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1. Introduction

Anyone lucky enough to be a parent will confirm that their child is the most precious and valuable part of their life. A contemporary parent is expected to do everything to make sure that their offspring receive the best possible start in life. One of the things parents pay particular attention to nowadays is their youngster's education. Living in today's information society, parents want their children to have a head-start. After all, in America what is called "kindergarten" is not a mere daycare institution, but is synonymous with "school": an institution to educate children. On the other side of the globe, China has only recently completed the transition from a planned economy to a market economy, which means that Chinese society is becoming more and more of an information society and that literacy and education in general are becoming increasingly important assets for the Chinese job seeker. Thus, the Chinese government attaches great importance to early child education. Like in the United States, school starts at 6 years age and before that many children (in particular in urban areas) attend pre-kindergartens. Especially since the one child policy was introduced, parents pay much more attention to the quality of their child's education and literacy (Su, 22). One important aspect of early education and literacy achievement is early reading socialization. This means that books for kindergarteners have gained importance and influence in the last years. Parents and kindergarten teachers buy books and read a lot to children and sometimes children will already start reading before they attend primary school.

In many toddlers' lives, books already play a crucial part and mostly they are not just books meant for fun but include a didactic purpose, some books more overtly than others. Books do not just teach to read per se but work semantically in two ways. On the one hand, they want to reflect the world around us to teach the young reader, or as it were "listener", about the world around them, while on the other hand, books always influence their reader and sometimes project an ideal target state rather than actual conditions. We all know that children are very impressionable and soak up all information to learn about and form their view of the world. Additionally,

[s]ome believe that the purpose of art is to stimulate the imagination and allow children to go over to the other side, as it were, without leaving home – that in stories a child can confront danger and passion and take extreme risks without forsaking the comforts of everyday reality. [...] On the other side of the debate are those who see images as causative with respect to behavior and formative with respect to attitude.

They claim that children reflect what they see. Accordingly, the imagery shown to young children must, they aver, be carefully monitored. (Spitz, 207)

Reading to a child is what Spitz (xiii) calls “a relational activity” because the reader and the listener usually interact physically and verbally. Spitz [xiv] calls this then a “conversational activity”. Children will learn during these conversations about the world, “moral lessons” and “prejudices are subtly implanted” (Spitz, xiii).

The ideologies produced and conveyed by cultural texts “provide[...] people with the sense of who and what they are.” (Nodelman and Reimer, 177) As we all know that today’s children are tomorrow’s adults who will shape this world, the effects of literature on our youngest are essential. I, therefore, deem it important to look at children’s books to learn more about the cultures they represent and the cultures they generate.

I decided to undertake a comparison of American and Chinese books because in European thinking, China and the US seem to represent the two outer ends of the stratification of the culture continuum: the “most western” and the “most eastern” cultures. As Nodelman and Reimer (80) claim that “ideology is always a matter of politics. That is, it relates to the ways in which people get and maintain power over one another”, it is to expect that those different cultural and political systems and its prevalent ideologies will influence the children’s literature it produces.

As its name implies, children’s literature is a body of texts defined by its intended audience. What it is and how adults think about it are intertwined with society’s ideas about children – about who they are and how and what they need to read. [...] a society’s ideas about children are a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. [...] [T]he ideas operate as part of the society’s *ideology*: the body of ideas that controls (or at least, tries to control) how members of the society view the world and understand their place within (Nodelman and Reimer, 79-80)

China as the representative of a very old civilization with a long culture of philosophies on education and behaviour indexes is still strongly influenced by the teachings of Confucius but also socialist thinking. The US on the other hand, is a comparatively very young society, composed of many different ethnicities, powerfully influenced by puritan and capitalist ideas. Nevertheless, the origin of what we consider contemporary children’s literature appears to be neither American nor Chinese.

Defining children's books as "works produced ostensibly to give children spontaneous pleasure and not primarily to teach them" (Darton, 1 qtd in Nodelman and Reimer, 81). Children's literature] that might fit Darton's definition was mainly a European phenomenon. What Europeans and European-influenced cultures currently see as the literature children obviously need and will like didn't even occur as a possibility to people in other places until Europeans began to influence them. (Nodelman and Reimer, 81)

In China especially, this kind of children's literature is only a very recent development which emerged after the cessation of socialism there, during which Máo Zédōng "enforce[d] an ideology of absolute equality of all people of every age [and] a special children's literature ceased to exist." (Nodelman and Reimer, 81)

In this text I want to narrow down the scope of my investigation focusing on the representation of families in Chinese and American picture books, to examine what modern families look like or should look like according to these books. According to this theme, I will investigate the assumptions about and the roles of children within the family, the relations amongst siblings (if existent) and parents/children and parent/parent, expectations about children and about the roles of children and gender roles within families. Families are the first and at the outset therefore the most important source for education. Not only intellectual education, but emotional, psychological and physical development also depends strongly on the family of origin. Many kinds of families exist and especially in the last two decades alternatives to the traditional heterosexual father-mother-child family have emerged. Although constellations divergent from the mainstream have probably always existed, they now have become well-accepted to a large extent and the focus of the public eye; and are for that reason also part of literature. I will also investigate how recent developments within the institution family are reflected in these books. In the following chapters, I will firstly try to give an overview of the actual state of families in these two countries, looking at statistics, laws and other material to discover differences or perhaps even contradictions between the literary and the "real" world (sections 3. and 4.).

I hypothesize that Chinese and American picture books portray very different families. Both countries are extremely large and populous countries even though the US with its approximately 300 Mio people [Richards et al, 12] has less than a third of the Chinese population (Richards et al, 13). The US is inhabited by many different ethnicities coming from very different cultures such as African-American and Hispanics, but also people of

Asian descent. In China - although there are also a large number of minorities – these ethnic differences do not assume the same relevance in the analysis as these subcultures largely share a long common history. “China has typically been characterized as more homogeneous in terms of cultural traditions and value system” (Hong, 128). The deviating lifestyles of the westernized urban and poorly educated rural populations will assume greater relevance in the Chinese examples. I therefore assume that families of these countries differ not only in structures but also in the most emphasized values. This is not only relates to the depiction of the actual family situation but also what is promoted as the “ideal”. Nevertheless, it is possible that this is not the case as in these times of globalization one culture might be overruled by the other. Modern China stems from a very old civilization with ancient traditions. China is also qualified as being on the rise, about to conquer the economic world and subsequently spread its culture around the world. In the last decades the US has been the dominant world civilization, spreading their lifestyle and worldview to the whole world in particular via TV and movies. The US has been culturally colonizing the world for a long time. Hollywood, its movies and its actors have conquered the most distant corners of the world and American music is popular virtually everywhere. These pictures and sounds not only bring stories to the world, including China, but transmit the American culture and the American way of life. US American culture becomes mingled with local cultures. I will attempt to determine if this also holds true for picture books. We will also see if one of the societies, most probably the Chinese, is influenced by the other by having assumed literary conventions seen as unnecessary in the opposing culture. Chou for example suggests in her article on co-sleeping that the many Chinese picture books that deal with the little children’s fear of having to sleep alone use an “imported idea of childhood” because in Chinese culture little children commonly do not sleep alone. Chou (19) thinks that these have been imported because picture books have only recently entered the Chinese market¹ and are mostly translated.

I will take a closer look at books for children between 3 to 6 years of age: An age range when children usually do not read themselves but are read to and thus will pay close attention to the visual aspects of the book. I will consider nine books (five American and four Chinese) which I have chosen for closer examination. The uneven distribution reflects the unsymmetrical number of original picture books available in both markets (as discussed in detail in chapter 0.).

¹ Although it has to be mentioned that Chou refers only to Taiwan, which is of course a matter of dispute whether it is part of China or not.

My approach will be largely (but not exclusively) semiotic, assuming images (and words) always evoke more than what they reveal at first glance because “pictures are no more “concrete” and no less abstract than words. They are what practitioners of semiotics call signs – representations whose meaning depends on a repertoire of learned strategies” (Nodelman and Reimer, 275). The assumption here is that artists use codes and conventions known in their culture when sketching picture book illustrations (Nodelman and Reimer, 11) because “to describe the visible world in images we need a developed system of schemata” (E.H. Gombrich, 87 qtd in Nodelman and Reimer, 11). I will also include a cultural studies approach as “[c]ultural studies is concerned with the political implications of the matters it studies. It often focuses on showing how local knowledge is connected to larger systems of knowledge.” (Nodelman and Reimer, 243). I will outline the history of the institution “family” in the respective country (see point 3. and 4.) and will attempt to determine how this history and the related politics have shaped the representations of families in picture books today and whether the depictions correspond to modern families at large. Furthermore, I will try to detect customs or behavior within the depicted families (‘structure’) that represent cultural specifics as “[a] group’s culture is not simply the ways in which its members behave - its characteristic customs and actions - but also the ideas and values that underlie those characteristic practices.” (Nodelman and Reimer, 243).

2. Features of Picture Books

Picture books are children’s first encounter with the written word. Words will accompany them all throughout their lives and even though modern society is becoming more visual, words will gain importance as the child gets older. They form the basis for future learning. The first encounters with books and words are not only meant to familiarize children with literature and its conventions but as with all books, picture books

offer[...] children insight into the feelings of others, as a transmitter of cultural heritage, and as a resource for the development of cognitive and linguistic skills. (Nodelman and Reimer, 30)

As the name suggests, picture books not only offer written words but also pictures.

[C]hildren (and those who read to them) are excited not only by a message, by its symbolic meaning, by themes in a book that connect with themes in lives, but also by a persuasive, compelling, or stirring manner of presentation. (Coles in Spitz, xi)

The visual part of the book constitutes a very important aspect of children's books. Although Nodelman and Reimer (275) discard the assumption of children having "an intuitive ability to understand pictorial information" and that pictures are "automatically understandable", Nodelman and Reimer (276) instead assume that pictures and picture books are only comprehensible for those who have learnt the cultural conventions of pictures and picture books.

Children are exposed to a variety of pictorial traditions, and it behooves us to realize that images are not transparent. Just as children need to learn the alphabet and Arabic numerals and punctuation, so they must learn our pictorial codes; we really cannot take them for granted. (Spitz, 114)

The assumption about the natural intelligibility of images is so prevalent that practically all books for toddlers contain illustrations. Nodelman and Reimer (276) attribute this to the fact that picture books are always bought and often chosen by adults – who believe in the instinctive intelligibility of and in children's preference for pictures. However, because parents believe pictures are naturally intelligible and do not pose a challenge, many parents pressure their children to proceed to reading more text-heavy books as soon as possible. This is a reason why the picture book market has been declining in the last years (Bosman).

I will be considering picture books exclusively throughout this paper (not illustrated books). This means that those books are heavily dependent on their images and that the images interact with the verbal text. This is because they are intended for young listeners who are able to read yet and therefore will strongly engage with the images. The texts are mostly undemanding as

[i]n picture books that tell stories, the texts are characteristically succinct and undetailed. (Nodelman, viii)

The pictures support the text and make the books more complex. The role which pictures play in the narrative may vary. The pictures may tell the entire story, might complement a text or are complemented by a text. They can reinforce the text or maybe even contradict the written text and, thus, change it. The contradiction might alter the story or add a level (e.g. irony) (Nikolajeva and Scott, 119). Especially

the pictures in contemporary books are often intricate in detail and sophisticated in style, even when they accompany simple texts, or even single words; and they often accompany complex stories that focus on elements different from the ones on which the pictures themselves focus. (Nodelman, 19-20)

In contrast to the fast-paced new media like TV, TV advertising, music videos, web 2.0 that have produced a youth with trained fragmented attentiveness but inexperienced in following “written texts, which have not only endings but also beginnings and middles, [...] (Nodelman and Reimer, 145), (picture) books offer the possibility to always return to them, look at them at your own pace, turn the page at your leisure and even turn the page back if necessary. In that way they give the opportunity to contemplate as long as is needed and to discover new implications with every revisit while still offering a constant and thereby what Spitz (30) calls a “meaningful and safe world”.

This “meaningful and safe world” (Spitz, 30) as it is depicted in picture books is hardly ever representational, but rather more as most adults would expect it to be: socially, culturally or morally instructive. This is why children’s books are frequently fables with explicit or implicit morals, messages and themes (Nodelman and Reimer, 67).

In focusing exclusively on themes as messages, readers assume that all stories are parables and fables – that they are not really about the characters they describe, but about their readers. The characters in parables and fables portray general human behavior to teach specific truths that can govern readers’ own future actions. (Nodelman and Reimer, 67)

Peter Hunt (3 qtd in Nodelman and Reimer, 128) goes so far as to say that children’s books by simply representing the world are always “educational or influential in some way; it cannot help but reflect an ideology. All books must teach something”. Although for the reader, the goal of reading might simply be to acquire “a body of knowledge of literature and life, what reader-response theorists call ‘repertoire’” (Nodelman and Reimer, 17) in order to become part of the reading community, i.e. to be able to participate in discourse on texts with peers. The resulting repertoire will then furnish a reader with “information and strategies for meaning-making authors assume their readers will possess” (Nodelman and Reimer, 53). In the long run, a repertoire of morals (conceived from a repertoire of literature) is meant to teach values which assimilate the child reader into adult community (Nodelman and Reimer, 97). To achieve this assimilation “[c]hildren’s literature is almost always didactic: its purpose is to instruct” (Nodelman and Reimer, 198).

What is actually taught to the reader is strongly dependent on the prevalent ideology of the society and the culture within which the book is produced but also of the author and the reader. According to Alston (9) “issues of power and control are embedded” in all families and in the ideology of the ideal family. What Foucault (in Alston, 10) refers to as “disciplinary power”

uses families to immerse children in state-promulgated ideologies. “These ideologies dictate patterns of behavior which insist on conforming to culturally constructed conventions of family” (Alston, 10). An ideology meant to create obedient subjects and disseminated among others by means of children’s books (Alston, 10).

In order to convey ideological implications, a text represents reality as necessary (Nodelman and Reimer, 40): For that reason it will manipulate the reader using the strategies of identification and manipulation through which readers discover the intended morals. Readers will identify with a character within literature when they find similarities between their own life or personality and the literary one (Nodelman and Reimer, 68). Thus the term “implied reader” does not refer to an actual person, but rather “represent[s] sets of tastes and interests that real readers are invited to share” (Nodelman and Reimer, 17). The manipulation following identification is then achieved when the implied reader i.e. “child readers who accept their similarity to a character are [...] asked to reach certain clearly asserted conclusions about right and wrong behavior” (Nodelman and Reimer, 179).

Numerous [...] children’s stories use the process of identification and manipulation to reach [...] illogical conclusions. Even if it is sometimes misleading, the process of identification and manipulation can be an effective teaching device. (Nodelman and Reimer, 68)

This need for morals leads us to a further peculiarity of books for very young readers. Children’s books mostly have two implied readers: a child and an adult reader. The child is considered by some theorists only a pseudo addressee, while texts actually cater to the well-funded adult who after all is the one purchasing the book and has different expectations about a “good read” than a child reader (Nodelman and Reimer, 21), like for example the above mentioned preference for *picture* books for children and the demanded didacticism.

While child and parent/adult differ in their expectations of books, there is also a “gulf between their writers and their intended readers“ (Nodelman and Reimer, 14) which is reflected in ideological beliefs about the implied reader that surface in books for children. The main assumptions about children and childhood in American literature are that children are

innocent, blissfully naïve and inherently good [...] emotionally vulnerable, [...] inherently wild [...] egocentric [...] highly egocentric [...] inherently conservative [...] [and] inherently gendered (Nodelman and Reimer, 87),

Nodelman and Reimer (86) identify a number of further characteristics which are common “assumption about children’s literature”. Among those are that they

have simple texts, bright, colorful pictures, and happy endings. [...] the most important thing to consider is the age of the children they are chosen for. [...] Children respond with delight to fantasies [...] Children like books they can relate to: stories about typical childhood experiences. [...] Children’s stories shouldn’t describe unacceptable behavior [...] [and] should also not contain depictions of frightening things[,] [but] contain positive role models [...] [and] valuable lessons about life.

It can be presumed (from the framework of the book *Pleasures* and the author’s heritages) that Nodelman and Reimer focus on the ideology and the thereto linked assumptions about children’s literature of American (and affiliated) culture(s). These assumptions and ideological ideas are beliefs that adults (i.e. also parents) have about children. Thus, they also reveal propositions about the relationship of adults and children. One often cited proposition is that adults colonize children by controlling what they know (or do not know) to exert control over them (Nodelman and Reimer, 101). In this way children are turned into what adults want them to become and make the assumption about them self-fulfilling prophecies (Nodelman and Reimer, 135).

Children’s literature, then, represents an effort by adults to colonize children: to make them believe that they ought to be the way adults would like them to be, and to make them feel guilty about or downplay the significance of all the aspects of their selves that inevitably don’t fit the adult model. (Nodelman and Reimer, 97)

It will be therefore interesting to see whether these assumptions, from which we might deduce underlying ideologies concerning child-parent relationships can be found in the selected books and whether they are to be found in both American and Chinese books.

Besides having more illustrations, children’s books differ from the literature of adults through the frequent use of “musicality, rhyming, [...] humor, surreal juxtapositions, elegance, simplicity and suspense” (Spitz, 8), “metaphor and symbol” (Spitz, 10). It is also noticeable that picture books despite their “morals and emotional commentary” tend to emphasize action rather than setting or characters (Nodelman and Reimer, 203). It is also a common feature that animals act as protagonists. In many cases these protagonist animals are anthropomorphic and are considered child substitutes. This means that they actually represent children and that child readers can and should identify with them. The use of animals therefore serves various purposes. Animals are often automatically associated with certain characteristics which then require no further explanation (even with young readers as these characteristics reoccur

throughout literature), like e.g. the sly fox, the wise owl and so on. However Nodelman and Reimer (194) suggest that animals also represent the “animal-like condition of children”. Meaning that children are still fairly unaltered by civilization and its culture and thus are still close to their natural and innate instincts, just like animals. Animals therefore embody a belief in the wild, untamed but also innocent spirit of children.

Like human children, Peter Rabbit is torn between the opposing forces of his natural instincts and the societal conventions represented by the mother’s wishes. (Nodelman and Reimer, 194)

Additionally, animals of different kinds are easily distinguishable and recognizable. Goldstein (qtd in Spitz 73-4) detects a further advantage in the use of animal characters:

Her answer in part is that “children’s books ... use animals to encourage empathy, to permit children to identify without being blocked, presumably, by the particulars of race or sex or ethnicity. The logic of this universalization/abstraction”, as she explains, “has it that making all the characters animals is an advance over making them all white. The logic also implies, however, that it would be impossible to ask children to identify with individuals culturally defined as visibly different from themselves.”

However in addition to these reason, animal characters are sometimes used quite simply because most children really like animals.

Children are a different kind of “reader” compared to adults. The youngest ones are simply listeners who may focus more attention on the visual part of the books. Adults who read books to children often fail to notice the details in the accompanying pictures because they are too engaged with the words. Another reason is that children are not as biased as adults, for them much of what they see is still new and fascinating.

In fact, conventional criteria about what constitute culture, art, literature (including children’s ‘classics’ and memories of childhood reading) can get in the way, as can certain kinds of ‘fixed’ moral and religious beliefs. Fortunately children, especially very young children, do not approach picturebooks [sic] with these preconceptions and prejudices and their openness and curiosity can teach many of us adults lessons about looking. (Arzipe and Styles, 22)

Arzipe and Styles (20) think that the meaning of text is constructed by filling gaps and “infuse[ing] intellectual and emotional meanings into the pattern of verbal symbols [while] these symbols channel his thoughts and feelings” (Arzipe and Styles, 20). “[A] gap is any aspect of a text that a reader makes sense of by providing knowledge from a pre-existing repertoire” (Nodelman and Reimer, 54).

According to Joy Moss, “Experienced and competent readers use a variety of reading strategies as they interact with texts: activating relevant prior knowledge, schemata, and appropriate concepts; predicting; questioning; inferencing; allocating attention; creating mental images; comprehension monitoring; relating new information to old; using the author’s organizational framework; and restructuring schemata or accommodation” (20) (Nodelman and Reimer, 31)

To construct meaning all readers use mental templates (Mines qtd in Arzipe and Styles, 184) which are built on things which one has experienced in the past. Arzipe and Styles (152) observed this in their study as well:

It is fascinating to look at the different types of experiences which the girls draw upon in interpreting the pictures. In both cases they use their own first-hand experiences – feeding the ducks in the park, for example, or playing with a moving toy. There are also those experiences whose reality is of a different nature. Kathy’s knowledge of life in prehistoric times comes from books read, films or TV programmes seen or museums visited. [...] This thoughtful and reflective dialogue with their past provides children with a powerful means of moving forward in their thinking.

Evidently child readers have less experience than older ones as they have not lived that long, yet (Nodelman and Reimer, 100). While this is true for life experience, it is certainly true for literary experience as well. Therefore Arzipe and Styles (25) call them “‘naïve’ with respect to literary conventions”. That is the reason why young children perceive and interpret texts in such a different way to adult readers.

Nevertheless picture books help us to turn these “naïve” readers into young experts of culture and literature because “picture books are a significant means by which we integrate young children into the ideology of our culture” (Nodelman qtd in Arizpe and Styles, 20). With time children move “from the ‘intimate’ to the ‘extra personal’”.

As their experience of books and of life widens, children develop more subtle schemata: not only information but also ways of connecting that information to a text’s reference to it that allow them to make greater sense of what they read and get deeper pleasure from it. (Nodelman and Reimer, 53)

After they have gained some knowledge about the world and how it works and also about literature, they can use this knowledge to construct meaning (Arzipe and Styles, 169).

Whichever we start with, the verbal or the visual, it creates expectations of the other, which in turn provides new experiences and new expectations. The reader turns from verbal to visual and back again, in an ever-expanding concentration of understanding... Presumably, the children know this by intuition when they demand that the same book be read aloud to them over and over again. Actually, they do not

read the same book; they go more and more deeply into its meaning. (Nikolajeva and Scott qtd in Arzipe and Styles, 20-1)

“There is now the distinct possibility that another story is unfolding and this leads [...] to a further layer of response, [e.g.] the ‘intertextual’.” (Arzipe and Styles, 169) With this possibility for revisitation and then reevaluation, picture books follow what Spitz (197) considers their agenda that is “to please and to comfort, as well as to instruct”.

I already mentioned that in order to best cater for the implied child reader (or rather all of the assumptions about him or her mentioned above), picture books are often simplified. Traditionally

texts of children’s literature tend to follow familiar patterns in fairly straightforward ways and provide fairly straightforward meanings and messages, and their object often is to make children comfortable with the world as adults understand it. (Nodelman and Reimer, 24)

These simplification are also evident in the representations of a world that is barely “realistic” (Nodelman and Reimer, 134) when it is exclusively “simple, happy, homogeneous, easily understood and much like the utopia adults like to imagine”. In particular, when it comes to families

children’s literature promotes a specific ideology; it attempts to instil in its readers certain values which dictate how families should be: loving, respectful, preferably with two parents, contained in domestic harmony and sharing wholesome home-cooked family meals. Yet the relevance, function and significance of family are never brought under scrutiny. (Alston, 2)

On the one hand, “simplifications” (i.e. often omissions) might serve the author well when dealing with a complex matter, it certainly is linked to the assumption that young children will not be able to understand complicated situations or deal with unpleasant ideas. On the other hand, this exposure to overstated happiness leaves the young reader yearning for a family life that is unrealistic and largely unattainable.

Even though young readers are fairly “naïve”, Arzipe and Styles as well as Nikolajeva (in Nodelman and Reimer, 213) perceive a change in the tradition of the picture book in recent years.

