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Han Zhang

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REPRESENTATIONS OF CHINESE CULTURE AND HISTORY IN PICTURE BOOKS OF  
THE WESTERVILLE PUBLIC LIBRARY: EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND ACCURACY  
OF CHILDREN LITERATURE ABOUT CHINA AND CHINESE CULTURE

Capstone Project

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the  
Degree Master of Arts in Education

By

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Otterbein University

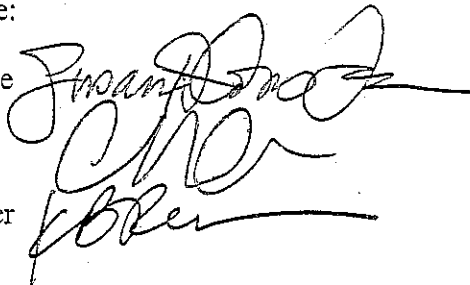
2011

Reading Committee:

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Capstone Advisor

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By

Han Zhang

2011

To My Parents

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## ABSTRACT

NAME: Zhang, Han

QUARTER/YEAR: Spring/2011

DEGREE: Master of Arts in Education

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TITLE OF CAPSTONE PROJECT: Representations of Chinese culture and history in picture books of the Westerville Public Library: educational quality and accuracy of children literature about China and Chinese culture.

In order to learn about the educational quality and accuracy of most children's picture literature accessible to readers of Westerville area, which aim to illustrate and introduce the content of Chinese culture and history, the author of this paper examines whether children's picture books in the Westerville Public Library serve American readers as authentic and accurate representations of Chinese culture and its history. Based on the ardent debates of former researcher, the author discusses frequent mistakes existing in most picture books. Later, the author collects data and uses estimation and hypothesis testing to prove the error rate of the whole pictures population and the hypothesis of comparing quality of books of past and present.

REPRESENTATIONS OF CHINESE CULTURE AND HISTORY IN PICTURE  
BOOKS OF THE WESTERVILLE PUBLIC LIBRARY: EDUCATIONAL QUALITY  
AND ACCURACY OF CHILDREN LITERATURE ABOUT CHINA AND CHINESE  
CULTURE

**Introduction/ Rationale**

My topic for this project originally came from a survey my friend and I did for the final presentation in a multicultural literacy class at Otterbein. We asked for some book titles from our classmates who are elementary social studies teachers that they mostly used at school when they were preparing to teach young students about China, and Chinese culture and history. Most of the book titles they gave us were picture books that were accessible within their classroom or public libraries around their school districts; teachers shared the titles without hesitation (See Appendix A). However, as we looked through these books, we were greatly surprised by the erroneousness and insensitivity of these books: most of these books mixed information about other Asian countries with China (See Appendix B).

This class experience compelled me to look more closely at the accuracy of picture books introducing China and Chinese culture to American children and the authenticity of contents of the most popular picture books read by young Americans as a means to learn about China. I became curious about what (if any) kinds of mistakes were showing up in picture books read by American children, so I decided to investigate picture books about China that are widely read in Westerville to examine the extent of their accuracy and cultural sensitivity.

Educators are widely agreed that multicultural children's literature plays an important part in developing children's awareness of other cultures and countries

(Bishop, 1991; Camarata, 1991; Liu, 1993; McElmeel, 1993). These books often serve to bring young learners at the preschool and elementary levels their very first impressions of foreign people and their lives in different countries, for instance, China (Liu, 1993). In addition, attractive stories, proper texts and colorful pictures help to build up mental images of people from diverse cultures, giving children's literature a wide and powerful influence on children's cultural understandings and belief systems.

It is reported that more than 5,000 titles of juvenile literature are published every year in America (Chen, 2009). Given the influences these books have on children, a central concern among researchers of youth literature is how many of these books are provide accurate, authentic, and complete representations of these cultures so that young students reading these books can correctly understand the cultures and countries they are attempting to represent (Chen). As a Chinese graduate student studying in America, I am particularly interested in the representation of China and Chinese culture in children's books.

The purpose of my research study was to investigate whether young children in Westerville are reading picture books about China that contain authentic and accurate information. I examined picture books on China to determine the extent to which they accurately represented my country and its people.

## **Literature Review**

The term *melting pot*, a metaphorical alias for America, indicates that its society is enriched by diverse people groups of different ethnic backgrounds, traditions, social classes, languages, and skin colors (Camarata, 1991; Banks et al, 2001). In such a multicultural society, parents, teachers, school policy makers, and everyone in society are

working collectively to implement equity pedagogy, defined by Banks and Banks (2004) as “to help all students acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to function effectively in a pluralistic democratic society and to interact, negotiate, and communicate with people from diverse groups to create a civic and moral community that works for common good” (p. xi).

Banks et al. (2001) have pointed out that one of the essential goals and principles of education is to include students of diverse ethnic backgrounds, so that they are provided with education that is responsive to their ethnic identity and provided equal learning opportunities for academic success. These theorists have also argued that multicultural education is a necessary and indispensable ingredient of quality education; that all students must be taught the value of other ethnic groups, proper understanding of differences between people and attitudes that counter stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination (Banks & Banks, 2004).

