

# *A Comparative Study of Children's Picture Book Awards and Exploration of Their Guiding Role—Analysis Based on Five Major Picture Book Awards*

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**Abstract:** Picture book awards are authoritative certifications in the field of picture books, and the winning works are all considered to be representatives of excellent works. This paper analyzes the five prestigious picture book awards based on the Caldecott Medal of the United States, the Kate Greenaway Medal of the United Kingdom, the Japan Picture Book Award, the Feng Zikai Children's Picture Book Award and the Hsin Yi Picture Book Award of China. Additionally, this paper explores the guiding role of picture book awards for the development of picture books through the comparisons and discussions of the major awards in the selection purpose, the scope of the selection, and the evaluation criteria, among other aspects.

## **1. Introduction**

It has been more than a hundred years since picture books began to emerge in the West. In Europe, America and Japan, where picture books are better developed, there are special picture book awards set up to stimulate the output of more excellent picture book works. Since the twenty-first century, a large number of foreign picture books have been introduced to China, which has led to the development of Chinese picture books and the attention of the industry and readers to Chinese original picture books. The Chinese Picture Book Award has emerged as an important platform to promote the development of Chinese original picture books. Starting from the five representative international picture book awards, this article analyzes the selection purpose, eligibility, evaluation criteria, selection of judges and other aspects, to grasp the creative characteristics and development direction of excellent picture books, and to provide a reference for the further development of picture books.

## **2. Overview of the development history and status of picture book awards**

Modern children's picture books originated in the United Kingdom, then spread to other European and American countries, and flourished under the impetus of children's libraries. In 1937, the Caldecott Medal, named in honor of the nineteenth-century English illustrator Randolph J. Caldecott, was established in the U.S., which is the world's earliest and most influential picture

book award, and the winning works are all recognized as masterpieces<sup>[1]</sup>. In 1955, the UK's Library and Information Association established the Kate Greenaway Medal. It was originally named after the highly influential nineteenth-century artist known for her fine children's illustrations and designs, aims to promote children's interest in reading by recommending high-quality books to children and teenagers and providing professional resources for children's group reading in schools and libraries<sup>[2]</sup>. It was renamed in 2022 as the Carnegie Medal for Illustration.

In Asia, Japan is a leader in the development of picture books. In 1978, the National School Library Association of Japan established the Picture Book Japan Award, the most prestigious and highly regarded children's picture book award in Japan. From its inception to 1992, the Picture Book Japan Award was held 15 times, followed by a two-year hiatus. Since 1995, the previous contest has been succeeded by the "Japan Picture Book Award," which is judged annually. It aims to popularize the art of picture books, revitalize the reading of picture books, and develop picture book publishing. It has three major categories of awards: "Japan Picture Book Award Grand Prize", "Japan Picture Book Award", and "Japan Picture Book Award for Translation". In addition, there is the "Japan Picture Book Award Readers' Prize", which is voted on by readers<sup>[3]</sup>.

Compared with the rapid development of foreign picture books, Chinese picture books have been slow to start, and it was only around the turn of the 21st century that Chinese picture books began to emerge as a result of the introduction of a large number of foreign picture books. Because of their quality assurance and increased popularity, European, American and Japanese picture book award-winning works have become the main targets of introduction. China's first international picture book award, the Feng Zikai Children's Picture Book Award, originated from the initiating organization's keen awareness of the phenomenon of children's books being imported and translated in large numbers during the process of children's reading promotion, and the goal of the award is to help promote the development of original Chinese picture books<sup>[4]</sup>. By 2023, the Feng Zikai Children's Picture Book Award have been held eight times, with a total of 47 award-winning works and several shortlisted or recommended works. Following the establishment of the Feng Zikai Children's Picture Book Award, the Taiwan Hsin-Yi Foundation founded the Hsin Yi Picture Book Award in China. The first award was launched in 2009, which is another influential picture book award in China. The Hsin Yi Picture Book Award is divided into two categories: the Picture Book Creation Award and the Picture Book Text Creation Award, So far, it has been held thirteen times, and the number of entries for the Award has increased year by year, from 277 in the first year to 790 in the thirteenth year, reflecting that more and more Chinese authors are interested in the creation of picture books and that the influence of the award has been increasing.

