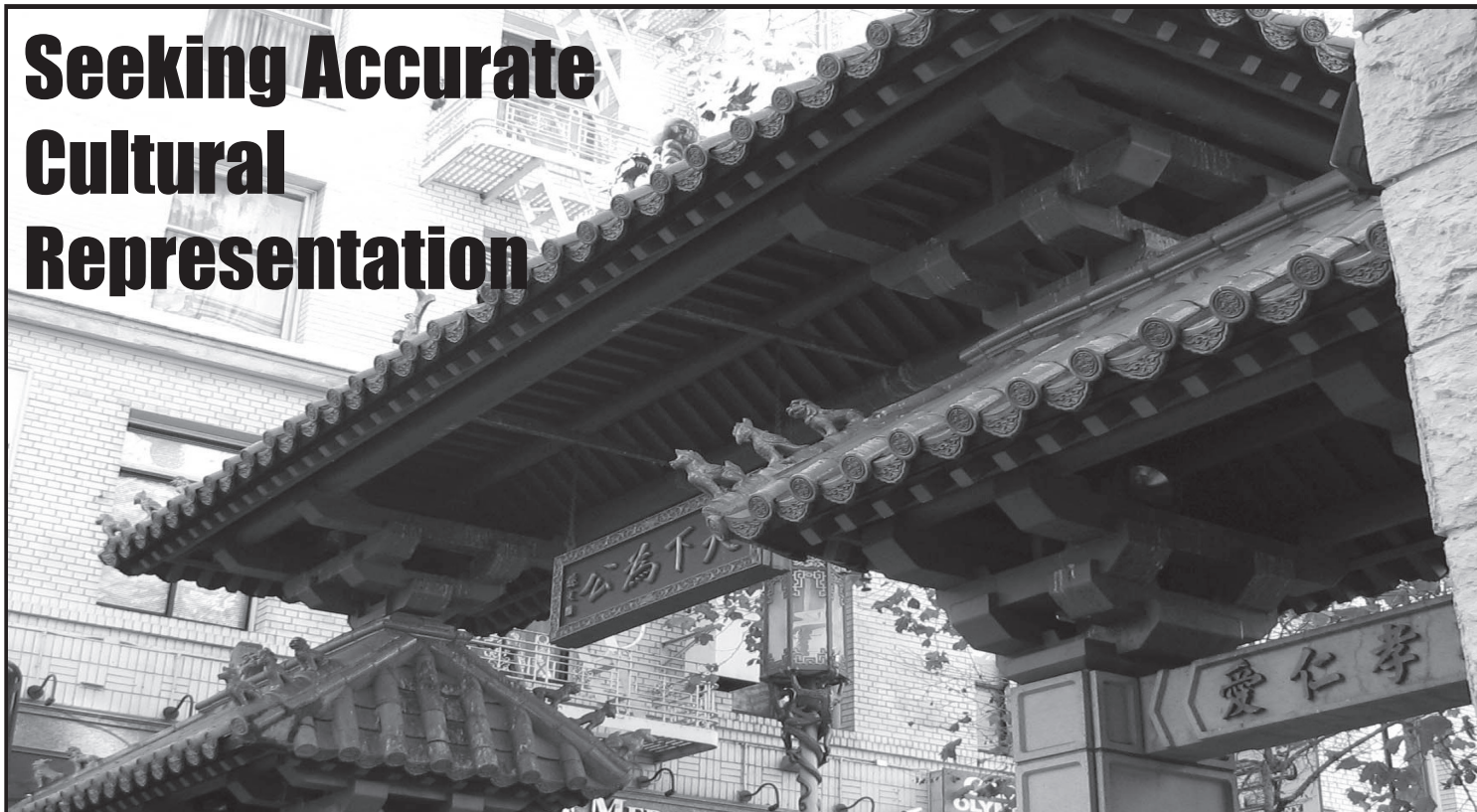


Seeking Accurate Cultural Representation



The sheer amount of American children's and young adult literature, boasting an outpouring of 5,000 titles every year, often amazes a person who is new to this field. Not only is a large proportion of these books of high printing and binding quality, but, at a quick glance, among them is also a pleasant diversity of genre, format, targeted age level, topic, and style.

When I first approached juvenile books published in the United States five years ago (many of them manufactured and shipped over from the People's Republic of China notwithstanding), I was excited to see ethnic Chinese and their culture portrayed in juvenile fiction, informational books, and exquisitely illustrated Chinese folktales conveying an aura of age-oldness and elegance. Through these sources, young readers in the U.S., including those of Chinese ancestry, can learn about Chinese language, Chinese dragons, Chinese New Year customs, Emperor Qin Shihuang's silent terra-cotta army, and many other topics of Chinese heritage.

Juvenile books about China and ethnic Chinese serve several purposes. They cater to young people's need for information about China—whether that “need” is spontaneous or imposed (at school, for ex-

ample). They expose readers to the culture and experiences of ethnic Chinese people in order to promote cross-cultural understanding. In these books, youth of Chinese descent, including new immigrants and native-born Chinese Americans, are also supposed to find the culture, experiences, and history which they share at varying levels and to see people of their own ethnic group portrayed in images and text.

Nonauthentic Reflections

Given these purposes, and another reason I will discuss below, a central concern among researchers of youth literature about Chinese as well as Chinese Americans has been a non-stereotypical portrayal of characters and an accurate and authentic reflection of Chinese culture. In two sophisticated studies by Liu (1993) and Liu (1998), both authors selected facets considered significant to Chinese culture—examples of such facets include food, clothes, ritual customs, festivals, religious beliefs, philosophy, and values—and analyzed how those factors were reflected in youth literature about Chinese and Chinese Americans.

