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Picture books about Korea and Korean Americans

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Picture books about Korea and Korean Americans

Abstract

Multicultural literature is beneficial to children to understand different cultures diversity in the global world. Koreans started to immigrate to the United States beginning in 1902. In spite of a lengthy Korean American immigration history, few children's books portray Korea and Korean Americans. This study overviewed picture books about Korea and Korean Americans available in local libraries and universities and identified cultural values and themes in the Korean American picture books. This study also examined authenticity and stereotyping in the Korean American picture books. Few pictures books about Korea and Korean American have been published over the past 40 years in the United States. More books about Korea and Korean American need to be published to help children explore traditional Korean beliefs and values.

PICTURE BOOKS ABOUT KOREA AND KOREAN AMERICANS

A Graduate Research Paper

Submitted to the Division of Elementary Education

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in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

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by

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ABSTRACT

Multicultural literature is beneficial to children to understand different cultures diversity in the global world. Koreans started to immigrate to the United States beginning in 1902. In spite of a lengthy Korean American immigration history, few children's books portray Korea and Korean Americans. This study overviewed picture books about Korea and Korean Americans available in local libraries and universities and identified cultural values and themes in the Korean American picture books. This study also examined authenticity and stereotyping in the Korean American picture books. Few pictures books about Korea and Korean American have been published over the past 40 years in the United States. More books about Korea and Korean American need to be published to help children explore traditional Korean beliefs and values.

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In the global world, our children need to be able to understand different cultures and accept cultural diversity. Children can broaden their minds and develop a global perspective through other countries' stories because good stories from other countries help children to connect to each other's culture, regardless of geographical and cultural gaps (Tomlinson, 1999). Books about other countries and people also provide children with an interest about the world. Eventually children will pursue their interest about the world throughout their lives (McElderry, 1987).

Korean Americans are one of the fast growing minority groups and the third largest ethnic group among Asian Americans in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). With American missionaries' encouragement, early Korean Americans immigrated to Hawaii between 1902 and 1905 to earn money. This time period is called the official immigrate period. After this time period, more and more Koreans moved to America and the population of Korean Americans rapidly grew after World War II (Choy, 1979). This growing Korean American population in the United States requires a better understanding of Korean and Korean American cultures.

Asian American literature provides children with opportunities to explore Asian American cultures (Norton, 2001). Children's books about Korea and Korean Americans are part of Asian American literature. Children's books about Korea and Korean Americans can be useful to help students understand Korean culture and Korean Americans' lives in the United States. Through these books children will be able to appreciate a unique Korean culture and distinguish it from other Asian countries' cultures.

In spite of a lengthy Korean American immigration history, few children's books portray Korea and Korean Americans. Korean American children's literature was reviewed for the first time by The Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC) in 1976. They found 66 Asian American picture books which were published from 1946 to 1976. Only two titles out of 66 were categorized as Korean American literature. At that time about 4,500 new children's books were published each year (Yamate, 1997). The two Korean American books were *Understanding Kim* (1962) and *Chinese Eyes* (1974). *Understanding Kim* is young adult fiction. *Chinese Eyes* is a picture book. Both of these books deal with Korean children's adjustments to life in America. According to CIBC's analysis, *Chinese Eyes* stereotyped all Asians as looking alike. Although this book is about a Korean child, the title is "Chinese" eyes.

Yamate (1997) conducted a study twenty years later and discovered that not many Asian American children's books had been published in those years. Continuing this trend, the publication of Korean American children's books has not increased. Philip Lee analyzed this trend and pointed out Asian culture remains underrepresented (Sloan, 1999). According to Leu's research in 1999, a small number of Asian Pacific American books were published in the 1990s. Only five Korean protagonists were found out of 34 books in Harada's research (1995) about Asian American picture books between 1983 and 1993. However, recently two Korean American authors have won national recognition awards. Linda Sue Park won the Newbery medal for *A Single Shard* and An Na was the Printz winner for *A Step from Heaven*.

