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Chinese Children's School Experiences Represented in Picture Books

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In a graduate level children's literature class, Eun Hye, the second author, was facilitating the discussion of the importance of multicultural children's literature from an assigned reading of Rudine Sims Bishop's "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors" (1990). As Lin, the first author, was engaged in the discussion by sharing different childhood experiences, one student, who was adopted from China by Americans as a toddler, said that she found herself rarely represented in picture books while growing up in the U.S. We both felt bad because we grew up in China and Korea respectively, surrounded by many children's books representing children like ourselves. However, when we each came to the United States in our 20s to attend higher education, we quickly learned that there is a limited number of books portraying Chinese and Korean children living in the United States. At different time periods, we both developed intellectual interests toward critically examining how these two groups of children (Chinese and Korean) have been portrayed in multicultural children's books.

Considering one of the pedagogical goals of multicultural education is having students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social communities experience educational equity (Banks, *Cultural Diversity* 3), it is important for children from marginalized backgrounds to have equal opportunities to find themselves represented in the books they have access to and read. Furthermore, based on our observation, while there is an abundance of picture books about school experiences of white American children, including the first day of school, friendship, new kids, and many other themes, there are far fewer books that reflect culturally and linguistically diverse children's school experiences. After listening to the adopted graduate student's story, we began thinking and questioning whether or not any picture books portray the school experiences of one specific ethnic group, Chinese children.

We started our research query by searching through the Novelist K-8 Plus database and found there were very few picture books that portray Chinese students' school lives. With more than 2.6 million Asian children attending U.S. schools ("Fast Facts"), we were hopeful our search would yield a wide selection of titles to analyze, but only five met our criteria. For the five picture books we selected, we organized our findings through three main lenses: activities done in school, interactions with peers, and interactions with their classroom teachers. Based on our findings, we also discussed how the authors' ideology is revealed in portraying students' school experiences in the picture books.

Theoretical Framework

Ideology is a system of common beliefs shared within a community that is used as the basis of social representations and practices of community members as they interpret the world (McCallum and Stephens 370). Each author belongs to their community and lives in a particular environment, which means their discourse conveys the ideology from that community or environment. In other words, there is no narrative without an ideology (Stephens 8). When authors write books, they consciously or unconsciously project their ideology or agenda into the story. Their values, cultures, perspectives, and preferences can be implicitly or explicitly reflected in a variety of story elements such as settings, characters, themes, and plots. For example, in the books we analyzed, three out of five books have Chinese adopted girls as protagonists. We learned that the authors of these books have all adopted a Chinese girl. In these three books, the authors' beliefs and personal experiences are revealed, which also represent the values from their particular communities and environments. Based on the framework of

ideology, we sought to examine how authors' ideologies influenced the representation of Chinese children's school experiences in terms of message/theme, characters, plot, and culture.

Scholars employed ideology as an analytic lens to critically examine children's books with a range of focus such as gender, race, culture, and politics. Heinecken indicated how gendered ideologies and ideology of white supremacy are projected in books about ballet. Most books on this topic describe girls' motivation to do ballet as wanting to wear beautiful dresses and look pretty, reinforcing the "talented" appearance as having fair skin (301). Wang also analyzed the gendered ideology and patriarchal ideology in her examination about Chinese contemporary children's fantasy (435).

In addition to gendered ideologies, political and cultural ideologies were examined in the following studies. Roy analyzed 13 U.S. children's picture books of Asian Indian folktales and found these books were influenced by Eurocentric imperial ideologies and the popular expectations of stereotypical images about Asian Indians (1, 8). Desai examined the political ideology and power relationships in picture books published in the U.S. about the Christopher Columbus discovery myth. She found that little change was made to the Columbus myth, and few titles offer alternative perspectives (194). An investigation by Son and Sung on the portrayal of Korean children based on Colonialism and Orientalism revealed that in most cases white children have the most influence on rescuing Korean children from problems ("The Journey" 61-62). In addition, Keller and Franzak found the central themes of 10 picture books about immigrant children perpetuate the ideology carrying hegemonic values by reinforcing the pressure to assimilate (177, 180).

