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Chen, Zhuoran (2024). **Chinese Young Children's Gender Subjectivities in Transnational Families in the UK**. Paper presented on the 32nd Annual EECERA Conference, Brighton/United Kingdom, 4.9.2024.

This paper discusses how transnational family experience provides an opportunity for young children to subvert dominant gender discourses in their home countries. It emphasises the importance of bringing in young children's perspectives in transnational family studies since young children are often seen as passive receivers of family migration decisions (e.g. Entorf & Lauk, 2008; Margarida Marques et al., 2007). Theorising gender as performative (Butler, 1990), this study looked into participants' gender perceptions and performances and applied an intersectional frame of analysis to understand the complexity behind that (Co, Crenshaw, and McCall, 2013). Within a qualitative interpretive paradigm, it examined the narratives and visual materials created by 20 children aged 4-8 living in Chinese transnational families in the UK through picture book reading, drawing, and photo-taking in their households and communities. Besides parents/guardians' consent, children's consent was obtained with a childfriendly information sheet and consent form provided. Children made decisions on which activity they wanted to participate in and whether they wanted to withdraw from the study or not. Pseudonyms were adopted. The preliminary findings suggest that young children in Chinese transnational families in the UK do not necessarily subject themselves to gendered norms set by their parents and they have (re)shaped their gender subjectivities while negotiating with the gender dynamics in the UK. This study can potentially contribute to knowledge on using child-centred methods to explore gender-relevant topics with young children, especially in cases where young children are experiencing the cultural differentiations of constructing gender.

Keywords

young children's gender subjectivities, Chinese transnational families, young children's perspectives, child-centred methodologies, gender discourses in China and the UK

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Young children's gender construction in Chinese transnational family contexts in the UK

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How do young children construct gender norms in the Chinese transnational family contexts?

- How do Chinese young children living in the UK describe their childhood experiences?
- How do dominant cultural norms and expectations in Chinese and British societies shape those children's descriptions and experiences?
- To what extent do children make sense of those norms and expectations in gendered ways?
- How are dominant norms of gender, in particular, negotiated by those children?

RESEARCH GAP

- Chinese new immigrants in Britain have been understudied.
- Gender is barely discussed in studies on Chinese young children's experiences in the UK.
- A lack of young children's voices in transnational studies – children as incompetent or as passive receivers of the family's migration decisions.



ETHICAL CHALLENGE

Schools should not teach about the broader concept of gender identity. Gender identity is a highly contested and complex subject. It is a sense a person may have of their own gender, whether male, female or a number of other categories. This may or may not be the same as their biological sex. Many people do not consider that they or others have a separate gender identity.

Draft Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education (Department of Education, 2024)

INCLUSION CRITERIA FOR FAMILIES

- 20 families, each family with at least one child.
- The child(ren) in the family should be born in China (including Hong Kong) and aged 4 to 8 years old.
- Both of the child(ren)'s parents should be Chinese and have grown up in China (including Hong Kong).
- The children should have at least one parent living with them in the UK.
- At least one of the parents in the family should be able to speak either Mandarin, Cantonese or English.
- Both the parents and the children should have lived in the UK for at least one year.

RESEARCH METHODS

First Visit

- Parents' consent, children's assent, discuss picture books options with parents
- Free playing with children

Second Visit

- Interview with parents
- Picture books reading
- Drawing
- House tour with photo-taking

Third Visit

- Unfinished activities
- Follow-up interview with parents

WINDOWS, MIRRORS, AND SLIDING GLASS DOORS

PICTURE BOOKS ARE:

- **Windows** – offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange
- **Sliding glass doors** – walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created by the author
- **Mirrors** – when the lighting conditions are just right, a window can be a mirror

Bishop (1990)



SELECTION OF THE PICTURE BOOK

FRIST ROUND

- Gender themed picture books
- Online and offline resources
- Picture books awards, different publishers, book review websites
- Journal articles