Since The Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC)'s research about Asian American children's literature in 1976, few studies have been conducted on this

topic. Children's books about Korean and Korean American were surveyed and studied as a part of Asian American children's literature but not as a separate topic. This study focused on picture books about Korean and Korean Americans with three objectives: (1) to overview picture books about Korea and Korean Americans available in local libraries and universities; (2) to identify cultural values and themes in the Korean American picture books; and (3) to examine authenticity and stereotyping in the Korean American picture books.

Survey of Books about Korea and Korean Americans

Korean American books were surveyed in the youth collections of two local public libraries and two local universities. Two websites were also resources in locating Korean American books. Each book was identified by year to analyze publishing trends. Every picture book was read and categorized.

Sixty-nine fiction books for juveniles and children were found through the research. Also two nonfiction picture books were found, *A Busy Day at Mr. Kang's Grocery Store* (Flanagan, 1996) and *Chef Ki Is Serving Dinner* (Duvall, 1997). As noted in Figure 1, all of the books were published between 1987 and 2001. More than half of the fiction books were picture books. Thirty-six out of 69 books contained illustrations or photos. Only five Korean American picture books were written between 1987 and 1992. In 1990 and 1992, no picture books were published at all. The majority of the picture books were published in 1993. Since then, more Korean American picture books have started to appear, but their number has not increased significantly.

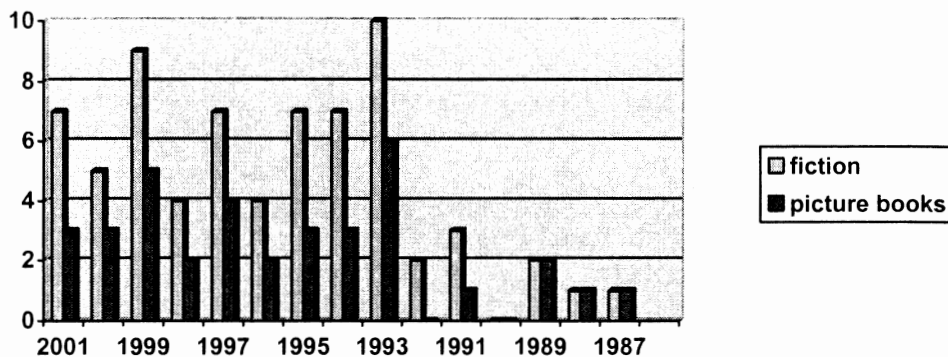


Figure 1. Korean American children's book publishing trends.

Between 1987 and 2001, a total of 24 authors wrote 36 picture books about Korea and Korean Americans which are available in local libraries and universities. As noted Figure 2, twelve Korean authors and 12 non-Korean authors wrote these books respectively. Eight authors each wrote more than two picture books. Non-Korean illustrators have contributed more to the creation of Korean American picture books. As noted in Figure 3, only four illustrators were Koreans, and 24 illustrators were non-Koreans. Photographers were counted as illustrators. Five authors, Yangsook Choi, Yumi Heo, Min Paek, Nina Pellegrini, Nami Rhee, wrote and illustrated the same book. These books were *New Cat* (Choi, 1999), *The Name Jar* (Choi, 2001), *Father's Rubber Shoes* (Heo, 1995), *One Afternoon* (Heo, 1994), *The Green Frogs* (Heo, 1996), *One Sunday Morning* (Heo, 1999), *Aekyung's Dream* (Paek, 1988) and *Families are Different* (Pellegrini, 1991), and *Magic Spring* (Rhee, 1993).

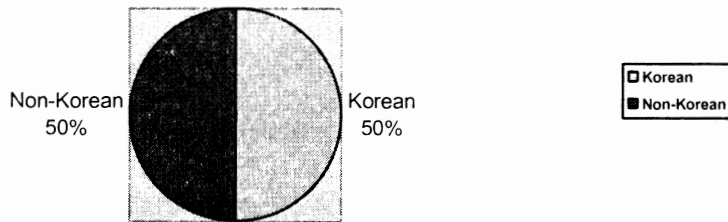


Figure 2. Korean American picture books authors' ethnicity.