### **3. Comparative Analysis of Picture Book Awards**

#### **3.1. Purpose of the Awards**

The purpose of an award is to show the creative direction it guides and the creative trends it encourages. As shown in Table 1, judging from the objectives of these five international picture book awards, they all aim at recognizing the creation of excellent picture books and at the same time stimulating the publication and development of picture books. Libraries in Europe and the United States have made great contributions to the promotion of children's reading, and librarians are the first group of people who pay attention to picture books, and the Caldecott Medal was founded by the American Library Association. The Caldecott Medal has a 15-member jury, eight of whom are elected by the full membership of the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) and seven of whom are specially appointed by the President of ALSC. The important role played by libraries is also emphasized in the purpose of the Kate Greenaway Medal, which is awarded by the Library and Information Association (CILIP) and supports librarians in their efforts to make the

world of reading a better place for children. It is clear that the promotion of libraries has been of indispensable significance in the development of picture books in Europe and the United States.

The Japan Picture Book Award has emphasized the importance of popularizing the art of picture books and picture book reading, and it not only recognizes outstanding local original picture books, but also outstanding picture books imported from abroad, reflecting its inclusiveness and self-confidence. The Chinese picture book awards are mainly set up to encourage original Chinese works, such as the Feng Zikai Children's Picture Book Award, which highlights the importance of original Chinese picture books, and encourages publishers to publish original children's picture books to promote the development of original Chinese picture books. The Hsin Yi Picture Book Award firstly affirms the importance of children's literature and reading, to let children find more recognition in original picture book works, at the same time, cultivates picture book creative talents, and improves the quality of picture book creation and appreciation.

Table 1: Purpose of judging the five major picture book awards.

Awards	Purpose of the Awards
Caldecott Medal	Recognizing the most outstanding American children's books published in the previous year
Kate Greenaway Medal (Carnegie Medal for Illustration)	Recognizes children's and teenagers' books that create an outstanding reading experience through writing or illustration. Support librarians who inspire and empower the next generation to create a better world through books and reading.
Japan Picture Book Award	Recognize outstanding picture books, popularize the art of picture books, promote the reading of picture books, and advance the development of picture book publishing.
Feng Zikai Children's Picture Book Award	Recognize writers and painters for creating quality Chinese language children's picture books; encourage publishers to publish original children's picture books; and promote public attention to original children's picture books and their reading.
Hsin Yi Picture Book Award	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Affirming the importance of children's literature and children's reading</li> <li>2. Promote the development of original picture books so that children can find more identity in their works.</li> <li>3. Reward the creation of picture books, cultivate talents in children's literature and children's picture books, and broaden the horizons of creators.</li> <li>4. Enhance the quality of creation and appreciation of picture books and children's literature, as well as the professional standards of practitioners</li> </ol>

### 3.2. Eligibility for entries

As shown in Table 2, all five of these picture book awards restrict the language in which entries can be made, requiring that all entries be in the native language of the country. The Caldecott Medal and the Kate Greenaway Medal both require the work to be in English and published in their own country, reflecting their protection of English-speaking cultural backgrounds. The Caldecott Medal has the most stringent requirements, which not only require the works to be published in the United States and in English, but also require the creator to be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident, which means that the creator has integrated into U.S. life, and has a deep understanding of U.S. culture, which makes it more convenient to create works in line with the U.S. cultural background. They have relatively broad age restrictions on the reading audience, including children and teenagers, so these two categories of award-winning books appear in a lot of profound works, such as *This Is Not My Hat*, *Zoo*, etc., easier for older children to read.

The other three prizes also require that the work be in the language of the country, but do not restrict the region of the creator. Among them, Japan's requirements are the most open. It does not require the first publication place of the participating picture books, as long as they were published

in Japan in the previous year, including translations and original local works. In addition, in terms of the age of the reading audience, the Asian Picture Book Award has a younger reading audience than those in Europe and the United States. The Japanese picture book award is mainly for children aged 0-6 years old, with 0 years old as the starting point, in line with the concept of picture books advocated by Japan, children can read picture books when they are born, and picture books are books read by adults to children<sup>[5]</sup>, and most of the excellent low children's picture books commonly seen on the market in China also come from Japan. The Feng Zikai Children's Picture Book Award and the Hsin Yi Picture Book Award require works to be original in Chinese, encourage local Chinese and overseas Chinese to use Chinese to create picture books, and apply to ages between those of Europe, America, and Japan, where children between the ages of 3-8 years old are in the stage of childhood, which is also the stage where they read the most picture books. Four of the five awards are for published picture books, except for the Hsin Yi Picture Book Award, which is for unpublished picture books, giving more young creators the opportunity to show their talent and publish their works.

