A CASE STUDY OF GRACE LIN'S
PICTUREBOOKS ON CHINESE THEMES:
"WHYCouldn'T SNOW WHITE BE CHINESE?"

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree Master of Arts in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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ABSTRACT

This study is to investigate Grace Lin’s picturebooks and how she represents mixed culture in her works. Living in a multicultural environment in the United States, children daily perceive different cultures from their friends, radio, TV, movies, and books. Understanding their own cultures and appreciating others’ cultures become a significant lesson in multicultural education. A number of researchers have examined the issues of multicultural picturebooks, but the published research focusing on Chinese or Chinese-American picturebooks is scarce.

In this study, I examined 8 picturebooks written and illustrated by Lin and 10 books illustrated by Lin but written by different authors. I used an interview with Lin and document analysis to construct the study. The interview helped me understand Lin’s family, education, and her purposes for creating picturebooks.

In my analysis, I divided Lin’s books into three categories: Chinese themes, non-Chinese themes, and Chinese themes that contain cultural conflicts. I analyzed the texts, illustrations, and cultural representations. First, I focused on analyzing four books that have Chinese themes written and illustrated by Lin. Second, I compared the three themes and investigated the differences and similarities amongst them. Third, I examined how Lin’s background influences her presentation of mixed culture.
My findings indicate that Lin considers Chinese and American cultures equally important to Chinese-American children. She uses first-person perspective to construct the stories and a child’s viewpoint to see the multicultural environment. She wants not only Chinese/Chinese-American children but also non-Chinese children to gain knowledge of Chinese-American culture. Lin’s picturebooks help children understand Chinese-Americans, not only because her books represent the cultural mixture that already exists, but also because they validate Chinese-Americans’ cultural identity. Finally, I provided recommendations for further study of Lin’s works and Chinese-American picturebooks.
Dedicated to my dear parents

&

friends who have encouraged and supported me with their everlasting love
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Since my childhood, I have always loved picturebooks. It has been a pleasure to research this topic, meet the artist Grace Lin, and write this thesis. I wish to express my sincere appreciation to my adviser Dr. Michael Parsons. His insightful guidance and encouragement helped me accomplish this study. I would also like to thank my reader Dr. Barbara Kiefer. Her valuable teaching of children picturebooks and comments of my research helped me improve my thesis. Further, I would like to thank Dr. Sydney Walker, Dr. Kenneth Marantz, and his wife Mrs. Sylvia Marantz for providing direction and ideas when I first conducted this study.

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I must thank my dear friends, Karen Oliver and Jessica Chung, and my writing tutors Elizabeth Zimmerman and Chaya Chandrasekhar, who patiently proofread my thesis and gave me suggestions during the process of writing this thesis. I must also thank Dave and Sofei Wang, who kept me in their prayers and encouraged me when I struggled with my study. I would like to thank my friends Chien-Hua Ko and Joo Yeon Shin for sharing their opinions and suggestions with me.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

"Why Couldn't Snow White be Chinese?" The picturebook author/illustrator, Grace Lin, titled one of her articles to express her feelings of being a Chinese-American when she was a child (Lin, 2004). Her experiences reflect many other Chinese-Americans' life experiences, and her picturebooks give voice to readers who come from similar cultural backgrounds and wish to discover their cultural heritage.

Picturebooks play an essential role in children's lives because children can see the world and learn different cultures from picturebooks before actually encountering those cultures in their lives. Cai (1994) indicated, "Children's books about people of other cultures have great potential to impact children's attitudes toward those people in the future" (p.169). Although a picturebook usually has only twenty-eight to thirty-two pages, it contains abundant messages and information that can impact children in various ways. The value of picturebooks not only lies in text and illustration, but also in cultures that represent verbally and visually.
Huang (1998) states, "In educational settings, picturebooks have also become recognized as indispensable vehicles for literacy and art education, and as critical avenues for our understanding of the social and historical conventions of a particular people and time" (p.2). As an international student working with Chinese-American children myself, Grace Lin’s picturebooks drew my attention, as her experiences seem to parallel my own life experiences in the United States: I want to blend in the American culture, but at the same time, I know that I will not be an Chinese-American or American.

The work of Grace Lin in the field of children’s picturebooks is highly acclaimed in the United States. She has won a number of awards, including the 2002 Austin Young Engineers Book Award for Fiction Gr.K-2 and Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People. She has made substantial contributions in the field of children’s picturebooks, particularly in the area of multiculture. The value of her picturebooks not only lies in its literary, aesthetic, and design quality, but also in the opportunities it provides children to explore Chinese-American culture.

In this study, I investigated the characteristics of the stories, the illustrations, and the mixed culture in Lin’s picturebooks. Because Lin is Chinese-American, it is likely that her picturebooks represent aspects of both Chinese and American cultures or Chinese-American culture. I am interested in how Lin represents and interprets mixed culture and how Lin’s Chinese-American background influences her works.

I chose all 18 books by Lin, 8 books written and illustrated by Lin and 10 books illustrated by her but written by different authors. I divided her books into three categories: Chinese themes, Non-Chinese themes, and Chinese themes that contain
cultural conflicts. I particularly analyzed four books with Chinese themes, written and illustrated by Lin. Moreover, I selected books from each theme and addressed both the cultural issues and cultural representations in these works. My study includes biographical, descriptive, and interpretative research approaches to examine how Lin represents the mixed culture. My analysis of Lin’s picturebooks fall into three areas: 1) story construction, 2) expression of art, and 3) cultural representation.

This thesis presents a much-needed analysis of Grace Lin’s picturebooks, expressing her ideas and creative attitude. I hope my research will be used not only for future reference in the study of Chinese-American picturebooks, but also for helping people appreciate the struggles and contributions of children’s picturebook authors/illustrators in multicultural field.

**Biography of Grace Lin**

Grace Lin is a Chinese-American who was born in New Jersey on May 17, 1974, and grew up in upstate New York. Her parents immigrated to the United States from Taiwan and have lived in the United States for more than thirty years. Lin wanted to be a picturebook artist when she was a child and she has constantly endeavored to achieve this goal. She received her BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design, majoring in Illustration.

When she worked as a bookseller in a children’s bookstore, she researched all the children’s publishers, editors and art directors whose works were sold there. This experience really helped her obtain the background necessary to launch in her
picturebook career. She started her career as a picturebook artist after she graduated from art school and currently her books are published in the United States and Asia. Now she is a picturebook author and illustrator, and she resides in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with her Italian-Canadian husband, Robert Mercer.

**Overview of Grace Lin’s Picturebooks**

Grace Lin published her first book *The Ugly Vegetables* in 1999. Currently, she has had 18 books published. In Table 1.1, I classified her picturebooks into two categories: 1) the picturebooks written and illustrated by Lin, and 2) the picturebooks illustrated by Lin but written by different authors.

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Table 1. Picturebooks by Grace Lin

**Purpose for the Study**

There are many picturebooks that address multicultural issues, such as generational conflicts, cultural approbation, and self-identity. However, not much research about Chinese-American picturebooks and authors/illustrators has been published. In this
thesis. I want to introduce more readers to the artist Grace Lin, her picturebooks, and her passion for working with children. I hope my study will stimulate more in-depth discussion and research of multicultural picturebooks.

The purpose of this thesis is threefold:

1) To describe the life and cross-cultural experience of Chinese-American picturebook author/illustrator Grace Lin.

2) To analyze Lin’s picturebooks from the perspectives of cultural representation.

3) To suggest the cultural significance and meanings of Lin’s life and work.

Research Questions

Based on the above purposes, the study is further guided by the following questions:

Main question:
How does Grace Lin represent mixed culture in her picturebooks?

Sub-questions:

1) How has Lin’s Chinese-American position affected her picturebooks? What are the significant events and experiences of Lin’s personal life that are particularly relevant to her picturebooks?

2) What are the topics of Lin’s picturebooks? How does she choose the topics? What are the essential messages of her picturebooks? What are the cultural significances and meanings of her picturebooks?
Research Design of the Study

The design of this study focuses on understanding the mixed culture in Lin’s picturebooks. Stake (1995) states, “the intent of case study research is to emphasize understanding the case itself” (p.8). Therefore, I believe using case study methodology is the best approach to gathering information and analyzing Lin’s works.

The primary data of the study includes the background about Lin’s picturebooks and the secondary data contains biographical data about her. My preliminary study involved an extensive search of all published and unpublished articles about Lin, interviews with Lin, and other relevant materials and documents. I conducted an interview with Lin in Boston, where her home/studio is located. The interview was recorded on cassettes and then transcribed onto paper. The final transcription was sent to Lin for approval.

The interview questions were divided into three areas: 1) Lin’s family background, 2) Lin’s educational background, and 3) Lin’s picturebooks (see Appendix A: Interview Questions). I used open-ended questions for our interview to get in-depth information about Lin’s background and picturebooks.

I collected all of Lin’s picturebooks for this study. Eight books are written and illustrated by Lin, and 10 books are illustrated by her but written by different authors, either Chinese or non-Chinese. Besides Lin’s picturebooks, I also collected and researched other picturebooks depicting Chinese/Chinese-Americans. These picturebooks include classic Chinese folktales, legends, and stories of Chinese immigration, contemporary Chinese, and Chinese-American in the States. These books
helped me gain an overall understanding of Chinese/Chinese-American picturebooks in the United States and issues related to multicultural picturebooks.

I analyzed the research data based on the studies in my literature review. I divided Lin’s picturebooks into three categories: Chinese themes, Non-Chinese themes, and Chinese themes that contain cultural conflicts. Particularly, I focused on the picturebooks written and illustrated by Lin and representing Chinese-American culture. The criteria for analyzing her picturebooks include story construction, expression of art, and cultural representation. This design is tied in answering my research questions and will provide future researchers a different viewpoint of investigating Chinese-American picturebooks.

Organization of the Study

Chapter I provides a background of the study by stating the research purpose, research question, and methods, along with the significance and limitations of the study.

Chapter II is literature review pertaining to children’s literature, including studies of picturebooks, understanding Chinese-American people, and issues of representation in multicultural picturebooks.

Chapter III explains the research methodology. It includes the design of the study, method of data collection, as well as analysis and interpretation.

Chapter IV presents the data analysis and interpretation. The presentation of data looked specifically at the research questions. The analysis and interpretation of Lin’s picturebooks are based on articles related to cultural representation.
Chapter V summarizes the characteristics and significance of the study. I provide recommendations for future research and my personal reflection of this study.

Limitations of the Study

My study presents insights and information offered by Lin that influenced the research process as well as the result. The choices of research topic, research questions, focus, and data collection are from my own perspective. On the one hand, my subjective viewpoints therefore limit the scope of the inquiry. On the other hand, I focus on Lin’s perspectives of her picturebooks rather than children’s response. Even though children’s response is an important part in picturebook studies, I am more interested in how Lin creates a picturebook from the beginning point, and how she connects her cultural background with her works. In order to make my research valid and reliable, I used 1) triangulation, 2) peer review and debriefing, and 3) clarification of research bias in this study.

Significance of the Study

This study is the first full-length thesis that offers theoretical insights into Lin’s picturebooks. It provides future picturebook authors and illustrators resources for exploring new ideas in the multicultural field. Moreover, the study contributes to the understanding of mixed culture in picturebooks. The results of this study deepen and widen our perception about the value of Chinese-American picturebooks and how cultural differences influence the artist’s work.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter, I reviewed literature related to picturebooks and Chinese-Americans. In the first section, I provided the definition of a picturebook, discussed the relationship between pictures and text, and addressed social and cultural influence of children, artists, and picturebooks. Section two is to give an overview of Chinese immigration, and a better understanding of Chinese-Americans in the present day. The last section, I discussed the issues of representation in picturebooks depicting Chinese/Chinese-Americans.

Understanding Picturebooks

What is A Picturebook?

Although picturebooks in art education have raised many issues, current and impending change give researchers new directions and topics to investigate. Former researchers tended to focus more on the verbal aspect of picturebooks and disregarded the potential effect of the illustrations. However, illustrations are an important element of

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picturebooks that have complex yet significant influence on children. For example, younger children may not know how to read the words, but they may understand the meanings of illustrations from their basic knowledge and imagination. Therefore, some researchers have started paying attention to the illustrations and consider taking picturebooks as an art form. In this section, I discuss the roles of text and illustrations in the picturebooks as well as the cultural and social impact on artists and children.

Definition

The term picturebook usually refers to a book with text and pictures that intimately interact telling a story. Cooney (1988) uses an interesting metaphor to explain the relationship between text and pictures in picturebooks. Cooney suggests that "the pearls represent the illustrations, and the string represents the printed text. The string is not an object of beauty on its own, but the necklace cannot exist without the string" (Kiefer, 1995, p.6). Hence, the picturebook is like a necklace linking illustrations with text, and the relationship between pictures and text is interdependent. Marantz (1994) states that it is necessary to consider all the design elements in the picturebook as a whole and observe them "in a sequence in which the relationships among them—the cover, endpapers, typography, pictures—are crucial to understanding the book" (p.3).

Based on the statements above, I use in this study the term picturebook to emphasize the subject as a unity instead of a division of two words, "picture" and "book."
Considering the Picturebook as an Art Form

Former Viewpoint

The picturebook has taken various forms over the years, e.g. information books, concept books, and toy books. However, it has not been understood as an art form until recent years. Former researchers have paid more attention to the text in the picturebook rather than the pictures. Moreover, picturebooks are covered most often in courses on children's literature rather than in courses on art history or contemporary art. Even though researchers have shown that engagement with visual symbols is essential to children, few studies have addressed the contributions that visual sections in picturebooks can make to help children develop knowledge of story structure and use of vocabulary (Kiefer, 1995, p.7).

New Viewpoint

Marantz (1994) states “picturebooks should be perceived and valued as a form of visual art, not literary art” (p.1). When the picturebook is taken as an art form, it not only emphasizes the significance of images but also identifies all the elements of a picturebook as a collective set, including the printed text, the pictures, story construction, and the book cover.

Moreover, when children read a picturebook, they do not look at text and pictures separately. Instead, they start to read a picturebook from its cover and then proceed to view the text and pictures together. Evans (1998) says that the words and pictures “work in partnership” to create layers of meaning (p.27). The adults reading with children are also exposed to the content with the text and pictures together.
Therefore, Kiefer (1995) indicates that the picturebooks “bring together image and idea in a unique and vital art form that can be explored on many levels by adults and children alike” (p.4).

Taking picturebooks as an art form does not mean pictures are more important than text. In fact, it emphasizes the integrity of the picturebook. A single picture cannot complete a picturebook; neither can a single page of text. A picturebook must consist of both the visual and literal— that is, it must contain pictures and text working together.

The Roles of Text and Illustrations in Picturebooks

Defining the picturebook as a form of art, we can start to explore the roles of two important elements: text and illustrations. In previous research, text has been considered an important element in the picturebook that can help children develop their verbal knowledge. When children read the text or listen to adults telling the story, they are learning to use vocabulary, understanding the story structure, and developing their writing skills.

However, in the past few years, more and more researchers have considered illustrations to be equal to or even more essential than text. Kiefer (1995) argues that the early experience with pictures in picturebook reading may lay the foundation for visual literacy and aesthetic understanding (p.9). It is likely that illustrations have special qualities that language does not have. For example, illustrations can help children imagine the situation in the picturebook and translate the symbols into personal realities.
Therefore, Marantz (1994) points out that “each picture in the picturebook is composed like all pictures and serves to stir our aesthetic sensibilities” (p.9).

Evans (1998) argues that illustrations provide a starting point from which the reader gets meaning and to which the reader gives meaning (p.28). Evan’s statement shows that she values the contribution of illustrations in picturebooks and considers them fundamental to picturebooks.

Although recent researchers take illustrations more seriously, they do not neglect the importance of text. They suggest that the text in picturebooks is a partner in the aesthetic enterprise. In other words, text and illustrations must complement each other if the communication with readers is to be successful. In short, when it comes to their roles, the text and illustrations are not competitors but complementary partners.