Since we examined Chinese children's school experiences, it was important to see how their culture is depicted in the books. We employed Orientalism that represents the West

population as strong, masculine, and active, while representing the East as weak, feminine, and passive (Kennedy 52). Inokuchi and Nozaki further discuss this boundary that distinguishes Westerners and non-Westerners using *othering*. The East is othered by being objectified, exoticized, and mystified (62). It is argued that higher hierarchies have more control in power relationships; for example, the Western population is considered more powerful than the Eastern population (Said 357). Although this theory is often employed to explain relationships between two countries or cultures, it can also provide a perspective to explore relationships or interactions between individuals (Son and Sung, “The Journey” 53). For example, by degrading others, some characters in the books are portrayed to have more power or privileges. Based on Orientalism, we analyzed how Chinese children are perceived and portrayed when interacting with people of different races in their schooling experiences.

Literature Review

In U.S. history, Asian Americans are an indispensable part, but nearly invisible in K-12 school history textbooks (An 258). Back in 1976, the Asian American Children’s Book Project Committee stated that only a total number of 66 books out of more than 3,000 children’s books published had one or more central characters that were Asian American. Furthermore, the majority of them were “racist, sexist, and elitist and that the image of Asian Americans they present is grossly misleading” (3). Rodríguez and Kim evaluated 21 picture books portraying Asian Americans published from 2007 to 2017, and found there was a significant improvement in the diverse representation of Asian American populations. They also found that only two books (10%) describe stories set in school focusing on immigrant children while nine of these books (43%) represent family lives (23).

Several content analyses of children's literature were conducted with focus on one region or country in Asian or Asian American groups. Son and Sung's investigation of 37 children's picture books about eight South Asian countries showed that these picture books usually present surface level cultures such as festivals, food, folktales, fashion, and famous people, which may account for a loss of deep cultural understanding ("Beyond Sari" 78-79). The following three studies investigated picture books about Korean culture in terms of culture, immigration, and relationships among characters. Wee, Park and Choi claimed that the picture books convey inauthentic content (e.g., outdated, and mixed with other Asian cultures) and stereotypical features about Asian appearances (80). Yi analyzed fourteen picture books about Korean immigrants, which include topics such as language conflict, family values, and life after immigration (142). Son and Sung examined a range of relationships children are involved in while constructing bicultural identities such as parents, grandmothers, Korean community mentors, peers, and teachers ("The Journey" 59-62).

Through the analysis of picture books about Chinese people and Chinese Americans, Cai found that a large percentage of these books are folktales, which have a tendency to represent the ancient civilizations of China rather than Chinese people's contemporary lives (170). Two decades later, Hsieh surveyed 154 children's picture books about China, including stories of Chinese people outside of China, stories set in China, and folktales (218). For the two decades between Cai and Hsieh, the number of picture books about Chinese culture has doubled, but a content analysis of these books was seldom conducted, although there are some articles discussing the pedagogical guidance of using picture books about Chinese culture in classrooms (see Giles et al.). Harada, Lowery, and Hsieh all pointed out that there have not been enough studies on Chinese American children's literature, not to mention the studies examining Chinese

children's school experiences represented in picture books. Our study was conducted to fill this gap by identifying and analyzing five picture books representing Chinese children's school experiences. We chose to examine them in school contexts to gain a better understanding of their representations in multicultural picture books.

Methodology

We employed content analysis as a methodology of our study. Content analysis is a systematic research method for analyzing a wide variety of data sources including textual, visual, and audio data to make inferences from data to the contexts in which they are considered (Krippendorff 24). Following the steps of conducting content analysis described by Hoffman, Wilson, Martínez, and Sailors (32), we first determined our research question: how do picture books portray school experiences of Chinese children who currently live in English-speaking countries?

