Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts

Volume 57
Issue 2 *June 2018*

Article 4

7-2018

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Recommended Citation

Wee, S., Kura, K., & Kim, J. (2018). Unpacking Japanese Culture in Children's Picture Books: Culturally Authentic Representation and Historical Events/Political Issues. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts, 57* (2). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol57/iss2/4

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READING HORIZONS

Unpacking Japanese Culture in Children's Picture Books: Culturally Authentic Representation and Historical Events/Political Issues

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Abstract

This study investigated culturally authentic representations and perspectives on historical events and political issues presented in children's picture books on Japanese culture. Our analysis of the representation of Japanese culture in the texts and illustrations was based on a sample of 37 children's picture books written in English or English/Japanese and published in the United States between 1990 and 2016 for ages 3–8. The majority of the sampled books were found to portray a visible and concrete level of Japanese culture, including clothes, food, holidays, festivals, and traditional activities, some of which had outdated and inaccurate descriptions and illustrations. Social customs and behaviors described in the children's books reflected traditional Japanese values and beliefs well, including respect, harmony, and *wabi sabi*. Books dealing with the crossing of different cultures showed conflicts, confusion, or identity issues in young Japanese protagonists who were often immigrant or biracial. Stories showing Japanese historical events/political issues as background included the voices of the Japanese/Japanese Americans with their perspectives, instead of mainstream European/American perspectives. Cultural authenticity, going beyond the superficial level to include marginalization at cultural crossings, and the focalization of historical events and political issues portrayed/illustrated in children's picture books are discussed.

Keywords: cultural authenticity, early childhood, Japan, multicultural picture books

Using Multicultural Literature to Develop Children's Racial/Cultural Understanding

Multicultural literature is becoming increasingly appreciated as a powerful tool to help children understand and accept diversity and to prepare them to live comfortably in our multicultural and multiracial world (Lenox, 2000). It can benefit all children in an early childhood classroom (Derman-Sparks, 1989) by helping them not only understand others' cultures but also identify and understand their own (Colby & Lyon, 2004; Mendoza & Reese, 2001). Children can develop understanding and empathy when they are introduced

to books that "accurately and positively portray the backgrounds of the families in the classroom and that extend children's awareness to the significant groups in their community and the wider world" (Derman-Sparks, 1989, p. 12). Thus, multicultural literature can be used to enhance young children's cultural awareness, help them accept other cultures, and reveal their own cultural identity.

Children's multicultural books can serve as mirrors and windows to the world (Bishop, 1990). Through mirrors, readers see something of themselves in the text and illustration, which helps them learn that they are valued/valuable in the society where they belong (Bishop, 2012). As windows, children's books provide opportunities to observe others' experiences and identities, and views of the world around them, helping young readers interpret society (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). In addition, Bishop (1990) argued that social values and norms as well as social powers are mirrored in children's books because "literature can transform human experience and reflect it back to us, and in that reflection, we can see our own lives as part of the larger human experience" (p. ix).

Cultural Authenticity in Children's Literature

Despite these important benefits, many researchers have pointed out that multicultural literature for children may include inaccuracies and inauthenticity (e.g., Cai, 1994; Mendoza & Reese, 2001; Wee, Park, & Choi, 2015). For example, the admixing of various Asian cultures (Chen, 2009; Smith & Wiese, 2006; Wee et al., 2015) and inclusion of some common stereotypes in the illustrations of Asian characters, along with the anachronous use of traditional clothing and hairstyles when telling contemporary stories (Cai, 1994) have been observed. While nonfiction or informational books are expected to be accurate, verifiable, up to date, and stereotype-free (Elleman, 1992), fiction books are created from the imagination. However, children's fiction books should be held to the same standards of accuracy and authenticity about culture as information books, since literature helps children construct knowledge about people and the world (Hearne, 1993). This is particularly true for books that deal with culture (Short & Fox, 2003) because ignoring important differences in other cultures can lead to stereotypes (Ingraham, 2007). Reviewing multicultural books' cultural authenticity is necessary to ensure that they become a valuable educational medium.

In their analysis of children's picture books about Korean culture published in the United States, Wee et al. (2015) found that the Korean culture was often presented superficially or with outdated information. Specifically, the majority of the sampled books (25 of 33) featured a strong emphasis on the concrete level of Korean culture, mostly about foods along with holidays, special ceremonies, and clothes, stressing exotic aspects of Korea. Some sampled books included admixing of Korean culture with other Asian cultures (e.g., Chinese/Japanese patterns and prints on clothing, Chinese style architectural elements and lifestyles). Furthermore, Cai (1994) problematized the number of published books about Asian culture in addition to stereotypical depictions and inauthentic presentations, including tendency to focus on their cultural traditions rather than contemporary life, on showcasing exotic features rather than characterization of a range of Chinese culture. The Council on Interracial Books for Children (1976) reported that children's books distort the Asian-American image by depicting Asian cultures stereotypically, including "racist, sexist, and/or elitist" description (p. 3). Chen (2009) suggested that overgeneralization of Asian cultures comes from a lack of real concern about the distinctions between different Asian cultures as well as a lack of understanding of historical legacies.

There have been debates on whether only the members of particular ethnic/cultural groups are able to write authentic literature (Bista, 2012; Cai, 2002; White-Kaulaity, 2006).

According to Mo and Shen (1997), cultural authenticity refers to interpretations that are accepted by the people of the culture, whose values may differ or even be opposite. Bista (2012) argued that authenticity is produced by people who have plenty of experience and understanding of a particular culture, rather than being based on the question of insiders or outsiders.

