



# Chinese Children picture books in Kansas 堪薩斯州中國兒童圖畫故事書

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**May 2012 @ the 5<sup>th</sup> WCILCOS Conference, Vancouver Canada**

# **Introduction**

Previous researchers (Wei, 1995; Chen, 2009; Mo & Shen, 2009; and Chen, 2011) suggested that:

- ❖ Cultural representation and authenticity are popular titles of Chinese children picture books
- ❖ Chinese picture books have gradually moved away from folklore and historical fiction (Yokota, 2009)
- ❖ The goals of this study, therefore, are:
  - To examine whether the picture books housed in the Northeast Kansas Library System (NEKLS) reflect the suggestions of previous studies
  - To investigate whether there is a relationship between the Chinese population and the Chinese picture book collections

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## **NEKLS Libraries and user's profiles**

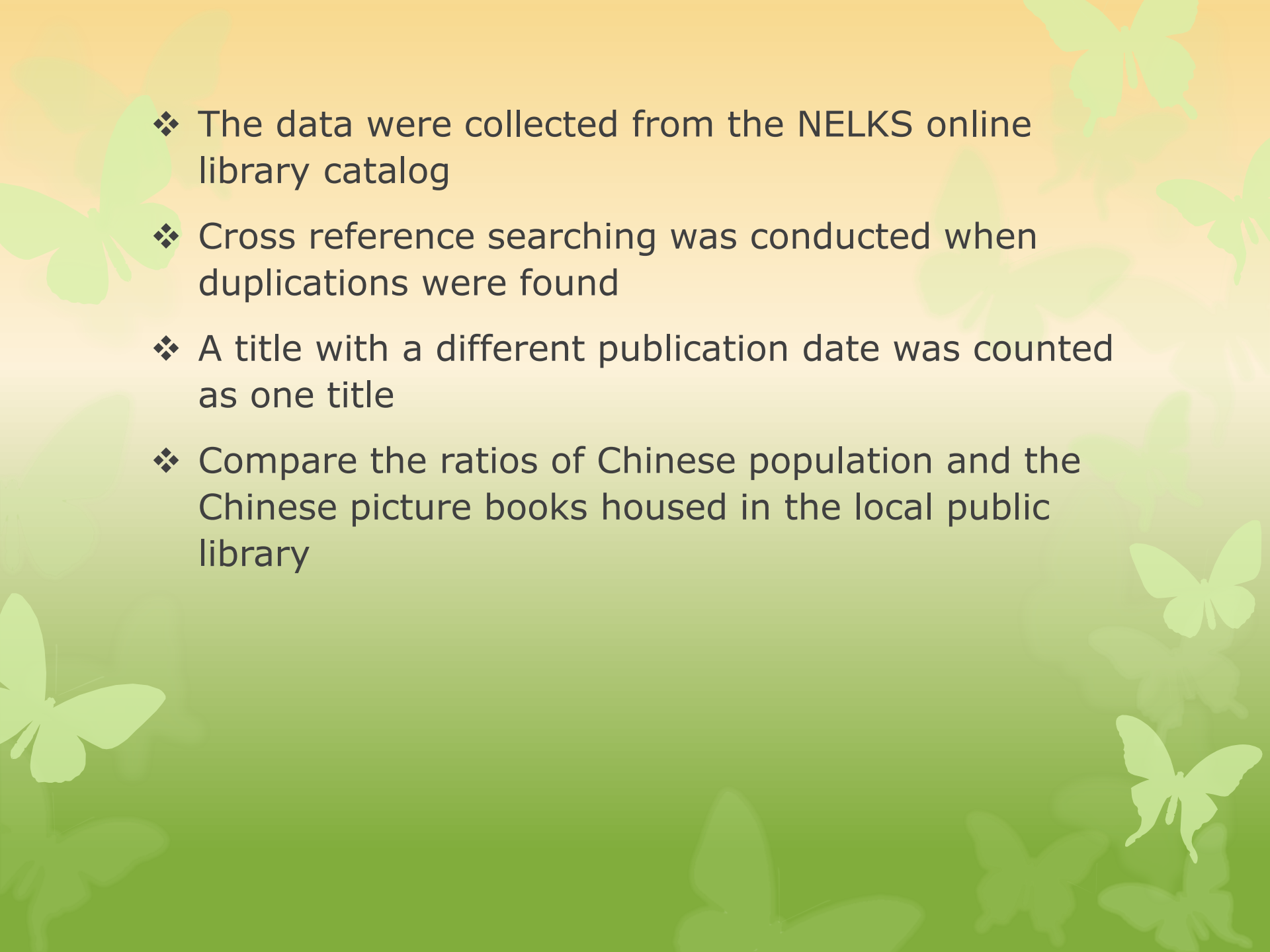


Northeast Kansas Library System (NEKLS)

- ❖ NEKLS is one of the seven regional systems of cooperating libraries in Kansas