[A] quiet revolution has been taking place within children’s literature. These picturebooks [sic] (along with other branches of children’s literature) diverge from any concept of children’s books as ‘simple’, if by simple we are referring to such aspects

as clear-cut narrative structures, a chorological order of events, an unambiguous narrative voice and, not least, clearly delineated and fixed borders between fantasy and reality. We can observe a shift in artistic representation from the mimetic toward the symbolic. (Arzipe and Styles, 22)

One wonders to what extent young inexperienced readers are capable of comprehending intertextual allusions, symbolism or complex (i.e. for children often confusing) narratives. It is clear that children find their own joy in most of these books anyway, mostly by constructing their own meaning. Nodelman and Reimer (213) argue that most of these modern picture books are not as radical as suggested by some. At least not when it comes to the underlying ideologies conveyed. Nodelman and Reimer (213) observe in these books the same (aforementioned) ideological beliefs about children and childhood as in more traditional children's narratives. Also Alston (135) finds in her book that even though

the style of writing has changed, no longer are texts punctuated with religious dogma; children are not usually whipped for disobeying their parents and nannies and governesses are generally, a thing of the past. But what remains strikingly similar is the all-important disciplinary subtext of family ideology: children should be brought up in loving respectful families, preferably by two parental figure, and an experienced reader will be able to recognize a 'good' family by the idealized home in which it lives, by its hared space, and by the food it consumes.

3. Chinese families now and then

Although China is a much larger country than the US with a population about four times greater (301 million American [Richards et al, 12] versus 1.3 billion Chinese [Richards et al, 13]), Chinese are a more synchronized people because Chinese unity has always been a big concern. Chinese society consists of 91.5 % ethnic Han Chinese and the remaining 8.5 % (Richards et al, 13) consists of more than fifty-six groups of minorities (China Botschaft, Bevölkerung). Also religiously Chinese people are officially in accord as the majority of them are atheists and only 4 to 12 % declare themselves as member of one of the world religions (Richards et al, 14 or China Botschaft, Religionen). Furthermore, the centralized authority during (毛泽东 here:) Máo Zédōng's time from 1949 until 1976 has been and is not only interested in political harmony, but used to order a homogeneous and uniting ideology for society as a whole (Griessler, 17-18). The main difference is to be found along the line of the urban-rural chasm. Many urban areas are in essence cut off from the rest of China (i.e. also the rest of the world). They then do not have access to modern means of technology and education to the same extent that city dwellers do. Thus, they are not subject to recent

technological and with it ideological developments or the Western influence which is growing stronger in China.

Already more than 2000 years ago 孔丘 (here always “Confucius“) main doctrine was harmony. Although Confucius was born in approximately 551 BC, to this very day, China is still heavily influenced by his teachings. Confucius, the great thinker and philosopher, established the guidelines which after a long period of evolution (including its elevation into the status of a religion) are still a pervasive philosophy in China and which influenced even the smallest societal unit, the family (Moritz, 42) .

Confucius was mainly concerned with social order in times of uproar. Although Confucius mostly talked about the state and society at large, his rules and behavioral guidelines were also meant for the family entity:

[D]ie Familie ist das Vorbild für die gesamte Gesellschaft. (Moritz, 63)

Just like (Chinese) society had a sovereign and inferiors, during this time (and until only recently) families consisted of a ruling father, a submissive wife and obedient children. A father was even authorized to enforce his will via brutal measures (Shen, 155). The importance of order, stability and harmony within the family were part of Confucius' doctrines which according to him have a significant function in a civilization. This is still reflected to this day in China's vital ancestry worship which tries to maintain the organization within a family even though one person has left the hierarchy by death (Griessler, 34).

Confucius wanted to establish and maintain order in the antique Chinese society by preserving these prevalent hierarchies. Within this hierarchy Confucius defined 5 main relations of which every individual's social networks consisted:

Fürst und Untertan, Vater und Sohn, älterem Bruder und jüngerem Bruder, Mann und Frau, Freund und Freund. Bis auf die letzte Kategorie, die als ein Verhältnis unter Gleichen gelten könnte, zeichnen die sozialen Grundbeziehungen strenge paternalistische Über- und Unterordnungsverhältnisse nach. (Griessler, 34)

Some of those associations have changed their nature or they are not as important anymore as they used to be. While the relationship of prince and subject has become rarer, the relationship of husband and wife is levelling out. These hierarchies are also reflected in the kinship terms as Mandarin Chinese has discrete terms for older and younger siblings (哥哥 gege and 弟弟

didi: older and younger brother; 姐姐 jiejie and 妹妹 meimei: older and younger sister). These differentiations on the grounds of age even extend to spouses of the parents' siblings (ie the wife of an older brother of your father would be called 伯母 bomu whereas if the brother was younger than your father she would be called 叔母 shumu, and so on). In the Chinese context older and younger brother are also becoming more alike even though this kind of relationship is slowly disappearing due to the one child policy.

Thus, as all of these associations and their denotations survived to some extent in modern Chinese society, with them - at least partly - Confucius' rules of behaviour within these relationships also still exist: The hierarchies were/are secured by every individual's behaviour according to the morals and rites (Moritz, 41). This means that everyone should be aware of their own position in the hierarchy and act accordingly. Confucius propagated the following morals:

Ehrfurcht, Ehrlichkeit, Aufrichtigkeit, Treue, Selbstüberwindung, Rechtschaffenheit, Geradheit, Ausdauer, Standhaftigkeit, Entschlossenheit, Höflichkeit, Achtsamkeit, gewissenhafte Pflichterfüllung. (Moritz, 61)

The deeper meaning of these morals for Confucius was the preservation of a harmonious society. By living according to these morals, people frequently sacrificed their own advantage for the good of the community (Moritz, 61).

Disziplinierung des Individuums im Interesse von Herrschaft, bedeutet seine Selbstbeherrschung und Selbstbescheidung [sic]. So wurde [...] das Streben nach persönlichem Nutzen, besonders nach materiellem Gewinn, diffamiert (Moritz, 54).

Society's good was and largely still is at the focus. To have a functioning social order, the one in the higher position (e.g. a father) had to always refrain from cruelty (Moritz, 61), arbitrariness, suppression, exploitation (Moritz, 53), and the like of the inferior. On the other hand, the inferior's morals demand(ed) for the subject to refrain from presumption or even revolution (Moritz, 55). Thus, 孝 (xiao i.e. filial piety) and familial loyalty are one of the major Confucian virtues (Griessler, 34). Beständig also perceives a strong influence of these Confucius' teaching in contemporary Chinese society and its approval of conformity as a result:

Insgesamt ist in der chinesischen Gesellschaft eine wesentlich größere Bereitschaft zu Gehorsam und zur Akzeptanz von Hierarchien festzustellen als in westlich-demokratischen Gesellschaften, was auf den chinesischen kulturhistorischen Hintergrund und soziopolitische Gegebenheiten in China zurückzuführen ist, in denen Autorität nicht primär als Einschränkung und Entmündigung empfunden wird, sondern vielmehr

als Erleichterung und Entlastung: Stabilität und Ordnung, welche die Akzeptanz von Hierarchie und Autorität voraussetzen, werden dem in Konfuzianismus so gefürchteten Chaos vorgezogen, so dass der Begriff der Autorität in China wesentlich positiver konnotiert ist. (Beständig, 4)

This philosophy has greatly influenced Chinese families throughout the centuries. It has always been self-evident for the Chinese youth that part of their role within the family is participation either in the family business (e.g. farming) or other wage earning. In their later years they were socially obliged to take care of their elders. Consequently, the more wage earners there were in relation to dependents in a clan, the better it was for all members. Shen (94) states, “that is why children production and breeding in China [had become] a focus of all members of families. It is even accepted by them as an essential moral duty”. Because traditionally a large family was considered a blessing (Shen, 69), “Chinese people put their family in a very important position” (Shen, 94). During the communist reign it was also true that the more sons working at the communal fields a family had, the more income they received (Countrystudies, Household). Women, on the other hand, did not continue with their family, as upon marriage they left their family of origin to live with their husband’s family. Again this has manifested itself in the Chinese kinship terminology with the word 外 (wai) among others denoting

(4) Familienangehörige der weiblichen Linie (über Mutter, Schwestern oder Töchter mit jm verwandt)

as well as

(1) außen; äußerlich; außerhalb: [...] (5) [...] nicht in enger Beziehung zu einem stehend; nicht von derselben Organisation (bzw Klasse usw.) (Xu et al, 827)

Therefore, sons were preferred to daughters in ancient China (Shen, 2).

During Máo Zédōng’s reign, large families were successfully propagated as Máo linked a large population with military, economic and political power. The average Chinese woman had 6 children at that time (Heilig). However, in 1979 - after Mao’s death - China decided on the one child policy to avoid a population escalation. During its initial years, the one child policy was very strictly enforced. There were only few exceptions to the rule, for example in some places (usually in the countryside) women were allowed a second child when the first-born child was a girl or handicapped. Brothers – at least legally – basically vanished. Another possibility to evade the policy would be to remarry a childless person. Nevertheless, the big

success of the policy demonstrated the will of Chinese people to sacrifice their own interests and subordinate themselves for the collective good (although there are also reports of rows between citizens and family planning officials). It is also reported that in cases where incentives, (high) fines or threats (of punishments e.g. imprisonment) did not have the desired effect, second children were prevented by forced abortions and sterilizations. Rumor has it that at times “illegal” children (uncovered at raids) were taken from their parents (Hays). Additionally, the government promoted later marriage and therefore later births, but also the equality of both sexes. Nevertheless, it is no secret that abortions or infanticides of female fetuses - although illegal - were a common practice in China for a long time (Shen, 112). Nowadays, the Constitution of China protects children and their rights (Shen, 82). However measures to curb population growth are difficult as many children who violate the one child policy are not registered officially. “According to some estimated [sic] there are 6 million undocumented children in China” (Hays).

While fertility measures in China are still highly uncertain most experts agree that the TFR² is now around 1.6 - far below the reproductive level of 2.1. The range of uncertainty is indicated by the fact that credible sources have published TFR estimates that range between 1.4 and 1.8 children per women. The future trend of fertility in China is highly uncertain. (Heilig)

We may assume that in all probability the fertility rate is below the reproductive level of 2, at which the population would rather de- nor increase. This means statistics imply a decline of the Chinese population in China at the moment. Even though there is an increased demand for better educated (instead of simply many) farmworkers/children also in the countryside (Countrystudies, Household), rural families tend to be larger than urban families still today. While “[a]ccording to China’s fourth national census, the average size of families in 1990 was 3.96 persons” (Shen, 69), now the “nucleus family [became] the major form of modern Chinese families” (Shen, 68). Nevertheless, in the cities three generations live together frequently. Healthy grandparents help raise the children and work in the household while both parents go to work (Countrystudies, Marriage).

With the success of the one-child policy economic prosperity rose (Hays) but soon the problems of the new policy showed. The new generation of only children was quickly called the “new emperors and empresses of China”. The only children were extremely spoiled. Of course there are also studies attesting the opposite, that those children are socially no different

² Total fertility rate.

to their preceding generations, but are instead more compliant to make new friends in new situations (Zhang, *Die Einzelkinder*). The fact is that most of the children now have 6 adults (4 grandparents and 2 parents) all giving them their undivided attention (and money), but also entrusting them with all their hopes for the future (Arte.tv). This means that these children grow up with the extreme pressure of having to succeed. This pressure shows itself (amongst other ways) in the great importance attached to educational success. On Arte.tv it is reported that nowhere in the world parents spend so much time and money for the child's education. As the contemporary job market is tough, competition for the best grades begins in kindergarten in urban areas (Arte.tv). While in the countryside many parents take their children out of school early so they can help in the family business (Nagy) and there is a high percentage of people who are still illiterate, children in the big cities are not meant to "waste" their time playing and have to learn for their later career before they can talk properly (Arte.tv). Due to this great demand numerous special early education centers have emerged (Hou). Later on in school, many children's days are filled with studying from morning to evening. Even in the afternoons and evenings after school and on the weekends, children mainly spend their time studying to achieve better grades (Arte.tv). Children whose sole responsibility has always been studying (and for whom health and moral and ethical instructions was pushed into the background during their early years), turn into adults who have yet not learnt to take care of themselves. However the next generation of parents does seem to be returning to the maxim that character formation is the most important lesson for children. Prof Chen thinks that the Chinese should learn from the western education system insofar as not only concrete (i.e. often abstract) fact learning is important in child education (Zhang, *Die Einzelkinder*).

However, now that birth control has been effective, China is gradually facing the European problem of an ageing population. "In Shanghai, people over 60 already make 21.6 percent of the population, and are expected to make up 34 percent in 2020" (Hays). In all of China, the number is estimated to be 24 % by 2050 meaning a total of 322 million elderly people (Shen, 55). In a society where government will not look after its elders but relies on the next generation to do so (Shen, 46), this problem is slightly different than in most social European countries. While European countries are struggling to maintain the financial resources for supporting the elderly, China lacks people to be responsible for this kind of care. One person cannot look after (or – regularly not - pay for the care of) up to 6 elderly people. China is especially lacking women for that purpose as they used to shoulder the main responsibility of

caring for the elders, but they have become even fewer than before in the wake of the one child policy due to illegal infanticides and abortions of females. Apart from that, women now generally participate in the workforce leaving them less time and energy for the care of the elderly (Shen, 59).

The Chinese Government has now loosened the one child policy (e.g. in rural areas if the first-born is a girl or in urban-areas when both parents are only children), but must realize that many young adults - those who are the first generation born with the one child policy - do not want to have more than one child, even if they were allowed to (Hays). While children used to contribute to the family income, nowadays in the cities they are seen as a financial burden. Parents not only have to answer financially for the child's needs but are also restricted in their own earning capability. Shanghai officials think the reluctance to have more babies is primarily due to these financial considerations (Hays). Zhang's (Die Einzelkinder) findings show that those "new emperors and empresses of China" set more value on individual fulfillment, but lack responsibility and self-dependence, perhaps explaining this preference for having just one child.

As the one child family is propagated as the ideal family and as it has become the established family image in idealizing advertisements, in real life as well as in the heads of many young Chinese parents, I will refer to heterosexual, married parents with one boy as the "ideal Chinese family". This does not represent any evaluation on my part and is not meant to imply that this is the "best" kind of family.

A further trend in Chinese families (as in many other countries) is the steep rise of the divorce rate. Historically Chinese family law supported arranged (Richards et al, 8) and coerced marriages, concubinage, polygamy and child neglect. This changed with the first Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China (Richards et al, 9). In the year 1980 a Marriage Law "promot[ing] late marriage and late reproduction" came into effect. The last amendment to the law was made 2001:

It supplements the divorce system, such as recognizing the visitation rights of one parent to the child after divorce and the right of the housekeeper in the family to claim economic compensation. Recognition of legal liabilities for domestic violence, maltreatment, and desertion of family members were added (qtd Chen in Richards et al, 9).

While the divorce rate of 1.46 per 1,000 in 2006 does not seem that high when compared e.g. to that of the United States of 4.95 per 1,000 population (Richards, 13), it designates a rise of 0.41 per thousand (from a national divorce rate of 0,105 percent in 2003) in only 3 years (Richards, 21) and 0.8 to 1.85 per thousand until 2010 (FlorCruz).

Once rare in China, divorce is becoming more common than ever. After thirty years of rapid economic growth and the influence of Western ideology, as more and more women gain financial independence and start to embrace individualism, fewer and fewer women chose to cherish traditional values and tolerate an unhappy marriage. Meanwhile, the liberal divorce law has also contributed to the rising divorce rate. (Richards et al, 9)

Along with these new possibilities enabling easier divorces, migrant workers (rural workers who commute to big towns and leave their families behind for a long period of time) has been underscored as one of the factors causing divorces (Richards, 68). This is relevant as

[z]urzeit wachsen in China 58 Millionen Kinder auf dem Land ohne ihre Eltern heran. Die Eltern dieser Kinder arbeiten in den Städten und verzichten darauf, die Kinder zu erziehen und mit ihnen gemeinsam zu leben (Zhao qtd in Li, Jianming).

Migrant work will be an issue in one of the books which will be analyzed in this study (see point 6.1.3.).

In addition to removing the stigma of divorce (especially for women)

[t]he law now provides for a “no fault divorce”. Though in practice, judges tend to maintain marriages instead of ending them, the liberal divorce law makes divorce much easier to obtain today than in the past. (Richards et al, 9-10)

“No fault divorce” means that basically there need not be any other motivation for divorce than a simple change of mind. Officially this is called “loss of mutual affection” but this “loss” is of course difficult to revise (Richards et al, 104). Hence, divorce has plainly become easy. Furthermore there is no waiting period before a divorce in China anymore. If the couple agrees to divorce, it can be completed within a few minutes with almost no expense. It may be executed so quickly that even the new term “flash divorce” has established itself for the procedure (Richards et al, 103).

Although historically (also with regard to Confucius’ philosophy) women were considered to be the property of and therefore inferior to men, nowadays men and women have equal rights (Shen, 106) and are equals in front of the law. Woman may take part in the work force

(adding up to 46.7 % of the workforce; Shen, 172) and become financially independent from their husband or parents. This entails that many of their children are educated outside of their homes. “In urban areas, full-time kindergarten is the dominant form of preschool education” (Shen, 89). Legally there is also no fixed gender division concerning child rearing in China.

Constitutional Law states: “[...] Both husband and wife have the duty to carry out [China’s] family planning policy. Parents have the duty to rear and educate their underage children, and children who have come of age have the duty to support and assist their parents. [...]” (Richards et al, 36)

The same applies after divorce: both parents have the right and the duty to care for their offspring (Richards et al, 126). China has a system of guardianship and visitation after divorce. While the guardian is accountable for most aspects of the child’s life, the other parent has the right to visitation. After the “tender years” (i.e. a child under the age of 2) either parent may be awarded guardianship.

However Shen claims that outside the legal sphere, women are still habitually expected to be submissive (“strong women are fine, but not as [...] wives”; 113) and are willing to devote themselves mainly to being wives, mothers and household managers (Shen, 113). In contrast thereto, Hong (24) quotes Bonney et al. 1992 and Hsieh and Burgess 1994 who claim that the “earning differential between male and female workers was one of the smallest amongst industrialized nations”. Housework is also allegedly shared more equally between the sexes than in some other Western cultures (Wang and Li, 1982 qtd in Hong, 24).

Furthermore, the major role grandparents often play in Chinese family life is illustrated by the fact that the relationship of the child with the grandparents is a crucial factor for the court decision on guardianship (Richards et al, 129).

Unlike civilizations founded on grounds of Abrahamic religions, Chinese historically did not condemn homosexuality as “none of the major Chinese religions consider homosexual acts as sin” (Books, 2). Actually “nearly every emperor in the Han Dynasty had one or more male sex partners” (Books, 5). Homosexuality only began to be deplored by the time Western philosophies gained influence in China. In the early 2000s homosexuality was finally legalized again (Books, 9). Exact numbers of how many homosexuals there are in China do not exist as the Chinese government neither approves of, nor disapproves of or promotes gay issues (Books, 10). Although there is little gay bashing in modern China (Books, 10), there are no gay rights organizations and “gay people still have to endure prejudice from the justice

system” (Books, 11). This may be due to the fact that as aforementioned, the continuation of the lineage had and still has great importance in Chinese culture. Even though homosexuality was not frowned upon men were expected to beget children (Books, 2). This might be the reason why homosexual marriages are still not permitted in China.

During the 2006 National People’s Congress and again in 2007, [sociologist and sexologist] Li proposed the same-sex marriage bill again. [...] This bill was dismissed both times. (Books, 12)

Furthermore, “the Chinese government forbids gay movies to be shown on TV” (Books, 10). Considering this Chinese policy of ignorance and censorship on TV concerning homosexuality, the strong governmental influence on book releases (see section 5.) and the ban on homosexual marriages, it is to be expected that there are no Chinese children’s books featuring homosexual couples.

Considering that Chinese ideological history of Confucian collectivism and socialist equality approximate to occidental democratic principles, it is of little surprise that the educational style of modern Chinese parents has become less strict, more democratic and children are attended to more than they used to be (Shen, 156). Other factors for this change towards more care orientation and greater esteem for autonomy in child education might be an increase in the educational level of parents (Hong, 71 or 101) and a decrease in the number of children per woman (Hong, 77). So owing to family planning policies, the Western influence and with it the influence of the insights into child development (see also point 0 below) and the economic changes in China, the educational style and with it the changing values in childrearing of Chinese and US-American parents seem to approximate each other too: Out of the six top values, which parents consider important to transfer to their offspring, 5 are identical.

For Americans, the top 6 value items in order of preference are ‘good manners,’ ‘tolerance/respect,’ ‘responsibility,’ ‘religious faith,’ ‘independence,’ and ‘hard work’. For Chinese, the 6 most valued qualities are ‘independence,’ ‘responsibility,’ ‘hard work,’ ‘tolerance/respect,’ ‘thrift/saving,’ and ‘good manners’. (Hong, 112)

By comparing these values one notices the fact that unexpectedly ‘independence’ is valued more by Chinese than by American parents according to Chinese surveys (Hong, 114). Their interpretation of “independence” seems to deviate from the interpretation of independence by American parents though. In China unlike in the US, “independence” seems to be no opposition to “obedience” (Hong, 129) as it would be understood by the Western parents. In

China, “independence” rather “means self-sufficient or self-reliant.” (Hong, 129) Additionally, “self-sufficient or self-reliant” have a different notion in Chinese than in American context.

[...], the primary purpose of the emphasis is not to pursue personal happiness and success but rather to contribute to the glory of the family and the well-being of society. (Hong, 12)

Therefore, in Chinese understanding “autonomy may not be so distinct from conformity” (Hong, 12). Although Chinese parents generally do not request unquestioned obedience anymore (Shen, 156) talking back to parents and swearing are still objectionable (Shen, 204). Despite these aspects, Chinese urban families’ top concern is their child’s competitiveness – especially in the job market (Nan, 1998 qtd in Hong, 138).

Consequently, as autonomy and conformity are not in opposition and considering the strong influence of Confucian “filial piety” and the only recent history of obedience under Máo Zédōng’s reign, I would have assumed that in general Chinese parents demand compliance to a greater extent than American parents. I will attempt to determine whether the selected picture books reflect Hong’s findings that there are hardly any differences in child rearing value’s anymore (Hong, 132).

4. American families now and then

“The American family” is even more difficult to outline than the Chinese family. Unlike the Chinese population, US-Americans do not share such a long common tradition. US-American tradition started only a little more than 500 years ago. The First Nation’s families’ customs can be neglected here because their influence on the modern American family is insignificant. Today’s American society is mainly rooted in British and French culture but was strongly enhanced by the Spanish (13 %), Irish and African cultures (13 %), not to underestimate all the other minorities including Asians (who make up 4 %; Richards et al, 13). “As a society, the United States is characterized by diversity in values/norms and heterogeneity of behavioral models offered to children” (Hong, 137). The common ground was their association with a Christian belief. The “American culture is centered on the values derived from Judeo-Christian roots” (Hong, 111). Protestants and Roman Catholics make up 76 % of the population (Richards et al, 13). The USA is not called a “melting pot” without reason. All these ethnicities have created the new way of life of Americans and therefore new family values (see above on differences of child rearing values in point 3.). On the subject of literature Northrop Frye (in Nodelman and Reimer, 229) suggests that

European culture was immersed for many centuries in the language and thought of Christianity, the archetypal images and structures of European and, therefore, mainstream North American literature have emerged from the central images and narrative patterns of the Bible.

Thus he expects Jewish and Christian values and images in most American texts (Nodelman and Reimer, 229). Besides the common Christian religious basis, the USA has been split politically by two opposing views for a long time. While modern China is strongly influenced by Confucius' teaching and socialism, the USA has always been a democratic society. In contrast to China's (still prevailing) collectivism, the "central tenet of the democratic societies [...] [is] that each human being is a unique individual with unique tastes and interests, entitled to the freedom to make choices" (Nodelman and Reimer, 108). This belief in individual freedom is represented in "countless children's book [sic] and movies [which] reinforce the message that people need to respect and to treasure the ways in which they are different from one another" (Nodelman and Reimer, 108). Despite this expressed inclination for personal freedom, two political directions have formed within US family politics: Conservatives want to return to traditional Christian beliefs such as the belief that sex should be performed only between married heterosexual couples and the prohibition of divorce meaning an obvious restriction of personal liberty. The opposing Liberals do not see such a "decline" in values in modern society, but instead consider the political reaction to societal changes as deficient and demand more support for families (like economic support for single parents, additional daycare programs, etc.) (Giele, 2007 in Wiseman, 15-16).

