A survey was made of all children's books about Chinese, Chinese Americans, or China for pre-kindergarten through third-grade reading level to determine how the books represent the Chinese or Chinese American to the young child. Books included in the study were identified by one or more of the following factors: (1) book title and bibliographic data; (2) Sears Subject Heading; (3) grade reading level; and (4) annotation or resume. An examination of the titles revealed three identifiable themes: Tales and Legends of Ancient China (8 titles); Stories of Pre-WW II China, circa 1920-1935 (7 titles); and Chinese Americans in U. S. Chinatowns (3 titles). The titles are grouped by theme and listed by date of imprint. No picture books were identified as showing life in contemporary China or Taiwan. Results of the survey show that (1) for the most part, the Tales and Legends of Ancient China have been well executed and that Bishop and Wiese's "The Five Chinese Brothers" remains the best known and most popular, exerting strong influence on young children's perceptions of Chinese people; (2) as a group, the stories of Pre-World War II China are old-fashioned and in some cases outdated; Handforth's "Mei Li" was found to be outstanding in this group; and (3) the stories with a U. S. Chinatown setting contain occupational stereotypes; overgeneralize the culture and traditions of Chinese Americans; and show no interaction with the dominant American society, with the exception of Hurd's "The White Horse." It is recommended that authors and publishers be encouraged to produce high quality books that present Chinese and Chinese Americans authentically. (GR)
CHINESE-AMERICAN IDENTITY AND CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS

Jean H. Wong
January 8, 1971
"Because we are adults so long and childhood is so brief and fleeting, it is assumed that the experience of childhood is relatively so much the less important. Yet childhood is the impressionable and formative period...The impressions of childhood are lasting, and the sum of its impressions is the pattern taken on by maturity. If this be true, the child is indeed father to the man. Can we then afford to be indifferent to the impressions that children receive from their reading?"

Lillian H. Smith

THE UNRELUCTANT YEARS
Mr. J. Chuan Chu emigrated from North China to the United States at the end of World War II. Having an Oriental face was a liability and he had trouble finding a place to live. With an engineering degree from the University of Pennsylvania, Mr. Chu has risen to become a vice president of Honeywell Information Systems. He lives today in the wealthy Boston suburb of Wellesley, Massachusetts. "If you have ability and can adapt to the American way of speaking, dressing, and doing things then it doesn't matter any more if you are Chinese," he is quoted in the December 13, 1970 edition of THE NEW YORK TIMES, "Orientals Find Bias is Down Sharply in the U.S."

The article reports the almost total disappearance of discrimination against the 400,000 Chinese-Americans living in the U.S. since the end of World War II and their assimilation into the mainstream of American life. Artificial barriers to becoming doctors, lawyers, architects, and professors no longer exist. Some have achieved national and international reputation: I.M. Pei, as an architect; Gerald Tsai, as head of the Manhattan fund; Tsung Dao Lee and Chen Ning Yang as Nobel prize winners in physics. (And most recently, Choh Hao Li, who led a research team at the University of California Medical Center in synthesisization of the human growth hormone.)

Most of the problems confronting Chinese and Asian-Americans today are more subtle, according to Dr. Ai-li Chin, a Chinese-American sociologist at
the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who is doing a study of the Chinese experience in the United States. Interviewed for the same article, she feels that "discrimination against Orientals has definitely diminished. In any statement you make about prejudice, you must be very careful. But for most Chinese the problem is not so much physical barriers, as it is for Blacks, as it is the question of identity. Who are you as a Chinese in the United States?" This is particularly true, Dr. Chin believes, for the younger people who have grown up in the U.S., still having an Oriental face, but not speaking their parents' language. "Ironically, at the same time as prejudice has diminished, some of these younger people have now begun to become concerned about white Americans' attitudes toward them. They refuse to accept as their parents did, the old humiliating Oriental stereotype."