- ❖ There are 16 small rural public libraries supported by NEKLS
- ❖ The majority population in these 16 small cities is predominantly Caucasian, 83.8% with 2.4% Asian Americans (n=858).

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# **Design and Methodology**

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- ❖ The data were collected from the NELKS online library catalog
  - ❖ Cross reference searching was conducted when duplications were found
  - ❖ A title with a different publication date was counted as one title
  - ❖ Compare the ratios of Chinese population and the Chinese picture books housed in the local public library





# **Research questions**

This study is designed to answer the following research questions:

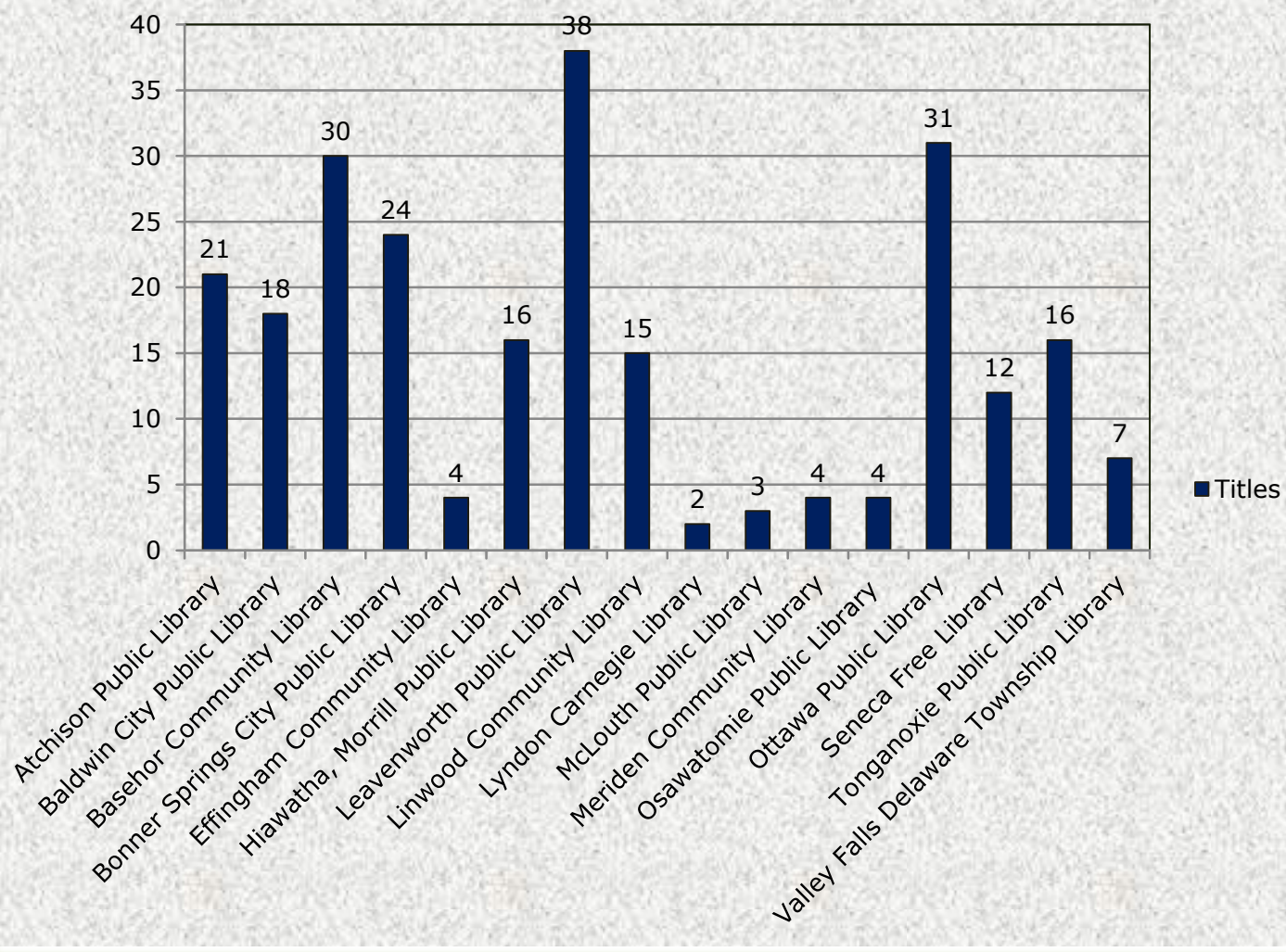
- ❖ What are the themes of the Chinese picture books?
- ❖ Is there a relationship between the population and library development policy amongst the 16 NEKLS libraries?
- ❖ Have the represented Chinese children literature books moved away from folklore stories?