Cultural and Social Influences

Picturebooks and Children’s Responses

Reading literature is a socially and culturally constructed event, and reading picturebooks is no exception. Authors and illustrators create picturebooks from their own cultural and social experiences; likewise children respond to the content according to their knowledge and backgrounds.

Kiefer (1995) and Evan (1998) both mention that children are meaning-makers. Kiefer argues that picturebooks are rich sources of intellectual and emotional meaning, especially in contributing to children’s cognitive and aesthetic understanding (p.12). On the other hand, Evan (1998) suggests that children have to use their imaginations to
interpret the words and pictures together in order to make sense of the story (p.28).

Kiefer and Evan not only consider the artistic integrity of the picturebook, but also imply that emotional responses may be part of children’s interactions with the picturebook.

When children read picturebooks, they bring background information, previous experience, and cultural and social issues to the text and pictures. Responding to picturebooks therefore involves a relationship between children and the book in a way that is personally meaningful to the children. Even though children’s responses may not be exactly the same as what the author and illustrator intend, the response process is the basis of all aesthetic experience. This response may lead children to develop a lifelong interest in books and appreciation of art (Kiefer, 1995).

**Traditional Chinese Art and Contemporary Chinese/Chinese-American Art**

Just as children are influenced by their cultural, social, and experiential backgrounds in their interactions with picturebooks, so are authors and illustrators. In children’s picturebooks depicting Chinese/Chinese-Americans, some artists use more traditional styles to illustrate the images. In his works, Ed Young uses traditional Chinese painting style and paper-cutting skills in his picturebooks. Because Young was born in China and came to the United States in his twenties, his works therefore still represent his experiences in China and traditional Chinese art. In terms of Grace Lin, an American-born Chinese, her picturebooks do not have much Chinese art but have more western styles. She uses watercolor and contemporary style in her picturebooks.

The following review discusses traditional Chinese art and contemporary Chinese-American art in picturebooks, and how artists’ cultural backgrounds affect their works.
Traditional Chinese Art

Traditional Chinese paintings were usually created by the literati class and the artworks contained both words and pictures (Sullivan, 1974, as cited in Huang, 1998). In the Chinese history, these artists were versatile scholars who were not only painters, but also poets, writers, and calligraphers. In traditional styles, words and images are equally important, and these two elements are connected and support each other. Chinese artists write poems in the blank area of the paper to describe the atmosphere of the picture. Moreover, the calligraphy itself is a special art form because Chinese characters are pictorial and symbolic. Huang (1998) explains that “the most ancient writings were adapted from cave pictures, and even today many Chinese characters are composed of pictorial symbols” (p.30). Therefore, Chinese paintings do not simply depict landscapes or people; they also have value in literature and ideography.

Besides paintings, folk art such as paper-cuttings and shadow puppets are important in Chinese art. Although there are not many studies about Chinese folk art (Minick & Ping, 1996), it still has influences on several picturebook artists, both Chinese and non-Chinese. For instance, Ed Young, a Chinese artist, and Mitsumasa Anno, a Japanese artist, both use paper-cutting techniques in their works (e.g. The Emperor and the Kite, Young, 1998; In Shadowland, Anno, 1988).

Contemporary Chinese/Chinese-American Art

Since the Chinese-American population is growing year by year, more and more Chinese-Americans are entering the art field in the United States. Contemporary artists in China or the United States are influenced by western art and culture (Sullivan, 1996).
It is possible that Chinese/Chinese-American artists sometimes struggle between Eastern and Western arts because these artists want to maintain the traditional Chinese art; at the same time, they want to be more modern and innovative.

For example, Dai-Chien Chang is a famous Chinese artist who successfully combined the cultural intention of Western abstract art and the aim of traditional Chinese painting (Ba, 1996). Chang had a solid foundation of Chinese painting skills and was influenced by Western art when he lived in the States for several decades. His works are highly appreciated in both Eastern and Western worlds.

Analyzing contemporary Asian American artists' works, Machida (1994) suggests four cultural themes demonstrated in their art: traversing cultures, situating, speaking to and of Asia, and addressing East/West Interaction. These four themes not only show a cross-cultural perspective, but also appear to be the issues contemporary Chinese/Chinese-American artists have to deal with. These themes are seen in both fine art and picturebooks. For instance, in her picturebook Apple Pie 4th of July, Wong (2002) describes a little girl who thinks that people prefer to have American food rather than Chinese food to celebrate the American holiday the 4th of July; and in Grandfather Counts, Chang (2000) portrays the relationship between three generations, and the conflict between Chinese and American cultures.

Whether artists move from Asia to the United States or are born in the United States, they have to make their transition to life in the West, not only in cultural and social community, but also in their emotional perspectives. These artists define a place for themselves and future immigrants, and also raise issues related to the growing
importance of Asian culture worldwide (Machida, 1994). In other words, the United States is a new land for these artists to express their cultures in art, and a place where people all over the world can hear the voice of Chinese/Chinese-Americans.

**Chinese Immigration and Contemporary Chinese-Americans**

Before we discuss picturebooks depicting Chinese immigrants and contemporary Chinese-Americans, it is necessary to understand the history of Chinese immigration. It is important to know why Chinese people came to America, how they identify themselves in a new country, and what struggles they have from past to the current day. These experiences not only influence Chinese/Chinese-Americans' lives, but also have impact on their thinking and art.

Chinese people have immigrated to the United States for over one century. Chinese immigrants in the past and modern day immigrants have different purposes for moving from their homeland to the United States. In the eighteenth century, Chinese people moved to the U.S. as laborers to seek new work opportunities. At the time, Chinese people did not consider the U.S. their home. In the present day, Chinese people who immigrate to the U.S. usually have a high education level or want to pursue higher education (Li & Li, 1990). Moreover, they start their family in the United States and expect their children to learn American culture. To them, the United States is another "home."
Four Immigration Periods and Cultural Identities

Based on the timeline presented in Wang (1991) and Siu’s (1992) articles, the history of Chinese-American immigration can be divided into four periods: (1) Pre-Exclusionary era, (2) Exclusionary Period from 1882 to 1943, (3) Repeal of Exclusionary Act of 1943 to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, and (4) Post-1965 era. These four periods show the transformation of Chinese immigration and Chinese-American identities. In the following part, I will describe these four periods along with different Chinese-American identities.

Pre-Exclusionary Era and Sojourner Mentality

In the Pre-Exclusionary era, Chinese people moved to the United States for job opportunities and they usually had a sojourner mentality. That is, they wanted eventually to “return to their ancestral villages to enjoy the fruits of their labor during retirement” (Wang, 1991). At the time, Chinese were treated like outsiders in the United States. Their “roots” were in the homeland China or Taiwan, so living in the United States was just a temporary journey.

Exclusionary Period and Assimilation

During this period, widespread anti-Chinese sentiment made many Chinese people return to China unwillingly. In order to blend into American society, many Chinese Americans “uprooted” all traces of Chinese cultural heritage because they wanted to be accepted and assimilated into the mainstream society. The mentality is like the Chinese phrase *zhancao zhuge*; “to eliminate the weeds, one must pull out their roots” (Wang, 1991, p.197). It is not easy for the Chinese to uproot their heritage because ancestor
worship and respect for forefathers were very important in Chinese culture. Their forefathers and homeland were like their “roots.” Uprooting their Chinese heritage was like forgetting where they came from and who they were. To the Chinese, then, it was very disrespectful and disobedient. Therefore, while these immigrants wanted to blend into American culture, they also had to tolerate criticism from their families in China or Taiwan.

Repeal of Exclusionary Act and Accommodation

In 1943, the U.S. Congress repealed the Chinese exclusion laws. Under these laws, 105 Chinese immigrants were allowed to enter the country every year, and they could become naturalized citizens. Chinese-Americans had more work opportunities and started to leave Chinatown, where they first started their lives in the United States. Accommodation in this case is different from assimilation mentality. For instance, even though many Chinese immigrants became United States citizens, they still maintained their Chinese values.

Post 1965 Period and Ethnic Pride

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, there were movements for developing Chinese-American identity. The purpose of the movements was not only to reconceptualize their identity but also to demand a rightful place in the United States for all Chinese-Americans (Wang, 1991). As mentioned above, most of the early adventurers came to the United States to work and make their fortune. They did not have formal education and lived at the lower level of society.
After 1965, unlike the Chinese of the Pre-Exclusionary era, more and more Chinese immigrants came to the United States to pursue higher education. Moreover, Chinese were no longer ashamed of their different appearance and culture. On the contrary, they started to trace their roots in China or Taiwan. Ethnicity and diversity started to be embraced by Chinese-Americans. Instead of feeling ashamed, these immigrants were proud of their Chinese heritage.

Although Chinese-American identities can be divided into several types, it does not mean Chinese-Americans can only have one identity at one time. The distinction between identities is often blurry, and Chinese-Americans can move from one identity to another. For example, Wang (1991) pointed out that accommodation could lead to assimilation if the Chinese in the States lost contact with China relatives. On the other hand, Wang mentioned that “accommodation could revert back to sojourner mentality if Chinese nationalism were to resurface” (p. 200).

**Contemporary Chinese-Americans**

Compared with former immigrants, contemporary Chinese immigrants are generally better off because they usually belong to the middle and upper social classes and have a good education. Hence, it is easier for them to get jobs and to acclimate to a new environment. However, they may still have one of the four aforementioned identities (sojourner mentality, assimilation, accommodation, and ethnic pride) because Chinese-Americans cannot be expected to behave exactly like mainstream Americans. There will always be some differences (Li & Li, 1990).
Cultural Conflicts

Even though Chinese-Americans have lived in the United States for a long time, new immigrants still share similar cultural conflicts with immigrants from the past time. Below are common cultural conflicts that Chinese-Americans currently struggle.

Alienation

When people move to a new country, they need to adjust to a new environment. It is a painful process to find a new identity. After living in America for a long time, Chinese immigrants think that they are no longer Asians because they are used to the life-style and environment in the United States (Li & Li, 1990). They accept American culture and practice it in their daily lives. However, they are not really American, either. Even American-born Chinese (A.B.C.) may feel that they are neither Chinese nor American. They are always viewed as a “minority group” or as “foreigners” in the American society (Wang, 1990). On the other hand, it is possible that indigenous Chinese in Asia also views Chinese-Americans as foreigners.

Generational Conflicts

Chinese-American children usually have generational conflict with their first generation immigrant parents because they grow up in American society and go to American schools. Young Chinese-Americans usually argue with their parents about independence and individuality (Li & Li, 1990). However, Ben (1996) and Zhang (1992) both point out that most Chinese people choose to live close to their relatives and community because the “Chinese culture emphasizes tradition, conformity, respect for authority” (Zhang, 1992). These traditional ideas do not place much value on
independence and individuality; on the contrary, Chinese traditional ideas often oppose what Asian-American children care about.

The acculturation process of second-generation Chinese immigrants is different from their parents’ experience. Their parents usually have a dual loyalty to both their former country and the United States (Li & Li, 1990). They think the United States is a good environment to educate and raise their children. At the same time, they expect their children to value Chinese traditions and to act like Chinese. However, Chinese-American children regard themselves as individuals with rights of their own. Their cultural values begin to differ from those of their parents’. For example, some parents may force their children to learn Chinese, but Chinese-American children usually refuse to speak or write Chinese because they do not consider Chinese (Mandarin) as their first language.

According to Dr. Chin, some of the young Chinese-Americans “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” (Wong, 1971).

Idealization and Disillusionment of American Life

Many Chinese immigrate to the United States because they desire the freedom and diversity that the country offers (Li & Li, 1991). Initially, Chinese and Taiwanese governments sent students to the United States to study. Wong (1990) indicates, “The sole purpose of study abroad was, historically, to help modernize China; patriotism motivated progressive intellectuals to seek knowledge overseas” (p.203). However, these students did not return to China and Taiwan because they found that the United States was a better place to start a new life. Part of the reason is that many Chinese intellectuals
had lost their faith in China’s ability to achieve modernization under the existing political and social order (Wang, 1990). Moreover, the freedom and open-minded expression in the United States was especially attractive to Chinese/Taiwanese people who had never experienced it. Wang (1990) explains the situation clearly,

The ideological and military conflict during the Cold War period, represented by competing models of development in China and Taiwan, further aggravated the growing disenchantment and loss of faith in China... many lost faith in their governments and in China's ability to modernize and become a legitimate national presence in the world. Exhausted and disillusioned, many ceased to see themselves as able to play any role in China's modernization and cultural regeneration (p.204).

Lacking faith in China and Taiwan, many students decided to stay in the United States. A number of them and their children became very successful in professional fields such as science, technology, literature, and art. For example, Samuel Ting is a Nobel Prize winner in physics, Yo Yo Ma is a world-renowned cellist, and Michelle Wing Kwan is a famous figure skater who has won five world championships.

Even though there are many outstanding Chinese and Chinese-Americans in the United States, as mentioned in the section on identities, Chinese/Chinese-Americans cannot be treated as mainstream Americans. Li & Li (1990) indicate, “because of their appearance, Asian-Americans will often be mistaken for foreigners or newcomers by the mainstream Anglo population.” The Chinese author, Tchen (1994) describes his experience of being stereotyped,

I first thought of the intricacies of cross-cultural representation when I received my high school graduation “portrait.” It was a black-and-white photograph expertly retouched and hand-tinted by the enterprising photo company, presumably to highlight attractive features and to minimize the undesirable skin eruptions common during those awkward years. Upon receiving the photograph, I didn’t recognize myself... The skin tones were
rather odd and yellowed and my eyelids had been made puffy...In the
representor’s mind’s eye I became more properly “oriental.” This was my
first explicit understanding of being cast in yellow face, and of how deeply
this phenomenon is inscribed into American ways of seeing (p. 13).

Stereotypes, prejudice, and misperceptions by non-Chinese are usually the issues
with which Chinese-Americans have to deal. When they achieve a certain level of their
“American dream” but are still treated like “inferior citizens,” the disappointment brings
them depression and disillusionment in American life.

A New Proposed Description of Chinese-Americans

In general, Americans emphasize independence while the Chinese value
interdependence; Americans stress universalism and Chinese prefer particularism.
In family relationships, Americans believe the husband-wife relationship is the dominant
dyad, but Chinese consider the parent-child relationship to take precedence over all
others (Liu, 1995). These concepts are deeply rooted in American and Chinese cultures,
and have not changed significantly over time. Chinese-American children not only have
to deal with conflicts between their parents and themselves, but also with conflicts
between modern American society and traditional Chinese values.

There are several considerations when we discuss Chinese-Americans, including
the definition of Chinese-Americans, whether they have a common culture, language, and
traditions, or if they are an amorphous group that defies definition. In my own
experience with Chinese-Americans, they have told me that they often receive questions
such as “How can you speak English so well?” and “Where are you from?” from non-
Chinese people. It is a challenge for people who are not Chinese-American to understand this complex group because they are different from both Chinese and Americans.

In his article, Wang (1990) indicates “Chinese identities in the United States have been shaped by the dominant ideas of assimilation and loyalty, but other ideas—which have evolved out of actual encounters between Chinese and Euro-Americans—have molded and transformed these identities; these identities have, in turn, influenced public policy” (p. 182). Chinese-American identities and cultural conflicts have been issues ever since the time the Chinese first came to the United States. We cannot avoid the differences in Chinese and American cultures, but we can prevent these differences from becoming stereotypes: “It is important to recognize these differences in behavior patterns as differences and not to over-generalize or over-emphasize them” (Li & Li, 1990).

When defining who and what “Chinese-Americans” are, I think we have to go further than traditional definitions and identities (see “Four immigration periods and cultural identities” above), and not only consider Chinese-Americans as a unique group, but also appreciate and respect their characteristics and values. Some people disrespectfully call America-born Chinese “bananas” because Chinese-Americans’ appearances are Asian (yellow), but inside, their thinking is American (white). The term “banana” focuses on the surface level of Chinese-Americans’ traits but ignores the value of their blended cultures. Chinese-Americans will always have conflicts with Chinese and American cultures, but they are constantly trying to find a balance between the two worlds.
Chinese-American Children’s Picturebooks

In the history of immigration, Chinese people went through cultural change, culture loss, culture maintenance, and culture transmission. They express these experiences in novels (e.g. *The Tiger’s Apprentice* by Laurence Yep), movies (e.g. *The Joy Luck Club*), and children’s picturebooks. These works of art not only help non-Chinese understand Chinese immigrants and Chinese-Americans, but also give Chinese-Americans a chance to let their voice be heard.