The importance of multicultural education is echoed by Geneva Gay (2003). Gay agrees with Banks that instructional practice and programs should respond positively and constructively to diversity; additionally, she specifically emphasizes that multicultural education must be systematically and comprehensively integrated into all subjects (e.g., math, reading, writing, and science), and not taught separately from the curriculum. “Multicultural education is much more than a few lessons about ethnically diverse individuals and events or a component that operates on the periphery of the education enterprise” (Gay, 2003, p. 33).

As an important component of multicultural education, multicultural literature is utilized by teachers as an approach to realize the goal of multicultural education with its

widespread use. According to Bishop (1990), multicultural literature plays an irreplaceable role in “reflecting children readers with transformed human experience, like a mirror... offering views of the world in which children are living, like a window...and making them walk through sliding glass doors to the world created by authors” (p. ix). Many theorists agree that multicultural literature benefits both children of diverse cultures and Caucasian children, in that children of ethnic groups can find images speaking for them and children of the dominant group can better understand the natural reality of the society around them (Bishop, 1990; Smith, 1993; Lee, 1995; Camarata, 1997). Moreover, multicultural literature serves the important purpose of teaching children of today to tolerate difference; understand unfamiliar history, tradition, arts, cultures and contributions of other groups; learn about their ancestry; promote cross-cultural understanding among people and to prevent them from committing stereotypical judgment about others from different backgrounds (McElmeel, 1993; Sims Bishop, 1990; Smith, 1993; Chance, 1995; Farris, 1995; Knowles & Smith, 1997; Banks, 2001; Harris, 2007 ). As Knowles and Smith (1997) concluded:

Multicultural literature first appeared during the late 1970s, and the genre has been increasing in popularity since then. This has helped teachers who see increasing cultural diversity in the classroom. These books break through old, hackneyed assumptions regarding people from different cultures and help students to better understand the struggles, feelings, and emotions of other ethnic groups. (p. 36)

Based on its positive effects, educators are widely using multicultural children’s literature in their daily teaching to develop students’ awareness of other cultures and

countries. There has been extensive progress in the field of multicultural literature since the 1970s: an increasing number of books about multicultural groups for children published each year (Bishop, 1990), a wider range of topics appearing in children's books depicting diverse ethnic groups, more non-white authors and illustrators writing these books, and improved image representation of children of diverse cultures (Harris, 2007; Horning, 2008; Smith, 1993). Furthermore, most of the central characters from multicultural backgrounds are more positive rather than negative (Harris, 2007; Horning, 2008).

Even though the fact of multiculturalism is outstandingly obvious in American society, and the representation and support of multiple cultures in children's literature has clearly improved, "the full acknowledgement and implications of this fact" (Smith, 1993) are still far from satisfactory and truthful. Minority group and non-white cultures, such as African-Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and Native Americans are still ignored and misrepresented, despite the fact that these groups have contributed historically and presently to American culture as a whole (Yee, 1973).

There are many researchers keeping watchful eyes on the existing multicultural literature for children, including books about China, Chinese people, and its history and culture. Most researchers have cited the influential impact and excellent work of the Council on Interracial Books for Children in revealing and investigating the issues of racism, sexism and elitism in nearly 64 out of 66 picture books published within 1945 to 1975 (Smith, 1993; Mo & Shen, 1997; Horning, 2008).

While, more recent, images and representations in these books have improved based on criteria such as whether they reflect the real lives of people, whether images are



stereotypical, whether they amend historical distortions and misunderstandings, whether they reflect the improving status of women, whether they measure success with the same American dream standard, or whether they cover accurate artistic forms of cultural background, critics have delineated more current and stringent criteria that books have not yet lived up to. These recent critics have argued that their own criteria of criticism continue to uncover inauthentic representations about countries and their cultures. In reference to books about China, Dorothea Scott warned as early as 1974 that “some of these stories read simply as interesting stories and not consciously in order to find out about China, will have made some impression on the imagination of readers almost without their realizing it” (p.1183).

In the next section, I summarize the findings of multicultural literature critics, specifically those looking at books about China, and their perspectives around the following four categories: authenticity, Western adaptation vs. original Eastern edition, insiders vs. outsiders, and imaginary vs. realistic.

### ➤ *Authenticity*

The biggest mistake committed by most China-related picture books and pointed out by most researchers is that most picture books suffer from a lack of authenticity. As a basic and central question of what is cultural authenticity, Weimin Mo and Weiju Shen (1997) question whether it is true that “authenticity equals non-stereotyped portrayals, positive images, lack of derogatory language, accurate historical information and cultural details, and realistic illustration all put together?” (p. 86) They do not agree, for example, that a photograph of a cultural setting or even a confirmation by members of a cultural

group, make a book authentic. They also point out that the nature of authenticity is not necessarily related to stereotypes or accuracy; instead, cultural authenticity refers to proper interpretations accepted or authorized within a range of different or even opposite values of its people, since members within these cultural groups could have very different beliefs about the same issue.

