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**Unwrapping the *Pojagi*: Traditional Values and Changing Times in a Survey of Korean-American Juvenile Literature**

Resubmitted to *Children's Literature in Education*

Belinda Y. Louie  
Professor  
Education Program  
University of Washington, Tacoma  
1900 Commerce Street  
Tacoma, WA 98402  
Phone: (253) 692-4434  
Fax: (253) 692-5612  
EMAIL: [blouie@u.washington.edu](mailto:blouie@u.washington.edu)

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Abstract

This article discusses Korean-American juvenile literature published in the United States in the last century. Teachers and students are invited to discover the knowledge and the pleasure that this collection offers to them. Focusing on the traditional values and changing times in the Korean-American community, this article helps readers understand the dreams, the joy, and the tenacity of Korean-American children and families. These books, portraying the fun times and the hard times of Korean-American young people, may also appeal to readers in the other parts of the world.

KEY WORDS:

Korean-American, multicultural literature, gender roles, traditional Korean values

## **Unwrapping the *Pojagi*: Traditional Values in Changing Times in a Survey of Korean-American Juvenile Literature**

### Introduction

Korean immigration to the United States began at the start of the twentieth century. Departing from the Land of Morning Calm, many Koreans have traveled east to the United States. Some have worked hard and found financial security; some have struggled and found broken dreams. Families have taken root, and children have been born, as new immigrants continue to arrive. Many parents take joy in their children's academic success, although they see no prospects in their own professional careers. While U. S. born teenagers embrace the freedom of the land of their birth, many Korean-born adults relish the century-old traditions of their homeland. In the last century, the Korean-American community expanded in this country without much attention from the general public. The article presents the available Korean-American juvenile literature published in the last century in the United States. The books are like the *pojagi*, a traditional Korean gift-wrapping cloth that is comprised of fabric fragments of various shapes and sizes (Smith, 1996). This article introduces these books to teachers and students, inviting them to unwrap this *pojagi* and to discover the pleasure and surprises that await them.

The books were identified through various sources: *Books In Print* database, web sites of several online booksellers, publishers' catalogs, local county library catalogs, local city library catalogs, the second edition of *Kaleidoscope* (Barrera, Thompson, & Dressman, 1997), the third edition of *Kaleidoscope* (Yokota, 2001), the fourth edition of *Kaleidoscope* (Hansen-Krening, Aoki, & Mizokawa, 2003), the multicultural booklist by the Cooperative Children's Book Center (Kruse, Horning, & Schliesman, 1997), and professional journals such as *School Library*

*Journal*, *Booklist*, *Booklinks*, *The Horn Book Magazine*, and *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*. These data sources were chosen after consulting similar studies on other juvenile literature collections (Cai, 1994; Barrera, Quiroa, & West-Williams, 1999; Heller, Cunningham, Lee, & Heller, 2000; Leu, 2001). The terms *Korean-American*, *Korean*, *Korean-American juvenile literature*, and *Korean juvenile literature* were used in the subject and the keyword fields. The search established a booklist of 94 books, of which 93 were located through the local library systems and book purchase. All 93 titles were read. During the reading process, I studied the books according to their genres, the publication dates, the reading levels, and the gender of the authors. I analyzed the themes of the books based on the Korean and the Korean-American cultural, social, and political contexts. In this article, I will present how traditional Korean-American values have changed in the contemporary world as reflected in juvenile literature.

Before 1990, only a handful of Korean folktales were published to enchant the American readers with tales of this far-away land. In the last decade, children's and young adult literature on Koreans and Korean-Americans has grown tremendously. About 90 percent of the books in this study were published after 1990. The 93 titles I located consisted of 41 realistic fictions, 27 folktales, 14 historical fictions, 10 informational books, and 2 anthologies. Titles are distributed across the grade levels, with more books for the elementary grades. A bibliography is included at the end of the article, indicating the genres and the levels of the texts. Forty-three of the 69 authors are Korean or Korean-American; 36 of the Korean and Korean-American authors are female. Among the seven male Korean and Korean-American authors, three published books for elementary and junior-high school level. The rest are professors who published books for adults that are also appropriate for high-school students. The trend of authorship is worth noting.

In addition, my search also generated an adult booklist with 51 titles, not including books about the Korean War experience by veterans, general information books on Korea, and academic books on Koreans and Korean-Americans. I located 45 of the 51 titles. I read the books to determine whether some of them are appropriate for high-school students. Six of them, appropriate in literary style and content for high-school students, are included in the juvenile list. At the end of this article, I have attached the complete adult list because some teachers may want to read them or select books for their advanced students.