Table 2: Eligibility of entries for the five major picture book awards

Awards	Eligibility for entries
Caldecott Medal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Medal is awarded annually to the artist of the most distinguished American picture book for children published by an American publisher in the United States in English during the preceding year. The award shall go to the artist, who must be a citizen or resident of the United States.</li> <li>2. A “picture book for children” is one for which children are an intended potential audience. The book displays respect for children’s understanding, abilities, and appreciation. Children are defined as persons of ages up to and including fourteen and picture books for this entire age range are to be considered.</li> </ol>
Kate Greenaway Medal (Carnegie Medal for Illustration)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Books first published in the UK or Ireland, or first published in another country must have been co-published in the UK or Ireland within three months of the original publication date.</li> <li>2. They must be written in the English language (either as an original work in English or a first English translation of a foreign-language work) and specifically published for children and young people.</li> </ol>
Japan Picture Book Award	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Entries are in the native language of the country.</li> <li>2. There is no restriction on the region of the creators.</li> <li>3. The entries are intended for children aged 0-6 years.</li> </ol>
Feng Zikai Children's Picture Book Award	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Entries must be original in Chinese and first published in Chinese, regardless of the creator's geographic location.</li> <li>2. There is no restriction on the theme or genre of the entries, except that the content and form of the entries must be suitable for children between the ages of 3 and 12 years old.</li> </ol>
Hsin Yi Picture Book Award	Entries should be suitable for children aged 3 to 8 years old, written in Chinese, the winning entry must not have been published in any media (including school publications, newspapers, and magazines, books, etc.) and can be publishable as a book in the future.

### 3.3. Evaluation Criteria

The five major picture book awards all pay great attention to the artistic expression of the pictures and the handling of the relationship between pictures and texts. As shown in Table 3, the two major awards in Europe and the United States pay particular attention to the artistic expression of the drawings. The Caldecott Medal emphasizes the recognition of works with outstanding

pictorial performance. The style of the illustration should be compatible with the theme of the story, and the drawings should have a strong narrative ability, which can depict the storyline, theme, characters, environment, emotions, and other information. The overall design of the book is also taken into consideration. It considers the focus on the artistry of the picture book rather than its educational significance. The Kate Greenaway Medal considers that the work should provide readers with a good visual experience, including the quality of the illustrations, the coordination of characters and scenes, the creativity of the illustration style, the performance of the visual narrative, and the conveyance of the mood of the colors, etc., all of which are within the scope of the judging. The Feng Zikai Children's Picture Books Award requires that the content of the work be conveyed correctly and with interest and creativity, and that the overall visual effect be aesthetically pleasing. Factors such as fonts, layout, printing, and binding are also taken into consideration, with particular emphasis on innovation and inspirational significance to the reader. The requirements for the Hsin Yi Picture Book Award are broader, with no specifications, and can be either an original work or a reinterpretation of original material such as a folktale.

Table 3: Criteria for the five major picture book awards

Awards	Evaluation Criteria
Caldecott Medal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Winning entries should have excellent artistic skills; the illustration style is appropriate to the theme and content of the story; and the drawings can depict the plot, theme, characters, setting, mood, and other information of the story.</li> <li>2. The book must be a self-contained entity that does not depend on other media (i.e., sound, movies, or computer programs) for its enjoyment.</li> <li>3. Each book is to be considered as a picture book. The committee is to make its decision primarily on the illustration, but other components of a book are to be considered especially when they make a book less effective as a children's picture book. Such other components might include the written text, the overall design of the book, etc.</li> <li>4. The award is intended to recognize outstanding illustrations and excellence in children's drawings in picture books and is not intended to be didactic or popular.</li> </ol>
Kate Greenaway Medal (Carnegie Medal for Illustration)	Consider the work as a whole in terms of visual experience, artistic style, visual presentation, synergy of illustration and text, and format. The entire piece should provide pleasure from a stimulating and satisfying visual experience that leaves a lasting impression.
Japan Picture Book Award	Focus on the artistry of the painting itself and how well the painting and the text fit together.
Feng Zikai Children's Picture Book Award	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The content and form are suitable for children readers aged 3 to 12 years old, are interesting and creative, and convey knowledge correctly. The illustrations of intellectual picture books must be correct and clear.</li> <li>2. Artistic skills are mature and the overall visual effect is aesthetically pleasing. The text and images can appropriately express and interpret themes, plots, concepts, characters, scenes, and atmospheres, etc., and there is a good relationship between text and pictures.</li> <li>3. In addition to pictures, the influence of other elements on the overall effect of the work is also taken into consideration, such as fonts, layout, printing, binding, and so on.</li> <li>4. Encouragement of innovation and inspirational significance to the reader.</li> </ol>
Hsin Yi Picture Book Award	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Picture Book Creation Award: The themes of the works can be freely chosen, including stories and knowledge works. Work specifications are not limited, they must be structurally complete and in line with the format of the picture book. They can be either original works or reinterpretations of existing materials, such as folk tales.</li> <li>2. Picture Book Text Creation Award: The genre of the work should be stories, fairy tales, fables, etc. applicable to the picture book format, except for children's songs.</li> </ol>