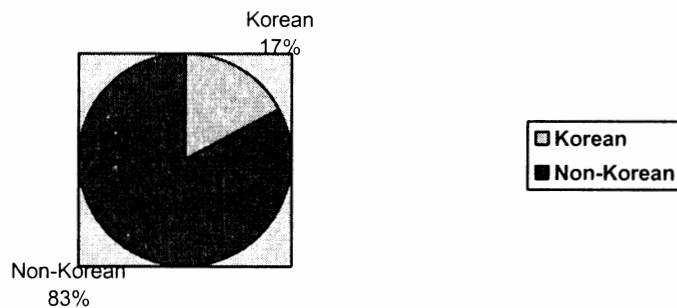


Figure 3. Korean American picture books illustrators' ethnicity.

Examining Picture Books about Korea and Korean Americans

Thirty-six picture books were categorized into five groups by genre and theme which were surveyed in this study. The genre and themes were folktales, historical stories, adoption, new life in the United States, and the relationship between a grandmother and grandchild. Folktales were divided again by several themes.

Korean Folktales

Fifteen books out of the 36 picture books were folktales. Korean culture and beliefs are thoroughly introduced in Korean folktales. Like other countries' folktales, Korean folktales provide moral lessons and enjoyment to children at the same time. Most characters in the Korean folktales surveyed in this study were friendly, humorous, and

superstitious. The Korean folktales were grouped into subcategories by themes: intelligent rabbits, good and evil, family, success, and Buddhism.

Intelligent rabbits. Rabbits often appear in Korean folktales. They are usually described as smart, intelligent, brave, tricky, witty, frivolous, and humorous creatures. Susanne Crowder Han's books, *The Rabbit's Tail*, *The Rabbit's Escape*, and *The Rabbit's Judgment* demonstrate these characteristics very well. *The Rabbit's Tail* (Han, 1999) is a story about why rabbits have short tails. The tiger is portrayed as a stupid and cowardly character in this book. Tigers are often portrayed as somewhat stupid, humorous, conniving, weak, noble, magnanimous, and godlike in Korean folktales (Han, 1999). The intelligence of rabbits is best shown in *The Rabbit's Escape* (Han, 1995). The sea king needs to eat a rabbit's liver to cure his illness. The loyal turtle goes to land to bring a rabbit into the sea world. He finds a rabbit and tells him that he can show him the sea world. The rabbit goes into the sea with turtle and enjoys his trip until he meets the sea king. When the rabbit finds out that the sea king wants his liver, he escapes from this dangerous situation by relying on his own wit. The rabbit tells the sea king that he left his liver on land. The turtle brings the rabbit back to land to get the rabbit's liver but as soon as the rabbit gets to the land he runs away. The loyalty of the turtle moves God's heart, and He gives the turtle a ginseng. In Korea, ginseng is used for recovering health or stamina.

The Rabbit's Judgment (Han, 1994) also features an intelligent rabbit and the tiger as a stupid character. A man rescues a tiger from a trap; but once the tiger is rescued, he wants to eat the man. They decide to ask other people's opinions about this situation. When other creatures have biased opinions, the rabbit has a fair opinion of both the tiger

and the man. By showing the original situation to the rabbit, the tiger goes into the trap again and the man saves his life. In this story, the rabbit is depicted as the smartest creature.

Good and evil. “Good people are rewarded and bad people are punished” is the classic theme in Korean folktales, just as in the folktales of other countries. Koreans teach their children to be good people through the traditional stories. In the story *Magic Spring* (Rhee, 1993), a very nice, old and childless couple happen to find a magic spring. From one sip of the spring, they become young again. The greedy neighbor goes to the spring to be a young man also. However, he is transformed into a baby. He is adopted by the nice couple who become young again by a magical spring. This story shows God helps good people.

The plot in *The Korean Cinderella* (Climo, 1993) is very similar to the European Cinderella story. Cinderella lives with a stepmother and stepsister. She always does housework for them and does not get anything in return but dirty clothes and poor food. One day, she goes to a party and happens to leave her one shoe. The prince discovers her to be the shoe’s owner and marries her.

Another Korean Cinderella book was found in this research. *Kongi and Potgi* (Han & Plunkett, 1997) is closer to the original Korean Cinderella story than *The Korea Cinderella* (Climo, 1993). In this Korean Cinderella story, animals help Kongi to get over many difficult situations. Han (1996) explained these animals represent Kongi’s mom who passed away. In Buddhism, people believe after they die some people come back to the world as animals. *Kongi and Potgi*’s story reflects this Korean belief.

