

Examining Cultural Authenticity in Picture Books about China and Chinese Culture

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Abstract

This study examined 20 picture books about Chinese culture published in South Korea to evaluate how accurately they capture concrete, behavioral, and symbolic culture, and the existence of bias and stereotypes. The results show misrepresentations of concrete culture, including food, transportation, costumes, characters, and the map. The Chinese culture is stereotypically represented by the traditional culture, without fully reflecting the country's recent development and status. Regarding behavioral culture, the customs during Chinese festivals are misrepresented, with Chinese people portrayed as small-eyed and having exaggerated facial expressions. Moreover, portrayals of Chinese people in social settings reflect gender-based stereotypes, unsanitary and having uncivilized social environments. Regarding symbolic culture, gift giving is misinterpreted and Chinese people's Confucian values are stereotyped. The study's findings of substantial misrepresentations and stereotyping underscore the need to make active efforts to maintain cultural authenticity in multicultural picture books.

Keywords: Multicultural picture book, Chinese culture, cultural authenticity

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Introduction

With the rapid progress of globalization, chances of coming in contact with people from different backgrounds are rapidly increasing. The importance of multicultural education is growing because it is necessary to live together with people from different cultural backgrounds while respecting each other's culture. Adults acquire information about other cultures through direct experience such as traveling or living together or from various sources such as television, movies, and online materials, but children often learn about other cultures through picture books (Kim et al., 2015; Liu & Chou, 2017; Osorio, 2018). Multicultural picture books are used as an important material in early childhood multicultural education, and young children's impression of other cultures may differ depending on how those cultures are portrayed in picture books. Therefore, it is important to choose culturally authentic picture books.

Multicultural education experts emphasize that cultural authenticity reflected in a picture book should be considered when choosing a multicultural picture book. In order for children to learn about another culture through multicultural picture books, descriptions of that culture must be accurate (Wee et al., 2015). In other words, prejudice can only be prevented when values held by people in that culture as well as their specific cultural elements such as clothes, food, and holidays are authentically described (Smith-D'Arezzo & Musgrove, 2011; Yoo-Lee et al., 2014). Multicultural education for young children using picture books should not stop at increasing their understanding of another culture but should help them develop positive perceptions on that culture without forming cultural stereotypes or bias (Lee & Kim, 2012). Prior studies on cultural authenticity in multicultural books have mainly addressed cultural authenticity reflected in African American storybooks (Bishop, 2003). In recent years, more studies are examining cultural authenticity reflected in picture books covering more diverse cultures (Wee et al., 2018; Zhang & Wang, 2021).

Korean society is increasingly becoming a multicultural society as the number of marriage migrant women and overseas workers increases. According to the 2020 immigration statistics, Chinese people account for the largest proportion of foreigners residing in Korea at 44% (Foreign Immigration Office, 2020). Although the proportion of

Chinese living in Korea is growing, it is reported that Chinese parents worry that their children might be bullied or teased because they come from Chinese families (Su & Lee, 2020). Implementing multicultural education through picture books about Chinese culture will help young children from Chinese families feel pride in their cultural heritage and help young children with backgrounds other than Chinese culture better understand Chinese culture (Song, 2010;Yuk & Choi, 2018). Little research has been done on how many Chinese-related picture books have been published and how accurately Chinese culture are depicted in those picture books in Korea. If the contents of those picture books are inaccurate or depict only negative aspects of Chinese culture, they will only cause prejudice against Chinese culture.

Attempts are being made to implement multicultural education using picture books in Korea, but very little has been studied on cultural authenticity in multicultural picture books with the exception of Kim's research on cultural authenticity in Korea-related picture books that were published in the United States (Kim, 2018). To fill this gap in research, this study analyzed the cultural authenticity in China-related picture books published in Korea.