### Traditional Values

Korean traditional values and beliefs are a mixture of shamanism, Buddhism, and Confucianism (Joh, 2002). Folktales, probably more than other genres, reflect the patterns of thought and values that have guided the lives of ordinary folks for hundreds of years. Shamanistic beliefs are seen in Korean people's animistic thinking, believing common objects like heaven, trees, stars, stones, and animals all have their own spirits. These spirits may be benevolent or malevolent. People worship the benevolent spirits such as the Spirit of Heaven for protection and prosperity. They also give offerings to malevolent spirits, hoping to prevent misfortunes in their lives. There are also stories about animals that are personified and that interact with humans. In *Sim Chung and the River Dragon* (Schecter, 1993), the underwater dragon has the power to restore people's eyesight. The woodcutter takes a heavenly maiden to be his wife in the folktale, *In the Moonlight Mist* (San Souci & Neilan, 1999). In *The Rabbit's Judgment* (Han, 1994), a clever and witty rabbit saves a man's life from an ungrateful tiger the man has just rescued. Shamanism brings both playful and instructive elements to Korean-American folktales

Buddhism influences people's thinking about retribution and rewards. Knowing that

rewards are there for benevolent acts and punishments for evil deeds, Koreans find comfort in a sense of justice and fairness in the world of folktales. Retribution is manifested in *Kongi and Potgi* (Han & Plunkett, 1996), Adam's *Korean Cinderella* (1982), and Climo's *Korean Cinderella* (1993), stories about how dutiful daughters are married to noblemen, with the wicked daughters banished at the end of each tale. Similarly, in *In the Moonlight Mist* (San Souci & Neilan, 1999), the kind woodcutter is rewarded with a beautiful wife for saving the life of a deer. In *The Magic Amber* (Reasoner, 1994), because of their kindness to a stranger, the poor farmer and his wife are rewarded with a magic gift that never stops providing them food. In these stories, the characters choose to be kind despite their harsh environments; their actions subsequently lead to prosperity.

The core belief of retribution is the belief that the stupid and the wicked will not last long, that their happiness will be short-lived. In folktales, the wisdom of the common folk always helps them to win over the powerful, yet stupid, people of their land. The humor in folktales amuses readers by depicting how the weak outsmarts the bully. In the animal stories, *The Rabbit's Judgment* (Han, 1994) and *The Rabbit's Escape* (Han, 1995), the rabbit's wit and calmness in times of trouble protect a man from the tiger and the rabbit from the dragon king, respectively. Suzanne Crowder Han (1991) records many similar stories in her collection of *Korean Folk and Fairy Tales*. Wisdom and wit are also effective means to defeat many tricksters' attempts to harm good folk. In *Sir Whong and the Golden Pig* (Han & Plunkett, 1993), wise Sir Whong patiently lures the trickster back to reclaim the fake golden pig. If people or animals fail to bring the wicked to justice, then heaven will. In *Magic Spring* (Rhee, 1993), the greedy and wealthy landlord turns into a baby after drinking too much from the magic spring of youth. He is adopted by the then old/now young neighbor couple whom the landlord used to

taunt for their childlessness. In *Mr. Pak Buys a Story* (Farley, 1997), the thieves are scared away when their advances coincide with the retelling of strange lines from a story that a thief had tricked Mr. Pak into buying. These tales reflect the Buddhist belief that the kind folks will receive their reward and the wicked folks will reap what they sow.

Since the Choson Dynasty in 1392, Confucianism has been the dominant force that shapes Korean cultural values and establishes Korean social structures (Park & Cho, 1995). It shapes human relationships based on the five cardinal virtues: filial piety for the parents, loyalty for the master, chastity for one man, respect for older siblings, and faithfulness between friends. Individual merit is determined by a person's dedication to these kinship-based virtues, and heaven always rewards the virtuous ones. Folktales, which play both recreational and educational functions, depict Confucian virtue in action. In *Woodcutter and Tiger Brother* (Rhee, 1999), a woodcutter tricks a fierce tiger into believing that he is the woodcutter's older brother. Even being a wild beast, he observes his duty to be a faithful son to the woodcutter's mother by bringing her gifts and later following her in her death. Sim Chung is rewarded by a marriage to the king for her selfless deed of sacrificing herself to restore her blind father's eyesight in *Sim Chung and the River Dragon* (Schecter, 1993). The loyal servant in *The Pouch of Stories*, recorded by Curry (1999) in her folktale collection, saves his master's life by courageously fighting off the attacks of the evil story spirits. When his father hurts his ankle, Sang-hee in *The Firekeeper's Son* (Park, 2004) faithfully lights a bonfire everyday to signal the king that all is well in the land. In the *Princess and the Beggar* (O'Brien, 1993), the princess stands by her beggar husband to teach him many noble art forms, including poetry writing and horseback riding. The beggar later defeats other young men from noble families in many contests and wins the favor of the king. Heaven also bestows much wealth on the younger brother who always