Young Chinese-Americans have become increasingly sensitive, like Blacks and Indian-Americans to what they consider Anglo-Americans' patronizing attitude toward them. They resent the tourists in Chinatown who politely ask if they can speak English. They indignantly reject the old stereotype of the slant-eyed, pigtailed "Chinaman", eating with chopsticks and mumbling "ah-so". They have formed radical groups modeled after the Black Panthers with names like the Boxers and the Red Guards in New York and in San Francisco. And they insist that many Anglo-Americans, behind a facade of believing in equality, are still prejudiced.

Why is this happening, this questioning of attitudes, when the barriers are apparently gone?

The social and economic integration of all minority peoples into the American culture has been a slow process, but it has been particularly slow
for American citizens of Indian, Chinese, Japanese, African and Spanish
descent, who are highly "visible" in a majority white society. By virtue
of their ethnic characteristics, they have been largely excluded from the
dominant culture in the United States. Social scientists now generally
agree that man has no inherent cultural predispositions or traits. He is
a product of his cultural environment.

In his recent study "Minority Americans in Children's Literature"
(ELEMENTARY ENGLISH, January 1967), David K. Gast, Assistant Professor
of Education, San Diego State College comments:

"The shaping begins at birth. Children literally 'learn what they live'. They learn prejudice against,
and intolerance of, people who are racially, reli-
giously, and culturally different from themselves. In
turn the objects of prejudice internalize the self-
debasing concepts that are held of them in the mirror
of the majority. The source of these learnings can be
traced to parents and other adults, peers, mass and
minor media, and teaching materials. The American
public school, functioning as a social sorting and
screening device with Protestant, white, middle-class
bias, has not always facilitated integration of the
minority American into the mainstream of dominant
culture, nor has it effectuated through its academic
protraital of minority Americans a social conscience on
the part of the majority American."

Dr. Gast felt that textbooks are not the only teaching materials that
convey concept of intergroup relations to school-age children. One source
of learning has been children's literature, and yet few studies had been
designed to analyze the images of minority groups in children's fictional
literature. The report in ELEMENTARY ENGLISH is based on his unpublished
doctoral dissertation, "Characteristics and Concepts of Minority Americans
in Contemporary Children's Fictional Literature," Arizona State University,
June, 1965. The population of the study was defined as all children's
fiction in book form about present-day (1945-1962) American Indians, Chinese,
Japanese, Negroes and Spanish-Americans first published between 1945 and 1962 for kindergarten through eighth-grade reading levels and noted in a number of standard selection guides including CHILDREN'S CATALOG and the ALA's A BASIC BOOK COLLECTION FOR ELEMENTARY GRADES. Of the 42 books that met the criteria established for the population, only 2 were identified as being about Chinese-Americans. The findings on these 2 books indicate that they portrayed Chinese-Americans as: favoring traditional dress; being semi-skilled workers of the lower socio-economic class with adequate incomes; placing value on schools of the dominant culture and Chinese language school; not college oriented; both future- and past-oriented, an ambivalent position; living in "Chinatown"; in general taking pride in their ethnic culture and clinging to traditional patterns of life while accepting some of the material goods and economic motivations of the dominant culture.

Of course, 2 books are not a large enough sample to infer any but the most general conclusions, but they do indicate a disparity between the actual life-style of most Chinese-Americans in 1970 and their portrayal in children's literature from 1945-1962. That they are living, for the most part, in the dominant American culture is substantiated in a study by D. Y. Yuan in a paper "Voluntary Segregation: A Study of New York Chinatown", PHYLON: THE ATLANTA UNIVERSITY REVIEW OF RACE AND CULTURE, Third Quarter, 1963. He reported a Chinese-American population of 25,000 scattered all over the metropolitan New York area, in addition to the 8,000 living in and around Chinatown. He felt that the majority had not isolated themselves in Chinatown because they were accepted almost anywhere they chose to live.
Let us closely examine, then, a larger sample than the one surveyed by Dr. Gast. Because attitudes are developed in the child by the age of 6 or 7, persist into adulthood, and are highly resistant to change, it was felt that a survey of children's literature that generally falls into the category of "Easy" or "Picture Books" would be the most significant. Books in this category, written for the pre-kindergarten to 3rd grade child, constitute his introduction to the world through literature. How do these books represent the Chinese or Chinese-American to the eyes and ears of the young, uniformed, and impressionable child?