Theoretical Background

Defining cultural authenticity of picture books

Multicultural picture books can provide good opportunities for young children to experience other cultures, and everyone will agree that they should authentically portray respective culture in order to realize such enriching experience by young children. Racial favoritism and stereotyping emerges as early as the age of 4 (Park et al., 2011; Raabe & Beelmann, 2011) and multicultural picture books are a good tool for multicultural education for young children (Kim, 2019), but only when they are authentic will minority students have a sense of pride in their heritage culture (Ra et al., 2019), and cultural majority students be able to develop good feelings for other cultures and their friends with that cultural background (Cheon & Jeon, 2020; Jeon & Lee, 2019; Ji et al., 2016; Ko, 2017; Wee et al., 2016)

For such reasons, cultural authenticity in picture books is drawing great academic attention. However, making a precise definition of cultural authenticity of picture books is not an easy task (Bishop, 2003). The scope of culture must be established first to determine which aspects should be examined when evaluating cultural authenticity of a picture book. However, culture is interpreted somewhat differently by different people. Most scholars believe that culture does not mean only tangible artefacts such as food, clothing, houses, literature, and paintings. This is well illustrated in the following definition by Tylor (1871: as cited in Shen, 2019): Culture is “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” Therefore, when evaluating the cultural authenticity of a picture book, it is necessary to examine the accuracy and appropriateness in describing not only the cultural facts and artefacts but also the morals, values, and beliefs of the culture.

There are no specific guidelines on which aspects to analyze when analyzing the cultural authenticity of a picture book. Nevertheless, many scholars suggest that the most important criterion for evaluating the cultural authenticity of a picture book should be whether the people of that culture can accept the contents of the picture book. Studies that examine cultural authenticity in picture books mainly analyze the following four cultural elements (Harada, 1995; Mo & Shen, 1997; Yoo-Lee et al., 2014). First, the most obvious question is whether the cultural information reflected in the text and illustrations of a picture book are accurate. Another important point of consideration is whether the text and illustrations of a picture book and the themes of the book might potentially cause stereotypes or biases against the culture or people living in that culture. The third important aspect to consider is whether derogatory language is used to diminish the target culture or race. Lastly, the values, attitudes, and beliefs conveyed in a picture book should be acceptable to the people from that culture.

Cultural Authenticity of Picture books on Chinese culture

Recently, studies on the cultural authenticity of picture books dealing with Asian cultures have been conducted in the United States. Among them, the investigation of Chinese culture accounts for the largest proportion. Cai (1994) examined 73 children's picture books

about Chinese culture published in the United States and found that 70% of them were Chinese folk tales. Only a few picture books dealt with contemporary Chinese society. In addition, illustrations of Chinese culture were often confused with images of Japanese and Western cultures.

Chen and Wang (2014) examined the cultural authenticity of 46 award-winning picture books published in the United States and found that the list was no longer dominated by folk tales. They found that themes were diversified and China's multiracial and multilingual characteristics were accurately depicted. However, the analysis identified some stereotypical elements, including passive and obedient behavior characteristics, straight hair and squinting physical characteristics, which are consistent with the findings in prior studies (Giles et al., 2018; Yoo-Lee et al., 2014).

Zhang and Wang (2021) analyzed 53 children's Chinese culture picture books published in Canada. The results show that most of the contents of the picture books are authentic and accurately describe China's Confucian values such as family unity, filial piety, gratitude, hard-working, and persistence. However, stereotypical depiction of Chinese people and culture were found, including portraying outdated social roles of men and women and exaggerated descriptions of Chinese facial features.

Although a good number of prior studies have been conducted on the cultural authenticity of China-related picture books published in the United States and Canada, no studies have been conducted on the cultural authenticity of Chinese-related picture books published in Korea. This study examined the cultural authenticity of China-themed picture books published in Korea.

Research Questions

1. How accurate are the description of the Chinese concrete-, behavioral-, and symbolic culture in picture books for young children?
2. Does the content of children's picture books contain stereotypes or bias against China or Chinese culture?

Method

Data Collection

Selecting Picture Books Related to China. In order to investigate the cultural authenticity of picture books dealing with Chinese culture, picture books for analysis were first collected. Using combinations of keywords (China, Chinese culture, picture books, folk tales, and trip), we searched library-housed databases, portal sites, and book store sites. Our search led to 27 picture books published from 2002 to 2020, but four books were out of print.