### 3.4. Panel of judges

An analysis of the professions, professional backgrounds, and research directions of the members of the judging committees of the major awards, as shown in Table 4, the judging of picture book awards in Europe, America, and Japan is organized with libraries as well as related associations as the core organization, are mostly librarians or individuals appointed by library associations, including picture book researchers and creators. This is due to the fact that Europe, America, and other developed countries have high requirements for librarians, who are required to have a librarianship and a children's pedagogy dual degree, and also take courses in children's literature, children's and teenagers' library services, etc., which are the authority and core force of children's reading and promotion<sup>[3]</sup>. The judging team of picture book researchers and creators integrated on this basis highlights the professionalism and openness of the award. Unlike other awards, the Japan Picture Book Award has specially set up the "Japan Picture Book Award Readers' Prize". This prize is selected by Japan's leading picture book recommendation website, Picture Book Navigator. The evaluation is based on the number of comments and book reviews received on the website, allowing readers to actively participate in the selection process. This unique approach further enhances the popularity of the Japan Picture Book Award.

In China, libraries have not yet developed to such a flourishing level that their promotional role is relatively weak. The judges of China's two major picture book awards are experts from fields related to children's studies. The Hsin Yi Picture Book Award, for example, was initiated by experts and scholars in the fields of preschool education, literature, fine arts, and reading research and promotion. Its judges also come mainly from these fields, including picture book creators, children's literature researchers and promoters, children's education, animation creation and education, and editors, who are concerned with the literary, artistic, and educational significance of picture book works, and the diversity of the judging identities reflects synergies and cooperation in multiple fields and enhances the authority of the award.

Table 4: Judges for the five major picture book awards

Awards	Panel of judges	Number of judges
Caldecott Medal	The Jury consists of 15 members, eight of whom are elected by the general membership of the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC). The remaining seven are specially appointed by the President of ALSC, including a Jury Chairperson.	15
Kate Greenaway Medal (Carnegie Medal for Illustration)	Most are librarians, and some have also worked as elementary school teachers.	12-13
Japan Picture Book Award	Writers, illustrators, picture book researchers, art critics, etc. appointed by the Picture Book Committee of the Japan School Library Association.	Unknown
Feng Zikai Children's Picture Book Award	Children's book translators and critics, early childhood education experts, editors, painters, picture book writers, reading specialists, librarians, etc.	7-11
Hsin Yi Picture Book Award	Preliminary selection: Picture book creation and teaching, children's education, animation scriptwriting, etc. Finalists: editors, picture book creation research and promotion, art education, animation teaching and creation, early reading and early childhood education research, children's literature research, etc.	3 in the primary, 5 in the final

## 4. The Picture Book Awards' Guidance and Inspiration for Picture Book Creation

### 4.1. Promoting the integration of world cultures based on national cultures

The major picture book awards set certain restrictions on the language of the work, the place of publication and the identity of the creator, which is conducive to promoting the spread of national culture, and the global translation of the winning picture books is also conducive to the exchange of various cultures in the world. Among the award-winning works of Feng Zikai Children's Picture Book Award, there are many works that promote traditional Chinese culture, for example, the first prize-winning work *A New Year's Reunion*, which is based on the background of the traditional Chinese Spring Festival, and combines simple words and simple painting style under the strong flavor of the Chinese New Year, showing a warm picture of a family loving and supporting each other while conveying Chinese culture and aesthetics. The book has been exported overseas, and its English version was hailed as the 2011 New York Times Best Children's Picture Book of the Year, exemplifying the best way to convey traditional Chinese culture and unique emotions through picture books.