defers to his arrogant older brother in the tale *Older Brother, Younger Brother* (Jaffe, 1995). In *The Kite Fighter* (Park, 2000), Young-sup experiences much internal struggle when he excels over his older brother in kite flying. The author offers a solution of partnership by having the older brother develop a glass-coated thread which helps Young-sup to win the kite flying contest. The value of an interdependent and role-dedicated person over an independent and self-fulfilled person has carried over from the ancient era into the present.

To uphold the Confucian ideal, the Choson leaders stratified society into four classes: the royalty, the aristocracy, the commoners, and the lowborn. Mobility between the social classes was virtually nonexistent. Throughout Korea, the concept of social distinction by birth prevails, meaning that one's position in the hierarchy of social classes has been mainly based upon ancestry. Intermarriage between families of different classes was strictly forbidden. This value comes forth even in the simple folktale of *Korean Cinderella* (Adams, 1982). When the governor decides to take Kongjee to be his wife, the father begs the governor to reconsider because his daughter is from the humble family and is not fit to become a governor's wife. The story is a fairytale because it is unrealistic for a low-born daughter whose faithfulness and goodness are rewarded with such upward social mobility. A poor farmer boy in *The Royal Bee* (Park & Park, 2000) is forbidden to attend school, a privilege reserved for the children of the Yangban class consisting of families of civil and military officials. Education opens a path of learning that might lead to the possibility of sitting for the civil service examination, subsequently promoting a person from a lower class to a higher class. At the very bottom of the social hierarchy are the outcasts, including uncared-for orphans, who have not been given the honor of family surnames. In Linda Su Park's *A Single Shard* (2001) the orphan Tree-ear, who bears no surname, has no identity, no past, and no future. His birth and death will not be recorded because there is no

clansman to perform such tasks. It is a tremendous act of kindness when a potter's wife asks Tree-ear to call her *Ajima*, aunt. Having an *Ajima* means that Tree-ear now has an identity, which gives him a clan and family connections. At the end of the story, the potter's wife gives Tree-ear a name that shares a syllable with her deceased son. The endowment of such a name is equivalent to adoption; Tree-ear can now assume the ancestry of the potter's family and also its trade. Traditionally, Korean families have been reluctant in taking care of children who are not their own. The struggle still exists in today. In *The Long Season of Rain* (Kim, 1996), set in 1960s Korea, Chun's family still resists the idea of adopting an orphan boy who is not related to them.

### Changing Times and A Different World

#### *Traumatic Past and Cultural Solidarity*

Within the century-long Korean-American experience, almost half of it was filled with the intense desire for Korean independence and the intense hatred of the Japanese for the 36 years of occupation of their land, permeating every class of Korean living in the United States. In 1990, among the 800,000 Korean-Americans residing in the United States, about 72% of them were foreign born (US Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics, 1993). The predominantly foreign-born Korean-Americans carried with them the deep hurt of a traumatic historical past. Contemporary Korean and Korean-American experiences are filled with *han*, an anguished bitterness that has no equivalent in the English language (Kim & Yu, 1996). This *han* aroused a Korean solidarity at home and abroad over 40 years in the twenty-first century, causing people of Korean descent to hold fast to their language and their heritage. Many Korean-Americans embrace this cultural solidarity, striving to retain their heritage while living in the United States. Many authors wrote about the painful loss of their homeland and the indignity of

Japanese domination.

*Year of Impossible Goodbyes* (Choi, 1991) describes the suffering that the Koreans bore under the Japanese occupation; for example, girls in the mother's workshop are taken to help the Japanese soldiers fight better and to bring glory to the Japanese emperor. During the war, over 200,000 Korean *comfort* women (who were forced to provide sexual *comfort* to Japanese soldiers) were forced to violate their Confucian virtue of chastity for one man, rendering them worthless people in their own eyes and in the society's. Linda Sue Park's *When My Name was Keoko* (2002) describes the Japanese occupation from the perspectives of two young children. They are forced to take Japanese names and to use Japanese only at school. Japanese soldiers are constantly there to monitor their movement. They face additional danger when their uncle participates in the resistance movement. *Clay Walls* (Kim, 1987) covers the experience of a Korean couple who came to Los Angeles between the world wars. The Chuns have problems to find a place to live and jobs that will sustain the growing family. Despite the financial hardship, Mrs. Chun is deeply involved in the Korean community and the fight for Korean independence. She contributes to the cause even as they struggle to make the ends meet.