However, over time, the representation of Chinese/Chinese Americans has not changed much. In this section, I will discuss the representation of culture in Chinese-American picturebooks.

**Representation of Culture in Chinese-American Picturebooks**

**Outsiders’ versus Insiders’ Voice**

In her survey of children’s books representing Chinese/Chinese-Americans, Wong (1971) indicates that there are no books published in the United States showing life in contemporary China or Taiwan, and a majority of the books are tales and legends of ancient China. Interestingly, two decades later, Cai (1994) comes to a similar conclusion in his research. He surveyed 73 picture-story books that feature Chinese characters; 51 books are tales, including modern folktales written by American authors. Cai indicates that in the children’s picturebook market, two-thirds of picturebooks depicting Chinese and Chinese-Americans were written by non-Chinese. Although some picturebooks describe contemporary Chinese/Chinese-Americans, the old Chinese tales and legends
constitute a larger proportion than contemporary stories. Wong's and Cai's articles were published 23 years apart, but they both reflect that the representations of Chinese/Chinese-American picturebooks give readers an incorrect image of contemporary Chinese/Chinese-Americans and Chinese culture. In addition, their studies also show that most of the picturebooks published in the United States depicting Chinese/Chinese-American culture are by non-Chinese (outsiders). Cai (1994) points that "an overwhelming proportion of folktales may distance the young reader from the contemporary reality of Chinese culture and reinforce negative perceptions of Chinese and Chinese-Americans" (p.170).

Can non-Chinese authors/illustrators represent Chinese and Chinese-Americans precisely? How do they deal with ethnicity, cultural authenticity, and cultural boundaries? On the other hand, is it possible for even insiders to depict Chinese people without stereotypes? In multicultural literature research, the debate often centers on whether only an insider can write culturally authentic literature about ethnic experiences, or whether outsiders can use imagination to successfully capture ethnic experiences as well (Bishop & Hickman, 1992). In my opinion, if authors and illustrators can thoughtfully and carefully research before they depict other cultures, all cultures can be accessible to both insiders and outsiders. At the same time, authors and illustrators can avoid misinterpretation of any given culture.

Issues regarding insiders' and outsiders' perspectives are complex. Researchers add another layer to debate over what is considered "truth" about a particular cultural experience. When insiders or outsiders want to write stories of a culture, they usually ask
themselves: How can I portray this culture precisely? Perhaps they have to first ask themselves: “Why do I need to write about this culture?” or “why is writing about this culture important to me and my readers?”

As an interpretivist myself, I believe there are many realities, which are constructed by social and cultural conventions. Outsiders can describe other cultures precisely if they have enough research and intimacy with that particular group. In contrast, insiders may misinterpret their own culture if they do not carefully investigate it. Dynak (1995) states, “cultural stereotypes derive from lack of intimacy” (p.369). Therefore, I think accuracy does not necessarily depend on whether an author grew up in the culture or not, but on whether he or she has enough intimacy and understanding of the culture.

**Cultural Authenticity**

**What Is Culture?**

In his article, Hooker (2003) defines “culture” as “the way that human beings learn to live with one another and their environment. There are many different cultures because culture is learned and human beings are flexible enough to learn vastly different ways of living.” Hooker emphasizes that culture is not the same as nature or personality. First, genetic input does not necessarily define culture because people who do not share kinship groups can have the same culture. Second, certain personalities may flourish more in one culture than the other, but culture is not the same as personalities. For example, people usually consider that Japanese are polite and Americans are straightforward. However, there must be some Japanese who are not courteous and
Americans who are not direct. From Hooker's (2003) viewpoint, culture is learned and cultivated, it does not naturally exist and happen. Therefore, he states that "it [culture] is based on a set of behaviors, attitudes, and ideas that human beings learn while living together" (p.61).

Geertz (1973) also claims that culture is "a learned behavior" and "a social legacy the individual acquires from his group." He argues that symbolic meaning is important in a culture because different cultures may have diverse meanings for the same thing. For example, the color white means purity to Americans, but white means death to Chinese. Americans and Chinese are not born knowing the symbolic meanings of certain colors, but they learn it from their own cultures. Based on the discussion above, even though Geertz's and Hooker's articles have a thirty-year gap, Geertz (1973) and Hooker (2003) both indicate that culture is shared, learned, and symbolic.

Branch and Rice (1992) define culture as "recognized as the feelings, the patterns of thinking, and the actions of human groups, including traditional ideas and their attached values" (Marantz, 1994). Branch and Rice's idea is similar to Geertz's (1973) statement that "culture is a way of thinking, feeling, and believing." In other words, culture consists of patterned and interrelated ideas, symbols, or behaviors.

It is not easy to have one definition of culture because culture is complex and composed of different historical, social, or political aspects. As mentioned above, culture is learned and cultivated by community members. However, the relationship between what is taught and what is learned are not absolutely the same. There might be some
parts lost or reproduced in the process of teaching and learning. Therefore, when culture is passed cross generations, it may be changed partially over time.

Based on the definitions above, when I use the term *culture* in this study, I am referring to shared and learned human behaviors that are social heritage or traditions passed on to future generations. I want to emphasize that culture consists of patterned thinking that has assigned meanings and values.

**What Is Chinese-American Culture?**

In this study, I consider American-born Chinese as Chinese-Americans. I classify Chinese who emigrate from Asia as Chinese immigrants even if they have lived in the States for decades. In general, I propose Chinese-American culture is a combination of Chinese and American cultures. It is a culture shared by both Chinese-Americans and Chinese immigrants.

In the term *Chinese-American culture*, the Chinese culture is learned from interaction with Chinese parents and relatives, and includes Chinese languages, customs, and ethnic backgrounds. In his book, Tong (2003) indicates that a number of the existing literature argues that Chinese-Americans success in educational and economic advancement stems from held values embedded in the Chinese culture, especially Confucianism. Hessler (2001) also shows the value of Confucianism to Chinese when describing a Chinese girl he observed: “the sense of self seemed largely external; you were identified by the way that others viewed you. That had always been the goal of Confucianism, which defined the individual’s place strictly in relation to the people around her” (Mirabile et al., 1999) Furthermore, the Confucian idea of “filial piety” is highly appreciated in the Chinese
society. As I mentioned in “A New Proposed Viewpoint of Chinese-Americans,” the parent-child relationship is more significant than other relationships. Tong therefore expresses that traditional family values and collective solidarity over individual interests are the reasons why Chinese-Americans have overcome poverty to achieve educational and income levels that exceed even those of Euro-Americans.

In terms of American culture, Chinese-Americans learn it by attending school, working, and participating in social events, not necessarily from their families. American culture places higher value on self-reliance rather than collectivism. Moreover, Americans appreciate frankness, openness, and directness while Chinese always prefer modesty and avoid conflicts. The American “transcendentalist” philosopher, Ralph Waldo Emerson, wrote an essay entitled “Self-Reliance” that captured American’s love of individualism. Phrases like “rags to riches,” and “doing things my way” in Emerson’s essay are still heard in the present day. Because of the differences between Chinese and American cultures, Chinese-Americans usually have conflicts with their families and try to seek balance between these two cultures. These conflicts have been presented in the “Cultural Conflicts” section (p.21).

Understanding Chinese-American culture is like viewing an iceberg—most of an iceberg is under the water, what we see is only a small part of it. We can see how Chinese-Americans behave and hear what they say, but a large part of their minds is invisible. The definition of Chinese-American culture is generalized in the literature I reviewed, but it cannot apply to every single Chinese-American. Some factors are more affected by place of dwelling and families. Surely Chinese-Americans will always be
involved in both Chinese and American cultures, but these two cultures themselves will keep changing over time as they continue to interact with different cultures.

**Why Does Cultural Authenticity Matter in Picturebooks?**

In his article, Cai (1994) argues that “to transit accurate information and to maintain the integrity of the culture, authors and illustrators are obligated to undertake earnest research in that culture” (p.188). In some picturebooks describing Chinese or Chinese-Americans, many images are not authentic. For example, some books might mix Chinese culture with other East Asian cultures, such as Japanese and Korean. Some books might be anachronistic, and some books might misinterpret the meanings of Chinese traditions. Cai says that this kind of situation often “results in vulgarizing the integrity of the Chinese culture or ambiguity of culture identity” (p.190).

From another point of view, Marantz (1994) questions how we define “authenticity” in multicultural picturebooks. He argues that “Certainly, it is difficult to come up with a working definition of the ‘authentic’ because human society is not some neat theoretical abstraction but rather a very messy mixture” (Marantz, 1994, p.5). For instance, when we discuss “Chinese culture,” does it refer to Chinese culture in China, Taiwan, or any other place? Does it mean traditional Chinese culture or contemporary Chinese culture? In China, after the ten-year Cultural Revolution, many valuable Chinese traditions and cultural monuments were lost. Even though some customs and traditions have been maintained, with time, these too might change. A specific example is Taiwan, which used to be occupied by China, Netherlands, and Japan for many years. Even though most of Taiwanese forefathers immigrated from China, the “Chinese
culture” in Taiwan is different from that of Mainland China because it involves Japanese and Taiwan aboriginal cultures. Based on the situations above, it is hard to define what “true Chinese culture” is.

Personally, I agree with Marantz’s viewpoint that it is not easy to define the “authenticity” of a particular culture because we share each other’s cultures every day. Surely authenticity is an important issue in multicultural picturebooks because it influences how people look at other cultures. If the author or illustrator does not research and observe the culture carefully, then creativity and renovation of tradition cannot be the valid excuses for non-authenticity. At the same time, we must all recognize the impossibility of replicating total cultures “authentically” in a book. Marantz (1994) concludes “The act of bookmaking is a bit like the act of translation; it is an artistic process that involves constant compromise” (p. 6).

Conclusion

Considering picturebooks as an art form emphasizes on the equality of text and illustrations. Behind text the illustrations is the cultural representation that artists and readers both respond to it. Issues about representation are not new, but these issues bring about an important idea that we have to learn and appreciate others’ cultures. When we are writing about our own cultures, we can be “outsiders” if we do not have a deep understanding of them. On the other hand, it is possible that we can be an “insider” if we carefully research certain cultures.
Picturebooks depicting Chinese/Chinese-Americans have been published in the States for more than forty years. However, the images of Chinese/Chinese-Americans are still similar as those in the past. The danger in reading multicultural picturebooks is that we all bring our own understanding of certain cultures when we read a picturebook, which is a partial truth of culture, not a complete truth. Cai (2002) points out, "[it] should be acknowledged that stereotypes are partial truth, but partial truth is not the whole truth." We might consider that a certain culture is similar to what is represented in a picturebook, but sometimes it could be misinterpreted or misunderstood.

Artists, publishers, and readers all have the power to influence how a culture is represented in a picturebook. The relationships among these three groups are complex because they involve marketing, educational, and political perspectives. Nevertheless, a picturebook also has the power to impact how children see people in certain cultures. Cai (2002) argues "The reason why partial truth can be imposed on reality is because the people who impose it hold the power over representation through control of the media and the publishing industry" (p.75). As readers, we cannot control how artists or publishers want to represent a culture, but we can try to avoid viewing a culture from only one angle.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this study, I used case study methodology to investigate the picturebook artist Grace Lin and her picturebooks. According to Yin (2003), a case study is "used in many situations to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena" (p.1). Meriam (2001) defines a case study in terms of its end product: "A qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (p.21). In their articles, Yin and Meriam both mention that a case study is a qualitative research method that is used to investigate a specific group or individuals. They also indicate that a case study is not the same as a case record or a case history but a holistic and meaningful characterization of real-life events.

Meriam (2001) emphasizes that the case study is an exploration of a "bounded system" or a case over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context. On the other hand, Yin (2003) claims that a case study is not a data collection technique but a formal research method. Yin focuses more
on comprehensive and reliable characteristics of a case study that include logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis. Stake’s (1995) definition of the case study covers both Yin’s and Mariam’s opinions: case study is an “integrated system” that contains various fields but still functions within a bounded area.

Based on the discussion above, I chose the case study methodology for my research because it is a form of qualitative research and it focuses on an individual or small participant pool, drawing conclusions only about that individual or group and in that specific context. I believe that this approach could best help me understand Grace Lin, her picturebooks, and the issues related to multicultural picturebooks.

Design of the Study

In order to understand how Lin represents mixed culture in her picturebooks, I used document analysis and an interview with Lin. I reviewed related research and picturebooks before I conducted the interview.

The analysis has three sections. The first section is a biographical sketch of Lin’s life in the United States, including family and educational background. The second part is a critical examination of Lin’s picturebooks depicting Chinese/Chinese-Americans and written and illustrated by her. The last section focuses on different themes of her picturebooks, including Chinese themes, non-Chinese themes and Chinese themes that contain cultural conflicts. Overall, the design of this study covers biographical, descriptive, and interpretative research.
Data Collection

Data were collected from three sources: 1) picturebooks by Lin, 2) an interview with Lin, and 3) written documents about Lin and her picturebooks. As mentioned in Chapter 1 (p.6), data collection involved developing a comprehensive collection of Lin's works. These works include picturebooks written and illustrated by Lin and books illustrated by her but written by different authors.

By interviewing Lin and follow-up queries through emails, I acquired first-hand information regarding Lin's experiences and picturebooks that are central to my study. Glesne (1999) states that an interview is "a human interaction" that can acquire data about the perception of one's experience (Yang, 2000, p.64). Therefore, the interaction with Lin helped me understand Lin's picturebooks as well as her thinking and personality.

The interview questions were divided into three parts: 1) Lin's family background, 2) Lin's educational background, and 3) Lin's picturebooks. In her family background section, the questions focus on why and how her family immigrated to the States, how her parents educated her about Chinese culture, and what significant events and experiences of Lin's life are particularly relevant to her picturebooks. This section is a foundation for understanding her background as a Chinese-American and how her family influenced her in creating her picturebooks.

The second part contains questions related to her education. I asked Lin about her education in American schools and how American education affected her and influenced
her picturebooks. In addition, the questions covered her training in art school, how she learned the techniques of making picturebooks, and how she developed her writing skills.

The last section concentrated on her career and her picturebooks. The questions in this section included Lin’s purposes for creating picturebooks, how she represents mixed cultures, and what she considers to be significant about her picturebooks to children. This section is very important because it not only describes her career as a picturebook artist, but also addresses her cultural heritages reflected in her works.

Besides conducting an interview, I also collected various documents about Lin and her picturebooks. These documents included how publishers of children’s book magazines view her works. This source provides a different angle to examine and critique Lin’s picturebooks. After I collected all the data, I categorized, organized, and annotated them for preparing my analysis.

Following is a list of different types of data that I collected:

1. Children’s picturebooks written and illustrated by Lin
   a. 8 books written and illustrated by Lin
   b. 10 books illustrated by Lin but written by different authors
2. Children’s picturebooks depicting Chinese/Chinese-Americans
3. Book reviews of Lin’s picturebooks in magazines and children’s literature journals
4. A face-to-face interview with Lin
5. Oral and written correspondence with Lin (i.e. phone conversations and emails)
6. Published articles about Lin
7. Unpublished articles by Lin
Methods

Document Analysis

I collected and reviewed all of Lin’s picturebooks and examined her official website to understand how she works as a picturebook author/illustrator. Moreover, I read book reviews and articles about Lin and took notes to learn about her background, training, and picturebooks. I collected book reviews from Lin’s website and booksellers’ websites. Several of the reviews were also published in children’s literature magazines and journals. The reviews helped me understand the style of Lin’s picturebooks. However, these reviews usually focus more on the illustrations rather than on text and cultural representation. Therefore, I read books and articles discussing every element in picturebooks to acquire knowledge of story construction, illustration, and cultural representation. I have presented these issues as they relate to picturebooks in Chapter 2.