## **The descriptive data**

A total 118 titles were found at the 16 NEKLS libraries.  
The distribution is as follows:

<b>Library</b>	<b>Number of Titles</b>
Atchison Public Library	21 titles (17.8%)
Baldwin City Public Library	18 titles (15.25%)
Basehor Community Library	30 titles (25.42%)
Bonner Springs City Public Library	24 titles (20.34%)
Effingham Community Library	4 titles (3.39%)
Hiawatha, Morrill Public Library	16 titles (13.56%)
Leavenworth Public Library	38 titles (32.2%)
Linwood Community Library	15 titles (12.71%)
Lyndon Carnegie Library	2 titles (1.69%)
McLouth Public Library	3 titles (2.54%)
Meriden Community Library	4 titles (3.39%)
Osawatomie Public Library	4 titles (3.39%)
Ottawa Public Library	31 titles (26.27%)
Seneca Free Library	12 titles (10.17%)
Tonganoxie Public Library	16 titles (13.56%)
Valley Falls Delaware Township Library	7 titles(5.93%)



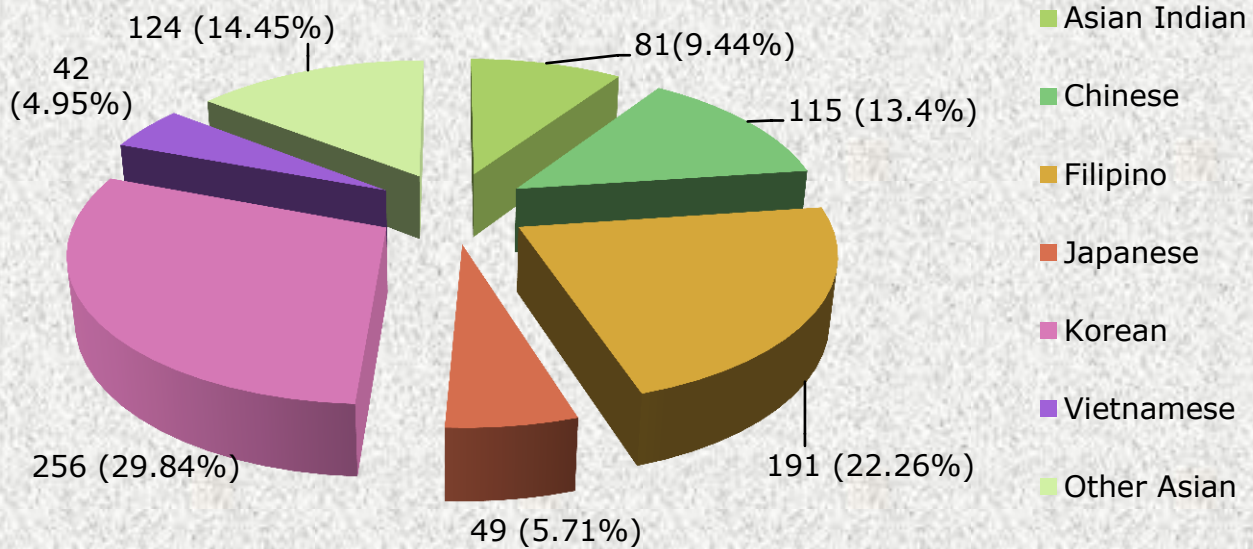


City	Asian American							Total
	Asian Indian	Chinese	Filipino	Japanese	Korean	Vietnamese	Other Asian**	
Atchison	4	18	9	3	7	6	7	<b>54</b>
Baldwin City	2	5	6	1	0	0	9	<b>23</b>
Basehor	1	3	14	3	1	1	2	<b>25</b>
Bonner Springs	1	2	13	0	1	6	12	<b>35</b>
Effingham	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Hiawatha	0	3	3	2	0	0	1	<b>9</b>
Leavenworth*	55	60	120	35	241	26	85	<b>622</b>
Linwood	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
Lyndon	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
McLouth	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	<b>3</b>
Meriden	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	<b>2</b>
Osawatomie	3	3	4	1	1	1	1	<b>14</b>
Ottawa	9	15	14	1	4	2	4	<b>49</b>
Seneca	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
Tonganoxie	5	6	5	0	1	0	1	<b>18</b>
Valley Falls	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>256</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>858</b>

\* The city of Leavenworth is an established military base, which libraries appear to be affected by migrating international (Asian) influence.

\*\* Other Asian alone, or two or more other Asian categories.

