

SYMBOLIC ANALYSIS OF CHINESE IDENTITY RECOGNITION IN *THE UGLY VEGETABLES* PICTURE BOOK BY GRACE LIN (1999)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how symbolism depicts Chinese identity in Grace Lin's picture book, *The Ugly Vegetables* (1999), focusing on multiculturalism and the immigrant experience. The objectives of this study are as follows; (1) To identify the key symbolic markers used in *The Ugly Vegetables* picture book to signify Chinese identity, (2) To explain how symbols contribute to the construction and recognition of cultural identity towards the characters, and (3) To elaborate how *The Ugly Vegetables* picture book employs symbolic elements to convey and represent Chinese identity. The story emphasizes embracing cultural heritage while integrating into a new home, symbolized by "ugly vegetables". The research, grounded in semiotics and symbolism theory by Charles Sander Peirce, investigates key symbolic markers representing Chinese identity. Research questions and objectives guide the study, employing descriptive qualitative research to provide insights. *The Ugly Vegetable* provides interesting insights into the numerous layers of Chinese identity depicted in the story. This study explores the text by examining major symbols such as Chinese characters, traditional clothes, Chinese cuisine, and the significance of "ugly vegetables." The importance of these symbols in expressing cultural identity and history is clear when examined through the perspective of Peirce and Saussure's semiotic theories.

Keywords: Symbolism, Cultural Identity, Identity Recognition, Chinese Immigrant, Picture Book

INTRODUCTION

Most children today have easy access to books about diverse cultures. Children's literature often plays a significant role in promoting and celebrating multiculturalism. Literature has a profound impact on children, shaping their intellectual, emotional, and social development. Exposure to literature from an early age helps children develop language skills. They learn new words, sentence structures, and linguistic nuances,

which ultimately enhances their reading and communication abilities. Brown (2004, p.180) highlights that “incorporating a range of media formats increases the learners’ willingness to learn more and recall better what they learn in developing the performance of ability they are projected to improve.” Literature exposes children to different cultures, traditions, and ways of life. It promotes cultural sensitivity and diversity, reducing prejudice and promoting an inclusive worldview. It does so by presenting diverse characters, settings, and themes that reflect the experiences and perspectives of people from various cultural backgrounds. Multicultural children’s literature features protagonists and supporting characters from different ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds. This diversity helps young readers see themselves in the stories and also introduces them to the lives and experiences of others.

Multicultural children’s books often explore the traditions, customs, and values of different cultures. They provide readers with opportunities to learn about holidays, foods, clothing, and celebrations from around the world. According to Bishop (1994), interacting with the content of these books gives them the opportunity to learn more about themselves and about people from different cultures. According to the writer’s experience, reading stories for children can be considered as a boring activity if not done in a correct way. Children usually understand many things more easily by visualizing what they see rather than just reading. In this case, picture books have both pictures and words, so they can be used as a medium for children to learn and enjoy stories. Picture books are becoming one of the all-encompassing learning tools for American children because they tell many stories on a variety of subjects. In this work, the author is interested in analyzing American cultural differences, especially for immigrant children.

In this thesis, the writer discusses identity recognition in a picture book entitled *The Ugly Vegetables* by Grace Lin (1999). *The Ugly Vegetables* by Grace Lin (1999) is a heartwarming children’s book. The book tells the story of a young girl and her mother who plant a garden filled with what they call “ugly vegetables” in the midst of their neighborhood filled with neighbors who plant beautiful flowers. The story revolves around the anticipation and eventual realization that the vegetables they’ve grown, such as bok choy (also known as Chinese cabbage or pak choi, is a type of leafy vegetable commonly used in Asian cuisine.) and daikon radishes, are indeed beautiful in their own way and bring the community together through a shared meal.

The writer chose this book due to its focus on multiculturalism and the immigrant experience. Grace Lin, who herself is a descendant of Taiwanese and Chinese, draws from her own background to create a story that resonates with children who may come from diverse cultural backgrounds (Hibler, 2023). The book is particularly relevant in addressing issues related to identity and how children of immigrants navigate living in two cultures. It showcases the beauty of embracing one's cultural heritage and traditions while also learning to appreciate and integrate into the culture of their new home. The Picture book tells the story of a child of an Asian immigrant who is being invited for gardening by her mother, but the plants that she plants are different from the plants her neighbors wanted to plant, because her neighbors who are not Asian are also gardening. Her neighbors plant various flowers, while she and her mother plant a strange plant because when it grows it looks strange and ugly according to her. But her mother always says that the plants that they want to grow are better than the flowers. It turns out that the plants are a variety of Chinese vegetables. After the harvest, her mother cooks a soup from the various Chinese vegetables and it tastes good. Their neighbors also visit her house to eat soup together. And she realizes that her mother's words were true. *The Ugly Vegetable* by Grace Lin (1999) is a book that appeals to readers interested in exploring the themes of multiculturalism, identity, and the immigrant experience. It serves as a valuable resource for teaching children about the beauty of diversity and the importance of embracing different cultures within a community.