Interviewing

Patton (1990) states, “The purpose of interview is to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind” (p.278). The interview questions in this study were created for collecting first-hand qualitative data in order to understand Lin and her picturebooks. These questions were open-ended and carefully worded and arranged. Patton explains that “the purpose of open-ended interviewing is not to put things in someone’s mind but to access the perspective of the person being interviewed” (p.278). After reviewing relevant literature and documents about Lin, I developed questions about her family, education, style of her art, choice of topics, and cultural representation. All of the questions focused on acquiring Lin’s opinions instead of expressing my perspectives.
I found Lin’s email address from her official website and sent her an email asking about the possibility of interviewing her. This initial correspondence included what the purpose of the interview was going to be, what questions would be asked, and how the information would be used in my research. Lin granted me the interview, which I conducted in her home, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on February 12, 2005.

I audiotaped the two-hour interview and digitalized the audiotapes into a computer and then transcribed it. I typed the interview word-by-word and sent the document to Lin along with the audio file I saved onto a CD. After she received and reviewed the files, we continued to correspond via email for clarifying some words or sentences that she did not feel represented her opinions accurately. I considered each step seriously and highly respected Lin’s suggestions and comments. The revised transcription was re-sent to Lin for final approval.

Analysis and Interpretation

The data of Lin’s personal life described her family background, educational background, as well as her purpose and perspective for creating picturebooks. This body of literature helped me answer the sub-questions of this study, including how Lin’s Chinese-American background affected her picturebooks, and what the cultural significances of her picturebooks are.

The second part of the data analysis focuses on Lin’s picturebooks. Among all of Lin’s books, I specifically analyzed four books that were written and illustrated by Lin and deal with Chinese themes. These books were Fortune Cookie Fortunes, Kite Flying,
*Dim Sum for Everyone,* and *The Ugly Vegetables.* I chose these four books because they were all based on Lin's childhood experiences, and she made both stories and illustrations. Other books were either written by non-Chinese authors or did not focus on Chinese/Chinese-Americans. In order to have an in-depth understanding of how Lin's background made an impact on her books and how she represented mixed culture, it is important to analyze these four books particularly.

After analyzing these four books, I took a further look of Lin's books and classified them into different themes. Some of Lin's books introduce Chinese traditions, some of her books express Western customs, and some of her books address issues of multicultural experiences and cultural conflicts. Based on these characteristics of Lin's books, I divided her works into three categories: Chinese themes, non-Chinese themes, and Chinese themes that contain cultural conflicts.

For books with Chinese themes, Lin uses Chinese people as the major characters and introduces Chinese traditions and customs, such as food and folk activities (e.g. *Dim Sum For Everyone* and *Kite Flying*). For those books with non-Chinese themes, she uses animals as the main characters and the stories are contemporary and do not focus on Chinese culture (e.g. *Robert's Snow* and *Merry Christmas, Let's All Sing*). In terms of books that deal with Chinese themes that contain cultural conflicts, she uses Chinese/Chinese-Americans as the main characters and represents cross-cultural experiences. This category has stories of Chinese immigration (e.g. *The Jade Necklace*) and contemporary Chinese-Americans (e.g. *The Ugly Vegetables*). Table 1.2 shows Lin's picturebooks classified in these three categories.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese themes</th>
<th>Chinese themes that contain cultural conflicts</th>
<th>Non-Chinese themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(2001) <em>Red is a Dragon</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>(2003) <em>One for Me, One for You</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2000) <em>The Big Buck Adventure</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The titles in bold face have Chinese themes and written and illustrated by Lin.

Table 2. Lin’s Picturebooks with Different Themes

Instead of analyzing every single book in each of three categories, I selected particular books from each classification, looking at the differences of their story construction, expression of art, and cultural representation. I examined the connections among text, illustration, and cultural representation, along with how they influence each other. The criteria for analysis were also used in analyzing the four books I mentioned previously (*Fortune Cookie Fortunes*, *Kite Flying*, *Dim Sum for Everyone*, and *The Ugly Vegetables*). The analysis addresses the first research question: How does Grace Lin represent mixed culture in her picturebooks? Following is a detail description of the criteria for analysis.

**Criteria for Analysis**

**Text: Story Construction**

In the story construction, I discussed the purpose of the story, the issues Lin wanted to express, and the characters she created. As mentioned in Chapter II, text and pictures
work as complementary partners. Therefore, it is important to discuss not only the text but also the relationship between text and pictures since they are the elements constructing a picturebook.

Illustration: Expression of Art

Expression of art focuses on Lin’s illustrations, including choices of design style (elements of design and principles of design), techniques (media, papers, and typography), and choices of historical or cultural conventions. Elements of design include line, shape, color value, and texture, whereas principles of design refer to balance, rhythm, and movement of pictures. The choice of historical or cultural conventions mean pictorial conventions borrowed from styles of art throughout history or cultural groups in order to enhance the meaning of the story or concept. I adopted criteria for analyzing Lin’s books from *Evaluating Children’s Books: A Critical Look* (Reprinted in Kiefer, 1995, p.122-123).

Cultural Representation

Artists often express their cultural background and experiences within their creations, and Grace Lin is no exception. As a Chinese-American artist, Lin crosses the gap between two cultures and represents Chinese-Americans in a contemporary setting. In this section I discussed subject matter of Lin’s books, including how she represented Chinese-American culture and cultural meanings and conflicts in her picturebooks. Table 1.3 sums up the data analysis criteria:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text: Story construction</th>
<th>Illustration: Expression of art</th>
<th>Cultural representation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Character representation</td>
<td>2. Choices of techniques</td>
<td>Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Text and illustrations</td>
<td>3. Choice of historical or</td>
<td>2. Culture conflicts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cultural conventions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Data Analysis Criteria for Lin’s Picturebooks

Validity and Reliability

Validity, reliability, and ethics are important conditions in a qualitative case study (Merriam, 1998). Crestwell (1998) suggests eight procedures for increasing the trustworthiness of research (Glesne, 1999). Instead of using all of Crestwell’s procedures, I applied three of the eight procedures to my study: 1) triangulation, 2) member checking, and 3) peer review and debriefing.

Triangulation

Schwandt (2001) explains that triangulation can “involve the use of multiple data sources, multiple investigators, multiple theoretical perspectives, multiple methods, or all these” (p.257). Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) indicate that triangulation “is not just a matter of checking whether inferences are valid, but of discovering which inferences are valid” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p. 199-200, as cited in Schwandt, 2001, p.257). Based on the statements above, in order to diminish researcher’s biases, I collected data from different sources, including developing a comprehensive collection of Lin’s picturebooks, a face-to-face interview with Lin, and document analysis.
**Member checking**

After the interview with Lin, I sent her the transcription and asked her to review all of the questions and answers. This was an important procedure for corroborating and ensuring that my account of our conversation was accurate.

**Peer review and debriefing**

During the process of my study, I confided in a trusted and knowledgeable advisor, Dr. Parsons, and reader, Dr. Kiefer. They advised me on ideas I shared with them about. Moreover, I asked several professors and PhD candidates to check the dependability of my research procedures.
CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter presents a biographical sketch of the author/illustrator Grace Lin, a description and interpretation of her picturebooks, and an analysis of the relationship between her background and her picturebooks. As a Chinese-American, Lin grew up experiencing the differences between Chinese and American cultures. Currently, she creates picturebooks to find her identity and share her childhood memories with children.

In the first section, I presented Lin’s family background, education background, and her purposes for creating picturebooks. Second, I focused on analyzing four books written and illustrated by Lin, depicting Chinese-Americans. I discussed cultural representation in Lin’s texts and images and how her background affects her creation of picturebooks. Third, I divided her books into three categories: Chinese themes, non-Chinese themes, and Chinese-themes that contain cultural conflicts. I compared these three themes and investigated the differences and similarities among them. In the last section, I presented her struggles in being a Chinese-American picturebook artist and how she overcame the difficulties to become a successful author and illustrator.

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Personal Life of Grace Lin

Family Background

Lin's parents and extended family immigrated from Taiwan to the United States more than thirty years ago. According to "Four immigration periods and culture identities" in chapter 2, Lin's parents and extended family were the fourth type of immigrants who came to the States in the post-1965 period. During this time, immigrants came to the United States to pursue a higher education and lead an upper-middle class life. Lin's father earned his M.D. in the United States and her mother earned a degree in agriculture. Most of Lin's uncles and aunts live in the U.S., as do her cousins.

Lin was born in New Jersey and grew up in upstate New York. She has one older sister and one younger sister. When she lived in upstate New York, most people in her neighborhood were Caucasian, and Asians only comprised a small portion of the population. Her parents wanted Lin and her sisters to blend in with American culture, so they decided to speak English to Lin and her sisters in the house rather than speak Chinese or Taiwanese. Unlike other Chinese parents in the States, Lin's parents did not force her to learn Chinese. Lin indicated that she now realizes that it is a pity she did not learn Chinese. However, from a different viewpoint, the fact that her parents did not force her to learn Chinese shows that her parents were open-minded and gave Lin the freedom to adopt American values and traits. Lin explained, "my husband is an Italian-Canadian and they [my parents] welcomed him in with open arms. I enjoy and appreciate the mix and freedom they have allowed me to mix cultures."
According to Lin, her parents passed down Chinese culture to her in subtle ways and gave her many opportunities to explore different cultures. Even though her family had Chinese food or other Chinese traditions at home, “most of the time we glossed over them [aspects of Chinese cultures]” Lin said. However, even though Lin’s parents did not emphasize teaching her Chinese cultures, they still had some traditional Chinese values. For example, they wanted Lin to choose a profession that they knew would ensure a stable financial future such as computer science. Hence, when Lin decided to go to art school, her parents were not enthusiastic. After Lin’s picturebooks were published and she received awards and high appreciation, her parents became ardent supporters, especially her mother. They started to realize that what Lin did was important to Chinese, American, and Chinese-American children. In addition, because many of her books are based on her childhood memories, her family served as a source for great information. As a result, her books acted as a link to bring her family closer. This was an unexpected benefit, which she did not predict would occur when she first made picturebooks.

It is no doubt that compared to traditional Chinese families, Lin’s parents were more Americanized in that they accepted American culture more freely. As mentioned in Chapter 2 (p. 23), people usually perceive Americans as those who emphasize independence, universalism, and husband-wife relationships, whereas Chinese stress interdependence, particularism, and parent-child relationships. Lin’s parents struck a nice balance between Chinese and American communities and they passed this attitude to Lin and her sisters, teaching them to be open-minded and to appreciate different cultures.
Educational Background

Childhood Education

Many Chinese parents in the U.S. expect their children to learn Chinese from local Chinese schools, and Lin’s parents were no exception. However, Lin did not have a Chinese school nearby until she was in middle school, when a Chinese school was 30-40 minutes away from her house. Additionally, during her teenage years, everyone wanted to be independent and not always listen to his/her parents. Lin said, “I was a moody, rebellious teenager. So I rejected it [to learn Chinese], which is what I regret now.”

Since Lin did not go to Chinese school, most of her learning experiences were from American schools. American education gave Lin the idea to “make learning fun.” This idea is also shown on Lin’s website. She designs games and exercises such as making kites and coloring pictures for children to play with.

During our interview, Lin said that she wanted to be a picturebook artist when she was a child. She showed me the first picturebooks she made for school project when she was in middle school (see Figure 1 and 2, p.50). Although the papers turned yellow over the years, I was still touched by the quality of her books. She wrote the stories and illustrated every picture. She drew the pictures on separate pieces of paper, nicely cut off each image, and pasted them on every page. She also showed me another book she made for a school project. The story was a fairytale and all of the illustrations were very refined, like the princess on the cover (see Figure 2, p.50). The books Lin made when she was young not only demonstrated that she had the talent to be an artist, but also showed that she had the heart to work with children and help them know about the world.
Figure 1. Lin's first picturebook, *Verdance*.

Figure 2. Lin's handmade picturebook, *Dandelion Story*.  

Art School Education

To further pursue her childhood interest, Lin decided to go to art school for training to be an artist. She entered the Rhode Island School of Design and majored in illustration.

During her college years, she went to Rome to study art for a year. Interestingly, this study abroad experience was the key that made Lin focus on representing Chinese-American culture in her picturebooks. When she was in Rome, Lin thought that she would make books with princesses and fairies. She wanted to use Leonardo Da Vinci’s style to draw fairytails. The training in Rome emphasized realistic painting, so Lin was taught how to mix colors and do subtle shading.

However, she realized that she was only imitating other artists and she would never be like them. Lin asked herself, “Why am I trying to pretend that I am Michelangelo when I’m nothing like him? Why am I doing all these drawings and all this art, based on the culture and experiences that are not even my own?” After she came back to the States, she started to think about what was unique about her and what her identity was. She realized that she was neither Chinese nor American, but Chinese-American. Therefore, she began to think about what made her Chinese-American strived to exhibit that in her works.

Self-taught Skills

Most of the training in art school focused on painting, so Lin learned the majority of her writing skills by teaching herself. After she graduated from art school in 1996, Lin had a number of jobs just to pay the bills. One of her jobs was working in a children’s
bookstore where she read every single book that bookstore had. This attitude reflects that besides being an artist and author, Lin is also an enthusiastic, curious, and humble learner. She can discover lessons everywhere because each book she read was an open-ended learning opportunity. Before her first book was published in 1999, she had developed a foundation of writing by learning from other artists’ books and taking several writing classes. This experience showed that the three-year struggle not only helped Lin build up her writing skills, but also strengthened her to be a successful artist.

**Lin’s Purposes for Creating Picturebooks**

The purposes for Lin’s picturebooks fall into three categories. First, by making picturebooks, she wants to find the culture she had lost. As mentioned in chapter 2 (p. 18), Chinese immigrants in the post-1965 period were no longer ashamed of their appearance and culture. Instead, they traced their roots back to China and Taiwan to understand Chinese culture. Even though Lin is Chinese-American and grew up Americanized, she believes that Chinese culture is part of her heritage towards which she can show pride. Lin explains,

> A lot of my books deal with Chinese culture because, in a way, I’m trying to find the culture I lost...the purpose of my picturebooks is completely selfish. I make these picturebooks because I like to make books and I make what interests me. I also make them because these are the books I wish I had when I was young...the initial purpose[s] of my books are pretty personal.

Because Lin uses picturebooks to explore the culture she had lost, many of her books are based on her experiences, and the characters are her own family members. Even though the stories are not entirely factual, they are still based on her memories.
The second purpose of Lin's picturebooks is to help children gain understanding about their Chinese heritage at an early age. It is easier for children to accept multiple languages or cultures when they are younger. On the other hand, when they are in junior high or high school, they have already established their own personalities and beliefs. In addition, teenagers usually reject things that their parents force them to do, such as learning Chinese. Therefore, Lin wants to encourage children to learn about Chinese-American culture when they are younger and more eager and excited to learn.

Third, Lin wanted to show Chinese/Chinese-Americans in a modern setting to children. In chapter 2, I mentioned that a majority of picturebooks depicting Chinese/Chinese-Americans are written by non-Chinese, and most of the stories are old Chinese tales and legends (p. 25). Moreover, when Lin visited schools, she often encountered questions such as “How come you can speak English so well?”; “Are you from China?”; and “Did your dad still have a ponytail?” These American children's impression of Chinese people was very outdated. It is possible that children receive this idea from their parents, movies, and picturebooks. Lin wants to show American children that even though Chinese/Chinese-Americans have a Chinese heritage and look different from Americans, they are still like other American people in the present day.

Not only Lin but also many other multicultural literature authors and illustrators are trying to help children accept their own cultures and other cultures by showing them the similarities among people. Cai (2002) indicates that a number of multicultural books carry the same message: “Despite different nationalities, appearances, languages, lifestyles, and other differences, we are all the same inside. ‘Joys are the same, and love
is the same. Pain is the same and blood is the same'" (p. 120). Lin's books also carry this message that even though people look different from the outside, yet in many aspects of their daily lives they are very similar. In addition, she emphasizes that her books are especially important for Chinese-American children because the characters are Chinese-Americans who have similar experiences as the Chinese-American children in her audience. She wants to educate Chinese-American children that "[Chinese culture] is your culture and it is special and wonderful."

