.108). Taken literally, the text of course can not act as the reader. But as Michael Steig (1989) points out, "although the entire process of reading . . . does take place within the

reader's mind, there still may be a phenomenologically sound use for a term like interaction or transaction: to designate a process between the reader and his perceptions of and responses to the text from moment to moment" (p.11).

Holland's (1975) psychoanalytical approach borders on the uniactional theory. He sees the relationship between reader and text as the self and the "other." He admits that the text as the "other" exists prior to the reader's experience of it and puts constraints on the reader's interpretation. This distinguishes his theory from uniactional theories. However, his main concern and interest centers on the function of the reader's identity. He defines interpretation as "a function of identity" (1980, p.123) and proposes a "defense-fantasy-transformation" model for literary experience. First, the reader shapes the text by means of his "adaptive and defensive strategies for coping with the world" (.127), then projects his fantasies on to it, and finally transforms the recreation of the text into a form socially acceptable to the public. Thus reading becomes a process of recreating the text in terms of the reader's personal identity.

In contrast to the uniactional theories are the interactional and transactional theories which incorporate both the reader and text as significant contributors to the reading experience but do not assign a central intended meaning to the text as the universal criterion for validity of interpretation. Both interactional and transactional

(Rosenblatt, 1937, 1985) theorists view the reading process as a reciprocal one, instead of a passive reader acted on by the text or a passive text acted on by the reader. However, the transactional theory collapses the traditional subject/object dichotomy. The transaction between the reader and text is not a process of the subject (reader) responding to the stimuli of the object. It is a "highly complex ongoing process of selection and organization" that results in the evocation of the literary work as distinguished from the text, the sequence of verbal symbols (Rosenblatt, 1985). This formulation of evocation is close to Fish's idea of the reader making the poem, but Rosenblatt does not exalt the reader's creativity. As she notes, "the view that the reader in re-creating the work reenacts the author's creative role superficially seems more reasonable" (1978, p.49). Nor does she deny the text's constraints on the reader's recreation. Robert Scholes's (1986) dialectic view of the relation between reader and text--an interactional theory--is more compatible with hers. Speaking of literary study, Scholes believes we are engaged in three kinds of activity: "reading, interpretation, and criticism." "In reading, we produce text within text; in interpretation we produce text upon text; and in criticizing we produce text against text" (p.24). He shares Rosenblatt's view that in the process of creation, the reader has more constraint than the author.

Iser's (1978) phenomenological approach carries some similar assumptions. Like Rosenblatt who sees meaning making as experiential, Iser holds that "meaning is no longer an object to be defined, but is an effect to be experienced" by the reader (1978, p.10). "It is something that has to be ideated ("evoked," in Rosenblatt's terminology) by the mind of the reader" (p.38). A literary text is thus indeterminant in the sense that it does not formulate meanings themselves, but "initiates performances of meaning" (p.27). It is this indeterminacy that brings about the text-reader interaction. While the text contains "gaps" (i.e. what is only implied) that stimulate the reader to "concretize" (p.21) them with their projections so as to synthesize an aesthetic object (Rosenblatt's "poem"), it also provides instructions and conditions for the production of that object. The interaction will fail "if the reader's projections superimpose themselves unimpeded upon the text"(p.167).

Jonathan Culler's (1975) structuralist reading theory is primarily concerned with literary conventions, the knowledge of which enables a reader to understand literature. The literary conventions are a system of rules governing the operation of literary discourse, like the grammar of a language. Both author and reader have internalized this "grammar of literature" (p.114) that makes literature intelligible. The author "can not simply assign meaning but must make possible, for himself and for others, the production

of meaning" (p.117). Reading, metaphorically, is a rule-governed game played by both the author and reader in the court of the text.

Rosenblatt's transactional theory and the interactional theories of Iser, Scholes, and Culler, acknowledge the constraint and guidance of the text to the reader. These theories justify the investigation of textual features, or in Scholes' more exact terms, textual power, in reader response to multicultural literature. To some extent, the textual power has been demonstrated by cross-cultural research in reading comprehension and interpretation which we surveyed in Chapter 3, although the main objective of the research was to show the function of the reader's schemata. Fish and Bleich's uniactional and Holland's near-uniactional theories represent the most subjectivist trend in the reading response movement. They have not simply put the reader in the center of the stage of literary criticism, but have also pushed the author and text off the stage.

Under their influence, there is a tendency to overemphasize the reader's role in recent theoretical and empirical studies. Rosenblatt (1978) warns that "in the recent reaction away from the-work-as-supposed-object, some have swung to the opposite extreme and are satisfied simply to concentrate on the reader's response" (p.151). More research in textual power is needed. In her study, Sims (1983) called for further research in this area. She raised, among others,

two questions to be explored: Do children's responses vary according to the categories of Afro-American children's literature? "To what extent are children's responses affected by those themes, values, and images which are unique to or especially emphasized in Afro-American literature?" (p.27) These questions are also applicable to the study of reader response to other ethnic literatures.

### **The Real Author and the Implied Author**

In various ways, transactional and interactional theories all acknowledge the author's role in the event of reading, but does not designate the author as the source of meaning the way Hirsch does. Rosenblatt admits the author into the scene of literary experience in this way: "He [the reader] will be conscious always that the words of the author are guiding him; he will have a sense of achieved communication, sometimes, indeed, with the author (1978, p.50).

However, the reader is not engaged in a face to face conversation with the real author as on a usual occasion of communication. In some works, the author intrudes into the text with open comments; in others the author withdraws behind his/her work. The author-reader relationship has evolved through the literary history. Yet, whether in traditional "closed" texts or more modern "open" texts (in Barthes' terms, "readerly" or "writerly" texts, 1970, p.4), the author's

presence is always there. Iser (1974) maintains that every literary work has two poles: the artistic creation (the text) by the author and the aesthetic realization (the reading) by the reader. The literary work lies half way between the two poles.

The author's presence is only implied in his/her artistic creation. Wayne Booth (1961) calls this implied presence or version of the author the "implied author," as distinguished from the real author who writes the book. The implied author is the real author's "second self." A real author has "various official versions of himself" in different works he creates:

Just as one's personal letters imply different versions of oneself, depending on the differing relationships with each correspondent and the purpose of each letter, so the writer sets himself out with different air depending on the needs of particular works (Booth, 1961, p.71).

The implied author is not to be identified with the narrator in the work, who is only one of the elements created by the implied author. The narrator could be a dramatized character in the work, but the implied author can not. "The 'implied author' chooses, consciously or unconsciously, what we read . . . he is the sum of his own choices" (pp.74-75).

The reader can always gets a clear picture of the implied author no matter how impersonal the real author tries to be when writing the work. In fiction, some aspects of the implied author may be inferred from the style and tone of the work,

"but his major qualities will depend also on the hard facts of action and character in the tale that is told" (p.74).

From the standpoint of ethical criticism, Booth holds that the actual writer should create for his/her work an implied author that represents a wise ethos. This often means "giving up a beloved fault or taking on an alien virtue" (p.128). The reader's reaction to the implied author's commitments will help determine his/her response to the work.

Iser (1974) accepts Booth's concept of implied author and paraphrases the term in simple words: "the man whose attitudes shape the book" (p.103). But Iser is more concerned with the process of reading than the ethics of literature. His phenomenological explication of the reading process focuses on how the implied author exerts control or provides guidance for a reader's act of reading. The implied author's attitudes that shape the book are equivalent to "schematized views," a concept Iser borrows from Ingarden. The "schematized views" are not plainly stated, but hinted at by various perspectives offered by the text. In the novel, for example, "there are four main perspectives: those of the narrator, the characters, the plot, and the fictitious reader [the intended reader]" (1978, p.35). As the reader tries to use these perspectives to relate the "schematized views" to one another, he/she brings the text to life, and their meeting place, which the reader finds at the end, is his/her experienced meaning of the text. Different readers may find different meeting places. However,



the network of perspectives predisposes the reader to read in certain ways.

Iser's term for the series of perspectives, the "net work of response-inviting structures," is "implied reader" (p.34). The term seems to be opposite to Booth's implied author, but in fact they refer to essentially the same thing from different perspectives. Both are theoretical constructs formulated to designate the conditioning force that the real author builds into the text when he creates the literary work. Both denote the "perspective view of the world put together by (though not necessarily typical of) the author" (Iser, 1978, p.35). The similarity of the two concepts is footnoted by these remarks of Booth's: "The author creates, in short, an image of himself and another image of his reader; he makes his reader, as he makes his second self" (1961, p.138).

A tension arises between the actual reader's and implied author's attitudes. Translated into Iser's terms, the tension is between the "role offered by the text and the real reader's own disposition." This tension is ever present in any process of reading, because it is "a precondition for the processing and for the comprehension that follows it" (Iser, 1978, p.37). This tension is particularly conspicuous in reader response to multicultural literature, where the gap between the actual reader's beliefs and the implied author perspectives is often very wide because of cultural differences. The interaction

between reader and author is therefore a very important aspect of research in reader response to multicultural literature.

The distinction between the real author and the implied author also merits special attention. Since these two are not identical, the perspective view of the world presented in the text, as Iser notes, is not necessarily typical of the real author. An author who writes about a culture other than his/her own may take on the alien beliefs and values of that culture. In some cases, he/she may give an authentic presentation of the alien culture in his/her works. The implied author, or the second self the real author creates, may be accepted by readers from that culture.

A typical example of the gap between real author and implied author is the novel by Forrest Carter, The Education of Little Tree. This book is about the life of a Native American orphan who learned the ways of his culture from his Cherokee grandparents in Tennessee. When recently reprinted it was an instant success, highly acclaimed by critics in general and well accepted by some Native American reviewers. Then suddenly it became a cause of controversy, an embarrassment to those who praised it, when the author's true identity was revealed. Forrest Carter turned out to be a pseudonym for a late racist. If a racist can write an authentic book about a minority, one may ask, why do we need to concern ourselves with the real author's perspectives and ethnic identity?

We may counter the question with another question: how many racists have written books like The Education of Little Tree? It is only a rare case that a racist is willing and able to write an authentic book about the experiences of an ethnic group. While some authors may be able to create an implied author that is completely different from him/her, others may not. This is especially true in multicultural literature. In most cases, the implied author and the real author are not two utterly different persons. In creating a literary world, the real author cannot put the complete reality into it, and has to choose what is to be included in it. The choices the author makes often consciously or unconsciously reflect his/her experiences and perspectives on the real world. Studies (e.g., Sims, 1982, 1984) have shown the connection between the real author and the implied author either in minority literature or in cross-cultural literature. At present, the "battle about books" is still very much a "battle about author . . . as a social constituency" (Gullory, cited in Gates, 1991).

The distinction between the real author and the implied author makes it possible to explain the existence of such books as The Education of Little Tree. The relation between the real author's identity and his/her literary creation is not one of determinism. It is possible for authors of the mainstream culture to write authentic books about minority experience. Among the numerous works of cross-cultural literature there are well written ones. The lesson--if there

is one--we may draw from The Education of Little Tree is not that the notion of cultural authenticity should be discarded or that the author's ethnic identity is no longer significant, but rather that, while emphasizing the influence of an author's cultural background on his/her works about another culture, we should not claim an absolute causal relationship between the two.

To sum up, reader response theory shifts the focus of critical attention from the text as the sole locus of meaning to the reader as an important constituent of meaning. While the uniactional theories deny the role of the text in literary interpretation, interactional and transactional theories recognize the text as a constraining and guiding force and also the author's participation in the reading event. These theories justify the study of textual features and the author's role in reader response criticism of multicultural literature. The politics of multicultural literature is complex, intermingling literary with social, ethical, and political problems. Each aspect of it calls for careful examination. The next chapter attempts to formulate a multi-dimensional model for the study of reader response to mulitcultural literature.

