

Influence of Chinese Culture on the Interpretation and Acceptance of Andersen's Fairy Tales: in the Case of *The Little Mermaid*

Zhang Guolong

School of Chinese Language and Literature, Beijing Normal University
19 Xijiekou Outer St, BeiTaiPingZhuang, Haidian Qu, Beijing Shi, China, 100875
Phone: +86 10 5880 6183
06104@bnu.edu.cn

Su Tangjun

School of Chinese Language and Literature, Beijing Normal University
19 Xijiekou Outer St, BeiTaiPingZhuang, Haidian Qu, Beijing Shi, China, 100875
Phone: +86 10 5880 6183
sutangjun1992@163.com

Abstract

Andersen's fairy tales, embraced by Chinese culture, have become a permanent childhood memory of Chinese people in the process of their explanation and acceptance during a hundred years. This article uses *The Little Mermaid* as an example to study Andersen's fairy tales, his biography, and the history of Chinese acceptance. It provides a historical survey and elaborates on the Chinese explanation, misreading, and misunderstanding of Andersen's fairy tales over a hundred years. Moreover, this article argues that there are three influential elements on the interpretation and acceptance of Andersen's fairy tales in China: the changing understanding of Andersen as an author; the age difference between disparate audiences; and the shifting Chinese social context and cultural needs.

Keywords: Hans Christian Andersen; Andersen's fairy tales; *The Little Mermaid*; explanation and acceptance in China; Context of Chinese Culture.

In 1913, Chinese author Zhou Zuoren became the first to introduce Andersen's fairy tales into China. After a century, Andersen's fairy tales have become the childhood staples of many Chinese people. Fairy tale as a literary genre is culturally contingent and changes with different social contexts. For example, the Danish word for fairy tale, "eventyr" also means adventure stories and legends. Hence, the culturally contingent nature of fairy tales makes it harder to study Andersen's fairy tales in different cultural context. The acceptance and interpretation of Andersen's fairy tales in China has been inevitably influenced by traditional Chinese culture and modern social context. This article, using his iconic tale *The Little Mermaid* as an example, provides a historical and comprehensive delineation of the multiple interpretations of Andersen's fairy tales in China, and also tries to examine the main elements that influence the explanation and acceptance of Andersen's fairy tales in China. The three interrelated dimensions, which have significant impact on the acceptance process, are as followings, the changing understanding of Andersen as an author, the age difference between disparate audiences, and the shifting Chinese social context and cultural needs.

1. Andersen's Fairy Tales over a Hundred Years: a Historical Survey

Zhou Zuoren is the first to introduce and review Andersen and his fairy tales in China, and his attitudes play an important role in introducing and spreading Andersen's fairy tales. In Zhou Zuoren's mind, Andersen "is a poet and an old kid.... He observes as a poet and writes in child's language, elaborating the ideology of the original people -- kids, even raised up in civilized society, are actually similar to the savage in human evolutionary system" (Zhou, 1918). Poetic nature and children-oriented language such as colloquialism are two dimensions he particularly underscores. Chinese society in the early twentieth century was experiencing a dramatic transformation from pre-modern feudal empire to modern nation-state, and Zhou was one of the many intellectuals who were influenced by Western anthropology and evolution theory. As the seminal figure in the pro-West New Culture Movement, he first proposes the values of the individual and advocates the composition of new literature for human beings and for children. Therefore, Andersen's humanist fairy tales naturally attracts his attention. Moreover, Andersen's fairy tales also resonate with Zhou's admiration folk literature and oral storytelling. To sum up, the May Fourth pioneers regarded Andersen's tales as useful tools to promote the literature and cultural transformation from pre-modern feudal doctrine to modern humanist value.

When Andersen's fairy tales were published in Denmark, they were severely criticized, since the Romantic style they manifested did not satisfy traditional Danish classical literary theory. Similarly, realism is also deep-rooted throughout the development process of Chinese literature. Although there have been outspoken advocates of fantasy and Romanticism during the May Fourth Movement, the appeal of "art for life" represented by "Literary Research Society" (*Wenxue Yanjiuhui*) generally took the lead. Ye Shengtao, as a member of this society, began the practice of Chinese fairy tales, and he carved out a road to create Chinese fairy tales independently. Although Ye Shengtao said frankly that he was influenced by Andersen's fairy tales, his *Scarecrow* (1923) and other fairy tales are full of Chinese images, narrative logic, class features, and educational forms, which obviously show stronger sense of realism. Though they partly borrow artistic techniques of characterization, fantastic metaphor, and exaggeration in Andersen's fairy tales, the fantastic characteristic and childish nature of Andersen's fairy tales are excluded. Briefly, the aim of Chinese fairy tales represented by Ye Shengtao is distinct from its Western counterpart, and so their aesthetics is largely suppressed. In the 1930s and 1940s, since national crisis and political events dominated the historical progress of China, ideology was emphasized at the expense of pure art, rigid realism was highlighted in an unprecedented manner, and so the fantasy of Andersen's fairy tales was treated as poisonous. Arguably, "much of Andersen's influence on modern Chinese children's literature is at a stylistic level rather than the spirit of fairy tales" (Li, 2005, p. 114). For example, Ye Shengtao often opened his stories with a brief description of scenery, reminiscent of Andersen's technique at the beginning of *The Ugly Duckling*. Here is the opening of his story *The Little White Boat* which included in the collection *Scarecrow* (1923):