**Representations of Chinese-American Culture in Lin's Picturebooks:**

**Analysis of Four Books Written and Illustrated by Lin**

As mentioned in Chapter 3, I focused on analyzing four books that contain Chinese themes and are written and illustrated by Lin. These books are *Fortune Cookie Fortunes*, *Kite Flying*, *Dim Sum for Everyone*, and *The Ugly Vegetables*. Lin indicated that when she creates a picturebook, she usually has the story first and then draws the illustrations. She has sketchbooks at every corner of her house and writes down ideas when she has inspirations. When she sees any good idea from the sketchbook that could act as a springboard, Lin starts to write the story or research related materials.

In this section, I discussed cultural representations in Lin's texts and images to understand how she represents Chinese-American culture in her books.
Cultural Representation in Lin’s Texts and Images

In these four books, Lin uses a first-person perspective to construct the stories. She is the little girl in the stories, and the other characters are the same as her family members: parents, one older sister, one younger sister, and herself. Below are the topics and issues Lin presented in these four books.

Topics and Issues

1. Generational Conflicts

These four books all focus on family activities. The Ugly Vegetables especially presents the relationship between a Chinese mother and her Chinese-American daughter. The daughter in this story, who represents Lin’s childhood self, was not happy about her mother planting Chinese vegetables in their garden. She wanted her to like her American neighbors who planted flowers. She was disappointed that her mother planted ugly vegetables until her mother used those vegetables to make delicious soup. Her neighbors came over to ask for the recipe and started planting Chinese vegetables in their gardens.

Lin uses conversations between the mother and daughter to show the differences between two different generations and cultures. The daughter repeatedly asked questions about why they had to do something different from their neighbors: “…why are we using such big shovels? Mrs. Crumerine has a small one”; “…why are we using a hose? Linda and Mickey use watering cans”; “…why are we sticking these papers in the garden? Mrs. Angelhowe has seed packages in her garden”; “why can’t we grow flowers?” The daughter’s attitude was very impatient. The mother’s answers were always firm but gentle. She responded to her daughter, “These [vegetables] are better than flowers” and
“You wait and see.” The daughter continually compared her garden with her neighbors because she felt that her neighbors probably used better ways to plant their flowers.

From the story, we can see that the mother resolved the conflict between her and her daughter gently, and also taught her daughter three things: First, patience. The vegetables took longer to grow than flowers, so she wanted her daughter to be patient and wait. Second, appearance cannot always reflect essence. Even though the vegetables did not look as beautiful as flowers, vegetables could become delicious soup that flowers could not. Third, hospitality. The mother shared the soup and recipe with her neighbors and taught them how to plant Chinese vegetables. These three character traits are important Chinese virtues that the daughter did not understand at first.

This story reflects the daughter’s Chinese-American mind and the mother’s Chinese values. When the daughter wanted to be the same as her neighbors, the mother did not tell her that what their neighbors did was wrong or not valuable. Instead, the mother wanted her daughter to respect the differences and cherish what she had at the same time. The literary depiction of this story tells readers that neither Chinese nor American culture is better; they are both important and precious to Chinese-Americans. Moreover, the story not only shows the struggles Chinese-American children have, but also reveals how Lin’s parents teach her to be a Chinese-American and how they encourage her to appreciate different cultures: We cannot avoid differences between two cultures, but we can try to understand the differences and learn from each other.
2. Family Relationships

*Dim Sum for Everyone, Fortune Cookie Fortunes,* and *Kite Flying* show all of Lin’s family members in the stories—the parents and three daughters. From the illustrations, we can understand that the interaction between family members is intimate and warm. For example, in *Dim Sum for Everyone,* the mother helps the little daughter put on her jacket; at the end of the story, the little daughter leans on the mother and sleeps. In *Fortune Cookie Fortunes,* the girl also leans on her father’s arm and falls asleep on a park bench. On the last page, the father embraces his two older daughters while the mother also holds the youngest daughter. These images show that the space between parents and children is very close and that this family is full of love.

One of the characteristics in Lin’s picturebooks is that when she presents family members, she usually begins with the parents and then introduces the children. Here are some examples: In general, people read books from top to bottom, left to right; in *Fortune Cookie Fortunes,* Lin illustrates the father on the very left side of the picture and the mother sitting next to the father, and three daughters on the right side of the page. Hence, readers receive the image of the father first and then the rest of the mother and children. On the following pages, Lin starts introducing the father’s fortune cookie first and the girls’ later. In *Kite Flying* and *Dim Sum for Everyone,* Lin also introduces mother and father before children. The text in *Kite Flying* starts with depicting the mother’s action of making a kite and then describes the father’s and three daughters’ actions. In *Dim Sum for Everyone,* Lin illustrates the mother picking the first dish before the father
and children. This pattern of introducing mother and father first implies respect for the role of parents, which is also a significant Chinese tradition.

3. Chinese-American Culture

In chapter 2, I proposed that Chinese-American culture is a combination of Chinese and American cultures and is shared by both Chinese-Americans and Chinese immigrants (p.30). Lin used Chinatown as a background environment in *Fortune Cookie Fortunes* and *Dim Sum for Everyone*. Chinatown is the place where Chinese immigrants started their lives in the United States. Lin’s illustrations of Chinatown not only reflect her childhood memory, but also express that Chinatown is part of Chinese-Americans’ lives.

There are various Chinese traditions and customs in Chinatown. For example, in Chinatown people can have Chinese food, purchase Chinese decorations, and watch traditional Chinese variety shows. However, part of these Chinese traditions and customs are combined with American culture in order to integrate multiple cultures. For instance, at the end of *Fortune Cookie Fortunes*, Lin wrote an essay to explain the birth of fortune cookies. She declared that some people believe that fortune cookies can be seen as a modern reinvention of the mooncake, which was used to deliver secret messages in the 13th and 14th centuries in China. In addition, during the American railway boom in the late 19th century, Chinese workers exchanged biscuits bearing words of encouragement. Lin (2004) indicated, “Fortune cookies can be considered one of the first true Asian American foods...Many claim sugar was added to the fortune cookie to appeal to America’s sweet tooth.” After hundreds of years, the fortune cookie maintains the function of delivering messages but its shape and taste are transformed into contemporary
style. In essence, the fortune cookie is a combination of Chinese and American cultures, and Lin also shows this mixed culture in her picturebooks.

The language of Lin’s picturebooks is English. However, sometimes she uses Chinese words instead of English. For example, Lin used Chinese kinship terms to name the family members: “Jie-Jie” means older sister and “Mei-Mei” means younger sister. However, in the American culture, people usually call their siblings by name rather than using kinships terms. These appellations are usually emphasized in a Chinese family because respecting people older than oneself is an important tradition, even in the same generation. Lin uses bilingual texts not only to demonstrate her attention to Chinese values, but also to show that the mixed culture has become more and more identifiable in Chinese-American families.

Character Representation

In a picturebook, there are a number of techniques to portray characters. The description of characters can involve use of both verbal and visual methods. Nikolajeva and Scott (2001) indicate that characters’ actions “can be described verbally or visually, and, as with the external description, the two descriptions can complement or contradict each other” (p.83). In other words, picturebook artists use text and images to construct characters. The interaction between text and images can encourage readers to develop different interpretations of characters. These interpretations can make characters more vivid in readers' minds.
From these four books, readers can presume that the protagonist is the little girl who represents Lin's childhood because Lin uses first person perspective to tell the story, and this little girl appears more than other characters. However, Lin does not focus on describing this little girl's characteristics, and other family members appear almost equally in the stories (the exception of this is The Ugly Vegetables). As mentioned previously, Lin uses kinship terms instead of names to identify the characters. This use of kinship terms underscores the importance of the relationship between characters. Interestingly, in these four books, there is no conversation between the father and the mother. Most of the interactions are between parents and children or the little girl and her sisters. In chapter 2, I mentioned that Americans think the husband-wife relationship is the dominant dyad while Chinese consider the parent-child relationship to take precedence over all others; Americans emphasize individualism while Chinese prefer collectivism (p.23). Lin tends to emphasize the relationship between parents and children rather than husband and wife, and she focuses more on describing family relationships rather than individuals. The way Lin portrays family relationships is more like a traditional Chinese family than an American family.

Nevertheless, the individual characters express more contemporary Chinese-American than traditional Chinese style. For example, the father in her books is very gentle and quiet. He is always smiling and taking care of his daughters. In a traditional Chinese family, the father usually plays a leader's role that has more power than other family members. Unlike male roles in other Chinese picturebooks, the father in Lin's books does not show the strong power or authority in the family. There is not much
dialog involving the father, and he plays a supporting role in the stories. The majority of characters in Lin's books are Chinese girls, not boys. Even though Lin's purpose is not to expect Chinese and non-Chinese boys to show appreciation for Chinese girls, it would be a great benefit if boys can understand more about Chinese girls through Lin's books.

Expression of Art

Media

Artists use different media to create their works of art, and different media can express diverse characteristics. Nodelman (1998) indicates that artists "choose media in terms of the effects they wish to create; but it is their conviction that certain media are best suited for certain effects that let them create those effects, not the media themselves" (p.75). Lin uses watercolor and gouache to illustrate pictures. Watercolor and gouache are media that can produce various effects. Artists can add different portions of water to dilute colors for creating floating and blurry images, or add little water to make saturated colors. In addition, artists can create new colors by mixing different ones. Lin uses saturated colors instead of gradients in her picturebooks. She wants to create images that are bright and colorful to show a happy and warm atmosphere to children.

Using bright colors in pictures was not Lin's first intention when she created picturebooks. As mentioned in the educational background, Lin learned a more realistic style in Italy, and hoped she could emulate Michelangelo's style of painting fairytales. The realistic style emphasizes hue, saturation, shadings, and three-dimensional representation. However, after she came back to the States, she tried to break the rules
she learned in Rome and paint with bright colors, without detail shadings. "It was really fun!" she said. At this key point, she found her own style and started to use it in her picturebooks.

Size

Most of Lin's books are designed in the same size (9 1/4 inches x 9 1/4 inches). In general, small-size books are intended for individual enjoyment or for a few children at a time, while large-scale books are for a larger group of children to see the pictures (Nodelman, 1988). Lin's picturebooks, which are medium size, can serve both individuals and small groups of readers. Lin indicated that publishers might encourage artists to use certain paper sizes. Personally, she likes to create books that are wider than they are high. She humorously said, "I don't tend to do books that are vertical, maybe because I am short (laugh)."

Nodelman (1988) argues that a wider book usually contains more information between characters and their environment, while a narrow book urges readers to focus on action or facial expression of the characters rather than on environment. In her books, Lin has created a number of double-spread pictures to show a wide view of the environment. In The Ugly Vegetables, Lin illustrated a picture that demonstrates the little girl's neighborhood (see Figure 3, p.79). From the picture, readers can understand that the little girl is living in a multicultural community because she has African-American and Caucasian neighbors and all of the houses are American style. In addition, the activities her neighbors are doing, such as playing in a tree house, taking a nap on a hammock, and barbecuing in the backyard, are rarely found in Taiwan or China. These
elements suggest that this story takes place in an American society. Moreover, the facial expressions of the characters tell us that it is a peaceful and happy neighborhood.

In *Fortune Cookie Fortunes*, the family goes to a Chinese restaurant in Chinatown (see Figure 4, p.79). Even though the gate has a Chinese style and the restaurant has Chinese roof tiles and a dragon picture on the wall, readers can still recognize that Lin is not illustrating a Chinese city because the surrounding environment is westernized.

In my opinion, designing wide size books shows Lin’s unique style and the way she views the world. She wants her readers to pay attention not only to the characters, but also to the environment. Noledman (1988) indicates that wider books ask readers to “take an attitude of detachment, to stand back objectively and interpret characters in terms of details of their settings” (p. 46). Lin’s books provide children with a broader view of that setting. Children can spend more time exploring the environment of the picture and engaging themselves in the picturebook experience.

Patterns

Lin enjoys using patterns in her pictures. She said, “...when the books focus on Chinese culture, I like to include Chinese inspired patterns.” The characters in Lin’s books all wear clothes with Chinese style patterns. Even though they are not wearing traditional Chinese clothes such as “Chi-Pau” (cheongsams), the patterns still enhance Lin’s purpose of introducing a Chinese-American family. Besides clothes, Lin uses patterns almost everywhere in her books. For example, she uses swirl patterns in the sky to depict wind or air. In *Robert’s Snow*, Lin uses snowflake patterns in the background
to give readers the feeling of winter. In the book *One for Me, One for You*, which is about math, she uses geometric patterns that highlight the topic of the story.

From the examples above, we can presume that Lin uses patterns that correlate to the subject of the book. These patterns not only become Lin's unique mark, but also make her books convey more of a Chinese atmosphere even though the books do not focus on Chinese subjects.

**Other Artists' Influences**

Before she creates a book, Lin usually reads a number of books to inspire her. She also researches related books to understand the sources of Chinese traditions and customs. She believes it is important to observe, research, and study the subject before making a picturebook. For every book she has made, she has read approximately 40 books to establish a "database" of the subject in her mind. And in every book, she was inspired by different artists.

For example, in *Fortune Cookie Fortunes*, Lin researched a number of books by Elisa Kleven. Lin indicated "her [Elisa Kleven's] art isn't hung up on perspective or anatomy—just about a joyful spirit!" Like Kleven, Lin drew little things everywhere in the book *Fortune Cookie Fortunes*. She did not focus on making the pictures look realistic. Instead, she wanted to create a happy image for children. In one picture in *Fortune Cookie Fortunes*, she illustrated hundreds of birds flying toward a birdhouse in a tree (see Figure 5, p. 79). The birds have various colors and come from different directions. Two girls standing under the tree enjoy seeing this beautiful scene. Lin not only adopted Kleven's joyful spirit, but also created a free and fun style in her book.
Endpapers

Endpapers can prepare readers to read the story by setting the mood, giving a preview, or complementing the illustrations (Kiefer, 1995, p.123). Nikolajeva and Scott (2001) indicate that a growing number of picturebook creators have discovered the possibilities of endpapers as additional text that can contribute to the story in various ways (p.247). Lin is one of the artists who effectively incorporate endpapers to prepare readers for the story.

In a number of picturebooks, front and back endpapers are usually identical. However, Nikolajeva and Scott (2001) argue that “front and back endpapers can be used to emphasize the changes that have taken place within the book” (p.249). In these four books, Lin does not use identical endpapers. Instead, she tends to start the narrative on the front endpaper and use the back endpaper to establish an ending scene. For example, in Dim Sum for Everyone, the front endpaper demonstrates the original materials for making Dim Sum while the back endpaper shows the finished dishes (see Figure 6 and 7, p.80). Likewise, the front endpaper of Kite Flying displays the tools for making a kite, such as wooden sticks, glue, and paintbrushes, and the back endpaper presents different types of kites with their representative meanings (see Figure 8 and 9, p.81). In Fortune Cookie Fortunes, the back endpaper describes the source of fortune cookies on the left side (verso), and, on the right side (recto), Lin illustrated a fortune with a piece of paper saying “you have just read a good book” to end the story (see Figure 10, p.81). In Lin’s books, endpapers are not merely a decoration, but convey important information to help readers preview and review the book.

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Comparison of Picturebooks with Different Themes

As mentioned in chapter 2, picturebooks are unlike the individual paintings displayed in museums or galleries. A single picture in a picturebook may be a good piece of art, but by itself, it cannot be considered a picturebook. We have to view a picturebook as a whole, which is, in essence, an interactive and communicative art form (p.10-11).

In this section, I divide Lin's books into three themes: Chinese themes, non-Chinese themes, and Chinese themes that contain cultural conflicts. I not only consider picturebooks as a unique art form, but also view each theme as a series of these artworks. Dividing her books into three themes can help us further understand how Lin deals with cultural issues in her picturebooks and how different cultures influence her creation.

Chinese Themes

In Chinese themes, Lin focuses on introducing Chinese traditions and customs and uses Chinese/Chinese-Americans as main characters. I have discussed Fortune Cookie Fortunes, Kite Flying, and Dim Sum for Everyone in the previous section. These three books are written and illustrated by Lin; the stories are based on her childhood experiences and the characters represent her family members.

