

Chapter 11

Chinese Children's Literature in North America

Belinda Yun-Ying Louie

Abstract In China, researchers and educators have found evidence to support that the shared-book reading approach improves Chinese children's literacy and language skills. In order to support Chinese language teachers who want to use the shared-book approach in north America, this study is a systematic analysis of Chinese juvenile literature available in north America. In this project, we considered 1,034 titles of Chinese children's literature books that were available to the north American community. These books were published in China, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and the United States. After removing the translated book portion of the collection, we analyzed five aspects of the books: genres, readability, aural accessibility, cultural content, and appeal to Chinese language learners. Overall, the books were written for Chinese-speaking children who have the oral language capacity to understand when the stories are read to them. In addition, some of the contemporary realistic fiction titles are laden with strong Chinese sentimentalism that may be foreign to students grew up overseas.

Keywords Children's literature • Genres • Readability • Cultural content • Aural accessibility

Chinese Children's Literature in the United States

Research on the effects of storybook reading among English-speaking children spans several decades and identifies key factors that relate to vocabulary learning in both classroom and home environments (Beck & McKeown, 2007; Elley, 1989;

B.Y.-Y. Louie (✉)
University of Washington, Education Program,
1900 Commerce Street, Tacoma, WA 98402, USA
e-mail: blouie@uw.edu

Robbins & Ehri, 1994). When parents share books with early childhood second language learners at home, frequently and accompanied by conversation, the experience helps these young children to develop a robust oral language (Collins, 2010). In China, researchers and educators have also found evidence to support that the shared-book reading approach improves Chinese children's literacy and language skills (Anderson et al., 2002; Chow, McBride-Chang, Cheung, & Chow, 2008). However, books for young children are not as available as books for advanced readers. Understanding that appropriate reading materials are pertinent to the success of the shared-book experience, Anderson and his colleagues (2002) spent an enormous amount of time designing and constructing appropriate and enjoyable stories when they launched the shared-book reading program in China. Teachers who use the shared-book approach read a text together with their students, using various activities to engage children in reading the text (Anderson et al., 2002). If the shared-book approach is to be implemented in the United States to facilitate Chinese learning, what books are available to teachers and parents? How appropriate are these books in terms of language and content? How appealing are these books to the North American learners? This chapter reports the results of a content analysis of Chinese children's literature available in the North America.

In my previous study on Chinese children's literature (Louie & Louie, 2002), I focused on how various genres of children's literature published in China helped teachers to fulfill the central Chinese government's literacy directives. The impetus for the current study came from teachers' desire to use literature to enhance Chinese language learning in North America. Hence, this project only considered books that were accessible to the North American community. This study is the first systematic analysis of Chinese juvenile literature available in North America, aimed at providing support for Chinese language educators. The knowledge gained from this study can also help other language teachers when they consider using children's literature to enhance language development.

In order to understand how these books may enhance Chinese language development of both heritage (with Chinese as the language spoken at home) and non-heritage learners, I analyzed five aspects of the collection: genres, readability, aural accessibility, cultural content, and appeal to Chinese language learners. In order to study the books' appeal to language learners, I collected information from 12 heritage learners, ages 4–16 years old, on their responses from 9 to 20 books in various genres. Likewise, I collected responses from 20 non-heritage learners, ages 4–14 years, after reading 9–20 books across genres. Genre study is important because discourse structures vary with genres. Genre analysis provides information on whether language learners are exposed to a balanced set of textual structures. In order to investigate whether the collection facilitates Chinese language development, I analyzed the books through two language-oriented lenses: the readability lenses and the aural accessibility lenses. Readability evaluation establishes reading levels of the texts so that teachers can select texts to match their students' reading abilities. The aural accessibility evaluation is important because of the large number of beginners who are still learning the oral language. Teachers need to know the aural levels of the texts so that they can ensure that the books

selected for reading aloud are accessible to the beginning learners. Understanding the cultural content of the books can alert teachers to spend time on background information and classroom discussion when presenting certain books to the students. Educators advocate for the importance of introducing literature with authentic cultural content (Bishop, 2003). However, the cultural content may hinder students' comprehension of the stories, depending on students' familiarity with the norms and values, social interactions and living conditions, and the literary allusions used (Louie, 2005). Finally, it is important to find out whether these texts appeal to language learners in the United States. Most of the Chinese books chosen for this study were originally published in Asian countries for the first language learners. Will the stories have the same appeal to the overseas Chinese language learners?