Accurate Voices in Children's Picture Books

Another important issue in multicultural books is the accuracy of dealing with and interpreting historical events from a Eurocentric standpoint (Atleo et al., 1999; Kohl, 1995; Moore & Hirschfelder, 1999; Slapin & Seale, 1998). Although cultural accuracy and cultural authenticity are often considered similar and interchangeable, these two have obvious differences. Cultural accuracy is defined as "richness of details, authentic handling of dialogues and relationships, and sensitive treatment of issues" (Yokota, 1993, p. 159). On the other hand, cultural authenticity refers to "non-stereotyped portrayals, positive images, lack of derogatory language, accurate historical information and cultural details, and realistic illustration" (Mo & Shen, 1997, p. 86). Short (2017) argued, "Texts are written from a particular perspective to convey particular understandings of the world with the language of the text and the narrative strategies positioning readers toward particular meanings" (p. 5). For example, when writing books about people from marginalized cultures, authors with White privilege are able to exercise their positions with subtle forms of –ism such as racism (Bishop, 2003).

This cultural arrogance is based on the assumption that what people from mainstream cultures value is universally valued by other cultures as well. Thus, any particular perspective taken in a text should be examined for accuracy and authenticity. With books set against historical and cultural backgrounds, it is especially critical to use primary sources to confirm the facts, without missing viewpoints that are not often heard. Numerous researchers have questioned whether it is appropriate for authors and illustrators from dominant cultures to tell stories about or on behalf of marginalized people, because it raises issues of accuracy and authenticity as well as perspective (Mendoza & Reese, 2001). Aoki (1993) argued that non-Asian authors tend to depict Asian Americans in negative and stereotypical ways. Reese and Caldwell-Wood (1997) also concluded that books with Native American protagonists written and illustrated by European Americans included inaccurate information and stereotypes.

Japanese Culture in Children's Picture Books

While most analyses of racial bias in children's books have focused on African American characters and their representations (Chukhray, 2010), there has recently been an increasing effort to analyze children's books containing Asian cultures, including Chinese (e.g., Chen, 2009; Zhang, 2011) and Korean/Korean American (e.g., Wee et al., 2015; Yi, 2013). However, still very little research has been conducted on the presentation of Japan and its contemporary culture in children's books. Some researchers have acknowledged common themes in Asian American children's literature (e.g., Manuel & Davis, 2006; Mendoza & Reese, 2001; Yi, 2013), such as cultural celebrations, major historical events, and generational conflicts. However, rather than approaching Asian cultures with a one-size-fits-all attitude, the identifying aspects of each individual culture must be portrayed clearly. Undoubtedly, the Japanese have their own unique cultural values and ways of life that are distinct from other Asian cultures. In an effort to explore main qualities of Japanese cultural values, Kelley (2008) analyzed four children's picture books on Japan. She found harmony, empathy, loyalty, and patience presented as aspects that contributed

to the foundation of the Japanese social system. Certainly, an exposition of how Japanese culture is portrayed and illustrated in children's picture books requires a much more comprehensive examination.

In addition to the lack of research in this area, there are several other compelling reasons that motivate this study. In spite of the significant population of Japanese Americans in the United States, constituting the sixth-largest Asian American group at around 1.3 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), not much attention has been paid to reviewing Japanese cultures portrayed in children's picture books (Gilton, 2007). Literature that reflects and confirms children's diverse cultures and ways of life can build self-esteem and develop a nonbiased understanding of other cultures as well as their own by working as mirrors and windows (Bishop, 1990; Derman-Sparks, 1989; Mendoza & Reese, 2001). Moreover, given Japan's long and close industrial and cultural relationship with the United States, its culture (e.g., electronics, sushi, anime) has penetrated essentially all American children's lives consciously and unconsciously. Thus, it is crucial to investigate what contents and aspects of children's picture books on Japan are dealt with, how they are conveyed, and what messages are sent.

This study aims to offer an in-depth understanding of how Japanese/Japanese American culture is portrayed and illustrated in children's picture books. With a focus on Japanese culture and current ways of life as portrayed in children's literature, the research reported here includes only recent fiction books published in the United States, specifically and intentionally excluding folktales. According to Miller-Lachmann (1994), the majority of folk tales are "set in rural or village communities untouched by the racial changes of the 20th century" (p. 36), which makes it difficult to explore current Japanese' ways of living, values, attitudes, and customs. The following research questions guided this study: (1) What aspects of Japan and its culture are presented and illustrated in children's picture books published in the United States between 1990 and 2016? (2) How do children's picture books portray Japanese/Japanese Americans and their cultures? (3) How are Japanese/Japanese American historical events and political issues portrayed in children's picture books?

Theoretical Framework

To answer each of the research questions, this study draws on several theories, including critical theory (Giroux, 1981; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994), levels of culture (Begler, 1998; Hidalgo, 1993), and the emic versus etic perspectives (Short & Fox, 2003).

Critical Theory

Critical theory is defined as a philosophical approach to society and culture, seeking to challenge the social, historical, and ideological forces and structures (Giroux, 1981; McCarthy, 1991). It attempts to reveal the contradictions, confront unequal power relations and disrupt the status quo (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994). Critical theory takes a basically critical perspective on contemporary society with an orientation toward investigating exploitation, repression, unfairness, and unequal power relations. In particular, critical literacy involves addressing issues of power and questioning practices of privilege and injustice (Vasquez, 2005). Lewison, Leland, and Harste (2008) argued that two important elements of critical literacy are consideration of multiple perspectives and challenging taken-for-granted perspectives. Young children's literature can serve as a powerful medium to support children's exploration of ideologies and equity in the world around them (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Laman, 2006; Quintero, 2004). A critical perspective was used in this study while analyzing the sampled books, such that attention was paid to any descriptions

and illustrations related to unequal relationships (e.g., discrimination and unfair treatment toward Japanese people during World War II), racial/cultural stereotypes, or prejudicial representations.