The writer is interested in identifying and analyzing the connection between identity recognition and how the main character is introduced to various Chinese vegetables by her mother, which originated from their origin homeland, which are indirectly introduced by her mother as the original culture of her ancestors which is the original identity of the main character. From the research questions, the objectives of the study are; 1) To identify the key symbolic markers used in *The Ugly Vegetable* by Grace Lin (1999) picture book to signify Chinese identity, 2) To explain how symbols contribute to the construction and recognition of cultural identity towards the characters, and 3) To elaborate how *The Ugly Vegetable* by Grace Lin (1999) picture book employs symbolic elements to convey and represent Chinese identity.

METHODOLOGY

The Research Approach and Design

The writer uses descriptive qualitative and focused on describing, explaining and interpreting the collected data deals with the phenomenon that happens in the story which is presented by the writer. Qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data (e.g., text, video, or audio) to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences. It can be used to gather in-depth insights into a problem or generate new ideas for research. According to Creswell (1998, p.15) states a qualitative study is defined as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants and conducted in a natural setting. The qualitative research is appropriate with this study. This research can be categorized as library research because the resource data are from documents. It is a way of collecting data taken from literature. The research design in this study can be described as an arrangement condition for collecting and analyzing data which are taken from *The Ugly Vegetables* by Grace Lin (1999).

The Data Resources

In this research, the information is within the shapes of pictures and sentences; particularly the character's articulations or exchanges and portrayals given by the creator of the book. The information in this investigation was taken from the picture book *The Ugly Vegetables* by Grace Lin (1999) This book can be called the essential source. In this regard, the writer employs records as the sources of information, since it is written material. To bolster the essential source over, the writer moreover needs other information called auxiliary source which helps within the handle of analyzing the essential information. Therefore, the writer gets a lot of information taken from textbooks, such as literary theory and other sources that discuss more about the problems of immigrant children.

The Method of Data Collection

In this study the writer took information from the picture book *The Ugly Vegetables* by Grace Lin (1999) There are a few strategies to analyze the information. To begin with, the writer perusing picture books also uses pictures as the most visual

information. Moment, the writer collects and records a few critical things from children's picture books by relating them to the common migrant involvement hypotheses. Third, the writer uses primary information as the subject and analyzes it utilizing auxiliary information to back this investigation. The writer analyzes the picture book by centering on words and pictures to see the problems of immigrant children in the main character picture book.

The Method of Data Analysis

The final action in subjective inquiry is analyzing and deciphering the information collected and displaying the result. There are many steps to be conducted by the writer to analyze the information. This study used the theory of semiotics using the theory from Peirce (1991) to get a better understanding of semiotics and how it connects to the issue that will be analyzed in this study. The writer also uses Peirce's concept of symbol in identifying and analyzing the symbolism that are depicted in the novel in order to answer the research questions. the writer examined the picture book carefully to discover the problem within the story. Conflict ended up the most consideration to be concerned. The method of data analysis takes after: *The Ugly Vegetables* by Grace Lin (1999) over and over, investigating and portraying the information, concluding information investigation in order to reply to the explanation of the inquiry about issues, and extricating the arrangement of the issues.

DISCUSSION

The examination of major symbolic markers is crucial in understanding the various layers of Chinese identity in Grace Lin's 1999 literary masterpiece, *The Ugly Vegetable*. This study explores the significance of these symbolic features, dissecting their role in the formation and recognition of cultural identity. By exploring the various symbols used in the narrative, this research hopes to illustrate how these aspects serve as important representations of Chinese identity, providing insights into the text's rich tapestry of cultural nuances. The examination of symbolic markers provides an angle through which we can appreciate and comprehend the richness and complexity of Chinese identity as depicted in Lin's literary work.

Key Symbolic Markers And Elements Representing Chinese Identity

1. *Chinese Characters (Hanzi)*

The use of Chinese characters or Hanzi in the illustrations represent the Chinese identity in the story. It can be found in the form of signs, posters, or written language within the story, emphasizing the presence of the Chinese language and culture.