Even though many picture books about China and Chinese correctly introduce cultural beliefs and values which truly existed in China's history and were accepted by many cultural groups in China, most of them still commit many non-authentic reflections summarized as confused with other Asian cultures, contain a disproportionately high ratio of folktales, miss important parts of Chinese history, and wrongly adapted (Cai, 1994; Chen, 2009; Mo & Shen, 1997; Chang, 2002).

For example, some scholars (Chen, 2009; Liu, 1993) found that among juvenile books about Chinese people and culture existed several serious problems impairing the authenticity of the literature: confusion of Chinese culture with other Asian cultures; a large proportion of settings in ancient China; and incomplete expression of China's contemporary history and situation.

Furthermore, these scholars found literature focused on certain periods in Chinese history to be lacking. Chen (2009) reviewed the historical and political reasons for limited publications of literature about the Chinese, and found that the Chinese perspective of the history of World War II, an extremely important and far-reaching historical event in China, the Sino-Japanese War was all but forgotten in children's books. Chen concluded:

Unsurprisingly, the history of World War II, with its profound impact on all parts of the world, can render the cohesive power of a common ancestral experience the young Chinese Americans in our schools need to claim as theirs. But they will not find it in school learning which focuses on World War II history in Europe and neglects to investigate how or if the vast Asian populations have been affected by the war; they will miss it in popular culture and youth literature which tells stories about the courage, conspiracy, loss, and trauma of White people in this war and occasionally about the pain of survivors of the atomic bombs. (p. 8)

➤ ***Western Adaptation vs. Original Eastern Edition***

In addition to the drawback of inauthenticity, one reason that these picture books may be inaccurate is that a large number of them are originally published in Asia and are then modified for Western audiences. Margret Chang (2002) realizes that European writers and illustrators have for centuries created their own editions of China's stories, and that these stories still exist in the current books that young Americans are reading on China, its people, its history and arts. These Western-created versions claim themselves as authentic Chinese stories without referencing the original story.

Also, these books suffer from "*Chinoiserie*" (Chang, 2002, p. 711), a fancy way to depict reality with the wildest imagination by simply adding a little Chinese flavor to its story. With an overtone of western cultural superiority, these books often describe Chinese culture as "exotic, barbaric, inscrutable, glamorous, splendid, cruel, grotesque, and sometimes incomprehensibly silly" (Chang, 2002, p. 711). For example, the cultural

practice of foot binding, practiced on a small segment of the population during several dynasties in Chinese history, is frequently represented as a common cultural practice in China. Chang suggests that authentic Chinese versions of the practice should be presented, however, only in accurate historical and cultural contexts and as a way for readers today to understand the past.

The major reason for the *Chinoiserie* phenomenon is summarized as an illogical overgeneralization of Eastern cultural reality simply from Western perspectives or presumptions, or called by Mo and Shen “the process of cultural filtering” (1997, p. 90), or presenting a Chinese story in a Western lens (Yee, 1973; Scott, 1974; Mo & Shen, 1997; Chang, 2002 ; Lee, 1995). For example, in many Western-published picture books, the image of men with their hair braided into pigtails represents Chinese men of any period of time, even though the braided pigtails as men’s hair style only existed during the Qing Dynasty (Chang, 2002).

### ➤ *Insiders vs. Outsiders*

When comparing original and adapted versions of Chinese picture books, another issue brought to the front is about authorship of these multicultural children’s books. Whether the backgrounds of the author and illustrator should have connections with Chinese culture is a significant point of discussion among multicultural literary critics. Impassioned discussions continue about who should be authorized to be the authors and illustrators of multicultural children’s books. Some (e.g., CIBC, 1974; Harris, 2007) advocate that most insiders of the culture described have the right to accurately write stories about their culture. Seto (1995) echoes Margret’s idea that “it is morally wrong for

authors to write about multiculturalism without real experience or knowledge of that culture” (p. 169). According to Seto, “cultural theft” of this kind is responsible for the misrepresentations of other cultures in children’s literature. She discusses some unexpected but seriously harmful consequences from caricatures of Asians in literature, such as the Los Angeles riots in 1992. In Seto’s view, there is no point for people who do not share the same culture to “define us, to re-write our histories, our cultures, our religions, even our languages” (Seto, 1995, p. 172).

In contrast, some others (Smith, 1993; Harris, 1999) advocate that outsiders of the culture could still be the neutral creators of the multicultural stories as long as their information is correct, properly researched, authentic, and genuine. An advisable solution is offered: rather than publishing Chinese-originated books through Western publishers, seek qualified translators to translate the books from the original language for American children without changing the contexts and illustrations within; and if outsider writers are to write books about China, they should at least have real personal experience with the culture (Lee, 1995; Seto, 1995; Chang, 2002).