The wars in Korea uprooted tens and thousands of lives. In *Echoes of the White Giraffe* (Choi, 1993), a sequel to *Year of Impossible Goodbyes* (Choi, 1991), fifteen-year-old Sookan goes through her teenage years in a refugee village in South Korea. *Peacebound Trains* (Balgassi, 1996) and *My Freedom Trip* (Park & Park, 1998) are picture books describing families fleeing to the south when the communists took over North Korea. The separation from loved ones leaves a hard-to-erase pain in Korean adults' and children's hearts. The unexpected events encountered by the Korean characters may intrigue the western readers to read on. They may also find it satisfying to read about how young people in Korea overcome trials and grow strong.

A prevailing theme of being hopeful and determined in times of war, uncertainty, and hardship will empower young people in other parts of the world.

*Conflicts in Social Roles within the Immigrant Family*

Most of the Korean-Americans came to the United States after the 1965 Immigration Act. The majority of post-1965 Korean immigrants were middle-class professionals or white-collar office workers. However, many were severely limited in their knowledge of the English language. For those who suffered from their language deficiency, they had to find initial employment in low-paying jobs as cooks, waiters/waitresses, or attendants at gas stations. Many Korean immigrants became small business owners to escape from these blue-collar occupations (Min, 1995). Currently, an estimated 75% of all Korean immigrants in the United States are small business entrepreneurs (Park, 1997). Husbands and wives have to work long hours to survive. The long hours of hard work, of learning a new language, and of dealing with the hazards of life are daily concerns for the Korean immigrants.

Korean immigrants in the United States maintain a high level of ethnic attachment, higher than any other Asian ethnic group (Jo, 1999). Most Korean immigrants speak the Korean language, eat mainly Korean food, and practice Korean customs. Korean immigrant parents embrace values that emphasize hard work, families, social status, and education, values that their children deem less important. For Korean immigrant children, language barriers, cultural differences, and a sense of alienation and discrimination in school are just problems that occupy their minds. Korean-American young people, who were either born in the United States or who came here at a very young age, are caught between two cultures. Their home culture is very Korean oriented, from language to food to values, contrasting sharply with the mainstream culture at school. Many Korean immigrants endure their hard work by taking pride in their

children's academic and career successes. Sometimes, it appears that Korean parents wish to fulfill the American dream through their children. Although most of the children have worked hard to please their parents, unfortunately, such wishes frequently conflict with some children's desires. The expectation of going to prestigious universities and entering professional occupations causes much stress and resentment in Korean young people.

Most Korean families embrace a traditional culture in which gender roles are sharply defined (Korean Overseas Information Service, 1993). Tension occurs between 'traditional' Korean immigrant men, "reared in families whose values were founded on Confucian principles, and their wives and children, who may challenge even reject, these values and who may be more willing to accept American egalitarian principles" (Jo, 1999, p.100.) The result of the strain is frequently manifested in verbal abuse, sometimes escalating to threats and insults, then physical abuse, or other types of destructive behavior, such as alcoholism, especially by the husbands. Such behavior is rarely reported outside the Korean immigrant communities, however.

*Women's roles.* Under the Confucian social structure and practices, women should abide by the law of three obediences: obedience to the father before marriage, obedience to the husband upon marriage, and obedience to the son after the husband's death. The woman's role is *within*, that is, within the home. The man's role is *outside*, that is in all the affairs of society and life beyond the confines of the home. In the past, Korean women led extremely secluded lives; they were seldom allowed outdoors in the daytime. Slave and outcasts, who did housekeeping work, were the only women who were allowed to show their faces in public (Covell, 1981).

Linda Sue Park depicted the lives of aristocratic women in *Seesaw Girl* (Park, 1999). The characters, Willow and Jade Blossom, young girls from a well-respected family, live in their family home until marriage. After Willow's marriage, she is considered a member of her

husband's family, only allowed to visit her family on special occasions. Women and girls from wealthy families are not allowed to wander outside her family home. Jade Snow desires to learn how to read and to write. She also struggles to satisfy her curiosity about the outside world by standing and jumping on a seesaw. Even though the family has many maids, being a honorable and obedient wife, Jade's mother still has the responsibility of washing her husband's outfits. She gently guides her young daughter to learn how to "make it enough for her happiness" by taking care of all the details in her household. The author creates a mischievous and genial character to delight the readers and to help them build connections with an ancient, aristocratic girl. Jade Snow is spirited and adventurous even though she lives within the constraints of her time and her culture.