Next, we utilized the Novelist K-8 Plus database as our primary tool to locate picture books that describe Chinese children's experiences at school where English is the dominant language. We used "Chinese children" as a keyword, using two descriptors, ages 0-8 and picture books for children. This search resulted in approximately 300 picture books. We then employed two additional criteria to narrow down the books: genre and setting of the story. We chose only realistic fiction and excluded other genres such as folktales, nonfiction, and historical fiction because our focus was to examine realistic representations of Chinese children. We also only selected books set in a country where English is the dominant language, which helped us to identify only 25 picture books. We further refined our list by selecting books focused on Chinese

children's school experiences, which ultimately resulted in five picture books that portray school experiences of Chinese children who reside in the United States and England.

We analyzed the five picture books using the following elements: what school activities are Chinese children engaged in and how do they interact with members of the school community? We examined both texts and illustrations to analyze activities done in school and interactions depicted in the picture books. For a more thorough analysis, we first created a table listing all school activities and interactions, and then examined the patterns or themes that emerged from them. We then discussed each in more depth based on the theoretical frameworks of the author's ideology and Orientalism.

Chinese Children's Experiences in Schools

After examining the protagonists in the five picture books, we found somewhat interesting patterns. Three out of five books use or mention the protagonists' Chinese names; four out of five protagonists are female; and three out of five books have Chinese adopted girls as protagonists. It is not clearly indicated in *Cleversticks* if Ling Sung was born in England or immigrated to England with his family. Mei Mei in *I Hate English* is a Chinese immigrant who struggled with English. Most books are set in schools in the United States except for *Cleversticks*, which is set somewhere in England.

Table 1

Information about Protagonists

Book	<i>I Hate English</i>	<i>Orange Peel's Pocket</i>	<i>Star of the Week</i>	<i>Cleversticks</i>	<i>Dumplings Are Delicious</i>
Name	Mei Mei	Chan Ming; Orange Peel (Nickname)	Cassidy	Ling Sung	Rain
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Male	Female
Status	Chinese immigrant	Chinese adoptee	Chinese adoptee	Chinese immigrant or Chinese English	Chinese adoptee
Setting	U.S.	U.S.	U.S.	England	U.S.

The following section discusses our analysis of the protagonists' school lives as portrayed in the five books by focusing on three aspects: school activities, interactions with peers, and interactions with teachers and tutors.

Activities Done in School

In *Orange Peel's Pocket* and *Star of the Week*, the main school activity depicts each of the two protagonists presenting about their cultures in front of class, which makes their teachers and classmates much more of a backdrop to the story. *Cleversticks* and *Dumplings Are Delicious* include daily classroom routines like centers, lunch time, snack time, and closure. *I Hate English* mainly portrays Mei Mei's tutoring experience in the Chinese Learning Center, presenting her

school as a place for her struggles. The illustrations portray Mei Mei's frustrations in the classroom by depicting her teacher giving instructions, but Mei Mei refusing to speak English.

Interactions with Other Students

All the classes in the books are portrayed with racially diverse children in the background illustrations. The children have a range of interactions, from minimal to somewhat more personal, but overall, their interactions do not impact the development of the plot. In *Orange Peel's Pocket* and *Star of the Week*, Orange Peel and Cassidy's classmates merely listen to their presentations, ask questions, or clap for them. There are not many meaningful interactions among them that contribute to the main plot of the stories. *Cleversticks* and *Dumplings Are Delicious* show more personal interactions between the main characters and their peers. For example, in *Cleversticks* Manjit, Terry, and Sharon are willing to show him what they are good at. In *Dumplings Are Delicious*, Rain and her classmates Katarina and Carlos talk about different kinds of dumplings they brought for lunch. Although they wonder why others' dumplings look different from theirs, they are respectful to each other. In *I Hate English*, Mei Mei interacts only with her Chinese friends because she does not want to speak English. To some degree, the interactions between the protagonists and their classmates appear to be shallow and limited. Their interactions do not seem to have much influence on the protagonists' school lives and management of the story's main conflict.