**CHAPTER V**  
**THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL MODEL**  
**FOR THE STUDY OF READER RESPONSE TO LITERATURE**

Reader response to multicultural literature is a broad field for exploration. As has been noted in Chapter III, the traditional schema-theoretic approach is limited in the scope of its investigation. To deal with various aspects of this complex of phenomenon requires a more comprehensive model which draws upon current reader response theories.

**The Eclectic Nature of the Model**

As we described in Chapter IV, there is no consensus among reader response theories. We found interactional and transactional theories more in keeping with the realities of reader response to multicultural literature. Therefore, these theories will serve as the theoretical cornerstone of this model. To address the concerns particular to the study of reader response to multicultural literature, however, this model also derives applicable concepts and ideas from some uniational theories, disregarding their controversial position on the status of the text. For example, despite Fish's denial

of the text's role, his notion of interpretive community is incorporated into the general framework of the model for dealing with the social aspect of reader response. Specifically, the model incorporates not only schema theory but also transactional theory (Rosenblatt, 1978), phenomenological theory (Iser, 1978), theories of intersubjective reading (Bleich, 1982) and of interpretive community (Fish 1980; Mailloux, 1976), "comparative inquiry" (Booth, 1988), and structuralist reading theory (Culler, 1975). Since it does not pledge allegiance to one single theory and also ignores some boundaries of the dispute, this model is eclectic in terms of its theoretical underpinnings.

### **The multiple Dimensions of the Model**

The fundamental assumption of this model is that the comprehensive study of reader response to multicultural literature should include the same aspects studied in research on response to literature in general, such as cognitive, developmental, affective, and social factors, but, within each aspect, the focus should be on those factors that are particularly relevant to multicultural literature.

As reader response is an organic process, these aspects are interrelated. They are separated for the purpose of analysis and explication. In the following we will discuss these aspects in three categories. Because of their

interrelationships, there is some unavoidable overlap among them. A discussion of what current reader response theory has to offer the study of these aspects and what specific research areas need to be explored is included.

### Cognitive-Developmental

From different perspectives, schema theory and Culler's (1975) structuralist reading theory stress what the reader brings to bear upon the text. The former concentrates on the reader's background knowledge or experience, while the latter centers around the reader's internalized knowledge of literary conventions. These two kinds of knowledge affect the reader's cognitive ability to process and interpret a literary text.

Fish's (1980) notion of "informed reader" is also applicable here. It can be redefined in terms of schema theory and Culler's theory of literary competence. In the context of studying multicultural literature, an informed reader is one who has developed a high level of cross-cultural competence. Bank's (1979) concept of cross-cultural competence (see Chapter II) could be expanded to include literary competence (Culler 1975). To read multicultural literature, one may need to know culturally specific conventions (or reading strategies) in addition to the general conventions governing literary discourse. To criticize multicultural literature, one may need to know culturally specific criteria that are different from those for mainstream literature, for each

culture has its particular aesthetics. A reader of multicultural literature needs to bring to the text knowledge of those conventions and criteria as well as information of the cultures represented in order to understand and appreciate it. Translated into the terms of schema theory, the reader needs to have culturally specific schemata of world experience and literary knowledge. A reader has a better chance to become an informed reader of the literature about his/her culture than a reader from another culture.

In the study of reader response to multicultural literature, the concept of informed reader is useful in two ways: 1) it expands the horizon of research in terms of the reader's cognitive function; 2) it opens up new channels for research in developmental response. Most of the research conducted on the basis of schema theory (see Chapter III) has, in a sense, demonstrated the difference between the informed reader and the non-informed reader either in cognitive reasoning process or in comprehension and interpretation. Further research can be carried out in these areas, comparing the response of readers from different cultural or subcultural backgrounds or comparing the responses of the same reader to literature about different cultures. The range of variables for comparison may be extended to include textual elements, such as theme, plot, characterization, images, symbols, style, language, etc. The process of "concretizing the gaps" (Iser, 1978) in the texts of multicultural literature also deserves



more research effort. Possible questions for exploration are: Do readers of different cultural background find different gaps in a multicultural literary text? Are their modes of responding (Purves, 1976; Squire, 1964; Wilson, 1966) different in dealing with those gaps?

A new area awaiting research is the comparison of different levels of cross-cultural competence among readers from the same cultural background; for example, mainstream culture readers who have been given instruction in multicultural literature and readers who have not. One may explore research questions similar to this one which were raised by Sims (1983) with regard to Black literature: "Does exposure over time make a difference, i.e. when children have been exposed to Black literature as an integral part of their reading experience, do they respond differently from those with limited and experimental exposure?" (p.27) Besides time of exposure, comparison can be made between the effects of different reading materials, curricula, instruction methods, etc. The central question is: do these factors help to turn students into informed readers of multicultural literature?

In multicultural education, a major goal is to cultivate cross-cultural competency in the students. We need first to develop a hierarchy of levels that elaborates on Bank's typology (1979) and then to determine which level is desirable for the students to attend at a certain stage of their schooling. Other studies of response posit developmental

stages of literary competence. For example, based on Piaget's theory, Applebee (1985) formulated four developmental stages in young readers' ability to analyze and generalize about a piece of literary work. Is his formulation totally applicable to response to multicultural literature? Can the progression in interpretive ability be retarded by lack of cross-cultural competence? These questions, relevant to the concerns of fostering cross-cultural competency in children step by step, are worth exploring.

### Affective-Attitudinal

As is argued in Chapter III, the affective component of one's schemata plays an important part in reader response to multicultural literature. In aesthetic reading, as Iser remarks, the reader actively exercises his/her faculties, "generally the emotional and cognitive" (1974, xiii).

In this study, the affective aspect is used in a broader sense: it includes not only the reader's emotional response but also his/her stance to the text that influences his/her response to the text. Stance is here defined as the reader's mental attitude toward the text.

The reader's emotional response may be investigated in two ways, similar to the research on the cognitive aspect of response, with focus on the product or on the process: 1) the reader's emotional reaction (e.g. like or dislike) to literary texts and elements (e.g. perspective, characters, theme, plot,

etc.) in the texts; 2) the reader's emotional change in the process of reading, e.g. from apathetic or even antagonistic to sympathetic or vice versa.

Previous studies which deal with affective response to multicultural literature, such as Sims (1983) and Ho (1990) mentioned in Chapter III, are focused on the product. More studies of this type are needed in order to understand the emotional reaction of readers from different cultural background to texts and textual elements. The second type of investigation is also of great significance. The claim that exposure to multicultural literature affects the readers' attitudes to himself and other minorities has long been made. Some studies provide support for the argument that literature does produce effects on the reader's attitudes (Jackson 1944; Frankel 1972; Woodyard 1970; Hayes 1969; Campbell and Wirtenber 1980). Other studies indicate no significant effects or obtain inconclusive results (Lancaster 1971; Brewbaker 1971; Walker 1972). But no study explores emotional change in the process of reading and what elements give rise to the change.

Stance reflects the reader's intention rather than emotion. Several reading theories place a premium on stance. Rosenblatt (1978) distinguishes between efferent and aesthetic stances; Vipond and Hunt (1984) propose three models of reading stance: information driven, story driven, and point driven; others differentiate participant and spectator roles

(Harding 1937, Holland 1968, Britton 1970, Applebee 1985). They share the assumption that the reader's stance shapes his or her experience of a literary text. Rosenblatt's two stances differ in emphasis: the efferent emphasizes the information to be taken away from the text while the aesthetic stresses the lived through experience in the process of reading. She acknowledges that "no hard-and-fast line separates efferent--scientific or expository--reading on the one hand from aesthetic reading on the other" (p.35). Between the two extremes of aesthetic and non-aesthetic reading is a continuum. The reader's stance may vary greatly between the two poles. Many texts "are susceptible to being experienced at different points of the continuum, even by the same reader under different circumstances" (p.36).

Stance or attitude towards a text, as we may infer from her argument, is to a great extent determined by the objective of reading. We may read a literary work for information as if it were a piece of expository writing or we may read a philosophical essay as a literary work. In light of the objectives for using multicultural literature in American schools, we may ask, what stance should the teacher encourage the student to take? Perhaps, the proper stance should rest in the middle of the continuum: to experience the exotic world of a different culture (or the world of his/her own culture) and to acquire knowledge about that culture. How different stances

affect the process and result of reading multicultural literature is another fertile area for exploration.

### Social-political

Reading is not only a subjective, cognitive process but also an intersubjective, social process, not only a personal act, but also a communal event (Fish, 1980; Bloome, 1983; Bleich, 1986). It involves the interaction between the reader and author (through the implied author) and among readers in a school or communal setting. Perhaps nowhere is intersubjective interaction more intense than in reading multicultural literature. As was noted in Chapter IV, the battle about books is essentially about authors. Does the author present a true picture of the ethnic culture? Does he/she portray authentic characters or stereotypes? Does the literary work carry any racist overtones? These are some of the questions the reader or critic frequently asks with regard to a work about ethnic groups. In reading multicultural literature, the reader is usually sensitive to the implied author's values and attitudes and reacts rather strongly to them. This sensitivity to racist tendencies or overtones is not difficult to understand in the large social political context of the movement for civil rights and multiculturalism.

In this respect we can draw upon Feminist criticism which is concerned with "identifying literature --the activities of reading and writing--as an important arena of political

struggle" (Schweichart 1986, p.39), and studying the reader in the light of social, historical, and political circumstances. It does not examine, as the mainstream reader response theories do, how a female reader makes sense of a text in a general way, but rather, in the case of a female reading a male text, what the text does to the reader and how the reader asserts herself against the control of the text. Schweichart points out, "the reader taking control of the text is not, as in Iser's model, simply a matter of selecting among the concretizations allowed by the text." It means "reading the text as it was not meant to be read, in fact, reading it against itself" (p.50). The feminist position is close to Robert Scholes' (1985) third kind of reading: creating "a text against the text." Situating the feminist reader in the context of social political struggle and identifying her response as a political struggle differentiates feminist response theory from mainstream theories. These concepts can also be enacted in the multidimensional model for study of response to multicultural literature. In patriarchal and white-dominated societies, women and minorities have similar experiences of oppression and goals of emancipation. And for both, literature is indeed an important political arena.

The consonance and dissonance between reader and author in terms of values, beliefs, and attitudes which are deeply rooted in what may be called "ethnic psyche" deserves further probing with regard to specific ethnic cultures.

The interaction among readers is no less important than that between author and reader in a reading event. As David Bloome (1983) defines it, reading as a social process is "an activity by which people orient themselves to each other, communicate ideas and emotions, control others, control themselves, acquire status or social position, acquire access to social rewards and privilege, and engage in various types of social interaction" (p.165). Along with the text and the reader, the social context of a reading event conditions the making of meaning. The participants in a reading event construct the meaning through interaction and negotiation.

The concept of reading as a social process is similar to the concept of interpretive community (Fish 1980). A consensus on the interpretation of a text is achieved only when the participants agree on the values, beliefs, attitudes, cognitive constructs, and interpretive strategies with regard to that text. The difference between them lies in their orientation. While the concept of interpretive community stresses similarity among the members of the community, the concept of reading as social process is oriented to the disagreements and negotiations of the participants.