As with Chinese families, the American family has gone through many stages and changes throughout the centuries. "The colonial family was clearly a major productive unit" (Gill, 16). This meant that family was also defined through their common cause of production for survival; family members lived and worked together. Later during the Victorian era, a family organization developed which Gill claims is what is called "the 'traditional' American family" (Gill, 17). At this point in history, the wife became the "Angel in the house" while the men turned into breadwinners earning their money outside of the home. For this reason, the then highly valued education of the young increasingly became the duty of the wife. Furthermore, the family as such lost many functions which were outsourced to institutions like schools, hospitals, prisons, etc. and became the unit

providing a relatively secure locus for the uniting wife and husband around common purposes and interests, including centrally the siring, bearing, nurturing, rearing, and providing moral and other instructions to children (Gill, 17).

As

Citizens and scholars alike widely presume that the ‘normal family’ is not only superior to all others but close to universal historically and cross-culturally, a quasi-natural institution, virtually the core definition of family (Popenoe in Stacy, 4)

Wiseman describes that the modern US-American welfare state and its legislation also still regard “family” in a similar way. According to Wiseman, the USA state not only has a clear concept of who is considered to be part of a family but also which roles they have to play in the construct:

First, “family” is defined as [...] a husband, wife, and minor children. Second, the husband/father is expected to be the primary breadwinner, while the female spouse is a nonparticipant in the labor force, especially before the minor children reach school age. Third, the most likely reason for the loss of the male breadwinner is death. Fourth, only those individuals who coreside are considered part of the nuclear family. Finally, family members are expected to pool and share social and economic resources. Despite the longevity of these assumptions, or perhaps because of it, contemporary scholars have recently begun to challenge the traditional definition of family that has driven family policy for the last sixty years. (Wiseman, 25)

And families are certainly changing. While at this point in time we consider nuclear families with heterosexual parents, consisting of a bread-winning father and a housewife mother with one to two blood-related children living in one household as a “traditional” family, those families are becoming fewer and have to give way to new constellations. It has even become difficult to define “family” in the modern Western society. Although, as Stacy (4, Introduction) claims

the word *family* continues to conjure an image of a married, monogamous, heterosexual pair and their progeny,

this certainly does not hold true in many cases nowadays. There could be any number of adults looking after or living with any number of children in any constellation; with any member openly being hetero-, homo- or even transsexual. Members might be blood-related but need not be. They might not even be related by blood or law. Not even a shared household is a sure indication for family ties. Some family members might live far away, some might come from different backgrounds and ethnicities. Changes in family structure are related to changing views on marriage. While marriages used to be connections of economics importance, nowadays most American marriages are entered into for emotional reasons. The

loss of the economic necessity for marriage (i.e. both sexes have the opportunity to and are expected to work and thus support themselves financially) has led to increased divorces rates.

Over time, divorce changed from something considered as a rare privilege, primarily for wealthy men, to a common, if still not widely accepted act increasingly available to women. [...] in 1970 [...] the state of California became the first state to remove fault as grounds for divorce. This periods of virtually unrestricted divorce[,] [was] popularly referred to as the era of no-fault divorce (Wiseman, 8).

Like in China the increasing divorce rate has been largely attributed to those “uncomplicated” no-fault divorces. Berk qtd in Wiseman (9) claims that this is why “the divorce rate in the United States presently is the highest in the world”.

Statistics say that from 1940-45 to 1975-80 the duration of marriage for White women fell from 32 years in average to 23 years (from 32 to only 15 years for Black women) (Gill, 18-19), that from 1950 to 1990 the divorce rate rose from 3,5 to 14,2 % (*U.S. Bureau of Census* in Gill, 22), that from 1960-64 to 1985-89 the amount of pregnant women getting married dropped from 52.2 to 26.6 % (Gill, 18-19), that from 1970 to 1994 “single-parent families among all families with children increased[...] from 13 to 31 percent” (Rawlings and Saluter in Gill, 25), that in 1990 36.3 percent of American children were living apart from their biological fathers (Blankenstein in Gill, 25), that from 1976 to 1990 the number of working mothers grew from 31 to 53 % (Gill, 28), in particular “that nearly two-thirds of mothers of children under six are employed” (Gill, 46) and that “after divorce, the percentage of children in poverty doubles from 19 percent to 38 percent” (Gill, 39).

In other words this means

- about half of American couples (who live together) are not married
- approximately a quarter of American adults live alone
- American marriages last on average around 20 years (although life expectancy is increasing)
- about one third of all children live with only one parent (usually the mother) and
- even more without their biological fathers
- now more than half of American mothers are working mothers and
- that poverty is a big concern for single parents

in the 1990s.

Consequently modern families often extend to step relations when parents re-marry (or at least enter into a new relationship). Gill does not concern himself with families which are not biologically related at all but still live together with a sense of kinship. Such extended and complex family structures make family life more complex than it used to be. Children have to live in and commute between two homes, get to terms with stepparents and step- and/or half-siblings. Holidays become more difficult to plan as more people (who mostly do not want to celebrate together) are concerned. The situation gets even more complicated if the concerned persons do not get along well or even harbor feelings of resentment against one or more family members and life has to be organized around these emotions (so that for example ex-relations do not meet each other).

Considering also families with adoptive or foster children, adoption has become the focus of attention in the public eye through famous adopters like e.g. Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt, Madonna, Sandra Bullock, Elton John etc. to name just a few. These examples also exemplify that

prospective parents are primarily white, middle-class and relative affluent, but the available children are disproportionately from poorer and darker races and nations. (Stacy, 51)

But these examples do not demonstrate that

favored straight married couples, for their part, typically seek healthy infants, preferably from their own race or ethnic background (Stacy, 51).

This means that the vast majority of children are hard to place. Most US-states therefore resort to single parents and gay couples to take in these children (Stacy, 51). Making these families not only exceptions due to their parent constellation but additionally because of the transgressions of the boundaries of class and ethnicity.

Therefore what Elton John and his partner David Furnish have done publically in Great Britain (although they did not have to resort to the mentioned crossing of the race and ethnicity boundary) is becoming an option for more and more homosexual couples in the US (though not in China, see above point 3) who wish to become parents. According to the US Census in 2000, 22 % of male same sex couples live with underage children (James in Stacy, 53). In other words, almost a quarter of male homosexual couples were parents. We may well assume that this number (due the weakening of the taboo) has risen since then. In the United

States specialized businesses which cater especially for the needs of same sex parents have emerged (i.e. adoption agencies, lawyers, playgroups etc.) (Stacy, 52).

Some gay couples have children from their previously heterosexual relationships (Stacy, 54). People who cannot or do not want to become parents “the conventional way” are not limited to adoption.

Access to effective contraception, safe abortions, and assisted reproductive technologies (ART) unhitches traditional links between heterosexual love, marriage, and baby carriage. (Stacy, 50)

Further modern possibilities of becoming parents include are sperm donations by known or unknown sperm donors. On the female side, there might be a so-called traditional surrogate (woman donating and “incubating” the egg) or gestational surrogate (only carry the biologically unrelated child to term) involved. The participation of a surrogate mother may lead to the family constellation of up to 5 parents (i.e. egg donor, sperm donor, surrogate woman and social parents). Certainly this is a very unusual situation and is not so relevant for the majority of children (yet?). Moreover, even if a child has been delivered this way, most parents probably will not explain this to their children - at the young age of picture book reading. Stacy (e.g. 77) even identifies some further forms of family structures, for example families of four social parents because both genetic parents live in homosexual relationships or any other form of polyamory (i.e. any love relationship openly including more than 2 people). Only children who grow up connected to all the involved parents will need explanations – that could be provided with the help of children’s books.

These new alternatives means of reproduction mean that parenthood on the one hand is not self-evident anymore but also that parenthood is often voluntary, well considered, and - prepared. Children are not a means of economic support as they used to be in a mainly agricultural society: initially a labor force and in old age social security (Stacy, 50). Nowadays the opposite is true with children needing a lot of attention (in the increasingly dangerous surroundings of urban areas and less supportive social - real life - networks) and money (due to increasing general costs of living, higher value on financial competitiveness and the outsourcing of education which is also increasingly essential and expensive). Therefore, parenthood is often an emotional decision today. “[...] Parents today typically seek the intimate bonds that children seem to promise” as it is often not found with partners (Stacy, 50).

In modern Western society, it is a commonplace to label the contemporary young generation as a lost generation (see e.g. Gill's book title "Posterity lost"). While Gill (4) sees

family [...] historically [...] [as] the primary institution devoted to preserving the species over time and in which our interest in posterity has been pointedly expressed,

he claims that this is not the case anymore. Gill bemoans a loss of morality and "family values" in his books due to "expanding ranges of individual choices and endless change" (8) but with it a highly uncertain future too. According to Gill, due to the fast development of technology, our society at large has "too much choice" (Gill, 187), which leads to an unpredictable future. People have a shortened time horizon and are less committed to their families and off-springs than they used to be. Thus, for Gill

[d]ivorce, spouse and child abuse, illegitimacy, shattered homes, fatherless children, the feminization of poverty, latchkey kids, hopelessly inadequate day-care facilities, falling test scores, juvenile crime, drugs, violence, and suicide (Gill, 1)

have become keywords of modern society and illustrate its slow breakdown. A collapse caused by malfunctioning families. This is (according to Gill, 208) caused by "a turning away from hard work, preparation, discipline, and sacrifice in favor of casual, undisciplined, easygoing risk-taking". These arguments are in line with the opinions of American conservatives who believe that a cultural and moral decline has initiated the problems of "the American family". According to them, part of this moral decline is the prevalent secularization that has

undermined the norms of sexual abstinence before marriage and the prohibitions of adultery and divorce. The solution to a breakdown in family values, to conservatives, is to revitalize and reinstitutionalize marriage. (Wiseman, 15)

More liberal minds do not see a deterioration of morals but rather believe that "the American family" is in the process of changing due to economic and societal changes (Giele, 2007 qtd in Wiseman, 16).

Although all of these topics are part of Western society, the question is if they really have increased or only become less of a taboo topic and are therefore discussed more openly in the public sphere. Certainly, the last keywords (crime, drugs, violence and suicide) on the list are without a doubt harmful for the individuals concerned as well as society in general, but the question is rather to which extent they have actually increased or intensified. Furthermore, other issues can be seen as rather ambivalent, not only negatively. Divorce also means having

parents who are not stuck in an unhappy or maybe even abusive and destructive relationship. While illegitimacy connotes negative associations, due to the stigma illegitimate children used to carry, nowadays the number of children deliberately born to unmarried parents is increasing. As it only means that parents are not married but not necessarily that they do not care for the child jointly and excellently and therefore also constitute a 'good' family. The question of fatherless children is also a topic of rather controversial discussion, with no clear outcome so far. While some declare that children need both mother and father, there are also traditional societies where children generally grow-up without their fathers even not knowing who their father is but without the feeling of deficiency. In Chinese Mosuo society, women are allowed to lead open relations with whom and how many men they want. If a child is sired, it stays with the mother and her family while the father stays with his. The father does not have any responsibility toward the child or the mother (also because it is not necessarily definite who the father is). The question of fatherhood does not arise. A man's sole responsibility is to support his maternal family. The Mosuo family constellation certainly provides an alternative to the father-mother-child family, which was long considered universal around the world (Stacy, 152-187). The Mosuo also seem to prove that the "sensation" of fatherlessness (which many claim to be so destructive for children) is created by social rather than biological conditions, giving the prospect that fatherless children (but also motherless ones) do not necessarily have to come to harm if their caretaking parent and society in general can provide for adequate alternatives.

In the American context families typically comprise of more than one child. According to the US Census the average American woman bears more than 2 children in her lifetime. The only child still holds negative associations of being selfish and spoiled (White, *The Purpose*). But only children are becoming more and more common these days. In the words of the Only Child Platform which has been set up to boost the prestige of only children this means:

There are an estimated 20 million only child households in the United States alone. [...] The percentage of women who have one child has more than doubled in the past 20 years up from 10 % to over 23 %. Only child families are the fastest growing families in this country and most industrialized Western European countries. According to the Census Bureau's Birth Expectation Survey, the number of women ages 18 to 34 in the United States who plan to have one child has increased steadily from 12.7 % in 1985 to 13.9 % today. In New York City over 30 % of children are only children. (White, *The Purpose*)

After the baby boom in the 1950s when the average woman bore 3.7 children, the fertility rate had decreased below and by the 1990s leveled off slightly above reproductive level

(Chinaprofile). This means that the population is not merely “reproducing” itself but, due to a birthrate above 2 children per woman, is growing moderately.

The very necessity for a platform like Only Child to build up the only child’s reputation affirms that one-child families have not yet reached a status of being “typical”. Thus, when I subsequently refer to the “ideal American family”, I will refer to “a married, monogamous, heterosexual pair” (Stacy, 4) with more than one child from which others are considered deviant. This is linked to the assumption that this is what most US-Americans will have in mind when hearing the phrase. Or as Wiseman (3) calls it “In some ways this definition remains very alive and well” as this definition “is still the framework for modern social policy” (24). However at the same time he acknowledged that it, although still present, is not necessarily true:

On the other hand, additional family definitions are now a part of the mainstream culture being influenced by social changes such as attitudes toward divorce, marriage partners, remarriage, culture, and values along with economic influences and government practices. (Wiseman, 3)

Part of the redefinition of family is the discussion about same-sex marriages in the United States. The debate is controversial in the United States. Many (often conservative) people disapprove of same-sex marriage. As mentioned before they see society endangered by a collapse of morals and values which reveals itself (amongst other ways) in homosexual marriages. This belief is often rooted in a deep religious belief that marriage is a divine means of reproduction. For this purpose only love between man and woman is beneficial, leading them to believe that only heterosexual marriage is divine and natural. Therefore DOMA Watch has been created to “support the preservation of marriage as a union of one man and one woman” (domawatch, About domawatch.org).

Nevertheless,

Currently, 30 states have adopted marriage amendments.

Only 5 states have neither a statute nor a constitutional provision prohibiting same-sex "marriage": Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York and Rhode Island.

Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, New Hampshire, and Vermont are the only states that have legalized same-sex "marriage." Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Iowa legalized same-sex "marriage" as a result of high court decisions: Goodridge (MA), Kerrigan (CT), and Varnum (IA). New Hampshire and Vermont legalized same-sex "marriage" as a result of legislation. Same-sex "marriage" is also legal in the District of Columbia. (domawatch, Issues by state)

Stacy (200) goes as far as claiming this notion of the traditional family as the “ideal family” is controversial or indeed almost dangerous nowadays:

The normal family ideology fosters bad faith, bad behavior, and bad public policy. A singular focus on monogamous heterosexual marriage justifies discrimination and disrespect for everyone who lives outside the charmed family desertion, high divorce rates and family instability. It also underwrites the malignant levels of hypocrisy (Stacy, 200).

Evidently (and as mentioned above), there are far more family structures possible which are indeed not predestined to be of less value than these seemingly ideal families.

Indeed, new sociological, demographic, and policy analysis suggests that family, as both a social and economic construct is a dynamic concept, the definition of which must be altered to fit the needs of modern American citizens and civil society. (Wiseman, 25)

Undoubtedly sometimes the “deviant” families prove healthier than the described “old-fashioned” or “ideal” ones. However, I will only use it as a visionary “ideal”. Whether these families are necessarily ideal in the real world will not be discussed within the scope of this paper.

We already saw this with the example of the one child family. Although it is deviant from the ideal, they already make up around one quarter of today’s families. This is a segment large enough to warrant being represented in children’s literature. Consequently in this context, the question arises which kinds of families are common enough that they should find their way into mainstream literature in a comparative extent? In my analysis all relevant kinds of families are comprised of at least one adult and one child.

Families have not only changed in their outward appearance of who belongs (and who does not) but also in the way they perceive themselves, in values and ideology and in everyday life and rituals.

Family is biologically useful, and yet the nuclear family, no matter how much it becomes naturalized by myth, is always a social and cultural construct (Alston, 11).

Ideologically a huge change in the position of the child has occurred in the last century. Due to less child deaths and a lower birth rate, children are taking up an increasingly central position within families (Alston, 21).

Families are now run, partly, to care for the children, whereas previously they had been run for adults with children playing an important role as contributors to the economic unit (Flanders, 41 qtd in Alston, 15)

This change has also led to a reversed power relation to a certain extent. While parents are still in control of their children on the surface, emotionally children have somewhat taken control over their parents. This becomes evident in particular when one watches advertisements.

[A]dvertisements are now aimed at children, [...] adults are now concerned with satisfying the consumerist demands of their children. It is not only the terms of consumerism that the child holds a newfound power but the child has also become emotionally central to the family. (Alston, 21)

While in the 20th century family ideally consisted of a bread-winning father and a house holding mother, rituals like the family meals with homemade food were celebrated and began to constitute a crucial sign of a ‘good’ family (Alston, 105). In the 21st century many more mothers became part of the work force too and family meals often consist of prefabricated meals, eaten in solitude (or at least in an incomplete family circle) (Alston, 124). The condition of the family home has also changed with the working mothers having less time to spend on cleaning and tidying up, instead focusing more on their children’s needs, the level of domestic cleanliness is no longer always the top priority. Even though

[m]aterially, the changes are immense, and yet culturally there remains a tendency to yearn for a lost golden age of nuclear family values, to promote the family that eats and plays together with a father, a mother and their children. (Alston, 21)

Still (Alston, 83 claims), in children’s literature the ‘good’ families are depicted eating healthy food together in a clean, cozy and secure home.

All the facts mentioned above are part of the reality of American children today. Thus, if books want to be authentic they need to reflect these facts. However, Alston (1) claims that “family in children’s literature is, at heart, deeply conservative”. Certainly not all families (i.e. children) are concerned by the previously mentioned examples of modern development, meaning not all books will deal with them. Many children do not live in the traditional family and should have the opportunity to identify with the books as well. I will strive to discover whether there are parallels between the books and “real life” (as it is defined in the statistics) and if Alston’s claim for the conservatism in family representation still holds true; and also if it holds true for Chinese family representations.

In contrast to the Chinese ideologies of social order by self-abandonment for the collective, US-American society celebrates individualism. The American doctrine “from rags to riches”, emphasizes each individual’s possibility (but also each individual’s own responsibility) for his or her happiness. This is also one of the assumptions underlying the popular “underdog” stories, in which initially powerless or inferior characters finally triumph.

The discussion of the valuation of conformity and autonomy occupies a central place in the U.S. child socialization literature. [...] This ideology emphasizes self-reliance and individual responsibility and dictates that individuals are personally responsible for their own progress – or lack of it – in the social hierarchy. [...] The pursuit of individual happiness and success is seen as the primary endeavor of life. (Hong, 11)

We will determine if literature reflects that the Chinese work for the community’s welfare whereas Americans strive only for their own personal benefit.

As already mentioned in Chapter 3, Hong’s study (12) found that the most important value of American parents concerning child education is “good manners” which would mean that they tend towards conformity along the conformity-autonomy continuum. “Independence” only ranks fifth with American parents whereas “independence” (those with a different connotation; see above point 3.) ranks first amongst Chinese parents. Nevertheless, Cherlin 1999; Margolis 1998 qtd in Hong, 15 claim that

[i]n contemporary American families, there is a movement from a traditional patriarchal structure toward a more democratic and less authoritarian one.

I will attempt to determine whether the most important values mentioned by Hong are to be found in the books analyzed.

5. Children’s book markets

The Chinese book market differs significantly from the American one. As China used to be a communist county from 1949 to 1979, the Chinese book market was owned and controlled by the stated during that time. Even nowadays the Chinese book market is strongly influenced by the Chinese government (BIZ Peking). Education was always considered a joint responsibility of family and state. During socialist times, children were – in contrast to the Confucian teaching - seen as individuals primarily obliged to the state (and not their families). Similarly, motherly love and warmth were even criticized by the communist regime (Zhao in Li, Jianming). Consequently, the government assumed the responsibility for educating its

youngest subjects (Beständig, 46) and for this purpose realized and used the power of books to influence its subjects and spread the preferred ideologies.

The Chinese have always considered reading as being extremely influential for learning and proper character building (Beständig, 2). Nevertheless, the children's literature market has only recently developed in China (Beständig, 24). I will deal with the reason for this later, and will now proceed by discussing more details on the Chinese book market.

There are about 580 official publishing houses in China (BIZ Peking, 1). Beständig (33) regards this as a small number in relation to the potential market. All of them are state-owned. They are divided into central, i.e. national houses (as governmental institutions) and regional houses. The regional houses in the various provinces are officially specialized in one of the following fields: politics and law, education, literature, science & technology and child and juvenile literature. The 328.000 Chinese publications within the children's sector of 2010 are divided into the categories of books, schoolbooks and picture maps (BIZ Peking, 3). Besides the official, governmental publishing houses, in the last years a vast number of unofficial private publishing houses have emerged (BIZ Peking, 1-2). Although these houses are private, they may not defy governmental control. In order to publish a book legally, it must obtain an ISBN (International Standard Book Number) and those numbers are only issued to governmental publishing houses. Hence, private agencies have to cooperate with the official publishing houses in order to purchase some of their ISBNs. As the official houses are liable for the content of the books having their ISBNs, private publications might be restricted by the ISBN-offering publishing house. Nevertheless, private agencies are considered more market-oriented (Beständig, 35). Therefore, these agencies are increasingly carrying out their program planning independently (Beständig, 30).

Furthermore, while in socialist China in the past publishing houses did not have to take financial factors into consideration, they must do so now (Beständig, 22). This means that publishing houses now have to compete financially in the (relatively) free market. In order to use existing resources sensibly, mergers and acquisitions are transforming the market structure significantly (BIZ Peking, 1-2). These economic considerations have recently led to the establishment of 30 publishing groups (BIZ Peking, 3). Nonetheless, publishing is still governmentally directed:

Hinzu kommen eine Zentralisierung und Konzentrierung von Zuständigkeiten in einigen wenigen Institutionen sowie die Organisierung der Beteiligten in Verbänden, wie zum Beispiel dem Verlegerverband und dem Chinesischen Schriftstellerverband, in dem alle namhaften Autoren und Literaturwissenschaftler Mitglieder sind. Diese beiden Verbände durchdringen die gesamte Buchproduktion und umfassen auch Teile des wissenschaftlichen Betriebs. (Beständig, 31)

For example, the China Children's Press and Publication Group (CCPPG) established in the year 2000, which is led by the central committee of the communist adolescent league, regulates a ninth of the annual production of Chinese children's and juvenile literature (Beständig, 37).

During its reign, the authority of the communist party was so absolute that the content did not even have to be convincing (Beständig, 1). But in 1982 "freedom of speech" was established.

[S]eit 1982 ist in der Verfassung [...] erstmalig in der volksrepublikanischen Geschichte die „Freiheit der Rede, der Publikation, der Versammlung“ (Art. 35) rechtlich verankert, die Inanspruchnahme dieser Rechte kann jedoch durch die staatliche Autorität eingeschränkt werden:

However, government may limit this freedom if "die Interessen des Staates, der Gesellschaft und des Kollektivs oder die rechtmäßigen Freiheiten und Rechte anderer Bürger verletzt" (Beständig, 32). Still, today a main aim of publications needs to be to communicate the ideas of socialism:

In der Verwaltungsvorschrift für den Publikationsmarkt“ vom 1. September 2003 heißt es in § 1 Absatz 3: „Der Verlagsbetrieb hat an der Linie des Dienstes am Volke und am Sozialismus festzuhalten, sich fest vom Marxismus-Leninismus, den Mao-Zedong-Ideen und der Theorie Deng Xiaopings leiten zu lassen [...]“ (Beständig, 38)

Only since the mid 1990s has children's literature become a separate market segment with specific bestseller lists for children's books in China (Beständig, 24). Age groups of books are 0 - 2 years, 3 - 6 years, 7 - 10 years and 11 - 14 years. Nevertheless, the children's books bestseller list includes all age ranges together (Wang, Xin, 3). All the books in my analysis will be exclusively from the second group for 3 - 6 year old children. Two decades before the founding of this discrete market segment, the number of children's books published was 1 per 8 children (Beständig, 24)! After the Lushan conference in 1978, children's book publishing houses were established in every province (Beständig, 29). By 2005 there were 31 publishing houses specialized in children's literature (Beständig, 30). Other publishing houses are also publishing books for this segment. In China there are about 250 million children are under the

age of 14 and as this segment had been neglected in the past the children's book market experienced growth rates of 10 % in recent years (BIZ Peking, 3). Even though there are more titles on the Chinese children's book market nowadays, in total there are not more books because the total circulation is not increasing equivalently (Beständig, 25).