Interactions with Teachers

Compared with the limited interactions with peers, the protagonists have more meaningful interactions with the classroom teachers and tutor, in Mei Mei's case. Before examining the interactions with them in more depth, one thing to note is all the classroom

teachers in the five books are white, except in *Cleversticks* where one of the two classroom teachers, Mrs. Dhanjal, appears to be of South Asian heritage.

The teachers appear to play more important roles in the protagonists' school lives than any other characters in school. In *I Hate English*, Mei Mei does not want to speak English and refuses to assimilate into her new school life. Nancy, who is a tutor in the Chinese Learning Center, helps Mei Mei feel more comfortable speaking English by using patience and a clever strategy. In *Cleversticks*, his teacher, Ms. Smith, praises Ling Sung for using paint brushes as chopsticks. Another classroom teacher, Mrs. Dhanjal, takes a picture of him to celebrate this memorable moment. They help Ling Sung reignite his love of school by publicly praising him, and asking him to teach everyone else how to use the paintbrushes as chopsticks. In *Dumplings Are Delicious*, Rain's teacher, Mr. Wood, clears students' confusion about the differences among dumplings by giving a special lesson about cultural diversity. When the protagonists need help to resolve their problems, their teachers do not hesitate to reach out to the Chinese children and solve the problems for them.

In addition to providing solutions to Chinese children's difficulties, teachers also function as an important part of building a story. For example, teachers provide an opportunity for children to give presentations in the two books that have a central plot around the protagonists giving presentations about their Chinese heritage. In *Orange Peel's Pocket*, when the classroom teacher shows a map of China, the whole class asks Orange Peel many questions about China to which she does not have answers. After school, Orange Peel starts the journey to find out the answers and then gives a presentation about Chinese culture the next day. In *Star of the Week*, when it is Cassidy's turn to be the star of the week, she makes a poster about her adoption journey which began in China. In these two books, there may be few meaningful interactions

between Chinese children and the teachers, but teachers set the stage for the protagonists to teach others about their culture. Overall, the teachers' encouragement and support have a positive impact on the protagonists' school experiences. Because of them, Chinese children could adjust to school lives better, understand diversity, and share their culture with peers.

Authors' Personal Experiences and Beliefs

As shown in our analysis, three of the five books have Chinese adopted girls as protagonists. We found that the authors of these three books had a personal connection to adoption since they all adopted a Chinese girl. One of these authors, Darlene Friedman, mentioned in a YouTube interview that she wrote *Star of the Week* featuring an adopted Chinese girl to mirror her own child's experiences and life, and have their voices represented in the book ("Star of the Week" 01:57-06:27). These books revealed the authors' personal values such as the love for their adopted children, the significance of adoption, and the importance of keeping one's cultural heritage.

In *Star of the Week*, the author indicates her positive viewpoint about adoption. Cassidy's adoptive parents never hide the fact that Cassidy was adopted, but instead, openly explain that some biological parents could not take care of their babies for different reasons, but they still loved their babies. Cassidy feels assured that she is loved all the time, no matter where her birth parents are. Through Cassidy's adoptive parents, the author's attitude toward adoption is evident to readers in that she attempts to change the negative connotations attached to the adoption. Using Cassidy's story, she claims the adoption could be a new start of life for some children and their new family loves them. Furthermore, the author makes a great point about different types, members, and formations of families.

In addition, the authors show their support toward maintaining their adoptive children's cultural heritage. In *Dumplings Are Delicious*, Rain's adoptive mother does not know how to make a particular Chinese traditional food, dumplings, but wants to learn how to make them with Rain in order to help her stay connected to Chinese culture. In *Orange Peel's Pocket*, when Orange Peel cannot answer her classmates' questions about the place where she was born, her adoptive mother provides support by taking her to Chinatown to visit many different stores. Even though Orange Peel's adoptive mother is not knowledgeable about Chinese culture, she shows her passion and support by encouraging her child to explore more about her heritage and accompanying Orange Peel to find out the answers. Through these two adoptive mothers, we can have a glimpse of the authors' values of supporting their adopted children to learn more about their culture.