A small stream is a home for all sorts of lovely things. Here grew small red flowers, slightly smiling, and sometimes they danced, which was a delight to see. Droplets of pearly dew lay on the green grass, like fairies' clothes, and dazzled men's eyes. The surface of the stream was covered with leaves of duck-weed from which towered some cassia-yellow flowers, just like the tropical beds of lotus—you could say it was a lotus-bed in fairy land... (Trans. Farquhar, 1999, 96)

In China, Ye Junjian is the next big figure who is tied with Andersen's fairy tales. As a famous translator of Andersen's fairy tales in China, Ye Junjian started the complete translation of Andersen's fairy tales from Danish original texts for the first time at the end of the 1950s. While publishing *A Complete Andersen*, he criticized and analyzed a number of the tales. Ye Junjian made great contributions to the spread of Andersen's fairy tales. In the 1950s, Chinese children's literature was influenced by revolutionary ideology characterised by socialist Marxism and class struggle, and the literary mainstream is guided by the slogan of "learning from the Soviets". The literary theories of Marxism and realism restricted the translation of foreign literature as well as the development of Chinese literature. As the leader of literature translators, Ye Junjian carried out in-depth research into Andersen's life experience and humanitarian spirit by adopting a logical thinking mode in the perspective of sociological criticism. Dealing with Andersen's realist fairy tales, Ye Junjian combined his research with the educational values and politicization of children's literature and finally made a push in the translation and commentary of Andersen's fairy tales. When everyone judged Andersen's fairy tales to be far from reality and criticized its fantasy, Ye Junjian pointed out the interconnected relationship between fantasy and reality, and thus asserted the usefulness of romance in Andersen's fairy tales, and finally went back to highlight the realism of Andersen's fairy tales. Nevertheless, by highlighting the realistic aspect of Andersen's works, the poetic and fantastic get less attention. As a result, the world's Andersen and Danish Andersen are forced to become "classed Andersen" and "people's Andersen." There is no doubt that when Sinologists read Ye Junjian's translations, they made comments like the following on their strong class consciousness: "He is not a romanticist, he is a romantic revolutionist" (Dong, 2005, p. 448). Entering the 1970s and 1980s, with the open-up polity of the state and the renewal of literary thoughts, Ye Junjian revised *A Complete Andersen*, adding more life inspirations, deep thoughts and rich emotions, which made the fairy tales truer, multiple, and stereoscopic.

In the new era, there existed multiple literary aesthetics due to the frequent exchanges of Chinese and foreign cultures, and the discussions of Andersen's fairy tales gradually changed from ideology-oriented to aesthetics-focused. Universal sympathy, profound humanity and melancholy aestheticism became new artistic standards, and they entered the children literary works of the new era represented by the Chinese literature author Cao Wenxuan. These are exactly the artistic features of Andersen's fairy tales and are the key to make them resonate with modern times beyond time and space. Cao advocated that children's literature writers should follow the writing spirit of "pursuing eternity" and express "the powers of morality, emotion, intelligence, and aesthetics" in their works (2014). The acceptance of foreign literature, including Andersen's fairy tales, has long been the basis of such thoughts. Cao finally puts humanity on a high ground in literature, and thus creates a model which combines reality, fantasy and the responsibilities of the times for Chinese children's literature.

2. The Various Contemporary Interpretation of *The Little Mermaid* in China

Since its first introduction into China by Zhou Zuoren, Chinese contemporary scholars continue to produce various interpretations of Andersen's fairy tales. This section focuses on the multiple examinations of *The Little Mermaid*, one iconic tale from Andersen's oeuvre. Just as Pil Dahlerup's article (1990) illustrates, six approaches including structuralism, psychoanalysis, folktale, Disney, hermeneutics, and deconstructionism are employed to analyze this tale. Chinese contemporary interpretations are as various and multiple as Dahlerup's article. According to incomplete statistics, there are no less than 28 interpretations of *The Little Mermaid* in contemporary China, which obviously shows that the profound influence of Andersen's works in

the Chinese context. Out of the 28 interpretations, several perspectives are of particularly significance since they embrace new and trendy theoretical frameworks to view the old tale through a fresh eye.