Levels of Culture

Begler's (1998) categorization of culture is used here to understand the aspects and levels of culture portrayed and illustrated in children's books. In this system, culture with a big *C* represents *high culture*, which includes "food, fashion, fiesta, folklore, and famous people" (p. 272). In contrast, culture with a little c refers to the "social, economic, and political system of a society—with people's values and beliefs providing a framework for all other aspects of culture" (p. 272). In order to understand the heart and spirit of the big *C*, Begler argued that we should start with the little *c*, but that understanding the high culture is vital to deeper cultural knowledge and positive cultural competence. In a similar line, Hidalgo's (1993) levels of culture are the concrete, the behavioral, and the symbolic. The most visible and tangible understanding of culture begins at the *concrete* level, often staying at the surface level and being represented by dimensions such as clothes, music, foods, and festivals. This level aligns with the big *C* level of Begler. *The behavioral* level reflects values, conveyed through languages, social and gender roles, and family structures, while *the symbolic* level includes value systems, customs, worldviews, and spirituality; these last two levels correspond to Begler's little *c* level.

The Emic Versus Etic Perspectives

When looking into the historical events and political issues presented in the children's books, the emic and etic perspectives were carefully considered. The emic approach to studying culture stresses that the members of the culture being studied are the main source of information for understanding the culture, while the etic approach employs preconceived notions and theories about cultures in general in order to study specific ones and identify cross-cultural traits (Pike, 1967). However, scholars pointed out the dangers of emic and etic approaches. Specifically, Gates (1992) argued racial, ethnic, religious, and gender identities do not always ensure that writers accurately portray their in-group culture. Regarding the etic approach, Morris. Leung, Ames, and Lickel (1999) argued that outside observations can possibly lead to unclear conclusions and generalizations about specific cultures. However, Bishop (1992) maintained that cultural insiders with emic approach can write culturally authentic literature about ethnic experiences. This study was informed by Bista (2012), who reasoned that people who have plenty of experience and understanding of a particular culture can produce authenticity even if they are not insiders.

Our positionalities as researchers in the study were grounded in both the emic and etic perspectives. One of the researchers was born and raised in Japan until 18 years old and maintains close connections with Japan through frequent visits and enjoying its culture while currently residing in the United States and having an American spouse. The other two researchers held an outsider perspective, as non-Japanese, but shared common Asian values such as Confucianism and collectivism, by having an East Asian heritage.

Methodology

Data Sources

In order to understand how Japanese people and their culture are depicted and illustrated in children's picture books, 37 children's books published only in the United States that included Japanese cultural elements, written in English or English/Japanese, were collected for analysis. Books originally published in Japan or other countries (e.g., Korea) and then subsequently republished in the United States were not included because these books served a different audience. Although this is not always the case, children's picture books published in the United States may speak of the experiences of Japanese Americans, which is seemingly different from ones published in Japan or other countries. The samples were found in local and university libraries, widely used online bookstores, mainstream bookstores, and multicultural children's book publishers. Only print editions (no e-books) were included, considering the wide availability of these books to children at home and at school.

The initial search began with "children's picture books," "Japan," and "Japanese culture" as keywords for books published between 1990 and 2016 that were written in English or English/Japanese for children 3–8 years of age. Given our research focus on authentic and accurate portrayal of Japanese modern/contemporary culture, rather than traditional culture, as well as the availability/easy access issue, the books chosen were limited to relatively recent publications. Japanese folktales and fairytales were intentionally excluded from the search process because traditional narrations have a more obvious cultural context in "old time" stories and contain ecological, cultural, and epistemological exotic features (Sung, 2009). In the second step, snowball techniques were used for a more extensive search, for instance, tracking authors or searching similar topics. The complete list of the sample books is presented in Table 1.

Data Analysis

A critical content analysis (Krippendorff, 2013; Short, 2017) drawing from the critical theory (e.g., Giroux, 1981; McCarthy, 1991) and emic versus etic perspectives (e.g., Short & Fox, 2003) was performed on the sampled books. Krippendorff (2013) considered qualitative content analysis as the close reading of small amount of texts with the critical framework such as critical discourse. Critical content analysis focuses on a "critical examining of issues of stereotyping and misrepresentation in literature, a deconstruction of books and the societal issues that are reflected in representation of particular groups of people" (Short, 2017, p. 6). Since texts are written from a specific stance, positioning readers toward particular meanings, critical analysis is required to explore the focalization (e.g., who gets to speak, whose story is told, in what ways) and social status of the characters (e.g., who has power) (Short, 2017).

The specific data analysis processes were as follows: First, initial analysis categories were created, using various sources including the Korean multicultural book-analysis categories (Wee et al., 2015), additional guidelines suggested by Norton (1991), and recommendations from the Council on Interracial Books for Children (1980); the different levels of culture (Begler, 1998; Hidalgo, 1993) were also considered. We analyzed both the texts and illustrations, and accordingly the analysis categories applied to both. As the close reading of the books progressed, the analysis criteria were revised, eventually yielding a total of 18 categories (e.g., characters, levels of culture, language, stereotypes of illustrations). Some of the categories included several subcategories.