While appreciating the efforts that the parents make to maintain their adoptive children's cultural heritage, we also found a potential essentialistic issue in these transracial adoptive families. As discussed above, the two adoptive mothers in *Dumplings Are Delicious* and *Orange Peel's Pocket* try to help their adoptive children connect with their cultural heritage by making dumplings together and visiting Chinatown. This shows that these mothers' understanding of Chinese culture was shaped by the dominant racializations, popular stereotypes, or social pressures for Chinese American children that Chinese children need to learn how to make dumplings and visit China town (Museus and Iftikar 97). Anne Phillips claims that when people see racial characteristics that do not fit their preconceptions, their overgeneralization and stereotyping would lead to discrimination: "I would never believe his story about China, because he even does not know how to make dumplings, as a Chinese" (50).

Finding a balance between cultural integration and racial differentiation is always a tough task for transracial adoptive families (Liow Rickard 378). Every adopted child needs to have a coherent story for themselves, no matter how complicated it is. However, when they arrive in America, it seems impracticable to maintain physical contact with their cultures of origin. To make things more challenging, many parents who are outsiders of the adopted children's cultures of origin tend to offer their adoptive children limited, shallow, or racialized support. The worst case is that parents consider Eastern culture as inferior and want to save their adoptive children from it by cutting off every connection, which may cause the loss of their adoptive children's cultural identity and lead to some long-term adjustment problems (Liow Rickard 376). The adoptive parents do not have to be experts on their adoptive children's cultures of origin, but they can research to uncover several resources to learn more history behind some superficial cultural icons to keep their parenting from uncritical multiculturalism (Liow Rickard 380-81).

Teachers as Rescuers

As our analysis shows, all the teachers in the five picture books are white except in *Cleversticks* which includes one additional classroom teacher, Mrs. Dhanjal, of South Asian heritage. We found they serve in two capacities: helping children to solve problems and setting the stage for a cultural presentation. Since three books portray children's problems and two books focus on a child's presentation of Chinese culture, the teachers appear to be given more power in developing the stories.

The following three books portray Chinese children encountering a problem at school. When they need to tackle the issues, they tend to rely on teachers among assorted members of the school community. It is understandable that teachers reach out to the children because they

have the closest relationships with their students and care about them. However, none of the Chinese students ask them for help; the teachers jump in and solve the problems for them, and the other members from school settings are not helpful. In *I Hate English*, Mei Mei's rescuer is Nancy, the tutor from the Chinese Learning Center. Nancy spends lots of personal time with Mei Mei, which eventually helps Mei Mei open up and speak English. In *Cleversticks*, Ms. Smith serves as the catalyst for Ling Sung to love school again through the simple act of complimenting him for using paint brushes as chopsticks. His peers are willing to help by spending time with him and showing what they are good at but cannot help him resolve the issue. In *Dumplings Are Delicious*, Rain does not understand why her classmates' dumplings look different from hers until their teacher, Mr. Wood, solves this problem by giving a simple lesson about diversity using dumplings. Even though Rain's classmates share many valuable opinions about diversity before the lesson, they are never counted as important ideas or as representing the cultural capital of knowledge the children already have. We argue that this does not authentically portray school experiences of Chinese children. They cannot be rescued with simple interactions with their teachers. They do not even need to be rescued by their white teachers or anybody. They would need to be given opportunities to resolve problems on their own. There is no doubt that trustful teacher-student relationships can support them in managing challenges in schools. We challenge the assumption that children of color are passive in seeking help or incapable of making decisions (Michie 8; Cammarota 244).