In a classroom setting, the teacher is an important participant in the reading event. The interaction is more often between the teacher and the students than between the students themselves. The stance (here a social stance instead of an interpretive stance as defined by Rosenblatt and others)

the teacher takes toward the event has great bearings on the results of the reading event (e.g. Marshall 1989; Rogers 1987). If he/she takes a conformist or assimilationist stance, he/she may enforce interpretation based on the values of the dominant culture. As Bloome points out, the results of such a reading event can be alienation, for the framework of the minority students for interpretation has been changed to fit in with the framework of the mainstream culture. If the teacher adopts a more open or "multiculturalist" stance, the results could be acceptance of various interpretations based on different systems of cultural values. The power structure in the reading context, or community, deserves close attention in the investigation of reader response to multicultural literature.

The interaction between students themselves can also have positive and negative results. As in the case of teacher, the outcome also depends on the social stance the students adopt toward the reading. When a controversy occurs in a classroom, for example, over whether Mark Twain's portrayal of Jim in Huckleberry Finn shows racial prejudice, the stances of the disputing parties will bear heavily upon the outcome of the dispute. Learning to approach a question from other participants' perspectives may yield more positive results. Wayne Booth (1988) developed a "logic" for evaluative criticism, which he called "coduction." It is a process of comparative inquiry that is open to further comparison.



Coduction can be conducive to a constructive interaction of participants in a reading event, especially one that involves multicultural literature.

Booth's approach to literary evaluation is in tune with Bleich's theory of intersubjective reading. Intersubjective reading is partly based on Ludwik Fleck's theory of "thought collective" (cited in Bleich, 1986) in which two or more people exchange thoughts. A reading community is a "thought collective," such as a family, classroom, academic meeting. Intersubjective reading is the ongoing exchange, continuous "dialogue" between the reactions and actual readings of the members of the thought collective. In a multicultural classroom, personal affect, interpersonal history and other pertinent elements in a reading event vary so much that the interaction between individual readers (including teacher and students) in the collective is no doubt dynamic and dramatic.

Comparatively few researchers have conducted studies in the area of response to multicultural literature that include collective inquiry into individual and cultural values. One study (e.g. Sharp, Mascia-Lees, & Cohen, 1990) has analyzed the interaction among readers of different cultural backgrounds in their evaluation of a literary work and tried to account for the different responses in a larger social-political context. They found that some black male readers have denigrated the works of black women writers whereas white women readers are receptive to them. But how readers

orchestrate the negotiation of meaning and value in a multicultural interpretive community needs further research.

### Conclusion

A multi-dimensional model for studying response to multicultural literature, then, would include aspects of schema and response theory, with balanced emphasis on both cognitive and affective aspects; and the social nature of reading multicultural literature, including the individual reader's stances and the collective inquiry of the multicultural interpretive community. The model also considers the development of cross-cultural competence and the fostering of informed readers for multicultural literature. This model is proposed to avoid the limitations of studying response to multicultural literature solely from the perspective of schema theory; instead, it incorporates reader-response theories.

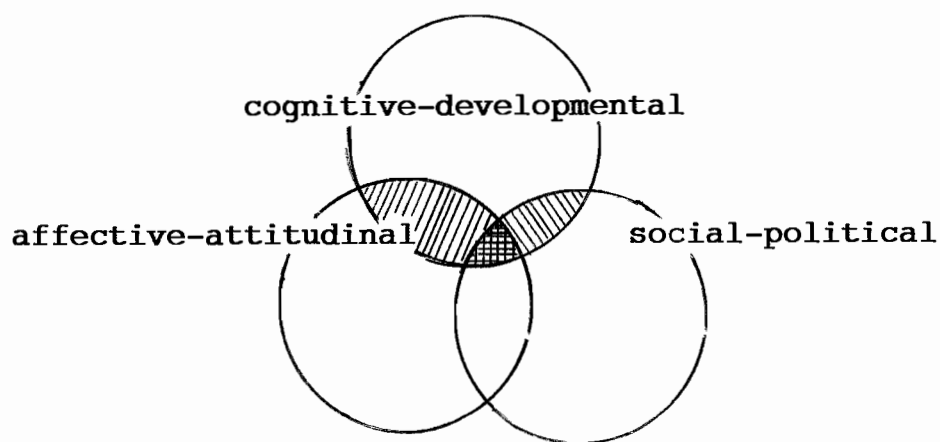


Figure 1. The Multi-Dimensional Model of Response to Multicultural Literature

What distinguishes reader response theory from its predecessor, the pseudo-scientific approach of New Criticism, is its focus on the subjective, humanistic nature of reading literature. If we intend to use multicultural literature as a vehicle to achieve multiculturalism, we need to highlight the subjective, humanistic aspect of reading, while keeping in perspective its intellectual, cognitive aspect. "The production of the meaning of literary text . . . does not merely entail the discovery of the unformulated . . . it also entails the possibility of that we may formulate ourselves and so discover what had previously seemed to elude our consciousness" (Iser, 1974, p.298). Iser's view of reading as morally beneficial denotes the goal of this multi-dimensional model: formulating the reader as well as the text.

This model has mapped out channels for exploration. Research can be conducted on each of the three aspects of the model or on the interrelationship between them. Three empirical studies were undertaken to test certain facets of the model. These studies are presented in Chapter VI.

## CHAPTER VI

### THREE EMPIRICAL STUDIES

Based on the multi-dimensional model proposed in the previous chapter, three empirical studies have been undertaken to expand the exploration of reader response to multicultural literature, each testing an aspect of the multi-dimensional model. The first study examines readers' response to literary features of multicultural texts--a question concerning the cognitive-developmental aspect. The second study investigates the effects of readers' stances on their reading strategies and recall of information from a multicultural text, dealing with the affective-attitudinal dimension as well as the cognitive-developmental. The third study looks into readers' response to biases in a multicultural text, exploring the social-political aspect and the affective-attitudinal as well. Since reader response is an organic whole, overlapping of the aspects is unavoidable and, in fact, desirable.

Each study is first discussed in detail, and then the implications and limitations of the three studies for the model are addressed at the end of the chapter.

### Empirical Study I

As has been noted in Chapter 3, many cross-cultural studies of reading comprehension did not use literature as the experimental materials, and the few studies of reader response to multicultural literature rarely concentrate on literary features. This study was intended to examine how readers of different cultural backgrounds vary in response to literary characteristics of a multicultural literary work. Since readers of different cultural backgrounds have acquired different literary schemata, competence and evaluative criteria, it can be hypothesized that they respond to literary features in ways consistent with their cultural backgrounds. This study compared the responses of American and Chinese readers' responses to thematic meaning, characterization and style of literary works. There are other features worth exploring, such as plot, imagery, and symbolism. However, a comprehensive study of response to all literary features is beyond the scope of this study, the objective of which is to underscore the importance of literary features as a component essential to the study of reader response to multicultural literature. As has been indicated in the explication of the multi-dimensional model in the previous chapter, literary conventions should be included as a part of readers' schemata and made a subject of study.

## Method

### SUBJECTS

12 American students from a major Midwestern university and 12 Chinese students from a university in the People's Republic of China participated in the study. Both American and Chinese subjects were selected on a voluntary basis. The age range of both Chinese and American subjects was between 20 and 27. In each group there were 7 females and 5 males. The Chinese subjects had studied English for 10 to 12 years. They were proficient enough in English to understand and respond to the experimental texts used in the study. Since none of the experimental materials were in Chinese, the American subjects would not have any problems understanding them. Most of the American subjects majored in education; none of them had systematically studied Chinese culture.

### MATERIALS

Three texts were used in this study: an American short story, "The Natural Father," by Robert Lacy (1988), a Chinese folktale, "The Shrewd Daughter in Law," translated into English by Sian-Teck Lim (1944) and a Chinese poem, "The Jewelled Stair's Grievance," written by Li Po and translated by Ezra Pound (1970).

"The Natural Father" is about the love between two American young people, a soldier and a secretary (for a

summary of the short story see Table 1). Since it deals with relationships between opposite sexes, about which values and attitudes vary from culture to culture, this story has potential for eliciting different responses to the thematic meaning of a story from Chinese and American readers.

**Table 1. Summary of "Natural Father"**

=====

Butters met Laura in San Diego in 1958. They fell in love with each other and started to make love on the third date. When Laura began pregnant, Butters found that he did not really love her and did not intend to marry her. They first wanted to try abortion but it was too risky. Laura was then sent to a church-supported center for unwed mothers in Arizona. Soon Butters was assigned to duties abroad. He had agreed to pay for Laura's expenses at the center. But shortly after he left her, he skipped payments. Only by pressure from Laura and her mother did he resume payment. Later Laura gave birth to a boy. Butters received a legal document that released his rights and responsibilities in the care and upbringing of the child. He signed on the dotted line labeled "Signature of Natural Father."

=====

"The Shrewd Daughter-in-Law" tells how a Chinese country girl outwitted her father-in-law and a high ranking official (Table 2). She was not only intelligent but also rebellious in the sense that she dared to defy authority figures--the old gentleman and the high ranking official. In traditional Chinese culture, young people were supposed to be obedient to the elderly and the common people obedient to the rulers. The shrewd daughter-in-law is an idealized character that embodies

the wishes of common people for superhuman talent who can outwit the oppressors.

**Table 2. Summary of "The Shrewd Daughter-In-Law"**

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Once upon a time there was an old man who had two daughter-in-laws. Annoyed at their frequent visits to their mothers, the old man told them to bring him some wind wrapped in paper and some fire wrapped in paper, or they would not be allowed to go home any more. Returning from their mothers' homes, they met a country girl who helped them solve the puzzles. The two things were: fan and lantern. Admiring the girl's intelligence, the old man married her to his third son. By the management of the new daughter-in-law, the household was soon prospering. The old man had an inscription, "No Sorrow," put up over the gate. One day a high ranking official happened to see the inscription, which he thought was impudent. The official demanded to see the old man. The shrewd daughter-in-law came out instead. As a fine on their impudence the official ordered her to weave a piece of cloth as long as the road before the house. The daughter-in-law asked him to tell her the length of the road. Unable to do that, he changed the fine to as much oil as the water in the sea. Again, she asked him to weigh the sea first. Baffled, the official changed his tactics. Holding a pigeon in hand, he asked her whether he was going to kill it or set it free. Standing astride the threshold, the daughter-in-law countered with another question, "Do I mean to go in or come out?" The official admitted his defeat and left.

=====

"The Jewelled Stairs' Grievance" expresses the feelings of a lonely court lady (or any wealthy lady). Its style is suggestive, using implicit images rather than explicit statements, in a way typical of traditional Chinese poetry. As Ezra Pound observes in his note to the poem, the lady's emotions are expressed through images. No direct reproach was



uttered. Even her social status and identity are only suggested. Here is the poem:

The Jewelled Stairs' Grievance

The jewelled stairs are already quite white with dew,  
It is so late that the dew soaks my gauze stockings.  
And I let down the crystal curtain  
And watch the moon through the clear autumn.

Pound's translation preserves the suggestive style of the original poem.

The probe statements (Appendix A) that accompany the story of "The Natural Father" are in two parts. The first part asks the subjects to respond to four probe statements regarding their beliefs on sexual relationships. The second part requires the subjects to write down their responses to the relationship between Butters and Laura, which is the focus of the story, carrying the thematic thrust.

Due to cultural difference, the Chinese subjects were expected to choose the answer in the multiple-choice questionnaire (Appendix B) that describes the shrewd daughter-in-law as both intelligent and rebellious and the answer that identifies her as an idealized character. Since American culture is more democratic than Chinese culture, to reason with authority figures may not be considered a rebellious act. American subjects would be likely to identify the shrewd daughter-in-law as intelligent but not rebellious and less

likely to see her as an idealized character for the same reason as the Chinese subjects did.