Two early childhood educators with extensive teaching experience rated the books on a Likert 5-point scale on four three criteria: whether the story was too long; whether the vocabulary was too difficult for children; whether the content was interesting; whether the illustrations were realistic and beautiful. Three books were eliminated because they were too long for young to read and pay attention to. Finally, 20 picture books were included in the final analysis (Table 1).

Table 1. *List of Picture Books*

Book Title	Genre	The core content	Publisher	Year
Oror and Odo	R	Living environment of the Miao nationality.	Gilbutkid	2008
Festival Bus	F	Traditional Chinese festival "Lantern Festival".	Hanwoori	2009
Liang's Treasure	R	Life of modern Chinese people and the friendship between children.	Arambooks	2011
Panda and the Baby	R	What Koreans have seen and heard traveling in China.	BIR	2013
Ping-ping Defeats the Monster	C	A folktale about Chinese New Year.	Kyowon	2019
Why is Everything Red?	R	Why Chinese people like red.	Kyowon	2019
Little Mooncake's Dream	F	Chinese food culture.	Kyowon	2019

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Shin Feng and Ming Ming Play in the Peking Opera	F	Facial makeup and costume characteristics of Chinese Peking Opera.	Kyowon	2019
Everything is Going to be Okay!	F	Friendship with a panda as the protagonist.	Kyowon	2019
Why Do You Hate Presents?	F	Why the Chinese do not like certain gifts.	Kyowon	2019
We will Solve Everything for You!	F	Historical sites of China.	Kyowon	2019
Kung fu Shen Xian	F	Chinese Kungfu.	Kyowon	2019
What Kind of Clothes?	R	Traditional Chinese dress "cheongsam".	Kyowon	2019
The Coolest Car	F	Traditional Chinese customs and habits.	Kyowon	2019
Jaeminaegol	C	A folktale about the Korean ethnic group in China.	Jaimimage	2002
Momo's Coin	R	Families left behind in China.	Totobook	2009
The First day the Tooth Fell Out	R	Harmonious neighbor relationship in Chinese Hutongs.	Sangsang School	2018
Ruby's Wish	B	Chinese women fighting for their rights.	BIR	2014
Lost and Found: Adèle & Simon in China	R	Historical sites, famous rivers and mountains, local customs.	Betterbooks	2017
Seeing the Sun in China	R	Contemporary life of the Chinese people.	Book in My Life	2018

Genre: B: Biographies; C: Chinese folk tale; F: Fantasy picture book; R: Real-life story.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was conducted by the corresponding author and two Chinese graduate students. These students from China participated in the analysis to gain insiders' perspectives. This study adopted "Levels of Culture" framework proposed by Hidalgo (1993) that classifies culture into three levels: concrete-, behavioral-, and symbolic-culture. This framework has been used in prior studies on the cultural authenticity of picture books (Kim, 2018; Wee et al., 2015). Specifically, concrete culture includes food, clothing,

shelter, transportation, Chinese characters, Chinese maps, and flags etc and behavioral culture includes social role, languages, facial expressions, behaviors, and manners etc. Finally, symbolic culture entails values and beliefs held by Chinese people.

Specific criteria was established to evaluate the cultural authenticity of the picture books. The criteria include; Is information pertaining to Chinese culture accurate?; Does it include stereotypes or biases?; Is any derogatory language used?; Are values conveyed acceptable to Chinese people?. Content analysis was carried out in two stages. The first stage focused on concrete-and behavioral-aspects of Chinese culture. The second stage examined the authenticity of symbolic culture and explored whether the values and beliefs depicted in the picture book reflect the common beliefs and values of current Chinese society (Mo & Shen, 1997; Wee et al., 2018). The researcher and two Chinese graduate students conducted the content analysis independently and compared the results after the analysis was completed. They discussed all the points that even one person pointed out as being inaccurate or culturally inauthentic.

Results

This study assessed the cultural authenticity of multicultural picture books published in Korea that depict Chinese culture. This section presents the results from the analyses of the selected picture books.