Table 1. List of the Sample Books

Year	Title	Writer/illustrator	Publisher
1991	*Tree of Cranes*	Allen Say	Houghton Mifflin
1993	*A Carp for Kimiko*	Virginia Kroll/Katherine Roundtree	Charlesbridge
1993	*Baseball Saved Us*	Ken Mochizuki/Dom Lee	Lee & Low
1993	*The Bracelet*	Yoshiko Uchida/Joanna Yardley	Philomel
1997	*Heroes*	Ken Mochizuki/Dom Lee	Lee & Low
1999	*Akiko's Flowers*	Rui Umezawa/Yuji Ando	Tundra
2001	*The Sea Maidens of Japan*	Lili Bell/Erin McGonigle Brammer	Lili Bell/Erin McGonigle Brammer
2002	*Home of the Brave*	Allen Say	Houghton Mifflin
2002	*The Way We Do It in Japan*	Geneva Cobb Iijima/Paige Billin-Frye	Albert Whitman
2003	*Suki's Kimono*	Chieri Uegaki/Stephane Jorisch	Kids Can Press
2004	*Allison*	Allen Say	Houghton Mifflin
2004	*I live in Tokyo*	Mari Takabayashi	Houghton Mifflin
2004	*Music for Alice*	Allen Say	Houghton Mifflin
2004	*Night of the Fireflies*	Karen Winnick/Yoriko Ito	Boyds Mills Press
2005	*Kamishibai Man*	Allen Say	Houghton Mifflin
2005	*Viva Japan!*	Elena Lopez/Cristina Gomez	AuthorHouse
2006	*Japanese Celebrations*	Betty Reynolds	Tuttle
2007	*The Wakame Gatherers*	Holly Thompson/Kazumi Wilds	Shen's Books
2008	*In My Day*	June Atsuko Martel, Joe Martel, Sandy Beelmann	CreateSpace
2008	*Grandfather's Journey*	Allen Say	Houghton Mifflin
2008	*Wabi Sabi*	Mark Reibstein/Ed Young	Little, Brown
2009	*Erika-San*	Allen Say	Houghton Mifflin
2009	*My Japan*	Etsuko Watanabe	Kane/Miller
2009	*Tea With Milk*	Allen Say	Houghton Mifflin
2010	*Circus Day in Japan*	Eleanor Coerr	Tuttle
2010	*The Boy in the Garden*	Allen Say	Houghton Mifflin
2011	*Drawing From Memory*	Allen Say	Scholastic
2012	*A Place Where Sunflowers Grow*	Amy Lee-Tai/Felicia Hoshino	Children's Book
2012	*Sora and the Clouds*	Felicia Hoshino	Immedium
2013	*Fish for Jimmy*	Katie Yamasaki	Holiday House
2013	*Passage to Freedom*	Ken Mochizuki/Dom Lee	Lee & Low
2013	*The Favorite Daughter*	Allen Say	Arthur A. Levine Books
2015	*Kiko the Short-Tailed Kite*	Meredith Newton-Halstead, Constance Blomberg-Aehl	CreateSpace
2015	*Little Kunoichi: The Ninja Girl*	Sanae Ishida	Little Bigfoot
2015	*Pinkalicious: Cherry Blossom*	Victoria Kann	HarperCollins
2016	*The Sound of Silence*	Katrina Goldsaito/Julia Kuo	Little, Brown
2016	*Megumi's First Trip to Kyoto*	Alexandra Parsons/Beatrice Favereau	CreateSpace

For example, the category of characters was divided into the main character and supporting characters, each of which was again identified by sex, age, racial/ethnic background, and physical characteristics. Notes were made of any type of stereotyping or misleading representation, in text or illustrations, of personality, attitudes, attributes, or abilities (inferiority or superiority), considering the "model minority" stereotype (Lee, 2009) and relationships with others.

Since not only the text but also the illustrations play critical roles in telling the story in children's picture books (Lynch-Brown, 1993), the illustrations in each book were carefully examined as well. Mo and Shen (1997) stressed the inseparable relationship between cultural authenticity and the quality of the art in multicultural picture books. Scholars have pointed out frequent mistakes in cultural depiction in children's books, such as admixing Asian cultures, and outdated and inaccurate illustrations (e.g., Cai, 2002; Mo & Shen, 1997; Wee et al., 2015). Mo and Shen suggested that authentic art forms should support and enrich the story by providing accurate images of the characters and detailed scenes of the real culture. Thus, categories for illustration analysis included accuracy, stereotypes, and authenticity.

The procedure used to finalize the analytic categories was inductive and emergent. In particular, with respect to historical events and political issues, the specific event and its setting, along with what stories were told and whose perspectives were taken (insider or outsider), were added to the analytic categories. Each researcher reviewed each page of all of the sampled books according to the finalized analytic categories. Thus, we included a total of 18 finalized analytic categories, starting from general information (e.g., genre, reading level, setting, main topic), in-depth analysis of Japanese main and supporting characters (e.g., sex, age, racial/ethnic background, physical characteristics, personality/attitudes/attributes, abilities, relationship to family/friends/others), different levels of cultures (e.g., foods, places, clothes, languages, customs, values and beliefs), to power relationship/struggles (e.g., socioeconomic class, occupation, unequal treatment, discrimination) and authors/illustrators (e.g., cultural insider author who has Japanese connection, cultural outsider author). We strived to include illustrations in our analysis during the content analysis. For example, when looking at description of physical appearance, we examined whether the illustration was matched with the verbal description and whether the illustration included any inaccurate, stereotypical, and/or inauthentic descriptions. Careful attention was also given to backgrounds of authors and illustrators in deciding whether they were insiders or outsiders.

All sampled books were read and coded by each researcher. Continuous discussions and reviews were carried out until points of disagreement were resolved. Krippendorff's Alpha (KALPHA) was used to confirm the inter-coder reliability, using a 20% overlap criterion (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). The KALPHA for the 20% overlap among the coders was .88, which is considered acceptable in most situations (De Swert, 2012).

Findings and Interpretations

Surface Level of Japanese Ways of Living: "I Live in Japan"

The majority of the books (27 of 37; 72.9%) included specific Japanese cultural components, such as clothes, food, celebrations, housing, festivals, and traditional activities, which were categorized as the concrete level of culture (Hidalgo, 1993). For example, *Suki's Kimono* (Uegaki, 2003) portrayed Japanese traditional clothing, the kimono, while *Japanese Celebrations* (Reynolds, 2006) introduced cherry blossoms, exotic decorations, and seasonal foods. Twenty-seven books (72.9%) explicitly introduced Japanese vocabulary

and phrases (e.g., *okasan, ohayo-gozaimasu, ikebana*), all of which were explained and/or translated into English in the text or a glossary to help readers understand the story and culture better.