A major problem for the Western market is the fact that the Chinese market is only in the process of developing an understanding of copyright. A respective law was only implemented in 1991. Although there is a "National Copyright Administration of China" and officials are called to initiate prosecution against pirated copies, these unauthorized copies are still a major problem (BIZ Peking, 4). License trading is a big business in China, in 2010 China bought 13,724 book titles from abroad. Although there are a few thousand picture books titles available in China, on the bestseller list of the big Chinese Online Seller DangDang 9 out of the top 10 books are foreign languages translations. In walk-in bookstores the relation of original Chinese books to translated books is balanced (Wang, Xin, 5). More than a third of titles for which licenses were purchased (i.e. 5,284) were from the US market (*China Publisher's Yearbook 2011* qtd in BIZ Peking, 5). 59 % of all title licenses (a total of 517) purchased for the Chinese language segment were for children's books (*Buch und Buchhandel in Zahlen 2011* qtd in BIZ Peking, 5). While in 2010 China only exported books worth USD 37.1 million, they imported books worth USD 94 million. Xin Wang (5) claims this is due to a competitive advantage of foreign languages picture books as well as a lack of Chinese children's books authors. The smallest share of sales was in children's books with 4 % (*China Publisher's Yearbook 2011* qtd in BIZ Peking, 7).

While Ariès and Shulamith Shahar (qtd in Nodelman and Reimer, 82) disagree as to whether in Europe childhood was already "perceived as a distinct stage in the life cycle" (Shulamith Shahar qtd in Nodelman and Reimer, 82) in the Middle Ages and whether there was literature in the Middle Ages which could be identified as "children's literature" (Nodelman and Reimer, 82), the Chinese children's book market only began developing by the beginning of the 20th century (Beständig, Zusammenfassung). Previously children's books did not differ greatly from adults books. In Chinese thinking childhood was not considered as a particularly different time of life (Beständig, 17). It was 1913 by the time the term "children's literature" (ertong (de) wenxue)" was first used publicly (Beständig, 16). Nowadays, there is a further differentiation for "you'er wenxue" ("toddler literature" or picture books, as it were; Beständig, 20). Throughout Máo Zédōng's reign, books and also children's books were used

as a means for propaganda. Only by the time China opened up to the West and Western ideologies, Chinese experts become aware of and interested in developmental psychology (Beständig, 16-7). Also Zhao (in Li, Jianming) describes how for a long time the Chinese mainstream was not aware of the particular needs and feelings of children. Children were expected to behave like little adults. Children of this generation finally grew to be adults with deficient awareness of their own feelings. Only because of the awareness of and research into child development, books can now be aimed directly at the needs and interests of children (Beständig, 20). Texts became child-centered, regarded pedagogic approaches and the psychological states in child development. They are now tailored for child receptivity. Language is more colloquial and plots have become appealing and entertaining (Beständig, 59-60). Nowadays a trend towards narration literature can be detected (Wang, Xin, 4-5).

Finally around 1980 literary awards slowly began to be introduced (Beständig, 38). The communist party also has the awards firmly in its grasp. Prizes are awarded by for example the Chinese Writers Association, the Ministry of Education and the GAPP (General Administration of Press and Publication of the People's Republic of China) (Beständig, 39). The first prize in this segment was awarded by the Chinese Writer's Association for extraordinary children's and juvenile literature. The awards ceremony is held every three years and meant to show the recent development and mastery by Chinese writers in the art of children's literature (China writer). According to Han in Beständig (38) the main criteria for evaluating books are a positive topic, convincing characters, interesting plot, legibility and literary quality.

The Feng Zikai Award is another award which was only recently established in 2009.

The Chen Yet-Sen Family Foundation is a Hong Kong based grant-making institution established in 2003, with a strategic focus on improving early childhood literacy, through the development of libraries and the promotion of reading programs. To date, the Foundation has helped support the construction of libraries and reading programs for children in high-need areas of Mainland China, Hong Kong, and West Africa. (Feng Zikai, award origin)

The award was set up as a response to the “distinct lack of original illustrated children's books in Chinese, with the market disproportionately dominated by translated work”. According to Chen's speech on the Feng Zikai-Award's objectives, “majority of quality Chinese children's books are in fact translated versions, in which distinguishing characteristics and original

meanings of the authentic pieces are often lost”. By establishing the Feng Zikai Award, the committee hopes to promote genuine Chinese children’s literature (Feng Zikai, award origin).

The Xingqi children’s book award was also founded 2009 with the same aim of supporting and recognizing Chinese authors and illustrators (Wang, Xin, 6).

While China is pressing towards more market-orientation, Nodelman and Reimer describe the predicaments of a completely economically oriented book market. Just as in China, merger and acquisitions have restructured the book business. “In recent decades, [...] many publishing companies which were once independent enterprises have been purchased by larger conglomerates” (Nodelman and Reimer, 110). Nodelman and Reimer (110) consider these mergers as problematic because they narrow down the number of people who make decisions about which books will be published. Additionally, the pursuit of greater profit leads to a narrowing down of published titles too. Many editors only publish books that promise to be the most profitable ones; thereby again reducing the number of published titles (Nodelman and Reimer, 110). Sutton (xiii), on the other hand, stresses that

fewer young children for whom to buy books and higher printing costs, plus lower margins and the vagaries of printing overseas, mean fewer new picture books being published. High costs encourage the economies of scale offered by large print runs, which means more mass-market-friendly repackagings of old favorites and picture books written by celebrities with parent-friendly brand recognition.

The same applies to bookstores: Initially independent bookstores dominated the American book business. In the 1980s a few chains took over the US book market. While these chains initially mainly ran small stores, in the 1990s the trend developed towards big box superstores (Nodelman and Reimer, 113). These superstores then propagated the limitation of book choices through the extensive advertising of only a few books. This is also achieved by publications of reprints, movies and TV tie-ins and series. They include characters that require less advertising because the consumers are already familiar with them (Nodelman and Reimer, 116). The predicament Nodelman and Reimer detect is not only the general downscaling of the amount of published titles, but also the trend towards mainstream books while “innovative or quirky or other unusual books that might be less likely to achieve wide success” (Nodelman and Reimer, 122) are neglected. Picture books are an exception though. “It may [...] be because these books, though unfamiliar, are short enough for parents to read, enjoy, and choose to buy while still in the bookstore.” (Nodelman and Reimer, 117). Nevertheless, teachers and librarians, who make up a large part of the book purchasers, are inclined to

choose more conventional books out of fear of censorship from the parents' side (Nodelman and Reimer, 122).

As only a few books can become mega-sellers but also because slow-selling books are soon discarded, authors hope to win a book award.

Cynics who work in the field of children's publishing sometimes express the opinion that innovative picture books and novels only get published on the chance that they might win awards that will make them bestsellers. If they don't win the awards, such books quickly go out of print. (Nodelman and Reimer, 121)

The most prestigious award for picture books in the US is certainly the Association for Library Services to Children's (ALSC) and The Horn Book's Caldecott Award (ALSC, preface). Also the renowned New York Times' Bestseller List includes a picture book category.

6. Picture book analysis

For the close examination of family representations in Chinese and picture books, my decision which books to analyze was based on the following criteria. I wanted to have books that deal explicitly with families or family issues as well as books that simply tell a story including a few family members. I feel I need to explain my use of the term "explicit" here. This does not mean that a book overtly and explicitly deals with families or family issues but perhaps only on a secondary level as themes or even motifs. In contrast, books that do not deal with families – as I defined it - "explicitly", are books that only include families, family members or substitutes thereof and are analyzed from this perspective.

Furthermore, I tried to find books that are either selling well or have won some sort of award or acknowledgement in order to create the illusion that they are books that "matter" more i.e. they are more influential than others. The first and the latter probably coincide anyway. These were easier to find on the American book market. As I previously explained above (see section 5. above), the US has the Caldecott Award with its Caldecott Medal and their honor books. I oriented my research on the winners of these awards. In China it was more difficult as the Feng Zikai Award is quite new and only few books have been already been awarded a prize. Nevertheless, I also chose books from their list.

All the books chosen were published after the year 2000, in order to get a feel for fairly recent developments and feature only one story (which especially in the Chinese context is not self-evident) and have principally only one image per page or double spread (excluding comic style books). I have chosen books which include complete or parts of families, but otherwise I have tried to remain random with the intention of not influencing the outcome too heavily.

It turned out that contrary to my expectations, only few picture books deal with family situations or feature families at all. Although families play a key role in all infant's lives, they do not feature heavily in their books. Even though "[c]hildhood is usually understood as that time of life when one needs parental love and control" (Nodelman and Reimer, 197), writers seem to like to focus on the adventure children experience when they are exploring the world on their own, unrestricted by controlling parents. One only needs to think of all the famous literary orphans or boarding school children, the most recent and prominent example of both being Harry Potter (Nodelman and Reimer, 197). These unrestrained children then can

move [the reader] away from the familiar experiences of home through new experiences that lead to a new and better understanding of what both home and oneself are and should be. (Nodelman and Reimer, 198)

Apart from the plot, which is in most books is hardly relevant for my detailed examination of families, I will examine perspective and narration, style of illustration, including color and blanks, the relation of the visuals to the verbal text, characterizations, personal relationships, family constellations, appearance or absence of family members, body language, gender roles, family rituals and their underlying ideologies.

6.1. Chinese books

6.1.1. 荷花镇的早市 („*Hehua zhen de zao shi*“/“*The Morning Market at Lotus Town*“)³

The Morning Market at Lotus Town by Xiang Zhou is one of the books that received the Outstanding Children's Picture Book Award in 2009.

³ Translation: <http://www.fengzikaibookaward.org/en/award-results/2009-award/92-2010-08-10-04-17-12.html> on November 19, 2011.

It is the story of little Yang Yang returning to the rural hometown of his father “Hehua zhen” (or “Lotus Town”) for his grandmother’s birthday. His aunt takes him to the morning market where he discovers a whole new world.

The cover image constructs what is meant to be a typical Chinese rural market scene: The onlooker is watching from above as the crowd is peacefully and cheerfully conducting their grocery shopping. *The Morning Market at Lotus Town* was written in 2006 and depicts modern day rural China.



Illustration 1: Zhou, Xiang. Cover.

The cover exemplifies a scene in a Chinese market and we re-encounter the picture on a double spread in the middle of the book. The market scene extends from the front to the back cover and shows a place which is, like so many meeting points in China, quite crowded. The people all seem to be Chinese with slightly dark complexions and black hair. Hair styles are all very similar, mostly practical. Some people cower in the somewhat characteristic Chinese sitting position on the floor. The people, we see, are dressed in simple, basic but colored clothing. All people seem to be humble because there are no fancy accessories, ornamental patterns, slim-fit cuts or other bits or pieces in the picture. Accordingly, the market stands are plain tables presenting indefinable products which I would guess are all foods. There are even a few - most clichéd - Chinese bicycles (though no other vehicles) in the picture.

The boy protagonist Yang Yang is also seen on the cover with his aunt. They form somewhat of a center of the picture because the other market shoppers and pedestrians stand a little aside and gather more densely on the left side of the page but in fact they are off the actual center of the page. They do not stand out of the crowd enough that before looking inside the book one becomes aware of the two character’s central position in the narration. The boy is even sketched without a face on the front cover. He is not the only one, though, as all the people in the upper half of the picture (signifying the further away masses) do not have faces. Faceless figures keep reappearing throughout the whole book. They do not represent specific individuals but rather an anonymous collective. Yang Yang and his aunt are also only part of

them without any individual particularities. They are merely typical representatives of the masses.

The cover already gives a strong impression of the whole book's aim and appeal.

Through [Yang]'s eyes, the picture book captures the beauty and poetry of Jiangnan – quiet and peaceful, with clear and beautiful waters far away from the city's noise and people that live modest, honest lives. Jiangnan, with its warmth and tranquility, feels like the home [Yang]'s always dreamed of. (Feng Zikai Award. *The Morning Market at Lotus Town*)

The description on the Feng Zikai Award-page appears as rural romanticism.

In the ancient literature of China, [...], the poets of earlier periods used Romanticism for displaying the pursuit of an ideal realm, while intending to present a sharp contrast with a realistic world. [...] Some argue that the latter feature of Chinese Romanticism actually birthed a Chinese form of mysticism. (Killion, 29)

All the illustrations stretch over double spreads (though leaving the text in blank space at the bottom), giving views of large scenery; always more or less from above. With the bird's eye view the focus is taken away from Yang Yang and his aunt and moved to the overall scenery. The scenes are all vibrant with life but never hectic. The landscapes are lush, litter-free and unpolluted. Like so many Chinese books, the whole book appears in a style of idealization and thereby mystification of the Chinese countryside.

The text, on the other hand, does not deal with the landscape but focuses a lot on food and a little on animals and the aunt's associations. The narration is that of a figural narrative situation. We get almost exclusively uncommented direct dialogue, mainly from Yang Yang and his aunt.

Therefore this is not a book which deals explicitly with family issues, even though the book is dedicated by Zhou to his mother and "all mothers of the world" (Zhou). The reader is not prompted to identify with Yang Yang. The only parallels between the main character and the implied reader are or should be their lack of knowledge about the Chinese countryside.

The illustrations are done in a vague style that look like mixed acrylic and crayon. The vagueness subtracts realism from the images and adds the previously mentioned sensation of romanticism. As already stated above, the faces are neglected and the foods are indefinable.

Colors are earthy and on most pages matt. On pages 24-27 however, the colors become stronger, emphasizing the specialness and cheerfulness of the event.

The story starts right on the inside title page. We see now that the little boy with the red shirt and cap is the hero of the story. He is holding hands with the lady in blue, who we also already know from the cover illustration. Behind him are a woman and a man. We find out via the text that those are his parents. Hence they depict a typical father-mother-child-family. We can assume that Yang Yang is the only child. They are dressed in modern western clothing. The father is wearing a business suit and tie and this wife a long overcoat and high heels. She is carrying shopping bags and pumps. The shopping bags denote a consumption-oriented and western attitude. As the text also reads “Yang Yang he baba mama yiqi dao xiang xia” (“Yang Yang and his parents are returning/have returned to the village“; Zhou, title page), the signs on the mother’s bag meaning “Shanghai” suggest that the parents and the boy live in the big industrialized city. In contrast, the aunt is dressed in a more traditional fashion, her hair and also her traditional flat “Old Beijing shoes” remind us of the pastoral setting.

The parents assume a reserved posture. They do not touch each other or the child but look down on the child in a smiling and pleased manner. Their attitude towards the child seems positive.

Throughout the book we do not get any information about the nuclear family itself, or about routine, traditions or daily structures of the boy’s life. Nevertheless, we get some insight into the family and the family structures.

On the subsequent pages, the aunt assumes the position of the substitute mother. The aunt leads the child through the town to the market and shows him around. It is interesting to note here that the father actually does have a sister. This can – officially - only be because they are old enough to be born before the introduction of the one-child policy as the aunt is the younger of the two (on page 10, she refers to her brother as her “ge” which is the older brother). Since the aunt is the father’s sister, we can assume that he is the parent who is familiar with the town. Also on page 10 when they meet Mr. Li, it shows that the boy’s father is no stranger to the town and the townspeople. The reason why the aunt takes the child instead of the father could be either that grocery shopping is seen as a woman’s task, that childcare is seen as being for women or indeed for no particular reason. The aunt takes the

nephew to the market instead of his father, takes him under her wing and shows and explains everything to him. This is also supported by the fact that most children in the images are either with women or by themselves, even so this rationale is not absolute as we also see men with children and even babies at the market in the pictures (e.g. Zhou, page 13).

The aunt holds the boy's hand through practically all the images, making sure that he does not get lost in the masses of people. The boy follows his aunt without ever protesting or trying any mischief. He does not show any emotions, especially not outwardly. His joy and his childlike reactions when he is excited about shopping for fireworks or cake, or when he enjoys playing with the chicken are only transported verbally. The only time he shows sentiments of protest is when he does not want to go home, but he is immediately called upon to be "guai" ("good", Zhou, 31) to which he conforms immediately. He is a flat character who has only one characteristic (which does not evolve). This feature is his curiosity. He keeps asking about everything he encounters along the way. Yang Yang thus gives his aunt the cues to explain the market to the readers.

We are safe to assume that the parents are still a couple. They bring their child to the aunt in a faraway place together and participate in the grandmother's birthday together. Furthermore, we can also take for granted that they trust their aunt with their child. The extended family seems to enjoy good relationships, celebrating together and helping each other with the festive preparations.

Noteworthy is also the propaganda billboard on pages 22 and 28 (Zhou), saying

"yao xiang fu, shao sheng haizi duo yang zhu" ("You want prosperity, have less children and more pigs").

This is even presented twice in the images. Both times it is the same wall with the same billboard but nevertheless it appears twice, giving it certain significance. This is clearly an odd and offensive sounding propaganda poster. Nevertheless, this depicts a poster that was actually put up in China (Hays). Whereas on the explicit level this means children are more costly than pigs, we can also interpret some equation of children with pigs in the slogan, as if pigs would satisfy the same emotional objectives as children. The proclamation suggests that the acquirement of a pig would satisfy the same desires as a child but is superior, insofar as a pig would cost less than a child. This propaganda completely ignores the fact that children are habitually born out of an emotional desire nowadays. Even though in the past they were

regularly born out of a need for farmhands or as security for the sunset years and the like, which certainly also meant greater economic welfare. Nevertheless, the propaganda is put there (as the signature verifies) by the Chinese “City Department for Family Planning” (“zhen ji sheng wei”; Zhou, 28). This slogan conflicts with the traditional Chinese view and Máo Zédōng propaganda of “duo zi, duo fu” (“more children, greater happiness”; Shen, 68). The “fu” in the two slogans are homophones with different Chinese characters, 福 and 富. In the new propaganda, the “fu” 福 of the luck of having children turns into 富 “fu” the monetary good fortune (due to not having children). This denotes an emphasis on the material rather than the immaterial prosperity, something that is certainly particularly important at a market place. According to Hays this slogan and some similarly “crude” ones were banned in 2007 (after the publication of this book) “because of rural anger about the slogans and the policy behind them”. Even though the comparison of pigs with children is offensive, it should be noted that the poster which does propagate the ideal of having “less children”, does not suggest refraining from children completely; thus indirectly naturalizing families in general and idealizing the one-child family.

The story of Yang Yang’s shopping trip illustrates the images of a family in good order with the ethics of solidarity, mutual support and good behavior. From the degree in which we get to know the family, the nuclear family is what I consider (in point 3.) to be an ideal family. The child’s status is clearly that of the learner and uneducated inferior. The main transported family value is the boy’s good manners. The book depicts “two of the most salient motifs of early childhood – curiosity about the worlds and the pleasures of tasting sweet food” (Spitz, 160). Despite “conformity” none of Hong’s (112) other listed values find their way into Yang Yang’s depiction (see 3. and 4. above). Although we do not know about Yang Yang’s parents or gain an insight into his home, we learn that nutrition is very important in his family. The aunt not only buys a fat chicken, bean sprouts and a cake for the grandmother’s birthday but also talks about other food they see or try. In almost every image we see someone holding, carrying or making food. Food in general is very central to Chinese culture. Chinese are very concerned about food and Zhao (in Li, Jianming) claims that Chinese like to express their affection via food. At the same time as it is a sign for physical and emotional nurturing, food implies a “membership both of family and of nation and so, in part, constructing identity” (Alston, 106). Although the food is mostly represented in a way that is not explicitly recognizable, its display in the market is distinctly Asian. There are a lot of fish (which could be still alive), living chickens, a lot of vegetables and some dishes served in Asian bowls and

cooked right there on the street. The implied Asian reader will recognize much of the foods presented and is invited to share a feeling of belonging (Alston, 119). The aunts' unmindful sharing of food with seeming strangers expresses her acquaintance with many people in the community, constructing them as a large family. Projecting what we know about the community on Yang Yang's family, we can assume that his (extended) family is a traditionally Chinese, nurturing one. This projection is adequate since his aunt is shopping for traditional Chinese groceries to feed the entire family. This notion is heightened in particular by the final images of a table full of different Chinese dishes. The last image portrays Yang Yang's return to a home (away from home), which serves him the right kind of food, at a beautifully prepared Chinese (round) dinner table, set for his whole family to take a seat and a bite. Thereby offering him what ideology expects of a 'good' family (Alston, 105).

6.1.2. 爸爸和香烟 (“Baba he xiangyan”/“Dad and his Cigarettes”)

Dad and his Cigarettes by Rui Zhou has received the “Zhongguo zuo jia xie hui er tongwen xue wei yuan hui” award (Zhou, back cover; “Children’s Literature Committee of the Chinese Writers Association”).

The book tells the story of a man who tries to quit smoking but fails miserably to do so. In the story there is an award for a “smoke-free household” and the father tries to participate by smoking outside of the house. However the smoke-free zones are extended further and further. The only way to keep smoking when the whole planet finally becomes smoke-free is to leave the planet - which he does. The moral of the story is not evident. It might be that smoking is bad but this is not clear because the father does not even try to quit. It seems rather that the calamity is caused by the expansion of non-smoking areas, giving smokers no more room to indulge in their pleasure. On the other hand, father's polluting outer space with cigarettes stumps makes him the “bad guy” after all.

This book is a little unusual in comparison to the other Chinese books analyzed (points 6.1.1, 6.1.3 and 6.1.4). It does not have any of the romanticism which the others emphasize, neither about the landscape nor about the people. Especially the end is not as positive as the others: While none of the Chinese books analyzed has an overly happy ending - *A New Year's Reunion* ends with father leaving (see 6.1.3.), *The Morning Market* finishes with the end of shopping tour (above 6.1.1.) and *The King of Hide and Seek* ends with Xiao Yong leaving his

home with his father (see 6.1.4.) -, they all have some optimistic points like an upcoming reunion (Yu or point 6.1.3), a birthday party (Zhou or point 6.1.1) or the children making Xiao Yong smile by calling him “The King of Hide and Seek” (Zhang or point 6.1.4) but *Daddy and his Cigarettes* does not have any optimism in its conclusion. The father is in Outer Space and will probably not come back. He even litters the cosmos with his cigarettes.

Moreover, the illustrations look peculiar when contrasted with those of the other books. The family does not look distinctly Chinese: The hair of father and mother looks almost a little brown, not deep black. Their eyes are – especially mother’s – big and round (emphasized by the father’s large spectacles) and the noses are untypically large. Additionally they are dressed in an occidental but not particularly modern style. This may be because the father’s smoking habit and addiction are unfavorable characteristics. The illustrator might not want the reader to associate it too closely with the Chinese community. Their surroundings, on the other hand, are traditionally Chinese: furniture has antique Chinese ornamental carvings and houses are built in ancient Chinese architecture. There are bowls and chopsticks for eating and a teapot with little teacups (without handles) and an electric rice cooker.

Furthermore, there are many pictures on the walls, covering a variety of motifs. While some are still life, many show people including the family members in all constellations, bestowing those depicted persons with certain importance.