Accuracy of culture descriptions

Concrete culture

Concrete culture is visible and tangible, and young children begin to recognize cultural difference and form their first impression through concrete cultural items. To understand the contents' accuracy, the texts and illustrations were analyzed; inaccurate information was found in five of the 20 picture books (25%). It includes food, transportation, clothing, Chinese alphabet, and a map of China.

In terms of food, errors were found in the texts describing *Tangyuan*, and *Xiaolongbao*.

First, in 'Momo's Coin', the description of *Tangyuan* is as follows: "Early in the morning on New Year's Day, my mom brought me hot and steamy birds' eggs *Tteokguk*." *Tangyuan* is a portion of food eaten during the Chinese New Year and the Lantern Festival in southern parts of China. A round glutinous rice dough is filled with dried fruits or sweet stuffing such as nuts mixed with sugar and then boiled in clear hot water and eaten. *Tangyuan* was translated as "birds' eggs rice *Tteokguk*." The Chinese *Tangyuan* is quite different from Korean *Tteokguk* and this particular translation makes it highly likely for *tangyuan* to be misunderstood.

Second, the description of *xiaolongbao* in 'Panda and the Baby' is not accurate: "I like *xiaolongbao* soup the most. It looks similar to dumplings in Korea, but I was surprised by its juice when I chewed it." *Xiaolongbao* looks like a soft fluffy steamed bun without much juice. Based on the description that juice gushes out, it appears that the terms *xiaolongbao* and *Guantang bao* (soup-filled dumplings) were mixed-up. The dumplings in the illustrations are also quite different from *xiaolongbao*.

In terms of transportation, 'Panda and the Baby' introduces the slow trains in the picture book as "the train that runs for three days." It is not accurate to describe slow trains as trains that simply run for three days. In fact, it refers to trains whose speed has not changed despite overall improvements in the speed of Chinese railways. They are characterized by slow speed and cheap tickets; however, there is no train in China that runs for three days.

In terms of costumes, detailed descriptions of traditional Chinese clothes were found to be incorrect. *Figure 1* shows an illustration from 'What Kind of Clothes?' which portrays a mix-match of a woman's hat from the Qing Dynasty and Chinese Qipao. It is wrong to wear clothes and hats that belong to different periods together. The hats shown in the illustrations appeared in the mid-Qing Dynasty. In modern days, Qing Dynasty hats for women are mainly used in movies, dramas, or performances.



Figure 1. Chinese female costume in 'What Kind of Clothes?'

Another error was found regarding a Chinese character. *Figure 2* shows the letter from *Liang* to *Cai* in 'Liang's Treasure,' containing the character “他”. The illustrator used “他” referring to *Cai*, who is a girl. According to the norms of modern Chinese, “她” should be used to refer to a woman.

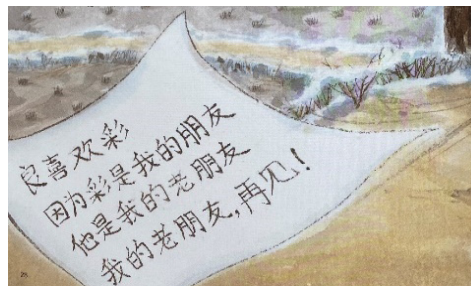


Figure 2. Liang's letter in 'Liang's Treasure,'

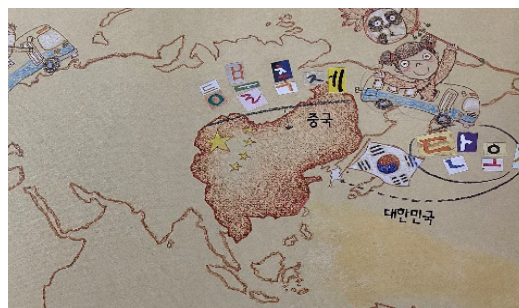


Figure 3. China map in 'Festival Bus,'

There were also errors in the illustrations of Chinese maps and flags. China has an area of about 9.6 million km². As figure 3 shows, for example, the map in 'Festival Bus' is missing a large region of China, including Tibet, Xinjiang, Qinghai, Sichuan, and Yunnan provinces, all of which are located in western China.