➤ *Realistic vs. Imaginary*

Discussion of the genre of children’s books about China often leads to the recommendation that folktales are an appropriate path to convey cultural topics (Bishop, 1990; Camarata, 1997). Camarata writes:

Folktales have long been a popular way to introduce other cultures to our children. The stories are short, accessible, and entertaining, running the gamut of human emotion and experience. Common threads often run

through stories from different countries, with each culture adapting or embellishing, and then incorporating its unique idiosyncrasies into the tale. A wide range of folktale collections are available, as well as many single stories that are published in picture-book format. There is a wealth of material to draw from in this genre, and new retellings appear all the time. (p. 38)

While some support the wide use of folktales to convey Chinese culture, others point out that there is too much imaginary fiction, especially folktales, used by authors and illustrators to express Chinese culture (Chen, 2009; Cai, 1994; Lee, 1995). These critics argue that folktales, as an imaginary genre, are too illusory and remote to tell the real story of people of nowadays (Hearne, 1993). Moreover, Hearne emphasizes that folktales are unique products originated from the culture, and that any adaptation or even translation may hurt its deep root of origin (Hearn, 1993).

Thus, regarding the question of how to use folklore as a genre to represent country and culture through picture books, Hearn (1993) has suggested: "Folktales are not born and nourished in isolation; they grow from social experience and cultural tradition. ... Authors and illustrators must balance two traditions when bring folktales from one world into another" (p. 33). The same advice is later given by Cai (1994) and Camarata (1997) that the setting, era background, time and place of the folktales should be clarified and emphasized to students with caution.

To summarize, furious discussions about the quality of multicultural children's literature have conducted between different researchers for more than fifty years. Their opinions have been focused on the fields of authenticity of the content, originality of the

story, author with authority to create qualified books, and the appropriate genre of multicultural children's books. Thus, I was provided with a framework by these researchers to explore the answer to my research question of the quality of picture books of China-related topics. In the following part, I will talk about how I collected my data and its findings.

## **Data Collection & Data Findings**

### **Data Collection**

I chose Westerville Public Library as my research target because it is the only public library in Westerville. The Westerville Public Library provides information, materials and services to assist and fulfill educational needs of residents of all ages in Franklin and Delaware counties of Columbus, Ohio. According to its annual report of 2010, the Westerville Public Library was again selected as one of the best in the country, ranking 8<sup>th</sup> in its population category. Also it was named one of only 85 Star Libraries in the nation, placing it in the top 1% of the 7,401 rated public libraries (Westerville Public Library, n.d.). Its strong reputation as a quality library makes it an interesting and appropriate context for my research.

According to the system librarian at Westerville Public, their collections contain 109 picture books about China, Chinese, Chinese Americans, Chinese culture, Chinatown, Chinese festivals, history, and other relevant topics. Additionally, there is another collection of books and stories about folklore that includes 47 titles of Chinese folktales (personal communication, April 20, 2011). The 156 total books have publication dates ranging from 1933 to 2011.

Among this total of 156 books, there are various artistic painting styles: oil painting, traditional elaborate-style painting, cartoon, paper-cut painting, ink and wash painting, and crayon drawing. The collection includes stories happening in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, United States, and England. There is also lots of variety in the contents: traditional Chinese story retellings for Western readers, China as the setting for stories, stories of early Chinese immigration, lives of Chinese or Chinese Americans, Chinese New Year and other festival celebrations. These books are written and illustrated by Chinese and non-Chinese who are interested in telling different Chinese stories to American children.

I asked for the statistics about how many times these books have been checked out by people around Westerville. These statistics are collected based on the titles but not the individual copies, and are cumulative from the time of acquisition of each title until April 20, 2011. I choose the top 10 most frequently checked out books from the 156 picture books about China and Chinese as my study sample to investigate in detail. I eliminated the book *Magic Carpet* (1991) because it is not primarily about China, but a story that only begins in China; thus I examined nine books. Table one provides an overview of the titles of the 10 most frequently checked out books.

Table 1 Top 10 Most Frequently Checked out Books and Total Pictures

	Titles	Pictures	Years	Times
1	<i>Learn about Shapes</i> , published by World Book, Inc.	16	1995	158
2	<i>The Five Chinese Brothers</i> , by Claire Huchet Bishop and Kurt Wiese	23	1938	156
3	<i>The Magic Boat</i> , by Demi	30	1990	136
4	<i>The Story about Ping</i> , by Marjorie Flack and Kurt Wiese	23	1933	122
5	<i>Silk Peony, Parade Dragon</i> , by Elizabeth Steckman ; illustrated by Carol Inouye	14	1997	112
6	<i>The Paper Dragon</i> , by Marguerite W. Davol; illustrated by Robert Sabuda	15	1997	111



7	<i>A Drop of Rain</i> , by Wong Herbert Yee	20	1995	109
8	<i>Magic Carpet</i> , by Pat Brisson ; illustrated by Amy Schwartz	17	1991	105
9	<i>The Chinese Siamese Cat</i> by Amy Tan ; illustrated by Gretchen Schields	16	1994	104
10	<i>Our home is the sea</i> by Riki Levinson ; illustrated by Dennis Luzak	15	1988	98
Total Pictures		172		

Table 1 (continued)

### Data Findings

I read each book one by one, taking note of misrepresentations and inaccuracies as I read. I then reread each book across a two-week period, adding to my observations as I read. Later, I continued to affirm the reason of these mistakes. Once I felt confident that I had identified all misrepresentations and inaccuracies that I could, I shared my findings with a Chinese graduate student peer and a Chinese professor. I solicited feedback from the two of them, requesting verification of or challenges to my observations. The two of them agreed with each one of my observations, articulating in some cases, more specifically what was involved with the misrepresentations.

