Special Reviews on Books About Mainland China

Li Jian

Lillian H. Heil
In the Summer of 1988, Li Jian (We call her Jane.) finished her Master's degree in elementary education at Brigham Young University. Her project was to critique the children's books printed in the United States that were written about Mainland China. Jane's home is in Tianjin, China. She's interested in children's books and also the way in which her country is portrayed to children in the United States. We asked if we might reprint some of her critiques and she has given us her consent.


About the Author

Mr. Fisher visited the People's Republic of China in the summer of 1984 and was deeply impressed by the Great Wall. Recipient, in 1950, of a Pulitzer Prize for painting, Mr. Fisher was the author and/or illustrator of over two hundred books, including Alphabet Art, Number Art, and Symbol Art.

About the Book

The story showed how the Chinese people labored and suffered day and night for ten years to connect the Wall by the order of Qin Shih Huang Di for the purpose of stopping Mongol invaders from the North. "Stop these barbarians," Qin yelled.

The story was powerfully told and illustrations were done by the author personally with a taste of traditional Chinese painting which was matched with poems or beautiful verses. No inaccuracies were found. The length of the Great Wall was reported pretty close to the fact of 6,700 km.

**About the Author**

Information not available.

**About the Book**

The nearly 4,000-year history of China was one of great achievements and enduring pride. It was also one of repeated invasion and harassment, with periods of political turmoil and economic hardship.

The first half of the twentieth century was especially convulsive, finally leading to the revolution that founded the People’s Republic of China in 1949. Today, a new “revolution” is under way. Sweeping economic reforms have opened China’s doors to foreign trade, tourism, technology, and cultural influences. The purpose of all this effort was to make China rich and strong again.

In this timely and insightful book, Jeffrey Hacker examines the changes that have taken place in China since the death of Mao, and offers an in-depth look at China’s Four Modernizations — the development of agriculture, industry, science and technology, and defense — as well as the new foreign policies, diplomatic alignments, and trade relations.

In a concise and lively style, the author discussed such topics as:

1) Mao’s great leap forward and the Cultural Revolution;
2) The priorities of Peking’s new leadership — from limited free enterprise to one-child families;
3) Taiwan and Hong Kong issues and what they meant to the People’s Republic of China.
4) China’s relations with the U.S., USSR, and the Third World.

In a balanced conclusion, the author brought together historical themes and contemporary issues in considering the problems and opportunities of China’s future.

**Inaccuracies**

1) P. 9 “Foreign Devils.” It was in the thirteenth century that the whole of China came
under foreign rule for the first time. Mongol barbarians led by Genghis Khan poured in from the north early in the century and took over vast territories. The next foreigners to take over and rule China were invaders from Manchuria in the Northeast. The Manchus conquered China and established the Qing dynasty in 1644.

Fact: China is a big country with 56 minority peoples in addition to the Han nationality. Both Mongol people and Manchu people belong to these minorities. They were not foreign invaders as the author erroneously stated.


About the Author

Information not available.

About the Book

This was one of the “Count Your Way Through...” series. The content was both entertaining and informative. Following one through ten, the book introduces young readers to each country and culture, covering such topics as history, geography, religion, and traditions.

According to a Chinese myth, four animals helped a being named P’an Ku create the universe, which took 18,000 years. This ancient story joined nine other explanations of varying aspects of Chinese life, from the five zones of the Chinese musical scale to the seven zones of vegetation found in China. The stunning, full-color illustrations enhanced the text and gave children an excellent opportunity to get to know their neighbors across the Pacific.

The book was easy to understand, covering many topics by counting the numbers. It was also the only book that mentioned: “The Chinese call their famous Great Wall the ‘10,000 li Wall’,” which would make the wall 3,300 miles long. It twists and turns so much that no one was sure of its exact length. This is a good book for the very young readers.
Inaccuracies

1) Introductory Note: “Now it (the common language of Mandarin Chinese) is the official language of the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of China (Taiwan).”

Fact: Taiwan is an island, which is one of the provinces in the People’s Republic of China.

2) P. 1 The Republic of China is made up of the island of Taiwan (Formosa), and three groups of tiny islands in the Formosa strait.

Fact: It was the same misconception mentioned above.


About the Author

Information not available.

About the Book

This was one of the “Passport to . . . “ series, which presents a comprehensive, up-to-the-minute look at China. The four separate parts of “Fact Files” in the book drew on the most current information available and the figures of many important aspects. They included:

1) Land and Population,
2) Home and Leisure,
3) Economy and Trade, and
4) Government and the World Role.