The title *Dad and his Cigarettes* with its relational word “Dad” leads the reader to deduce that the story is told from the perspective of the man’s child. This is confirmed on page 34 where the narrator uses first person “wo dui baba shuo” (Zhou; „I said to Dad“). However the son we see in the images is too young to tell this story as impartially and reliably as it is told. Instead the narrator comes across as an unbiased omniscient third person who also knows what happens in front of the UNO committee (Zhou, 41) or at the Great Wall (Zhou, 28/29) although the boy is not present at those locations and who renders the verbal interactions exclusively in direct speech. In fact the boy’s standpoint and emotions concerning the situation are not mentioned at all. We can only infer his misery from the pictures in which he is mostly shown with sad puppy eyes or in the end when the boy watches the stars together with his mother every night.



Illustration 2: Zhou, Rui. Cover.

The illustrations are precise water colors using fairly realistic colors although the images are not reasonable altogether. Nevertheless, the drawings' detailed and fairly clear style conveys a realistic view. This visual realism is in contrast to the romantic idealizations of the other books. In *Dad and his Cigarettes* the images show unfashionable clothes, the overweight father, repeatedly shocked or disturbed looking people and the narrative outcome is pessimistic. Additionally, the “realism” is achieved through the depiction of ugly

cigarette smoke, which I would consider as unusual in a children's picture book. On one page we observe the father's thoughts in thought bubbles (Zhou, 34/35, 36 and 42) and on another there are little cigarette butts instead of stars in the night sky (Zhou, 48). There are no blank spaces and the images always fill complete double spreads. Several images are repeated: for example the outside title page image of the father on the bicycle is repeated twice inside (Zhou, 15 and 34/35), the image of the family at the railing of a ship is twice in the book (Zhou, inside title page and pages 38/39) and the image of the father in the spaceship is (including the image on the back cover) used three times (Zhou, inside cover page and page 43).

In terms of the family and gender roles, it can be noted that chores are divided according to the conventional gender division. The mother is responsible for childrearing and cooking while father is the breadwinner. We know that he works because he insists on working for the embassy of a tobacco producing country when they have to move out of the country (Zhou, 38). Clothing conforms to traditional gender customs: The father mostly wears pants, a shirt and a slipover and once a suit with a tie, the mother wears a long dress all the time and the child wears dungarees (which allows us to deduce that the child is a boy, thus I refer to him accordingly).

The father is the (anti-)hero of the story while the mother stands behind him supportively. She tries to help the father by encouraging him on his way and staying with him even when they have to leave the country

Mama [...] ai baba ai de mei fa ke xiang, zhi hao tongyi ban jia. (Zhou, 22)

(“mother [...] loves dad so much that she agrees to move”). There are no words of opposition from her side at any point. The mother is depicted emotionally more calm, as she, although

looking miserable about the father's upcoming departure, is hardly even crying. Even after his ultimate failure she remains loyal and composed and watches the stars every evening with her son.

The father on the other hand is depicted as weak and at the mercy of his addiction. The idea to take part in the competition for the "smoke-free household" is brought forward by his wife and he agrees only out of love for his family (Zhou, 5). Instead of refraining from smoking he cowers down in a corner in front of his house to shelter against the cold of the snow and avoid discovery (Zhou, 10/11). He generally has his eyebrows raised and pulled together illustrating his distress and anxiety. Yet he still stands fully upright, even when his dependency on cigarettes causes him to cry (Zhou, 37). In spite of this the father does not consider stopping smoking for a second. He endures the cold of the snow, long strenuous bicycle rides, the heat of the desert, moving out of his home and at length separations from his beloved ones without once attempting to quit smoking. His portrayal fits Northrop's mode of "the ironic, which tells of characters inferior to others in power and intelligence" (Nodelman and Reimer, 230). In this case the hero clearly lacks power, not over others but his own will power.

The boy in the story does not yet have any responsibilities, being still too young, he is still allowed to play (e.g. when he sits in the moving box on page 25 or climbs on his father's back in the images on pages 31-35). The parents do not try to explicitly convey any family values to the child. The father does not set a good example of responsibility or hard work. The boy is usually next to his mother, she is a self-reliant role and tolerant model to the boy. When in the desert he is on his father's back although the father does not have time to pay attention to his son. The mother in contrast is always close to boy: she holds him on her arm, holds his hand or has her hands protectively on his shoulders. They stand in union next to the father. Nevertheless the boy looks up to the father, never questioning or even criticizing his behavior, neither within the story in direct speech nor by means of his status as the narrator. Even by the end when the father's failure is obvious, the boy shows no disappointment or other negative emotions towards the father, his addiction, decisions and actions.

The ending is so bizarre that one is compelled to stop and reconsider what this is all about. If there is an intended moral to the story, it is quite ambiguous. Equipped with a repertoire of children's books which want to be didactic and teach us helpful lessons, one is inclined to decipher the message of the story as being an anti-smoking campaign. But that does not quite

work. On the last page, we see the father littering Outer Space from the viewpoint of the boy and his mother. With their back towards the reader, both are looking in the same direction as we are and the boy is pointing towards the sky. Even the title “Daddy and his Cigarettes” but also the first person narrative helps us to identify ourselves with the boy. The outcome is extremely unfair as seen from the boy’s perspective because he is punished for his father’s negative smoking habit as he is left behind without a father. The anti-smoking message is obscured by the fact that we do not identify with the boy and do not know his thoughts. We do not know if he feels bad about the course of events, his decisions and the final consequences. He could be of the opinion that his father is not the “bad guy”, but rather that the extension of the smoke-free zones has led to his misery.

This leads the reader to consider another interpretation that would challenge the prior one. The heavily exaggerated outcome could also be judged as comic or ironic; an ironic mode which is also implied by the portrayal of the father. “[I]ronies are internal and deliberate, and the result is an ambivalence about the relative values of innocence and experience, the idyllic and the mundane” (Nodelman and Reimer, 211). Because there is never an explicit statement against smoking itself, the message could be interpreted as disapproval of smoke-free zones rather than of smoking.

Even though this interpretation is in line with Derrida’s Deconstructivism (“If the story can evoke these possibilities, then the apparent unity with which it supports a message [...] is clearly just an illusion”; Nodelman and Reimer, 237), it is difficult to accept this interpretation in a children’s book. Smoking is perceived as unhealthy in the US as well as in China and it is unlikely that such a counter-mainstream book would be awarded by the Chinese Writers’ Association. A third interpretation could be that the father has not actually left for outer space but has died as a result of smoking and gone to heaven. The mother’s comment “na shi ni baba reng de yan tou er!” (“those are your father’s cigarette butts”, 48) when the boy asks about the stars, could be interpreted as a soothing memory she creates for her son. This ending would unmistakably establish cigarettes as the evil force (and not the smoke-free zones). However this interpretation of the ending does not satisfy the reader as there are no hints given that the end should be understood metaphorically and that the father has actually died. In fact this assumption is highly improbable considering the succession of events in the story one could feasibly expect that the father has actually moved away from Earth to live in Outer Space.

Not only the overall interpretation remains unclear but also the message about the family. The family is an ideal (according to my point 3) and traditional family. Not only does it consist of the “ideal” father-mother-child constellation, they also confirm numerous literary assumptions about ‘good’ families: sitting together at the dining table trying to solve their problem together (Alston, 133), always cups of tea at the table and once with what looks like vegetables and soup (Alston, 123). The home is clean and tidy, secure and full of maternal signifiers like plants, decorations (e.g. family pictures), tea pots and other dishes (Alston, 90-1). Before the father’s relocation the family consisted of mother, father and son with the mother as the housekeeper and the father as the breadwinner. Despite these positive signifiers, (if we are to remain with the anti-smoking interpretation) the family is tainted by the father’s addiction. An addiction at first invading the family home (5) and even the family table when the father lays his cigarettes and lighter there (16). He is thereby not only harming his family (instead of protecting it like it would be expected by the literary conventions of a ‘good’ father), but is demonstrating that he is not in control of himself or his desires. Not being able to control himself, he seems unfit to be the “head of the family” (Alston, 9). Something ideologies of disciplinary power but also of Confucian hierarchy would expect of him. The family is held together with mutual love, however neither love nor a sense of responsibility is strong enough to keep the family from the final separation. Emotions are not strong enough to get out of hand. The father, mother and child only cry “quietly” (37-8). Accordingly the family finally fails when the addiction clearly wins out and the father leaves his family behind on earth while he resides in space. The ultimate failure is illustrated by his inability to return home and reunite the family (Alston, 73). The mother is left behind as a single parent, the father is isolated from all other humans and the boy is left without a father at hand.

6.1.3. 团圆 (“*Tuanyuan*”/“*A New Year’s Reunion*”⁴)

Tuanyuan by Li Qiong Yu was the first winner of the Feng Zikai-Award in 2009 as the “best Chinese Children’s Picture Book” and also “Best Illustrated Children’s Book of 2011” by the New York Times Book Review (Feng Zikai, *10 Best Illustrated Children's Books of 2011*).

Tuanyuan tells the story of Mao Mao and her father, who is a migrant worker and only comes home once a year for the Chinese New Year festival to visit his wife and daughter. With an

⁴

Translation: Yu, imprint.

estimated 225.42 million migrant workers according to the Chinese National Bureau of Statistics of China in 2008 (*Statistical Communiqué*) and approximately 58 million children of migrant workers (Zhao qtd in Li, Jianming), migrant workers are common in China and it is also common that they come home to their family just once a year, customarily reuniting with their families at the time of the Chinese New Year's festival.



Illustration 3. Yu, cover.

The award-winning book is illustrated with strong, vibrant colors placed on a white background. Red is especially prevalent. Red denotes joy and luck in Chinese culture and plays an important role in the New Year's celebrations in China. There are not only the red lanterns typical of New Year celebrations and signs with Chinese characters but also red clothes, bedclothes and furniture emphasizing the happiness of the occasion. While the images have clear contrasts and there are no diffusions giving the illustration a sense of realism, tiny details are missing, as if the exact details got lost in the

narrator's memory over time.

The story is told from the perspective of little Mao Mao and is the only Chinese book examined which gives the young reader the opportunity to identify more closely with the protagonist by using her voice in first-person narration. Nevertheless, the narrative is true to the facts, using a lot of direct speech and not revealing Mao Mao's inner feelings. The story has some diary style features, stating the dates involved twice and recounting the day-to-day activities. The images complement the text but sometimes also reveal a little more of the circumstances involved. While the text is a little more colored by Mao Mao's understanding and perceptions of the situations (like when she describes that after the haircut her father suddenly looks like her "former" father again) than the other examined books, the pictures seem to be even more inclusive and factual, revealing what escapes Mao Mao's childish perception.

While mother and daughter prepare themselves for the rare visit on the inside title page (we see the mother in front of a mirror combing her hair), the child introduces us to the story "Baba zai waiguo gai da fangzi. Ta mei nian zhi hui jia zi ci, na jiu shi guo nian." ("Daddy is abroad building big houses. He only comes home once a year, for the New Year's

celebration.”) On the left side of the inside title page we see that it is the year 2001. Houses and decoration are distinctly Chinese and fairly modern. There are electric lamps, a telephone (on the back cover, there is something that may even be a cell phone or walkie-talkie) and clothing is mainly western style (except for the dragon carriers at the festival).

Although the father is absent the whole year, the family is depicted as a functioning and happy unit. On the front cover we see (later inside the book as well where the image is repeated) father, mother and daughter are joined in a loving embrace. They sleep together in one bed under one blanket and the father seals the union by holding his arm around both mother and daughter. Mao Mao is at the center of the family physically as well as perceptively as both parents always have their eyes contentedly fixed on their only child. They are smiling and the girl sleeps peacefully in the middle. The Father's arm around his family not only pulls them together and forms a clear union, but also signifies his position as the protector of this union. On the back cover the union of the family is illustrated by the family portrait on the table. The father is behind the mother and child, creating a visual circle of people belonging together. The famous Taiwanese author Song Xi further attests significance to the family portrait in his analysis of *Tuanyuan* at the end of the book. He equates the fact that at first the family portrait is cut off in the middle of the father's face due to the limited space in the page and only shown completely at the end before the father leaves with the girl's mental picture of her father. While at the beginning she can scarcely remember her father, she has established a new image of him in the end (Xi). Actually the relationship of father and daughter is the main focus of the narrative (as it is told by Mao Mao). Mao Mao does not have any siblings. The mother is in the background but always present. This could of course be attributed to the exceptional visit and we do not know the actual position of the mother in the girl's life. The father treats Mao Mao tenderly. There is almost always a smile on his face and his face is always turned towards her. Sometimes he crouches down and puts his arm around her when interacting with Mao Mao. He seems prepared for Mao Mao's initial shyness towards him and hands her a hat as a gift.

While the father assumes childcare responsibilities during his short stay, the labor division of the couple is more traditional when it comes to the household chores. Although the father is gone all year he seems to be solely responsible for the maintenance work in the house, not only does he have to “bu chuangu feng, shua xin men qi” (Yu; “grout the windows” and “lacquer the doors”), he even has to do light work like “huan xin dengpao” (Yu; “change a

light bulb”) during his precious time at home. Xi evaluates a further meaning to the practical purpose of these chores. He sees grouting the window as giving shelter to one’s family, lacquering the door as an image of an upright person and the light bulb as bringing light and therefore positive feelings to one’s home (Xi). We are also led to believe that he helps with cooking the traditional rice dumplings, even though Mao Mao does not tell us who actually prepared the dough and cooked the dumplings, the picture implies that the father was heavily involved. The dumplings are still raw and Mao Mao’s fingers are dirty when her father inserts the coin into one of the dumplings but the father’s amount of participation is unclear and moreover the food is served by the mother next day. Power relationships seem to be indicated by the father looking down on Mao Mao in almost every picture, even in images where he is lying down, sitting or kneeling, his position is always above that of Mao Mao. Only in the moments of Mao Mao’s greatest joy (when she finds the coin in the dumpling and when she watches the dragon dance on her father’s shoulders), she is on eye level or even above her father. During the dragon dance, which denotes the narrative’s climax, the perspective even changes from full frontal to a view from below up towards Mao Mao on her father’s shoulders, raising Mao Mao’s joy even further. At these moments their power levels as the girl’s joy (and not controlling her) becomes his priority.

The mother’s responsibilities (at least during the father’s stay) are limited to caring and nurturing. Right after his arrival the father is served a drink and food. Later we also see her serve the dumplings, adjust Mao Mao’s scarf and help the father with packing his luggage. In the relationship to her husband, beauty also plays an important role. She spends the time before his arrival in front of a mirror and combs her hair. We also see some flacons on the dressing table. Furthermore, he brings her a coat not only to keep her warm and protected from the cold but also as an action for her beautification, but we should keep in mind that new clothes are part of the Chinese New Year’s celebration traditions. Still we clearly see Mao Mao’s mother looking at herself, quite pleased as she tries on the new coat.

The family home is warm and comfortable, offering protection against the cold winter outside, like how the family provides protection to Mao Mao and like the sanctuary it is supposed to be (Alston, 70).

Mao Mao’s role as a child and a girl does not involve any chores during the holidays. She is free to play with the other children in the snow, but of course she has to accompany her

parents on the New Year's visits. Like her mother, Mao Mao serves a drink to her father while he is working in the house. She is well-behaved never breaking rules and does not mind helping her father with his chores.

We clearly see and feel that the family is held together by mutual love which for Mao Mao's part is strongly illustrated by her attachment to the lucky coin and by her returning the coin to her father on his farewell. She values the coin more than a red envelope which according to Chinese tradition contains a present of money and consequently signifies new toys for children (Xi). She tries to create a closer bond with her father by means of the coin and making him promise to bring it back and stuff it into a dumpling again next year. A sense of belonging is again created by food, the food they share and the way they consume it is distinctly Chinese. Eating Chinese dumplings, in Chinese bowls and looking for a hidden coin in the dumplings makes them part of the Chinese community. Eating together as a family at the family dinner table join merges them as a family unit (Alston, 119) and by serving this kind of food in this manner, they adhere to the ideology of how 'good' Chinese families should spend the New Year's holidays (Alston, 105). Additionally the other foods on the table (fruits and a chicken) suggest a nurturing familial environment.

The hidden coin is also significant in another way, as Chinese people believe that the finder of the coin which is hidden in a rice dumpling will have good luck in the upcoming year (Yang). Therefore the coin also symbolizes the luck that the father brought and the girl apparently wants her father to bring back to her again next year. It also gives the story its own kind of happy ending as the happiness of the family (like the luck of the coin) does not get lost, even if it is hidden sometimes (Xi). The prospective returning of the father next year also adds to the happy ending. "Happy endings in children's literature often consist of homecomings" (Alston, 73). While children are mostly the ones coming back to their family after an adventure, here the return of the father signifies the return to the togetherness of the whole family.

For his part, the father expresses his affection with his presence, sharing his time and physical expressions of fondness. He does not want to let go of his daughter at the end and we may interpret his silence when Mao Mao asks him to bring the coin back next year as a lump in his throat due to his suppressed expression of grief. The girl does not explicitly interpret these incidents. She also does not mention that her mother seems to cry when packing her father's

luggage. It is only implied in the picture. The mother turns her face away from her family and the reader but because she is wiping her nose we may assume that she is weeping.

The book's message is certainly that families may also work well in spite of being separated by great distances.

The difficulties that face the families can only strengthen the ideal of family; family, we are told, is always worth fighting for and the battle must involve some sacrifice. The heroism of the characters is demonstrated by the extent of their sacrifice (Alston, 57).

It gives children (and maybe also their parents) the reassurance that they are not the only ones who live this hard kind of life and thereby gives hope and encouragement to them to remain loyal to their families.

6.1.4. 躲猫猫大王 (“*Duo maomao da wang*”/“*The King of Hide and Seek*”)⁵

Duo maomao da wang is not a book having family as the explicit area under discussion. It deals with the thoughtful treatment of a mentally handicapped boy. The book won the “Recommended Writing Award” by the Feng Zikai Award Judging Panel of 2009 (Feng Zikai, Award Winning Books).

It is the story of a woman who remembers her best childhood friend. They used to play hide and seek together but her friend Xiao Yong was always found first because he only knew two hiding places. The girl showed Xiao Yong new hideouts but after hiding there, Xiao Yong again could not think of any new places to hide. When the boy's grandfather dies, he cannot cry at first. When his father is coming to get him, he hides in the fields and his friends finally find him and then call him the “King of Hide-and-Seek”.

The whole book is done with a brown background color conveying a feeling of nostalgia. However the brown color also transports the reader into the rural and autumnal atmosphere of the setting. Even though the story extends over a longer period of time (maybe even a few years) the mood (i.e. colors) of the scenery does not change. The autumn (already on the endpapers) with its brown colors on every page and the dead trees without leaves communicate a sense of dullness, sadness and romantic beauty.

⁵ Translation: Zhang, imprint.

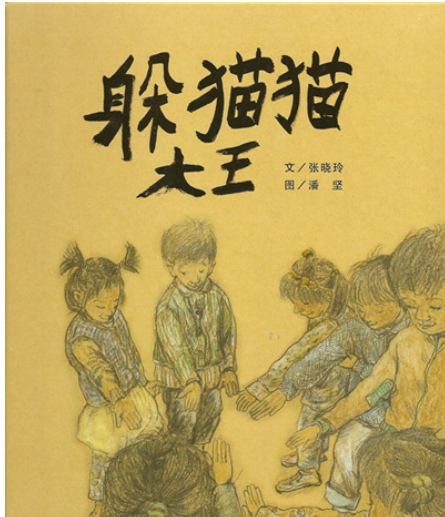


Illustration 4: Zhang, cover.

The pictures look like sketched pencil and crayon hand-drawings. The drawings are partly detailed but not so with the vast vegetation. Space is used flexibly in the book, sometimes the illustrations are set within a blank space, sporadically they fill up the entire page and sometimes the visuals are larger than one page or take in the complete double spread.

On the cover image, we are presented with the two heroes, Xiao Yong and the narrating girl. They stand a little bit apart from the other children and are the only ones with their backs of their hands showing, which sets them apart from the rest and associates them with each other. The children look perceptibly Chinese (hair, hair style and facial features) and are dressed in a plain fashion. Xiao Yong is the only child wearing a key around his neck (so - as we may conclude later – that he does not lose it). The image is found in the middle of the book.

We get to see quite a lot of the surrounding landscape, which is rural and poor. The long landscape “shots” have a distancing effect for the reader. There seems to be hardly any electricity in Xiao Yong’s house. There are electric light bulbs, without shades hanging from the ceiling but other than that there are no electrical appliances in the book. The stove and heating are wood-fired and there is no running water or other sanitation. There does not seem to be any toys for Xiao Yong or the other children, instead, they play with a beetle by the light of an oil lamp and have to craft Xiao Yong’s crown from grass and twigs. Of course, with the opening words “Xiao Yong shi wo xiao shihou zui hao de pengyou” (“When I was little Xiao Yong was my best friend”), Zhang sets the story in the past. Unfortunately we do not know how far back in time the story takes place. Even though, the “Author’s Note” on the last pages, informs us that the narrator is actually the author, there is no information about the author’s age in the book. However the illustrator 潘 (“Pan”) claims to have illustrated the images according to her memories of the countryside home of her great-grandmother and gives her birth year as 1961. If we assume she gives a valid depiction of her memories, we can consider the images to be a true representation of pastoral China and its poverty around the 1970s.

The narrating girl, whose name we are not told, is not completely reliable. Although she tells us everything true to detail, she is still too young to comprehend everything that is going on. Therefore, we only slowly realize that the boy Xiao Yong is a special boy and somewhat slow witted. Indeed only by the time we learn that he could not – while his friends were already attending school – distinguish between 1 and 10 Yuan, we become certain of the fact that the boy is somewhat mentally handicapped, underlined by the fact that the boy is not attending school like the other children. The narrating girl never expresses this explicitly because she “*bu zhidao wei shenme, Xiao Yong mei you shang xue*” (Zhang) (“did not know why Xiao Yong would not go to school”). Also, when she describes how Xiao Yong was later unsuccessful in trying to find other hide-outs, she only says: “*Ke bu guan ta duo zai shenme difang, zhuang cheng shenme mo yang, duo hen rongyi de bei zhao dao le.*” (Zhang; “No matter where or how he tried to hide, he was found very easily”). Only the images reveal that Xiao Yong’s attempts are not very skillful, when he stands next to a scarecrow pretending to be a scarecrow himself.

When finally the boy’s grandfather dies, an adult articulates quite straightforwardly what was so far unstated. “*Zhe haizi shi sha de, yeye si le, lian ku duo bu hui.*” (Zhang; “That boy is stupid. His grandfather died and he can’t cry.”) Obviously, this adult neighbor does not allow any other form of grief than the conventional loud lamentation for the deceased, although Xiao Yong is wearing the in China customary black mourning armband and a white headband expressing his sorrow.

The home where Xiao Yong lives in appears loveless. It is in some ways not a home for him as “home is the place in which the family are together” (Alston, 81) and we do not see any of his family until the very end. As Alston (78) suggests “when the mother is absent from the home, the family suffers”. Additionally (or maybe even *because* the mother is absent) none of the signifiers of a cordial home are to be found. There are no decorations, no plants or even a tablecloth. Food is also not evident. There is one barrel of something that looks uncooked potatoes and some bowls lying around but nothing else; no cooked meals. As the “perfect home as described in children’s literature should be cozy, safe and warm with a constant food supply” (Alston, 83), Xiao Yong’s house is clearly quite the opposite.

The book (also according to the addendum of the famous Chinese children’s book author “梅子涵” “Mei Zi Han”) is meant to advocate affectionate conduct with disabled persons. We see

a boy who is included in a circle of friends who like to play with and help him and even endeavor to build him up by calling this somewhat unskilled boy “a king”. Nevertheless, right from the start we see how tough life is for Xiao Yong because of his backwardness and the poverty he lives in. Albeit he is given great freedom to play or do anything he wants to and does not have to fulfill any tasks (not even going to school), Xiao Yong’s reality is certainly much lonelier and tougher than that of any of the other child heroes we meet in the other books. He has to stay at his grandfather’s but spends most days alone as his grandfather is out of the house selling fish until late in the evenings.

Gender roles are untypical (especially for the times in question) insofar as Xiao Yong is taken care of by two male family members (his grandfather and his father). The girl on the other hand, exhibits typical female characteristics of compassion and caring, not just when she helps Xiao Yong to find better hiding places but also when she hastens to assist in looking for Xiao Yong when he has disappeared. She even remembers him many years later and cares for his story enough to tell it to us.