A tiger is an evil creature in *Sun and Moon* (Pfister, 1998). He eats a mother, disguises himself to look like her, and goes to her house to eat her children. The smart brother does not believe the tiger is their mother and does not open the door for him. When the tiger is going to eat them, the brother prays to God to send them a strong rope if He thinks they are nice children. The tiger sees the brother and sister go to heaven with a strong rope. He prays to God like the brother did, but God gives him a rotten rope. In this story, the older brother takes care of all difficult situations and saves both his life and his sister's life. The younger sister displays the shy, fearful, passive, stereotypical Korean female characteristics often portrayed in the past. Female characteristics in contemporary Korea are not as passive as they used to be.

The story of *Mr. Pak Buys a Story* (Farley, 1997) is little odd but funny. A wealthy and old couple gets bored so they send their servant to a town to buy a story for them. A naïve servant buys a strange story from the thief. Even though the story is odd, the couple likes the story and enjoys it everyday. One day the thief goes to their house to rob them when they are listening to the story as usual. Ironically, the thief's movements and the story match exactly. The thief thinks they know he is trying to rob their house. In the end, he cannot rob them because of the story he sold. This story shows the wisdom of a Korean saying "you receive as much as you give."

Family. Family value is shown in several folktales with good and evil themes at the same time. Family is the most important value in the Korean society. Younger people are supposed to behave in certain ways to show their respect to older people. For example, young people should speak the formal language, use both hands when they hand them something, and bow when they greet them. *The Older Brother, Younger*

Brother (Jaffe, 1995) is a good example of these values. The bad, older brother takes all of his father's properties and does not give his younger brother anything but insult. One day, the younger brother happens to find a sick swallow and fixes his broken leg. The swallow brings the younger brother the gourd seeds. He plants the seeds and harvests gourds. The well-grown gourds are full of silk, money, rice, and carpenters. The older brother gets jealous of his brother. He searches for the swallow and breaks a swallow's leg. The swallow brings him gourd seeds also, but the older brother gets snakes, scorpions, demons, and bogies when he harvests the gourds. The older brother loses everything and regrets his behavior. At the end, the younger brother forgives his older brother and they live happily together. In this story, the younger brother never complains about what his brother does and listens to his evil brother. He shows his respect to his older brother even when his older brother is bad to him.

In Korea, the oldest son in the family has the responsibility of taking care of his parents with his wife. Nuclear families are more common in Korea now; but many extended families, which contain several generations, still exist. This cultural tradition is shown in the story *In the Moonlight Mist* (San Sounci, 1999). A poor, but nice woodcutter who lives with his old mom happens to rescue a deer from a deer hunter. The deer repays the woodcutter for his kindness by telling him that he can have a maiden as his wife if he steals a maiden's clothes when they come down from the heaven to take a bath on every full moon day. The maidens are not able to go back to heaven without heavenly clothes. The deer warns him not to give his wife the heavenly clothes until they have two children. One full moon night, the woodcutter goes to the place the deer told him and steals some maiden's heavenly clothes. The maiden who loses her heavenly

clothes becomes the woodcutter's wife and lives with him and his old mother. In spite of the deer's warning, the woodcutter gives his wife the heavenly clothes after they have one child. This is because she misses the life in heaven so much. As soon as the maiden gets the heavenly clothes back, she goes back to heaven with her child. The deer helps the woodcutter again to go to heaven. However, when he gets the chance to go to the heaven, he sends his mother to there first. In the end, he can go to heaven because of his warm heart for his mother.

The Green Frogs (Heo, 1996) is one of the most well-known folktales in Korea. This is a story Korean children hear often in their homes to learn to obey their parents. When a child does not listen to his mom, he/she is called a "green frog". In the story, the green frogs do the opposite of what their mom says. One day, the green frogs go to the place they should not go. When they meet a snake, their mother rescues them and gets hurt herself. When she dies, she asks her children to bury her next to the stream because she anticipates that her children will bury her by the warm hill. The green frogs regret not listening to their mother and decide to listen to the mother's very last wish. The green frogs bury their mother by the stream; and whenever it rains, they cry worrying about the mother's grave. That is why frogs cry on rainy days now.