An initial list of 18 titles was established, imprints 1933 - 1968, using the criteria of inclusion on two or more of a number of selection guides (See Appendix A), and all titles listed in the ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LIBRARY COLLECTION, 5th Edition. Books included in the study were identified by one or more of the following factors: (1) book title and bibliographic data; (2) Sears Subject Heading; (3) Grade reading level; and (4) annotation or resume. The population of the survey is defined as all children's picture books about Chinese, Chinese-Americans, or China, for pre-kindergarten through third grade reading level.

Four picture book collections were then surveyed for additional titles, but none were located. The collections were in the New Brunswick Public Library; The Franklin Township Public Library; the MacAfee Road Elementary School Library in Somerset, New Jersey; and the Rutgers University Library juvenile collection.

An examination of the titles revealed three identifiable themes:

8 titles - Tales and Legends of Ancient China
7 titles - Stories of Pre-WW II China, circa 1920-1935
3 titles - Chinese-Americans in U.S. Chinatowns
Titles are grouped by theme and listed by date of imprint within each group, from the oldest to the most recent. In a few cases it was not possible to locate a copy for personal examination, and these have been double-starred (*•*).

Tales and Legends of Ancient China

THE FIVE CHINESE BROTHERS (1938). By Claire Huchet Bishop and Kurt Wiese. Probably the best known and most popular of all the titles on the list. The story of five clever brothers who outwit the executioner when one of them is sentenced to death, it is an engaging tale of humor and resourcefulness. Unfortunately, the illustrations employ yellow for skin color, a popular misconception for many years, and are suggestive of stereotype cartoon representations of Chinese people.

THE WHISKERS OF HO HO (1958). Story by William Littlefield. Pictures by Vladimir Bobri. A Charming tale of an old Chinese man, his hen and his rabbit, who carry beautifully painted eggs across the sea to a land where people are celebrating Easter. Illustrations are simple and brightly colored, beautifully complimenting a warm and dignified tale.

LITTLE TWO AND THE PEACH TREE (1963). By Patricia Miles Martin. Illustrated by Joan Berg. The story of Peach Blossom, too shy to speak, who saves her father’s rice fields by drawing a picture. A gentle tale with delicate illustrations that should have appeal for small girls.


PEBBLES FROM A BROKEN JAR: FABLES AND HERO STORIES FROM OLD CHINA (1967). Retold by Frances Alexander. A collection of 18 brief tales illustrated with old scissor-cut pictures. The stories are simply and tastefully written, and often quite amusing.

THE EMPEROR AND THE KITE (1967). By Jane Yolen. Pictures by Ed Young. Tiny princess Djew Seow rescues her father the emperor from imprisonment in a high tower by sending him a hand-woven rope with her kite. Illustrated with especially handsome and unusual paintings reminiscent of scissor-cuts, the illustrator received a citation as runner-up for the 1968 Caldecott Medal.

TIKKI TIKKI TEMBO (1968). Retold by Arlene Mosel. Illustrated by Blair Lent. Children love to chant along “Tikki tikki tembo-no sa rembo-chari bari ruchi-pip per pembo”, the small boy’s name that proves too long to be recited in times of danger. Illustrations are detailed and colored in subdued hues, making them more suitable for individual inspection.
CHINESE MOTHER GOOSE RHYMES (1968). Selected and Edited by Robert Wyndham. Pictures by Ed Young. Designed to be read vertically like an oriental scroll, rhythmic easy to read poems in Chinese and English flow lengthwise on the pages. Engagingly illustrated with paintings in a modern adaptation of a classical style by the award-winning Chinese-American artist.

Stories of Pre-WW II China

THE STORY ABOUT PING (1933). By Marjorie Flack and Kurt Wiese. Small children love this story of the little duck lost on the Yangtze River. The color illustrations can be "read" independently by the non-reader, and will give them information about life on the river. The illustrator, however, chooses yellow for skin color, the same yellow used for the color of the little duck, reflecting the stereotype of that period.

