

“The Most Celebrated Cohort’? Asian American Children’s Literature”

Children’s literature depicting the Asian diaspora has grown considerably over the past few decades, and especially in recent years. When I began studying APA youth literature over ten years ago, the collection of texts that existed was a fairly predictable, stable body of literature addressing topics such as immigration, learning English, Chinese New Year, and Japanese incarceration. In “What a Forgotten Kids' Book Reveals About U.S. Publishing,” Pooja Makhijani argues that had the 1924 Immigration Act not been implemented, it is possible that Asian American youth literature might have had a different trajectory, especially since a South Asian Indian, DGM, was one of the first recipients of the Newbery Medal. It wasn’t until after the 1965 Immigration Act that, as there were then more Asian people in the United States, more Asian American writings emerged in significant numbers. In *The Children of 1965: Writing and Not Writing as an Asian American*, Min Hyoung Song addresses these works by Asian Americans who were born in or after the 1960s and are now “part of the largest and most celebrated cohort of American writers of Asian ancestry ever to exist” (8). In this paper, I argue that Asian American youth literature may be approaching a similar “celebrated cohort,” as measured by both popularity and critical acclaim. However, despite significant gains, this body of literature still suffers from persistent distortions and erasure. By examining children’s literature addressing two specific topics - Korean food and Korean naming conventions - I will trace how this particular body of literature has developed over the years, and what interventions it makes (and does not make) in order to diversify and complicate depictions of the Korean diaspora in an increasingly transnational world. I will also address persistent silences and absences, such as the silences around Japanese aggression in Korea, and transracial, transnational Korean adoption narratives specifically from the #OwnVoices perspective of adopted Koreans.