Success. Success stories are often told to Korean children to encourage them to challenge their lives. In ancient Korea, the social classes treated people differently. Some people in the lower class desired to move to the upper social class level, but it hardly ever happened. *The Royal Bee* (Park & Park, 2000) is a story of a young boy who was born in a poor and lower society level. He succeeds with his own efforts and moves to the high society level. He is smart and nice. He always cares about his mother. One of the reasons

he wants to learn is to give his mother a better life. In ancient Korea, society was divided into certain levels of status. It was almost impossible for lower level people to move up to high social level. Nevertheless, some people of low social economic status in Korean history succeeded academically or politically by their own efforts. This story is realistic since it is based on the life of author's grandfather. Usually only upper level class children went to school in ancient Korea. They learned about Chinese scholars' teachings and studied with textbooks which were written in Chinese characters. Typically a teacher lectured, and children were expected to memorize all the phrases in the books. This old Korean school system can be found in this story.

The story *The Princess and the Beggar* (O'Brien, 1993) is based on a historical story. However, since this is a story passed down by words of mouth, it is hard to tell if this is the real story for sure. A smart, but always crying, princess marries the beggar by her own will. She educates her foolish husband and finally makes him a great general. This book deals with several social and gender issues. First, the princess marries the beggar; this could not happen in a royal family. Second, a woman chooses her spouse. In ancient Korea, usually women did not have a right to choose their spouse as parents arranged their children's marriages. Third, a woman educates a man. Again, in ancient Korea, women had fewer rights than men. Women could not go to school, be a politician or scholar, or anything like this. However, several queens did rule ancient Korea. The eventual goal in a woman's life was to become a good mother and a good wife in ancient Korea. These values are the influences of Confucianism. Gender roles are strictly distinguished in Confucian's lessons. *The Princess and the Beggar* is a well-known

Korean folktale in spite of its totally opposite way of thinking of traditional Confucianism. It reflects that some ancient Korean women had innovative thoughts.

Buddhism. Korea has a long history of Buddhism. In certain dynasties, Buddhism was a national religion. Many Koreans still practice Buddhism. For these reasons, Korea has many Buddhist cultural sites and relics. The Buddhist influence can be found in many Korean folktales. A Buddhist monk often appears in the stories as a friendly character.

The Moles and the Mireuk (Kwon, 1993) is a story about the father mole's trip. He travels to find the strongest creature as his daughter's spouse. He goes to the sky, sun, cloud, wind, mireuk, and finally, noticed that moles are the strongest creature in the world. This story teaches children simple lessons such as 'happiness is around' and 'the smallest can be the strongest.' Many people seek a universal truth in Buddhism like the father mole in the *The Moles and the Mireuk* (Kwon, 1993).

Historical Stories

Two historical stories were found in this study. One is about King Sejong and the other is about an escape from North Korea during the Korean War. Since both stories are based on historical facts, they are realistic. Korea has its own language, "Hangul." It was invented by King Sejong in 1843. Before King Sejong invented the Korean alphabet, Chinese characters were used. Due to the difficulty of Chinese characters, only scholars were able to write and read. *The King's Secret* (Farley, 2001) weaves these historical facts into a fictional story. When Hangul was invented, it was not welcomed by scholars, because it was considered a vulgar language. This fact is reflected the story. King Sejong invents the Korean alphabet, Hangul. Even though it is easy to use, scholars refuse to learn it. King Sejong lets the little boy who he taught Hangul write on the leaves with

honey. Then, the insects can eat the honey. When the scholars visit the King's garden, they see Hangul on every leaf and think it is a miracle. Finally, they begin to appreciate the Korean alphabet.

The story of *My Freedom Trip* (Park & Park, 1998) takes place in recent past when Korea divided into two countries: South and North Korea. The Korean girl, Soo, lives in North Korea with her parents. One night, Soo's father escapes to South Korea. He sends a guide to their family to help them escape. Soo takes a trip first to the South Korea with the guide. When she almost gets to South Korea, she runs into a North Korean soldier. This situation creates tension and makes the reader wonder about the solution. The tension is dissolved easily. Luckily, the North Korean soldier has a warm heart for the little girl. He simply lets her go to South Korea. Soo makes her freedom trip to South Korea but she never sees her mother again because the Korean War breaks out before Soo's mother escapes. This story is based on the life of the author's mother. This situation was almost impossible to have occurred during the war. A lot of North Korean died when they escaped to South Korea for their freedom in the past.