Even in contemporary Korea, women are still mindful of their subservient position in the family (Jo, 1999). In *A Long Season of Rain* (Kim, 1996) Junehee's mother works at home from dawn to dusk to take care of the family, enduring frequent demeaning treatment from her husband and her mother-in-law. She has the burden of all the household responsibilities but has little decision-making authority. Stella's mother in *Stella: On the Edge of Popularity* (Lee, 1994), is expected to serve her husband's dinner every night after spending a long day working alongside her husband in their dry-cleaning store. The husband refuses to let the grandmother and the daughter help during mealtime because he sees it as the wife's responsibility. Partnership in the store does not mean equality at home. In an extreme case, Young Yu's mother in *A Step from Heaven* (Na, 2002) is a victim of domestic violence; she works multiple jobs to support the family while enduring repeated beatings by her husband. In many immigrant families, wives had to work outside the home to help support the family. Financial demands bring upon a change from an inside-oriented to an outside-oriented role for women. This change causes frustration in

many husbands who are burdened with the failure to provide for their families. Some husbands feel threatened and respond to the changing time by insisting that their wives be more subservient at home.

Women's struggle to be independent and to gain education has continued to gain momentum. Induk, in *The Girl-Son* (Neuberger, 1995), challenges the gender barrier by dressing as a boy and persevering to fulfill her dream of attending school. Today, girls no longer need to fight for the opportunity to attend schools. However, they are placed in a much more ambivalent position, especially in Korean families that have immigrated to the United States. Daughters are expected to do extremely well at school to honor their parents and their families. They are encouraged to stay strong at school to accomplish what their parents, whose native tongue is Korean, cannot achieve. However, their parents hardly understand the struggles that their daughters face when they have to stay strong in the mainstream society (Kibria, 2002).

In *Finding My Own Voice* (Lee, 1992), Ellen Sung understands that her family wants her to attend Harvard. She needs to study hard to bring such honor to her family. However, she wants to spend time with her boyfriend, to practice for her gymnastics competition, and to enjoy her last year of high school. Life becomes more complicated when other people at school become hostile when Ellen starts a romantic relationship with a popular member of the hockey team. Similarly, Taeyoung in *Tae's Sonata* (Balgassi, 1997) encounters discrimination when she partners with the popular Josh on a class project. Although she enjoys working with Josh, she is ashamed to bring him to the family grocery store or to have him meet her Korean-speaking parents. Also, she resents the fact that teacher and students always consider her as the "Asian girl." Very often when Korean-American daughters come home, they are expected to obey their parents and to defer to their brothers. Their academic achievements are their contributions to the

family honor, and their accomplishments set a fine example for their brothers. In other words, they are urged to accomplish for the sake for others, not really for themselves. In *Stella: On the Edge of Popularity* (Lee, 1994), Stella's parents demand that she do well at school so that her younger brothers will follow her example. In *A Step from Heaven* (Na, 2002), Young Ju ranks first in her class; her happiness is shadowed by the knowledge that her brother is the one whom their father expects to bring pride to the family name. Although adolescent readers may not live under the same family demands of the Korean-American characters, they may empathize with the characters' struggle to balance social expectations and personal desires.

A different message is given in picture book *The Best Older Sister* (Choi, 1997). The mother tells her young daughter that a daughter is just as special as a son when she asks, "Is your right eye more special and important than your left eye?" (Choi, 1997, p. 33). Written for younger audience, this picture book does not present the complexity of a Korean-American girl's role. The author, Sook Nyul Choi, presents an encouraging message for the young readers. In her historical fictions, Choi likewise creates strong female protagonists who shoulder numerous responsibilities outside the home during wartime in Korea. In *Year of Impossible Goodbye* (Choi, 1991) and *Echoes of the White Giraffe* (Choi, 1993), Sookan runs around the mountain covered with refugee huts, attends school, and helps in many building tasks. Although her mother still constantly reminds Sookan to behave like a young lady, the war setting allows Sookan freedom and independence that a young woman from an upper-class family would not have experienced. Because the husband and the sons have gone to war, even Sookan's mother has to take on a man's responsibilities so that the remaining family can survive. It is empowering to read about the free spirit of the female characters, charging forward despite the dragging gloom of the war.