Xiao Yong’s role within the family is undefined. He does not carry out any chores. The only job he attempts, namely selling fish, is too demanding for him. He appears to not even try to go to school. Even though he fails to be of any assistance in earning money, he does also not resort to the usually female role of housekeeping either (possibly out of lack of ability). Conversely, Xiao Yong’s is unable to mourn appropriately at his grandfather’s funeral. When he is finally able to cry, he hides in the fields to do so. This inability to display emotions openly is usually associated with men. His father does not comment on the visual signs of his swollen eyes but instead seems very well able to relate to the boy’s sentiment to hide.

While the grandfather is out of the house earning money, the neighbors’ children become something like his family. The question immediately arises why the boy lives with his grandfather and not with his parents. In the end, when the grandfather dies we learn that the father is not dead, but instead he has simply left the boy with the grandfather. The roles of the adults are very unclear, we do not know where the boy’s mother is; if she has died, left or is still there but just not present in the story. By and large, the men of the family seem to be responsible for the boy’s well-being. Also the whereabouts of the grandmother (whether she is dead or merely absent) remain unexplained. There is no further justification why the boy is left with the grandfather and where the father takes him at the end. The boy was

certainly not left with his grandfather because the grandfather had more time for him or was better equipped for the boy and his special needs. The grandfather is poor, absent all day and, moreover, alone. The grandfather does not bother to take the boy along to the market and there is no educational possibility for a boy with special needs. He does not even get (hands-on) support from the boy's father, as the neighboring children have never seen the father before. Even Xiao Yong does not seem to be happy to see him or know his father well since he hides from him when he comes to take him away with him. We may very well assume that the father left the boy with the grandfather because of the boy's disability; that his father (and perhaps also his mother) basically abandoned him.

Overall the family is portrayed negatively. Xiao Yong is mainly left alone by his grandfather and even more so by his parents or other relatives. The other family members also seem to be generally alone as their respective partners are missing. Xiao Yong's father seems only to be motivated by responsibility when he comes to pick up his son. He treats him kindly but not too empathetically. He does not hug or even talk to the boy when he comes out from the fields even though he must suppose that the boy's eyes were all swollen because he had been crying.

The ending can be interpreted in two ways. It could be the homecoming of Xiao Yong which represents the happy ending of so many children's books (Alston, 73), but could also be the opposite as Xiao Yong has to leave the place he had regarded as home forever. Nikolajeva and Scott (153) suggest that a "safe homecoming is accentuated by the right-to-left movement", which in this case would not be applicable. Both interpretations are valid as neither Xiao Yong's grandfather's house is portrayed as a real home nor do we know what the father's place is like. If we like to think that the father offers a better home for Xiao Yong it would mean a happy homecoming; otherwise he has had to leave his home for good meaning Xiao Yong would be even more deserving of our sympathy. Some critics consider this linear plot with an open ending as a sign of literary quality as it defies the literary conventions in children's books and stimulates questions within the reader (Nikolajeva, 47).

Neither the narrator nor the hero protagonist nor any other protagonist is lectured about tolerance throughout the plot. The lesson is directed unswervingly at the implied reader, who should be touched by Xiao Yong's fate and who should learn from the good example the narrator and her friends set by incorporating the boy into their circle of friendship. A compassionate reader is left with the hope that nowadays children with special needs grow up

in families that are better prepared for the difficult situation of dealing with a handicapped family member. By making the reader sorry for Xiao Yong, the story fulfills its agenda of encouraging better treatment of disabled people.

The book is supplemented by comments from the author, the illustrator and the renowned Chinese picture book author and university professor at the research center on children's literature of Shanghai University (Sina Blog) Mei Zihan. Mei's (Commentary) explanations simply emphasize the didactic nature and the purpose of the book for those who failed to fully grasp the deeper meanings of the book by themselves. This is also accomplished by the accounts of Zhang and Jian, who lend the story authenticity and urgency by verifying it.

6.2. American books

6.2.1. *The Hello, Goodbye Window*

The first American book I chose to analyze more closely is the 2006 Caldecott Award winner and Boston Globe – Horn Book Honors (Awards)-book *The Hello, Goodbye Window* by Norton Juster and Chris Raschka.

While this book initially seems to be about a window in the house of the protagonist's grandparents', the narrative is clearly all about family. Nevertheless it should be noted that windows are "symbols that appear ubiquitously in books for young children" (Spitz, 58). In this book a little girl who regularly spends her days and nights at her grandparents' house tells us about one particular window in her grandparents' house. Interestingly

[i]n the United States today, men and women are living longer than ever before, but because young families are more mobile than ever, children may actually see less of their grandparents than was the case in former decades. This is lamentable because intergenerational bonds are among the strongest anchors we have in the turbulences of our lives. (Spitz, 100)

In spite of this (or maybe even as a result), grandparents are also a popular theme in modern children's books.

Oddly, in past times, when children had more opportunities to interact informally with grandparents, fewer picture books were devoted to the subject; today, the theme has achieved popular status. The flood of new books about grandparents could perhaps be interpreted as participating in a kind of cultural nostalgia. (Spitz, 100-1)

Some books could even be considered a substitute for the actual presence of grandparents by offering children imaginary grandparents (Spitz, 101). Considering the dreamy visual style of *The Hello, Goodbye Window*, this could be one of the intentions of this book.

[W]indows [...] appear on the title pages of many picture books and [...] afford us symbolic entry into the different world of the story to follow. (Nodelman, 81)

The Hello, Goodbye Window invites us to take a glimpse at how the three of them spend their days together and what they do or say. It is not a story about a particular day or stay-over but instead the synopsis of their whole relationship by relating typical episodes or regularly occurring incidents. The account is given from the perspective of the little girl. She uses the typical voice of a little child, employing youthful fantasy intrinsic for children (e.g. talking about the Queen of England visiting their house; Juster) and like all little children sees herself as the “center of the world” when she says that “when I [...] take my nap [...] nothing happens until I get up” (Juster). This reveals her as an unreliable narrator when she tells us what life with her grandparents next to this window is like.



Illustration 5: Juster, cover.

The innocent features of the narrator also extend to the quality of the illustrations. They have the characteristics of children’s drawings. The colors are soft and friendly, radiating a positive and homely atmosphere. The cover is white like a sheet of paper used for children’s pictures. Lines are neither straight nor precise. The pictures do not have lines at all but consist of washy colorings, with no clear edges, giving them innocent ambiguity and a feeling of uncertainty due to their vagueness and lack of details, like the images of a dream or a wishful fantasy of grandparents. This fits well with the theme of the “window”. As

[t]his theme is, simply put, that of the overlap, the confusion between notions of what we take to be located inside ourselves and what we take to be external. What, in other words, is me versus not me? For example, have I just imagined or dreamed this, or did it actually happen? [...] The window, therefore, Margritte intimates, is a translucent membrane suspended between fantasy and reality, a membrane that thickens and darkens as we grow older but never become entirely opaque. [...] The window exists to keep out what is real, but, as in the story of Peter Pan, it can keep out *only* what is real, not what is unreal. (Spitz, 58)

The cover picture shows us that this book is – like the title suggests - really about a window but also about family relations. We see two people looking out and waving at a girl outside the window. Everyone is happy, smiling and their faces look kind.

What we hardly notice at first sight though is the different skin colors of the grandparents. The “Nanna” has a slightly darker complexion than “Poppy” and sumptuous brown lips. Interestingly though, we hear later that she is “English” like the Queen. Upon noticing this, one also realizes that the protagonist child exhibits traces of her mixed ancestry with her skin color darker than her grandfather’s but lighter than her grandmother’s and her dark curly hair which together with her brownish skin tone hints at an African heritage. Hence, we expect that one of the parents (if they are her biological parents) should also have a darker skin tone and indeed the mother also appears to be biracial. The mixed-race situation does not seem to be an issue within the family and, therefore, in this book. It is not mentioned explicitly by the girl and, there are also no implicit hints at differences between the family members due to their skin color. This conveys to anyone who even notices the differences a complete naturalness and the idea that different ethnicities living together in harmony goes without saying:

[A]n attitude of tolerant unconcern for such matters in a text that never mentions the [...] color; the apparently superfluous information in the picture gives the text a meaning it would not have on its own (Nodelman, 106),

The “story” of *The Hello, Goodbye Window* starts even before the actual title page. We see a small family – father, mother, and daughter – in a loving hug, building a tender circle. The mother is bending down towards the child; eyes closed and ready to give the child a hello- or goodbye kiss. The father has his arms around the mother’s shoulders. The image is similar to the *A New Year’s Reunion* (point 6.1.3.) the child is in the center between her parents with the uniting and protecting arm of the father around both of them. All three of them are smiling and have reddened cheeks, showing their excitement about being together again. The illustration clearly expresses love, happiness and the unity of the family – a picture-perfect



Illustration 6: Juster, outside back cover.

family, so to say. The same picture reappears three times in the book. It repeats itself like a visual motif, underlining the book's theme. As I said, it is the first illustration of the book, giving the reader a first hint of what this book is about but also as a starting point for the story. Finally it appears on the outside back cover again and is therefore closing the circle of the "story" with the child returning to its parents. There is also a comparable picture of the girl at the center of an embrace of her grandparents and just like the family, the plot itself thereby portrays an affectionate circle.

The story continues on the double spread of the inside title page. We see two united parents arm in arm waving goodbye to their little daughter. Their eyes are watery. Therefore we know that they are sad to be taking leave of their child. The child seems happy though as she is skipping and not turning around to look back at her parents while walking away through a garden gate.

On the next page, we see the house behind the garden gate. The child is already awaited; again by a united couple – this time her grandparents. We learn that she lovingly calls them "Nanna" and "Poppy" and that their relationship is built on regular encounters with well-known routines for both parties, like when she

climb[s] up on the flower barrel and tap[s] the window, then duck[s] down and they won't know who did it, or press[es her] face against the glass and frighten[s] them (Juster) -

extracting a predictable response from the others and with mutual teasing ie "If they see you first, they wave and make silly faces" (Juster) and joking (eg. when they talk to their own reflection in the window as if they were real people or when they makeup fantasy visitors). The grandparents and the child look content and are always smiling in the pictures. Their encounters are always presented as being pleasant ones. The girl sometimes stays over night or takes a nap at her grandparents' house.

Their days together seem structured, they eat breakfast together, go to bed together and the girl takes regularly naps at their house. The girl does not have any chores to do there besides enjoying herself. There is some emphasis on obedience as she has to heed some instructions from her grandparents like "not [to ride her bike] in the street, please" or "not [to collect sticks and acorns] in the house, please" (Juster). Even in these cases the grandparents exemplify good manners and use "please" when addressing the child.

The grandparents are portrayed as being old with slightly grey or even no hair and have their reading glasses lying around. Nevertheless, they are still youthful and engage actively and playfully with their granddaughter. They thereby counteract the general

portrayal of old people in western art and literature [...] for age is all too often ridiculed: cruel witches and envious crones are the prototype of aged women, and doddering fools the stereotypical representations of old men (Spitz, 101).

The grandparents' favorite room in the house is the kitchen as it "is where Nanna and Poppy are most of the time" (Juster). The kitchen which is a place associated with warmth and nurture is also where the "Hello, Goodbye Window" is. There is constantly some kind of nourishment available there. At our first glance in the kitchen we see a full cup on the kitchen table which reappears few times and later there is also a sandwich there. The food supply is regular and reliable and food served is wholesome i.e. "oatmeal with bananas and raisins" (Juster) establishing her grandparents as responsible caretakers (Alston, 108). This is also affirmed by the furnishings of the kitchen. It is not only full of kitchen utensils but also plants and family pictures which make the room homely. The house is furnished appropriately for children with dangerous things out of reach and a special step stool. It is a safe and stable place and is so comfortable that the girl does not wish to leave it. The Hello, Goodbye window does not allow them to see outside, but instead they can only see themselves in it or indeed just what the girl dreams up, for example she dreams of a T-Rex, the pizza delivery guy and even the Queen of England dropping by to visit. Additionally, the garden seems to shelter them from the outside world. The girl is completely cut off from the world outside her grandparents' home and when she leaves is directly handed-over into the care of her parents. This portrays the girl as being in need of continuous supervision, i.e. she is dependent on adults.

The roles of the individual family members are not gendered. The girl does not mention any activities which are conventionally strongly associated with females. She mentions coloring, gardening and daydreaming as hobbies. Furthermore, the grandparents' behavior is not particularly gendered. On the second double spread, we see Nanna sitting at the kitchen table reading the newspapers, an activity at which men are often depicted (Alston, 97). On the other hand, Poppy is responsible for the traditionally female domain of cooking, i.e. making breakfast. Both seem to like plants and gardening and both rebuke the girl to behave correctly

and safely. Poppy generally appears a little more childish as he kids the granddaughter quite often and also engages in wild actions like chasing her with the water hose. The dress code is traditional as all the women wear dresses and the father has a hat, a shirt and a tie while only the grandfather wears an apron at the “breakfast scene”. We do not get to see too much of her parents, but they are depicted as more or less equal. Both have tearful eyes when they see the child off and hug the child when welcoming, thereby both exhibiting the similar levels of emotionality. I also noted that the men tend to hold their hands on the females’ shoulder in a rather supporting or even protective manner.

All in all the book conveys a picture of what I described as “the idealized family” above (see point 4). All family members have a wonderful, happy and trustful relation with each other. The child loves all of them equally because she is “glad because I know we’re going home, but it makes me sad too” (Juster). The home is what it’s supposed to be; full of warmth, nurture, safety and stability. Although the end seems like the closure of a home-away-home circle (Nodelman and Reimer, 197-8), it is not as the circle constitutes of “a move away from the familiar experiences of home through new experiences that lead to a new and better understanding of what both home and oneself are and should be” (Nodelman and Reimer, 198) but this girl does not move away from her home, instead her grandparents’ house seems to be just an extension of the homely environment she normally inhabits at her parents’ house.

The family is modern insofar as both parents are employed as the child mentions that the parents pick her up after work and that gender roles are blurred. The girl does not seem to have a sibling, but the girl is still quite young and could well be a first born. The parents are still united and happy as a couple as are as the grandparents. The fact that this “perfect” family is of mixed-race accentuates the irrelevance of ethnicity.

When the girl comments

[w]hen you look from the outside, Nanna and Poppy’s house has lots of windows, but there’s only one Hello, Goodbye Window [...]’s right where you need it (Juster),

we can interpret the window as being an analogy for her family. The girl is not really concerned about the windows. The comparison is already made when the girl begins to talk about the window but then elaborates on her grandparents and her relationship with them. This analogy is then expressed explicitly on the one but last page. Like the windows in the quote above, there are many families that look the same from the outside but that are special

only to those who belong to them and just like the “Hello, Goodbye Window [...]’s right where you need it” (Juster), we learn from her narration that her family is always reliable as well as “right where [she] need[s] it” (Juster).

On the last page, the girl holds up her Poppy’s harmonica telling the reader that someday she will have a “Hello, Goodbye Window” and that she wants to be a Nanna with a Poppy. The girl has completely assumed the idealized picture of a family and considers (life-long) marriage and parenthood followed by grandparenthood as the norm. Her wish for a “Hello, Goodbye Window” but also for a Poppy who “can play the harmonica” (Juster) can be understood as the wish for the same positive and fun family situation she experiences as a child to continue throughout the various stages of her life.

6.2.2. *Fred stays with me!*

The next book analyzed *Fred stays with me!* by Nancy Coffelt is a Horn Book Honor Award Winner but has also received a number of other recognitions. On the outside back cover we see that *Fred stays with me!* (Coffelt) has been

- a School Library 2007 Best Book of the Year
- a Kirkus Reviews 2007 Best Children’s Book and
- a ALA Notable Children’s Book.

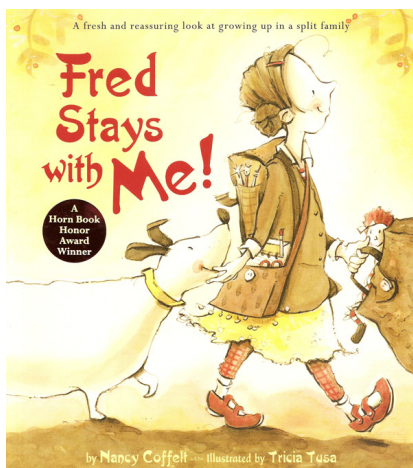


Illustration 7: Coffelt, cover.

Just like *The Hello, Goodbye Window* by Juster *Fred stays with me!* also deals explicitly with the topic of family. In this case we do not encounter the ideal (as in point 4.) family but rather a young girl facing the challenges of many modern families: her parents are separated or divorced and she has to commute between her parents homes. On the cover we already see the focus on the girl and the dog and their connection as she touches him with her hand. There is neither a visual nor verbal reference to the parents. Rather the girl and the dog seem like a well-rehearsed team. Actually the girl and the dog even look somewhat alike as only long-lasting couples sometimes seem to do. They hold their pointed noses up high expressing confidence with a smile on their lips, small eyes and blushed cheeks.

The story is also told by the little girl, whose name we do not learn, giving the young readers the possibility to identify with her. The girl does not seem to be as young as the girl in Juster's book. Her perception seems accurate and reliable. There are no fantasy creatures or unlikely events occurring in her narration.

The whole book is done in brown, yellow, white and red colors. Although the girl is smiling in almost every image in which we see her face, the sepia colors tone down the happiness and the joy of the girl. Sepia is usually used to give images a feeling of age and distance in time. The girl is recounting something that she seems to have detached herself from. The illustrations are mixtures of watercolors and "hard" lines. Lines and edges are clear but not entirely precise giving the impression of hand-drawings. They try to give the impression of realism. The illustrations are very detailed even showing the dirt under the cupboard for example. The use of blank space varies greatly from page to page. Sometimes the pictures fill a double spread, sometimes only one page, sometimes there are white borders framing the pictures and sometimes isolated objects appear in the middle of a blank page. The only double spreads with objects set in a blank space are the images of the beds – depicted without Fred or any other living creature. The beds look like lonely islands in the middle of nowhere, shown out of their context, symbolizing the girl being taken out of her "natural surroundings" where she had grown up until then. There is nothing about them that conveys a sensation of coziness and homeliness, but instead they convey simply isolation.

The text is put in varying positions, within or outside of the designs or occasionally even by itself on an empty page. The illustrations extend over the double spread twice, specifically when the girl tells us that "Fred always has time to play" (Coffelt) and that "Fred is my friend. We walk together. We talk together. When I'm happy, Fred is, too. And when I'm sad, Fred is there" (Coffelt). Thus, those two images support the instances where the bond is greatest between the girl and the dog. While the images fill the pages, the situations metaphorically "fill her heart". The girl feels complete and not as disrupted as in the split images, where she is not surrounded by the constrictions of her split family, visualized by the limiting borders and blank space (Nodelman, 53) and like the sepia color scheme mentioned already, they intensify detachment and objectivity (Nodelman, 50).

The book is composed in a contrasting style. From the first double spread on, we recognize the contrasting composition guiding us through all of the girl's descriptions. On this first

double spread, on the left side we see how the girl is pulled out of the picture by her mother, while on the right side she is dragged in the opposite direction by her father –Fred is always with her, and she is looking happily at him. This is not only clearly sets out the situation within the family but visually and systematically depicts the disruption and inner conflict of the girl, whose life is split into two opposing but also complementary parts. This construct is interrupted several times, either when she tells us about the things that have stayed the same e.g. where the girl states that “My Dog, Fred, stays with me” and that “I still go to the same school. I still have the same friends” (Coffelt) or in the abovementioned illustrations that span over a whole double spread.

Apart from the sepia toning, the book transports a positive and self-assured attitude to the reader. The girl often has a smile on her face, walks with her head up high and handles the family situation with no obvious signs of emotional misery. Additionally, the narrative climaxes when the girl boldly takes a stance in an argument with her parents concerning where the dog should live, she exclaims “Fred stays with ME!” (Coffelt) and thereby is able to keep the dog in spite of his misbehavior. This image best conveys the author’s intent. We see the girl holding her dog in her arms standing in the middle of a cone of light, like on a stage. The shadows of the parents are outside of the light and there is even a sock on the floor in the dark, but the spotlight, i.e. the focus is on the girl and the dog. The girl is who is important. The sock representing all the havoc which the dog wreaks is in the dark and thus does not matter. The parents’ inclinations are irrelevant, only the relationship of the girl and the dog and the support and personal strength which the girl obtains from it are important.

We do not actually see the girls’ divorced parents, we only see parts of them and we hear what the girl tells us about them. The emphasis is completely on the girl and her dog, but gives the reader the possibility to (as in *Where the Wild Things Are* by Sendak) “project into the blank an image of his or her own mother”, too (Spitz, 128). Furthermore, this underscores the girl’s loneliness, especially in the images where the girl is sitting at the kitchen table eating alone. Although the text reads

[w]hen my mom and I have pizza, or when my dad and I eat peanut butter sandwiches,
Fred waits for crumbs (Coffelt),

this seems to depict the common mealtime arrangements in both houses – only the dog is by her side. Instead of sitting with both her parents and particular her mother, whose most important obligation to nurture their child (Spitz, 62), feeding her, she sits by herself

demonstrating “maturity and independence” (Spitz, 62). Spitz (62) further sees milk and generally nourishment as metaphorically standing for a parents’ love, which in this case is not provided by the parents and forces the child to “grow toward self-reliance”. Besides, pizza and peanut butter sandwiches are definitely not the most nutritious and health foods for a child.

Even though the parents are divorced, they seem to be not too divergent as what is compared in the various double spreads is - though different - not completely antithetic. In both parents’ homes there are, of course, a bed and (lonely) lunch times, but there are also outdoor activities and trouble with the dog. Both parents lose their nerves with the dog and want to give it away. They even echo each other’s words almost verbatim.

There are no obvious gender differences. Both parents share an equal position of power. The visual symmetrical separation of their spheres in the book suggests that they are both responsible for the girl to the same extent and that both have the same amount of influence and power and both have a say in the issue of the dog.

The different beds cannot be related to either parent. Both parents serve not particularly healthy and time-consuming meals (assuming that the pizza is not made from scratch). Both parents own and drive a car. The rooms that we get to see are not very divergent. Even the furniture of both houses is drawn as if belonging to the same house (e.g. the sideboard in the father’s bedroom and the one in the mother’s living room but also lamps, picture frames and wallpaper look similar). In this book clothing is also rather stereotypical as the mother wears a skirt and a braid, the father pleat-front trousers and the girl a lot of skirts and dresses (though not exclusively), long hair and ribbons. This even extends to the dogs. The neighbor’s poodle wears ribbons and a decorative necklace while Fred wears nothing but an ordinary dog collar.

Both houses are fairly tidy: the beds are made, the dishes are clean and stored orderly in the cupboard and on the sideboard. Nevertheless there is dust under the sideboard and there is chaos in both houses due to the dog’s misbehavior. Both parents seem to try to keep order and with it their power position, but obviously cannot manage completely. This is also implied through the shadows of the parents in the climactic scene where the girl announces her plea. The girl stands highlighted in the spotlight coming from above but the unseen parents cast a shadow towards the girl. “Such inconsistencies suggest that light sources, like shadows, are

more significantly meaningful than representational. In fact, they are often used symbolically.” (Nodelman, 154). While overlapping shadows tend to suggest the power of the objects that cast them over the objects they overlap” (Nodelman, 153), these shadows fall short and cannot reach the girl. Their shadows and thus their power do not reach her at the moment of her empowerment.

In summary, this book relates the empowerment of a child of divorced parents and imparts a positive attitude to readers who themselves might have separated parents. The book therefore advocates independence meaning non-conformity (i.e. “standing up” against the parents and for ones own needs) as well as in the sense of self-reliance. Furthermore, she shows responsibility when she takes on the task of solving the problem her dog caused, together with her parents.