Method

Book Sources

I obtained 1,034 titles of children's literature from five major sources: China Sprout, Asia for Kids, China Books, Chinese Childbooks, and Amazon. These books were published in China, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and the United States. I also analyzed electronic books that were available through a Taiwanese Council for Cultural Affairs Web site, which provides free access to numerous children's literature titles in Chinese (<http://children.cca.gov.tw/home.php>). The books included original tales authored or retold by native authors and translated books first published in languages other than Chinese, such as Japanese, Korean, Dutch, French, and English. I excluded original and translated books with advanced readability, such as the Harry Potter series, because higher-level language learners perform more like first language readers; thus, the books are beyond the scope of this paper.

Genres

Simply put, "a genre is a kind or type of literature that has a common set of characteristics" (Lukens, 2006, p. 15). I analyzed the collection of books based on some of Lukens' categories, such as realism, traditional tales, fantasy, rhyme to poetry, and nonfiction. In children's literature, books are classified into different genres based on their character, text structure, and setting. Although genres overlap and variations exist within any given genre, genre classification helps teachers to be aware that there are more types of literature for children than those with which we are familiar, such as folk tales or nursery rhymes (Lukens, 2006). Teachers should be sensitive to the broad and rich variety of literature available so that they can help students to appreciate a diverse set of reading materials.

Table 11.1 High frequency words in the 12-leveled text

Grade level	Volume	Words that students can recognize		Words that students can write	
1	1	400	950	100	350
	2	550		250	
2	3	450	850	350	650
	4	400		300	
3	5	200	400	300	600
	6	200		300	
4	7	200	400	200	400
	8	200		200	
5	9	200	400	150	300
	10	200		150	
6	11			120	200
	12			80	
Total		3000		2500	

Readability Evaluation

I worked with two experienced Chinese language teachers to determine the readability levels of the 1,034 stories based on the 2008 character frequency list provided by the People's Education Press in China, which was included in each of the 12-leveled reading texts adopted by the majority of elementary classrooms in China (see Table 11.1). For our collection, we focused on the first grade and second grade character lists. The first grade list consists of 950 characters, with 850 additional characters in the second-grade list. The two Chinese teachers classified the books into 4 levels: "pre-1 level" for books with fewer than 50 % of the characters that are in the first grade list, "1st grade level" for books with 50–80 % of the characters in the first grade list, "2nd grade level" for books with more than 80 % of the characters in the second grade list, and "above 2nd grade level" for books with less than 80 % of the book's characters in the second grade list, meaning that many new characters were present. It is important to evaluate the books according to frequency lists based on graded text to provide some comparison with the Chinese students in China.

Aural Accessibility Evaluation

We determined the stories' aural accessibility by matching the books to the levels in the Center for Applied Linguistics' (CAL) Oral Proficiency Exam and Student Oral Proficiency Assessment Rating Scale (COPE/SOPA-RS) (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2003). There are 9 levels in the scale, ranging from Jr. Novice-low to Jr. Advanced-high in four categories: Oral fluency, grammar (speaking), vocabulary (speaking), and listening comprehension. The first three categories are geared toward the learners' language production, while the last category focuses on their language perception. While oral fluency and speaking grammar were not suitable for text

evaluation, the categories of speaking vocabulary and listening comprehension provided a highly workable scale, with benchmarks for assessing a text's aural accessibility. When teachers are cognizant of the aural level of the books, they will be less likely to choose read-aloud books which are beyond the listening comprehension of the Chinese language learners. (See Table 11.2)

Cultural Content Analysis

I also analyzed the cultural authenticity of the books in terms of richness in cultural details, values, taken-for-granted information possessed by the community, motivation to tell the stories, and lexical choice (Bishop, 2003; Yokota, 1993). For example, in *Paper Horse* (Xiong & Xiong, 2008), the author portrayed a little girl, who lived with her grandmother, waiting for the girl's parents to come back during the Chinese New Year. It is still a common practice for parents in China to leave their only child with the grandparents while both parents work in other cities. In *Lantern Festival* (Bao, 2009), the setting was the Chinese Lantern Festival. The characters were a young boy and his balloon-vendor parents. The Chinese communities around the world have the shared knowledge that families will go to town to view all kinds of beautiful lanterns. The Lantern Festival is an important and joyous time for many Chinese families, rich and poor.