Liu (1998) also examined the written and pictorial physical descriptions of Chinese characters, and paid particular attention to slanted eyes and a non-differential depiction of different characters. These two symptoms, together with bright yellow skin, found in Kurt Wiese's illustration

of *The Five Chinese Brothers* and widely criticized, have become a quick detector for stereotypes and racism in books about Chinese, even as ethnic Chinese authors and illustrators can be exempt from such scrutinies.¹

Confusing and Mixing Asian Cultures

Researchers invariably found erroneous representations of Chinese culture in books for young people. A frequent mistake is the confusion of Chinese culture with cultures from other areas; in particular, studies show that Japanese culture is most susceptible to being mixed with Chinese culture (Cai, 1994; Liu, 1993; Mo & Shen, 1997). These East Asian cultures, being geographically proximate and historically related, seem to be too much trouble for American authors, illustrators, and editors to tell apart.

Blair Lent's *Tikki Tikki Tembo* (1968), a folktale originating from Japan, was touted as a *pourquoi* tale about Chinese naming tradition, and librarians and researchers pointed out the dubious cultural representation as early as 1974 (Cai, 1994; Scott, 1974). In 1998, a heated debate erupted on the *Child_Lit* listserv concerning the cultural issue of this “Chinese” folktale, and a few ethnic Chinese expressed clear unhappiness with the misleading information about Chinese culture in the book (*Child_Lit*, 2004). Despite a simple correction required in the original, the

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Mahjong, World War II, and Ethnic Chinese in Multicultural Youth Literature

Minjie Chen



misnomer remains in a paperback edition released by Square Fish Books in 2007.

In another picture book I examined, *Ms. Frizzle's Adventures: Imperial China* (Cole & Degen, 2005), the illustrator freely blends motifs and features from Japanese and Chinese cultures, so that the section on Chinese kung fu actually shows two barefooted men practicing martial arts in karate uniforms. As my discussion will show, beneath these apparently innocuous oversights or "artistic liberties" are some larger issues: a lack of real concern about the distinctions between Japanese and Chinese cultures and a lack of understanding of the historical legacies which contributed to the delicate relations between people from Japan and China.

Mostly Set in Ancient China

Another discovery made by researchers was that juvenile literature (excluding informational books) featuring Chinese characters tends to be folktales and stories set in ancient China. For example, Cai (1994) surveyed 73 picture story books that feature Chinese and Chinese American characters and found 51 of them to be folktales. He pointed out that the high ratio of folktales was not unique to his survey, but "consistent with the ratio of the folktales in the publication of picture books about Chinese and Chinese culture in general" (p. 170).

Liu's (1998) statistics of story books,

published from 1980 to 1997 and portraying ethnic Chinese, provided us with a more nuanced picture. Whereas folktales were rare among story books about Chinese Americans, in which the majority was historical fiction and modern realistic fiction, folktale constituted the most common genre for story books about Chinese people in China (22 out of 35 in her sample) (p. 67). Among contemporary realistic fiction and historical fiction set in China, Liu (1993) did identify more titles set in 20th century modern China than in ancient China, but this tiny body of juvenile fiction casting Chinese people in China was dwarfed by a much larger number of Chinese folktales.

In addition, as Cai's (1994) analysis showed, picture books, even those set in contemporary mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, tended to address topics concerning cultural traditions and to present a tourists' view of Chinese everyday life.

The nature of youth literature featuring ethnic Chinese, with its heavy emphasis upon stories from the remote past, partly explains why earlier studies of this body of literature paid meticulous attention to whether the illustrator had presented the right shape of the Chinese dragon and whether the description of a wedding ceremony rings true to Chinese culture. Well-received autobiographies and personal narratives such as *Red Scarf Girl* by Ji-li Jiang (HarperTrophy,

1997), *Chinese Cinderella* by Adeline Yen Mah (Delacorte, 1999), *Red Land, Yellow River* by Ange Zhang (Groundwood, 2004), *Little Green: Growing up in the Cultural Revolution* by Chun Yu (Simon & Schuster, 2005), and *Diary of Ma Yan* by Yan Ma (HarperCollins, 2005), all providing a closer and more realistic look at the 20th century and contemporary China, are only recent additions to juvenile literature about Chinese.

If researchers such as Cai (1994) expressed composed discomfort with publishers' effort to portray ethnic Chinese through folktales (p. 188), the irritation was voiced blatantly by a female Taiwanese who joined the Child_Lit listserv thread on cultural misrepresentation in *Tikki Tikki Tembo*:

I will be quite offended if ALL children are learning in school about China is through [f]olktales... [M]any think that to plan a "multicultural" curriculum is to introduce FIVE different folk stories from five different cultures. This, quite frankly, disgusts me! (Child_Lit, 2004, original capitalized words)

The woman, without giving her real name to the listserv,² proceeded to volunteer a long list of topics which she considered better vehicles for conveying Chinese culture and Chinese experiences to young people in the U.S. Her suggestions ranged from classical Chinese poetry to significant events in modern Chinese history to contemporary Chinese society under

the influence of Western cultural import (Child_Lit, 2004).

Plainly or Subtly

Chinese folktales and stories from ancient times can speak for Chinese culture plainly or subtly. Tales well-known among contemporary Chinese are part of their shared knowledge and the shaping force of their perspectives and ideas. Many Chinese may still find the story of “The Lost Horse,” first recorded more than 2000 years ago in a Taoist book *Huai Nan Zi*, now taught in Chinese junior high school and adapted by Ed Young into a picture book for young American children, a source of peace and hope in the ups and downs of unpredictable life.

