

Beyond Borders: Reconstructing British National Identity in Radical Tales about China

In her award-winning book, *Left Out: The Forgotten Tradition of Radical Publishing for Children in Britain, 1910-1949* (2016), Kimberly Reynolds identifies a radical tradition of publishing that she claims “was designed to ignite and underpin the work of making a new Britain for a new kind of Briton” (1). In this paper, I will focus on Reynolds’ claim that the UK was in the process of re-identifying itself to include its increasingly diverse population, and consider how children’s books that were disseminated widely through print and media served to construct a new national identity. In particular, I am interested in how British Chinese immigrants were represented to white British children and were slowly incorporated into the nation’s narrative about itself.

Using archival material from Seven Stories: The National Centre for Children’s Literature, I compare early efforts in the 1960s and 70s within the UK to depict a “diverse” children’s literature alongside recent efforts among media, publishers, and, of course, Seven Stories. Some materials that will be used to unpack the newly emerging national identity in contemporary Britain include the Pearl Binder Collection, which features a children’s series about a young boy from Hong Kong (the *Ladder Street* series [1964-74]), as well as more recent publications by British Chinese authors/illustrators. Importantly, the transnational picture book, *I Am Mulan* (2017), fosters a new image of China and the Chinese by merging Western and Eastern narrative and illustrating techniques, and also speaks to the global nature of children’s literature through its publication history.