The fact that the parents are divorced is considered a normal situation since questions about how and why it happened are not dealt with. Although the fact that such books exist indicates the underlying ideology that ideally a child needs the security of a stable home with married (heterosexual) parents or otherwise ought to have alternative stability if the parents cannot offer it. Furthermore, I deem it noteworthy that the parents in this narrative are still depicted as “parents” as they nevertheless act in concert, seem to agree in a lot of things (such as food, activities and the dog) and have obviously parted on friendly terms for the good of their child. There are no disagreements or even angry arguments depicted or even implied between the parents. I would expect that a large number of divorces would involve some sort of dispute or resentment (of at least of one party), this book represents quite an oversimplification of the subject matter. In particular, as the intention is to comfort distressed children of divorced parents, the depiction might be too unproblematic to reflect the life situations of children who are most in need of such comfort. The story suggests a world which adults want, want children to believe in or want for their children: a harmonious world in which divorces can be handled sensibly. In this respect, the family still represents some sort of ideal, although “only” the ideal “separated” family, meaning that if a family breaks up, this ideally happens calmly without mutual aggression and with the parents handling the situation with the best interests of their children in mind. The image of the pet as the loyal companion of the child, giving the child stability in a chaotic situation is even more relevant in the context of a disrupted family.

This book comes with “A Note from the Author” directed at the parents (or other caretakers). The author explicitly states his aim to empower children to speak out about their wishes and needs but also to make parents understand children’s need for continuity and lasting, stable bonds. Hence, this book does not endeavor to be didactic solely for the child reader but also for the adult reader. Certainly, the “note” directed at adults is also meant as an advertisement because they, as the ones typically purchasing books for their children, are the ones who need to be convinced of its merits.

6.2.3. *The Kissing Hand*

This book by Audry Penn won the Distinguished Achievements Award by the Ed Press and was number 1 on the New York Times bestseller list (Penn, cover). The book comes with a CD which includes an audio-version of the story and “Chester’s Original Song”. The song is in essence a summary of the book. I will focus on the written text and the illustrations in my analysis.

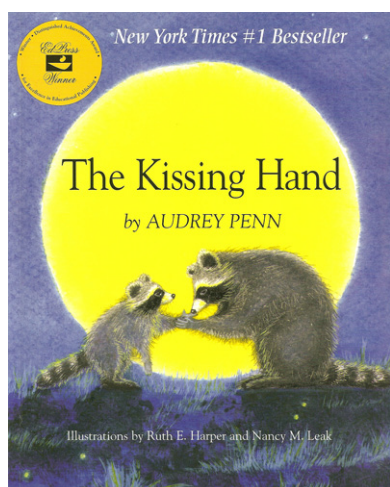


Illustration 8: Penn, cover.

On the cover we already learn that the story centers on two raccoons. They are depicted in a rather (but by far not absolutely) anthropomorphic posture, hinting that they will act as human substitutes in the story. The narrative introduces us to Chester Raccoon who is sad because he has to leave for school soon. He does not want to leave home but instead wishes to stay with his mother, but his mother gives Chester a kiss on the hand and tells him that this kiss will always stick to his hand and remind him of her love wherever he goes. Chester gives his mother a kiss too and finally - knowing his mother’s love will go with him - is confident and ready to go to school.

The message of the narrative is very obvious that a mother loves her child unconditionally and eternally, regardless if it is near or far away and will comfort it when it is distressed. A message that in accordance with the literary tradition says that a “good mother will always be at the beck and call of her family” (Alston, 83).

The story is told by a reliable third-person omniscient narrator who knows what Chester feels and thinks, but mostly reproducing matter-of-factly direct dialogues of Chester or Mrs.

Raccoon. The omniscience of the narrator is rarely revealed in the text, for example when she/he claims that “The warmth of Chester’s kiss filled her heart with special words.” (Penn), but is shown frequently in the images that enhance the text rather than merely attend them. Although we do not learn any specifics about them in the text, we see Chester’s friends and toys in the pictures. While the text only reads “Now he knew his mother’s love would go with him wherever he went.” (Penn), the pictures show Chester in five different situations in which he either looks at his hand for reassurance or he is playing, always surrounded by flying hearts. Furthermore, we perceive the information that Chester’s school is a tree which he attends with various different kinds of animals like mice, rabbits, birds etc. from the images. In addition, we can see what usually cannot be seen. The love between the child and mother which is illustrated by lots of flying hearts, hearts that flow around in the air between the two, stick to their hands and emerge from them when needed.

The mood is set right on the front cover. It is night and two cuddly little creatures linger in the light of the full moon. There is nothing scary about this night as both creatures seem to be comfortable and treat each other tenderly. The size difference leads us to assume that the larger one is an adult, maybe a parent and that the smaller one is probably their child.

The book has neither a front endpaper nor an end endpaper, instead it starts with a “Foreword” by “Jean Kennedy Smith, Founder and Program Chairperson Very Special Arts”. This foreword explains the aims and applications of the story:

[F]or any child who confronts a difficult situation, and for the child within each of us who sometimes needs reassurance. [...] Parents and others who care for children will find an unforgettable way of communicating the message that all of us most need to her – ‘You are loved.’ (Smith)

and thereby promotes the book.

The inside title page, which mirrors the cover image, extends over the double spread adding three watching creatures to the scene (which are also found on the outside back page) and which are also to be found a third time later in the book.

Unlike the cover page, most pictures are done in bright, friendly and rich colors. Only the final pages, when Chester goes to school are in dark blue. Chester is a nocturnal animal and obviously attends school by night. Although the scenery gets darker, colors are still vibrant and pleasant. The images are mostly spread over a full page or even a full double spread.

When specific events are singled-out, for example when Mrs. Raccoon lists future activities the illustrations are “singled-out” with a surrounding, dominant blank space. Apart from that there is only one more double spread with prevailing blank space: when Mrs. Raccoon actually plants the kiss on Chester’s hand. There is nothing else on those two pages, just Chester, his mother, the hand and lots of hearts, symbolizing the love between the two. The message is clearly that nothing else matters except them and their mutual love.

In contrast to Juster’s and Coffelt’s girls, Chester has a task which he must fulfill.

‘Sometimes we all have to do things we don’t want to do,’ she told him gently. ‘Even if they seem strange and scary at first’. (Penn)

Chester has to go to school. This may also be categorized as emphasizing “self-reliance” because going to school means that Chester must part from his mother. Apart from that it seems that Chester is free to play with friends and/or toys, read books or play on a swing. There are no obligations or other worries in his life but the impending separation from his mother.

Concerning family ties, the pervading love seems to be only that between a mother and her child. There are no fathers to this story. The mother tells Chester that she once got the kissing hand from her mother – again no mentioning of a father here. This seems to be coherent with natural raccoon behavior as these animals live, i.e. sleep only with their own sex from a certain age on, males and females do not bond after mating (Gehrt on Wikipedia/Raccoon). Nevertheless, Chester appears “fatherless” to the reader as only few readers (especially children) will be aware of this fact and will simply transfer the behavior of these anthropomorphically depicted animals to a concept of human socialization. Especially since this reference to feral behavior is negated by the fact that although the fathers are completely absent from the story, Chester’s mother is referred to as “Mrs. Raccon” implying the existence of a “Mr. Raccoon” – who obviously takes no part in the child rearing activities. Actually, he does not show visually nor is he even mentioned.

Chester’s mother very affectionate towards him and is always facing, holding or hugging her son. Apparently there are no siblings meaning that Mrs. Raccoon is exclusively focused on Chester. The overall message is that the bond between a mother and her child is special and seems to be even more special than the connection between father and child.

Although the “Mrs.” hints at Chester being part of a typical father-mother-child family and there is all the love and care that a family needs, the complete absence of the father or other male social parent somewhat dents the picture of the perfect family. On the other hand, the absence of the father poses no obvious issue for Mrs. Raccoon or Chester. They seem to have either come to terms with the absence of the father and lack nothing (as if he was never been part of the family and is not to be expected to be). In any case, the two member family appears happy and satisfied the way it is. His mother seems to be extremely important to Chester as he is not able to leave her and be happy without the firm invisible link to his mother. Although he leaves home physically, psychologically he does not leave his home completely behind.

[T]his notion jibes with children’s early fantasies of being the sole love object of their mothers. It is a notion that implicitly denies the mother’s independent existence. Like the book as a whole, it presupposes eternal, all-encompassing symbiosis between a mother and her child. (Spitz, 143)

Chester’s mother also seems to be dependent on this link to her son which all of a sudden seems to exert power over her (visually illustrated by the mother looking up to her son who is now positioned in a tree above her). It is clear that she would not be happy without her son. Family is constructed as the sole source of happiness and a backdrop that lends security even when physically separated.

6.2.4. *Fancy Nancy: Heart to Heart*

Fancy Nancy: Heart to Heart written by Jane O'Connor and illustrated by Robin Preiss Glasser is the only book I analyzed which is part of a series. The series, which started in 2005, consists of almost 50 books by now (fancynancybooks). The series was on the New York Times Bestsellers List (HarperCollins). The books also have their own website www.fancynancybooks.com that not only advertises the books but also related merchandising, such as costumes, a Nintendo game, and further activities relating to Fancy Nancy and fanciness, such as instructions for fancy parties. Moreover, the page also offers fun activities like coloring on the screen or on paper, ecards and a blog. The page offers advice for “fancy together time” (fancynancybooks) for parents and children. *Fancy Nancy* can even be found on Facebook and also offers an “App” for iPad and iPhone. This is a manifestation of Hardyment’s (qtd in Alston, 11) child as a consumer in a capitalist society in which the satisfaction of a child’s desires has become a central need of parents (Alston, 21), consequently leading to the book industry targeting children in such a manner.

In *Heart to Heart* Nancy is the narrator who explains to the implied reader what's so fancy about Valentine's Day and what fancy things you can do. When all of a sudden she finds a Valentine's card addressed to herself, she sets about finding out who sent it to her. Finally, her little sister is revealed as the sender and "secret admirer" (O'Connor).

From the cover we already gather that *Fancy Nancy* is mainly aimed at typical girl readers. The book is done in pink colors with hearts all over which relate to the Valentine's Day theme of the book. The front cover features a fancily decorated doll and a dog. The dog is wearing a necklace amongst other decorations and a tutu. Nevertheless, the dog is smiling, conveying its delight about the outfit. Of course, Nancy is also dressed fancily, wearing reams of ribbons and a little crown in her hair. Her posture with the straight back expresses self-confidence. Both her pinkies are sticking out, highlighting her poshness.

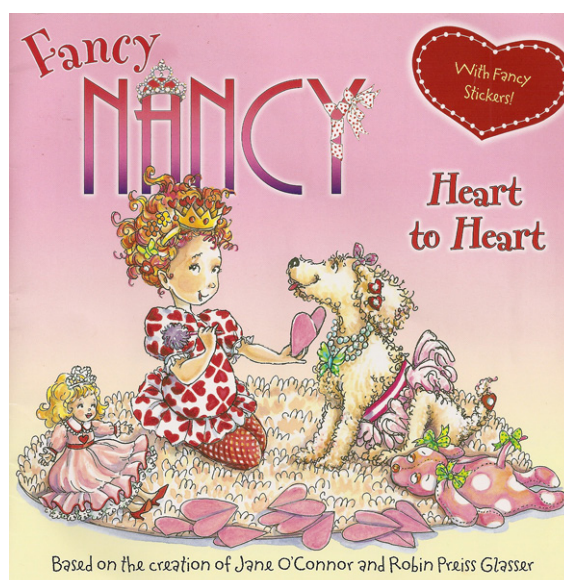


Illustration 9: O'Connor, cover.

The remaining illustrations are set against the backdrop of blank page. The color red is also a persistent theme throughout because Nancy is wearing an outfit covered with red hearts and there are red hearts on literally every page of the book. Although the pictures are set against a white background they are full of colors with many tiny details. The onlooker is almost gets overwhelmed with all the niceties present, accessories like ribbons, bows, laces, necklaces, bracelets, boas, handbags, flowers and lavish patterns are to be seen everywhere, especially in Nancy's and her friend Bree's room, this gives the images a somewhat edgy feeling. Nevertheless, it is a tidy and cozy home.

Fancy Nancy is delivered from Nancy's perspective. She is the narrating "I", directing her speech directly towards the reader. Even the text is written in a handwritten style font, suggesting that maybe Nancy wrote it. The reader is not meant to identify too strongly with Nancy. A few times she looks directly out of the page at the observer. Nancy talks in her own idiosyncrasy to the reader. She mixes French words into her vocabulary, always explaining

them to the reader and once also indicates the correct pronunciation. She also takes a somewhat patronizing stance towards her observers, Nancy keeps explaining things like words (not only French but also e.g. the word “admirer”), (Valentine’s Day’s) customs and procedures (e.g. writing down the suspects) to the reader, telling us that she addresses a young child as her imagined reader.

Nancy is full of energy and self-content. Everything she does seems to be directed towards an invisible observer. She takes on what Nodelman and Reimer (120) call the typical female fashion-model pose, always smiling for the onlooker. Nancy’s posture is that of a grown stylish lady, a posture Nodelman and Reimer (121) consider inviting “the gaze of the viewers”, usually taken by females and which “signal[...] desirable femininity and delighted acquiescence in being viewed in visual imagery”. Not only does she arch her back and position her legs and hips like models like to do when they pose for pictures but she also sticks her behind and her pinkies out, crosses her legs and walks on her tiptoes as if she was wearing high heels. Especially on the double spread where she chooses the right outfit for “mystery-solving” her tiptoeing insinuates high heels because there are actually high-heels lying in her room. Furthermore, Nancy wears eye shadow and nail polish. This depiction of a young girl is certainly highly controversial as Nancy is depicted like a mature or at least adolescent girl prettifying herself in a sexual manner. Her dressing up can be regarded as the sexualization of a girl. In a country of child beauty pageants and booming child beauty parlors, Nancy’s creators seem to have their finger on the pulse of time. They (like obviously many parents) consider it unproblematic and deem it normal child behavior that children want to dress up fancily as they see adult women doing it. Still, Nancy uses make-up and high heels which are used by women to appear more sexually attractive since they show (or fake) sexual maturity or arousal. Also her indulgence in the chocolate which she devours whilst lying on her bed, posing for the reader and licking her lips has certain sexual undertones. She greedily holds a chocolate in each hand and cream is dripping from one of them. This certainly undercuts the prevalent ideology according to which children are innocent and asexual (Alston, 115).

Interestingly, not all girls depicted in the book are like this. Nancy’s mother and sister are not at all fancy, instead they wear comfortable sneakers and jeans and no accessories whatsoever. Moreover, we need to question what this emphasis on outward appearance communicates to the child reader. Nancy obviously pays a lot attention to her looks, she even changes clothes

to be properly dressed for “mystery-solving” and her friend Bree is also very fancy with many barrettes in her hair, an outfit similar to Nancy’s and a similar passion for sequins and doilies. Nevertheless, Nancy is not a superficial girl.

Nancy is strongly rooted in her family and surrounded by love. While her best friend is also a fashion victim like herself, her family is not. Her parents are practically “regular” people. They dress more comfortably than fashionably. Only the dog does not stand a chance against Nancy’s attempts at beautification. Love seems to be everywhere in this family: the father gives “a bouquet – of flowers” to her mother and the mother and sister jointly craft a Valentine’s card for Nancy and use her much-loved fuchsia glitter as sign of their affection. When she finds out that her “secret admirer” (O’Connor) is her sister, Nancy “give[s] her a very big hug” (O’Connor) and finally shares her beloved raspberry cream chocolate with her sister to express that the affection is mutual.

The family is an “ideal American family” (see above 4.) consisting of a mother, a father and two children. On the first double spread we see a family portrait drawn by Nancy including all family members along with the dog. They are all smiling and the parents are holding hands. The sun is shining as an illustration of joy.

In the narrative as told by Nancy, Nancy’s world mainly revolves around Nancy herself. Her parents only seem to play a marginal role. The mother helping her sister on the Valentine’s card is not mentioned verbally, we only see in a picture that her mother is sitting in front of a table full of art material and she is busy cutting out a heart for another Valentine’s card. This contrasts Nancy’s sister’s dependence with Nancy’s self-reliance and independence. She neither asks her parents about Valentine’s Day, for help for Valentine’s Day’s preparations nor does she ask them for assistance when she tries to find out who sent her the Valentine’s card. Thus, it is safe to say that she is not just autonomous but also energetic, motivated and smart.

Nancy’s place in the family does not involve having any chores to carry out, yet when she chooses her “mystery-solving ensemble” (O’Connor) her room looks extremely chaotic but then not so on the next page, so we may assume that she has cleaned up after herself. While Nancy is very independent, her little sister is still aided by her mother with creating a

Valentine's card for Nancy. The mother spends creative quality time with her daughters but we do not see any interaction of the father with the girls.

The secondary message of the book is about love and this is consistent with the title *Heart to Heart* and the Valentine's Day theme. It emphasizes that the love between family members is also important on Valentine's Day, the day traditionally associated with romantic love.

6.2.5. *"Let's Get a Pup!" said Kate*

On the back cover of *"Let's Get a Pup!" said Kate* by Bob Graham we find a notable list of awards and recognitions received. This includes

- An ABC Children's Booksellers Choice
- An American Library Association Notable Children's Book
- An ASPCA Henry Bergh Children's Book Honor Award Winner
- A *Booklist* Editors's Choice
- A Book Sense 76 Selection
- A *Boston Globe-Horn Book* Award Winner
- A *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* Blue Ribbon Winner (Graham, back cover)

This is the story of little Kate, who wants a little pup. Hence, her parents go to the animal rescue center and get a puppy for her. After the first night with the new family member, they decide to also get another – bigger and older - dog that they saw at the shelter and also take it home.

The story already starts before the inside title but after the blank front endpaper. We take a peek into Kate's room. Through the window we see the sun rise. The text reads

The end of Kate's bed was a lonely place. Tiger the cat no longer slept there. Tiger died last winter, so there were only Kate's two feet to keep each other company (Graham).

The illustration stands isolated in the middle of blank space transporting Kate's solitude to the onlooker. However the image also extends the text with the visual metaphor for the loneliness of the feet. Accordingly, Kate's feet stick out from under her blanket. The curtains look like they are moving in the wind blowing through the open window. Thus, we may assume that Kate's feet are cold without the blanket and no one to keep them warm. The inside title page

with Kate yelling “Let’s Get a Pup!” (Graham) is also already part of the story. Kate has gotten out of bed and runs along the corridor towards her parents’ room.

The narration uses a figural narrative perspective. The figural narrator gives us external observations without insight into the character’s internal feelings. Verbal expressions are all conveyed by direct speech.

The image outlines are drawn with fine pencil lines and filled with watercolors. There is a lot of blank space. Occasionally there are multiple scenes per one page surrounded by blank space and text. The text is always situated within these blank spaces. Colors are mostly true to reality, except for the nighttime images where the girl and the dogs are highlighted by standing out as the only colored items on the page while the rest is just in blue, thereby drawing attention to the girl and the dogs, emphasizing their warm friendship that unites them against the rest of the dark and scary world.

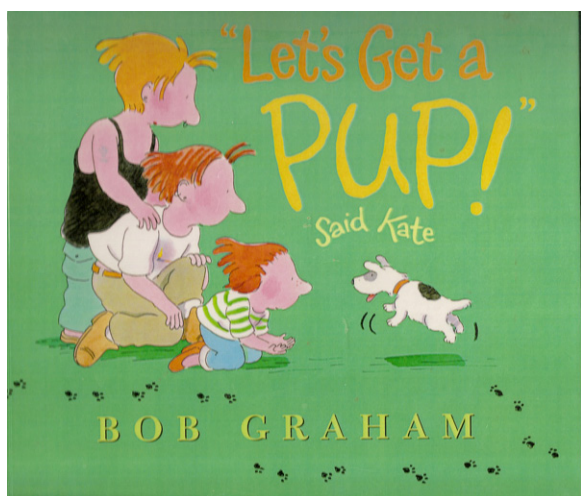


Illustration 10: Graham, cover.

The family certainly looks unusual compared to other “picture-perfect” picture book families. Their make-up is not particularly gender stereotypical. Father and mother look very much alike, not just from the facial features but also their dress style. On the front cover page, it is even hard to distinguish father and mother. Apart from their different hair colors, their hair is much alike, both have very short cut, obviously uncombed hair. The mother’s haircut is even shorter than father’s. and the daughter has a short

haircut too. All of them wear almost unisex clothes: pants and (T-)shirts. The father wears a hat, which is typical for men and a shirt with a soccer ball printed on it. The mother especially, is dressed in an unusually stereotypically masculine style for picture-book standards. Although in one image she is wearing a short, pink nightdress and we see high-heels lying in front of her bed, most of the time she wears cargo pants, flat shoes or flip-flops and she even has a tattoo on her upper arm and a nose piercing. The colors of the clothes - mainly blue, white and green - are unisex, too. Kate’s father sports a “5 o’clock shadow” and also has an

ear piercing and an earring. All in all, they are not particularly elegant but rather somewhat unkempt people. This is also evident in their house.

The pink lingerie and the high-heels are especially interesting, in particular, in connection with the pills we see in the drawer of the nightstand, which are likely to be contraception pills due to their location, as all those hints are indications of the mother's sexuality. This is contrary to the ideology of the asexual (good) mother and somehow gives the mother an odd appearance. Similar to the stepmother in Anthony Browne's illustrated version of *Hansel and Gretel* where also

the [...]mother's lingerie hangs out of the drawers untidily; the woman's sexuality far from being hidden is almost flaunted. This [...] helps to construct her both as a sexual being, a taboo subject for the 'good' mother in children's literature (Alston, 112).

Moreover, their behavior is hardly gendered. The mother and father act mostly in unison. When Kate suggests getting a pup, the parents agree immediately and instantly start looking for a new dog. Furthermore, they agree on the dog, i.e. the dogs at once. Uncharacteristically, the father wishes for a cute dog while the mother more stereotypically gets an emotional shake in her voice when she realizes that they cannot take all the dogs with them. Besides, she is the one demanding a bath for the rather smelly Rosy, but all three of them are then involved in the activity.

Additionally the image of Kate sitting on the toilet with her, as to be expected in that situation, pants pulled down strikes me as unusual and Spitz confirms that

the bathroom, and especially the bath room as equipped explicitly with a toilet, is the least frequently pictured indoor space in books for young children. (Spitz, 50)

As abovementioned, the house looks chaotic – even before the dogs move in. Not just Kate's room with a bag under her bed, paper under her table, crayons lying on the table and an open closet looks a little untidy, but the parents have underwear on the floor, an open wallet on the nightstand and clothes over the foot board of the bed in their bedroom as well. In the kitchen and the living room there are toys, dirty dishes, magazines lying around and the telephone is on the floor and there is a picture just leaning against the wall (instead of hanging up). The mother is slouching rather than sitting on the couch and the father is lying on the floor in front of the television. When the dogs eventually move in, they cause even more havoc in the

household. The dogs are allowed to not only to sleep on the couch but are also welcomed into Kate's bed. Dave pulls down the tablecloth and spreads flower on the floor. Rosy sweeps the dishes of the table with her tail and causes puddles of water on the floor while taking a bath. However the family does not seem to mind. One sees in the images that the parents react swiftly to limit the damage caused by the dogs but there is no verbal scolding of them evident in the text.

In accordance with the literary tradition of the family dinner table being the place for family decisions, this family is at their breakfast table when they decide to get a dog, but the mealtime ritual is not completed. The family interrupts its meals twice to rush to the rescue center although such haste should not be necessary. The meal obviously does not have enough significance to them. The setting of the table is ambiguous as well. Despite the fact that it is full with dishes and food packages, there is no food to be seen on the table, only some sandwiches are to be seen on the sideboard. Even though the mealtime ritual is performed, something is still missing that would give the desired effect of a sense of belonging together. Both dogs cause several disruptions to what should, according to literary conventions, be peaceful family mealtime gatherings. Consequently they are disturbing the family union.