The story of Monkey King’s odyssey, enthusiastically retold in English by several Chinese American as well as non-Chinese authors/illustrators for a young audience, has nurtured the imagination of Chinese children for at least five centuries. Some of these children would grow up to become successful writers and artists, such as Maxine Hong Kingston, Patricia Chao, and Gene Luen Yang,³ and would appropriate this magical monkey for their own literary creations.

While we can not discredit stories as illegitimate bearers of Chinese culture simply by their temporal distance, the Taiwanese posting prompts us to investigate what is missing in American youth literature which has been used to help understand Chinese and their culture and to tell people of Chinese ancestry who they are.

Case Study: The Sino-Japanese War

The next section of this article will focus on an event in modern history—the Sino-Japanese War (1937-45)—and its representation in American youth literature. In an almost offended tone the Taiwanese woman wrote, “If you want to learn about Chinese culture—talk about the Dynasties, talk about the wars, ...talk about WWII when the Japanese invaded China and massacred millions of Chinese...” (Child_Lit, 2004).

What is the significance of this war, fought 70 years ago between Imperial Japan and China with U.S. military aid, to modern China, to contemporary Chinese, and to ethnic Chinese people in the United States? How have youth growing up in America, including those of Chinese ancestry, been informed of ethnic Chinese experiences during World War II through juvenile literature?

Two years before Nazis invaded Po-

land, marking the start of World War II in the European theatre, the full-scale war between Imperial Japan and China broke out in 1937. Initially, the United States maintained its neutral position between the invader and the invaded, but as Japan’s military advance increasingly threatened America’s interests in China and in the Asia Pacific, President Roosevelt adopted a series of policies and moves to aid China, and then the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941 launched full-scale U.S. involvement in the Pacific War.

Thus, the Sino-Japanese conflict became merged into a world war. It ended with the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, in 1945. Foot stated that “[World War II] ranks, with population pressure and climate change, among the principal factors that shape our everyday lives” (2005, p. v).

Impact on Mainland Chinese

For Chinese people, the far-reaching impact of the Sino-Japanese War is beyond measurement. In terms of casualties, China lost soldiers and civilians through battles, air raids, and mass atrocities in the millions. War crimes committed by the Japanese army in China as well as in other Asian countries—currently the best-publicized of these crimes are the Nanking massacre, “comfort women” (the euphemism for sex slaves for Japanese troops), and Japanese biological warfare (1932-45)—not only wiped out a large but highly contested number of POWs and civilians, but also left survivors dealing with physical pain, emotional trauma, poverty, and social discrimination for the rest of their lives.

The haunting effect of the Sino-Japanese War was given a fresh and tangible form by an incident in August 2003, when 44 Chinese residents were killed or injured by mustard-gas bombs abandoned by the Japanese army in Qiqihar, Heilongjiang Province of China (Lam, 2003). In the political arena, the legacy of the Pacific War repeatedly disturbs international relationships between Japan and other Asian countries, occasionally triggering protests and escalating into diplomatic crises.

In terms of cultural impact, aside from countless war-inflicted losses such as library collections destroyed by the Japanese bombardments and arsons (Lin, 1998), the war against Imperial Japan has inspired the creation of novels, poetry, paintings, comic strips, movies, television dramas, operas, music, songs, and other cultural artifacts in mainland China. Youth growing up in China are not short of opportunities to encounter the

Sino-Japanese War in literature suitable for their reading level.

My incomplete search found well over 600 titles of Chinese-language illustrated story books set during World War II in China, a body of literature not without its problem of imbalanced, biased, and shallow representation of the war. Nonetheless, the war against Japan and some of the most popular works on this topic have remained in Chinese public conscience and become their frame of reference.

Impact on Chinese Immigrants to U.S.

The Sino-Japanese War was significant to Chinese immigrants residing in the U.S. at the time. It brought changes to race relations in the U.S. and “opened the door to expectations of further improvements in the status of the Chinese in America” (Lai, 1997). Until World War II, Chinese immigrants in America had been subjected to not only violent racist attacks but also a series of punitive laws and regulations. The Naturalization Act passed in 1870 limited American citizenship to “White persons and persons of African descent,” barring Asians from U.S. citizenship. The infamous Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 suspended immigration of Chinese laborers, making Chinese people the target of “the first legislative act to single out a race of people as undesirable immigrants” (Krenn, 2006, p. 55).

The social exclusion and racial discrimination they suffered in the U.S. partly explained why Chinese sojourners never “felt at home in America” (Yu, 2001, p. 134) but strongly identified with their ancestral land—China—now under foreign aggression. In Lai’s (1997) fascinating account of the many ways in which the Chinese community in the United States supported China’s resistance to Japanese aggression, we learn that ethnic Chinese in the U.S. protested the Japanese aggression in China, raised substantial funds for the war and relief effort, and served in World War II.

Indeed, from this “bachelors’ society”⁴ a much higher proportion of eligible men were inducted than from the general American population. Many Chinese Americans, like the Portland-born fighter pilot Arthur Tin Chin, would serve in the Pacific and China-Burma-India theaters fighting against Japanese. Meanwhile, as Song (2002) argued in his study of the New York Chinese community, Chinese immigrants also took the opportunity to pursue their dual identity as Chinese Americans during the war years.