After analyzing the collected books, I categorized identified inaccuracies and misrepresentations into four themes: Settings of Stories, characters, language, and object representation. I organized the mistakes found in these sampled books in these four fields and I describe them in the next section.

#### ❖ Settings of Stories

First of all, anachronism happens frequently in these picture books. Anachronism refers to the situations in which people with different features from different time periods are represented together at the same time. Many stories set their background settings

merely in Qing Dynasty (Figure 1). For example, there are 4 out of 9 books *The Five Chinese Brothers* (Bishop, 1938); *The Story about Ping* (Flack, 1933); *The Paper Dragon* (Davol, 1997); & *The Chinese Siamese Cat* (Tan, 1994) showed images of Chinese people living in the Qing Dynasty but crossing many Chinese contexts. As a matter of fact, there are about 23 major dynasties in China's history. The Qing Dynasty is the last



Figure 1

feudalistic Dynasty in China's history, lasting only 268 years (1644-1911). Images of Chinese in the Qing Dynasty poorly represent Chinese people in different historic

settings.

Furthermore, none of the nine books examined gave the specific background information about when and where the story happened, and many mention the setting with vague time references like "a long time ago." Not only are the time periods vague, but many are embroidered with details unfitting of *any* Chinese time period. For example, in *Silk Peony, Parade Dragon* (Steckman, 1997), there is a picture of the money that a Mandarin man finally gave to Mrs. Ming, the owner of the dragon farm (figure 2). A closer observation reveals that the Chinese characters on the coins are "Cheng Tai Tong Bao (成泰通寶)" (Steckman, 1997, p. 24), which is the money circulated during 1889-1906 in Vietnam, not in China at all.

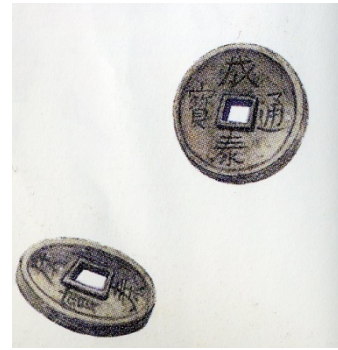


Figure 2

Another example is the illustrations in *Our home is the Sea* (Levinson, 1988) showing the street view of Hong Kong with a tram on the street and clothes hanging to



Figure 3

dry out of the windows of all the buildings (Figure 3).

If the story is intended to take place in a specific time period, young American readers would be hard pressed to know what Hong

Kong has ever looked like

(let alone what it looks like today). Although there is nothing wrong with the picture, it is necessary for the authors to set the stories at detailed and specific time periods or locations to make the stories more realistic and accurate so that young readers can understand that there is a difference between China's past and present. Just as Camarata (1991) says:

As with writers of fiction and nonfiction, authors who are successful in the picture-book format often draw on personal experience or contacts with individuals from other cultures. In these books setting is important, and is

depicted not only through the text, but in the illustrations, which are an integral part of the story. (p. 39)

### ❖ Characters

Both the texts and illustrations of characters within these stories also display different kinds of mistakes or stereotypes toward Chinese people. For example, four books of these nine show images of Chinese characters with exaggerated slanted eyes. For example in *A Drop of Rain* (Yee, 1995), every Chinese person has identical slanted eyes without any distinction (Figure 4). The same type of representation is found in *The Story about Ping* (Flack, 1933); *The Five Chinese Brothers* (Bishop, 1938); and *The Magic Boat* (Demi, 1990). Even the Chinese characters from the Qing Dynasty all have slanted eyes which are unrealistic.