A reader who is familiar with traditional Chinese poetry would likely be able to tell the speaker's social status from the images, describe her emotions as intense, and identify the lyric's style as suggestive rather than elusive (in the sense of being obscure). The accompanying questionnaire focuses on the style of the poem (appendix C). The poem was given in the experimental booklet without the author's and translator's name. After the experiment, the Chinese students were asked if they had read the poem before. None of them had.

### Procedure

Both American and Chinese subjects read all the three texts and responded to the questionnaire individually. There was no time limit on completing all the tasks. The subjects were told that the object of the study was to investigate reader response to multicultural literature and assured that their identity would be kept confidential. This researcher entrusted a professor in China with the experiment with Chinese subjects. He used copies of the same experimental materials and followed the same procedure in the whole process. After the subjects finished the tasks, the professor sent them back to this researcher for analysis.

## Results and Discussion

### Response to thematic meaning

Responses to the probe statements related to the story were scored on a 1-5 scale, with 1 indicating a "most liberal" response and 5 a "most conservative" one. Thus "strongly agree" could be associated with 1 or 5. For example, "strongly agree" with probe statement 1, "When two persons are in love, premarital sex is unavoidable and acceptable," was assigned the point value 1, while "strongly agree" with probe statement 2, "under no circumstances should one have sex with a date who he/she does not know very well," was graded 5. The mean scores are reported in Table 3. A factorial analysis of variance was performed on the data with culture and sex as between-subject factors and attitudes on probes as within-subject factors. Main effect was found on culture x attitude interaction, for probe 1,  $F(1,22) = 5.31$ ,  $p < .0$  and for probe 4,  $F(1,22) = 5.59$ ,  $p < .05$ . There was no significant interaction between sex and culture on the two measures.

On Probe 2, "Under no circumstances should one have sex with a date who he/she does not know very well yet," and Probe 3, "When a man has sex with a woman and fathers a child, he should marry her," there was no significant difference between the two groups. Both Chinese and American readers were very conservative on Probe 2. While the Chinese readers' attitude on Probe 2 is in keeping with their

**Table 3. Mean scores of responses to probe statements concerning relationships between opposite sexes**

	Probe 1		Probe 2		Probe 3		Probe 4	
	mean	s.d.	mean	s.d.	mean	s.d.	mean	s.d.
Chinese	3.58	0.99	4.25	0.86	3.33	0.65	4.33	0.49
American	2.58	1.08	4.33	0.65	2.58	1.31	3.50	1.08

conservative attitudes on other probes, the Americans' attitude is inconsistent with their attitudes on other probes, which were much less conservative. An explanation could be that the AIDS epidemic has changed their attitude to this problem. They have become more careful with casual sexual relations. An American subject actually mentioned AIDS as a threat to "unprotected sex" in his response. On probe 3, while more conservative than the Americans, the Chinese are more liberal than on other probes. This could be accounted for by changing tradition. Since old-fashioned arranged marriage has become a thing of the past, Chinese now believe in true love as the basis of happy marriage.

The results of the analysis suggest that the Chinese tend to be more conservative than Americans on relationships between opposite sexes, at least in terms of attitudes to some aspects of the sexual relationship. Significantly more Chinese objected to premarital sex and teenage sex than Americans.

The free written responses were analyzed by measuring the subjects' attitudes toward the relationship between Laura and

Butters, which carries the thematic meaning of the story. Responses to the relationship were coded into three categories: descriptive, judgmental, and no comment. A descriptive response to the relationship states the facts without explicit censure, for example, "I think it is very sad that a child was conceived in a relationship based on sex rather than on love." A judgmental response makes an explicit censure, more critical than a descriptive response; for example, "The relationship between Laura and Butters is abnormal (my emphasis)." An independent rater and this researcher read and coded the responses. The reliability between the two raters was 91%. Table 4 presents the frequency of responses to the two characters' relationship.

**Table 4. Frequency of responses to the relationship between the two main characters**

	descriptive	judgmental	no comment
Chinese	4	5	3
American	7	2	3

No significant variation was found for the two measures. As Table 4 shows, however, the Chinese subjects tended to be more explicitly critical of the relationship between Laura and Butters. Five Chinese vs two Americans made judgmental responses to the relationship. A comparison of the responses coded as "judgmental" also revealed that the Chinese tended to

moralize more about the relationship. Here are the Chinese's responses:

. . . actually their discretion about sex resulted in nothing but bitterness or difficulty to both of them and to the baby, perhaps to the society as well. One should always keep his share of responsibility in mind.

Lovers should hold pure and sincere love for each other. Premarital sex should be avoided, otherwise, they will hurt themselves both physically and spiritually.

The relationship between Butters and Laura is abnormal . . . think the focus of the story is to tell people that love is a serious thing, people must regard it as serious and honest.

They are too young and their relationship is more animal[-like] than spiritual.

They do not love each other, but had an affair, so they were imprudent.

The following are the Americans' responses which were coded as "judgmental:

When two people who barely know each other have sex, I feel that a long, meaningful relationship is hopeless.

The two main characters, Laura and Butters, dated, but were not in love. Nevertheless, they engaged in meaningless, empty sex that never seemed to be very satisfying to either of them. In fact, it took on the complexion of an act like tying one's shoelaces.

The finding that the Chinese are more judgmental in response to the relationship between Laura and Butters is consistent with the findings on their attitudes towards relationships of opposite sexes. It may be argued that since

the Chinese are more conservative in their attitudes, they are more critical of the two main characters' relationship in the story and tend to derive a didactic or moralistic theme from the text.

### Response to style

The frequency of responses to each of the multiple-choice questions related to the poem is presented in Table 5. Each response was scored on a 1-3 scale, in which 3 meant consistent with the style of the poem and 1 discrepant with it. The total scores on the measures were then subjected to an analysis of variance, with cultural background as between-subject variable and identification of emotional intensity and style as within subject variable. Main effect was found for the interaction between cultural background and appreciation of style,  $F(1,22) = 10.37, p < 0.01$ .

Responses to the open-ended questions, "Who could be the speaker of the poem? What is she possibly complaining about?" were not scored. The data was subjected to a qualitative analysis. All Chinese subjects were able to identify the speaker of the poem as a lovesick girl or lady longing to see her lover or husband. Some of them also infer the social status of the speaker from the images. The

**Table 5. Frequency and mean scores of responses to questions on style**

=====					
The emotion expressed in the poem					
	intense	moderately intense	not intense	mean	s.d.
Chinese	7	4	1	2.50	0.67
American	1	6	5	1.66	0.65
-----					
The style of the poem					
	suggestive	elusive	neither	mean	s.d.
Chinese	9	1	2	2.58	0.79
American	4	6	2	1.83	0.93
-----					
How do you like the style of the poem					
	very much	ok	not at all	mean	s.d.
Chinese	4	6	2	2.08	0.79
American	1	7	3	1.91	0.51
-----					
	Total scores		mean	s.d.	
Chinese	86		7.16	1.64	
American	65		5.41	1.08	
=====					

following examples will illustrate the point:

A lady who is staying at the house alone. Possibly she is missing her husband and complaining about the distance between them and the loneliness she cannot get rid of when he is absent. "Jewelled steps" and "gauze stockings" indicate her family is well off; "dew" and "crystal



curtain" suggests chill and quietness while "the moon" in the "clear autumn" arousing the lady's emotion.

The speaker of the poem may be a widow. She had lost her husband. Though she was rich, she was still sad. She missed her husband very much.

The American subjects, on the other hand, are not quite sure about the identity of the speaker and what her grievance is. Although most of them identify the speaker as a female, perhaps from the image of "the gauze stockings," only three interpret it as a love poem, and two identify the speaker as a lady of high social status, a "princess" or a "queen." Some of the interpretations are superficial, for example, "The speaker could be someone (a girl) walking down the wet steps complaining about getting her socks wet."

The results of the analysis provide evidence of how culturally specific literary schemata or competence influence readers' comprehension and evaluation of style in multicultural literature. When reading a culturally familiar text, readers are more likely to understand it and appreciate its style. Since the Chinese subjects had acquired the literary schema and developed literary competence to appreciate the traditional imagistic Chinese poetry, they performed better in interpreting and appreciating the style of the poem than American subjects, even though they read the poem in English.



The reasons some Chinese subjects gave for choosing "idealized character" to describe the daughter-in-law revealed some variation from those given by American subjects. For example, one Chinese subject wrote:

The image of the shrewd daughter-in-law indicates the hopes of the Chinese common people who are under the oppression and exploitation of the rich and the upper class.

This explanation views the character in a social-political context. In the story, the official is a representative of those in power who try to control everything. Few people would dare to defy him in real life. Some other examples also show a similar tendency to evaluate the character in a larger social context and see her as the projection of people's wishes:

She [the shrewd daughter-in-law] was the incarnation of people's good wishes. People wanted someone who could solve any difficult problems.

The shrewd daughter-in-law displays no mistakes or faults but virtues, which are the ideal qualities of traditional Chinese women.

She is more or less idealized, because in Chinese society direct confrontation between people of different generations is usually discouraged.

The American subjects, on the other hand, tend to describe the character in terms of idealized individual qualities. The following examples illustrate this point:

I'd say idealized because it was given that she was a 'simple country girl' which would imply that solving difficult riddles could not come naturally.

Realistically, a countrywoman can be as such, but she seems excessively so.

I don't believe that any realistic person would question an official as the daughter-in-law.

The American subject who gave the last explanation seems to misunderstand the term "idealized character." She apparently understands "realistic" as "sensible" and "idealized" as "idealistic" or "impractical."

The foregoing comparison and analysis shows that some Chinese and American subjects had chosen the same answer for different reasons. This point is further proved by the responses they made to the question about the daughter-in-law's character. There is some consistency between their responses to the two questions. Of all six Chinese subjects who believed she was both intelligent and rebellious, four regarded the lady as an idealized character, while none of the four American subjects who identified her as an idealized character chose the "both intelligent and rebellious" answer.

The other four Chinese subjects who identified the daughter-in-law as an "idealized character" were of the opinion that in folktales or legends characters are often idealized. One of them wrote, "The author created an idealized character, for the story might have been a folk one. So it is not likely to happen in real life." Another noted, "She is a

[sic] idealized character. It is Chinese tradition to create a character full of wits." Whether Chinese folktales have unique idealized character as distinguished from Western folktales takes some research to decide. Being familiar with folktales in their own culture certainly help these Chinese subjects identify the daughter-in-law as an idealized character.

While finding no main effects for the measure of characterization, this study still provides some evidence to support the hypothesis that readers may respond to characterization in multicultural literature in ways consistent with their cultural backgrounds. Study III also found variance between Chinese and American subjects's evaluation of the main character, Hip Wo, although response to literary features was not the focus of that study. In their responses, the American subjects tended to see Hip Wo as a positive character, simple-minded but hardworking and brave, while the Chinese subjects view him in a negative light, subservient and foolish.

Further research may improve on this study and find more solid evidence to support the hypothesis. One possible way to improve it would be to have subjects respond freely to the characterization rather than choose a preset answer which may either influence their choice or fail to summarize the characteristic traits of a character in the story.

## **Empirical Study II**

This study investigates the effect of reader's stances on reading strategies, focus of attention, and the remembering of information from the text. Some studies (e.g. Many, 1990, 1991) have examined the effects of stance on literary response, but they neither addressed the problem from a cross-cultural perspective nor looked into the effects of use of reading strategies. In this study, it was hypothesized that readers who adopted an efferent stance would use some reading strategies more frequently than readers who adopted an aesthetic stance, therefore remembering more of the information about the culture described in the text. Only American subjects participated in this experiment, for the goal of this study is not to find out how different cultural backgrounds affect readers' response but, instead, to investigate how different stances influence reader response to multicultural literature.

