

Chinese books

Where there's no room for Dick and Jane

By FLORENCE HOWE
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A year ago we ordered four children's books from China: *I Am On Duty Today*; *Flowers in Full Bloom*; *The Little Doctor*; and *Secret Bulletin*. I want to describe these chiefly as possible models for books our children need.

The Little Doctor is a girl. She treats her younger sister's sick doll, then her younger brother's teddy bear, and a rocking horse whose "leg" is broken. Without any help from brothers — big or small — the doctor mends the rocking horse with a hammer and nails.

On the cover of another primer, *I Am On Duty Today*, a girl puts on a red armband, and inside she says:

I am on duty today
Helping in our nursery
I get up with the sunrise
And to to work happily.

In the following pages, a boy joins her and the two perform identical tasks: they tidy the school-room, feed pet animals, greet the other children as they arrive, and check them for cleanliness. They are the last to leave at the end of the day and the teacher thanks them for their work.

The illustrations contribute to the lesson in sexual equality. All children are dressed in plain, comfortable, bright-coloured clothing that consists of trousers and a shirt. Only small details — a pigtail or a hair ribbon — distinguishes girls from boys.

Flowers in Full Bloom, a somewhat more advanced primer, continues the lesson in sexual equality. The book's scheme is simplicity itself: twenty-one illustrations of children in adult work roles, each picture accompanied by a poem. On the first page, for example, a girl mends a fishing net:

I am mending the net for our commune.
When it is finished, I'll put out to see
Where shoals of fish with glittering scales,
Both large and small will swim into my net.

The book includes more pictures of girls than of boys, and while we might expect boys to ride buffalo and sharpen sickles, we do not expect girls to steer banana boats, or to put out to sea in fishing boats. Nor do we expect to find boys and girls wishing clothes or performing identical farm tasks.

The title page of the book offers additional instruction. Wearing a long yellow sash, bracelets,



hair ribbons and flowers, a girl plaits her hair before a mirror:

This little girl can arrange her hair,
Decorating her ebony plaits
with red silk bands.

She dances at the harvest gathering,
Like a butterfly fluttering among the flowers.
With a carrying-pole she shoulders
two baskets which touch the ground;
She carries a hoe taller than herself.
She sings a song about pineapples and bananas,
Which makes our mouths water.

The audience claps for her,
And she nods back to them.

The lesson is clear: work does not "defeminize" women. The flower in full bloom is strong enough to wield a hoe and carry heavy baskets from the fields.

Unlike the others, *Secret Bulletin* is a com-

plicated and suspenseful story written for older children. Two children, a boy and a girl, who seem to be between ten and twelve years old, are attempting to operate a primitive mimeograph machine in a secret place. They have been assigned the printing of handbills announcing "that the People's Liberation Army had crossed the Yangtse River and that Shanghai was soon to be liberated."

There is some dispute about the preparation of mimeo ink. The boy stubbornly insists upon his own knowledge of inks and nearly wrecks the stencil before he listens to Hsiao-Fen's information about thinning the ink with kerosene.

Later, as they are trying to carry the leaflets — hidden in their clothing — across the spy-filled city, he foolishly greets someone he should not have recognized, and they are both stopped for searching. To get them out of trouble, Hsiao-Fen hides all the leaflets in her clothes and then pretends she's crying about a sick relative.

The story is deliberately the boy's: he tells it in a consistent reportorial style that includes his own feelings but imposes none on Hsiao-Fen. "Though we were the same age," he reports on page one, "I always used to think of myself as the older, and I wanted her to listen to me."

By page thirty, however, his experiences have transformed that view: "Suddenly I began to feel that Hsiao-Fen was really the older of us. Certainly she understood things better than I." He admires her for her brains, her wit and her courage.

The books our children read also provide instruction in sexually-ascribed social roles and in the sexual basis of power relationships. Many stories focus on children's relationships, and significantly, in most U.S. and Canadian primers, brothers are older (and wiser) than sisters.

In our children's books women are mommies and mommies do not work. If women appear rarely as workers, it is in stereotyped white-collar jobs — receptionist, telephone operator, secretary. Mostly, their "career" is marriage, and that lesson is taught early.

Clearly, we need new books. The Chinese ones offer some helpful models — women are doctors, lawyers and factory workers. But we can also work out our own models. We can tell our daughters and sons about our own lives and the lives of women we've known or are beginning to learn about. Let's write primers that we liberate our children.