Stories about Korean Americans in the United States

Korean Americans brought Korean culture to the United States. Most of them have been well adjusted to the new society in spite of language barriers and cultural differences. Three themes are found in stories about Korean Americans: adoption, new life in the United States, and the relationship between grandmother and grandchild.

Adoption. Adoption is one of the themes in Korean American picture books. It is essential to have adoption stories since many Korean children have been adopted in American family over the years. Three picture books deal with this theme: *Katie-Bo*, *Jin*

Woo, and *Families are Different*. Books about adoption would be good for adopted Korean children and for American families who adopted Korean children to help them understand each other.

Katie-Bo (Fisher, 1987) and *Jin Woo* (Bunting, 2001) have a similar plot. Both stories depict adoption from an American child's point of view. They tell how the family members feel about an adopted Korean baby. They describe how American brothers feel as the time is close to meet a Korean baby. In both stories, an American child gets jealous of an adopted Korean baby; but in the end, they accept the baby as a family member and everything becomes happy for the baby.

Families are Different (Pellegrini, 1991) is based on the author's experience. She adopted two Korean girls in real life. This book tells about how much each family can be different. In the story, an adopted Korean girl finds that she looks different from her parents. This opens her eyes to interracial families and many different kinds of families. She finally understands that everyone is different and confirms her family love.

New life in the United States. Korean Americans have a long immigration history. Since the Korean American population is growing fast, it is necessary to have stories about Korean Americans to understand their lives in the United States. *The Name Jar* (Choi, 2001) is a story about a Korean girl whose family immigrated to the United States. On the first day of school, Unhei, is teased about her Korean name on the school bus. When she introduces herself to her classmates, she does not say her Korean name. She says that she has not picked her American name yet. When Unhei is struggling with picking her American name, her mom tells her that Unhei is the name that grandmother and mother got from the name master. After listening to her mother, Unhei remembers

her name stamp, which her grandmother gave her when she left Korea. Finally, she decides to keep her Korean name. Unhei is an unrealistic character because most of Korean immigrated children have a difficult time adjusting in American schools because of their English abilities. She speaks very good English despite just coming from Korea. She does not have any problems communicating with American friends.

A Korean girl who immigrated to United States can be found in *Aekyung's Dream* (Paek, 1988), also. Aekyung does not speak English very well and has a hard time adjusting to new life in America. However, all of sudden after she dreams of King Sejong who invented the Korean Alphabet, "Hangul", she begins to speak English well, makes friends, and has happy life in America. The resolution is somewhat exaggerated because all Aekyung's worries are gone because of one dream.

A Busy Day at Mr. Kang's Grocery Store (Flanagan, 1996) and *Chef Ki Is Serving Dinner* (Duvall, 1997) are real life stories. These books show immigrated Korean Americans' lives through photos with short stories. Mr. Kang and Mr. Ki's daily routines are well depicted. Mr. Kang wakes up very early in the morning to get ready to open his grocery store. He is always welcome his customers with smile. Mr. Ki runs restaurants and introduces Korean culture to Americans through his cook. He considers his cooking as an art. Both of them are hard workers from Korea.

Busy, hard working Korean parents can be found in *Father's Rubber Shoes* (Heo, 1995). Yungsu's father runs a grocery store. Yungsu misses his Korean friends because his father is too busy to play with him. One night, Yungsu's father tells Yungsu his rubber shoes story. He says that rubber shoes were very precious things when he was young. He adds that they immigrated to the United States because he wants to give

Yungsu some precious things like his rubber shoes. After hearing father's story, Yungsu begins to understand his father and becomes happy. It is true that rubber shoes were the kind most Korean children wanted to have several decades ago. However, the father's story about rubber shoes is not well related to Youngsu's life in America. Yungsu's father's explanation about the reason for their immigration is not quite understandable. He could find the precious thing for Yungsu in Korea, also. This story leads the reader to misunderstand Korea as a country where people cannot get precious things in their lives.