SECOND ROUND

- Should be able to open discussions about gender
- Offer possibilities for both boys and girls
- Do not depict girls or boys negatively
- Are likely to engage children

Bartholomaeus (2016)



GENDER REPRESENTATIONS IN PICTURE BOOKS

- Gender stereotyping and under-representation of female characters (e.g., Fox, 1993; Hamilton et al., 2006; Koss, 2015).
- Gender biases have been found to often exist in contents, language and illustrations (Tsao, 2008).
- Male are represented twice as often in titles compared to females (McCabe et al., 2011).
- Both female and male representations are aligned with certain gender stereotyped personalities and roles (Jackson & Gee, 2005).
- Sexist books portray gender stereotyped female personalities, domestic chores, and leisure activities (Diekman and Murnen, 2004).

THE NEW QUEER CHILDREN LITERATURE

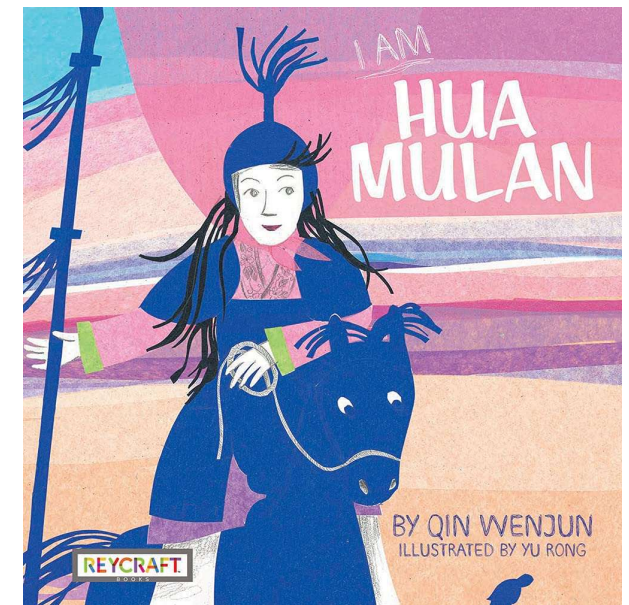
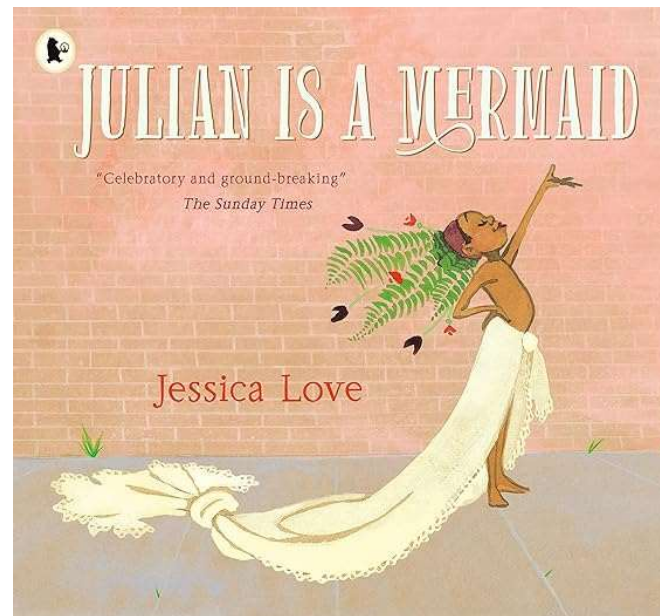
RAINBOW FAMILY

- ❖ Same-sex families
- ❖ Through eyes of presumably heterosexual cisgender children
- ❖ Transgender – protagonists often have preferences and behaviours that are typically expected regarding their chosen gender

NEW QUEER CHILDREN LITERATURE

- ❖ Children as the protagonist
- ❖ Coexistence of straightness and queerness
- ❖ Welcome various different gender expressions

SELECTION OF THE PICTURE BOOKS



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Q&A
THANK YOU