Compared with other international picture book awards, Japan's awards are relatively more open in terms of cultural restrictions, and it has set up a translation award specifically for imported works, which also reflects Japan's inclusiveness towards foreign cultures, and demonstrates that they are confident in absorbing the essence of excellent foreign works, and innovating and inheriting them based on their own cultures.

### 4.2. Adhering to a child-centered creative direction

Children's nature is the soul of picture book works, creators need to stand in the children's perspective to think, to create works in line with children's cognition and feelings. For example, the American Caldecott Honor book *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!* tells its story in the form of children's favorite interactive games. From the beginning of the story, it draws the young readers into the book. Throughout the book, the pigeon pleads, coos, and negotiates with the reader, attempting to convince the "you" outside of the story to let it drive the bus. This conversational style allows children to experience a sense of empowerment and greatly enhances interactivity. There is a lot of white space in the picture, highlighting the image of the pigeon, and huge dialog bubbles are used to circle every word the pigeon says, as if "you" and the pigeon are really the only ones conversing in the story. This creative design, which makes children laugh, earned the book a Caldecott Honor upon its publication.

The five major picture book awards all set clear limits on the age of the reading audience of the works entered, and place the needs of children at the forefront. This approach emphasizes respect for children's levels of perception and cognition, and requires works that can engage and inspire children, allowing them to read for pleasure and education.

### 4.3. Focus on comprehensive artistic qualities to enhance aesthetic and imaginative skills

The picture book is a comprehensive art that integrates many fields such as literature, art, design and children's education, and the selection criteria of these picture book awards reflect this comprehensiveness. The judges not only focus on the interpretation of the story and artistic expression of the pictures, but also on the integration of pictures and text, and overall design. At the same time, the diverse team of judges, with professional backgrounds in many fields, ensures the professionalism and fairness of the selection process. Excellent picture book works can not only improve children's aesthetic ability, but also cultivate their imagination. Take the Japan Picture

Book Award-winning work *30,000 Watermelons Ran Away* as an example, the book cleverly uses the ring lining page to imply the storyline, and the picture of the weirdly shaped animals, each of which is oval in shape and has a stripe of ripples on its body, only to realize that this is precisely another kind of watermelon's transformation after reading the back story. The whole story is also a bold imagination based on reality, the watermelon escaped and surged onto the road into a watermelon river, rolled down the hill and fell into a big pool of watermelon juice, turned into a super big mouth almost to eat the little animals which steal the watermelon juice to drink; and finally turned into a red sun with black seeds hanging in the sky. The author's elaborate details plus wild imagination make this book even more vivid and interesting.

#### 4.4. Creating a better future with children's books and exploring the meaning of reading

Reading plays an important role in shaping the future of children. Children's books are more than just educational tools; they are an important medium for stimulating imagination and developing emotional intelligence and values. They convey wisdom and ideas that guide the next generation to become caring, creative members of society. The power of picture books lies in their ability to enlighten, stimulate and expand children's minds, constantly opening up new horizons and perceptions.

Through the selection objectives of the Picture Book Awards, we can see their determination to promote the reading of picture books. Through the establishment of the major awards, they have promoted the production of outstanding works and provided more rich and interesting choices for children's reading. These awards help the bright future of children's reading. Each book is a window to an unknown world, opening a marvelous door for children. They are not only carriers of stories, but also channels for enlightening thoughts and transmitting values. These excellent picture book works are not only a combination of pictures and words, but also a source of cultivating children's emotional intelligence, creativity and imagination. Therefore, the existence of the Picture Book Awards is not only a recognition of creators, but also a promotion of reading and transmission of values.

### 5. Conclusions

The establishment of picture book awards is an important means for countries to promote the development of picture books and children's reading in their countries. They promote the diversity and quality of picture book creation, and not only provide a platform for creators to showcase their works, but also encourage them to continuously explore and innovate, and stimulate creative inspiration. They also provide guidelines and references for creators to polish and pursue quality improvement. The selected outstanding picture book works provide more wonderful and interesting reading choices for children and stimulate their interest in reading. These excellent works are not only attractive in terms of storytelling and artistry, but also convey wisdom, emotions and values in a subtle way, which has a positive impact on children's growth.

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