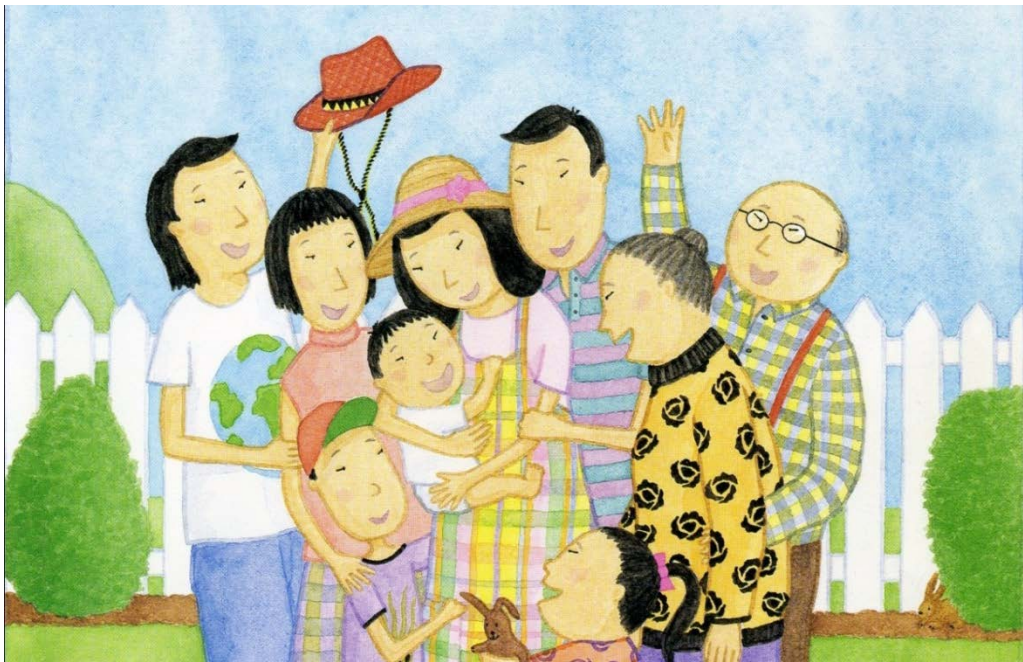


Figure 4



In addition to over generalizing physical characteristics of Chinese people, authors also ascribe general character traits to the Chinese. In *Silk Peony, Parade Dragon* (Steckman, 1997), the author projects to young readers a one-sided image of Chinese people. On page 15, the text reads, “but because Chinese people love to bargain, there is never a fixed price” (Steckman, 1997, p. 15). I don’t know how the author comes to the conclusion that Chinese people love to bargain, but clearly, the conclusion is a stereotype.

Furthermore, within these picture books, it is very confusing to separate the realistic images of Chinese people from the artificial ones. In *The Chinese Siamese Cat* (Tan, 1994), the children shown in this book are the traditional child images of Chinese New Year paintings rather than children in reality (Figure 5). While these images may be appropriate in a story of Chinese New Year, *The Chinese Siamese Cat* neither takes places nor refers to anything related to Chinese New Year.



Figure 5

Another common feature of Chinese people in these sampled books is their magical powers. There are three books: *The Five Chinese Brothers* (Bishop, 1938); *The Magic Boat* (Demi, 1990) and *Silk Peony, Parade Dragon* (Steckman, 1997) that

emphasize the mysterious super power of Chinese people or material. For example, five Chinese brothers in an ordinary family include one who can swallow the sea, one with an iron neck, one who is soft enough to stretch his legs to as far as sea, one who cannot be burned, and one who can hold his breath forever (Bishop, 1938). The boat in *The Magic Boat* (Demi, 1990) can change its size to normal size as a real boat or to a tiny size like a toy. And whole story of *Silk Peony, Parade Dragon* (Steckman, 1997) is based on magic powers of the dragon named Silk Peony. In these books, common Chinese people have been represented by authors as owning certain mysterious and powerful abilities, which is definitely sending wrong information to young American readers.

Finally, Chinese dragons, both with correct and incorrect images are frequent characters in picture books about China. Five out of nine books: *Silk Peony, Parade Dragon* (Steckman, 1997) and *The Paper Dragon* (Davol, 1997) are centered on dragon characters, and another two-- *Learn about Shapes* (World Book, 1995) and *The Chinese Siamese Cat* (Tan, 1994) -- contain dragon images. Some of these dragon depictions are accurate and appropriate, while others are wrongly drawn and misplaced within the context. For example, in *The Chinese Siamese Cat* (Tan, 1994), the illustration of a dragon is right, although the text describes it as a lizard. The difference between a Western dragon and a Chinese dragon is that the former has two wings and the latter does not (Figure 6).



Figure 6

The dragon in Chinese culture is an imaginary spirit beast but never a kind of real animal that people could keep as a pet. Yet, In *Silk Peony, Parade Dragon* (Steckman, 1997), the author describes a lady managing a farm of seven dragons, which could be rented by people for the Chinese New Year parade. The dragon is never alive in Chinese's daily life, but is always seen in other artistic formats instead, such as painting, mural, and work of arts. The dragon is the totem for Chinese people for thousands of years. It is the symbol of harmony and auspiciousness in Chinese culture, which is different from the Western monster dragon image.

#### ❖ Language

It is impossible to tell a Chinese story without using Chinese characters since characters often represent ideas that are not directly translatable into English. Yet while characters may be used in English versions of Chinese picture books, they are sometimes used inaccurately. For example, *the Magic Boat* (Demi, 1990) is a story about an honest and kind-hearted boy and his magic boat. The magic boat, the young boy's reward for his kind deed of helping an old man, was stolen by a mean person named Ying. The story explains, "in Chinese, 'Ying' means 'tricky'" (Demi, 1990, p.10). In fact, the word for

“tricky” in Chinese would be “Yin” and not “Ying.” Furthermore, like many Chinese characters, “Yin” has multiple meanings— each is pronounced the same way, but there is a different character for each meaning. So it is not proper to say that Yin (let alone Ying) means tricky in Chinese. Also, many female and male Chinese people’s given names are Yin, or Ying, so it is so improper to give American children the inaccurate impression that Yin means tricky.

Another language error is found in *The Chinese Siamese Cat* (Tan, 1994). The author states that the little cat Sagwa put “a big, fat exclamation point” (Tan, 1994, p. 14) on the paper, erroneously giving the impression that the ancient Chinese used modern American punctuation. However, traditional Chinese writing has never used the exclamation point or even any



Figure 7

punctuation.