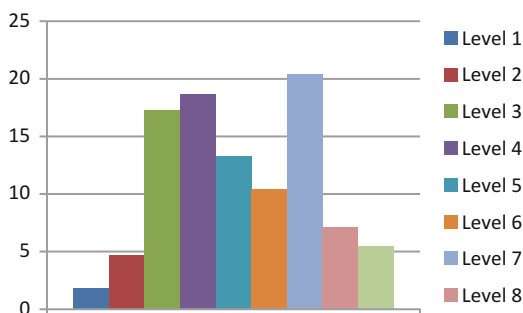
Appeal to North American Learners

Twelve heritage learners (ages 4–16 years) and 20 non-heritage (ages 4–14 years) learners, who were enrolled in a Chinese language enrichment program in a Saturday Chinese heritage language program, responded to a collection of books. The students read individual stories and rated the stories' appeal using a 4-point Likert-type scale. Books were selected by the teachers based on their estimate of children's reading and listening abilities as well as their interest levels. For the first grade and under groups, teachers selected all the language-based books because other texts were too difficult for this level. Our heritage learners in this group were American-born children who came from Cantonese-speaking homes. Similar to the non-heritage learners, they struggled as they learned Mandarin. We included texts from other genres for older and more advanced students. Although the elementary age students enjoyed traditional stories, they only enjoyed the stories which were written in English. The traditional tales in Chinese were far beyond their reading levels. Teachers read the stories aloud to students who had not yet developed the literacy skills to read the stories. We interviewed the students and asked them to write or tell us their comments for each of the stories presented. The selected stories represented all the genres in the collection. Students with high Chinese language proficiency read the stories on their own. Children enjoyed reading the books with a setting similar to their own cultural context. Understanding to what extent Chinese books appeal to English-speaking children living in the United States will help teachers to select books for their students (Fig. 11.1).

Table 11.2 Aural accessibility evaluation chart based on the oral proficiency exam and student oral proficiency assessment rating scale (COPE/SOPA-RS)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
-Includes words in very specific topic areas in predictable contexts	-Includes specific words in limited number of topic areas, high-frequency expressions, and other memorized expressions	-Includes vocabulary centering on basic objects, places, and common kinship terms	-Includes basic vocabulary in statements and questions to satisfy basic social and academic needs	-Includes basic vocabulary of a personal nature and limited academic topics	-Includes a broad enough vocabulary for discussing simple social and academic topics in generalities, but lacks detail	-Includes vocabulary for discussing concrete or factual topics of a personal nature, topics of general interest, and academic subjects	-Includes vocabulary for details about concrete or factual topics of a personal nature, topics of general interest, and academic subjects	-Includes precise vocabulary for a wide variety of topics related to everyday social and academic situations
-Includes a few memorized, high-frequency expressions	-Includes predictable questions, statements, and commands in familiar topic areas	-Includes simple questions, statements, and commands in familiar areas	-Includes familiar and new sentence-level questions and commands in a limited number of content areas	-Includes sentence-level statements in new contexts	-Includes longer stretches of discourse on a number of topics	-Includes more details in discourse on some academic topics and familiar topics	-Includes details in connected speech on a variety of topics	-Includes complex academic discourse and highly idiomatic speech
								-Includes a few

Fig. 11.1 Aural accessibility level



Results and Discussion

In the context of international children's literature, most of the translated international books available in the United States were first published in the European countries such as Holland, Germany, and France (Lehman, Freeman, & Scharer, 2010). Unlike the books published in the United States, translated books tend to present various facets of life—sickness, suffering, and even death—in a more stark manner (Louie & Louie, 1999).