Figure 1 (Lin, 1999, p.8)

In figure 4.1, the main character's mom can be seen to write several Chinese characters as a sign in the garden. The depiction of Chinese characters or Hanzi serves as a representation of Chinese identity and cultural heritage. Chinese characters or Hanzi have a history spanning thousands of years, evolving from ancient pictographs into the complex characters used today according to Wei (2014). They are deeply ingrained in Chinese culture and serve as a tangible link to China's rich cultural heritage. As such, Chinese characters symbolize the continuity and endurance of Chinese civilization, reflecting the country's long history and cultural traditions. For many Chinese individuals, proficiency in reading and writing Chinese characters or Hanzi is a source of cultural pride and identity. Mastery of Hanzi is often viewed as a mark of education, intelligence, and cultural sophistication according to Zhou (2019). Chinese characters are not merely symbols for communication but also carry deep cultural significance. Zhou (2019) emphasizes that Hanzi evokes a sense of belonging and pride in one's cultural heritage, which are often used as visual symbols to represent Chinese culture in various contexts, including literature, art, and media. These Chinese characters act as visual cues that reinforce the cultural setting of the story. They serve to immerse the reader in the

protagonist’s Chinese-American community, providing an authentic representation of the cultural environment in which the story unfolds.

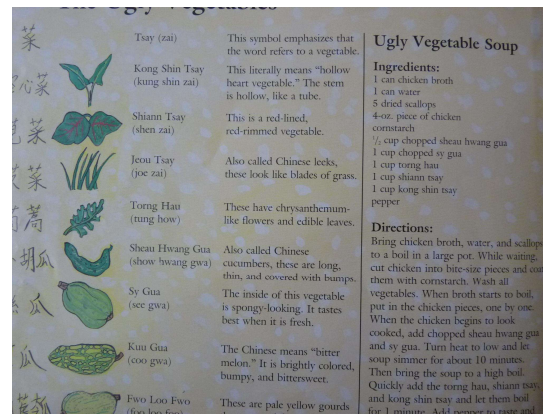


Figure 4.2 (Lin, 1999, p.31)

The use of Chinese characters or Hanzi in the recipes serves as a representation of Chinese identity and cultural authenticity. In the book, the protagonist’s mother prepares a delicious soup using the “ugly vegetables” grown in their garden. The recipes for this soup are included in the story, and they are written in both English and Chinese characters. By including Chinese characters or Hanzi in the recipes, it emphasizes the cultural heritage of the protagonist’s family and the authenticity of the traditional Chinese dishes they prepare. It not only adds a layer of realism to the story but also reinforces the importance of cultural identity and pride.

In the context of Peirce’s (1991) triadic structure for signs, the use of Chinese characters or Hanzi in the illustrations represents the sign. The sign, in this case, is a visual representation of the Chinese identity and cultural heritage within the story. It serves as a medium through which meaning is conveyed to the audience. The object, in Peirce's framework, refers to the thing or concept to which the sign refers. In this case, the object is the Chinese identity and cultural heritage itself. The Chinese characters act as a symbol or representation of this object, linking the visual depiction in the illustrations to the broader cultural context they signify. The interpretant is the third element in Peirce's triadic structure and refers to the meaning or interpretation that the sign elicits in the mind of the observer. When readers encounter Chinese characters in the illustrations, they interpret them as symbols of Chinese culture, heritage, and identity. The interpretant, therefore, is the cultural significance and sense of belonging evoked by the presence of these characters. Saussure’s (2011) dyadic model of the sign

also applies to the use of Chinese characters in the illustrations. In this model, the sign consists of two components: the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the physical form of the sign, such as the written Chinese characters themselves. These characters serve as visual representations of linguistic units and carry meaning through their visual appearance. The signified, on the other hand, is the concept or idea that the signifier represents. In this case, the signified is the Chinese identity and cultural heritage. The presence of Chinese characters in the illustrations signifies this cultural identity to the audience.

By including Chinese characters in the illustrations, the story in the picture book celebrates the richness and diversity of Chinese culture and highlights the importance of cultural identity. The presence of these characters helps to affirm the protagonist's connection to her heritage and underscores the message of pride in one's cultural background that is central to the narrative of *The Ugly Vegetables*.

2. *Traditional Clothing*

The clothing choices can serve as a visual representation of cultural identity. The use of Chinese clothing serves as a representation of Chinese identity and cultural heritage. Throughout the illustrations, characters are shown wearing traditional Chinese attire, such as qipao dresses. Qipao represents Oriental feminine beauty and is a classic Chinese national traditional clothing that is beautiful and balanced inside and out (Wei, 2017). The use of Chinese clothing in the illustrations helps to visually establish the cultural setting of the story. It immerses the reader in the protagonist's Chinese-American community and provides a sense of authenticity to the characters and their surroundings.



Figure 4.3 (Lin, 1999, p.18)

In figure 4.3, it can be seen that the main character and her mother are wearing a Qipao, a Chinese traditional dress that according to Su (2019) is inspired by the clothing of Manchu people, which has a long history in Chinese culture, dating back to the Qing Dynasty. Its design reflects traditional Chinese aesthetics and craftsmanship, embodying the cultural heritage of the Chinese people. By wearing the qipao, individuals connect with their cultural roots and showcase their pride in Chinese heritage. While the qipao has traditional roots, it has also undergone modern adaptations to suit contemporary tastes and fashion trends. Today, the qipao is not only worn on special occasions but also as everyday attire, particularly in regions with a strong Chinese cultural influence. Its versatility and timeless appeal continue to make it a cherished symbol of Chinese identity.

