

## **Crossing Oceans, Building Bridges: Curating Diversity in Seven Stories—The National Centre for Children’s Books**

In 2014, a grassroots organization comprising authors including Ellen Oh, Aisha Saeed, and Chelsea Pitcher began the “We Need Diverse Books” campaign on Twitter, rounding up support for their call to make children’s literature more inclusive. Despite this rally to create a more diverse children’s literature, there remain contexts in which the voice of ethnic minorities is absent, leaving the stories of these groups to be told by a dominant white majority. In this paper, I will use archival material from Seven Stories—The National Centre for Children’s Books to trace the way that British children’s authors and illustrators have historically depicted China and its people, often to the detriment of the rapidly growing Chinese community within the UK.

Within the stacks of Seven Stories, there are many examples of the uncritical and often irresponsible manner in which British authors/illustrators have represented China. Beloved author Peter Dickinson, for example, admits in a letter to a PhD student at Simmons College that, in his research for his novel *Tulku* (1979), he consulted a history of Tibet that was later discredited, and that all other details of Tibet and mainland China were merely stories created to entertain his two sons. Even those with personal experience in China did not always manage to challenge dominant stereotypes about the Middle Kingdom. In the dummy book for *Chi Ming and the Tiger Kitten* (1964), racist depictions of Chinese (e.g., slanted eyes) already begin to emerge in Pearl Binder’s illustrations. It is my contention that bringing to light these archival materials, despite their limitations, can serve as an important starting point for curating diversity, for they speak of the silences and gaps within the British children’s literary tradition. With the emergence of British Chinese authors/illustrators (e.g., Meilo So and Yu Rong) who seek to more authentically depict Chinese culture, it seems timely to return to this history, which provides insight into early attempts to cross oceans and look beyond the nation.