One is a Drummer, Red is a Dragon, and Round is a Mooncake are all written by the same author, Roseanne Thong. These three books are a series of concept books for children to learn about numbers, colors, and shapes. Thong uses narrative rhyme to connect the concept of numbers, colors, and shapes with objects that are Asian or universal. For example, in Round is a Mooncake, the text starts with "Round is a
mooncake, Round is the moon, Round are the lanterns outside my room” (Thong, 2000, p.2). Every double-page spread has different Chinese objects for children to learn.

Although these books include a number of Chinese objects such as inking stones, rice, and red envelopes, we can still recognize that the background environment is more western than eastern. It is possible that Lin illustrated these pictures based on her Chinese-American background and experiences. At the same time, she needs to corroborate with the author’s text and appeal to children in different cultures.

In my opinion, growing up in a Chinese family and receiving an American education enabled Lin to learn about the uniqueness of Chinese and American cultures and the universality which connect them. Even though the books focus on Chinese themes, we can still see that Lin subtly shows cross-cultural images in her art.

Non-Chinese Themes

In the books that contain non-Chinese themes, animals become the main characters. Lin wrote and illustrated Robert’s Snow, Merry Christmas, Let’s All Sing, Olvina Flies, and Okie-Dokie, Artichokie!, and other books written by different authors. The books with non-Chinese themes do not focus on introducing Chinese traditions, and topics are broader than books with Chinese themes. The topics include family relationships, which are also addressed in books with Chinese themes, friendship (Okie-Dokie, Artichokie!), holidays (Merry Christmas, Let’s All Sing), courage (Olvina Flies), math (One for Me, One for You), and adventure (Robert’s Snow).
Animals as Main characters

Using animal characters is a frequent and significant characteristic of children’s picturebooks. Nikolajeva and Scott (2001) indicate that the purpose of using animal characters, from an adult’s perspective, is that “little children have much in common with small animals, and that their behavior is closer to that of animals than of civilized human beings” (p.92). Interestingly, in the majority of the stories, these animals usually have human attributes. They wear clothes, speak human languages, and have social lives. In other words, picturebook artists believe that children are familiar with animals so that children can easily relate to the story.

In Lin’s books with non-Chinese themes, all of the animal characters act like human beings. They have names, different types of personalities, and human motivations. For example, the monkey in Okie-Dokie, Artichokie! likes exercising and watching TV, just like many human beings do. In my opinion, depicting the protagonist as an animal not only helps children get involved in the story, but also gives picturebook artists more freedom to exaggerate the situation or avoid issues such as age, gender, and social status.

In the case of Olvina Flies, Lin used the chicken, Olvina, to help children feel more relaxed about flying. In this story, Olvina was invited to the Tenth Annual Bird Convention in Hawaii. Even though she was a bird, she was afraid of flying. Lin wrote humorous dialogues between Olvina and her pig friend, Will:

“Oh, Olvina,” Will moaned. “Don’t be such a chicken.”

“But I am a chicken,” Olvina said to herself after Will left.
From this conversation, readers can find the interesting point that Olvina was too
"chicken" to fly; in fact, she was a real chicken. The dual meaning of the word "chicken"
not only makes the story funny, but also enhances the personality of the character. In the
story, Lin did not mention how old Olvina was or what job she had. This character can
represent any child who does not feel comfortable about flying. Hence, children can
easily understand the concept and further be encouraged to overcome their fears.

Nodelman (1988) mentions that using animal characters is a way for children to
learn about animals. Comparatively few contemporary children have actually seen living
farm animals except in zoos. Children cannot recognize these animals from experience in
reality, but they can learn them from picturebooks (p.34). Therefore, reading
picturebooks becomes a significant part of children's early visual education. Although
animals in Lin's books act like human beings, they still have some of their animal
characteristics. For example, the giraffe in *Okie-Dokie, Artichokie!* was so tall that he
could not stop hitting his head on the ceiling; the mice in *Robert's Snow* were small
enough to live in a boot. Commonly, people think that picturebook artists use animal
characters because children "like" animals. However, I agree with Nodelman (1988) that
it is possible children learn to like animals because of their frequent appearances in
picturebooks.

**Collectivist versus Individualist**

In her books with Chinese themes, Lin usually represents family life. In *Dim Sum
for Everyone* and *Fortune Cookie Fortunes*, the settings are in restaurants, showing
family members having dinner together. In *Kite Flying*, the story depicts that the family
making a dragon kite together. Family reunion is an important tradition in Chinese
culture because it shows that the family is growing and enjoying blessings from
ancestors. Lin, whether consciously or unconsciously, expresses this atmosphere in her
picturebooks that deal with Chinese traditions and customs.

However, in the books with non-Chinese themes, the stories focus on depicting
individuality rather than family cohesion. Like Maurice Sendak’s *Where the Wild
Things Are* and Beatrix Potter’s *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, readers can recognize that the
protagonists have families, but their families are not the central points of the stories.
When Lin creates books that do not deal with Chinese culture, she tends to portray the
individuals’ personalities in more detail and the stories focus on particular characters.
For example, in *Robert’s Snow*, the little mouse, Robert, is the protagonist. From the
storyline, readers can understand that Robert is full of curiosity and likes adventure.
Nevertheless, in the Chinese-themed books, we cannot accurately recognize the
characters’ personalities.

In a number of American picturebooks or cartoons, stories depicting individuals
seem to be more popular than those portraying families. In Disney cartoon movies such
as *Snow White* and *The Little Mermaid*, or in famous comics such as *Peanuts* and
*Garfield*, the stories focus on individuals. However, picturebooks depicting
Chinese/Chinese-Americans usually pay more attention to families, even in the
contemporary ones. Though Lin did not purposely do this, her American stories
emphasize individuals while her Chinese stories are collectivist.
Chinese Themes that Contain Cultural Conflicts

In her books with Chinese themes that contain cultural conflicts, Lin uses Chinese/Chinese-Americans as the major characters, and the stories represent cross-cultural experiences or the images cross two cultures. I have discussed The Ugly Vegetables in the previous section, so the following analysis focuses another book Lin illustrated, The Seven Chinese Sisters.

Chinese Dragon or American Dragon?

The Seven Chinese Sisters is written by an American author, Kathy Tucker, and the story is based on a classic Chinese folktale, The Seven Chinese Brothers. In the folktale, The Seven Chinese Brothers, each of the brothers had a special talent. When one of the brothers was trapped and going to be killed, the other brothers used their talents to rescue the brother. Similarly, in The Seven Chinese Sisters, a dragon kidnapped the seventh sister. The other six sisters rescued her from the dragon by using their different unique skills.

When I read this book, what caught my attention first was not the talents of the seven sisters, but the skinny dragon. I questioned why the dragon in the story was not a “typical Chinese dragon” because Chinese dragons would never live in mountains, kidnap babies, and cry aloud (see Figure 11, 12 and 13, p.82-83). A traditional Chinese dragon is usually flying in the sky, and its image is very positive and powerful (see Figure 14, p.83). It is a symbol of the Chinese empire and the spirit of the Chinese people. While the dragon in this story looks like a skinnier Chinese dragon, his character is more like a western dragon in a fairytale. In addition, when the dragon whimpered,
“Hungry, hungry,” only the fourth sister understood him because she could talk to dogs. The text indicates, “...the word hungry is exactly the same for dragons as it is for dogs.” In Chinese tradition, dogs usually refer to low-level animals because they obey people's commands to get food and they rely on people. Even though the dog and dragon are both in the Chinese Zodiac and they both mean lucky in certain years, Chinese people hold dragon in a higher regard. For example, many people prefer to have babies in the year of dragon rather than the year of dog. They believe that children who are born in the year of dragon can have fortunate lives. In this story, the author not only made the dragon westernized, but also implied that the dragon's language was similar to the dog's!

Chinese people may think the author diminished the dragon's value.

After I read the story, I asked myself: “If the author and illustrator understand the history of the Chinese dragon, why did they create this type of dragon? What was their purpose in making this book?” Personally, I think it is confusing to see a Chinese dragon that is skinny and has negative characteristics.

In our interview, Lin told me that this book received two extreme responses from readers. Some readers thought that the story was very interesting because the dragon was different from the traditional Chinese dragon. Other readers did not appreciate the way Lin illustrated the dragon because it was not an authentic Chinese dragon. Lin indicated that she wanted to make the dragon a mixture of Chinese and American, and also old and contemporary. “If you read the story, it is not a traditional story—I simply matched the illustrations to the tone,” Lin said. In other words, the illustrations have to correspond with the text.
Lin was trying to use a new viewpoint to illustrate this story. She did not want to limit the illustrations to classic Chinese styles. She wanted to show a Chinese story in a modern setting; therefore she did not draw a traditional Chinese dragon. In fact, not only the dragon, but also several other objects are of mixed Chinese and American styles. For example, in the kitchen, there are chopsticks and Chinese bowls on the table. However, the oven, the wall, and the floor are westernized (see Figure 12, p.82).

From Lin's viewpoint, readers should not have assumptions about any culture when reading a story. People can argue that even though this is a story about seven "Chinese" sisters, the text does not mention which country and in which time period the sisters lived. They could live in a western country and in the present. Therefore, the dragon could be modern and the house could have both Chinese and American styles. If the text had indicated that the story was happened in China in the Han dynasty, then it would have been important to research what type of house and objects people used in that time period.

In my opinion, this story is controversial and the images can make readers feel confused. Some readers assume that Lin did not know how to draw a Chinese dragon. But I believe that Lin, a professional artist, knows how to portray a traditional Chinese dragon and researched the dragon image before she illustrated it. For example, in the book *Red is a Dragon*, she did illustrate the dragon in the typical way—very powerful, serious, and positive (see Figure 15, p.84). In *Red is a Dragon*, she portrays a dancing dragon that Chinese people use in celebrating Chinese New Year or holidays. In *The Seven Chinese Sisters*, however, Lin illustrated a contemporary dragon that is skinny and
evil because she wanted the images to match the text. When Lin illustrates stories written by other authors, she has to adjust the figure in order to match the story. Nevertheless, if the story/image crosses two cultures, a mixed representation can cause readers confusion and misunderstanding.

In his article, Cai (2002) discussed the issues of crossing cultural borders in children’s literature. He emphasized, “…when using multicultural literature to facilitate border crossing, we should direct our efforts to helping mainstream culture children understand and respect parallel cultures” (p.118). Therefore, it is important to be sensitive when depicting cross-cultural images. In the case of The Seven Chinese Sisters, if the young readers, especially non-Chinese children, have little background knowledge of Chinese dragons, the story may mislead children to think that a Chinese dragon is similar to a Western dragon.

Cai (2003) indicates that authors and illustrators should first cross the cultural gaps before they bridge cultural gaps for their readers. In other words, authors and illustrators have the responsibility to acquire and develop a culturally specific sense before they write or illustrate the culture. Cai concludes, “…there is a danger of imposing their [authors’ and illustrators’] perspective on the experiences of the people they portray and so perpetuating stereotypes and misrepresenting cultures other than their own” (p.179). Perhaps the author of The Seven Chinese Sisters used her own imagination to depict the dragon or she wanted to be creative and used a new angle to see a Chinese dragon. However, if authors or illustrators use imagination to depict a culture without employing in-depth research, they may misinterpret cultures that are either their own or others’.
Struggles

As a picturebook artist, Lin has received a number of awards and her works are highly appreciated by both Chinese and non-Chinese readers. However, even though her books have a variety of subjects, people usually consider Lin a creator of “multicultural picturebooks” for children. Lin expressed sadness that her books are labeled only “multicultural” section. “When they [her picturebooks] are labeled as multicultural books,” Lin said, “it is assumed they are for a small population.” Therefore, she is constantly facing the challenges of fulfilling readers’ and publishers’ expectations in her picturebooks.

It is inevitable that sometimes authors and illustrators have to compromise with publishers in order to sell books. In fact, the conflict between artists and publishers is not only about sales volume, but it is also related to their cultural, social, and political beliefs. In our conversation, I felt that Lin was trying to break the line between different cultures and challenge her readers to look at others’ cultures with an opened mind. During her talks in schools and bookstores, she asks children, parents, and teachers to challenge their old viewpoints of different cultures. She encourages her readers to “Pick up a book that is different from your culture and enjoy it; don’t just go to a different one because the character doesn’t look like you or your children.”

Being a Chinese-American artist, Lin understands that she would never become a Chinese or a Euro-American. But she tries her best to deepen and widen her understanding of Chinese-American culture to introduce it to children. As mentioned before, she created these cross-cultural books because she wanted to have them when she
was a child. In addition, she wants children to embrace their own cultures and be proud of them. Even though she experiences some struggles when she created these books, she is highly respected as a children’s picturebook author and illustrator. Her books not only enrich our understanding of Chinese-American culture, but also broaden our view of a world in which many cultures are mixing together.

**Conclusion**

Becoming a picturebook artist was Lin’s childhood dream, and she certainly has achieved her goal and accomplished quality work in this field. The stories in Lin’s books are insightful and the illustrations are original and fresh. She tells the story from a child’s viewpoint and sees the world through a child’s eyes. Children’s book editor Zinsser states: “No kind of writing lodges itself so deeply in our memory, echoing there for the rest of lives, as the books that we met in our childhood...To enter and hold the mind of a child or a young person is one the hardest of all writer’s tasks” (Zinsser, 1990, p3. cited in Huang, 1998, p.152). Lin created books that she did not have in her childhood, and she used these books to keep her childhood memories and share them with children.

At first, Lin wanted to be an artist drawing western fairytales. Ironically, when she was in Rome, Lin realized the beauty of Chinese culture and found her direction for creating Chinese-American picturebooks. This overseas experience stimulated her to discover her inner self and motivated her to create art that belong to herself and her own culture. She represents these feelings in her picturebooks. Lin is like the little girl in
The Ugly Vegetables. In the beginning, the little girl wanted to be like her neighbors growing flowers. By the end, she has changed her perspective and is proud of those Chinese vegetables. Many Chinese-Americans have this turning point in their lives—at first they try to be more like Americans, but later they realize that their Chinese culture has values that are important and unique.

The four books written and illustrated by Lin all represent a harmonious atmosphere between Chinese and American cultures. In The Ugly Vegetables, the mother taught her daughter three virtues that were mentioned in Confucianism or other classic Chinese teachings. The American neighborhood and Chinese virtues construct an interesting contrast. At the end of the story, the image shows that Lin’s family is having dinner with neighbors and everyone is smiling, enjoying the delicious soup and beautiful flowers (see Figure 16, p.84). In Dim Sum for Everyone, Fortune Cookie Fortunes, and Kite Flying, Lin introduces Chinese food and customs in American society. Readers can easily see multiple races of people in the background, representing an environment that welcomes people from different races. Americans emphasize the beliefs that it is important to treat all races equally and develop a peaceful world among different races. Lin represents these beliefs in her books not only to teach children the importance of treating people equally, but also to reflect her appreciation of different cultures.

In addition to books dealing with Chinese traditions and Chinese-American life, Lin also created books whose topics are universal. Interestingly, we still find some Chinese-style patterns in the characters’ clothes and in the backgrounds. For example, in Robert’s Snow, Lin continues using her “swirl patterns” in the sky, and patterns of the
curtain are like the patterns she uses for Chinese character's clothes (see Figure 17, p.84). Apparently, Chinese images are always in Lin's mind because they are part of who she is.

In summary, Lin's Chinese family background and American education have made her a unique picturebook artist. She does not try to define what Chinese-American culture is, but she wants to share her experience as a Chinese-American, whose life is markedly different from Chinese and American children. By portraying the richness of Chinese-American culture, Lin not only encourages children to learn about Chinese-American culture, but also finds the precious cultural heritage in herself.
Figure 3. The little girl’s neighborhood *The Ugly Vegetables*.

Figure 4. Chinatown in *Dim Sum for Everyone*.

Figure 5. One of the detail drawings in *Fortune Cookie Fortunes*.
Figure 6. The front endpaper in *Dim Sum for Everyone*.

Figure 7. The back endpaper in *Dim Sum for Everyone*. 
Figure 8. The front endpaper in *Kite Flying*.