The grandmother, *halmoni*, holds a special, respected, and authoritative role in a Korean

family. As a matriarch of the house, the grandmother has authority over all the details of the household. She has risen from the subservient role of a daughter-in-law; when her husband passes away, the master of the house is now her son. In *The Long Season of Rain* (Kim, 1996), the grandmother is a traditional and authoritative figure, who sides with her son to lord over the daughter-in-law. In *A Step to Heaven* (Na, 2002), halmoni is the warm memory that Young Yu holds onto when her father's alcoholism destroys her family. In *Stella: On the Edge of Popularity* (Lee, 1994), the grandmother is the one who reminds Stella of her duties and who encourages Stella to be strong. In *Peacebound Trains* (Balgassi, 1996), *Dear Juno* (Pak, 1999), *Sori's Harvest Moon Day* (Lee, 1999), *The Trip Back Home* (Wong 2000), and *Halmoni's Day* (Bercaw, 2000) the halmoni is the children's connection to the Korean heritage, keeping the family history and traditions present in the children's lives. In *Halmoni and the Picnic* (Choi, 1993), *Yunmi and Halmoni's Trip* (Choi, 1997), and *The Best Older Sister* (Choi, 1997), halmoni is the person who takes care of the children when the parents are busy at work all day. The grandmother is the pen pal, the caregiver, the comfort provider, the fieldtrip chaperone, the storyteller, the family historian, and the wise counselor, filling out roles that are essential in the raising up of the young ones in a changing world.

*Men's roles.* In the collection of Korean-American juvenile literature, the roles of father vary from a well-defined traditional role to a variety of roles due to cultural and economic changes experienced by both immigrants and families in Korea. In the Confucian hierarchy, the father is the authority figure within a family (Korean Overseas Information Service, 1993). He protects, supports, and comforts the whole family without open expression of love or affection; in return, he receives respect and obedience from his family members. However, the ideals of the father figure should not be confused with the reality of the father figure (Heller, Cunningham,

Lee, & Heller, 2000). Some traditional men nourish and care for the family, while others simply rule over them to serve their own needs; although both groups may claim that they value and follow Confucian teaching. The juvenile literature reflects different facets of the traditional father figures in real life.

In *A Single Shard* (Park, 2002), the author creates a balanced portrayal of Korean fathers in the potter and Crane-man. The potter, a father figure who is also the trade master, is reserved and tacit in demonstrating affection, yet he is forward and blunt when expressing his criticism. A slight touch on the shoulder, an order to fetch a big tree-trunk to build a wheel, and an indication of another boulder next to the one that he sits are clear signals of kindness and acceptance to Tree-ear. However, a teenager like Tree-ear still wishes that the potter could be gentler in his speech and in his actions. In contrast, Crane-man is like a father to Tree-ear, while also being a friend. He is the one who raises Tree-ear and listens to him during numerous troublesome times. He also teaches life lessons to Tree-ear through his riddles. Patient and sensitive, Crane-man is “home” to Tree-ear, providing physical and emotional shelter until Crane-man dies. By creating a wise and loving father figure in the homeless Crane-man, the author makes a statement that wisdom and kindness are not the exclusive rights of the upper class. Richness in human relationships can be found when one is willing to share one’s heart and possessions with others. A sense of kinship can be found among non-kin, a very unusual concept in the Confucian order. In *A Single Shard*, Linda Sue Park avoids stereotyping by showing the differences between two father figures. The potter and Crane-man are different versions of Korean fathers. Focusing on the relationships of Tree-ear with two father figures, the author articulates some qualities that many teenagers would like to see in their fathers. Readers will also enjoy the fast-paced plot and exciting events in the story.

*The Long Season of Rain* (Kim, 1996) portrays a family going through changes in 1960s Korea. As a military officer, Junehee's father asserts his authority at home as well as at work. He communicates with his wife and daughters in the form of orders, expecting to be obeyed without question. When the children fail to act precisely as he expects, punishment is delivered promptly. Instead of taking neglect and condescension silently, Junehee's mother returns to her mother's house, indicating her refusal to accept her husband's treatment of the children. On the way to the grandmother's house to ask his wife to return, the father tells the children that their mother is a wonderful person unlike himself. The book ends with the possibility of an even bigger change as the father declares that the family will be moving to the United States where he will start a business.