In order to combat Japanese war propaganda and accusations of U.S. prejudice

against Asians, it became necessary for the American government, after being plunged into the Pacific War, to repeal the Chinese Exclusion laws. The effort of the Chinese community in the repeal movement not only helped bring an end to the discriminatory legislation and hence made Chinese aliens eligible for naturalization, but the process itself was also meaningful in that it comprised Chinese participation in American politics and mainstream activities.

Following the repeal in 1943, and essentially after the landmark 1965 Immigration Act, the previously stagnant flow of immigrants from China moved again. The new influx of Chinese immigrants would be people who had lived through the Sino-Japanese War or children and grandchildren of those who had been part of the turmoil.

Juvenile Fiction Featuring the Sino-Japanese War

My focal point in this article is American juvenile fiction with the Sino-Japanese War as its main setting or subject. Young people have multiple sources to learn about the past: family stories, classroom teaching, museum visits, library materials, newspaper, television, movies, the Internet, and even computer games. Among youth literature, nonfiction⁵ is arguably the most direct source providing factual information about any topic, but fiction and imaginative works can speak emotional truth too often hidden in nonfiction by figures and maps.

Armed with artistic captivating power, fiction can sell its carefully or poorly researched information no less aggressively than nonfiction does. With its focus on works of fiction, this article is part of a larger project to study American youth literature about the portion of World War II fought in China.

Themes and Patterns

By combing through multiple bibliographies and searching in library catalogs, I located 28 fiction titles specifically written for a young audience and published in the U.S. (including titles published previously or simultaneously in other countries) from 1937 through 2007 about World War II in China.⁶ I have also included in my study three adult titles which are suggested by the bibliographies I consulted as suitable reading for older young adults. I will discuss the general patterns of these books within the context of social, political, and cultural dynamics in America.

The first thing noticeable about this search result is that little has been told

about ethnic Chinese experience during World War II in American juvenile fiction. The 31 titles, produced over a span of 70 years, is best understood in the context of American youth literature about World War II. Partly as a continuance of the tradition of storying war in American children's and young adult literature (Myers, 2000), and partly due to its unparalleled impact and consequently a heavy emphasis on the subject in the social studies curriculum (Schlene, 1992), the history of World War II has inspired the creation of a huge number of books for young readers in the English world.

J. K. Rowling's popular *Harry Potter* series, by frequently referencing Nazi history—from the downfall of an evil wizard in "1945" (Rowling, 1997, p. 103) to a prison called "Nurmengard" (or should it be spelled "Nuremberg," as Rowling's fans asked knowingly in online forums?) to lock him up (Rowling, 2007, p. 360)—illustrates how World War II history, or, more precisely, World War II fought in the European theatre, has seeped into contemporary Western consciousness.

Even if we do not count literature related to World War II history at such a subtle level, a bibliography shows that, by April 1994, at least 750 fiction titles focusing on World War II had been published for young people in the U.S. (Holsinger, 1995). To find out whether or not World War II remains a favorite topic in today's youth literature, one only needs to check the latest "Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People," an annual list of juvenile books recommended to social studies teachers who can use them with K-12 students, and browse under the section "World History & Culture" to see how often "world history" actually means "World War II history in Europe."

In the booklist of 2006, for example, six out of 11 books under this section focus on World War II and the Holocaust (four titles). The only book about China deals with Mahjong—"a game that originated in China almost a thousand years ago," as the reviewer noted ("Notable," 2006). The only book which gives some space to the Pacific War, *Remember World War II: Kids Who Survived Tell Their Story*, gives a wrong date, 1940, for Japan's invasion of China (Nicholson, 2005, p. 31).

Much More Than Mahjong

Four people who experienced the Pacific War as a child—two in Hawaii, one in Manila, Philippines, and one in Tokyo, Japan—recalled their lives during the war. Despite a map showing that China was besieged by the Japanese army (Nichol-

son, 2005, p. 32), there is no story about Chinese.

What were Chinese doing during World War II? Well, when they were not combating Japan and its collaborators, when they were not preparing war relief for Chinese soldiers, when they were not hiding from air raids, when they were not hungry and weary after fleeing from cities conquered by the enemy, when they were not caught in the terror of a bubonic plague and other endemic diseases spread by the Japanese army, when women were not rounded up as sex slaves for the "comfort" of Imperial Japanese soldiers, and if they kept their lives at all, yes indeed, some Chinese played Mahjong even during the war years.

Publication Patterns

In my list, the first juvenile fiction published about the Sino-Japanese War was dated 1938. A publication date chart (see Table 1) of these 31 titles reveals how the output has fluctuated over the past seven decades.

About half of the 31 books were published within an extremely short span of six years from 1940 to 1946. When a person named Jeannette Hill asked *The Horn Book Magazine* in 1945 for titles of books about "the children in China during the war," the magazine recommended four chapter books and a short story published during this time period (English, 1945, p. 374). Interest in the war in China seemed to rapidly die down after that—at least publishers of youth literature turned away from this topic. Only three novels were published in the next three decades, with the number of titles hitting the bottom during the 1960s. The number has climbed up only slightly since the 1980s.

Table 1

Juvenile Fiction about Ethnic Chinese Experience during World War II

Date of Publication	Number of Titles
1930s	1
1940s	15
1950s	2
1960s	0
1970s	1
1980s	4
1990s	4
2000-2007	4
<small>(including one self-published title)</small>	
Total	31

Shaped by Pearl Buck

The 15 war novels produced during the 1940s are quite “abnormal.” Unlike what later researchers lamented about the excessive attention paid to ancient China and cultural traditions in fictional writing for youth, the limited number of wartime titles constitutes a unique body of juvenile novels with intense focus on contemporary Chinese issues, a phenomenon not occurring again.