### ❖ Object Representation

In the same book (*The Chinese Siamese Cat*), the illustrator shows a pot full of ink situated in a traditional Chinese study room (Figure 7). However, the “ink pot” does not exist in China. Chinese ink comes in the form of a solid ink stick which, when ground



on an ink stone and mixed with water, creates ink for writing. There would be a pot full of water to be used to clear the brush pen, but never an ink pot.

In another example of misplaced objects, in *Our Home is the Sea* (Levinson, 1988), the hero in the story sees a peacock in the public park of Hong Kong. In fact, the peacock is not an animal native to China. It is less possible to see a peacock at Hong Kong anytime except at the zoo. Another mistake is that an illustration is in contrast to its text. The illustrator depicts two men in squatting when the author writes “The men sit down to talk” (Levinson, 1988).

There are still other miscellaneous flaws both in content and illustrations within these nine books. In *The Story about Ping* (Flack, 1938), page 11, the author explains that there are all kinds of boats on the Yangtze River, then refers specifically to “...fishing boats and beggars’ boats” (p.11). It does not make any sense that beggars would have boats, since the cost of begging for them would be too high. If they were, in fact, in a boat, why were they not fishing for food rather than begging for it? Later, the author goes on saying that “A little boy with a barrel on his back which was tied to a rope from the boat just as all boat boys on the Yangtze River are tied to their boats” (Flack, 1938, p. 17). I don’t know if this was true or not during the time takes place this story is happening, but I am pretty sure that this does not exist on the Yangtze River right now! This book does not provide a suitable representation of a fisherman’s life on Yangtze River.

### **Findings of Statistical Analysis**

With the collected data of the nine samples, I wondered how the sample data would project onto the total collection of picture books on China-related topics. While

the four themes I discussed above describe various trends of misrepresentation that these nine books demonstrate, there were several other idiosyncratic inaccuracies that must be brought to readers' attention.

For the quantitative analysis, I tallied the number of mistakes in both illustrations and in the text connected to the illustration. If the same mistake showed up more than once, I counted it each time it appeared. For example, the ink pot is not used in China and the exclamation point is not a Chinese character. These are blatant departures from reality. On the other hand, setting multiple stories in the Qing Dynasty, while not representative of current China, is not a mistake; rather it is an example of *Chinoiserie*, which holds some truth and accuracy but is perhaps overblown or overrepresented, so that I did not consider it as mistake.

There were a total of 172 pictures across the nine books and there were no pages where there was text without a picture. In all, I counted 34 mistakes either in text or illustration across the 172 pictures. Thus the error rate is  $34/172=19.77\%$  (Table 2).

Titles	Brief Reasons of Mistakes	No.
<i>A Drop of Rain</i>	N/A	0
<i>The Five Chinese Brothers</i>	N/A	0
<i>Learn about Shapes</i>	The Great Wall	1
<i>The Magic Boat</i>	Chinese name, identical look of Chinese	2
<i>Our home is the sea</i>	Peacock, two men squatting	2
<i>The Paper Dragon</i>	Images of dragon with wings	2
<i>The Story about Ping</i>	Boat boy, beggars' boats	5
<i>Silk Peony, Parade Dragon</i>	Dragon as pets, the money, & love to bargain, etc	7
<i>The Chinese Siamese Cat</i>	Ink pot, dragon as a lizard, exclamation point, etc	15
		Total: 34

Table 2 Problematic Pictures Summary in Sample

In order to know what the error rate of the all pictures in 156 books (population) is, I sampled 9 books, including 172 pictures, in which 34 mistakes were found, therefore

the sample error rate is  $\hat{p} = \frac{x}{n} = \frac{34}{172} \approx 0.197674$ . And the standard error is

$$s_{\hat{p}} = \sqrt{\frac{\hat{p} \cdot (1 - \hat{p})}{n}} = \sqrt{\frac{(0.197674)(0.802326)}{172}} \approx 0.030366$$

Then I use 95% confidence interval to estimate the error rate of the whole population with the sample error rate 19.7674%. The math formula I am using is:

$$95\% \text{ confidence interval of } p \text{ is } (\hat{p} - z_{0.025} \cdot s_{\hat{p}}, \hat{p} + z_{0.025} \cdot s_{\hat{p}}) = (0.1382, 0.2572)$$

We are 95% confident that the error rate of the whole population 156 books  $p$  is between 13.82% and 25.72%. Potentially, there could be 766 errors in illustrations in the children's Chinese picture book collection at the Westerville Library.

Another question I am wondering is that whether books published recently are better than those published in the past both in quality and quantity. In other words, if I assume that the current books made any progress, compared with the counterparts of the past, how can I prove it? In order to test this hypothesis, I divided 9 sampled books into two groups by the date they published. Group One includes *The Five Chinese Brothers* (Bishop, 1938) and *The Story about Ping* (Flack, 1933), which were published in the 1930s. Group Two involves the rest of seven books, which were published in 1980s to 1990s.