Based on Peirce's (1991) triadic structure for signs, the clothing choices in the illustrations represent the sign. The sign, in this case, is the visual representation of cultural identity conveyed through the characters' attire. It serves as a medium through which meaning is communicated to the audience. The object, according to Peirce (1991), refers to the thing or concept to which the sign refers. Here, the object is the cultural identity and heritage associated with traditional Chinese clothing. The use of qipao dresses and other traditional garments in the illustrations signifies this cultural object, linking the visual depiction to broader cultural contexts and traditions. The interpretant, the third element in Peirce's framework, is the meaning or interpretation that comes in the mind of the observer. When readers see characters wearing traditional Chinese attire, they interpret it as a symbol of Chinese identity and cultural heritage. The interpretant, therefore, is the cultural significance and sense of authenticity evoked by the presence of these clothing choices. Saussure's (2011) dyadic model of the sign also applies to the use of clothing as a representation of cultural identity. The sign consists of two components: the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the physical form of the sign, in this case, the traditional Chinese clothing worn by the characters. These garments serve as visual representations of cultural identity and heritage, carrying meaning through their appearance and symbolism. The signified, on the other hand, is the concept or idea that the signifier represents. Here, the signified is the cultural identity and heritage associated with Chinese clothing. The presence of traditional attire in the illustrations signifies this cultural concept to the audience.

3. *Chinese Cuisine*



Figure 4.4 (Lin, 1999, p.24)

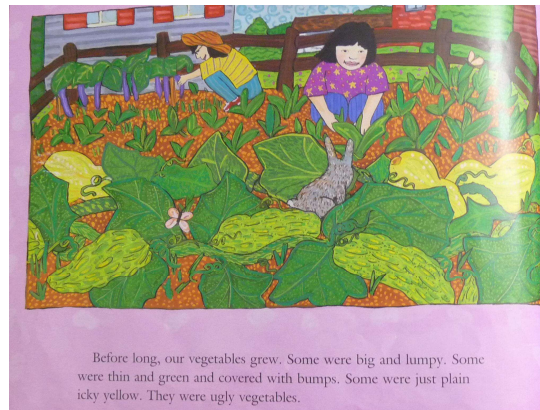
The book also highlights traditional Chinese vegetables and dishes, showcasing the importance of food in Chinese culture. Chinese cuisine plays a significant role in representing Chinese identity. According to Zhang (2023), “food culture exchange reflects the group's identification with the cultural identity of their home country”. Throughout the story, the protagonist’s mother prepares a traditional Chinese soup using the “ugly vegetables” grown in their garden. This soup in figure 4.4 serves as a central element of the narrative and symbolizes the protagonist’s connection to her Chinese heritage. The preparation and consumption of traditional Chinese cuisine in the story highlight the importance of food as a cultural marker and a means of preserving cultural identity. Through the process of cooking and sharing a meal made with homegrown vegetables, the protagonist and her family celebrate their Chinese heritage and traditions. Furthermore, the specific ingredients and cooking techniques used in the preparation of the soup reflect the culinary heritage of Chinese cuisine. By showcasing traditional Chinese dishes, such as the soup made with “ugly vegetables,” the story reinforces the cultural authenticity and richness of Chinese culinary traditions.

Using Peirce’s (1991) triadic structure for signs, the traditional Chinese vegetables and dishes featured in the story can be seen as the representation of the sign. They serve as visual and narrative representations of Chinese cultural identity and culinary traditions, conveying meaning to the audience. The object, according to Peirce, refers to the thing or concept to which the sign refers. Here, the object is the cultural significance and importance of food in Chinese culture. Traditional Chinese vegetables and dishes, such as bok choy, Chinese long beans, or Chinese radishes, symbolize this

cultural object, linking the narrative to broader culinary traditions and practices. The interpretant, the third element in Peirce's framework, is the meaning or interpretation elicited in the mind of the observer. When readers encounter traditional Chinese vegetables and dishes in the story, they interpret them as symbols of Chinese cultural identity and culinary heritage. The interpretant, therefore, is the cultural significance and sense of connection to Chinese heritage evoked by the presence of these food items. Saussure's (2011) dyadic model of the sign also applies to the depiction of traditional Chinese cuisine in the story. The sign consists of two components: the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the physical form of the sign, in this case, the traditional Chinese vegetables and dishes described in the narrative. These ingredients and dishes serve as visual representations of Chinese cultural identity and culinary traditions, carrying meaning through their depiction and association with Chinese culture. The signified, on the other hand, is the concept or idea that the signifier represents. Here, the signified is the cultural identity and culinary heritage associated with traditional Chinese cuisine. The presence of these ingredients and dishes in the story signifies this cultural concept to the audience.