### **Method**

#### **Subjects**

Twenty-eight graduate students in education from a large Midwestern university participated in the study.

The subjects were divided into two groups, one adopting the efferent stance to reading and the other the aesthetic stance.

The two groups had approximately the same number of male and female subjects.

Four were dropped from the analysis, because three of them did not complete the task and the other one had studied modern Chinese history and Mandarin Chinese before. Since the experimental text was about Chinese culture, this subject's knowledge of China would help her outperform other subjects and thus interfere with the analysis of the data. After the elimination of the four subjects, 12 subjects remained in the efferent group, and 12 in the aesthetic group, respectively.

### **Materials**

Two experimental booklets were used in the study. The first booklet contained an excerpt from the autobiographical novel, China Boy, by Gus Lee (1991), which depicts the author's experience of growing up Chinese in San Francisco, California. The excerpt, the second chapter of the novel entitled "Earth," describes how the narrator's family fled from China during World War II. It is packed with information about the values, beliefs, attitudes, history, politics, and other aspects of Chinese culture. For a summary of the text see Table 7.

In the second booklet there were a) one free response question, b) one recall question, and c) 12 probe statements (Appendix D). The free response question asked the subjects to write down whatever came to their mind while reading the text.

The recall question required the subjects to write as much as possible about what in the text struck them as different from their own culture. The twelve probe statements are related to the information about Chinese culture provided in the text. Each statement was accompanied by four rating choices: 1) true, 2) must be true, 3) could be true, and 4) false. Subjects circled one of the options to indicate their judgement of the statements' validity.

### Procedure

Each of the two groups of subjects participated in the experiment at the same time but in separate rooms. A time limit was set on the completion of the tasks, 30 minutes for

**Table 7. Summary of the text used in Study II**

=====
Earth (Chapter 2 of China Boy)
<p>The narrator Kai Ting's family fled China in 1943 during World War Two. Before she left with the children, Kai's mother did not have a chance to say good-bye to her father, who was an army officer, fighting the Japanese in a province. The family found it hard to part with people of their blood and the home and hearth of their ancestors. On the way out of China, they had to dodge Japanese troops, bandits, thieves, and deserters, but they had survived the perilous escape. The mother believed the world was composed of five elements: earth, wind, water, fire, and iron; and she was earth. She had crossed it and became it in the flight. Since Kai was born in America, he missed the trip. His three sisters went through the odyssey with their mother. The family arrived in America safely but unsure about their future. The mother carried with her a wealth in jewelry and "an unpaid debt of <u>shiao</u>, piety to parent, in her breast."</p>
=====



reading and responding to the text and another 30 minutes for completing the recall question and probe task.

Before they started, the researcher told the group which was expected to take an efferent stance that while reading the text as they might usually do, they should pick up as much information as possible about the Chinese culture. The other group was told to read the story for pleasure as they might usually do with a novel. Both groups were required to write down whatever response they had to the text.

The text was split up into six sections. The end of each section was marked with a red dot. Subjects were told to stop at the end of each section and write down their response to that section. After they completed the free response task at the end of 30 minutes, they continued to do the recall and probe task for another 30 minutes.

For the free response task, two dependent variables were measured: reasoning operation and focus of attention in response; for the recall task, one dependable variable, i.e. cultural idea unit, was measured; and for the probe task, the four response options were the dependent measures of interest.

## Results

### Performance on Free Response

The free response data was analyzed in terms of reasoning operation and focus of attention. Ten categories of reasoning operations and two kinds of focuses (culture-oriented and non-culture-oriented) were used in the analysis of the response units. A response unit, or idea unit, is operationally defined as a unit which contains one distinct idea in one clause in most cases. For definition and examples of reasoning operation categories see table 8. Response units that refer to an aspect of culture as related to the text are categorized as culture-oriented units. For example, "Extremely cruel to punish the second born girl for not being a boy" is classified as a culture-oriented unit, because it comments on the traditional Chinese value system

**Table 8. Categories and examples of reading strategies**

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1. Retelling (summarizing, reiterating, or paraphrasing the text)	
Example 1:	"The story gives an explanation as to why the family has chosen to leave their native land."
Example 2:	"Megan continued to feel isolated with resentment toward her uncaring mother."
2. Elaborating (visualizing or elaborating on features of the story)	
Example:	"I can visualize this family's members as a real family with real people."
3. Engaging (Showing signs of personal responding, relating, identifying, or particular interest in an element of the story)	

"Table 8 (continued)"

Example 1: "I identified with the family's plight, danger."

Example 2: "I can sense the emotions of the family's fear, sadness for leaving, etc."

4. Questioning (Expressing a question or uncertainty)  
Example: "How did the troops get killed but the family survived?"
5. Hypothesizing (predicting, or confirming or revising a prediction; shows awareness of other possibilities)  
Example 1: "I know they will make it to America since the narrator telling it was not born yet."  
Example 2: "I think he or she is telling the stories that have been told to him or her--second hand information."
6. Analyzing (noticing or describing features of the story, such as relationships, similarities, differences)  
Example 1: "Mother seems rather cold and unfeeling to the girl Megan--almost unnatural."  
Example 2: "I also noted the author's integration of the American culture as well as the family's American and Chinese names."
7. Generalizing (making generalizations, judgements or comments on the whole story or an aspect of it)  
Example 1: "The writer is trying to familiarize the reader with Chinese customs and history."  
Example 2: "The departure of the family was very emotional."
8. Evaluating (evaluating the literary quality of the whole story or an aspect of it, e.g. scene, ending, language) characterization.  
Example 1: "This is very moving and poetic writing."  
Example 2: "The historical setting is well portrayed. in which the character battle for survival."
9. Monitoring (Keeping track of understanding)  
Example 1: "I think I missed the point."  
Example 2: "Have trouble following the Chinese names."
10. Miscellaneous (any fragments or comments totally unrelated to the story)

=====

Note: this table is based on Rogers' (1991) categories.

regarding women's status. On the other hand, "Very brave and desperate to make such a journey to "freedom," especially alone" is classified as a non-culture-oriented unit, because it does not make textual or extratextual reference to any aspects of the Chinese culture.

An independent rater read and coded 50% of the data. The reliability between the rater and this researcher was 85% on reading strategies and 95% on orientation. Table 9 contains the means and percentage of response units in each reasoning operation category by person. These data reveal that the group with an aesthetic stance used monitoring (26%) and evaluating (11%) strategies much more frequently than the group with an efferent stance (12% & 5%), but used the retelling strategy much less frequently (9% vs. 31%). An ANOVA was performed on the data. Significant effects were found in monitoring and retelling. For monitoring, the statistic was  $F(1,22) = 5.54$ ,  $p < .05$ , and for retelling,  $F(1,22) = 6.29$ ,  $p < .05$ . Although the aesthetic group uses evaluating strategy (11%) apparently more often than the efferent group (5%), the analysis of variance did not yield any significant difference.

Table 10 contains the means and percentage of culture-oriented and non-culture-oriented response units by person. An Anova was made of the culture-oriented response units. Significant interaction between stance and culture-oriented units was found,  $F(1,22) = 9.67$ ,  $p < .01$ ., showing that the

**Table 9. Mean scores and percentage of response units in each reasoning operation by person**

	Aesthetic			Efferent		
	mean	s.d	%	mean	s.d.	%
Retelling	1.50	1.38	9%	6.00	6.06	35%
Monitoring	4.08	2.99	26%	1.50	1.38	9%
Elaborating	0.50		3%	0.25		1.5%
Engaging	2.67		17%	2.17		13%
Questioning	1.67		11%	1.25		7.5%
Hypothesizing	0.50		3%	0.92		5.5%
Analyzing	0.17		1%	0.58		3.5%
Generalizing	2.67		17%	3.33		19.5%
Evaluating	1.75		11%	0.83		5%
Miscellaneous	0.25		2%	0.08		0.5%
Total	15.76		100%	16.91		100%

**Table 10. Mean score and percentage of culture-oriented and non-culture-oriented response units by person**

	Culture-oriented			non-culture-oriented	
	mean	s.d.	percentage	mean	percentage
Efferent	7.75	4.73	46%	9.5	54%
Aesthetic	3.25	1.65	21%	12.42	79%

efferent group was more likely to make culture-oriented statements.

### Performance on Recall Task

The results of performance on this task were measured by examining idea units for cultural differences the subjects noticed and recalled from the text. An idea unit of cultural difference is a unit that shows an aspect of the Chinese culture which differs from the subjects' own culture. For example, "the family lived with expanded families, mothers, grand mothers, sisters-in-law, cousins," or "the idea of name changing for good luck is very different" are idea units of cultural difference. On the other hand, such an idea unit as "that kind of hardship of uprooting myself isn't something I can really associate myself with" was not counted as an idea of cultural difference because it showed difference in cultural values, beliefs, attitudes, and other aspects.

As expected, the efferent group recalled more idea units of cultural difference than the aesthetic group. A *t* test was performed on the difference between the mean idea units of the two groups. Significant difference was found in favor of the efferent group. The results of the analysis is shown in Table 11.

**Table 11. Total and means of culturally different idea units recalled in each group**

	efferent	aesthetic	t test
total units	54	34	
mean units	4.5	2.83	1.90

=====

p < 0.05

#### Performance on Probe Task

The probe statements were given four point values: true=4, must be true=3, could be true=3, and false=1. If the statement was false, the ratings were reversed. It was expected that the efferent group would score higher on the probe task than the aesthetic group, but an analysis of the mean scores on the total 12 statements showed only a slight difference between the two groups (Table 12). As in the probe task of the previous study, the probe statements themselves may provide clues to the right answers. Besides, the interval

**Table 12. Mean scores on probe task**

	mean	s. d.	minimum	maximum
efferent	36.08	4.27	30	45
aesthetic	35.25	4.71	27	43

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between reading the text and working on the probe task was too short. If there had been a longer retention interval, there might have been some significant difference.

### Discussion of the Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which a reader's stance affects his/her response to multicultural literature. The analysis of the data revealed main effects of stance on the three measures: selected reasoning operations, focus of attention, and recall of information in the text. The hypotheses for the study have, to some extent, been supported.

The variation in reasoning operations was expected, but it was not expected that the aesthetic group would use the monitoring strategy more often and the retelling strategy less often than the efferent group. Based on the studies of some theorists and researchers (Rosenblatt, 1978; Corcoran, 1987; Many 1990, 1991), it may be assumed that the aesthetic group would use the engaging, elaborating, questioning, and hypothesizing more frequently. For these strategies are characteristic of what Rosenblatt (1978) defines as an aesthetic stance. According to her, in aesthetic reading, the reader attends to the "moment-to-moment participation" in the text (p. 28) and engages in the on-going experience of the events he/she evokes from the text, "sensing, feeling,



imaging, thinking under the stimulus of the words" (26). While the data of the aesthetic group does contain a higher percentage of these operations being used except for hypothesizing, the difference is not statistically significant.

A possible explanation for the high percentage of the monitoring operation being used by the aesthetic group could be that the culturally unfamiliar text erects an obstacle to immediate engagement. Readers in the group express confusion and frustration while trying to understand the text. The following are some examples:

I find myself having to re-read to get the gist of what was said (monitoring).

It [this piece] begins giving Chinese history while reporting on the individual struggle of one torn family (retelling). It seems very jumbled and is difficult for me to put together (monitoring).

This is the most confusing part this far (monitoring). I am lost on all these names of people and place (monitoring).