Given their race as being of European descent, we saw the dichotomy that white teachers helped children of color and had them give a presentation about their non-European culture to peers in the classroom. The teacher-student relationship or interactions in school could be further explained as "white teachers are superior and active" and "children of color are inferior and

passive.” Their different hierarchies indicate the power relationship reflected in Orientalism in which the West populations are considered stronger and more masculine than the East populations (Said 357). Seeing white teachers as “ideal” saviors is also universal in many movies and literature (Brown 153). These white teachers are romanticized to be “heroic liberal warriors” to save children of color from dilemmas (Matias 9), such as the Hollywood film *Freedom Writers*, which illustrates how a young white teacher saves the day of children of color and leads them to achieve academic success and upward social mobility (Aronson 38). This plot looks similar to another Hollywood film, *The Blind Side*, in which a young African American football player has no capacity to solve the problems in his life and nobody from his community could help him out, until Leigh Anne Tuohy, a white, kind woman appears. To some degree, these plots indicate a common theme in which the “white saviors” guide people of color to escape from the marginalizations or predicaments they are facing (Cammarota 243).

Uncritical Multiculturalism

The authors and illustrators used different strategies to express their desire to popularize multiculturalism in their books. First, the illustrations portray the classrooms as culturally diverse. All five books include students of a variety of racial backgrounds. In addition, the authors convey the message of multiculturalism by depicting teachers appreciating cultural differences even though they do not appear to meet the goals of multicultural education to ensure greater voice, power, equity, and social justice for marginalized cultures (Cai and Bishop 58). The following section further discusses how the authors project their agenda of multiculturalism in the books.

In *Dumplings Are Delicious*, the author uses different dumplings from various cultures to

make a point about diversity and acceptance. Rain is confused when she sees a range of dumplings shared by her teacher and classmates and does not understand why her dumplings look different from the others. In order to address this confusion, the teacher explains that many countries have their own types of dumplings, such as Russian pirozhki, Latin American empanadas, and Polish pierogies. These dumplings may have different tastes, shapes, colors, or sizes, but are all delicious among their own group of fans. Through the characters' actions, the author's intent appears to emphasize the importance of finding and appreciating values in diverse cultures and traditions, while also broadening readers' horizons by embracing the beauty of various other cultures. However, the authors' superficial way of introducing and celebrating cultures will not help children gain a deeper understanding of cultures and social and political issues in relation to ethnic groups. This approach "often results in the trivialization of ethnic cultures, the study of their strange and exotic characteristics, and the reinforcement of stereotypes and misconceptions (Banks, "Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum Reform" 144).

The author of *Cleversticks* portrays the two teachers encouraging culturally diverse students by recognizing and praising their individual strengths. The main character, Ling Sung, does not like school because he cannot find a thing he is good at, unlike his peers. One day, one of Ling Sung's classroom teachers, Ms. Smith, compliments him for using paint brushes as chopsticks to pick up pieces of a biscuit. In this story, the author emphasizes the importance of teachers' support and encouragement, especially for the students with diverse cultural backgrounds since they may be more sensitive to the teachers' words.

The authors of *Orange Peel's Pocket* and *Star of the Week* suggest that Chinese children's presentations about their culture could be one of the ways to have their voices heard in school, which in turn could benefit non-Chinese students in the classroom because they could

learn something that they might not be familiar with. On the surface this seems to be a win-win situation, but it needs to be carefully probed to determine if Chinese students feel willing and comfortable carrying out the task. In other words, they should be encouraged to give a cultural presentation only when they are eager or interested, but never be required or pushed to satisfy others' curiosity. We wonder if Chinese students' school experiences are sacrificed to teach other students about Chinese culture. Their teachers and classmates *expect* them to teach Chinese culture instead of non-cultural topics they are interested in by othering and exoticizing them. This makes Chinese children confront pressure and expectations that children from the dominant culture do not have to deal with. At the end, we need to examine the purpose and hidden agenda of the cultural presentation and how it can impact culturally diverse students' school experiences.

In addition, we found that Chinese students are portrayed making connections to stereotypical icons such as dumplings, chopsticks, and red silk knots. Researchers of youth literature about Chinese children and Chinese culture share concerns about whether the characters are portrayed non-stereotypically and if Chinese culture is authentically represented (Chen 2). These concerns are quite reasonable because stereotypical portrayals represented by superficial icons would limit recognizing or understanding the sophisticated and long, rich history of Chinese culture.