MEI LI (1938). Written and illustrated by Thomas Handforth. An interesting story of the adventures of Mei Li, a little girl of North China, and her brother San Yu on a trip to the New Year's Fair in Peking. The black and white drawings complement the text. Awarded the Caldecott Medal in 1939.

THE CHINESE CHILDREN NEXT DOOR (1942). By Pearl S. Buck. Drawings by William Arthur Smith. An American mother who spent her childhood in China tells her children about her life and neighbors there. Although the story comments on how funny our customs might appear to Chinese children, the tone of much of the text is condescending and the way of life described is now outdated.

FISH IN THE AIR (1948). Story and pictures by Kurt Wiese. This amusing tale of Little Fish and the Big Wind is a reflection of the author-illustrator's memories and perceptions of a China of perhaps 50 years ago. Yellow is chosen to represent skin color, while the illustrations and descriptions of the characters do not convey an impression of personal dignity.

** TOMMY AND DEE DEE (1953). Written and illustrated by Yen Liang. Recommended by two selection aides as good for the promotion of international understanding, the story of the American boy Tommy and the Chinese boy, Dee Dee features their differences and similarities in ways of life. (Included in this category because the author is known to write about his own childhood)

** HAPPY NEW YEAR (1961). Written and illustrated by Yen Liang. Dee Dee and his sister Bao find the 8th day of the 12th month an exciting time, the beginning of Chinese New Year's Festival. The author-artist presents the holiday as he knew it when a child in China.

Chinese-Americans in U.S. Chinatowns

MOY MOY (1960). Written and illustrated by Leo Politi. Moy Moy is a little Chinese-American girl who lives on Chanking Street in Los Angeles. This bright and colorful book shows neighborhood preparations and celebration of the Chinese New Year, with the children's lion dance and the dragon parade. Pictures show a totally Chinese environment: traditional home furnishings, toys, musical instruments, shops, and writing. Children and adults wear Chinese clothing, and although the older brothers are described as "going to school", the only school illustrated is the Chinese language school. Adults are portrayed as shopkeepers, and the crowd that gathers to watch the New Year's parade is Chinese.

THE RICE BOWL PET (1962). By Patricia Miles Martin. Illustrated by Ezra Jack Keats. Ah Jim lives in Chinatown, San Francisco, and must find a pet small enough to fit into a rice bowl, for the family is big and the apartment is small. His friends at the "American" school are named Ling Sam and Ping Loo, and while traveling throughout the city looking for a pet, he does not interact with people outside of Chinatown. Ezra Jack Keats' colorful drawings of San Francisco include Chinese-American adults wearing traditional clothing, pictured as shopkeepers.

SOO LING FINDS A WAY (1965). By June Behrens. Pictures by Taro Yashima. Soo Ling wants to help her grandfather when a new laundromat opens across the street from their hand laundry. A dull story, with illustrations that lack the color and warmth found in Yashima's drawings for the MOMO books. An attempt to show the Chinese-American in our society through the postman, the grocer, the laundromat proprietor, Soo Ling and her grandfather, close examination reveals no evidence of interaction with the dominant American culture.

For titles published from 1968 to 1970, and presumably of too recent imprint to be included on any of the selection lists, the "Books to Come" section of the March 15, 1970 and October 15, 1970 SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL, the juvenile collection in the Rutgers Library School Laboratory, and the picture book collections of the four libraries previously noted were surveyed. 7 titles were identified, and examination revealed two identifiable themes:

6 titles - Tales and Legends of Ancient China
1 title - Chinese-Americans in the dominant American culture

Titles are listed by date of imprint within each group, and those that could not be located for personal examination have been double-starred (★★).
Tales and Legends of Ancient China

MA-LIEN AND THE MAGIC BRUSH (1968). Retold by Hisako Kimishima. English version by Alvin Tresselt. Illustrated by Kei Wakana. A talented but penniless peasant boy is given a magic brush that converts whatever he paints into real objects. He uses the brush to help the poor and foil the plans of a greedy mandarin. A pleasant Chinese folktale retold by a Japanese folklorist, with expressive, brightly colored illustrations.