Pearl Buck, who contributed to three titles on my list, must be credited with helping to shape Americans’ more positive perceptions of China and with demonstrating to American publishers the marketability of a “real” and “new” China by her bestselling success with *The Good Earth* in the 1930s (Leong, 2005). It is debatable, however, how much longer a single woman’s literary talent could have swayed the taste of a larger society “knowing” Chinese as heathen, uncivilized, backward, and amoral, if the Sino-Japanese War had not increasingly entangled the self-interest of the United States into a Chinese crisis.

In 1935, after two of her novels met with positive review but unimpressive sales, “Buck suspected public interest in stories about China would begin to wane, and she felt she should start writing stories set in America” (Bitonti, 2007). She proceeded to published two biographies of her parents and a novel set in America. When she once again switched back to a Chinese setting in *The Patriot*, chronicling a Chinese protagonist’s life during the war between China and Japan in the 1930s, it was in 1939. Her biographer commented, “In a sense, the war came to Pearl’s rescue as a writer, by authorizing her to return to the Chinese material she knew best” (Conn, 1996, p. 221).

This is not totally precise. The Sino-Japanese War itself was not enough to ensure a market in the U.S. for novels of this topic. As it turned out, in the realm of juvenile fiction, the trajectory of yearly publications about the war in China is compatible with America’s lessening distance from the conflict—from neutrality to intervention to full participation. Thus, even though the full-fledged war between Japan and China broke out in 1937, only three titles were published before 1941, and another 13 mushroomed from 1942 through 1946, which was part of the boom of juvenile novels, including many popular series of battle stories, set in the Pacific theatre.

A Decline after 1946

After 1946, juvenile novels focusing on the Sino-Japanese War all but disap-

peared. It was as if the moment China finished its short-term role as an American ally in war, it became much less interesting and worthwhile to help American young people imagine Chinese experience during World War II. On the other hand, during these early postwar years, American publishers continued to provide juvenile literature—fiction and nonfiction—about World War II set in the American home front, in some other parts of the Asia Pacific, and in Europe.

Five Chimneys, a memoir of a Hungarian woman who was imprisoned in Auschwitz, was translated and published for a young audience in 1947; Anne Frank’s diary was published in English in 1952, with an introduction by Eleanor Roosevelt; and the same year, Claire Huchet Bishop published *Twenty and Ten*, a juvenile novel about ten Jewish children in hiding in France during the war.

If the Sino-Japanese War had ceased to be an interesting topic, the first half of the 1950s also created an especially disagreeable climate for this and other topics relating to modern China. One of the political consequences of the Sino-Japanese conflict was that the Chinese Communist Party was able to expand its membership and power during the years of World War II (Van Slyke, 2001). In the subsequent civil war (1946-49), it defeated Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist Party, and became the ruling party of the current Chinese government.

The Korean War (1950-53) saw Chinese and American soldiers fighting each other and eventually led to the establishment of yet another Communist regime in North Korea. In 1951 and 1952, the U.S. signed several peace treaties with Japan, making it a much needed collaborator to contain the communist threat in Asia (Barnhart, 1999). Meanwhile, during the McCarthy era, writers, filmmakers, and scholars, as well as working-class people, could be persecuted if they were suspected of being Communists or Communist sympathizers.

Youth materials were not left out of this ideological combat zone. As Jenkins’ investigation (2001) of Cold War censorship in the years from 1946 to 1955 showed, American librarians serving young people had to adopt various strategies to defend their choice of allegedly pro-Communist books. The Sino-Japanese War, which invites sympathy to China, became a risky topic. Children’s novels set in China were still published, but they tended to be charming stories in a China which is devoid of political conflicts and commotions.

The only three books published during this time period listed in Liu’s (1993) study, *Li Lun, Lad of Courage* (1947), *Su-mei’s Golden Year* (1950), *Little Wu and the Watermelons* (1954), share the theme of farming or growing food. The civil war and the ensuing radical changes in Chinese society were nowhere to be seen. The trend of distancing young readers from China’s political reality in fictional writing had been established once and for all.

Newbery-Winning Authors

Only two juvenile novels set in wartime China were published in the 1950s, by Newbery-winning authors Elizabeth Foreman Lewis and Meindert DeJong respectively. The timing of the two books is intriguing. According to the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, DeJong wrote *The House of Sixty Fathers* in China, where he spent three years during World War II as historian for the American Composite Wing of the Fourteenth Air Force, but did not get it published until 1956. The reason quoted was that “the story was considered too realistic and too harsh for a children’s book” (Kibler, 1986).

The cruelty and horror of the war in China was not totally absent in works of the 1940s published for youth, although few could tell it as grippingly as DeJong did. Could it also be that, after missing the “golden time” for the Sino-Japanese War novels, his publisher had to wait for a “safer” moment? Harper & Brothers announced the title under “A preview of Harper highlights for 1952” in *The Horn Book Magazine* as early as February 1952: “[DeJong] is working on *The House of Sixty Fathers*, the moving and beautiful story of a boy caught up in war. Tien Pao happens to be Chinese, but his story is a universal one” (“A Preview,” 1952, emphasis mine). Notice how the wording suggests an attempt to distract us from the specific identity of Tien Pao as a Chinese.