## NEKLS Asian American Population



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## **Discussion and conclusion**



***Research question #1:*** What are the themes of these Chinese picture books?

A total of nine themes are identified that mirrored the lives of Chinese people and their culture:

- ❖ Legends and folktales
- ❖ Heritage and family bond
- ❖ Chinese language and traditional customs, including food culture
- ❖ Ethnic relations
- ❖ Festivals and celebration
- ❖ Contemporary Chinese Americans stories
- ❖ Immigration experience
- ❖ Adaptation of western stories set in China
- ❖ Adoption stories

The number of stories in the nine themes are distributed as follows:

<b>Themes</b>	<b>1980-1990</b>		<b>1991-2001</b>		<b>2002-2011</b>		<b>Total</b>
Legends and folktales	6	(54.55%)	14	(32.56%)	10	(15.63%)	<b>30</b>
Heritage and Family bond	1	(9.1%)	4	(9.3%)	5	(7.81%)	<b>10</b>
Chinese language and traditional customs (include food culture)	1	(9.1%)	6	(13.95%)	9	(20.93%)	<b>15</b>
Ethnic relations	1	(9.1%)	1	(2.31%)	3	(6.98%)	<b>5</b>
Festivals and celebration	2	(18.18%)	9	(20.93%)	8	(12.5%)	<b>19</b>
Contemporary Chinese Americans stories	0	(0%)	4	(9.3%)	23	(35.945)	<b>27</b>
Immigration experience	0	(0%)	2	(4.65%)	3	(4.69%)	<b>5</b>
Adaptation of Western stories set in China	1	(9.1%)	1	(2.31%)	0	(0%)	<b>2</b>
Adoption stories	0	(0%)	1	(2.31%)	4	(6.25%)	<b>5</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>		<b>43</b>		<b>64</b>		<b>118</b>

The previous table shows that:

- ❖ Legend and folktale stories are the main themes of from the 1980-s thru 1990s and has declined in the last decade
- ❖ Chinese heritage and family bond became the popular theme. The libraries housed only one title in this category before the 1990s and increased to 9 titles in the last ten years
- ❖ The biggest increased category is the contemporary Americans stories, which yield 23 titles compared to no titles before the 1990s
- ❖ Adoption is another theme not found in the collections before the 1990s

**Research question#2:** Is there a relationship between the population and library development policy amongst the 16 NEKLS libraries?