For example, in *Cleversticks*, Ling Sung's school life and self-perception are saved by his being able to use chopsticks. The cultural icon, chopsticks, changes his school life when Ms. Smith recognizes his talent of using paint brushes as chopsticks. We wondered why he could not be praised for non-cultural items like his friends. Manjit is acknowledged for her beautiful handwriting, Sharon for buttoning up her coat perfectly, and Terry for knowing how to tie his shoes. We understand that the author wanted to recognize the importance of maintaining Chinese

children's heritage by connecting them to cultural icons, but this is another example of othering them by expecting and singling out the differences. They sometimes should be portrayed as *children* doing something similar that many children do in the classroom. This may cause a problem of incomplete representation and cultural authenticity.

Red silk knots are another cultural item that is emphasized and attached to a Chinese student. Orange Peel holds it in her hand when she gives a cultural presentation because it comforts her as a symbol of good luck. It is one of several items given to her when she visits multiple stores in Chinatown to gather information for her presentation. She receives a piece of silk from Mr. Fan's tailoring store, a peony from Mrs. Liu's flower shop, a noodle recipe from Mr. Yu's noodle shop, and a red silk knot from Jasmine's ice cream shop. Among all the items above, the red silk knot appears to be random because there is no clear relationship between ice cream and red silk knots in Chinese culture. This arbitrary connection removes the symbol of good luck from the red silk knot and makes it a stereotypical cultural icon.

We have no doubt that the authors had good intentions of conveying the message of multiculturalism in these books. However, this uncritical multiculturalism contributes to highlighting Chinese students' differences and the non-American elements of their cultures of origin. This emphasis could lead to "forever foreigner stereotypes" which perpetuate the non-American features of other ethnic groups (Rodríguez and Kim 25) and may result in exoticizing Chinese students' cultural experiences and othering them in the U.S. schools. Their position of being rescued by white teachers also indicates the low placement in the power structure shown in Orientalism. Thus, representing Chinese students' school experiences should be done in authentic ways that reflect those values, facts, and attitudes that insiders of a culture consider worthy of acceptance (Mo and Shen 58). As mentioned in the introduction, all children need to

have equal opportunities to be represented in children's books. However, when they are portrayed in limited and inauthentic ways, it can do more harm than good by reinforcing stereotypes about their culture and experiences. This will go against the goals of multicultural education because it will take lots of time and effort for readers to unlearn inaccurate and inauthentic information they learned from books. Thus, we can never emphasize enough the importance of having authentic representation of culture and experiences of culturally diverse children in multicultural literature.

Concluding Thoughts

After examining five picture books about Chinese children in western, English-speaking schools, we found that Chinese children were portrayed to have limited and culturally inauthentic school experiences. They had closer and more meaningful interactions with white teachers who showed more power by rescuing them from problems and developing stories. They were also othered with expectations to be different as students with dissimilar cultural backgrounds. Their differences were often emphasized by requesting them to give a presentation about Chinese culture, or doing something Chinese such as using chopsticks and eating dumplings.

We also found that authors' ideologies are implicitly and explicitly conveyed in these books. We believe it is important for teachers to help students to gain awareness of ideologies embedded or hidden with different literary elements in the books. Students should be taught to critically read them by "challenging assumptions about race, class and gender" (Hade 252). Students should sometimes "read against an author, questioning and even refusing to become the kinds of sympathetic readers of their stories" (Hade 252). As Youngs' study shows, it is also important to expose students to books which challenge the dominant ideologies, such as

Orientalism (48).

We argue it is important to authentically represent culturally diverse children's school experiences, considering there are very few books available to portray them. A chapter book, titled *The Great Wall of Lucy Wu*, portrays more realistic school experiences of a feisty Chinese American female character who loves to play basketball. Chinese traditions, legend, and history are weaved in solving issues of intergenerational relationships and bullying, which add more depth in Chinese culture. We hope there are more children's books that illustrate culturally diverse children's experiences in schools so that their membership in this important community can be confirmed and represented. We also would like to see more diversified Chinese children's school experiences to provide more authentic and comprehensive views of their lives.

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