On the concrete level, various Japanese traditions were introduced in an authentic manner. Examples included flying a kite in the shape of a carp on Children's Day in *A Carp for Kimiko* (Kroll, 1999), becoming an *ama* diver (female divers of Japan) in T*he Sea Maidens of Japan* (Bell, 2001), *ikebana* (Japanese flower arrangements) in *Aiko's Flower* (Umezawa, 1999), and *kamishibai* (a form of Japanese street theater and storytelling) in *Kamishibai Man* (Say, 2005). Using an adult protagonist, *Kamishibai Man* showed the passage of time and the precious value of old meanings and memories. In contrast, young protagonists in the books dealing with tradition commonly did not understand the reason for following the tradition at first, and accordingly were reluctant to perpetuate it. However, when they learned what it meant, all of them eventually embraced and treasured it.

Direct comparisons of the Japanese and U.S. cultures were also found. *In My Day* (Martel, Martel, & Beelmann, 2008) portrayed food, housing, schools, and festivals of both Japan and the United States through a girl who lived in Yokohama, in Japan, and a boy who lived in Connecticut, in the United States. While juxtaposing these two cultures side by side, the book presented both commonalities and differences, rather than emphasizing the exoticness of the cultural differences alone.

With regard to culturally authentic descriptions and illustrations, overall 32 books (86.4%) portrayed the Japanese culture with correct and up-to-date information in the texts, while 27 books (72.9%) presented authentic Japanese culture in the illustrations. Inaccurate illustrations and cultural stereotypes, as well as mistakenly using images from other Asian cultures to represent the Japanese, were found mostly in books relating the concrete level of culture. For example, Kanji characters (Chinese characters used in modern Japanese writing) were presented on signs of stores in illustrations in *Circus Day in Japan* (Coerr, 2010), but they either did not make any sense or were written inaccurately, so they appeared to be symbolic drawings that only imitated Kanji characters. Furthermore, in spite of the fact that many Japanese live in highly urbanized municipalities, their ways of living were not reflected authentically in some of the books. Instead, agrarian countrysides filled with traditional clay-tiled houses and traditional interiors such as *tatami* flooring and sliding paper doors were found in the illustrations of more than half of the books. It is worth noting that Japan still has such traditional houses and interiors, which originated more than a thousand years ago, but children in Japan today are more likely to live in more modern-style housing.

Other Asian cultures/languages were occasionally admixed with Japanese culture. For example, the *hina* dolls (traditional Japanese dolls displayed during a girls' festival) illustrated in *A Carp for Kimiko* (Kroll, 1999) looked Chinese in their hairstyles and accessories. In *Suki's Kimono* (Uegaki, 2003), all of the Japanese American characters, illustrated with slanted eyes and big cheekbones, looked Mongolian. Both illustrators of *A Carp for Kimiko* and *Suki's Kimono* are considered cultural outsiders, who do not have strong connection with Japanese culture. *Allison* (Say, 2004a), a story about an interracial adoption, did not specifically state which country Allison originally came from, but said she came from "far, far away, from another country" (p. 8). Readers can guess that Allison came from Japan from her grandmother sending her *kimono* dresses. However, her baby doll was named Mei Mei, which is not Japanese but Chinese, meaning "younger sister." The dichotomy of wearing traditional Japanese clothes but having a doll with a Chinese name could confuse readers.

Going Deeper: Respect, Harmony, and *Wabi Sabi*

Cultural values and customs that the Japanese regard highly were represented in a significant number of the books (22 of 37; 59.4%). Social behaviors (e.g., how to fold and arrange bedding, how and what to eat for breakfast, how to say goodnight to parents) and customs (e.g., the same backpack color for girls and boys, shoe storage for indoor and outdoor shoes) embedded in everyday activities were found easily. These behaviors and customs showed Japanese values such as respect, harmony, and empathy. Specifically, children greeting their teachers by bowing politely showed respect for elders, and having the same school supplies and lunch menu for all students and wearing uniforms in *The Way We Do It in Japan* (Iijima, 2002) showed harmony. *Viva, Japan!* (Lopez, 2005) revealed several Japanese values through an American girl's school experience in Japan. Working together with her classmates to clean their classroom and the school grounds represented respect for the environment, and serving lunch to her classmates symbolized empathy and group harmony.

Even a deeper level of Japanese philosophical and spiritual concepts was introduced. In *Little Kunoichi: The Ninja Girl* (Ishida, 2015), *shugyo*, a concept important to Eastern philosophy meaning "training like crazy," was introduced through a girl's endless practice to gain ninja mastery, by which she also demonstrated patience and perseverance. *Wabi Sabi* (Reibstein, 2008) sought for the meaning of *wabi sabi*, which is "a concept centered on finding beauty through simplicity" and "a way of seeing the world that is at the heart of Japanese culture" (n.p.). In spite of the concepts involved being highly complicated and philosophical, the meaning was revealed in a way that was simple enough for young readers through a cat named Wabi Sabi who traveled across Japan seeking advice and understanding from a variety of sources.

Oftentimes societal values and beliefs that do not persist in present times were included in the sampled books. Some stories were not in a contemporary setting, but predictably set some 30 years in the past. However, by not indicating the time setting in the text clearly, these books can lead young readers to misunderstand the contemporary Japanese societal values and behaviors. For example, *Tea With Milk* (Say, 2009b) described a lack of women's rights and freedom by including a scene where a man in Japan said, "I've never seen a woman drive" (n.p.), and Masako's parents hired a matchmaker for her. When Masako went back to Japan from San Francisco, she also "took lessons in flower arranging, calligraphy, and the tea ceremony" (n.p.), and she "had to wear kimonos" (n.p.). In reality, however, people in Japan do not wear kimonos as daily wear, but only for special occasions such as weddings and festivals. Not many young Japanese women take lessons for traditional activities, either.