Cities	Chinese population	Number of Chinese Children picture book titles housed at the public libraries
Atchison	18	21 titles (17.8%)
Baldwin City	5	18 titles (15.25%)
Basehor	3	30 titles (25.42%)
Bonner Springs	2	24 titles (20.34%)
Effingham	0	4 titles (3.39%)
Hiawatha	3	16 titles (13.56%)
Leavenworth	60	38 titles (32.2%)
Linwood	0	15 titles (12.71%)
Lyndon	0	2 titles (1.69%)
McLouth	0	3 titles (2.54%)
Meriden	0	4 titles (3.39%)
Osawatomie	3	4 titles (3.39%)
Ottawa	15	31 titles (26.27%)
Seneca	0	12 titles (10.17%)
Tonganoxie	6	16 titles (13.56%)
Valley Falls	0	7 titles (5.93%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>118</b>

The data suggest that there is no relationship between the Chinese population and the library collection development policy:

- ❖ The US census (2010) shows that there is no Chinese residents in the City of Valley Falls, yet the public library records show 7 titles related to Chinese culture
- ❖ Despite only 3 Chinese residents living in City of Basehor, the public library houses 30 titles of Chinese children picture books (ratio is 3:30)
- ❖ City of Leavenworth has 60 Chinese residents, yet the local library only houses eight more titles (60:38) than the City of Basehor



**Research question#3:** Have Chinese children literature books moved away from folklore stories?

The collected data shows that the Chinese legends and folktales were the major themes in 1980s and 1990s which yielded 54.55% of the Chinese book collections. In the last decade, this category has decreased to 15.63%.

However, the data were from one particular library system in Kansas. Thus, a further investigation would be needed to confirm that there is a trend for Chinese children books moving away from folklores genre considered as a general library trend.

Of the 118 Chinese children picture books retrieved from the 16 NEKLS libraries, some other interesting findings occurred:

- ❖ Some authors recognized that the Chinese culture consists of diverse ethnic groups which have their own spoken language; the most obvious being Mandarin and Cantonese. This was reflected in *Dim Sum for everyone!*, *Char siu bao boy*, and *Kung-hsi fa-ts'ai*.
- ❖ The portrayal of Chinese character in these stories is generally docile and easily adapted to new environments, where they are able to establish friendships with other ethnic groups, for instance, *My first American friend*.

❖ Folktales contain Chinese cultural beliefs and values:

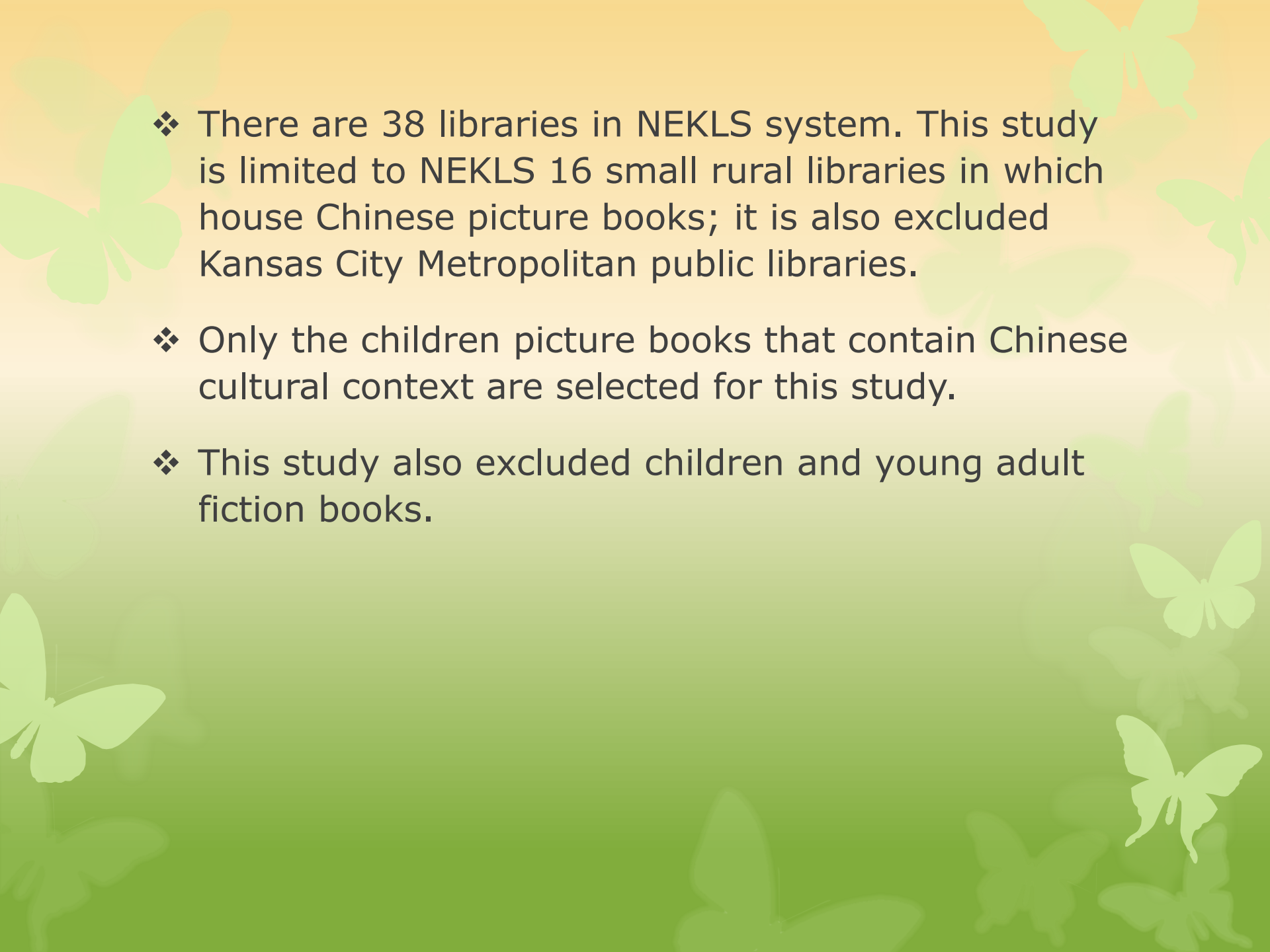
- Gender inequality: e.g. *Beautiful warrior, Silk peony*.
- Filial piety: e.g. *The song of Mulan*.
- Zen principles: e.g. *Zen shorts*
- Family bond: e.g. *The seven Chinese sisters*
- Inter-generational relationship such as stories about grandparents and grandchildren: e.g. *Dragon hunt*
- The meaning of happiness: e.g. *The magic pillow*

❖ Historical stories are not a common theme. Of the 118 titles of this study, only one story was found in this category, *Nim and the war effort*, which is a story set in the Sino-Japanese war.



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## **Limitations and Future Studies**

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- ❖ There are 38 libraries in NEKLS system. This study is limited to NEKLS 16 small rural libraries in which house Chinese picture books; it is also excluded Kansas City Metropolitan public libraries.
  - ❖ Only the children picture books that contain Chinese cultural context are selected for this study.
  - ❖ This study also excluded children and young adult fiction books.

This study is limited to NEKLS 16 rural area libraries. A broader study should include the Kansas City metropolitan public libraries where the libraries serve a much larger Chinese population compared to the selected libraries in this study. Projected further studies are:

- ❖ Compare an authorship study between Asian and non Asian authors
- ❖ A comparative study of the Chinese cultures with other cultures
- ❖ Chinese culture mirrored in young adult fiction books
- ❖ Demographic profiles and public library children picture book collection policy
- ❖ A comparative study by region, such as Midwest versus East and West coasts

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