Figure 9. The back endpaper in *Kite Flying*.

Figure 10. The back endpaper in *Fortune Cookie Fortunes*.
Figure 11. The skinny dragon in *The Seven Chinese Sisters*.

Figure 12. The dragon kidnapping the baby in *The Seven Chinese Sisters*. 

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Figure 13. The crying dragon in *The Seven Chinese Sisters*.

Figure 14. Chinese dragon.¹

Figure 15. The cover of *Red is a Dragon*.

Figure 16. Neighbors having dinner together in *The Ugly Vegetable*.

Figure 17. The little mouse’s bedroom in *Robert’s Snow*.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

In Lin's picturebooks, she represents Chinese-American culture from three perspectives. First, she emphasizes that Chinese and American cultures are equally important to Chinese-Americans. She does not advocate Chinese-American children to be more Chinese or American. Instead, she encourages them to be themselves—Chinese-Americans. She explains, "I am 'Chinese-American'...I can't separate them [Chinese and American]. It's not that I like one better than the other, or one is more important than the other. It's just that is what I am. That's what I have to accept, care about and be proud of."

Second, she uses personal experiences to depict Chinese-American culture and first-person perspective to construct the stories. Unlike other Chinese-American authors who write about others' stories, Lin writes the stories based on her personal experiences. She uses picturebooks as a medium to communicate with children. She understands the feeling of being a Chinese-American child, and she is sensitive toward the emotions and
struggles of the Chinese-American children today. She uses her childhood experiences as the background and tells the stories from a child’s viewpoint, making children feel that they are listening to a story from their friend. Therefore, her books draw children closer to the stories and encourage them to understand their culture and to embrace it.

Third, her stories focus on family relationships. Her books depicting Chinese-Americans stress the importance of the family relationship. The family’s activities are the center of her stories. As mentioned before, Lin said that her purpose of making picturebooks is selfish and personal because, through creating picturebooks, she hopes to find the culture she lost. As a reader and researcher myself, I think she is more generous than selfish, because she wants to share her experiences of being a Chinese-American with children and even adults. She not only hopes children read her picturebooks but also expects parents to read with their children. Therefore, parents and children can learn Chinese-American culture together and the interactions between them can help them develop stronger family relationships.

**Cultural Significance of Lin’s Books**

Lin’s picturebooks, especially the books depicting Chinese-American culture, are important to Chinese, Chinese-American, and American children for several reasons. For Chinese children, either in Asian countries or the United States, her books are a good reminder that Chinese culture is beautiful and precious. Some of these Chinese children may not know the meanings of “Dim Sum” or the method of making a kite; Lin’s books can provide them with additional Chinese customs and traditions. Moreover, Lin’s books
demonstrate that Chinese children should not take what they have and what they see daily for granted because they can easily ignore the value of Chinese culture. This is the culture that Lin had lost and spent a number of years retracing it.

For Chinese-American children, Lin's books can help them understand that they are not alone; there are people who are just like them—they speak English, eat rice, go to American schools—they are Chinese-American. Lin uses her personal experience to write and illustrate the stories. She tells the stories from a child's viewpoint so that children can feel closer to the characters. Lin's books can encourage them to embrace both Chinese and American cultures and accept their unique identity.

Lin's books teach American children to appreciate Chinese-Americans and their culture. As mentioned previously, American children's impression of Chinese people is often outdated because they usually see Chinese people's images in old settings. Rochman (1993) says, "If you read only what mirrors your view of yourself...you get locked in. It's as if you're in a stupor or under a spell. Buried" (p.11, cited in Cai, 2002, p.118). By representing Chinese/Chinese-Americans in a modern setting, Lin's picturebooks can help American children understand that Chinese/Chinese-Americans have many similarities to them. Her books help American children have a more opened mind to accept and appreciate other cultures.
Recommendations for Future Research

Children's Responses

I studied Lin's picturebooks from a researcher's viewpoint, but I think it is also important to gather children's responses to her books. Talking about and responding to picturebooks allows children to think more deeply about the text and pictures in addition to pushes them to strengthen their intellectual and emotional abilities.

In order to provide children a better quality of picturebooks, future research can examine children's responses to picturebooks from various perspectives such as cultural, social, and artistic viewpoints. Moreover, researchers can investigate how children from different cultures respond to Lin's books. Some questions might include: Do Lin's picturebooks help children understand Chinese/Chinese-American culture? What part(s) of Chinese/Chinese-American culture do non-Chinese children want to know? Why? How do non-Chinese children respond to Lin's books? By assessing children's responses, authors and illustrators can understand children's thoughts better and create picturebooks that are more meaningful and helpful to children.

Application of Picturebooks in the Classroom

Many teachers use children's picturebooks in the classroom to teach students literature, art, and other subjects. Lin's books are good for teaching children about Chinese-American culture and art. Teachers can use the activities that Lin has posted on her website to teach children, such as coloring pictures and making a kite. These activities are related to her books and art. Future studies could investigate how children learn about culture from Lin's books when they are reading, writing and making art.
Research on Other Chinese-American Artists' Picturebooks

This thesis is a case study and only focuses on one artist, Grace Lin. There are many other Chinese-American artists who also have outstanding works in the field of multicultural literature. Future researchers could conduct comparative studies to examine the differences and similarities of these artists' works and how they represent Chinese-American culture. This could help researchers understand the struggles these artists have and how these artists can make people aware of the importance of Chinese/Chinese-American picturebooks and culture.

Yes, Snow White Could Be Chinese!

"Why Couldn't Snow White be Chinese?" is an essay Lin wrote to express her struggles as a Chinese-American when she was a child. She mentioned it in our interview:

...my school was putting on a play performance of The Wizard of Oz, and I wanted to try for Dorothy. Before the audition, one of my friends said to me, "You can't be Dorothy, Dorothy is not Chinese!" After she said that, I felt so stupid. I felt she was so right, Dorothy wasn't Chinese—what was I even thinking? It was a reminder to me that I was different, something that I ignored most of the time.

Growing up Americanized, Lin experienced the feelings of being neither Chinese nor American. In fact, she said, "most of time I forgot I was Chinese. It was only once in a while I would remember I was Chinese." However, when her friend reminded her that she was not the same as American children, she realized that she was different.

Therefore, she created picturebooks that she wished she could have had when she was a
child. She does not want Chinese-American children to have the negative experiences that she had.

In her books, we can see that Lin always brings a happy and joyful atmosphere into her stories and pictures. This atmosphere reveals that Lin not only wants to share her experience as a Chinese-American, but also hopes that every child can enjoy reading her books and have a happy childhood. Lin said,

In my life, moments of insecurity and isolation could have been magically erased simply by having a book transform into a friend that shared what I was and what I am...if these books had been generously spread, exposing children of all races to the Asian part of the melting pot, perhaps then my childhood friend Jill would have not said, “Dorothy’s not Chinese” but rather, “Sure, Dorothy could be Chinese.”

Lin’s books are a bridge connecting Chinese and American cultures. Living in the modern world filled with many cultures, it is necessary to have an open mind to appreciate different cultures because we are all connected to each other. Marantz (1994) indicates that the goal of multicultural education is to enhance “the self-esteem of children of all cultures and the respect for the culture of others, while expanding their aesthetic as well as their cultural horizons” (p.1). Picturebooks are part of multicultural education and children’s lives. Lin’s picturebooks demonstrate an awareness of Chinese-Americans’ identities that allow children first to know Chinese-American culture and then to love the Chinese-Americans they know. These Chinese-Americans have both Chinese and American heritage, possess a unique culture, and shine in Lin’s picturebooks.
Figure 18. Grace Lin and I in her house. Boston, February 12, 2005.
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Interview Questions

I. Grace Lin’s family background
1. Where are your grandparents from?
2. When did your grandparents come to the United States?
3. How did your grandparents learn Chinese culture?
4. Where are your parents from?
5. When did your parents come to the United States?
6. How did parents learn Chinese culture?
7. Were you born in the United States or Taiwan?
8. Have you been to any Asian countries? If so, which countries have you been?
   What do you think about Chinese culture in Asian countries? Is it different from what you learn and understand in the United States? What do you think the differences are?
9. If you have been to Asian countries (e.g. China, or Taiwan), do you think the experiences influence your picturebooks? In which way do you think the experiences influence your thinking and works?
11. What Chinese customs do your parents and grandparents teach you?
12. Does your family practice any religion? If so, which religion does your family practice? How does it influence your thinking and artwork?
13. What does your family think that you are doing children’s book author/illustrator?

II. Grace Lin’s educational background
1. Did you go to Chinese school when you were a child?
2. If you went to Chinese school, what did you learn from it? (e.g. Speaking, writing, and reading, Chinese custom, etc.) Did you learn about Chinese art there?
3. Have you ever learn/heard about Confucianism? If so, how has it influenced your attitude toward elders, education, family, and picturebooks?
4. When you studied illustration in college, did you focus on picturebook illustrations? How was the training of art in college?
5. Did you learn skills of creating picturebooks from school or by yourself? How do your learn the writing skills and the relationship between text and image?
6. How has American education influenced you? Which part(s) do you like? Which part(s) don’t you like? Why?

III. Grace Lin’s career: picturebook author/illustrator
1. When did you decide to be a children’s author/illustrator? What encouraged you to make this decision?
3. What is the age range of the your readers?
4. What is your purpose of creating picturebooks?
5. How do Chinese and American cultures influence your work?
6. What culture(s) do you want to introduce to children? Chinese culture in general, or Chinese-American culture (e.g. Chinese culture from your background, parents and experiences)? Why?
7. How do you collect information before you start to create a picturebook?
8. How do you choose the topics and how do you construct a story?
9. How do you choose the books (written by other authors) to illustrate?
10. What are the differences between illustrating your own books and illustrating other authors’ books? Do you use different styles to illustrate them?
11. In the books written and illustrated by you, you seem to start the story from the front endpaper. In addition, the front endpaper and the back endpaper usually have some similarities. I think they provide a preview and review for readers. However, in the books written by other authors, it seems that you don’t illustrate too much in the endpaper. Why do you choose different ways to illustrate the books?
12. Why do you use contemporary style rather than traditional Chinese painting to illustrate your picturebooks?
13. Does your style relate to the media you are working in?
14. Which picturebooks’ authors and illustrators do you like most? Why? Do they influence your thinking and picturebooks? How?
15. Why do all of the Chinese characters in your picturebooks wear traditional Chinese clothes?
16. in your picturebooks, why do you use certain patterns in the background? Do they have special meanings?
17. In the future, in which countries do you want to publish your picturebooks? Why?
18. Have you ever tried to make a wordless picturebook? Why and why not?
19. In most of your books, why do you use first-person perspective? Some researches indicate that small children have not yet developed a clear sense of an “I” and have problems identifying themselves with the strange “I” of the text. When the “I” of the story lacks a name, the identification is encumbered. What do you think about it?
20. In your picturebooks, it seems like you are talking about your childhood experiences. How old are these characters? Why did you choose these certain ages for the characters? Are most of your childhood memories around that age?
21. In your picturebooks, how do you convey movement, simultaneous succession or sequence of pictures? Why do you choose methods?
22. There are many different picturebooks formats. Why do you choose this size of paper? What are the strengths and weaknesses of it? Have you considered using different format? Why or why not?
23. How’s your relationship with editors/publishers? How do you work with them? Do they choose stories for you to illustrate?
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT
Interview with Grace Lin

Interviewer: Wen-Chi Chan
Interviewee: Grace Lin
Place: Lin’s home/studio, Boston, Massachusetts
Time: 2PM, February 12, 2005

W: Can you talk about your family? Where are your grandparents and parents from? When did they come to the United State?
G: My grandfather passed away when I was very young, so I didn’t get to know him very well. Both of my grandparents were from Taiwan. My parents moved here (U.S.) to go to school, probably around the age as you are. My father came here for medical school. My grandmother is American citizen, too, but she still lives in Taiwan. Most of my parents’ brothers and sisters live here (U.S.), so I have many uncles and aunts live here. I was born here, so were my sisters. I was born in New Jersey, and my younger sister was born in New York. We moved to up state New York when I was a year old, so my parents have lived there about thirty years now.

W: How did your parents teach you Chinese culture?
G: When I was a child, differences were less tolerated. We lived in Upstate New York where there were few minorities, especially Asian. My parents wanted us to blend; they wanted us to grow up “American” and made the decision to speak to us in English in the house. My sisters and I grew up Americanized. There were always subtle differences, like Chinese food or red envelopes, but most of the time we glossed over them.

A lot of my books deal with Chinese culture because, in a way, I’m trying to find the culture I lost. When I was younger, I was ashamed or sometimes even angry about being Chinese. It’s only now, after becoming an adult and I realized that there was something I lost, ignoring these parts of my heritage. There were lots of things that we did, like eating ginger soup at a baby shower that I never bothered to learn more about. So now, I research these kinds of things about my heritage. I find out why. I feel like these things are so important and nice for everyone to know about. That’s why I started doing this kind of book.

W: Compare to other Chinese parents, do you think they use different ways to show you Chinese culture? If so, what are the differences?
G: I think the main difference is the language. The fact that I didn’t learn Chinese is something many other Chinese people can’t understand and my greatest regret. But, my parents passed Chinese culture down to me in very subtle ways and they allowed me to take on many American values and traits—for example, my husband is an Italian-Canadian and they welcomed him in with open arms. I enjoy and appreciate the mix and freedom they have allowed me to mix cultures.
W: I read one of your articles called "Why Couldn't Snow White be Chinese." Can you talk about this story a little bit?
G: Like I said, I grew up very "American." Most of time I forgot I was Chinese. It was only once in a while I would remember (I was Chinese). As I wrote in the essay, my school was putting on a play performance of "The Wizard of Oz," and I wanted to try for Dorothy. Before the audition, one of my friends said to me, "You can't be Dorothy, Dorothy is not Chinese!" After she said that, I felt so stupid. I felt she was so right, Dorothy wasn't Chinese—what was I even thinking? It was a reminder to me that I was different, something that I ignored most of the time.

W: What changed you to value Chinese culture?
G: It's hard to put your finger on it. Probably just growing up and times changing. I think nowadays individuality is valued more. Also, after I left upstate New York and went to college, I was exposed to more multicultural people. People began to ask me things about my culture that I didn't know. I started to feel slightly ashamed that I knew so little about my own heritage. It's very a gradual embracing.

W: Which part(s) of Chinese culture do you feel proud of? Why? Which part(s) of Chinese culture don't you like? Why?
G: The truth is I will never be Chinese. I have met many Asians, especially Asians from China or Taiwan and I'm not like them. I will never be Chinese or Taiwanese in the same sense they are. However, I'm not American in the stereotypical sense either. I am "Chinese-American" or "Asian-American." I can't separate them. It's not that I like better than the other, or one is more important than the other. It's just that is what I am. That's what I have to accept, care about, and be proud of. That's the only way I can answer the question.

W: Have you been to any Asian country?
G: I've been to Taiwan and Japan when I graduated from college. I haven't been to China.

W: What do you think the differences between Chinese in Asian countries and Chinese in America?
G: That's a really good question. My books deal with Chinese-Americans because that's what I know and my main experience. When I have met Asians from other countries, I remember feeling like some of the Chinese men were not very respectful of Chinese women. I remembered feeling glad that I was Chinese-American because I felt women here are treated with more respect. This could be stereotype, as it is just from my own limited experience of Chinese people, but it seems to me there is not as much appreciation for girls and women in many Asian countries. Maybe that's why most of my books are about Chinese girls. These things are important to me. I always run into problems, even with Chinese-Americans. Sometimes the worst racism is within your own culture. Some people accuse you of "not being Chinese enough" and betraying your heritage...or even the divisionary line between being Chinese and Taiwanese. These subtleties can cause the most friction.
W: How do your male relatives treat women in your family?
G: The men in my family were never really disrespectful but there was a definite divide on what they considered “women’s work” and “men’s work.” And while the woman could cross the line and do things that were considered “men’s work”, the men would never dream of doing “woman’s work.” There is unconscious feeling that “woman’s work” (cleaning, cooking, etc) was below them.