4. *Symbolism of the Ugly Vegetables ingredients*

The choice of vegetables like daikon and bok choy, which may be considered "ugly" by some standards, serves as a metaphor for appreciating diversity and cultural uniqueness. It promotes the idea that beauty can be found in unexpected places. The term "ugly vegetables" used in the book title suggests that these vegetables may be perceived as unattractive or undesirable based on conventional standards of beauty. However, by showcasing the beauty and value of these "ugly" vegetables in the context of Chinese cuisine, the story encourages readers to challenge preconceived notions and appreciate the diversity of cultural perspectives and tastes. It sends a message that beauty can be found in unexpected places and that uniqueness should be celebrated rather than shunned.



Before long, our vegetables grew. Some were big and lumpy. Some were thin and green and covered with bumps. Some were just plain icky yellow. They were ugly vegetables.

Figure 4.5 (Lin, 1999, p.15)

In figure 4.5, it can be seen that the protagonist explains that the garden is full of ugly vegetables. By featuring these vegetables prominently in the story, Grace Lin emphasizes the authenticity of the protagonist's Chinese cultural heritage. The inclusion of these ingredients reflects the culinary traditions passed down through generations and reinforces the protagonist's connection to her Chinese roots. Despite being overlooked or underestimated, these vegetables thrive and ultimately contribute to the creation of a delicious and nourishing meal. Similarly, Chinese culture has endured and flourished over centuries, adapting and evolving while maintaining its core values and traditions. The use of daikon and bok choy in the story reinforces the protagonist's cultural identity and pride in her Chinese heritage. These vegetables are not only ingredients in a recipe but symbols of cultural resilience, strength, and authenticity. Through their inclusion, Grace Lin celebrates the richness and complexity of Chinese identity, highlighting the beauty and significance of cultural diversity.

Analyzed using Peirce's (1991) triadic structure for signs, the choice of "ugly vegetables" in the story represents the sign. It serves as a metaphor for appreciating diversity and cultural uniqueness, conveying a deeper meaning to the audience. The object, according to Peirce (1991), refers to the thing or concept to which the sign refers. Here, the object is the idea of diversity and cultural uniqueness. The "ugly vegetables" symbolize this concept, linking the narrative to broader themes of cultural acceptance and appreciation for difference. The interpretant, the third element in Peirce's framework, is the meaning or interpretation elicited in the mind of the observer. When readers encounter the portrayal of "ugly vegetables" in the story, they interpret them as symbols of cultural resilience, strength, and authenticity. The interpretant, therefore, is

the message of celebrating diversity and finding beauty in unexpected places conveyed by the presence of these vegetables. Saussure's (2011) dyadic model of the sign also applies to the metaphorical use of "ugly vegetables" in the story. The sign consists of two components: the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the physical form of the sign, in this case, the "ugly vegetables" described in the narrative. These vegetables serve as visual representations of cultural uniqueness and diversity, carrying meaning through their unconventional appearance and symbolism. The signified, on the other hand, is the concept or idea that the signifier represents. Here, the signified is the idea of appreciating diversity and finding beauty in unexpected places. The presence of "ugly vegetables" in the story signifies this concept to the audience.

Contribution of Symbols to the Construction and Recognition of Cultural Identity

The book uses various symbols to convey elements of Chinese culture, fostering a sense of belonging and celebrating cultural diversity. The writer found several ways in which symbols contribute to the construction and recognition of cultural identity in the picture book.

1. *Chinese Character (Hanzi)*

The presence of Chinese characters, known as Hanzi, in Grace Lin's picture book *The Ugly Vegetables* serves as a profound representation of cultural identity within the story. Chinese characters have a rich history and are deeply ingrained in Chinese culture, symbolizing the continuity and endurance of Chinese civilization. In the context of the narrative, their inclusion contributes significantly to the portrayal of the protagonist's cultural heritage and underscores the importance of cultural pride and identity.

Throughout the book, Chinese characters Hanzi appear in the illustrations and recipes, acting as visual cues that help the readers to immerse into the protagonist's Chinese-American community. These characters serve as a tangible link to China's cultural heritage, affirming the protagonist's connection to her roots and providing insight into the cultural environment in which the story unfolds. From signs and posters to written language within the story, the presence of Chinese characters reinforces the authenticity of the narrative, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of Chinese-American cultural identity.