It is unclear if Lewis, too, had to wait for many years before *To Beat a Tiger, One Needs a Brother’s Help* (1953), a young adult novel about refugee boys in wartime Shanghai, could be published. There was an 11 years’ gap between the publication date of this new title and that of her last work—*When the Typhoon Blows*, another war novel set in China and published in 1942. On the last page of the book, one boy who survives the war makes a vague anti-Communist comment, which I suppose gave the book a passport to publication in the middle of the McCarthy era.

The Contemporary Period

DeJong's critical and commercial success with *The House of Sixty Fathers*, a Newbery Honor winner still in print today, should have reopened space for the Sino-Japanese War novels and anticipated a new surge of interest in this topic and possibly in realistic Chinese topics as well. This was not what happened. For several decades to come, the brilliance of *The House* was the last light shone on ethnic Chinese experience during World War II for young American readers.

DeJong's book was wedged between the end of the McCarthy era and new, rising tensions between the United States and countries of the Communist camp (Sputnik was launched by the Soviet Union in 1957). The Sino-U.S. relationship continued to worsen, and America signed a new U.S.-Japan security agreement in 1960 to strengthen the mutual tie.

American children's authors may be said to have steered clear of the topic of the Sino-Japanese War until 1990. *Tiger, Lion, Hawk: A Story of the Flying Tigers* (1977), the only title we have in the 1970s, is a quick-read combat story featuring U.S. fighter pilots in the China-Burma-India theatre during World War II. If it was the author's intention to divert readers' attention from China and from the Sino-Japanese War, he reached his goal quite well. *Tiger, Lion, Hawk* gives so little information about Chinese involvement in the war that young readers with no background knowledge could finish this book without realizing that China was at war against Japan.

The beginning of the book, for example, mentions the *Panay* Incident, in which Japanese warplanes sank the U.S. Navy's gunboat in 1937, but manages to avoid providing the location of the Incident, Nanjing, China, and the context of the incident—it happened during the bloody Sino-Japanese War, on the day before China's capital city fell.

Of the four titles in the 1980s, *Little Red* was originally a short story written by Pearl Buck in 1945, and illustrated and republished in 1988. Three other titles were all by non-American authors. J.G. Ballard's *Empire of the Sun* (1984) and Michael Morpurgo's *King of the Cloud Forests* (1988) were first published in Britain, and *The Bombers' Moon* (1985) was written by Betty Vander Els, a Canadian author.

All three books share one theme: White children, whose parents were missionaries or businessmen, got caught in the Sino-Japanese War/Pacific War in a turbulent China. The protagonists were all separated from parents, forced to start

journeys and adventures, sometimes with adult protection and other times having to fend for themselves, until the final rescue and reunion. Though Chinese characters are peripheral in these three stories, the books at least give glimpses into a wartime China where threats of death, journeys of escape, and loss became part of daily business.

The Long Silence

The long silence about Chinese experience during World War II in juvenile fiction is not only sustained by an apathy in mainstream society towards an uncomfortable topic which reminds Americans of the "betrayal" of Red China, but which is unfortunately not anti-Communist, it was also bracketed between a period when White people told most of the stories about ethnic Chinese and a later period when a limited number of Chinese Americans finally found their literary voice.

Until 1990 Chinese Americans had barely produced novels about the Sino-Japanese War for American youth. The first Chinese author who appeared in my list was Yee Chiang (1903-77), a painter and prolific author best known for his travel writings. He spent the war years in Britain and first published his book *The Men of the Burma Road* in London in 1942.

Chinese Americans have been latecomers to the world of youth literature. The pattern of authorship revealed in studies (Lin, 1999; Liu, 1993) about youth literature featuring Chinese and Chinese Americans is that White authors dominated the writing of juvenile books about China and ethnic Chinese in early times, and gradually Chinese Americans authors were allowed access to the creation of juvenile books and were granted opportunities to tell their own stories.

Although a few Chinese American authors or illustrators such as Ed Young published as early as the 1960s, for reasons that defy a simple explanation, novel writing has been a much rarer endeavor among them. Until 1990, Laurence Yep, Lensey Namioka, and Raymond Chang were among the few Chinese American authors who had published historical and contemporary fiction (for youth) featuring Chinese in mainland China.

Chang's novel *In the Eye of War* (1990), which he co-authored with his wife Margaret Scrogin Chang, was based on his childhood experience in wartime Shanghai. Namioka is the author of a recent young adult novel, *Mismatch* (2006), reflecting the impact of the Sino-Japanese War on two contemporary Asian American

families. Except for some of the early White authors who had first-hand knowledge of China and even of the Sino-Japanese War, non-Chinese Americans lost touch with China when it closed its door to Westerners from 1950 till the end of the 1970s, and they grew up in a society which provided little information in popular culture and school curriculum to trigger their interest in the topic. When they thought of obtaining, second-hand, information from people who had experienced the war, as we have seen in *Remember World War II: Kids Who Survived Tell Their Story*, it does not seem to have occurred to them to ask Chinese Americans.

Iris Chang's Influence

Iris Chang's bestselling adult nonfiction account of the Nanking massacre has left marks on the juvenile novels relating to the Sino-Japanese War published after 1997, even though the number of books is small and none has accepted the challenge of telling a story about Japanese war atrocities to a young audience in an honest and sensitive manner. *Chinese Cinderella and the Secret Dragon Society* (Mah, 2005) makes a brief mention in the "Historical Note" of Japanese biological warfare, a topic to which Chang also draws the public attention. One protagonist in *Mismatch* (Namioka, 2006) even speaks of Iris Chang's book in conversation.

Without these followers, a lonely voice, however eloquent, beautiful, and passionate, would eventually be forgotten. In social studies classrooms, thus far, her success with awakening the American public to a forgotten history has not been translated into the teaching of World War II atrocities in Asia for middle and high school students (Zhao & Hoge, 2006).