W: Do you have the purpose that you expect Chinese (or non-Chinese) boys to show appreciation for Chinese girls?
G: It’s not exactly a planned purpose, but it would be a great benefit.

W: Do you think the experiences influence you and your picturebooks?
G: I think it did a little bit. It pointed out the differences of architecture and culture more for me. Actually, I would say the experience that had the biggest influence on my art would be when I went to Italy during my college years. I studied abroad in Rome for a year. Ironically, that made my work more Asian than anything else. Before, when I went to college, I knew I wanted to be a children’s book illustrator. I thought I would do books with princesses and fairies—Cinderella, [and] Snow White. So, when I went to study in Rome I thought I would learn how to draw like Leonardo Da Vinci and paint fairy tale pictures in his style. But, the longer I stayed in Italy, the more I thought, “what am I doing? I’m just trying to imitate these artists. Why am I trying to pretend that I am Michelangelo when I’m nothing like him? Why am I doing all these drawings and all this art, based on the culture and experiences that are not even my own?”

I realized that instead of trying to copy all these people, I should look inside of myself and try to see what is was uniquely me and to create art that truly my own. When I returned to the U.S., I started to think about my identity. It was then that I began to realize that I was not Chinese and not even American. I was and am Chinese-American. So I thought about what makes me a Chinese-American and began to show it in my work.

W: What does your family think that you’re doing children’s book illustrator?
G: When I first decided I wanted to go to art school, my parents were not enthusiastic. Even though they are great parents and were supportive, they also have traditional Chinese values. Asians are usually very practical people and my parents wanted me to choose a profession they knew would insure a stable financial future. Once we saw a street artist and my father gave money to him because he thought someday I might be like him...and he hoped someone would give me money. But, since my books have been published, they think it’s great. My mom is my biggest fan. She tells everyone she meets to buy my books. A lot of my books are about her, so she’s especially proud. My newest book, which comes out next year, is all about my family. It’s called “The Year of Dog.” It’s almost a biography. My family loved it; they really understand what I am trying to do now.

In fact, we are closer now because of my books. Like I said, we always glossed over our heritage when I was younger, so we never really talked about their past experiences. But when I began writing books, it gave me an excuse to ask them about it. Stories,
memories and histories are shared—things would have been lost if I haven’t thought about putting in and writing it down.

**W:** What are the significant events and experiences of your personal life that are particularly relevant to your picturebooks?

**G:** Most of the stories are from my childhood. All of the books I write and illustrate that are Asian oriented have a real life inspiration. For example, *Dim Sum for Everyone*, takes place in Boston Chinatown because every time we went to Chinatown we had Dim Sum. You couldn’t get Dim Sum in Upstate New York. *So Dim Sum for Everyone* is based on my memories.

**W:** When you were little, did you go to Chinese school to learn how to speak Chinese?

**G:** No, we didn’t have Chinese school. It was only when I was in eighth or ninth grade that they were able to get Chinese school. It wasn’t even in my area. All Chinese families, they lived about 30-40 minutes away. At the time, I was really interested in boys and NOT learning Chinese. I felt like it was hard enough trying to get a boyfriend looking Chinese, why would I want to speak it? At that point, my parents had changed their philosophy a bit and were trying very hard to have us learn, but I was a moody, rebellious teenager. So I rejected it, which is what I regret now.

I think, if you want to have someone embrace his or her culture, you have to start earlier. You do it when they are in the nursery school, in 1st grade. That’s when kids are eager and excited. They say, “It’s cool to learn Chinese!” If you do it when they are junior high or high school, they are so busy being their own person. I guess that another reason why I do younger books. I feel like that’s the age when you can really influence them. If they see these Chinese books at an early age, they are less likely to reject it when they are older.

**W:** In your books, you did write some Chinese characters and draw Chinese decorations. Do you learn it in your childhood or after you become an illustrator?

**G:** I remember some of the decorations vaguely, but I have to look things up.

**W:** When you studied illustration in college, why did you focus on illustrations?

**G:** I went to art school because I wanted to be a children’s book illustrator. I love children’s books. I just always loved it—I loved the art. I can show you my first picturebook. I did it when I was 7th grade.

**W:** How about the training in art school? Did they teach you how to write picturebooks? How did you learn the writing part?

**G:** The writing I learned afterwards. It’s a long road to become a children’s book illustrator. I graduated from school in 1996, and my first book was published in 1999. So it was about a three-year struggle to get my first book published. During these years I had a lot of jobs for just paying the bills. One of the jobs was working at a children’s bookstore. There I read every single book that children’s bookstore had; and I learned
how to make a good children’s book. The writing part was partially self-taught, though I took some writing classes at that time as well.

**W:** How has American education influenced you? Compare to Chinese education, which part(s) do you like? Which part(s) don’t you like? Why?

**G:** I can’t really answer that, as I don’t know anything about the Chinese education system. My mom has all these horror stories about school in Taiwan. My feeling is that American education is less strict and more enjoyable. The idea of “making learning fun” seems to be more of an American philosophy…which, of course, I prefer.

**W:** Since your parents grew up in Taiwan, they probably know a lot about Confucius philosophy. Did they tell you about that?

**G:** They don’t really tell me too much about Confucius philosophy. My mom does tell me school horror stories. For example, after they received their tests back, the teacher would make everyone who got less than a perfect score stand up. Then she would instruct them to hit themselves and then slowly let those with higher scores sit down. So, the person who had the lowest score would have to stand up hit himself for the longest time as well as be singled out for his poor grade. It was like double torture—not only physical because of the pain of hitting yourself but also because of the humiliation in front of your classmates. That’s what they told me about Chinese education.

**W:** Who are the target audience of your picturebooks? Chinese? Americans? Or Chinese-American children? What is the age range of the your readers?

**G:** The official age range is 3-8, but they could be for any age because of the subjects they teach. The books are important for all races. When I make the books, I usually have Americans and Chinese-Americans in mind. I feel it’s important for Americans to see Chinese family in a modern setting. When I was growing up, the only book I remember that has Chinese people in it was *The Seven Chinese Brothers*. It’s a really fun book, but it is a folktale with Chinese men with long ponytails. Kids would ask me if my dad had a ponytail, just out of ignorance.

A lot of Chinese children’s picturebooks tend to be in the “olden days”. Even in the movies, like *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*—which are beautiful movies and I think are great, the settings are placed in a different time. I think it’s important to show Chinese people are a part of today’s society as well. They have a Chinese heritage, yes, but they drive a cars and talk on the phone too.

I do a lot of school visits, where I go to classroom I talk to kids. Sometimes I get questions like “How come you can speak English so well? Are you from China?” That’s why I think these books are important because they show kids Chinese-Americans. That even though we might look a little bit different, we really live just like you. We are not like strange aliens. The books are important for Chinese-Americans kids it shows them there are people out there just like you, this is your culture and it’s special and wonderful.
W: Is that the purpose of your picturebooks?
G: I think it's a great benefit. The truth is that the purpose of my picture books is completely selfish. I make these picturebooks because I like to make books and I make what interests me. I also make them because these are the books I wish I had when I was young. So the initial purpose of my books is pretty personal.

W: Are you trying to represent Chinese culture or Chinese-American culture?
G: I would say Chinese-American culture. As I said earlier, my books are based on my experiences and me as a Chinese-American.

W: How to you define what Chinese-American culture is?
G: That's a good question. I'm not trying to define it, I just think about my experiences and the things in my life that were different from my friends in elementary school. For example, at home we would set the table with forks and chopsticks. These small things that are different are what adds to the richness of Chinese-American culture. I'm just trying to show glimpses of it.

W: How do you make your picturebook?
G: I get ideas everywhere. I carry sketchbook with me all over the place. Whenever I have an idea, I just write it in my sketchbook. Sometimes it's good idea and sometimes it's not a good idea, but it's important that I don't forget it. Later, when I am thinking about writing a story I see if there is any good ideas that can act as a springboard for me, either to write about or research. Then I write the story, draw the pictures, etc—all working with a publisher, hopefully.

W: How about the books you illustrated but written by other authors?
G: That's usually different. For those books, a publisher calls me up and says, "We have a story and we think you will be really good at illustrating, would you take look at it and would you like this job?" Then, they mail it to me or fax to me. I read it and think about if I can do art well and if I can fit it in my schedule, etc.

W: So actually writers can't choose illustrator and illustrator can't choose writer.
G: Sometimes you can. Usually what happens is the writer writes the story and sends it to the publisher. If the publisher likes it, the publisher would choose illustrator. They probably would choose another four (illustrators), or they would go to writer to let them choose 3 illustrators from 10. Because there is a chance that I might turn it down, or someone else might be busy. But it all depends on the publisher; sometimes the writer gets no input at all.

W: Do you have chance to meet the author?
G: Usually not.

W: When you make your own books, do you have stories first or it comes together?
G: For me, I write the story. I write my stories on my computer, and then I'll do the pictures on tracing papers, sketch papers, and I'll scan it and put it all together and make
a rough book dummy which I send to the publisher. Then they get it back to me, usually requesting revisions. The drawings are fairly rough because sometimes I have to go the rough many revisions. When the drawings are approved, I get to do the paintings.

W: Do you choose the media first or the style first?
G: I think they go hand and hand. You paint a certain way depending on the media you are using. When I was in Rome, we painted very realistically. They taught us how to mix colors and do subtle shading. But when I returned from Rome, I just want to forget about that. I wanted to break the rules and paint with a bright color right out of tube and see what would happen. It was really fun! And I found I liked those painting better than my other paintings that I spent 400 hours on trying to make every eyelash and hair.

W: How do you see the changes from your first picturebook to the recent one? (E.g. direction, topics, styles).
G: I think my first book (The Ugly Vegetable) is a lot looser. I was trying to make it from a child’s point of view, a little bit rougher, a little bit more naïve. I wanted to give it the feeling that a kid could have painted it, especially since it was in the 1st person. My next book was Round is a Mooncake. The writing in that was more elegant more sophisticated. So I tightened my style so it was more refined looking. However, when that book came out, publishers saw it preferred the tighter style and requested that I do the art similarly. I enjoy the tighter painting style, but I also like to loosen it up—usually when the story calls for it. For example, in Olvina Flies, a more comic and humorous story, the lines are looser and perhaps more “cartoony.” If the stories are more realistic, or a little older, I try to make it more realistic. In Robert’s Snow, I tried to capture more light and shadow. I think it changes a little with each book.

W: Do you use different style or perspective to illustrate the books written by other authors?
G: Not necessary different style, just something that matches the story. To some people it looks the same, but to me, it looks very different. It’s hard to illustrate somebody else’s books because in my own books I know I want it should look like. When I illustrate somebody else’s book, it’s easy for me to overlook things in the writing. It’s a different process. Actually, I don’t really like it as much, but I think it is good for me. My work gets better because other people’s stories force me to stretch me to do things that I don’t do normally.

W: Which picturebooks’ authors and illustrators do you like most? Why? How do they influence your thinking and picturebooks?
G: I like quite of few, for every one of my books I have a dozen books to inspire me. For example, in Fortune Cookie Fortunes, I looked at a lot of books by Elisa Kleven. Her book have so many little details, she creates her own little world. And her art isn’t hung up on perspective or anatomy — just about a joyful spirit. So in Fortune Cookie Fortunes, I tried to put little things and details everywhere—like her books. For every book I do, I probably have read 40. I’m going to be starting a book called the Read Thread, it’s a
fairy tale, and so I bought books by Trina Schart Hyman and Mercer Mayer to look at. Even though people probably won’t see an obvious influence, it’s there.

**W:** Why do all of the Chinese characters in your picturebooks wear traditional Chinese clothes? Why do you use certain patterns in the background? Do they have special meanings?

**G:** I actually don’t consider the clothes they are wearing to be traditional. They are not wearing Chi-Pau or cheongsams. The girls are wearing pants, and sweaters and mittens. However, I do use a lot of traditional Chinese patterns. I enjoy using patterns, and when the books focus on Chinese culture, I like to include Chinese inspired patterns. If you notice, I put patterns almost everywhere in my paintings—even swirls in the sky. The swirls are kind of my interpretation of wind or air. Usually, I try to use patterns that correlate to the subject of the book. For example, in the book _One for me One for you_, which is about math, I used more geometric patterns.

**W:** In most of your books, why do you use first-person perspective?

**G:** Usually because they are all based on my childhood experiences. So I try to keep it authentic. Even though the story is not exactly what happened, it’s based on my memory.

**W:** Will you try to do folktale in the future?

**G:** I think the closest thing that I have in the works is the _Red Thread_, which is kind of a contemporary fairy tale that mixes Asian elements into it, but is not a traditional folktale. _The Red Thread_ is about Chinese adoption. The style and research involved in a traditional folktale is not my forte. To do traditional folktale, it seems like you would want art that is traditional as well. You’d need to get somebody who knows how to do traditional Chinese watercolor to illustrate that—which I don’t do. But perhaps someday.

**W:** There are many different picturebooks formats. Why do you choose this size of paper?

**G:** There are certain sizes that the publisher likes to work with. They have certain sizes that they encourage you to use; they don’t like you to use something that is really unusual. I don’t tend to do books that are vertical, maybe because I am short (Laugh).

**W:** How do you work with editors/publishers? How many times do you have to talk with them before the book published?

**G:** Some books take long than the others. They may not get back to me for five weeks. It’s really different for each book.

**W:** How do you think about the critiques about your picturebooks?

**G:** Most of them are positive, so that make me feel good. When there are negative ones, sometimes I hit myself because the criticism is something I didn’t see. But in general, I did the book the best I could at that time. If someone didn’t like it, I just hope that they like the next one.
**W:** In *Round is a Mooncake*, you use the mouse of *Robert’s Snow*, the chicken in *Olvina Fly*, the monkey in *Okie-Dokie Artichokie*, and the book of *The Ugly Vegetables*. In the *Merry Christmas*, you use the monkey in *Okie-Dokie Artichokie*, and the hippo and crocodile in *One for Me, One for You*. Why do you use the characters in different books?

**G:** I do have characters cross over. In *Olvina Flies*, you can see the monkey is in there. To me, because I work on the books so long, the characters seem like real people. And when the book is over, it’s like they don’t live anymore. So I put hide them in other books, so it’s like they are still living and their story is still continuing. I think it’s fun for kids who do read all these books that they can find these characters in other books.

**W:** When you do the school visit, what do you talk about “multiculture”?

**G:** I usually talk about multicultural books to adults, usually teachers. I talk about how I grew up, how my books of my books are labeled multicultural which can be limiting. For example, originally this book called “The seasons,” was about a Chinese girl through all of the seasons. It’s a science book. It supposed to be about her going through the seasons and a scientific explanation about the world around her. When I proposed the idea, the publisher requested that I not make it a Chinese girl. They were afraid that it would get labeled as a multi-cultural book and the market would be limited. Things like that make me sad. In the end, we compromised to have different children of different ethnicities, so it would be more general.

It’s important in the multicultural book market. Like I said, they’re the books I want to have when I was a kid. But it’s sad that when they are labeled as multicultural books it is assumed they are for a small population. During my talk, I ask kids, parents and teachers to try to challenge that. Pick up a book that is different from your culture and enjoy it; don’t just go to a different one because the character doesn’t look like you or your children.

**W:** In *The Seven Chinese Sisters*, Why do you illustrate the dragon more like the dragon in Western folklore?

**G:** That was interesting. Some people questioned that. I thought it’s appropriate because in the writing indicated that he cried and he’s skinny. That’s not what a Chinese dragon would do. I thought the story was quite a mix of American and Chinese culture, and also contemporary and old, so I tried to do the same thing in my illustrations. That’s why the dragon is like mix of American (western) and Chinese. But some thought I should have made the dragon more traditional, or I didn’t know how to draw a real dragon. But if you read the story, it’s not a traditional story—I simply matched the illustrations to the tone. I really like that story. Some people love that book, and some people don’t. It’s interesting that it has very different opinions.

**W:** In the future, in which countries do you want to publish your picturebooks? Why?

**G:** I would really like it to be printed in Taiwan because of my mom. Then my relatives there can really see what I really do. (Published in) In China, too.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Scholarly Research


Children's Picturebooks