In another Yumi Heo's book, *One Sunday Morning* (Heo, 1999), a Korean boy named Minho has a lot of fun with his father one Sunday. They go to the park, take a carriage ride, see the animals in the zoo, and ride the merry-go-round. Miho enjoys his Sunday very much, but it was a dream. Both of Heo's books, *Father's Rubber Shoes* and *One Sunday Morning*, reflect Koreans' busy lives in the United States.

The Korean character in *Smoky Night* (Bunting, 1994) is a grocery store owner, also. The grocery store's owner Kim and her neighbors are not friendly to each other. The relationship between Korean Americans and other racial ethnic groups is not good in this story. When the Los Angeles' riots break out, Kim and her neighbor spend time together at the shelter. During this time in the shelter together they understand each other and become friends regardless of their ethnic background.

The New Cat (Choi, 1999) is about a cat that is at a tofu factory owned by a Korean. The cat rescues the tofu factory from fire. The Korean character's job is upgraded in this story compare to other stories. A Korean man is the owner of the factory. This story is fantasy story and shows a Korean American's life indirectly.

Many Asian ethnicities are shown in *Dumpling Soup* (Rattingan, 1997). This is an interracial family story. All families get together at their grandmother's house in Hawaii and make dumpling soup together for a New Year's celebration. In this book, Korean Americans are related to other Asian Americans through interracial marriage.

Relationship between a grandmother and grandchild. A special relationship between a grandmother and grandchild is one of main themes in Korean American picture books. Korean grandmothers in the books surveyed in this study are loving, caring, and friendly. *Halmoni's Day* (Bercaw, 2000) and *Halmoni and the Picnic* (Choi, 1993) show the relationship between a Korean grandmother and her America born granddaughter. In both books, a grandmother visits her family in America from Korea. At the beginning, the American born grandchild is not proud of her grandmother who looks different, wears different clothes, and does not speak English. In *Halmoni's Day* (Bercaw, 2000), the grandchild meets her grandmother for the first time at the airport. She invites grandmother to her class. She worries about what other classmates will think about her grandmother. Through her grandmother's story, every American is impressed and the grandchild feels strong love for her grandmother. This story sounds unrealistic because it is hard to imagine that a Korean grandmother who would give a speech in Korean in an American classroom on their first visit to the United States.

Halmoni and the Picnic (Choi, 1993) and *Yunmi and Halmoni's Trip* (Choi, 1997) can be considered a series. Yunmi's grandmother comes to America to help Yunmi's busy parents take care of her. One day, Yunmi invites her grandmother to a picnic with her classmates. Yunmi's grandmother makes "Kimbab", which is Korean picnic food. Yunmi worries that her classmates might not like the Kimbab her

grandmother made. She also worries that they might find her grandmother's traditional Korean dress strange and learn that she cannot speak English. However, Yunmi's classmates like grandmother and her Kimbab. Yunmi becomes very happy with her grandmother.

Yunmi and Halmoni's Trip (Choi, 1997) introduces more Korean traditional customs than *Halmoni and the Picnic* (Choi, 1993). For example, all family members prepare the food and bring them to the ancestors tomb to celebrate an anniversary. Yunmi visits Korea with her grandmother in *Yunmi and Halmoni's Trip* (Choi, 1997). She meets her Korean relatives and has a really good time. She realizes everyone missed her grandmother when she was gone to America. Yunmi does not get enough attention from her grandmother while she is visiting Korean relatives. She worries that her grandmother might not go back to America with her. However, her grandmother tells her she will go back to America and live with her. Yunmi regrets that she was jealous of her relatives and affirms her grandmother's love for her.

A special relationship between a grandmother and grandchildren is portrayed in *Dear Juno* (Pak, 1999). Juno is a Korean American child who does not know Korean. He develops a relationship with his grandmother in Korea through the mail. He is so excited to get the letter from his grandmother even though he cannot read her letter. It would be difficult for American born children to develop a strong relationship with their Korean grandmothers who cannot spend much time with them because they are very far away.