Mr. Kim in *Necessary Roughness* (Lee, 1996) could easily be Junehee's father after the family moves to the United States. His conversation with his son usually ends in yelling or extended periods of silence; he often complains that his son would never talk back if they were still in Korea. Leaving his profession as chemist and the title of Ph.D. behind, now Mr. Kim is a small business owner. Although he works well among Koreans in the Los Angeles, he can hardly function when he moves the family to Minnesota where his English proficiency is not sufficient for him to interact with the local folks. Having to rely on his children for outside communication just adds to his sense of loss -- losing control of his business, losing control of his family, and losing control of his authority of being husband and father that were the foundation of his identity. For example, Mrs. Kim steps in to speak to a landlord, without her husband's approval, after several failed attempts to secure living quarters for the family. The stronger Mr. Kim feels about the loss, the more he tries to fight to retain control of his wife and children, resulting in mounting tension in the family. It takes a tragic event in the family to help Mr. Kim realize that

he has to change and to see his family through new lenses, putting the Korean lenses aside and wearing the Korean-American lenses as the family resides in a new land.

The adjustment of role that occurs in Mr. Kim may not occur in other men, for example Young Yu's father in *A Step to Heaven* (Na, 2002). Being disillusioned with his new life in the United States, he becomes an alcoholic. The pride in him forbids him to accept that his wife has to work to support the family. Alcoholism leads to domestic violence, drunken driving, arrest, and finally abandonment of the family. The Confucian ideal and reality clash when the husband and father demand obedience and inflict pain and harm. Regarding role adjustment, Korean men take different paces in their adaptation to their new lives in the United States. In *Tae's Sonata* (Balgassi, 1997) and *Stella: On the Edge of Popularity* (Lee, 1994), the fathers are business owners, struggling with long working hours. Their children miss the time in the past when the fathers held professional jobs in Korea. While Tae's father stocks up on Korean novels for his wife to read when the business is slow, Stella's father demands his wife to serve him after both spending a long day in their dry-cleaning shop. Both fathers strongly encourage their oldest daughters to be successful at school. While Tae's father takes on extra duties to ensure that his daughter has time to study, Stella's father just wants his daughter to report that she is doing well at school.

In contrast, intended for younger readers, picture books for middle and lower elementary students present images of kind and supportive fathers in Korea and in the United States. The authors and illustrators do not present the tension at home and the complexities of gender roles when families are under political, cultural, and economic pressures. Although all the fathers in the picture books face tremendous challenges, they all care for the families. In *Peacebound Trains* (Balgassi, 1996), the father protects his family by sending them to a safe region while he

stays to fight the war. The illustrations and the text both portray a loving husband and a caring father. In a translated book, *Sori's Harvest Moon Day* (Lee, 1999), set in modern Korea, the father buys groceries, saves the best seats for the family while he stands during a long bus ride, and carries a sleeping child on his back after a weekend of festivities. Similar types of Korean fathers are found in picture books about families living in the United States. In *Dear Juno* (Pak, 1999), the father helps to wash dishes after a meal. In *Father's Rubber Shoes* (Heo, 1995), the father's rough hands hold the son's small ones while he tells the son a story explaining how much he wants to provide for his son. Mr. Kang in *Busy Day at Mr. Kang's Grocery Store* (Flanagan, 1996) is a successful owner of a small grocery. After a thirteen-hour day, a tired but happy Mr. Kang goes home to his family, who all work hard to build a new life in the United States.

Positive, but more complex, portrayals exist in two biographies. *Lost Names: Scenes from a Korean Childhood* (Kim, 1988) and *Quiet Odyssey: A Pioneer Korean Woman in America* (Lee, 1990) are about two important parts of Korean-Americans' history: their painful experiences during the Japanese occupation of Korea and their pioneer lives in the United States. What are impressive in both books are the personality traits of the husbands and the fathers in the families. The men lead their families with gentle strength; they are loving and firm, comforting and protective. In *Lost Names*, Richard Kim recalls the turmoil in his childhood when Japanese imposed their sovereignty on Korean soil. He shows the readers how a nation's dignity was lost when the Japanese forced all Korean subjects to adopt Japanese names. His father's steadiness and tenacity sustained the whole family during this turmoil. In *Quiet Odyssey*, Mary Paik Lee describes early Korean immigrants' hopes and dreams in the midst of constant hardship and setbacks. Despite coming from a scholarly background, her parents came to the United States

and worked as migrant laborers to raise a family of seven. Mary and her husband continued the struggle to raise their three boys, who later participated more freely in American society. When Mary Paik Lee was interviewed by Sucheng Chan, the editor of her biography, about what kind of message she wanted the readers to receive, Lee expressed her disappointment in some of the books that depicted Asian men as uncaring husbands and authoritarian fathers. Lee wanted people to know that her marriage was a happy one, and that both her own father and her husband were loving parents (Chan, 1990).