In the first group, 5 mistakes are found within 46 pieces of pictures, so the error rate of group one is 5/46, which is about 0.11; 29 errors are found in group two, make its error rate 29/126, which is close to 0.23. Thus, from these two error rate, it seems that the

error rate of group one is smaller than that of group two, making it the alternative hypothesis. To test this hypothesis, MINITAB is run, and the following is the result:

Table 3 Result of Output of MINITAB—Test of Hypothesis

<b>Test and CI for Two Proportions</b>			
Sample	X	N	Sample p
1	5	46	0.108696
2	29	126	0.230159
Difference = p (1) - p (2)			
Estimate for difference: -0.121463			
95% upper bound for difference: -0.0239808			
Test for difference = 0 (vs < 0): Z = -2.05 P-Value = 0.020			

The p-value, 0.02, is much smaller than 0.05, meaning we are able to reject the null hypothesis. There is strong evidence, then, that the alternative hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, the final result is that the error rate of the books published in the past is smaller than that of books of more present. Books published more currently have more mistakes in pictures than those of the past.

## Conclusion

My quantitative data indicate that there is between 13.82% and 25.72% error rate in pictures of the whole 156 books, if in 95% confidence interval. Larger than 13.82% and up to 25.72% is a large error rate. Also, through the testing of the hypothesis, it is surprising that authors and illustrators of modern picture books in China related topics have made more mistakes than those of the same theme yet further back in history. Besides, my study revealed that picture books produced about China today not only have not made any progress, but they have actually regressed from 1930s. My statistical

analysis also reveals that there are many books written by authors and illustrators of non-Chinese descent, with main topic about Chinese tradition folklore or legend.

Currently, children living in the Westerville area are more likely to read and gain wrong information about China, Chinese and its culture. Books published between 1980s and 1990s tend to have more problems in their content and illustrations compared to those published more than fifty years ago. This is an interesting result I gained from statistical analysis, but my research question has been answered: it is less possible for children around Westerville area to get access to books without any flaws that to read a book about China or Chinese people that contains significant flaws. And my desponding estimation is that is more than 14% of the pictures in all the picture books about a Chinese topic have some kind of mistakes.

In both the text and illustrations found in these nine sampled books, many different kinds of errors appear. These errors include: lack of specific indication as to when a story is occurring; generalization of a single instance as applying to all Chinese people; unrealistic content or illustrations which are far from reality; misconceptions of Chinese characters; and the perpetuation of stereotypes of the appearance of Chinese people.

### **Self-Reflection / Limitations of the Research**

Each kind of research has its own limitations which fail to tell the truest story. So do mine, in most steps of researching: data collection, data analysis, and the result. The first thing I could have done differently in data collection is to collect data covering enough authors from different backgrounds, so that I could compare what the different

representations of the authors and illustrators of Chinese descent and those of non-Chinese descent or without personal experience in China created. The samples I picked only involved authors of non-Chinese descent, so that I do not have two to three different groups of authors. I still do not have clear evidence as to whether those who live within the culture or those who are outsiders have more chance to create better children's picture books about China, Chinese and Chinese culture.

It is possible that the books I analyzed may be biased or too narrow to represent all the Chinese children's literature. Children today are exposed to many other forms of literature: TV shows, movies, and other media. I could have included other media formats, such as films about Chinese topics into my research. Although I planned to do so, this type of resource was very limited in the Westerville Public Library, with only *Mulan* in media Juvenile fiction.

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## APPENDIX A

### **HOW MUCH DO YOU INTRODUCE ABOUT CHINA?**

#### Question List for Small Group Interview

Q1. In your past teaching experience, does your school ever offer the multicultural books for students to read either in classroom or outside the classroom?

Q2. If your answer is yes to the question above, which group(s) of people has your school ever introduced to students through those readings?

Q3. If your school ever offered reading about Chinese culture, what books will be used? Please name the titles of the book as many as possible.

Q4. If you have never used books about Chinese culture, what do you think is the biggest obstacle for you to get them?

Q5. When you were teaching content of World War II, have you ever talked about the Sino-Japanese War or Nanking Massacre, no matter whether there is Chinese American students in your class or not?

## APPENDIX B

**FEEDBACKS FROM SOCIAL STUDY TEACHERS**

	Titles	Nots
1	Suki's kimono	Juvenile picture book of <b>Japanese</b> story
2	Tikki Tikki Tembo	Juvenile picture book of <b>Japanese</b> story
3	Zen short	Juvenile picture book of <b>Japanese</b> story
4	Goodbye 382: Shin Dang Dong	Juvenile picture book of <b>Korean</b> story
5	Two sticks	Juvenile picture book, without any Chinese features and setting, but the character is Asian-looking.
6	Christmas around the world	Juvenile picture book contains China section
7	Siamese cats	Juvenile picture book about cat caring
8	Seven Chinese sisters	Juvenile picture book, old story
9	Ruby's wish	Juvenile picture book, old issue that could be miss-leading.
10	The five Chinese brothers	Juvenile picture book, old story
11	Chinese Cinderella	Teen Fiction
12	Chinese New Year	Juvenile non-fiction
13	Mulan	Juvenile non-fiction