Cultural Crossing and Clashing: "Would I Ever Fit In?"

Another important issue found in the books was culture crossing, which is the intersection of American/Western culture and native Japanese culture (6 books; 16.2%). Cultural crossings emerged through various situations in stories, such as immigration, a biracial child, a first-time visit to Japan, and coming back to Japan after living in the United States for a while.

Some stories showed the dynamics of the coexistence of two cultures within individuals. For example, *Tea With Milk* (Say, 2009b) is about Masako, who moved to San Francisco from Japan when she was a little girl and went back to Japan with her parents after graduating from high school. Both cultures mixed in her daily life and actions. For

example, she was wearing a kimono and speaking English for a job. Speaking her very best English while bowing as a proper Japanese lady should made her feel odd at first, but she got used to it. The protagonist tried to make a connection between the two cultures instead of separating them. *Erika-San* (Say, 2009a) showed cultural crossings through an American woman who looked for the old and traditional ways of Japan and a Japanese man who preferred coffee to tea. The protagonists gradually found the coexistence of two cultures, which were different but similar in terms of celebrating tradition and customs.

Some stories celebrated a protagonist's culture while trying to find common ground with other cultures, and others highlighted the differences or conflicts between them. In this process, unfair/disrespectful treatment toward Japanese/Japanese American protagonists was often noticed in spite of the protagonists' desire to maintain their Japanese cultural heritage. For example, in *Suki's Kimono* (Uegaki, 2003), when a Japanese American girl named Suki wore a kimono to school, her sisters were against it, saying, "You can't wear that.… People will think you're weird" (n.p.), "everyone will laugh, and no one will play with you" (n.p.), and they pretended they did not know her. Other children giggled, pointed at her dress, said she looked "funny" (n.p.) and "like a bat" (n.p.), and even snatched her dress. This showed not only cultural outsiders (e.g., Suki's friends, school boys) but also insiders represented as Suki's sisters devaluing Japanese cultural assets, rather than respecting and having pride/cherishment. Suki responded to derogatory/offensive comments, stares, and actions toward her kimono with passive attitudes such as ignoring most of the time or speaking up sometimes (e.g., "I'm not dressed funny"). No characters (e.g., teachers, parents, guardians, older children) in the book addressed unfair treatment toward Suki caused by her wearing of the Kimono.

Similarly, *The Favorite Daughter* (Say, 2013) addressed cultural heritage and identity through the situation of Yuriko, a half-Japanese girl with blonde hair living in the United States. Several incidents, including a new teacher mispronouncing her name as "Eureka" and friends laughing at her baby picture in a kimono, led her to want to change who she was. Not only the peers but also the teacher showed disrespect for Yuriko's culture, and they did not apologize for their intentional/unintentional mistakes or errors, which led her to resist again and repress her heritage. Since names have significant association with cultural and ethnic identity, they should not be trivialized through mispronunciation. Although Yuriko gained confidence at the end by realizing that her Japanese traditions brought her joy, as a biracial child she had to get through challenges and pressures to choose one culture, either American or Japanese, rather than valuing to hold both cultures. Another example can be found in *The Way We Do It in Japan* (Iijima, 2002), in which Gregory, who was half Japanese and half American, moved from the United States to Japan. When wearing the same standardized gym uniform, Gregory felt like part of the group. However, when other Japanese boys called him *Amerikajin*, which means "American" in Japanese, he wondered if he would ever fit in.

Grandfather's Journey (Say, 1993) revealed generally shared feelings of immigrants by stating, "The moment I am in one country, I am homesick for the other" (n.p.). This ambivalent feeling of having a dual and dissected identity can be love for both countries, but, at the same time, the person may experience feeling anonymous and confused when they go to one country and think they do not belong anywhere. The stereotype of the forever foreigner draws on ideologies that construct the image of Asian as "others" (Sung, 2009).

Reconsideration of Historical Events/Political Issues: Stories Told by Insiders

Nine books (24.3%) dealt with historical events and political issues concerning Japanese and Japanese Americans. Reese et al. (2001) stressed that children's picture books about history can be controversial in terms of the degree to which the writers are responsible for historical and cultural accuracy. Out of nine books, eight were written by Japanese/Japanese American authors from the Japanese/Japanese American perspectives. These stories took place during historical periods or backgrounds of discrimination, war, or other conflicts, and the characters were oppressed because of their racial or cultural group membership. These stories clearly and directly demonstrated unequal power relations, oppression, and unfair treatment. Only one story, *The Wakame Gatherers* (Thompson, 2007), was written by a non-Japanese author. Written by an English-American author, *The Wakame Gatherers* included the war between Japan and the United States briefly to share the experiences of the biracial protagonist's Japanese paternal grandmother called Baachan (meaning "grandma" in Japanese). Baachan's war experiences were expressed by such testimonies as "I did not have much clothing.…We were always hungry. But we were lucky to have the sea for fish and seaweed" (n.p.). Nothing was mentioned from the same time period about the American maternal grandmother, Gram.

Among the nine books dealing with Japanese/Japanese American historical events and political issues, three historical backgrounds were identified. Seven books described wartime in 1942, when the U.S. government forced Japanese immigrants and their descendants into camps away from the West Coast. The other two backgrounds were the 1960s Vietnam War era in *Heroes* (Mochizuki, 1997) and Lithuania in 1940 in *Passage to Freedom* (Mochizuki, 2003). With varying historical backgrounds, each of the books portrayed the lives of Japanese Americans and the values they expressed in those settings. The Japanese protagonists shared the common quality that, while going through the tragic events of their times, they did not lose their dreams and hopes. *Baseball Saved Us* (Mochizuki, 1993) showed patience via the Japanese American protagonist who overcame hardship caused by discrimination, bullying, and name-calling through playing baseball. *Fish for Jimmy* (Yamasaki, 2013) illustrated love for family even under the harsh conditions of an internment camp through Jimmy's brother slipping outside the camp fence to catch fresh fish when Jimmy refused to eat. By telling a biographic story about how the war completely changed the main character's life but not her dream, *Music for Alice* (Say, 2004b) transmitted the value of perseverance.