Behavioral Culture

Behavioral culture refers to how cultural identity develops through nonverbal communication, such as social roles, languages, facial expressions, human attitudes, lifestyles, language, and manners etc. Inaccurate statements were found in one of the 20 picture books (5%). Inaccurate information was identified regarding the depicted behavioral culture describing Chinese people's holiday customs. Figure 4 shows two children kneeling on the ground while making a wish on the Mid-Autumn Festival in 'Little Mooncake's Dream'. This action of kneeling is incorrect. This belongs to the custom of the Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival in the past. However, in modern China, people don't kneel down when making a wish on the Mid-Autumn Festival.



Figure 4. Children kneeling making wishes in 'Little Mooncake's Dream'

Symbolic Culture

Symbolic culture includes values and beliefs held by Chinese people. Inaccurate statements of the Chinese symbolic culture were found in 1 of the 20 picture books (5%). In 'Why do You Hate Presents?', the author wrote: "You want to break up as soon as we meet? I hate fan gifts." This text explains why Chinese people do not like fans as gifts. However, this notion is inaccurate. In China, a fan symbolizes kindness and good deed and has long been recognized as one of the best gifting items. During the Tang Dynasty, fans were gifted

to neighboring countries when ambassadors were dispatched for cultural exchange. Today, leaders bring fans as gifts when visiting foreign countries.

Stereotypes

The content analysis revealed that there were four aspects of stereotypes for Chinese people: Chinese people's facial features of Chinese people, gender roles, lack of description of contemporary China, and uncivilized behaviors in picture books.

Appearance

Through the analysis of texts and illustrations, it was found that six of 20 picture books (30%) have stereotypes about appearance of Chinese people. As Figure 5 from 'Ruby's Wish_J' shows, the Chinese are depicted as typically having small and slanted eyes.



Figure 5. Depiction of Chinese people in 'Ruby's Wish_J'

Traditional gender roles

In terms of gender roles, the social roles represented by the 20 picture books indicate that men are more likely to take on professional roles than women, as they are depicted as performing 11 different roles, including chefs, office workers, and drivers etc. There are only five occupational roles for women. And the text and illustrations in the picture book also describe this gender inequality. In 'Liang's Treasure_J', Liang lives with her mother and grandmother. Her father works in Beijing.” And as shown Figure 6 from 'Momo's Coin_J', Momo's father works outside all year round and can only return to his hometown to reunite with his family during the Chinese New Year. This illustration shows the scene of Mom taking care of Momo while her father is away. Figure 7 is from 'The First day the Tooth

Fell Out. The illustration shows what the little girl saw when she passed the alley. As Figure 7 shows, mothers are holding their children. Both illustrations show the traditional social roles of women, which was to take care of the family and raise the next generation. With the development of modern society, more and more women are participating in workplace life, and men are beginning to take on the responsibility of raising children, but these are not reflected in picture books. It shows the lack of a description of the current social development in China.

In the feudal society that lasted for more than 2,000 years, women had always been in a subordinate position. However, with the movement to stop foot binding and the promotion of gender equality, the status of women has been greatly improved (Jiang, 2020). In modern China, more and more women enter the workplace, and men also share the responsibility of parenting, but this is not reflected in picture books.



Figure 6. Momo's mother 'Momo's Coin'

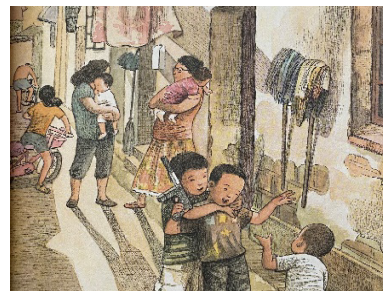


Figure 7. Image of mothers holding babies in 'The First day the Tooth Fell Out'