For readers, the inclusion of Chinese characters serves as a recognizable marker of Chinese culture, regardless of their familiarity with the language. The characters represent more than just words; they embody the essence of Chinese identity and heritage. Whether readers can read them or not, the presence of Chinese characters prompts associations with Chinese culture, evoking a sense of familiarity and authenticity. This recognition enhances the narrative's authenticity and fosters a deeper appreciation for the protagonist's cultural background.

Moje's (2002) framework regarding the identity concept, which emphasizes the complex, hybrid, and fluid nature of identity, which can be concluded that individuals' identities are not fixed but rather shaped by various social, cultural, and contextual factors. In the case of the protagonist in Lin's book, her identity is influenced by her Chinese heritage, her experiences as a Chinese-American, and her interactions within her multicultural community. Lin's inclusion of Chinese characters aligns with Moje's (2002) assertion that identity can be complex, as it encompasses multiple layers of cultural influences. The protagonist's identity is not solely Chinese or American but rather a fusion of both, represented visually through the presence of Chinese characters alongside English text. This hybridity mirrors Moje's idea that identity is fluid and dynamic, constantly evolving as individuals navigate different spaces and relationships. Furthermore, Moje's (2002) concept of identity as fluid and shifting is exemplified in the protagonist's journey throughout the narrative. As she explores her neighborhood and interacts with her neighbors, her identity is shaped by her cultural heritage, but also by her experiences as a member of a diverse community. The presence of Chinese characters serves as a visual reminder of her roots, grounding her identity even as it adapts to the multicultural environment around her. Moreover, Lin's use of Chinese characters resonates with Moje's (2002) emphasis on the role of culture in shaping identity. The characters not only represent language but also embody the essence of Chinese culture and heritage. Regardless of readers' familiarity with the Chinese language, the presence of these characters prompts associations with Chinese culture, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation for the protagonist's cultural background.

2. *Traditional Clothing (Qipao)*

The depiction of characters wearing traditional Chinese attire, such as the qipao, in Grace Lin's picture book *The Ugly Vegetables* contributes significantly to the visual

representation of Chinese cultural identity within the narrative. The qipao, with its long history and intricate design, serves as a powerful symbol of Chinese fashion and cultural heritage.

Furthermore, the qipao serves as a recognizable symbol of Chinese culture for readers, regardless of their familiarity with Chinese fashion. Its distinctive silhouette and intricate design evoke images of Chinese tradition and elegance, resonating with readers of all backgrounds. Through the recognition of traditional Chinese clothing, readers are invited to explore and appreciate the richness of Chinese cultural heritage, fostering a greater understanding of Chinese-American culture.

Moje (2002) argues that identity is not only shaped by personal experiences but also by cultural symbols and representations, also emphasizes the role of cultural artifacts and practices in shaping individuals' identities. In the case of Lin's picture book, the portrayal of characters in qipaos serves as a visual representation of Chinese cultural identity, contributing to the construction and recognition of identity within the narrative. Moje (2002) theory highlights the significance of cultural artifacts in shaping individuals' identities. The qipao, with its long history and intricate design, embodies Chinese fashion and cultural heritage. By depicting characters wearing qipaos, Lin visually communicates the protagonist's connection to her Chinese cultural roots. This representation aligns with Moje's notion that cultural symbols play a crucial role in shaping individuals' understanding and expression of identity. Furthermore, Moje's (2002) framework mentioned the role of recognition in identity formation. The qipao serves as a recognizable symbol of Chinese culture for readers, regardless of their familiarity with Chinese fashion. Its distinctive silhouette and intricate design evoke images of Chinese tradition and elegance, resonating with readers of all backgrounds. Through the recognition of traditional Chinese clothing, readers are invited to engage with and appreciate the richness of Chinese cultural heritage, fostering a greater understanding of Chinese-American culture. Moreover, Moje's (2002) theory underscores the importance of cultural pride in identity development. By showcasing characters wearing qipaos, Lin celebrates the beauty and elegance of Chinese tradition, reinforcing the protagonist's connection to her cultural roots. This celebration of cultural heritage promotes a sense of pride and belonging for the protagonist and other Chinese-American readers, aligning with Moje's (2002) assertion that cultural practices and representations contribute to individuals' sense of identity and belonging.

In essence, the depiction of characters wearing qipaos in *The Ugly Vegetables* contributes to the construction and recognition of cultural identity within the narrative. Through the portrayal of this iconic garment, Grace Lin celebrates the beauty and elegance of Chinese tradition, reinforcing the protagonist's connection to her cultural roots. By showcasing traditional Chinese clothing, Lin invites readers to engage with the story on a deeper level, fostering a greater appreciation for Chinese-American cultural heritage and the importance of cultural pride and identity.

3. *Chinese Cuisine*

The portrayal of traditional Chinese cuisine in Grace Lin's picture book *The Ugly Vegetables* serves as a rich tapestry of cultural identity within the narrative. Through the preparation and sharing of dishes, particularly those made with "ugly vegetables," Lin celebrates the cultural significance of culinary heritage and underscores the importance of food in Chinese culture.