This was a little easier to read, for there were more examples that appeal to human emotions (monitoring).

Since there is a continuum between the aesthetic and efferent stances to reading (Rosenblatt, 1978), the efferent group also uses a monitoring operation to keep track of understanding, but not as often as the aesthetic group. They are not primarily concerned with the ongoing aesthetic experience, but typically directed their attention "outward . . . toward concepts to be retained, ideas to be tested, actions to be

performed after the reading" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 24). This may account for the high percentage of the retelling operation being performed by the efferent group; for retelling could be a means to retain information from the text. Further studies are needed to substantiate this assumption.

Further studies may also explore the aspects of culture readers focus on in efferent reading of multicultural literature. This study has found the efferent group focused on the culture represented in the text more than the aesthetic group. However, this study did not analyze the specific aspects of culture in categories that may be applicable to most efferent reading of multicultural literature in general. It is possible to generalize response units in terms of the cultural aspects they focus on, such as social relation, interaction, behavior, status, structure, cultural assumption, attitudes, beliefs. For example, this response unit can be classified in the category of social interaction: "Interesting that the whole family would be punished for the acts of one person," while the unit, "Chinese men can only shed tears when the cause is great" will fall into the category of social behavior. A generally applicable coding system may contribute to the analysis of responses to multicultural literature.

### **Empirical Study III**

This study represents an initial attempt to determine whether readers will affectively interact with the implied author in ways consistent with their cultural backgrounds. Chinese and American subjects read excerpts from a work of cross-cultural literature which shows bias in presenting the experience of Chinese Americans. It was expected that Chinese subjects would be more likely to dislike the story and the main character who is portrayed as a typical representative of the Chinese Americans, because the implied author's perspective is at odds with the Chinese subjects' perspective. The Chinese subjects also would be more sensitive to racial bias in the text.

### **Method**

#### **Subjects**

The subjects were 24 graduate students from the Ohio State University, who volunteered to participate in the experiment. Half of them were Chinese and half Americans. The Chinese students have been studying in the United States for 1-5 years. They had all taken the Test of English as a Foreign Language before they came to the United States and their English proficiency is considered as adequate for academic study at the Ohio State University. The groups were

balanced in terms of gender; most of the subjects in both groups were education majors.

### Materials

There were two experimental booklets. The first booklet contained the experimental text, a chapter taken from the novel, Footprints of the Dragon, by an American author, Vanya Oak (for a summary of the text see table 13). The novel describes the experience of Chinese immigrants who helped build the continental railway in the 19th century. From this researcher's point of view, the description presents Chinese Americans as stereotypical, whose beliefs, attitudes, and behavior do not reflect historical realities. For its prejudices this book is also criticized by Elaine H. Kim in Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and their Social Context (1982). Kim points out: "In Oak's book . . . the white railroad bosses are uniformly kindly and benevolent, while the Chinese workers are grateful for their high wages and exhilarated by the challenges their work provides " (p. 19). The chapter used as the experimental text offers a typical example of the author's prejudices.

The second booklet contained a modified Likert scale that asks the subjects to respond to the story and the main character by indicating whether he/she strongly likes, likes, dislikes, or strongly dislikes him; a open-ended question requiring the subjects to describe their responses to the

story and the main character more specifically; and five probe statements on the description of Chinese laborers' attitudes towards working conditions and towards their supervisor and on the portrayal of the main character Hip Wo. The first four statements each were accompanied by three choices: true, fairly true, and false and the last one by three other choices: realistic, fairly realistic, and stereotypical (appendix E).

### Procedure

Both American and Chinese subjects were expected to read the experimental text, complete the Likert scale test, answer the open-ended questions, and complete the probe task. All subjects participated in the entire experiment individually. No time limit was put on the fulfillment of the tasks. Before they started, they were told to read the experimental material as they usually read a novel and then complete the tasks as they were instructed in the booklet. The subjects were told that the researcher was interested reader response to literature.

Three dependent variables were measured in the experiment: affective response to the story and the main character, sensitivity to the author's bias, and background knowledge of the historical events covered in the story. The first variable was measured by scores on the Likert scale; the second by the free responses which were categorized and scored

according to a bias coding scheme; and the third by ratings given to the probes on a 1-4 scale.

**Table 13. Summary of the text used in this study**

=====

The Smoke Dragon Conquers Cape Horn  
(Chapter 6 of Footprints of the Dragon)

As the railway construction went on, Hip Wo and other Chinese workers moved to Cape Horn over the American River, where they were going to cut through the cliff to make a roadbed for the railway. The workers were lowered down the steep cliff in baskets, and with chisels and hammers, they carved out holes in the face of the rock. Into each hole black powder was placed to blow up the rock. Sometimes the workers were not pulled up in time and were hurled down to death by the force of explosion. The Chinese workers did not protest or complain. In spite of the difficulties and dangers, Hip Wo enjoyed the work. He was very proud of being chosen to do the most dangerous work by the American superintendent. He was in fact speechless with astonishment and promised earnestly to do his very best. When he was working in the small cleft between rocks, boulders and whole trees bounced down the cliff. Swinging himself upwards and clinging to a ragged edge, Hip Wo narrowly escaped being hit by a boulder, but some others were killed in the accident. On learning of their death, Hip Wo only murmured an unhappy "Ai-ya!" The living condition was also very hard. When it rained heavily and their tents became too wet to live, the workers had to seek shelter in caves. Nevertheless, the workers were in a good mood. After the track was finally laid and the train came, the workers beat their pans to celebrate the event

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## Results

### Affective Response

A *t* test was performed on the scores of the Likert scale that measured affective response, using cultural background

variables (Chinese vs. American) as between subjects factors and affective response variables (strongly like, like, dislike, strongly dislike) as within subject factors. The dependent measures were the subjects' ratings as to whether they strongly like, like, dislike, or strongly dislike the story and main character. The following point values were assigned to the four statements: strongly like = 1. like = 2. dislike = 3, strongly like = 4. Through the analysis of variance it was found that the cultural background x attitude interaction was significant,  $t = 2.06$ ,  $p < .05$ . Table 14 shows the mean scores given to the affective response statements.

### Sensitivity to Bias

A bias coding scheme was developed to categorize the free response. The responses to the story and the main character were divided into idea units. The idea units

**Table 14. Mean scores assigned to affective response statements**

=====										
Affective response statements										
	s.like		like		dislike		s.dislike		mean	s.d.
	story	Hip	story	Hip	story	Hip	story	Hip	Hip	
=====										
Chinese	1	3	10	8	9	12	8	4	4.58	1.62
American	4	6	14	12	3	0	0	0	3.25	1.05
<i>t</i> test									2.06	
=====										
p < 0.05										

were classified into five categories: description, characterization, personal response, general comment, and background knowledge. These categories are defined as follows:

1. Description: responses in which the subject refers to or evaluates the way the author describes things.  
e.g. "On one hand the narrator is presenting his/her understanding of the culture by using Chinese ways of describing things."
2. Characterization: responses in which the subject refers to or evaluates the author's portrayal of characters.  
e.g. "Hip Wo, a courageous and resourceful worker, doing his best to stay alive day by day."
3. Personal response: responses in which the subject expresses emotional reactions to the event, characters, and other aspects of the story.  
e.g. "I am irritated by the focus on the characters' value of pride."
4. General comments: responses in which the subject comments on the story as a whole or on any aspects other than description and characterization.  
e.g. "The story sounds like a mere celebration of the work which at the same time was dangerous and hateful to the workers."
5. Background knowledge: responses in which the subject uses pertinent background knowledge in the interpretation of the text.  
e.g. "It is known that the Chinese laborers were once living a miserable life and they had no choice but to depart their families to make a living outside their own country."

Three ratings were applied to the response units in each category to indicate the subject's sensitivity to bias: + , - , 0. "+" denotes the subject's attitude towards the implied author is positive in the idea units; "-" denotes the subject's attitude is negative; and "0" denotes the subject's attitude is neutral. For example, in the idea unit "Good story portraying a strong work ethic and the virtues of perseverance," which was coded and rated as "general comment +," the subject's attitude towards the implied author is



positive, while in the idea unit "The main character looks like a fool," which was coded and rated as "characterization -," the subject's attitude towards the implied author is negative. An independent rater coded and rated 50% of the idea units of the free responses. The interrater reliability between the rater and the researcher was 83%.

The percentage of each of the three ratings in the total response idea units in the five categories is shown in Table 15. The percentage of "-" ratings is significantly higher and that of "+" ratings, lower, for the Chinese group

**Table 15. Percentage of ratings for response units**

	Chinese		American	
	number	percentage	number	percentage
Total	59	100%	55	100%
+	9	15%	12	22%
-	24	41%	5	9%
0	26	44%	38	69%

of subjects than for the American group. The proportion of each category within the total response idea units is presented in Table 16, which shows that the Chinese subjects commented on descriptions and referred to background knowledge more often than American subjects.

**Table 16. Proportion of each category within the total idea units**

=====				
	Chinese		American	
	number	percentage	number	percentage
description	6	10%	1	2%
characterization	20	34%	26	47%
general comment	13	22%	14	25.5%
personal response	14	24%	14	25.5%
background knowledge	6	10%	0	
Total	59	100%	53	100%
=====				

#### Performance on Probe Task

An ANOVA was performed on the probe performance data (Table 17). The dependent measures were the subjects' ratings as to whether they believe the first four probe statements were historically false, fairly false or true and whether the main character Hip Wo was realistic, fairly, realistic, stereotypical. Point values were assigned to the ratings of the probe statements: true=1, fairly true=2, false=3; realistic=1, fairly realistic. The first four probe statements were historically false, and the main character was stereotypical. It was expected that Chinese subjects would score higher on this test of performance on probe task. Contrary to the expectation, Americans scored higher. The

ANOVA, however, did not show significant difference between the performances of the two groups.

**Table 17. Total scores on probe task**

	Chinese	American
true	25	3
fairly true	15	24
false	8	21
realistic	5	0
fairly realistic	2	5
stereotypical	5	7

### Discussion of the Results

The data from the affective response test and sensitivity to bias test support the hypothesis that readers interact with the implied author in ways consistent with their cultural background. Evidence obtained from the affective response test indicated that the subjects' attitude towards the literary work used in the experiment was related to their cultural background, that is, significantly more Chinese subjects disliked the work than American subjects. Evidence gathered from the sensitivity to bias test demonstrated that the Chinese subjects were more sensitive to the implied author's

bias and felt more strongly about it than American subjects. This was further corroborated by some qualitative analyses of Chinese and American subjects' free responses.

Compare the following negative free responses to the description of sufferings the Chinese laborers experienced and their attitude towards work:

#### Chinese subjects

"It hurts my ethnic pride to how my people suffered . . . I am irritated by the focus on the characters' value of pride."

"I strongly disliked the story because Chinese laborers were described like fools in it. Although the work was so dangerous and a lot of laborers had died, Hip Wo was still willing to accept it and he felt very proud after he finished the it."

"I felt sympathy for Hip Wo, actually for the Chinese people who worked the continental railway then. However, If I were Hip Wo, I would not have that kind of feeling of conquering a mountain after I had done the job."

#### American subjects

"Given how poorly paid see these laborers must have been, how miserable their working conditions were, and how dangerous their jobs were, I can't imagine they took so much pride in the work and respected the decisions of Americans so much."

"The story left a lot unsaid about the way the immigrants were misused. They were looked on more as work animals than as people."