Among the 1,034 literature titles, 354 of them were translated books and 680 were written by Chinese authors. More than one third of the collection consisted of translated books. Translated literature is a unique phenomenon in Chinese children's literature. Translated books have difficulty entering the children's publishing world in many countries because of marketing and economic concerns (Louie & Louie, 1999). However, it is not the case in the Chinese-speaking communities. Children's literature began its slow emergence as a result of the May Fourth movement (1919–1936) to educate the masses using the vernacular language instead of the highly-literate classical language (Farquhar, 1999).

The progressive education reform looked to the western world for inspiration and information. Intellectuals expanded their horizons beyond the classic Confucian texts to explore western perspectives. Western classics, popular works, and later children's literature gradually established a strong foothold in the Chinese publishing industry, only to be interrupted by the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s and 1970s (Farquhar, 1999) when Chairman Mao banned anything that was not aligned with the political thoughts of the central government of the time. Since the May Fourth movement, translated children's literature started with established western classics, such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Now, the translated children's literature includes most of the award-winning books from the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Korea, and Japan. Many children in North America have already read the stories that were first published in the United States and Canada, such as the *Spot* series, which focuses on a little dog (Need to add to the reference list at the end). These children are familiar with the story grammar and the general context of many series of stories, facilitating speaking vocabulary and listening comprehension.

Genres

The focus of this study was the Chinese-authored texts, which cover six genres: realism (57 %), language (19 %), non-fiction (10 %), traditional tales (12 %), rhyme to poetry (1 %), and graphic novels (1 %). Most realistic stories carry few culturally-specific details. They portray children, or animal characters acting like human beings and engaging in daily activities such as playing with friends, chasing balloons, eating breakfast, and shopping. A few of the characters are shown in culturally authentic settings. I will discuss these culturally-specific books in the content analysis section of this chapter. Because of the universal experience in activities of daily living, readers with sufficient literacy or aural proficiency should have no problem comprehending the texts in the realism genre.

The language books aim at teaching first-language and second-language learners Chinese words and phrases. Their format is very similar to the concept books for preschoolers learning the names of colors, shapes, and other familiar items in their lives. These books always come with bright and appealing photographs or pictures to accompany the Chinese characters, pinyin or *zhuyinfuhao* (Chinese sound notation systems in China and Taiwan respectively), or English words. Children have no problem with literacy or aural proficiency in language books because vocabulary-building is inherent to the purpose of the texts.

The non-fiction books cover a wide range of topics about the Chinese culture, land, language, and people. For example, books explain the nature of the Chinese characters to increase readers' knowledge in the Chinese written language. Many books provide information on various Chinese festivals to stimulate readers' interest in discovering the Chinese culture. There are also books on nature for young children, appealing to their interest in insects, plants, and animals. Chinese language learners enjoy looking at the pictures when the text is too difficult for them to read on their own.

Traditional tales include both the beloved tales deeply rooted in the Chinese culture as well as universal tales shared by other cultures. Legends, fables, fairy tales, folk tales, and tales on historical figures introduce the colorful stories which contribute to the Chinese heritage. Legends explain creation. According to the Chinese legends, Pangu pushed the sky from the earth to create the space in between them (Dong, 2009). Then, Nuwa flicked wet mud all over to give birth to the people who inhabited in the land (Liu, 2010). Houyi shot down nine hot suns to preserve the last sun that we have today to save the world from draught (Dong, 2010). In contrast, fables are didactic tales that provide timeless wisdom to the young readers. Persistence allowed a "foolish" old man to move the mountain to make it easier for folks to travel from his town to others (Cai & Zhang, 2006). The struggle between the selfish crane and the equally selfish clam only benefited the third-party fisherman who walked by to catch both for his dinner table (Yu, 2010). Many of these fables are *chengyuguxi*, providing the background stories to hundreds of four-character Chinese idioms that are commonly found in writing and oral repertoire. Chinese fairy tales put heavenly and human beings together providing entertaining

drama to common folks for generations, for example, the famous adventures of the Monkey King and his entourage who disturbed the heavenly court, the earthly demons, and the human villages (Xu, 2008). The story of the heavenly weaver and the lowly cowherd was the tale behind the Double Seven Festival, the day that the couple enjoyed their annual reunion. The kitchen god, the door god, the match-maker old man, and the wealth god also appear in the fairy tales, with the narrator explaining how the gods (like kitchen fairies) interacted with folks in their lives (Xiong & Xiong, 2008; Gan, 2011a, 2011b). In the Chinese tales, heavenly and earthly beings often interacted in daily lives. Heavenly beings could easily take on the human forms to live among villagers. Tales of historical figures have been preserved to guide children in their character development. Kong Rong, the youngest of three brothers, chose the smallest pear from the basket to show respect to his older siblings (Louie, 2007). Cao Chong proposed an ingenious way to weigh an elephant (Su, 2007). The universal tales are stories that either have their origins in other cultures or share many common elements with other cultures. Stories such as the mouse maiden looking for a bridegroom and the blind man encountering an elephant can be found in other language versions.