Particular historical events, such as Word War II and the Vietnam War, led Japanese American protagonists to ask questions about their identity. Although they were born and raised in the United States and saw themselves as Americans, they were treated as foreigners by White people around them. In *Baseball Saved Us* (Mochizuki, 1993), the father explained to his son, "America is at war with Japan, and the government thinks that Japanese Americans can't be trusted. But it's wrong that we're in here. We're Americans too!" (n.p.). When mistreated by White peers, young Japanese American protagonists were oftentimes described as passive and quiet, not speaking up for themselves, wanting their fathers or uncles to stand up for them. However, in reality, not all Japanese Americans were silent during the wars. Fred Korematsu was a son of Japanese immigrants who remained an activist throughout his life, fighting the government's internment of Japanese Americans during World War II (John, 2017; also refer to www.korematsuinstitute.org). Thus, such stereotypical portrayals of Japanese people in children's picture books can reinforce and (re)produce the stereotypical view of Asian passivity.

Discussion

This study analyzed 37 children's picture books on Japanese culture published between 1990 and 2016 that targeted the ages of 3–8. It focused on what cultural aspects were portrayed and how they were presented. This section further discusses their cultural authenticity, going beyond the superficial level to include marginalization at cultural crossings and the focalization of historical events and political issues.

Cultural Authenticity

We found that only a small number of the picture books showed stereotypical and biased portrayals and illustrations of the culture (five in texts and 10 in illustrations out of 37 total books). Although small, these inaccurate and inauthentic descriptions of the culture can be attributed to the backgrounds of the authors and illustrators. In our analysis, inaccurate information or stereotypes/biases (e.g., maintaining traditional styles of housing and lifestyle in rural areas, Asian stereotyped facial illustration with slanted eyes and big cheekbones) were shown in the books written or illustrated by non-Japanese authors or illustrators, which is consistent with the notion that books written or illustrated by members of the cultural group are much more authentic than those done by outsiders (Gilton, 2007). However, this does not mean that all the books that were written/illustrated by non-Japanese authors/illustrators were inauthentic. Many of them portrayed Japanese culture without any stereotypes, while a few Japanese American authors or illustrators included outdated images. Some non-Japanese authors or illustrators had experience living and working in Japan or had studied Japanese, according to the biographies presented on their websites. Specifically, Betty Reynolds (2006), author of *Japanese Celebrations*, lived in Tokyo for seven years and started sketching all of the mysteries around her in Japan according to her website (www.bettyreynolds.net).

These findings support Bista's (2012) argument that authenticity can be produced by those who have experience and understanding of a particular culture, irrespective of having an emic or etic approach. Instead, what is necessary is for authors and illustrators of any background to study thoroughly about the culture from multiple sources, or live and work with the group for a sufficient time, and to consult with group members in specific cultural contexts in order to keep their cultural knowledge and information updated and fresh (Gilton, 2007).

Going Beyond the Superficial Level

According to Hapgood and Fennes (1997), culture can be defined as surface and below surface, material and nonmaterial aspects of a way of life. The sampled picture books most frequently tended to describe the concrete level of culture (e.g., celebration, food, clothing), as categorized by Hidalgo (1993). The portrayal approach used in the books of this study often falls into the tourist approach through listing a variety of Japanese holidays and foods (e.g., *Japanese Celebrations* [Reynolds, 2006], *I live in Tokyo* [Takabayashi, 2004]), which should be avoided in early childhood education curricula (Derman-Sparks, 1989; Fang, Fu, & Lamme, 1999). Fang et al. (1999) stressed the criticality of paying attention to discourses of power and dominance, going beyond looking at concrete category that includes foods and holidays. As children's picture books affect the formation of young readers' understanding about others, it is crucial that these books, especially those that introduce other cultures, depict realistic stories and illustrations about the everyday lives of the peoples and nations they represent.

A good number of the sampled books introduced various Japanese cultural values and philosophical concepts, such as *wabi sabi* (in *Wabi Sabi* [Reibstein, 2008]) and *shugyo* (in *Little Kunoichi: The Ninja Girl* [Ishida, 2015]). These cultural ethos are subtle and are not immediately evident, which can be abstract and complex to young readers. However, these values and philosophies embedded in the protagonists' everyday lives are introduced naturally by stories, which helps children understand them easily. Children's picture books need to incorporate various behavioral and symbolic levels of culture and present them accurately, while not heavily emphasizing superficial, stereotypical facets, because doing so leads to true understanding and appreciation of the underlying values and social customs.

Marginalization at Cultural Crossings

Overall the picture books on the topic of cultural crossings described the mixed and complicated feelings that the protagonists as immigrants and/or biracial children experienced, rather than presenting the funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) or cultural advantages that the protagonists possessed by having different cultures. The protagonists struggled with being different, coping with changes, missing their homelands, and navigating between countries, identities, languages, and cultures (e.g., *The Way We Do in Japan, Tea With Milk, Grandfather's Journey*). Moreover, the Japanese American protagonists experienced discrimination, microaggression, and unfair treatment due to their different cultural background, such as name, clothing, and appearance (e.g., *The Favorite Daughter, Suki's Kimono*). Disrespectful responses toward Japanese American or mixed Japanese children presented in the children's books can mirror societal views about minority cultures. Strangeness or otherness of minority cultures can confirm the identity of the mainstream as superior (Bauman, 1995; Kostogriz & Doecke, 2007).