As we have noted, more Chinese subjects responded negatively to the story and the main character. The above comparison shows that even in the negative responses of both groups, there is some culture related difference. The Chinese

subjects' responses are more personal and emotional than American subjects' responses, which are more analytical, and tend to generalize about the ethnic group. This is true of some neutral responses as well. For example, when referring to that period of history, a Chinese subject wrote, "It describes the hardships of the early Chinese laborers. That past history means hard work and industry and also heartbreak (my emphasis)." In their responses as a whole, the Chinese subjects are more culturally conscious and emotionally involved.

Contrary to what was expected, the data from the probe task did not show significant difference between the two groups. While the Chinese subjects who did well in the affective response test and sensitivity to bias test also scored higher on this test, there is an inconsistency between American subjects' performances on this task and the previous two tasks. Most of them scored higher in this test. One possible explanation is that the probe statements may have given answers away, calling attention to sensitive cultural issues and even providing clues to the right answer.

In summary, the findings of this empirical study support a cultural basis for differences in readers' affective response to multicultural literature. They also support the assumption that a work of cross-cultural literature may not truthfully present the experience of an ethnic group if the author's perspective, beliefs, attitudes are alien to the

people he/she writes about. The present experimental text revealed cultural bias in what Simms (1975) termed as errors of commission and omission. As an error of the first type, the text stereotypes the Chinese as workaholic, obedient and even subservient; as an error of the second type, it covers up the American capitalists cruel exploitation and oppression of the Chinese laborers by leaving out how they misused and abused the cheap Chinese labor and making it appear as if only the Chinese foreman was responsible for the sufferings of the Chinese laborers.

### **Implications and Limitations**

The three empirical studies discussed in this chapter are distinguished from previous research, especially those studies on cross-cultural reading comprehension, in their theoretical orientation and, to some extent, in research methodology. They were designed to set up new signposts for further inquiries rather than to achieve definitive conclusions.

The first study is focused on literary features, an aspect few previous studies of reader response to multicultural literature have investigated. One of the points the study intends to make is that literary features should be included as an essential component in the study of literary response from a cross-cultural perspective. The second study compares the effects of different use of reading strategies in

dealing with cultural gaps and recall of information about the culture presented in the text. Using all American subjects without comparing cultural backgrounds may seem to be irrelevant and fall outside the category of cross-cultural study as they have been usually conducted. However, it deals with a very important aspect of response to multicultural literature, which has great implications in education. The third study touches on a critical problem in multicultural literature--racial bias. Articles have been written about blatant or subtle racial bias but few studies have looked into actual readers' response to it.

Each of the three studies touches upon an aspect of the proposed multidimensional model for the study of multicultural literature. Together, they provide some backing for the proposed multidimensional model for the study of multicultural literature by verifying the validity of the theoretical assumptions behind the model as well as demonstrating that each aspect of the model maps out a fertile field to explore. Although these studies do not cover all the areas encompassed within the three aspects of the model, they have both theoretical and instructional implications.

### Theoretical implications

The findings of Study I showed that readers tend to interpret and appreciate more discriminatingly the style and characterization of culturally familiar literary works. These

findings suggest that there are culturally specific schemata and competence for various literary features. Previous studies have found that readers make more informative summaries of stories for which they have appropriate schemata and concluded that "story schemata" (Rumelhart, 1975; Kintsch and Greens, 1978) or "story grammars" (Stein and Glenn, 1975; Mandler and Johnson, 1977) are culturally specific. The findings of this study are consistent with those of the previous studies in verifying the existence and operation of culturally specific schemata in reader response to multicultural literature. Yet, this study expands on the previous research in two respects: 1) it shows that there are other specific literary schema in addition to these schemata of general background knowledge about a certain culture; 2) it shows that the reader's literary schemata affect their interpretation and appreciation of literary features as well as their comprehension and memory of the content.

These culturally specific literary schemata are actually internalized literary conventions of specific cultures. They are acquired and developed through long-term exposure to the literature of a specific culture. The process of acquiring these literary schemata is identical with the development of what is termed in this study as cross-cultural literary competence. Some researchers (Steffensen, Joag-Dev, and Anderson, 1979) argued that these kinds of schemata are "textual" rather than "content" schemata (p. 27). They did



not define the two terms. But citing Morgan's (1970) distinction between conventions of language and conventions about the language (a matter of culture, e.g. manners, religion, law, etc.) in the discussion of their findings, they in fact suggested that story schemata are linguistic. According to Culler (1975), literary conventions are extralinguistic rather than linguistic knowledge structures: "literature is a second-order semiotic system which has language as its basis" (p. 114). On the other hand, they are different from other extralinguistic knowledge structures, the so-called conventions about the language, because they are more closely related to the language. Sometimes it is hard to draw a line between understanding the language of a poem and understanding the poem itself (Culler, 1975).

Literary schemata and other extralinguistic knowledge structures (e.g. world knowledge) may combine to affect the reader's response to multicultural literature. This study shows some relationships between them. For example, knowledge about Chinese society and knowledge about Chinese folktales work together to influence Chinese subjects' interpretation of the shrewd daughter-in-law as an idealized character. Both schemata are sources of difference in reader response to literary features of multicultural literature.

Study III deals with the social-political aspects of reader response to multicultural literature, or more specifically, with how the readers react to the implied

author's racial prejudice. Its finding that readers will respond negatively to literary writings which perpetuate stereotypes of their culture provide empirical support to such theoretical claims about reading that readers may create "a text against the text" (Scholes, 1985, p. 50.) or "read the text as it was not meant to be read." (Schweichart, 1986, p. 27 ). The author of Footprints of the Dragon might mean to praise the Chinese builders of the continental railway, but the Chinese readers tend to read the text as a slander rather than as an eulogy to the Chinese workers.

Both cognitive and affective aspects of the Chinese readers' cultural schemata are activated in the negative response to the work. The Chinese subjects are more deeply engaged in the reading and their response more personal than the American subjects. This suggests that, in addition to the cognitive aspect, affective aspect of the reader's schemata contributes to difference in response. The function of the affective schemata is best exemplified in this response: "It hurts my ethnic pride to see how my people suffered and the history still repeats in different ways. I am irritated by the focus on the character's value of pride." This example also shows that the affective aspect of a reader's schema is culturally specific. The findings of this study serve to emphasize the importance of affective response to multicultural literature as well as to literature in general. The aesthetic experience of reading is a "fusion of thoughts

and feelings, of cognitive and affective, that constitute the integrated sensibility" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 46). Yet, in research on reading lopsided emphasis has been laid on the cognitive aspect; the affective facet has not been given due attention.

Some studies (e.g. Brewer and Lichtenstein, 1981; Golden and Guthrie, 1986; Sadoski, Goetz, and Kangiser, 1988) that did investigate the role of affect in reading researched the relationships between affect and other elements such as image and plot structure in order to account for divergence and convergence of response. They were primarily concerned with whether the text or the reader was the primary influence on comprehension, interpretation, and appreciation. As far as reader response to multicultural literature is concerned, the focus of research is more on divergence than convergence with a view to determining how reader's cultural backgrounds contribute to the divergence in response. Yet, the relationships between affect and other variables will be an interesting and promising topic for further inquiry in the study of reader response to multicultural literature. Enciso's (1991) study of engagement in reading sheds some light in this respect by illuminating the interrelationship between participation, elaboration and evaluation. At the end of her study, she also raises a question relevant to this study: Is some minority students' better performance in response to

literature pertaining to their cultural heritage a result of more engaged reading?

Although affective response is at the core of engagement in reading, the term engagement as used by Enciso has broader signification than affective response. This shows that in the study of reader response to literature in general or to multicultural literature in particular, it would be difficult to separate one aspect completely from other aspects.

Study II examines how stance towards a text affects reading processing strategies and memory of content. It found that the aesthetic group used the monitoring strategy significantly more frequently than the efferent group. But no main effect was found for other reading strategies. These findings reinforce the results of other studies. Stance may not only affect level of interpretation (Galda, 1982; Cox and Many, 1989; Many, 1990, 1991) but also reading strategies used to process the text. This provides further empirical support for Rosenblatt's (1978) distinction between efferent and aesthetic reading and her contention that between the two extreme ends there is a continuum.

Another question for further research arises from this study: Is efferent stance, as suggested by Many (1990, 1991), necessarily correlated with lower level of understanding with literary texts? In Many's studies, efferent stance is identified with focus on literary analysis or technical analysis. This does not hold true at least for this study, in

which the efferent stance means focus on the cultural aspects of the story. This stance may actually help the reader better understand the text that presupposes cultural schemata different from their own and adopt a more positive attitude toward the alien culture. In the proposed multidimensional model, stance is subsumed within the affective-attitudinal aspect, yet, as shown here, it is interrelated with the other two aspects. This interrelationship is indicated in the diagram of the model by the convergence of the three circles.

A reader's stance toward a multicultural text can be social-political. For instance, the interpretive stance investigated in Study II could also be affected by a reader's social-political stance. The relationship between the two kinds of stances may be another possible subject for further study.

### Instructional Implications

The findings of Study I suggest that one's cultural schemata may influence his/her understanding of literary features as well as the thematic meaning of a literary work that embodies the schemata of another culture. Allowance should be made for diversity of interpretation. When literary work that presents the dominant cultural perspective is used in the class, teachers should be aware that minority students may interpret the work differently from majority students. On the other hand, the findings of this study also underscore the

necessity of learning the literary schemata, or conventions, of a culture if the students are expected to interpret and appreciate literature of that culture more discriminatingly. Literature and art are an essential component of a culture's heritage. To develop cross-cultural competence, students should therefore be instructed in the literary conventions of other cultures. In the United states, the majority students need to learn the literary conventions as well as the values, beliefs, and attitudes of minority cultures just as minority students learn those of the majority culture.

Study II has apparent implications for classroom practice. If multicultural literature is to be used as an instrument for promoting multiculturalism, students should not read it simply for pleasure. They should be encouraged to take an efferent stance to read the text for information. Since they are reading literature, however, this should be a moderate instead of extreme efferent stance; that is, one should read for information while enjoying the story. The efferent group in Study II adopted this moderate efferent stance. As a result, they were less involved in keeping track of understanding, in other words, they dealt with the cultural gaps in the text more readily, and they recalled more cultural propositions from the story. They also used the retelling strategy more frequently. However, whether this strategy or other strategies should be encouraged in a moderate efferent reading remains to be determined by further research.

The findings of Study III shows that some cross-cultural literary works could be tainted by subtle racial prejudice as is Footprints of the Dragon, which perpetuates stereotypes of Chinese Americans in the disguise of realistic portraits. One implication of the study is that when choosing cross-cultural literary works for use in the classroom, caution is needed. Authors may be well-intended in portraying an ethnic group as I believe the author Footprints of the Dragon is, but their perspective does not match that of the culture they try to present. This inevitably results in stereotypical distortion of that culture. Another implication is that students' affective response to multicultural literature is a factor as important as a cognitive response for consideration in classroom instruction. Special attention should be paid to the emotions and feelings of minority students when they encounter books which supposedly reflect the reality of their experience, especially if the author is not a member of the culture he/she is writing about.

### Limitations

There are obvious limitations to the studies. First, the sample size of subjects for each study is relatively small. The small sample as well as the population from which the sample was selected restricts its generalizability to some extent. Second, while predesigned categories of response (i.e. multiple-choice questions and probe statement tasks) used in

the studies directed subjects' attention to specific aspects of response, they might at the same time constrain or condition the readers' response. This drawback was not completely avoided by the inclusion of open-ended questions which asked subjects to justify their choices. Finally, free written response has its inherent limitations. Even though they were found to be more complex and interpretive than oral response (Applebee, 1978; Beach, 1973), they do not necessarily represent the subjects' complete response during the reading experience. To capture the responses more fully, one could combine written response with oral interviews.



## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

#### The dialectics of Multicultural Literature

Multicultural literature has been recently drawn into the vortex of social-political contentions. It was introduced into the curriculum as a challenge to the dominance of literary selections, which "are still predominantly concerned with growing up white, male, and middle class" (Pam Gilbert, 1990). It has been used as an instrument to promote multicultural education which sets a goal of fostering acceptance of cultural diversity, sensitivity to social inequalities, and encouraging social actions to rectify them. Bound up with social-political causes, multicultural literature is more for enlightenment than for entertainment.

To fulfill its mission, multicultural literature has to have a dual nature: it presents commonalities as well as differences across cultures. Its power to teach and move the reader to accept diversities depends on its addressing universal problems of human situation. The dynamic interplay between universality and peculiarity exists in any kind of

literature but it stands out more strikingly in what we categorize as multicultural literature. Because of this dual nature, as Rudine Sims Bishop (1987) argues:

Literature can show how we are interconnected to one another through our emotions, needs and desires--common to all. Second and coincidentally, books can help us to understand, Appreciate, and celebrate the differences among us (p. 60).

The theme of convergence and divergence also concerns anthropologists who compare different cultures. For comparison, they have to express cultural differences into variables, "universal categories of culture" as U.S. anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn (1952) call them. For example, social context is such a category by which anthropologist Edward Hall (1976) distinguishes low-context and high-context cultures. Kluckhohn provides a rationale for this categorization:

In principle . . . there is a generalized framework that underlies the more apparent and striking facts of cultural relativity. All cultures contribute so many somewhat distinct answers to essentially the same questions posed by human biology and by the generalities of the human situation. (p. 317)

In multicultural literature similar "universal categories of culture" can be classified for comparison. For example, there are common themes or motifs that occur in the literature

of various cultures. An effective way to conduct cross-cultural study of literature is to examine the variants of these common themes or motifs. Reading a version of a folktale, say Cinderella, from a distant culture, for instance, we never fail to be amazed at how similar humans are to each other while we recognize the differences. Without common needs, desires, and emotions, we will be unable to gain empathy into cultures different from our own, will never understand, let alone appreciate, literature from other cultures. Yet, if a literary work about a different culture does not present the distinct perspective of that culture, does not present that culture's "distinct answers" to our common questions, that work will not be of much value for our purpose. It will be worse if it imposes on the reader false images or stereotypes of that culture. It may be argued that multicultural literature is driven by the dialectics of multiplicity in unity.

### **The difficulty of Studying Variation in Commonality**

Human commonality is the basis of the comprehensibility of multicultural literature, but it becomes the major factor of interference in the study of reader response to multicultural literature, which aims to bring out variation in reading due to specific cultural backgrounds. Human beings not only share biological and psychological commonalities; they

may also have similarities in other aspects. Anthropologists, such as Levi-Strauss, have tried to define the common fundamental operations of the human mind through the study of mythologies. Structural linguists, such as Chomsky (1984), have generated a universal grammar, and social linguists, such as Brown and Levinson (1987), have described some universals in language usage. Folklorists, such as Vladimir Propp, have formulated plot patterns that may be universally applicable. Students of comparative literature have also found parallels in idea and form between different cultures. It is beyond the scope of this study and this researcher's capability to discuss all the discovered commonalities. For our purpose, however, it may be assumed that to varying degrees human commonalities will surface side by side with cultural peculiarities in literature, which is usually a comprehensive reflection of human experiences, and some of them will certainly affect the study of reader response to multicultural literature. How they affect the study needs to be dealt with in specific projects.

Another factor that interferes with the study of reader response to multicultural literature is the blurring of cultural boundaries. Owing to the global expansion of mass media and extensive cultural exchange, cultures are not as insulated from one another as they used to be. For example, China and other East Asian countries are now greatly influenced by Western culture. The younger generation in

particular tends to reject traditional Oriental values in favor of Western values. The change of values, beliefs and attitudes are reflected in the literature they are exposed to, which further expedites the process of cultural assimilation. Stories like "Natural Father" used in Study 1 are not as alien to them as to the older generation. Because of cultural assimilation, finding experimental materials with distinct cultural characteristics from contemporary literature would not be an easy task for researchers in this field.

Subcultures in a country such as the United States are often dominated by the mainstream culture. Even if they do not lose their ethnic identity and cultural heritage, people of subcultural backgrounds are usually bicultural or multicultural. Reynold, Taylor, Steffensen, Shirey and Anderson (1982) noted that there is a great deal of cultural overlap among the minorities. This makes it difficult to compare the responses of readers from subcultures. In their study, Kintsch and Greene (1978) had intended to compare white Americans' and Apache Indians' responses to fairytales with Western and Appachan story schemata, but found it unfeasible because today's Apaches are bilingual and were familiar with Western story schemata. The cultural overlap puts another block in the way of researchers in this field. That may account for the fact that relatively few studies compare responses of readers from subcultures and readers from the main culture in the United States.

### Responding to the Challenge of Reality

Whether the blurring of boundaries between cultures and subcultures is the positive result of cultural exchange or the negative result of cultural domination is a good subject for another study. Cultural overlap, however, does not mean there is no significant distinction between subcultures and cultures. Distinctions do exist and await researchers to detect and define. More studies are needed to provide extensive empirical evidence for the distinctions and to expose the existing overt covert biases in favor of the dominant culture in reading materials, standardized tests, curriculum and instruction, and other fields of education. These issues are not just grist for the mill of academic theorizing, but real issues of power struggle in the whole educational system.

Any study of response to multicultural literature--if it is to serve the general purpose of multiculturalism--should be concerned with the interactions of cultural values, beliefs, and attitudes between reader and author as well as with the functions of cultural schemata. The reader is not a "cultural virgin"; on the contrary, he/she is loaded with cultural values and beliefs, ready to interact with the author implied in the text. As far as reader responses are concerned, Eagleton (1983) observes, they "are deeply imbricated with the kind of social and historical individuals we are" (p.89).

Reader response criticism should avoid what Schweikart (1986) describes as a "utopian" tendency. She comments on the tendency:

The different accounts of the reading experience that have been put forth overlook the issues of race, class, and sex, and give no hints of the conflict, sufferings, and passions that attend these realities . . . reader response criticism must confront the disturbing realities of our historical reality. (pp.35-36).

To confront the reality of multicultural society and to promote multiculturalism has been the basic theme for this study. The multi-dimensional model is proposed to encompass all the important areas in which there are cultural differences so that any possible manifestations of cultural bias and prejudice will not be overlooked. For researchers, the model opens up new fields of research that will be more directly related to the reality of multicultural education. For educators, the model highlights important problems that may be encountered in the teaching of multicultural literature. Keeping in view the three major dimensions of the model, educators may be more aware of the complexity of students' response to multicultural literature and better armed to tackle instructional problems.

The model is conceptualized to respond to the challenging reality of multicultural education; and it should further be tested in reality for its feasibility.

APPENDIX A  
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RESPONSE TO THEMATIC MEANING



## QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RESPONSE TO THEMATIC MEANING

Please choose an answer that best indicates your attitude toward each of the statements:

1. When two persons are in love, premarital sex is unavoidable and acceptable.  
(1) strongly agree (2) agree (3) undecided (4) disagree  
(5) strongly disagree
2. Under no circumstances should one have sex with a date who he/she does not know very well yet.  
(1) strongly agree (2) agree (3) undecided (4) disagree  
(5) strongly disagree
3. When a man has sex with a woman and fathers a child, he should marry her.  
(1) strongly agree (2) agree (3) undecided (4) disagree  
(5) strongly disagree
4. Teenagers should avoid sex when they are dating, since they are not financially established to resume responsibility if they happen to have a baby.  
(1) strongly agree (2) agree (3) undecided (4) disagree  
(5) strongly disagree
5. Please read the short story "Natural Father" by Robert Lacy and write down whatever response you have to the relationship between Butters and Laura, which is the focus of the story.

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RESPONSE TO CHARACTERIZATION

## QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RESPONSE TO CHARACTERIZATION

Please read the folktale, "The Shrewd Daughter-in-Law," and answer the following questions:

1. Which of the following best describes the character of the shrewd daughter-in-law?  
a) intelligent                      b) rebellious                      c) both
2. The shrewd daughter-in-law is a  
a) realistic character              b) idealized character  
c) goddess
3. The water buffalo she is riding is a  
a) wild animal              b) domestic animal  
c) mythical animal
4. Give reasons for choosing the answers to the questions.

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RESPONSE TO STYLE

## QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RESPONSE TO STYLE

Please read the following Chinese poem and respond to it as required:

## The Jewelled Stair's Grievance

The jewelled steps are already quite white with dew,  
It is so late that the dew soaks my gauze stockings.  
And I let down the crystal curtain  
And watch the moon through the clear autumn

1. Who could be the speaker of the poem? What is she possibly complaining about?
2. Which of the following best describes the speaker's grievance?  
a) intense      b) moderately intense      c) not intense
3. How do you like the style of the poem?  
a) very much      b) Ok      c) not at all
4. Which of the following best describes the style of the poem?  
a) elusive      b) suggestive      c) neither

## APPENDIX D

### PROBE STATEMENTS FOR EMPIRICAL STUDY II

## PROBE STATEMENTS FOR EMPIRICAL STUDY II

Read the following statements and circle one of the four options that best describes the statement: 1) true, 2) must be true, 3) could be true, 4) false.

1. There are five elements in the world. My mother's element is earth.

1      2      3      4

2. My elder sister, Jennifer, possessed unimpeachable status, because she was first born.

1      2      3      4

3. Jennifer did not want to leave Shanghai. She came to the United States for her mother's sake.

1      2      3      4

4. Megan, my second sister, was as beautiful as the elegant Jennifer, but was poorly dressed, because she was a girl, not a boy.

1      2      3      4

5. My family had to leave home. "How can this be?" my mother asked her sister-in-law, who was higher in rank and therefore possessed the answers.

1      2      3      4

6. Chinese men are only allowed to shed tears when the cause is great.

1      2      3      4

7. When they fled China, my family feared the loss of the clan's lineage not so much as the loss of their wealth. My mother carried a lot of jewelry in the lining of her clothing.

1      2      3      4

8. On the escape or after arrival in America, my mother always carried an unpaid debt of piety to her parents in her breast.

1      2      3      4

9. My family arrived in America after the odyssey, feeling they did not do anything wrong in the preceding years to deserve the sufferings.

1      2      3      4

10. The family tutor gave English names to my sisters. My mother liked the name changing. The Chinese often change names for good luck as well as for pleasure.

1      2      3      4

11. We also change our clan names and family titles. That will bring us good luck, too.

1      2      3      4

12. The Chinese believe China is the center of the world. In fact, China means the Middle Kingdom in Chinese.

1      2      3      4



APPENDIX E  
PROBE STATEMENTS FOR EMPIRICAL STUDY III

## PROBE STATEMENTS FOR EMPIRICAL STUDY III

Circle one of the following that you think best describes your response to the story:

1. The description of the Chinese laborers' attitude toward the hard and dangerous working condition is historically  
a) true                      b) fairly true                      c) false
2. The description of the relationships between the Chinese laborer, Hip Wo, and the American overseer is historically  
a) true                      b) fairly true                      c) false
3. The description of the Chinese laborers' attitude toward accidents is historically  
a) true                      b) fairly true                      c) false
4. The portrait of Lee, the Chinese foreman and interpreter, as playing a key role in supervising the work is historically  
a) true                      b) fairly true                      c) false
5. The portrait of the main character, Hip Wo, is historically  
a) true                      b) fairly true                      c) stereotypical

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