Rhyme and Poetry

The rhymes and poetries celebrate the nature, the seasons or childhood play. In *Mid-Autumn Moon, Very Pretty* (Hung, 2001), the rhymes describe the changing colors in the fall, the snacks children love to eat during the fall season, and the activities that they enjoy playing at this time of the year.

Graphic Novels

It is an emerging trend that Chinese artists present classic teaching and stories using the graphic novel format. We identified 4 books in this study. Tsai (2001) retold and illustrated a collection of Confucius' sayings, helping young learners to understand and to appreciate the teaching of the sage. In *Shaolin Temple*, Tsai (2006) used fun drawings and bilingual texts to make Chinese martial arts accessible to today's children who want to learn more about the Chinese culture.

Readability Evaluation

After excluding the translated books, two experienced Chinese language teachers used the 2008 character frequency list of the People's Education Press in China to categorize the readability levels of the 676 Chinese stories in this collection into

4 levels after excluding the translated stories. In Pre-level 1, the remaining books included fewer than 50 % of the Chinese characters that readers are expected to recognize in Level 1 (first grade). In Level 1, books included 50–80 % of the 950 Chinese characters that children are expected to recognize in first grade in China. In Level 2, books included over 80 % of the 850 additional characters that children are supposed to recognize in second grade in China. In Level 2+, books included less than 80 % of the Chinese characters in the first grade and second grade list, with new characters at a more advanced readability level.

Among the 676 books in this collection, 35 books (5.8 %) belonged to the Pre-level 1 category. Children in China should be able to read these books before they enter first grade. In Level 1, there were 295 books (43.6 %); 232 books (34.3 %) in Level 2, and 114 books (16.3 %) above Level 2. In order to read 50 % of these books, books at Pre-level 1 and Level 1, Chinese language learners in the United States have to be able to recognize approximately 760 Chinese characters. Recognizing the large number of Chinese characters is an extremely daunting task for these beginning learners.

Very few elementary schools in the United States offer Chinese language classes. Children often learn the Chinese language by attending weekend Chinese heritage language classes or short-term enrichment classes at school. The once or twice a week lessons make Chinese learning a very slow process for the young learners. It takes many years (definitely more than one) of such infrequent classes before these students can recognize 760 characters. In addition, teachers teach the English-speaking children to read by decoding the alphabetic script. Sight word approach, which relies on strong visual differentiation, is not an effective means to learn the English language. Students are expected to recognize only 220 sight words from the Dolch list by third grade. The number is far below the 950 characters that native Chinese children are expected to recognize just in first grade. Therefore, the instructional experience of the English-speaking learners does not enhance their character recognition in Chinese.

Aural Accessibility Evaluation

Two Chinese language teachers classified the 676 Chinese tales based on the 9 levels of speaking vocabulary and listening comprehension identified in the COPE/SOPA Rating scale. (See Table 11.3). About 80 % of the books are at Level 3 and below according to the audibility evaluation. At Level 3, texts include simple questions, statements and commands in familiar topic areas. There is a pattern of repetition. The vocabulary centers on basic objects, places, and common kinship terms. Between Level 4 and 6 are 46 % of the books. At Level 6, the texts include longer stretches of connected speech on a number of topics. The vocabulary is broadened to include simple topics with general but not detailed description. About 34 % of the books are between Level 7 and 9. At Level 9, the texts include complex discourse and idiomatic expressions. The vocabulary becomes more precise on a wide variety of topics related to everyday social situations.