The impact of Chang's book on many Chinese Americans should not be underestimated. Her coverage of a history to which the mainstream society was oblivious has facilitated the healing process of those Asian Americans who were victims of Imperial Japan's aggression and atrocities. A *New York Times* article wrote,

At virtually every reading or book signing [of Iris Chang], someone recounts a horrific tale about Japan's brutal march across the Pacific six decades ago.

To Ms. Chang, it is as if "The Rape of Nanking" has opened an emotional relief valve for thousands of surviving victims of Japan's wartime aggression, people whose raw frustration at being overlooked in popular culture and academic histories has been simmering for years. (Dao, 1998)

The public attention which Chang helped bring to Chinese experience during World

War II has had an unforeseen impact upon young Chinese Americans who did not experience the war. Although Chang's book, with its grim and graphic portrayal of atrocities, is not for the faint heart and *not suitable for young readers*, Chinese American high school and college students who finished reading the book (with difficulty, as many admitted) and participated in the 2006 Iris Chang Memorial Essay Contest expressed a sense of confusion and ambiguity about their ethnic/cultural identity. What does being Chinese mean?

An Indonesia-born Chinese, a college student whose family immigrated to the U.S., wrote,

Neither my parents nor grandparents spoke, wrote, or read a single character of Mandarin. We had no relatives who were born in China. We were neither Buddhists nor members of any prominent Chinese religion, nor did we celebrate any Chinese holidays.

...[A]t Chinese school, I realized just how un-Chinese I was. ...[My teachers] believed I was a rebellious child: they viewed my inability to speak Chinese...an indicator of being uncultured. I began to see myself as a cultural non-entity. (Oka, 2006)

Another doctoral student, who was born in northeastern China and came to the U.S. at a young age, described a feeling of ambivalence about Chinese identity:

On the surface, I walk, talk, and speak like an American, but underneath, a big part of my identity is still rooted in the land I left at the age of four. But just as much of American culture remains alien to me, so too does the part of me which is Chinese. (Wang, 2006)

Chinese Americans

The group of Americans defined as "Chinese Americans" have immigrated to this country at different time periods from the gold rush in the mid-19th century to as recent as yesterday, from different geographical areas including mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan as well as other parts of the world where the Chinese Diaspora first settled before moving again. The distance between each individual Chinese American and what we understand and promote as a common Chinese root culture may run the entire spectrum from little to great identification.

This great intra-ethnic diversity weakens the cohesive power of traditional cultural characteristics to give people a true sense of who they are and where they belong. At this point, it is perhaps of little help to the identity quest of these Chinese Americans to give them books about what Chinese people were dressed

like a thousand years ago, what Chinese characters written in brush and ink look like, and what is the typical procedure for celebrating a traditional festival. Part of their puzzle comes from the disconnection between what Chinese culture is supposed to be according to such books and what real experience they have had as Chinese growing up in America.

Conclusion

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

As Oka (2006) put it, Chang's book on the Rape of Nanking came as "a beacon of light in the dark seas of self-discovery." The book awakened Oka's historical awareness. By inquiring into her family history during World War II and in post-war years, she gained a better sense of her place in a family in migration for several generations from China to Indonesia to the U.S. The growth of historical awareness similarly worked for Wang, who wrote,

In Iris Chang's book, I finally discovered a piece of myself I didn't know existed.... Iris Chang's first gift to me was to open my eyes to a painful episode in the history of my people, jolting me out of ignorance into a more difficult but more enlightened place. (Wang, 2006)

Another Chinese American girl's experience illuminates the way a young child is prevented from coming to terms with her ancestral land and her ethnic identity when adults' selective teaching of modern Chinese history is determined by how sexy a topic is on an anti-Communist meter, not by how weighty an event really is.

My obsession with fitting in extended far beyond trying to wear cool clothes or hanging out with the "in" crowd. It often extended to my rejection of my family, my heritage, and my identity....

I found myself through Chang's books. No longer ashamed of my heritage, I learned not only to accept my Chinese ancestry but be proud of it.... I can be proud to have my cultural roots from a country that has gone through subjugation like

during the Cultural Revolution, oppression of freedoms like during the Tiananmen Square massacre, or cruel domination as in the Rape of Nanking—yet still has the spirit to protest about it....

To this day, I proudly tell others I am a Chinese-American and no longer mask my eyes behind heavy make-up. (Yan, 2006)

These authentic voices tell of a troubled sense of identity among a young generation of Chinese Americans and of their enlightenment through a history to which they can genuinely relate. These voices serve as a solid indication of the problematic relationship between multicultural youth literature and the ethnic/cultural identity of Chinese Americans.

Until we give them both stories about Mahjong and stories set in modern history which help them make sense of the lives, choices, perspectives, and biases of their grandparents and parents, as well as stories about themselves, we will continue to raise troubled young people who grow up unsure of who they are, where they belong, and how much respect their people deserve.

Notes

¹ In *Lon Po Po*, a Caldecott winner, Ed Young gave one of the three sisters big and slightly exaggerated slanting eyes, as if to respond to criticism targeting *The Five Chinese Brothers* with gentle humor—a certain proportion of the Chinese population were born with eyes looking slanted if not as thin as a thread.

² Throughout the discussion, she used the nickname "liTtLe RicE" to identify herself. She introduced herself as being a Chinese raised in Taiwan though now married to a Jewish man.