In the story of *The Trip Back Home* (Wong, 2000), an American born Korean girl visits her Korean grandparents and an aunt. She experiences normal Korean country life and feels lots of love from her Korean relatives during her visits. The story goes very

smoothly. As readers read this book, they can imagine the peaceful Korean scenery and Koreans' life.

Illustrations

Most of the books are very well illustrated. Illustrations accurately portray Korean culture. The book *Royal Bee* (Park & Park, 2000) has illustrations that are especially authentic. The old Korean clothes are very well described in this book. Illustrations in *My Freedom Trip* (Park & Park, 1998) show Koreans in the 1940s well; and also, the tension of escape can be found. Koreans in *Halmony's Day* (Bercaw, 2000) look real. Normal Korean faces are well drawn in this book without exaggeration.

The illustrations in *The Trip Back Home* (Wong, 2000) do not represent contemporary Korea, even though that is where it is set. It rather looks like Korea did a few decades ago or a traditionally preserved village. Everyone is shown wearing traditional Korean clothes. Grandparents might wear traditional clothes in daily life, but a young, single aunt is wearing traditional clothes, too. Usually, young people in Korea wear traditional Korean clothes only on very special occasions. Most Korean people dress in the western style. People with long braided hair are found in this book. In old days, people did not cut their hair during their lives because they believed that to keep their hair was the one way to respect their parents. Now it is really hard to find people with long braided hair in contemporary Korea.

The illustrations of *Dear Juno* (Pak, 1999) are not very accurate either. All the faces of the Korean characters look the same. All of them have small eyes like two dots on their faces. Juno's grandmother does not look like a Korean grandmother at all, especially in the very last scene where she is holding the tea wearing a gown under the

tress. A true Korean grandmother's image cannot be found in the entire book. One minor mistake was made in *Jin Woo* (Bunting, 2001). The symbol of the Korean Airline on the airplane's tail was wrong. It would look like Air China's symbol. The Korean airline has the "Teaguk" mark on its tail, which is known as the "Yin and Yang" mark in the United States.

Conclusion

Korean American picture books have been published since 1974. Even though the Korean American population has been increasing, only a small number of Korean American picture books are published each year. Thirty-six Korean American picture books were found in the present study. Twenty-four authors and 28 illustrators have created picture books about Korea and Korean Americans.

Of the picture books surveyed in this study, almost half of books are folktales. Other picture books are categorized as historical stories and stories about Korean Americans. Traditional Korean beliefs and values are reflected in the folktales, such as take good care of your parents, show respect to older people, good people are rewarded, etc.

Only two picture books are about historical stories. Stories about Korean Americans are still limited to the themes of adoption, adjustment in new life, and interrelationships between family members. In the adoption stories, the excitement of American families who adopt Korean children is very well depicted. Korean characters in Korean American picture books are still limited in variety. Most of Korean parents are described as hard working people. Korean children are often not well adjusted to their new life in the United States, but somehow they overcome the difficult situations. The

relationship between a grandmother and grandchild is one of the prominent themes in Korean American picture books. Grandmothers in picture books are grandchildren's favorites, even though the grandchild worries about or even feels ashamed about their Korean grandmothers because they dress differently, do not speak English, and bring "strange" Korean culture to the America. However, eventually all worries and shame disappear and they affirm their love for their grandmothers.

Illustrations of most pictures books accurately represent Korean culture.

Traditional Korean clothes are well illustrated in the picture books of folktales. However, in a few books, Koreans still look the same. They all have small eyes, black hair, and round faces.

Contemporary Korea was not introduced through the Korean American picture books survey in this study. More picture books are needed for understanding contemporary Korea. A great variety of Korean characters and themes in picture books are also required to eliminate stereotyping Koreans.

Korean American picture books should be used in classrooms, libraries, and homes to introduce Korean culture and Korean Americans' lives to children. They will arouse their interests about Korea and Korean Americans. Picture books about Korea can be a bridge which can connect children to Korean and Korean American culture regardless of the geographic, language, and cultural differences. Picture books about Korean Americans will not only help American children understand Korean Americans' lives in the United States, but they also help children who are adopted from Korea to find their identities. Through the Korean American picture books, children will be able to learn about traditional Korean beliefs and values.

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