Immigration is one of the most stressful events families and individuals can undergo, and cultural mismatch can make immigrant children vulnerable and marginalized (Sirin, Ryce, Gupta, & Rogers-Sirin, 2013). The complexities and ambiguities that immigrant children received led them to feel that they did not belong anywhere and put them in the margin or border (Lee, 1995). Through the story and illustrations, children's picture books on the crossing of cultures can serve as a mirror to help immigrant and Japanese American children residing in the United States recognize their in/visibility, find answers to who they are, and learn how to adopt their new culture. Mirroring their own experiences of steering their way in a new life through books can empower immigrant children (Bachban, 2007) and assist in building their self-esteem and a sense of significance (Bishop, 2003). Further, stories about Japanese/Japanese American immigration experiences and cultural crossings/clashing provide children from mainstream culture with a window to understand different cultures and perceive social justice and unequal power relationship.

Focalization of Historical Events/Political Issues

Most of the picture books in the sample that reflected on historic events and political issues dealt with Japanese American experiences and feelings during World War II or the Vietnam War. These books commonly showed the perseverance and pride of Japanese Americans, rather than highlighting their suffering or devastation, which honored and dignified their way of life. The importance of the stories about the internment camps, where more than 100,000 Japanese Americans were forced to live during World War II, was recognized only recently (Minamoto & Vukov, 2000). Most U.S. history books present a biased focus on European American figures and events, excluding minority groups (Gutmann & Ben-Porath, 2014). Indeed, how the Japanese and Japanese Americans were treated in the World War II internment camps has rarely been described in American

children's literature. More importantly, even the sampled books about the wartime tended to describe Japanese Americans of the time as a silent and passive group who did not speak up for their civil rights. Such descriptions can implicitly reinforce a passive image of Japanese Americans to young readers by serving as mirrors and windows.

It is important to note that almost all of the books in the sample (eight of nine) on historical events/political issues were written by Japanese/Japanese American authors. Therefore, the eight books, by giving a face to pervasive social and historical issues and working as mirrors and windows, provided young readers with an opportunity to hear the excluded voices of Japanese/Japanese Americans and to see historical events from a different perspective. For example, Mochizuki (1993), the Japanese American author of *Baseball Saved Us*, presented how Japanese Americans felt about and overcame unfair treatment, discrimination, and oppressions using their own voices, which helped readers hear the supposedly silent voices of Japanese Americans during the wartime and see the events from an alternative viewpoint. Moreover, some books could have offered a chance to see how people on the other side of a conflict viewed the same events, but this was not addressed fully. For instance, *The Wakame Gatherers* (Thompson, 2007) included a Japanese grandmother and an American grandmother, both of whom experienced World War II, but only the Japanese grandmother's experiences were described, not the American grandmother's. Thus, more efforts are required to provide readers with diverse voices about the same historical event to expand their understanding.

Implications

Our findings highlight several implications on how the analysis unpacking the representation of Japanese/Japanese Americans in picture books can help children's cultural understanding. First, because children's picture books mirror the power relations and social positions and offer windows to see into them (Botelho & Rudman, 2009), accurate and authentic descriptions and illustrations of natural aspects of cultural values and activities happening in everyday lives should be emphasized. Books that present concrete and symbolic levels of Japanese culture in accurate and authentic ways play an important role in enhancing Japanese/Japanese American children's understanding of their own culture, developing positive self-perceptions, and helping them not feel marginalized through seeing representations similar to their situation and validating their experiences (Jones, 2008). Moreover, children from non-Japanese cultural backgrounds will learn various aspects related to Japan, including their everyday lives, traditions, philosophies, and historical and political issues through these books. Furthermore, children will learn something new by reading books on historical events and political issues written from insiders.

Second, considering the lack of materials describing various aspects of Japanese American's actions and experiences during wartime, teachers can use children's picture books written by insiders, adding explanations of correct historical contexts and Japanese American activists. Resonating with these finding, Noll (1995) raised the issue of providing accurate perspectives on historical events without demonstrating negative images in children's literature. She also stressed the need of accurate portrayals of dominant views of a particular historical time period while presenting alternative views. It is crucial to encourage children to think carefully about the meanings embedded in texts from dominant cultural perspectives using critical literacy while reading books (Smolkin & Suina, 1997; Yenika-Agbaw, 1998). By doing so, children can challenge issues of cultural difference, equity, and assumptions about race, class, and gender (Cai, 1998).

To select good picture books representing Japanese/Japanese American cultures, teachers can refer to criteria for excellence, such as awards and other resources. There are many awards that educators can refer to in selecting good multicultural books, such as the Amelia Bloomer List, the Américas Award, and the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature, not only for authors but also for illustrators (Boyd, Causey, & Galda, 2015). As another way to integrate children's multicultural picture books into their classrooms, teachers can invite parents from different cultures to fill in the gap between the insider and outsider perspectives. Parents can be engaged in the process of selecting storybooks, tapping their insider perspectives on their cultures. These efforts can help develop proper guidelines and resources, avoiding inaccuracies and stereotypes against particular cultural groups.

Lastly, with a critical lens, problematizing, thinking critically, and raising questions concerning how a specific culture, especially minority culture, is portrayed and illustrated can be a significant step to help young children examine how children's picture books mirror unequal power relations, social equality, and microaggression that have been taken for granted in society. More in-depth conversations and critical exploration of diverse aspects between educators, school librarians, and other teachers should be conducted in the area of children's multicultural picture books, in particular regarding Japanese/Japanese American culture. Different approaches and perspectives taken in children's picture books by insiders and outsiders to present historical and political events concerning minority/cultural groups can be examined to see how diverse or restricted they are.

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