All the same, the family does pull together. On the first page Kate does a somersault into her parents' bed. The text starts with a rhyming verse

"Let's get a pup!" said Kate
 "What, a brand-new one?"
 said a now wide-awake Mom.
 "With the wrapping still on"?
 added her breathless dad.
 "Pups don't come wrapped,"
 replied Kate.
 "I know they don't", said Dad.
 "It's just a joke." (Graham)

The rhymes do not continue on the next page, but do keep reappearing throughout the book. The rhyming words give a sense of a well harmonizing family unit. They decide quickly and jointly for a dog and then on a second one. While it is surprising how swiftly the parents accept Kate's idea of getting a dog, we quickly realize that this is what all of them want. They are so in unison that they rephrase each other's sentences, e.g. when they say:

"He's all that we want," said Kate.
 "All that we came for," said Mom.

“We’ll take him,” said Dad. (Graham)

or do not even have to complete their sentences:

“Dave was crying last night, so he slept with me,” said Kate. “But I didn’t sleep ...”

“Neither did I,” said Dad. “I was wishing...”

“Neither did I,” said Mom. “I was wishing...”

With their breakfast once again uneaten, they dressed and left immediately. (Graham)

They agree without difficulty on the kind of dogs and how to keep the dogs. The dogs seem to also be part of the family as they are also allowed to do whatever everyone else is allowed to. They unrestrictedly share all the space in the house and cuddle with the family members, e.g. with the father in front of the television and with Kate on the couch and in her bed. Some family unity is visible in the family portrait in the parents’ bedroom, where father and mother stand close to each other holding a baby in their hands. Both are looking down at the baby with a look that is more astonished than happy. The protagonists hardly smile anywhere in the story, their mouths are small and therefore their rare smiles are always small and only suggested. Their lips mostly look like they are articulating an “oh”. Nevertheless, singling out all the portraits, this gives a somewhat weird sentiment about the family. Unsettlingly a picture in the kitchen almost like a family portrait featuring the elegantly dressed parents side by side shows the father holding, not a child but a little cat or a dog in his arms. Underneath this we see a drawing by a child, showing just a single person. There are two more photos at the foot end of the parents’ bed. One is of a person (which could be Kate) with an animal on its arm and the other shows just a cat. There is another picture of the cat on a sideboard in the living room, next to a portrait of two unidentifiable persons and an image of a bird and one of two dogs. In summary: there is only one complete family portrait, the parents are present in two of the pictures, Kate is shown on one or two, the cat twice and the dogs share one. This gives a distorted image of the importance of the individuals in the household. Especially the fact that Kate, just like the cat, features in just one picture with her parents and once by herself, heightens the impression that the pets are regarded as being as important as the humans, or at least the child in this household. Considering Kate’s lonely feet at the beginning of the story and the two child drawings of a single child, this leaves us with the impression of a child that is lonely within the structure of the nuclear family.

Finally we see Kate in her bed with the two dogs arranged like we have seen (in other books but also here) other family portraits arranged. The rest of the room is dark and they are framed by the night and highlighted by the use of colors. The big dog is lying in the middle with the

two little ones (Kate and the other dog) by his side. He is lying on his back, almost human-like with his paws on top of their heads. Furthermore, in the last illustration of the book the dogs are also not lying at Kate's feet, again Kate and the dogs are framed by darkness, but this time Kate is cuddled into the side of the big dog, Rosy's midsection where young puppies usually lie. The text below this image reads:

Their weight is comfortable and reliable, and will stop Kate's bed from floating away into the night. (Graham)

This final sentence is a bit odd. One has to wonder why Kate's bed should "float[...] away into the night" (Graham). This "floating" or a sensation thereof was not mentioned before in the book. If we consider the preceding words that a "comfortable and reliable" "weight" "will stop" (Graham) this floating, we are induced to conclude that "floating" is caused by the opposite, i.e. discomfort and unreliability. The question arises why a little girl needs dogs to give her this feeling of security, which every child should feel in its home?

The family seems to be intact on the surface. The narrative depicts a family nucleus with the traditional constellation of a mother, a father and a child, although the dogs also seem to be part of this family. Nevertheless, a number of signs show that they deviate from the traditional literary 'good' family, like the untidiness, the mother's displayed sexuality and the interrupted meals. Yet the parents are (still) married (they are wearing rings) and all the family members are present and actively involved in the story. The atmosphere and the level of conversation are presented as affirmative and cooperative. Kate is depicted as an independent and responsible girl who does not need to get any orders from her parents and cares for the dogs on her own initiative (e.g. when she walks the dogs). Nevertheless, there are hardly ever smiles in their faces and we do not perceive too much affectionate behavior among the family members. The only cuddling scene in the book takes place between humans and dogs and it seems that the relationships between human and animal in the family are more loving than those between human and human. The family atmosphere is positive but certainly not as warm as in some of the other picture book families (see e.g. points 6.2.1, 6.2.3, or 6.2.4).

Overall the book seems to have the same message as *Fred stays with me!*, namely that a dog could make up for parents' deficiency in providing a loving and secure home. Although in *Fred* the difficulties of the family are more evident, in *Let's get a Pup!* the shortcomings are much more subtle and therefore difficult to discover but are nevertheless no less severe.

However in both books, pets are presented as in some ways being better than humans and the solution to the child's predicaments.

7. Conclusion

I would once again like to remind the reader that having only examined 9 books, my comparative analysis can by no means be considered as being comprehensive. Nevertheless, I will try to determine a pattern of similarities and differences in terms of how families are represented by the books chosen.

I want to start by comparing the main child characters in the books. Although I chose the books randomly and "far fewer classic picture books [are] with starring roles for girls than for boys" (Spitz, 25), out of the nine books only 3 to 4 books, *The Morning Market*, *Dad and his Cigarettes* and *The Kissing Hand*, feature a male protagonist. In *The King of Hide and Seek* it is not so clear whether Xiao Yong or rather the narrating girl is the hero. Although the story is all about the Xiao Yong, the girl is the one the implied reader should identify with and whose lead they should follow. If we consider Xiao Yong as the central character (as I do as the plot centers on him), a clear difference between American and Chinese books emerges: 3 out of 4 Chinese books have male hero, while 4 out of 6 American books have a heroine. Here the American books offer a more modern approach.

In the two Chinese books *The Morning Market* and *Dad and his Cigarettes*, both boys do not adhere to the Euro-American

idea that males are naturally uncontrollable [which] allows some boys to wreak havoc on others and force other boys [...] to be considered by themselves and others as abnormal. (Nodelman and Reimer, 166)

Instead they are completely passive and submissive, power relations are clear as they are subjugated by their adult caretakers.

Furthermore, they do not venture outside:

Over and over in picture books for young children, we encounter these gender differences. Little girls turn anger against themselves whereas little boys send it outward. Boy characters set off on adventures and try to become heroes by learning to fend for themselves; girls are expected to hold on tight and solve their problems within, not outside of, their primary relationships. (Spitz, 48)

The nameless son in *Dad and his Cigarettes* is too young to set out on adventures on his own or to criticize his father for his demeanor but Yang Yang (*Morning Market*) is also completely

submissive to his aunt and only asks questions thereby emphasizing his adult aunts' superior knowledge about rural Chinese life. None of the boys feels the need or the urge to "rebel against the constriction of a society" as would typically be expected of male characters (at least in American) children's literature (Nodelman and Reimer, 166). Only Xiao Yong tries to escape his departure and the future imposed on him by adults by hiding in the fields, but his resistance is short-lived before he ultimately submits. Besides, Xiao Yong's resistance is not threatening to the adults' authority since Xiao Yong is mentally ill and his reaction stirred by grief. Even though they do not know his father or what is going to happen, his friends all instantaneously decide to support the father and help in finding and handing over Xiao Yong. It seems that the Chinese ideal image of the obedient child who knows its place in society and family is still prevalent in Chinese children literature. The American male example of a literary hero in *Kissing Hand* also does not revolt strongly against his imposed departure. There is no rebellious spirit in him when he states "'I don't want to go to school' [...] 'I want to stay home with you.'" (Penn). Through the accompanying picture which shows a big tear drop in Chester's eye, we comprehend that Chester's tone is mostly sad. His "please" when he asks his mother "Please may I stay home with you?" (Penn) means we anticipate no rebellion on his part against his mother's authority, unlike so many boys before him (Nodelman and Reimer, 166), although Spitz argues that

little boys, who must, it is commonly believed in our culture, separate and differentiate themselves from their mothers, such combativeness is discouraged in little girls, who are taught early on that they should seek safety in sameness with their mothers rather than stage frontal rebellions against them. (Spitz, 146)

Neither in the Chinese nor in the American books any boy does revolt. On the contrary, Chester is distressed upon thinking about the impending separation from his mother and is only comforted when his mother gives him a present that will give him the feeling of connection with her despite spatial distance.

The girls, on the other hand and in contrast to traditional gender roles that "men act and women appear" (Nodelman and Reimer, 166), are far more active; at least the American girls are. Mao Mao in *Reunion*, just like her male counterparts, shows no signs of self-initiated actions. Additionally, Mao Mao does not reveal any signs of protest against her parents' conduct. She submits to her father's hello kiss even though she is scared of this almost unknown man and does not object with even a single word against her father's fresh departure. Instead she develops an admiration of sorts for her father who allows her to do and does things with her that her mother does not allow or do with her.

Fancy Nancy, Kate and the girl in *Fred stays with me!* are a different kind of girl. All three are active and initiate the storyline and are self-reliant enough to find the final solution to their “predicament” on their own. Only the girl in *Fred stays with me!* speaks up and questions her parent’s authority, when she does not allow them to take Fred away. She not only gets away with it but instead of – as is traditionally common – her finally accepting her parents’ authority (Nodelman and Reimer, 157), her parents respond to her demand. This is an indication of a new underlying ideology with the child as the center of the family. It subverts the power relations of the traditional adult-child-relation when the girl’s need for a permanent companion is put before the parents’ need for tidiness and tranquility.

Furthermore, none of the human children experiences the typical childhood dilemma

whether one should act naturally in accordance with one’s basic animal instincts or whether one should do as one’s parents wish and learn to act in obedience to their more civilized codes of behavior (Nodelman, 116).

Fittingly, only Chester the raccoon contemplates resisting society’s obligation of attending school. More appropriately, it is school he wants to resist, the very place of (human) civilization and obedience, but Chester is not afraid of this cultivation, instead just of the separation from his mother. Like most picture book heroes Chester eventually resists his natural impulse and obeys his mother’s and society’s obligations.

The girls Mao Mao, Nancy and the narrating girl in the *King of Hide and Seek* have features typically attributed to females. While Nancy indulges in beauty and fashion, the girl in the *King of Hide and Seek* – just like Mao Mao, who takes affectionate care of her father by bringing a hot drink - takes care of the neighbor’s boy, not only by helping him find a hiding place but also emotionally when she starts chanting for the “king”. Theme-wise the female protagonists as well as the male ones all deal with emotional topics. All the girls deal with topics of emotions, affection and relationships. Chester’s and Xiao Yang’s story and the story of the boy with the smoking father are also highly emotional. None of the Chinese books have a frame and Nodelman (51) argues that “books that focus more centrally on action and emotion rarely have frames of white space”. Nevertheless, the Chinese stories focus less on their protagonist’s feelings than the American ones do, indicated also by the absence of frames.

The *Morning Market* does not deal with emotions at all. In the other three Chinese books the protagonists' feelings are only evident in the visuals, as is common with picture books.

pictures often fill in the details of emotion and of setting that their words leave out and that color seems most suited to convey. (Nodelman, 69)

We see the *Cigarettes-boy's* and his parents' emotion only in the image of their distressed faces. The same is true for Mao Mao. We see her cry and we see her delight only in the illustrations and their colors. They are not mentioned in the verbal text. Xiao Yong's sentiments are generally only conveyed implicitly. Verbally we hear that his eyes were swollen and so we suspect that he had been crying. Visually only the colors hint at the melancholy of the theme. Mao Mao is also the only Chinese child whose family exhibits physical tenderness.

The American books are generally more sensitive. The *Hello, Goodbye Window*, *Kissing Hand*, and *Fancy Nancy* all foreground and focus on emotions (of their protagonists and thematically). All of them receive physical attention like hugs. *Fred* is the only American book largely neglecting the protagonist's feelings verbally, but centers on the sensations of loneliness and how to deal with them. According to the convention "the words usually stick to telling us about what happens" (Nodelman, 71), her melancholy is mostly expressed by color and visual symbolism. In opposition, "*Let's get a Pup!*" verbally mostly and visually completely only implies Kate's seclusion.

Thereby a further difference between the families of the two nations emerges. Three of the American families have one or more dogs. All of the dogs are part of the family. While Kate's dog and Fred are as important as a human, offering qualities and relationships to their owners, Nancy's dog also takes part in family activities. The dog can already be seen on the title page and a few times within the book. He is dressed appropriately with an Amor's costume and is also allowed to lie in Nancy's bed. Furthermore, the grandparents in the *Hello, Goodbye Window* have a cat, although it does not have a significant role in the family structure. On the other hand, none of the Chinese families have pets.

Other children only appear peripherally. There is Mao Mao's friend who shows a red envelope, Fred's mistress' and Chester's fellow students and Xiao Yong's friends, who form only a nameless and unidentified group. However the girl narrating Xiao Yong's story is eminent. With her supportive and caring attitude towards Xiao Yong she perfectly represents

the female stereotype. We do not hear anything about her family or her position within her own family though. Nancy's friend Bree seems to reflect Nancy as they are dressed and styled alike and involved in the same activities. But again we do not get any further insight into her friend's family life.

Concerning Hong's finding (112) that Chinese as well as American parents consider independence and self-reliance to be important reflects differently in the selected books. Three American girls (6.2.2., 6.2.4. and 6.2.5.) are self-reliant and solve their problems and only one Chinese book (6.1.4.) shows self-reliant children, who care for themselves. All of the children are well-behaved, although none of the books stresses this quality in particular (even though American parents refer to this as the most important child rearing value; Hong, 112). "Tolerance", which ranks highly in the American listing, is the theme of the Chinese Book *The King of Hide and Seek* and Chinese highly-ranked "responsibility" is evident in "*Let's Get a Pup!*" said Kate when Kate is looking after her dogs. I therefore conclude that Hong's findings are not mirrored in these (few) books.

But families certainly do not consist just of the children.

It is worthwhile pointing out, moreover, that these differences in attitude and behavior characterize not only male and female *child* characters but fictional *parental* characters as well. (Spitz, 48)

All visible mothers and the grandmothers fulfill a traditional role in the family by serving food to their families. Wholesome food and food-related rituals still seems to be an indicator of a 'good' family both in Chinese as US children's literature. Yang Yang, Mao Mao, the *Window-girl* and Nancy are served wholesome food which is eaten amidst their decent family. Xiao Yong and Chester do not get food at all. In Chester's case the story time seems too short to include food as it basically just comprises a conversation with his mother. Xiao Yong's story in contrast spans several few years and we are left to wonder how he was fed at all with no one at home with him and no food visible in his home. Interestingly, in this book (6.1.4.) the grandfather and later the father are the main custodians of the boy, but they do not take on the female caregiver's role of providing emotional and physical nurture. This could be in relation to Spitz' (170) statement that fathers are mostly portrayed "as providers only of provisional love - of love, in other words, that is conditional upon its being deserved rather than freely bestowed" and Xiao Yong may not deserve it due to his mental handicap.

Furthermore, Kate's and Fred's mistress' family - as examples for deficient families - do not serve wholesome food during a joint meals. Fred's girl has to eat her food by herself and Kate has her meals interrupted twice.

Otherwise the various family structures show no differences. Three of the Chinese families (*Cigarettes* and *Reunion*) and three of the American families (all except the family in *Fred*) consist of the "ideal" father-mother-child constellation. In *The King of Hide and Seek* the exact family situation is vague, in *Fred stays with me!* the parents are divorced and in the *Kissing Hand* the father is completely absent and only Fancy Nancy has a sister. One American (*Window*) and two Chinese books (*Morning Market* and *The King*) mention grandparents. This would be in agreement with Richards et al.'s (129) assessment that grandparents play a greater role in Chinese families than in American. Nevertheless, the role the grandparents in *The Hello, Goodbye Window* play is by far more significant than that of the grandparents in the Chinese books. This is again consonant with Spitz' (100-1) evaluation that grandparents appear more often in books when they appear less in real life.

While grandparents emerge in only 3 books, all the books describe parents. Even in books like *The Morning Market* or *The Hello, Goodbye Window* in which they do not play an active role, they set the frame and allow a homecoming. Only one child (Xiao Yong) in the Chinese books does not seem to have a mother, while only one child (Chester) in the American books does not seem to have a father. Even though a large number of children in the US live with only one parent and even more in blended families (see point 4.), most picture book families are actually "picture book family", i.e. the ideal father-mother-child constellations. The same is true for the Chinese family. It seems that "it is not so much the family as reality that is our subject here as the family as an ideal" (Alston, 1). While one book deals with divorce, none of the books mentions step-relations. It is also a sign for the perception of divorce as still exceptional as it is made the main focus of the plot and is somehow seen as being something out of the ordinary. In Chinese children's literature divorce does not seem to be a subject at all. On a random inspection of Chinese books in general, I could not find any that broached the issue of divorce, even though the divorces rate is also on the rise in China (section 3 above).

Almost all the books (with the exception of *Baba he xiangyan*) describe an idyll. Nodelman and Reimer (210) think that this is representative as

children's books tend to try to persuade children that adult nostalgia is actual current childhood experience – that the world is in fact as idyllic as children's books suggest.

Even *Tuanyuan* (see 6.1.3.), *Duo maomao da wang* (see 6.1.4.) and *Fred stays with me!* (see 6.2.2.) with themes anticipated as being unsettling, create an “innocent and optimistic way of looking at things” and have a more or less happy ending (Nodelman and Reimer, 2009). Of these only *Tuanyuan* gives a little – although not very deep – insight into the suffering of the little girl.

Another aspect that reveals how picture books attempt to gloss over reality with a desired ideal of family is the taboo of violence.

With respect to child abuse, Straus and Stewart (1999) identify that hitting children is the most tolerated form of family violence and that nearly all parents slap or spank their children at some point.

Nevertheless, this form of punishment is still a taboo in children's books and adults never threaten to use or actually fall back to using physical punishments. Therefore all homes depicted in the books, whether US-American or Chinese, are portrayed as secure places where the children do not have to fear violence or usually even scolding. Even the children living in emotionally disrupted families (6.2.2. and 6.2.5.) are offered some kind of stability. Even Xiao Yong has his stable circle of friends he can rely on. Emotional neglect, which of course is also a kind of abuse, is apparently not a taboo in picture books. On the other hand, neglect seems to be the kind of abuse children encounter by far the most frequently (in the US):

Studies through the National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003) report that the percentage of substantiated cases of child abuse/or neglect include: 60 percent neglect, 20 percent physical abuse, 10 percent sexual abuse, and approximately 8 percent emotional abuse. (Wiseman, 14)

Accordingly (?), two of the American children and one of the Chinese children could be considered as suffering from emotional neglect. The two American children Kate and Fred's mistress fight their loneliness by deepening their relationship to their dog. With this glossing-over, basically all the books of both cultures validate the assumptions of Nodelman and Reimer (87) that children are “innocent, naïve [...] and emotionally vulnerable” and need protection from the sometimes harsh reality.

Xiao Yong is the only disabled person in all of the books and there are no physically disabled or addicted people. Xiao Yong's treatment as the hero of his story again foregrounds his still

special status, showing that disabled people have not yet been accepted as regular members of society. Furthermore, there were no radically unconventional family constellations like homosexual parents or indeed any other homosexual persons, adopted children or blended-families.

The American children were less controlled and supervised than their Chinese counterparts within their homes. Except for Xiao Yong who was completely free to act as he wished, all Chinese children were monitored by their parents all the time. American Fancy Nancy, Chester and Fred's mistress were all basically free to do as they choose, while the *Window-girl* and Kate were guided only minimally by their families.

Furthermore, Alston (90) states that "[t]he ideological and the physical presentations of the home are intrinsically linked". When she asserts that the child became "idealistically central to family and yet at the same time was physically pushed to its margins" (Alston, 91), she refers here to the fact that during the last century British (and also American) children have been given their own private sphere/room; a room that divides the family and also constrains the child (Alston, 89).

It is interesting to note that the American middle-class child, unlike children of other social classes and many other countries, is expected to sleep in a room by him- or herself (Spitz, 23-4)

Accordingly, three of the US-American books refer to separate children's rooms which are the children's private spheres. In *Fancy Nancy* each sister has her own room. Mao Mao on the other hand, sleeps in her parents' bed and none of the Chinese children seems to have their own room. In "*Let's get a Pup!*" said Kate and in *Fred stays with me!* the beds represent the girl's inner solitude. Fred's mistress even has two beds of her own but both stand in isolation. Kate needs pets to help her cope with the seclusion within her own private sphere. Just the *Window-girl* is content with her bed but maybe this because we do not know whether this bed is located in her own separate room or in her grandparents' room.

Finally, it seems to be the case that Chinese books focus less on the individual than the American books do. While all of the American books handle topics concerning individuals and their individual experiences, the Chinese books allow us fewer possibilities to identify with the protagonist. While the "predicaments" of the American families only concern themselves as individuals, the predicaments in *Cigarettes* and *The King* concern a whole

village or even the whole planet (i.e. the UNO committee). Moreover in the *Morning Market* Yang Yang and his aunt are depicted as being part of a larger community. Chester is the only American hero who is also presented as being a part of a community, although they play no role in his dilemma at hand.

Conclusively, American as well as Chinese family representations are conventional in their depiction of family. Generally ‘good’ families consist of a mother-father-child constellation, offer wholesome food, live together and offer stability. Newer constellations like divorced parents are not established as the norm yet and although more modern family structures are rarely to be found in the children’s books of either culture, they are more likely in American than in Chinese books.

In Chinese as well as in American books the assumptions concerning the innocent and vulnerable child which needs moral as well as formal education are still upheld. In the American books the children are more self-reliant, but at the same time have a stronger focus on family.

In general I can conclude that the perception of the “ideal” family of both cultures still seems to be the basis of their societies, as the most naturalized and unquestioned institution. Even though some parents are not able to offer this stable refuge, the children can find comfort within their homes by adding a further (animal) family member. The need for a family and the need for a safe haven, which a family may offer, are never questioned.

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10. Declaration of Authenticity

I confirm to have conceived and written this diploma thesis in English all by myself. Quotations from other authors are all clearly marked and acknowledged in the bibliographical references, either in the footnotes or within the text. Any ideas borrowed and/or passages paraphrased from the works of other authors are truthfully acknowledged and identified in the footnotes.

11. CV

Doris Schinerl was born 1979 in Vienna, Austria. In 1998 she graduated from the Handelsakademie Hetzendorf with Matura and then spent one year in Greater Atlanta, Georgia, USA working as an au pair. After working as an assistant in a renowned Viennese law firm, she began studying English at the University of Vienna in 2004. In 2007 her daughter was born.

12. Abstract

This thesis concerns itself with five American and four Chinese modern picture books and compares the respective family representations. The representations were analyzed in terms of family constellations, gender roles, child rearing values and ideologies of families. For a cultural studies point of view, I have also included abstracts about Chinese and American families. The analysis showed that as well American as Chinese picture books still follow traditional narrative structures and that representations of families are hardly original, even though the American books demonstrate a slightly more modern approach.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In dieser Diplomarbeit wird das Familienbild in amerikanischen und chinesischen Kinderbüchern verglichen. Nach einer Analyse der jeweiligen Buchmärkte und Überblicksdarstellungen der Geschichte der Institution Familie in den beiden Kulturen, wurden fünf amerikanische und vier chinesische moderne Kinderbücher im Hinblick auf Familienkonstellation, Geschlechterrollen, Werte in der Erziehung und Ideologien betreffend Familien untersucht. Die Analyse hat ergeben, dass Bilderbücher der letzten Jahre sowohl im chinesischen als auch amerikanischen Raum noch an traditionellen Erzählstrukturen festhalten und auch die Darstellung der Familien wenig innovativ sind, wobei sich die amerikanischen Bücher als geringfügig moderner darstellen.