Chinese cuisine holds a special place in Chinese culture, serving as a cornerstone of culinary tradition and cultural identity, also as a vehicle for preserving traditions and fostering community connections. Through the preparation and sharing of meals, families and communities come together to celebrate their cultural heritage and strengthen bonds. In *The Ugly Vegetables*, the protagonist's mother prepares a traditional Chinese soup using ingredients from their garden, showcasing the importance of food in Chinese-American cultural identity.

For readers, the inclusion of Chinese cuisine serves as a recognizable marker of Chinese cultural identity. The flavors, aromas, and textures of Chinese dishes evoke associations with familiar culinary traditions, resonating with readers of diverse backgrounds. By depicting Chinese cuisine authentically, Lin invites readers to explore and appreciate the richness of Chinese-American culinary heritage, fostering a greater understanding and appreciation for the protagonist's cultural background.

Furthermore, the portrayal of Chinese cuisine in *The Ugly Vegetables* offers readers an opportunity to engage with cultural traditions in a meaningful way. Through the depiction of recipes and cooking techniques, readers gain insight into the culinary practices that have been passed down through generations. They learn about the ingredients, flavors, and rituals associated with Chinese cooking, deepening their understanding of Chinese culture and culinary heritage. Moje (2002) emphasizes the role

of cultural practices, such as food traditions, in shaping individuals' identities. It can be concluded that identity is constructed through engagement with cultural artifacts and practices, and food plays a significant role in this process. In Lin's picture book, the depiction of traditional Chinese cuisine serves as a rich tapestry of cultural identity within the narrative, contributing to the construction and recognition of the protagonist's Chinese-American identity. Chinese cuisine, with its rich flavors and centuries-old traditions, holds a special place in Chinese culture and serves as a cornerstone of cultural identity. Through the preparation and sharing of meals, families and communities come together to celebrate their cultural heritage and strengthen bonds. In *The Ugly Vegetables*, the protagonist's mother prepares a traditional Chinese soup using ingredients from their garden, showcasing the importance of food in Chinese-American cultural identity. This portrayal aligns with Moje's assertion that cultural practices, such as cooking and sharing meals, contribute to individuals' understanding and expression of identity. Moje (2002) emphasizes the role of recognition in identity formation. The inclusion of Chinese cuisine in *The Ugly Vegetables* serves as a recognizable marker of Chinese cultural identity for readers. The flavors, aromas, and textures of Chinese dishes evoke associations with familiar culinary traditions, resonating with readers of diverse backgrounds. By authentically depicting Chinese cuisine, Lin invites readers to engage with and appreciate the richness of Chinese-American culinary heritage, fostering a greater understanding and appreciation for the protagonist's cultural background.

4. *"Ugly vegetables" Ingredients*

In Grace Lin's *The Ugly Vegetables*, the symbolic representation of "ugly vegetables" offers profound insights into cultural identity and challenges conventional perceptions of beauty. Through this symbolism, Lin celebrates diversity and underscores the importance of embracing cultural heritage. The use of "ugly vegetables" in a homemade soup, as depicted in the story, highlights the resourcefulness and ingenuity of Chinese cooking. These vegetables, often overlooked or underestimated, are transformed into a nourishing and flavorful dish that reflects the resilience and creativity inherent in Chinese cuisine. The term "ugly vegetables" serves as a metaphor for appreciating diversity and cultural uniqueness. In the story, these vegetables are initially perceived as unattractive or undesirable based on conventional standards of beauty. However, as the narrative unfolds, the protagonist discovers the

hidden beauty and value in these overlooked vegetables. Their resilience and ability to thrive despite their unconventional appearance mirror the resilience of Chinese culture in the face of adversity and challenges.

For readers, the portrayal of “ugly vegetables” serves as a recognizable symbol of Chinese cultural identity. It prompts reflection on the cultural significance of food and the complexities of cultural diversity. By embracing the beauty of “ugly vegetables,” readers are encouraged to recognize the value of cultural heritage and the importance of embracing one’s roots. Furthermore, the symbolism of “ugly vegetables” extends beyond the narrative of the story to resonate with real-world implications. In a society that often prioritizes superficial standards of beauty, the celebration of “ugly vegetables” serves as a reminder of the beauty found in diversity and individuality. Through this symbolism, Lin encourages readers to embrace their unique cultural identities and appreciate the richness of cultural diversity.