Table 11.3 Texts selected across genres for students to respond

Level	Heritage students	Non-heritage students	Realistic stories	Traditional stories	Language-based texts	Non-fiction	Total number of books
1st grade & under	3	5			9		9
2nd to 3rd grade			3		6		9
4th to 6th grade	1	9	3		8	1	12
7th to 9th grade	4		14	5		1	20

Books at Pre-level 1 (5.8 % of the collection) in readability level, ranged from level 1 to 3 in their aural accessibility level. For books at the first grade readability level, about 48.8 % of the books, their aural accessibility levels range from 3 to 6. For books at second grade readability (38.3 % of the collection), their aural levels range from 5 to 9. The easy-to-read books still require relatively high listening comprehension ability, making it difficult for non-native, non-heritage Chinese language learners to understand the texts even when the teacher reads the books aloud to them.

Cultural Content Analysis

Many contemporary realistic stories portray animal or child characters in their daily routines. These books contain only limited amount of culturally specific elements. In *Panda Loves to Play* (Yao, 2009), Panda plays among the trees in the summer. Panda plays in the snowy mountain during winter. In *Scarf* (Yan, 2001), the little boy shows his love to grandmother by wrapping his scarf around grandmother's neck. In *Just Like an Elephant* (Lin & Hsu, 2001), the children had fun mimicking different animals. Books with universal themes are easy for young Chinese language learners to identify with. Subsequently, learners encounter no difficulty in understanding the content of the texts.

We have identified three cultural elements in the collection that may require teachers' instructional support to facilitate comprehension if they use the books in Chinese language classes. First, some Chinese children's literature is filled with didactic lessons that teachers and parents want children to learn. Chinese adults want children to learn the morals when they read stories, not just to improve their reading skills, and definitely not just to be entertained (Louie, 1996). However, some of the sentiments expressed in the stories are laden with Chinese values that Chinese language learners in the United States may find difficult to comprehend. In *Little Black Lamb* (Su, 2008), the little lamb walked away from his siblings when the mother took them out for a walk. He played with the birds and rolled around in the flowers. When the sun went down, he could not find his way home. At the end, the author wrote, "Poor Little Blackie, he never saw his mother again!" It is not unusual for Chinese adults to use scare-tactics to make sure that children behave.

In *Mother and Son* (Liu, Chiu, & Wang, 2009), the mother stopped going out with her friends, never ate out, and never traveled after her teenage son ran away from home. At the end, the son missed his mother and returned home, only to find his mother very sick in the hospital. This book has low readability and appropriate aural demand. However, the detailed description of the lack-of-life in the mother's world creates a strong sense of guilt for the son that may not appeal to readers in the United States. Teachers may want to discuss with their students that Chinese parents love their children. Parents want to build their children's characters through stories. Part of the character building is to ensure that children understand the importance of obedience to parents, which is a virtue in Chinese society.

The second Chinese cultural element that teachers may pay attention to is the traditional tale. Many Chinese language learners in the United States, heritage and non-heritage, have limited knowledge of the authentic Chinese traditional tale. The heavenly beings in the tale, the Monkey King's fight with various types of demons, and the young gentleman's wife turning out to be a snake demon may seem odd to students when they encounter the stories for the first time. Teachers may want to give a synopsis of the stories and a brief explanation about the characters before the books are introduced to students. When students know what to expect, resistance as a reaction to the unfamiliar tales is less likely for the western learners.

Lastly, language learners may have problem understanding the Chinese sentiment and the Chinese way of life in some contemporary realistic stories. Chinese picture books were used to transmit "the rules of life," teaching children that some values such as bravery and honesty are essential in life (Qi, 2011). Many authors embrace the didactic role of literature that is to shape children's moral values, to help children experience other's feelings, and to mold their characters (Louie, 1996). Sentimentality occurs when authors overuse feelings or emotions to make readers feel uncomfortable when readers "are asked for an emotional response in excess of what the situation requires" (Lukens, 2003, p. 121). For example, the *Love of China* picture book series published by the Chungqing Publishing House, aims at portraying the lives of children in modern day China. The stories tell about the life of children in the city and countryside. Sentimentalism prevails in the whole series. In *Lotus Lanterns and the Sound of Flute* (Bao, 2009), Ling missed her older sister, Xiaoyu. Xiaoyu was in a school bus with her classmates traveling on a narrow mountain road during a heavy rain. The rain caused a landslide which hit the bus and knocked it over a cliff. All the children were killed in that accident. It is unnecessary for the author to use such an intense and tragic event as the backdrop of Ling's sadness. The emotional impact of the accident was out of proportion with the gentle flute music and flowing river in the rest of the picture book. In *Lantern Festival* (Bao, 2009), a boy stayed next to his father in bitter cold waiting for him to finish selling the balloons so that they could watch the new year's lanterns. The overuse of emotion occurs when the author described how the boy braved the bitter cold and encouraged his father, "Baba, I am not cold. We will finish soon. There are only two more balloons. Mama told me that she would look for us at the end of the day. We will sell the balloons and go the lantern festival together." The author furthered the sentimentality by ending the story with a handicapped girl buying the last two balloons and offering one to the boy. She also gave the boy the lantern festival tickets that the family could