THE LEGEND OF THE WILLOW PLATE (1968). By Alvin Tresselt and Nancy Cleaver. With pictures by Joseph Low. No one knows who first told the story of the willow plate. Just as the pattern has remained a household favorite, so too has the sad story of Chang and his love for the beautiful Koong-se. The illustrations give a somewhat modern interpretation to traditional Chinese designs, with the familiar blue willow pattern used in the end papers.

MAI-LING AND THE MIRROR (1969). Adapted from a Chinese folktale by Roz Abisch. Illustrated by Boche Kaplan. Identified as an ancient Chinese folktale, the humorous story of a jealous wife, Mai-Ling, who sends her husband out on a foolish errand. Simply and clearly told, it would be a good choice for story hours. The stylized black, white, green and blue drawings do not successfully carry out the humor of the text.

THE NIGHTINGALE AND THE EMPEROR (1970). By Hans Christian Anderson. Illustrated by Anne Marie Jauss. The artist notes that the text for this edition has been based on "The Nightengale" from WONDER STORIES TOLD FOR CHILDREN published by Houghton Mifflin Company. The text lacks the flowing beauty of the LeGallienne translation, and the illustrations are alternately dull and overly garish.

** KIM SOO AND HIS TORTOISE (1970). By David Collins. Illustrated by Alix Cohen. Kim Soo enters his tortoise in a contest to please the emperor in order to save his family and his village.

THE SEVENTH MANDARIN (1970). By Jane Yolen. Pictures by Ed Young. When a wild storm wrenches the kite that carries the king's soul out of the hands of the seventh mandarin, he follows it into poverty-ridden regions of the kingdom he has never seen before. A dramatic and original fable, written with economy and style of language and illustrated with outstanding watercolor paintings that will appeal to the mature child.

Chinese-Americans in the dominant American Culture

THE WHITE HORSE (1970). By Edith Thacher Hurd. Pictures by Tony Chen. Feeling lost and alone in the crowded city and his big school, Jimmie Lee often daydreams. On a school trip to the zoo, he finds a beautiful white horse and rides him high into the sky. He shouts, "Hello sky! Hello! I am here. I am here." Suddenly a classmate's voice brings Jimmie back to the zoo and back to reality. Without saying a word, he gets up and walks away from everyone. This curious combination of elusive fantasy, second-grade text, and superb illustration is the single picture book located that shows a Chinese-American child in a situation that can be described as the dominant American culture. However, the author and illustrator have portrayed a lonely boy who does not identify with his environment or his peers.
Findings

Of the 25 titles included in the survey, 14 are Tales and Legends of Ancient China; 7 are stories of Pre-WW II China; 3 are stories with a U.S. Chinatown setting; and 1 can be described as having a dominant American culture setting. There were no picture books identified as showing life in contemporary China or Taiwan.

For the most part, the Tales and Legends of Ancient China have been executed with taste, high literary quality, and beautiful and expressive illustrations. They convey a feeling of respect and admiration for the ancient ways. The Jane Yolen-Ed Young collaborations are outstanding, as is Wyndham's CHINESE MOTHER GOOSE RHYMES. The notable exception is Jauss's version of THE NIGHTINGALE AND THE EMPEROR. Certainly not an attractive publication, it suffers even more when compared with the beautiful LeGallienne edition. Bishop and Wiese's THE FIVE CHINESE BROTHERS comes perilously close to being caricature in its illustrations. Although this is offset by the style of most of the other books in this group, it remains the most well known and most popular with the youngest children, and therefore exerts the strongest influence on their perceptions of Chinese people.

As a group, the stories of Pre-WW II China are old fashioned and in some cases outdated. Buck's THE CHINESE CHILDREN NEXT DOOR is written in a condescending style that might have been acceptable in 1942, but is out of place today. Even someone who is known to be sympathetic to the Chinese can be guilty of a patronizing tone. Wiese's illustrations in THE STORY ABOUT PING use the yellow skin color that is characteristic of his work. The story of the little duck is a charming one, and the book as a whole cannot be regarded as a negative presentation. When a comparison is made of
Wiese's illustrations of people in A FISH IN THE AIR with Sasek's in THIS IS HONG KONG, Macmillan, 1965, it is readily seen that his characters lack an appearance of simple human dignity that should be present. Handforth's MEI LI is outstanding in this group, and it is hoped that other stories of this period in China's history will be written that will maintain its high quality of text and illustration.