Why the North Vietnamese don't hate the Americans

By MARTHA WESTOVER
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Liberation News Service

(Note: Martha and Tony were members of the National Student Association delegation of student body presidents which recently visited Hanoi to negotiate a peace treaty between American and Vietnamese students.)

HANOI — We drove the few miles from the airport to Hanoi down roads crowded

with pedestrians and bicycles. Approaching the city we saw evidence of U.S. bombing: the bridges, the power station, the railroad yard and assorted buildings in the centre of the city. The U.S. government claims it never bombed Hanoi, but it was apparent, after a short time there, that this is a lie. The Vietnamese told us that the U.S. had bombed Hanoi 527 times.

Hanoi is an unusual city by our standards. Most buildings were built by the French and are lined with large trees and there are many lakes and parks with walks and beautiful gardens. Bicycles, pedestrians and ox-drawn carts jam the streets. There are few automobiles. Those they have are used for visitors such as us, foreign diplomats or other special guests. The result is a bustling city where the loudest noise to be heard is people's voices, a strange sensation for Americans.

No beggars

There are a few things about Hanoi that stick in one's mind, and many are more striking after seeing other Southeast Asian cities. There are no beggars, prostitutes, or drug addicts on the streets of Hanoi. There are no people without homes. There are few luxuries, but no one is destitute. There are no rich people, no one to beg from, and no one with so little he or she has to beg.

Everyone receives 16 kilograms of rice per month, plus an allotment for other food, housing, clothing, a bicycle and necessities. The only people who get more are those involved in hard manual labor: up to 24 kilograms per month, because they burn more energy. Therefore, in a factory the manager would probably get 16 kilograms while a laborer may get 24. Government officials get 16.

Also striking about Hanoi is the at-

mosphere on the streets — the kind you used to be able to feel on some U.S. campuses or youth sections of cities before things turned ugly.

No police guns

For example the police don't carry guns or clubs. People are generally smiling and you just don't see fights or arguments. If two bicycles collided, as they often do, the riders don't argue about whose fault it was. They simply repair the damage together, pat each other on the back, and go their respective ways. Because of an incredibly strong solidarity and unity of purpose they have learned to put pettiness aside.

Midway through our first week in North Vietnam we set out to visit Hoa Binh Province in the northwest mountains. The major accomplishment of Hoa Binh is the elimination of starvation.

The provincial vice president explained that the land in Hoa Binh is not good for farming, being mountainous and rocky. People died by starvation every year and by the thousands in years of famine. Since 1959, however, every person in Hoa Binh has been guaranteed enough to eat. The Vietnamese attribute this accomplishment to the collectivization of farm lands and the learning of new methods making possible utilization of previously unused land.

We visited a cooperative farm and were told by the woman who is president of the cooperative that this commune, as was true with almost every school, farm, factory, hospital or church we visited, had been a target for U.S. bombers between 1965-68.

Walking about the farm we came to a building with the casing of an unexploded bomb hanging outside on a chain, strung up as a bell to call people to work. We followed a trail of bomb craters that had been refilled through a small wooded

section until we came to a fairly new home. When we entered we were shocked because we were greeted by a woman who had been severely injured in a bombing attack. It was an extremely awkward moment for all of us, no one knowing what to say or do.

Finally the injured, scarred woman broke the tension by coming forward and hugging us. This was quite a surprise, especially when it was explained (she could not talk because of her burns) that in 1968 she was in a shelter with her two children and a bomb exploded on top of them, killing the children and critically injuring her. We were the first Americans she had ever seen. Her only previous experience with Americans was when they dropped bombs on her and her family. Yet she greeted us as friends.

This was the reception we received from everyone we met in North Vietnam and it made us curious. We had expected, even at times hoped for, some hatred towards us as Americans, yet there was none.

Americans

The North Vietnamese simply don't have the racial attitude towards Americans that many Americans have towards Vietnamese. For instance, they don't have words for the Americans that are the equivalent of 'gook,' 'dink,' or 'slant.' Also, the government constantly tells the people that there is an absolute distinction between the American people who are good, and the U.S. government, which is bad.

We tried to explain that it was not so simple, that many Americans support the U.S. actions in Vietnam. Their reply was, "We realize your government has the ability to deceive many people, but basically the American people are good and they will stop what their government is doing to Vietnam."