Aligning with Moje (2002), which emphasizes the role of symbols and cultural practices in shaping individuals’ it can be concluded that identity is constructed through engagement with cultural artifacts and practices, and symbols play a crucial role in this process. Lin's use of “ugly vegetables” as symbols in the narrative serves to challenge conventional perceptions of beauty and celebrate the diversity inherent in cultural heritage. Moje’s theory highlights the significance of symbols in shaping individuals' understanding and expression of identity. In *The Ugly Vegetables*, the term “ugly vegetables” serves as a metaphor for appreciating diversity and cultural uniqueness. Initially perceived as unattractive or undesirable based on conventional standards of beauty, these vegetables represent the resilience and creativity inherent in Chinese cuisine. Through their transformation into a nourishing and flavorful dish, Lin highlights the resourcefulness and ingenuity of Chinese cooking, showcasing the ability to find beauty and value in overlooked or underestimated elements.

Furthermore, Moje’s framework emphasizes the role of recognition in identity formation. The portrayal of “ugly vegetables” helps readers to reflect on the cultural significance of food and the complexities of cultural diversity. By embracing the beauty of these unconventional vegetables, readers are encouraged to recognize the value of cultural heritage and the importance of embracing one’s roots. This recognition fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation for the protagonist’s Chinese-American identity and the cultural richness depicted in the story. Moreover, Moje’s theory

underscores the importance of symbols in extending beyond the narrative to resonate with real-world implications. In a society that often prioritizes superficial standards of beauty, the celebration of “ugly vegetables” serves as a reminder of the beauty found in diversity and individuality. Through this symbolism, Lin encourages readers to embrace their unique cultural identities and appreciate the richness of cultural diversity, aligning with Moje’s assertion that engagement with symbols fosters a sense of belonging and identity.

The story in *The Ugly Vegetable* by Grace Lin (1999) also highlights the importance of intergenerational communication and cultural understanding. The girl’s mother patiently explains the value of the “ugly” vegetables, emphasizing their cultural significance and culinary uses. This exchange demonstrates the crucial role of parents in transmitting cultural values to their children and helping them navigate the challenges of biculturalism. The symbols in *The Ugly Vegetables* contribute to the construction and recognition of cultural identity by weaving together visual, culinary, linguistic, and communal elements that reflect the richness of Chinese culture. Through these symbols, readers can gain insights into the values, traditions, and aesthetics that form the cultural identity depicted in the picture book.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis of Grace Lin’s *The Ugly Vegetables* reveals a rich tapestry of symbolic markers that contribute to the representation and recognition of Chinese identity. The study focused on three major research questions, exploring the key symbolic markers used in the picture book to signify Chinese identity, their contribution to the construction and recognition of cultural identity, and how symbolic elements are employed to convey and represent Chinese identity.

The key symbolic markers and elements identified include elements such as the traditional Chinese characters, traditional clothing, Chinese cuisine, symbolism of “ugly vegetables,” Chinese festivals, and cultural traditions. Each of these symbols serves as a visual and narrative representation of Chinese culture, contributing to the overall portrayal of Chinese identity in the story.

These symbols play a crucial role in the construction and recognition of cultural identity within the narrative. The “ugly vegetables” metaphorically represent diversity

within the Chinese community, emphasizing the beauty found in cultural uniqueness. The traditional Chinese garden serves as a cultural landscape, connecting characters and readers to the aesthetics and traditions of Chinese culture. Symbols like Chinese characters, traditional clothing, and red decorations contribute to the linguistic, visual, and symbolic aspects of cultural identity.

The study also highlights the importance of family and generational ties, as well as the potential inclusion of a tea ceremony as symbolic elements. These aspects add depth to the representation of Chinese identity by incorporating familial and ritualistic dimensions, providing a nuanced understanding of cultural practices.

The objectives of the study were to identify symbolic markers, explain their contribution to cultural identity, and elaborate on how symbolic elements convey Chinese identity. The findings demonstrate that the symbolic markers in *The Ugly Vegetables* serve as powerful tools for conveying and recognizing Chinese identity, offering readers a window into the cultural richness depicted in the picture book.

The significance of the study lies in its contribution to literature analysis, particularly in the realm of children's literature. By exploring how Chinese identity is represented in *The Ugly Vegetables*, the research enhances our understanding of literary techniques and narrative strategies used in children's literature. The study also emphasizes the practical significance of the research by providing educators and parents with insights into addressing the experiences of immigrant children, fostering cultural diversity, and promoting multicultural literacy among young readers.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the study, including the small number of studies specifically discussing *The Ugly Vegetables* and the potential difficulty in generalizing findings due to the limited research base. Despite these limitations, the study has shed light on the symbolic richness of the picture book and its potential impact on readers' understanding of Chinese identity and multicultural experiences.

In conclusion, *The Ugly Vegetables* by Grace Lin stands as a valuable literary work that not only entertains but also educates readers about the intricacies of Chinese identity, cultural traditions, and the beauty that lies in embracing diversity.

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