Maps, diagrams and charts were carefully prepared to offer a complete and in-depth understanding of life in China and China’s role in the world today. Full-color photographs on almost every page complemented the text and bought the country alive.
The length of the Great Wall and the Long March were closer to fact than in any other book. They were respectively reported as 6,350 km (3,946 miles) for the Great Wall and 12,00 km (7,450 miles) for the Long March. The book adopted the modern official Chinese spelling system for all the names and places. It conveyed the most accurate information compared to similar books published in the U.S. and came closer to revealing China's real face today. It is highly recommended for basic and general knowledge about the country.

No Inaccuracies Were Found.


About the Author

Information not available.

About the Book

On August 28, 1784, the American ship "Empress of China" sailed into the crowded harbor of Canton, China. The ship hoisted the American flag and fired a thirteen-gun salute. A new era had begun.

At that time, the United States was a young nation seeking to expand its foreign trade. China was an ancient country and its people regarded Americans and all other foreigners as barbarians.

The vast majority of the Chinese have always been suspicious of intrusion from the outside world. During World War II, the two countries united to fight Japanese aggression. However, after World War II, the U.S. - China relations reached their lowest ebb. The former allies were soon to become adversaries in the Korean War. Few then would have guessed that by the early 1970's, Mao and American President Richard Nixon would be shaking hands in Peking. The author briefly traces the fascinating and often unpredictable encounters of the eagle and the dragon in this authoritative look at the first 200 years of their relationship.
Inaccuracies

1) p. 33 “The purpose of the Great Wall, stretching 1,500 miles across Northern China, was to keep out invaders from the rest of Asia.”

Fact: The Great Wall stretches 6,700 km.

2) p. 34 “Kublai Khan was the first Mongol ruler of China. He established the Yuan Dynasty, which had its capital at Peking beginning in 1264.”

Fact: The Yuan dynasty established its capital at Peking in 1271.

3) p.109 The story was about the communist leader Mao Tse-tung, who had led some 100,000 of his followers on a year long, 6,000-mile retreat across China in 1934 and 1935.

Fact: The Long March was more than 8,000 miles.


About the Author

Information not available.

About the Book

In story-telling style, a little boy leads the reader through a visit to China. He was very curious about China which did not mean the china plates, but meant China with a capital “C,” a huge country on the other side of the world; somewhere between him and the moon by day, and him and the sun by night. The story was well-told with photos of the places he had been and the people he had met (mostly young children) during his trip. By the end of the trip, he concluded: “I had seen how I was like the Chinese people and how I was different; yet, I was almost as curious as when I’d come. I wanted to know and understand more, but perhaps that was learning. Like the ancient dragon, I was chasing the moon, the pearl of wisdom.”
This book is especially suitable for the very young readers. The language is plain and the content is comprehensive and enjoyable. In addition, the book had a sound disc attached to it which contained a short lesson in the Chinese language.

No Inaccuracies Were Found.


About the Author

Information not available.

About the Book

A biographic story about Confucius, the man who had more influence on China’s early history than any other man. He was not a king nor a warrior, but a great philosopher and a scholar. He was named “Great Master of K’ung” for his wisdom. Although he was relatively unknown during his own lifetime, Confucius has had an enormous influence upon the values, principles and customs of the Chinese people. This story introduced the reader to the land of ancient China and its development from a collection of tribes around the Yellow River, to a unified state under the “First Emperor,” Shih Huang-ti. By exploring this fascinating period, the book provided an entertaining and informative insight into the origins of the Chinese culture and civilization.

Inaccuracy

1) p. 35 “When it was finally completed, the Great Wall stretched some 2,400 kilometers (1,500 miles) in length.

Fact: It is 6,700 km in length.

About the Author

Information not available.

About the Book

This is an English/Chinese picture dictionary with an illustrated selection of words accompanying their pronunciations in Roman spelling. Illustrations were identified in both languages.

This is not a suitable book for American children to learn standard Chinese language because the Chinese language this book tries to teach is actually Cantonese, both in written form and in pronunciation. Cantonese is one of the many dialects spoken by people from Canton and Hong Kong. It is not understood and used by the majority of the Chinese people and from other places in China. The official language in China is Mandarin Chinese which is the popularized language used throughout the country. Besides, many years ago, mainland China has adopted a simplified way of writing words. The Chinese characters in this dictionary still retained the old way of writing, a more complicated written form. For the convenience of people from Hong Kong and Taiwan (where the simplified way of writing was not used), and for the major Chinese overseas newspaper, this form is useful. There were at least 30 differences in pronunciation between Cantonese and Mandarin. There are four tones in Mandarin whereas there are nine tones in Cantonese. To avoid confusion, it was suggested that the book be renamed the English/Cantonese Dictionary.

No Inaccuracies Were Found.