

The Translation and Critical Reception of Nathaniel Hawthorne's Children's Literature in Republican China (1912–1949)

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Abstract

It is generally agreed that the translation of children's literature is an under-researched area. With only three books focusing on the subject, even rarer is the research on children's literature in China, and none of which dwells on the translation of American children's literature in modern China, not to mention the research on the translation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's children's literature. Yet Hawthorne's children's literature enjoyed a wide circulation in Republican China (1912–1949), which even overshadowed the translation of his often-quoted classics. Based on André Lefevere's rewriting theory, this article argues that the translation of Hawthorne's children's literature was initiated in late Qing when the dominant culture changed its view of children and the importance of children's education. But it also benefited from ideological advocacy for child-orientation and from the poetic urgency for the establishment of children's literature in China. The translation, supported by various forms of patronage, ushered in a period of prosperity in the May Fourth era and greatly affected the creation of children's literature in China as an independent category. Then, confronted with the nationwide political agenda of the impending war, the translation of Hawthorne's children's literature lost its impetus beginning in the late 1930s, although there were some translations or retranslations of Hawthorne's famous fairy tales sporadically in the 1940s.

Keywords

Republican China (1912–1949), May Fourth period, ideological advocacy, poetical urgency, patronage, translation of Children’s literature, rewriting theory, Nathaniel Hawthorne

1. Introduction

If, as Thomson-Wolgemuth (1998) and Pinsent (2006) suggest, the translation of children’s literature is an area that is relatively novel within translation studies, then China’s translation studies on children’s literature is still in its infancy. At present, there are three books published about children’s literature translation in China: Li (2010), Yu (2013), and Song (2015).¹ Although these books contribute a valuable perspective on the translation of children’s literature in modern China, to our regret, they scarcely dwell on the translation and reception of American children’s literature, let alone the research on the translation of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s children’s literature.

It may also be strange for modern Chinese scholars of American literature that Hawthorne’s famous allegorical short stories, such as “Young Goodman Brown,” “The Minister’s Black Veil,” and “The Birthmark,” all of which are so often read and studied today, were scarcely known or translated in the early days of the Republic China. Hawthorne’s writings for children that are now mostly neglected in Hawthorne studies, on the other hand, drew great attention and enthusiasm from Chinese scholars and translators in the first half of the twentieth century.

Therefore, based on André Lefevere’s rewriting theory, this article aims to give a detailed description of the translation of Hawthorne’s children’s literature in the Republic China from the years of 1912 to 1949, while at the same time exploring in depth the possible reasons why Hawthorne’s writings for children enjoyed a wide translation and circulation among Chinese readers in this period but lost their impetus afterwards.

2. An Overview on the Translation of Hawthorne’s Children’s Literature from the 1910s to 1940s

Hawthorne’s children’s literature first made its way into China via Professor M. E. Tsur 楚爾教授, a missionary who selected some stories from Hawthorne’s *Tanglewood Tales* and edited a miscellaneous Chinese