As the only male Korean-American author in realistic fiction, John Son gave an unusual glimpse of the inner world of men beyond the outside façade of authority and position. In *Finding My Hat* (Son, 2003), Son wrote about how Jin-han's parents struggled to start and to maintain their small wig store. The father cared for and supported the family. Although the father let his temper flare at times, he treated his wife with respect as an equal partner in family and in business. The book ended with the grief and the loss experienced by both father and son when the mother died. Son revealed the vulnerability of the men, their dependence on the wife and mother, and their sense of helplessness in caring for her on her deathbed.

*Korean Values and Adopted Children in the United States.*

Korean orphans are a special group of Korean-American immigrants. Between 1954 and 1998, families in the United States adopted about 98,000 Korean children (Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000). The first group of Korean children, who came after the Korean War, was of mixed race -- with Korean mothers and military fathers from other countries. The adoption of Korean children was an important service because the mixed race children were not accepted by Korean society. Later, the adoption of Korean children in the United States continued for Korean orphans and infants born out of wedlock because of the limited interest in adoption in Korea;

Koreans continued to value bloodlines highly.

Adoption stories become an identifiable segment in the Korean-American juvenile literature. These books describe a special changing time when mixed-race children and Korean children were raised by American families. Most of them are not familiar with the Korean traditional values, yet many are curious about these values because their faces remind them that their background is different from the those around them. Their struggles are with the decision of whether to learn about their birth culture and to which community their allegiance belongs.

*Youn Hee and Me* (Adler, 1995) reveals the contrast of feelings experienced by a brother and a sister, one adopted as an infant and the other when she was eleven. The older sister insists that her little brother should remember their birth parents and keep the Korean values. The little brother prefers to become a regular American child. In *If It Hadn't Been For Yoon Jun* (Lee, 1993), the struggle between two cultures is intense in the life of Alice, who was adopted by the Larsens. Why should she be assigned to work with the new Korean immigrant boy for the International Day at school? Alice worries that this association will ruin her relationship with other members of the cheerleading squad and her budding romance with Troy on the football team. Two picture books, *Families are Different* (Pellegrini, 1991) and *An American Face* (Czech, 2000), are stories of young Korean adoptees trying to understand how they can be a part of a family and a community when their looks are so different from others. *We Adopted You, Benjamin Koo* (Girard, 1989) describes how Benjamin faces the struggle of identity with supportive adoptive parents. Despite his struggles, Benjamin lives a happy life. In contrast, Elizabeth Kim's life is filled with sorrows since childhood as she tells her life story in *Ten Thousand Sorrows: The Extraordinary Journey of a Korean War Orphan* (Kim, 2000). Being a mixed-race child, she was abandoned by her family after witnessing the hanging of her mother.

After being adopted by an American family, her hardships and sorrows kept on accumulating. *Mail-order Kid* (McDonald, 1988) is a light-hearted book, focusing on the adjustment difficulties from the perspectives of a child whose family adopts a Korean boy. Eve Bunting's *Jin Woo* (2001) also looks at an American child's struggle to share the love of his parents with a newly adopted Korean baby.

### Conclusion

Korean-American juvenile literature reveals the history, the values, and the U. S. cultural realities experienced by many Korean Americans since the turn of the century. Voices in the folktales convey traditional values that many people still treasure. Their historical past -- including the Japanese occupation, as well as the dispossession and exclusion experienced since immigrating to the United States -- remains a strong force in their community, shaping individuals' interpretations of current events and propelling them to hold on to their heritage in the United States. The Korean socio-cultural order, with its deeply-seeded Confucian roots, still penetrates every aspect of Korean-American consciousness though in a less rigid form. In *A Single Shard*, Linda Sue Park said that "A well-kept tradition can be stronger than law" (Park, 2001, p. 97). Obedience at home is a virtue for children and women. One has to pay a tremendous price, encountering social contempt and self-condemnation, if one chooses to depart from the social order. Additionally, being a scholar and a gentleman is to be of a higher social caste than a man who earns an honest living by manual labor. Despite today being a different time and the United States being a different world, Korean-Americans still feel hurt when they have to give up their professional careers and engage in small businesses or manual jobs. Many parents push their children to attend Ivy league schools and to obtain higher degrees as a way to restore the family honor in an invisible, yet ever-present, social caste system. Adoption by

American families only adds to the complexity of the Korean-American sensibilities. The children and families shown in the Korean-American juvenile literature continually face the complexities of changing values in a different world. Their dream, their joy, their tenacity, and their *han* are revealed as we unwrap the *pojagi* of their lives as reflected in the books.

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