Of the 3 stories with a U.S. Chinatown setting, all contain occupational stereotypes, overgeneralize the culture and traditions of Chinese-Americans, and show no interaction with the dominant American society. Martin's THE RICE BOWL PET is the most acceptable and believable of the 3 titles. Keat's illustrations are consistent with the well-written text, and one wishes that the author and illustrator would collaborate again and develop the characters of Ah Jim and his family and friends, and show them in the world outside of Chinatown. Politi's MOY MOY is typical of his other books about American minorities -- full of bright and colorful illustrations, but showing the main character living in the most segregated of worlds. Behren's SOO LING FINDS A WAY is a well-meaning attempt that fails. One is left with the impression that Yashima could not get enthused about drawing laundries.

The single title that can qualify as portraying Chinese-Americans in the dominant American culture, Hurd's THE WHITE HORSE, has as the main character a boy who is in the dominant culture but does not feel a part of it. He obviously lives in an urban Chinatown and attends a highly integrated school. No ethnic label is placed on him by the text, but we see him passing grocery stores that adults will recognize as being Chinese. Tony Chen's drawings are so true to life that children will immediately want
to identify with them. For the Chinese-American reader, this will mean identification with a character who does not interact with his environment or his peers.

The findings for the Chinese-American books surveyed do not differ from those obtained by Dr. Gast, even though 8 years have passed since he sampled the literature. Chinese-Americans are still portrayed as: favoring traditional garb; being semi-skilled workers of the lower socio-economic class with adequate incomes; placing value on schools of the dominant culture and Chinese language school; living in "Chinatown"; in general taking pride in their ethnic culture and clinging to traditional patterns of life.

Analyzing the survey by imprint, we find that the majority of titles have been published since 1960. With all their limitations, the 4 books dealing with Chinese-Americans are positive representations, albeit stereotyped, but they have been available for 10 years or less. 12 of the 14 Tales and Legends have imprints dating from 1960 to 1970, making them available for a relatively short period of time. Of the 9 remaining titles, 5 have been on library shelves and recommended lists for the past 25-35 years, and have probably been a major influence on the attitude development of many young American children, including young Chinese-Americans. During the years following World War II, and until 1960, while Chinese-Americans were being assimilated into the mainstream of dominant American culture, these were the picture books most representative of Chinese and Chinese-Americans in the United States: THE STORY ABOUT PING (1933), THE FIVE CHINESE BROTHERS (1938), MEI LI (1938), THE CHINESE CHILDREN NEXT DOOR (1942), and FISH IN THE AIR (1948). Is it any wonder that many young Chinese-Americans are having an identity problem?
What is needed?

- We should encourage authors and publishers to increase the number of picture books of high literary quality showing Chinese-Americans as main characters who live among and associate with Anglo-Americans and Americans from other minority groups.

- We should encourage authors and publishers to produce picture books of high literary quality that consciously avoid occupational stereotypes and overemphasis of the ethnic traditions of Chinese-Americans.

- We should encourage authors and publishers to produce picture books of high literary quality and authenticity of presentation showing China's historical period before World War II, and life in contemporary China and Taiwan.

That which enters the eye will never leave the heart
(Old Chinese proverb)


BOOKS FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LIBRARIES, AN INITIAL COLLECTION. Ed. by Elizabeth D. Hodges. ALA. Chicago, 1969.


LET'S READ TOGETHER. BOOKS FOR FAMILY ENJOYMENT. ALA. Chicago, 1960.

SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL. March 15, 1970.

SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL. October 15, 1970.
APPENDIX B

Author Index


Liang, Yen. TOMMY AND DEE DEE. Illus. Walck, 1953.