not afford. The dramatic occurrence of a handicapped girl bringing happiness to the boy's family is a tear-jerker that creates excessive emotional intensity.

In *A New Year's Reunion* (Yu, 2008), the father came home to spend a week with his family once a year during the new year time. The little girl had a great time visiting friends, watching her father fix their house, and eating special dishes with both parents. At the end of the story, she waved good-bye as her father left by bus, wondering how she could spend another year waiting for his return. Learners in the United States may find it hard to accept the sadness and the fact that fathers or mothers can leave their families for extended period of time because of their work. Teachers need to discuss this reality with the language learners so that they will understand that parents still love their children even though they take jobs far away from their homes.

Appeal to North American Learners

We gathered responses from 12 heritage learners (ages 4–16 years) and 20 non-heritage (ages 4–14 years) learners, who were enrolled in a Chinese language enrichment program in a Saturday Chinese heritage language program. The oral proficiency levels of the 10 non-heritage learners were at junior novice-mid level (corresponding to Level 2 of the aural accessibility scale) and 10 were at junior novice-high level (corresponding to Level 3 of the aural accessibility scale) according to the COPE/SOPA rating scale (CAL, 2003). Three heritage learners were at junior novice-mid level (corresponding to Level 2 of the aural accessibility scale), 3 were at junior novice-high level, 1 was at junior intermediate-low level (corresponding to Level 3 of the aural accessibility scale) and 4 were at junior advanced-high level (corresponding to Level 9 of the aural accessibility scale). Teachers read the stories aloud to students who had not yet developed the literacy skills to read the stories themselves. We interviewed the students and asked them to write down or tell us their comments for each of the selected stories.

Students with low oral proficiency could hardly understand the books, even when teachers read the books to them. Students with low oral proficiency responded mainly to the pictures and the limited texts that they understood, missing the cultural nuances of the stories. Students with high proficiency (all of them were heritage learners) did not like to read contemporary realistic stories with cultural authentic sentiment and setting. Two heritage learners (14 years old and 16 years old) experienced no difficulty reading the Chinese Breeze Graded Reader Series. However, they responded negatively to the ways relationships were portrayed in the books. They found the relationship among the man and two ladies in *Whom Do You Like More?* (Liu, Chu, & Wen, 2008) “very weird,” and “scandalous.” They did not like *Mother and Son* because the story was “too sad” and “boring.” These two heritage learners were born in the United States and speak Mandarin at home. Fully immersed in the American culture, they demonstrate resistance towards strong sentiments expressed by Chinese characters in the stories.

Conclusion

The Chinese children's literature in the United States is increasingly available to parents, teachers and students. The collection covers a variety of genres. Many of the books were intended for Chinese language learners. However, with most of the books published in Chinese-speaking countries, the readability of the books appears to be too high for English-speaking learners in the United States. For the same reason, the books are more appropriate for learners who have the oral language to understand the texts. Many heritage and non-heritage learners who are beginning to learn Chinese have low aural capacity. They hardly understand the stories even when teachers read the stories aloud to them. Instead of reading the whole text, teachers may guide students to learn new words from the text and pictures, very similar to shared reading with young children learning to read in their first language. Frequent reading using this approach will still enhance vocabulary growth (Collins, 2010). For the more advanced learners who can read the texts on their own, teachers should initiate a rich discussion to help these students understand the values and contexts of the stories.

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