Lack of description related to Chinese people's new values

In terms of symbolic culture, 6 of the 20 picture books convey the traditional values of Confucianism. In 'Ping-ping Defeats the Monster', Ping Ping bravely fights monsters for the safety of the villagers. In 'Everything is Going to be Okay!', in order to present a perfect performance, friends help each other. In 'Everything is Going to be Okay!', the little detective helps everyone punish the bad guys. In 'The Coolest Car', although the car knows that he is late, he is still enthusiastic about helping others. In 'Jaeminaegol', the little girl bravely jumped into the sea and sacrificed herself for the safety of the whole village. In 'Momo's Coin', a family enjoys the joy of reunion during the Spring Festival. These moral

values of bravery, kindness, mutual help, and family unity have deeply influenced Chinese people up to now. But the picture books surveyed lacked descriptions of modern value systems. With the development of modern society, new values such as “freedom, equality, fairness, civilization, and legal system”, which applicable to modern society, have become more and more popular among the people (Qiu, 2015).

The unsanitary and uncivilized social environments in China in the past

‘Panda and the Baby’ describes what Koreans saw and heard on their way to China to visit their relatives. They saw women sleeping under their seats on the train from Beijing to Chengdu (Figure 8). Such behavior was common in China 20 years ago, but this is very rare now. This illustration can lead a reader to develop prejudices against China as being unsanitary and having uncivilized social environments.



Figure 8. Image of crowded train in ‘Panda and the Baby’

Discussion and Conclusions

This study evaluated the cultural authenticity of Chinese culture-related picture books published in Korea. Most of the incorrect information appeared in concrete cultures, and there is only one issue for behavioral- and symbolic-culture, respectively. Regarding the accuracy of the depiction of concrete Chinese culture, inaccurate descriptions were found in the depiction of foods, transportation, clothes, Chinese characters and Chinese map. But unlike the previous study (Liu , 1998), there was no confusion with other cultures.

With respect to the behavioral- and symbolic-culture, there are fewer incorrect

descriptions, which may be explained by the fact when describing foreign cultures, authors, who are outsiders, tend to focus on the concrete level of culture (Bishop, 2003). It goes without saying that if we want to fully understand a particular culture, it is not enough to stay at the concrete level. In-depth understanding of behavioral- and symbolic-culture is also necessary (Bennett, 2009; Wee et al., 2018).

The investigation of stereotypes revealed that the descriptions of Chinese people's facial features represent stereotype. In addition, gender roles and social values, and uncivilized behaviors in picture books may lead to stereotypes for Chinese people. This was true of even picture books written by Chinese authors. As Wee et al. (2018) pointed out, most multicultural books do not describe contemporary target society. Yokota (2009) also noted that the themes of multicultural picture books are often limited to traditional culture. The content analysis of this study also revealed that there is a lack of portrayal of the contemporary China and multi-ethnic characteristics of China society. Too much depiction of traditional culture is not conducive to children's understanding of the development status of modern China (Cai, 1994). China is developing rapidly during the reform and opening up economy. With the construction of modern cities, cities such as Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen and other places have shown spectacular urban landscapes. Among the 20 picture books surveyed, only 'Seeing the Sun in China' truly portrayed the modern life of the Chinese. Therefore, the content of children's picture books needs to show more of China's modern development. The role of teachers is crucial when choosing and sharing multicultural picture books (Han, 2015; Yuling, 2008). Unless teachers explain that the books are stories of China's past, it is easy for young readers to misunderstand that these books are describing contemporary China. Teachers need to pay special attention to when picture books were published and when the stories took place.

This study examined the cultural authenticity of multicultural picture books at the concrete-, behavioral-, and symbolic culture. The results of this study have the following implications. First, there are not many picture books related to Chinese culture published in South Korea. Therefore, it is necessary to develop more picture books related to Chinese culture. In particular, it is necessary to develop information picture books that convey Chinese cultural information with exquisite pictures. Second, given that inaccurate descriptions of Chinese culture mainly appear in concrete cultures, publishers need to go

through rigorous scrutiny of text and illustrations by experts and cultural insiders. Third, the majority of books dealt with traditional Chinese culture, and as China's modern economy develops, it is necessary to introduce picture books that portray contemporary Chinese society.

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