³ Chinese American authors of *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* (1989), *Monkey King* (1997), and *American Born Chinese* (2006) respectively.

⁴ According to Peffer's (1999) study, the Page Law, a federal statute enacted in 1875, made it difficult for Chinese women to enter the United States, to the satisfaction of American capitalists who could continue keeping Chinese males as the cheapest laborers by saving the payment for family support. The gender imbalance in Chinatown was maintained until the middle of the 20th century.

⁵ My preliminary search for juvenile nonfiction works has found fewer titles than fiction for youth: a dozen information books, two autobiographies, and several biographies about Claire Chennault have World War II in China as the central topic or main backdrop.

⁶ The geographical scope I am interested in is mainland China; thus stories portraying wartime Hong Kong and Taiwan are not included here. Those two places had distinct histories during World War II and require separate studies. Hong Kong, a British colony since the Qing Empire of China lost the First Opium War in 1842, remained a haven for refugees flooding in from the mainland until the Pacific War broke out. Taiwan became Imperial Japan's colony in

1895, when China lost the first Sino-Japanese War, and was not returned to the Chinese government until the end of World War II.

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Appendix

Recommended Titles of Juvenile Fiction Featuring Ethnic Chinese during World War II (Published prior to 2007)

Chang, Margaret Scrogin, & Raymond Chang. *In the Eye of War*. New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 1990.

Shao-shao, a ten-year-old boy from an upper-middle-class Chinese family, tells of his much sheltered life in Japanese-occupied Shanghai during the last year of World War II.

Chiang, Yee. *The Men of the Burma Road*. New York: Transatlantic Arts, 1942.

A fictional account of two Chinese families' participation in the construction of the Burma Road, built by more than 200,000 Chinese laborers, often with the most primitive tools, in the mountains connecting southwest China to Burma after the Japanese army closed all of China's seaports.

Cormack, Maribelle, & Pavel Bytovetzski; illustrated by Margaret Ayer. *Underground Retreat*. New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1946.

A thrilling story of an American girl, her British boyfriend, and a wealthy Chinese family being stranded in Nanking under Japanese attack. After organizing some sabotage actions against the occupation army, they flee by plane, by boat, by wheelbarrow, on foot, and finally settle down in an area of safety controlled by the Chinese Communist Party.

Appendix (Continued)

Recommended Titles of Juvenile Fiction Featuring Ethnic Chinese during World War II (Published prior to 2007)

DeJong, Meindert; illustrated by Maurice Sendak. *The House of Sixty Fathers*. New York: Harper, 1956.

Tien Pao is separated from his parents when the Japanese attack China. The boy witnesses the horrors of war, saves an American pilot from the Japanese, and finds a substitute family in the airman's barracks—which becomes “house of sixty fathers” to Tien Pao. DeJong's gripping account keeps you on edge until Tien Pao's final reunion with his parents.

Lee, Milly; illustrated by Yangsook Choi. *Nim and the War Effort*. New York: Frances Foster Books/ Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997.

Set in San Francisco's Chinatown after America has been provoked to join China's fight against Imperial Japan, this is a rare story reflecting the sense of double identity which the Pacific War instilled in the Chinese community. In a busy day, the young protagonist Nim wins the paper drive for the war effort before attending her Chinese school as usual.

Lewis, Elizabeth Foreman. *To Beat a Tiger, One Needs a Brothers Help*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1953.

A group of teenage boys, separated from parents or orphaned, form a gang in wartime Shanghai. Occasionally they receive kind help from adults, but most of the time they survive by their wit, luck, and roughness they acquire over the years.

Mah, Adeline Yen. *Chinese Cinderella and the Secret Dragon Society*. New York: HarperCollins, 2005.

After twelve-year-old Ye Xian is kicked out of her father's and stepmother's home in Shanghai, she is taken in by a kung fu academy and trained to secretly fight against the occupying Japanese.

Namioka, Lensey. *Mismatch*. New York: Delacorte, 2006.

A young adult romance novel set not during the war years but in contemporary America. The story illustrates how a war between Japan and China, having ended decades ago, is creating barriers to the relationship between a Chinese American girl and a Japanese American boy—barriers no fewer than those Romeo and Juliet faced.

Ruby, Lois. *Shanghai Shadows*. New York: Holiday House, 2006.

During World War II, Shanghai sheltered over tens of thousands of German, Austrian, and Polish Jewish refugees that escaped the Nazi terror. This book is a rare young adult novel about the survival of a Jewish family in Shanghai.

Sanford, Doris; illustrated by Graci Evans. *My Friend, the Enemy: Surviving a Prison Camp*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1992.

This is a rare picture book rendition of two siblings' survival in a prison camp in China. Kathy and Dick, two Caucasian children separated from their parents, are among the 1,700 POWs put in this concentration camp by the Japanese. For five years until the war is over, they live on meager and wormy food, and under the threat of diseases and gun shots.

Smith, Icy; illustrated by Gayle Garner Roski. *Mei Ling in China City*. Manhattan Beach, CA: East West Discovery Press, 2008.

In wartime Los Angeles China City, a 12-year-old Mei Ling raises relief funds for refugees in China, while corresponding with her best friend Yayeko Akiyama, who has been taken away to a Japanese American internment camp. Additional facts and rich archival photographs are included at the end.

Vander Els, Betty. *The Bombers' Moon*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985.

For four years, Ruth and her younger brother Simeon are separated from missionary parents and herded about with their schoolmates on an odyssey of escape from Japanese air attacks. The wartime adventure, narrated matter-of-factly, takes them from central China to India and back to Shanghai, where the family reunites.