One group of academic works emphasizes the generic characteristics of fairy tale in *The Little Mermaid*, with a special focus on the logic and the space in fairy tale (Chen, 2011; Huang, 1988). Fairy tale is a genre between fiction and reality, and it entails both real and fictional aspects through its logic. In general, fairy tale logic refers to the thinking clue and cognitive mode of the seamless connection between fantasy and reality, emotion and experience, and writer and reader in the fairy tale art. “Wish-oriented fantasy,” “intrinsic rationality,” and “essential truth” are three main elements making up fairy tale logic, and these three elements make fairy tales self-sufficient. *The Little Mermaid* is a typical example in this view. The decoration of the Dragon Palace in the seabed, the manner and behavior of the characters in the sea, and the development of the little mermaid’s characteristics are all beyond reality but at the same time within the realm of life, and they are far from convention but within human experience. Additionally, the whole text meets readers’ psychological needs, fulfilling people’s expectations for life and living. Space theory in literature is a new trend in the West literary criticism (see Zoran, 1984), and it has been also utilized in the analysis of *The Little Mermaid* in China (Huang, 1988). In his article, Huang points out that the story scenes change from ocean to land to sky, which not only shows the ascendance from lower status to higher one but also hints at the unique substitution of life and spirit hiding in the spatial transformation of “three”: the little mermaid—long life with no spirit; the daughter of human beings—shortened life with spirit; the daughter of the sky—nonmaterial but elevated spirit. If this kind of special attention of spatial dimension works along with other analytical perspectives, understanding that is more fruitful will be accessible.

Another cluster works focus on “binary opposition” originated from structuralist theory, which is insightful in its dealing with the rich metaphors and oppositions in *The Little Mermaid*. Structuralist theory is one of the most fundamental concepts when linguist Saussure established structural linguistics. With the supplements and developments from Levi Strause, Jacobson, and Barthes, it has gradually become a scientific analytical method that is widely used to analyze various narratives. There are many examples of oppositions in *The Little Mermaid*: enjoying rights in the seabed/coming up to the land with nothing, owning a beautiful voice and forever/suffering the loss of the voice, and killing the prince/self-sacrificing. Moreover, many synchronic metaphors are also worth studying, such as fish tail and human legs, voice and spirit.

Women’s rights movement inspires the third perspective (Cui & Zhang, 2012). Base on feminist criticism, this method reveals female’s silence in the male patriarchal world through the little mermaid’s losing voice and tail. Employing a feminist perspective to criticize Western canonic fairy tales from Charles Perrault, Brothers Grimm, and Andersen are common in the past several decades in the West under the influence of women’s liberation movement and gender politics, since these male authors’ works are deeply ingrained in patriarchy paradigms, which depict female authors as weak, vulnerable, and passive (Haase, 2000). Andersen is no exception in this misogynistic trend. In this sense, feminist engagement with fairy tales should be encouraged to interrogate and challenge the dominant discourse on the domestication and disempowerment of female members in the society.

The last group of scholarship uses concepts from ecological criticism to interrogate the anthropocentric position inside Andersen’s works (Hu, 2004; Wu, 2007). Andersen’s narrative describes the little Mermaid’s painful integration into the human realm and her longing of the eternal soul, by discarding her identity as a half-animal creature. Such a worldview reinforces the

hierarchy structure in which human is superior to animals and other creatures in the world. Ecological literary theory interrogates this human-centered attitude and proposes a more egalitarian worldview with no discrimination on nonhuman creatures. Some scholars draw on the concept of gender to theorize the relationship between humans and the natural world, which produces the theory of ecofeminist. An ecofeminist examination of Andersen's tales is urgently needed in the Chinese scholarship, which will be capable of breaking gender stereotypes and dominant human-centered discourse, and achieving cross-cultural dialogue with the West Academia.

We must go back to the nature of literature reception when discussing the acceptance of Andersen's fairy tales in China. M. H. Abrams (1953) raised "four elements of literary activities," establishing interactions among "the world, writers, works and readers." From a micro perspective, each element can be further divided. Moreover, the interaction of the four elements is actually a dynamic process with multilayered structures. Tong Qingbing in *Literary Theory Course* (1992) divides the structures into three dimensions: "literary discourse, literary image and literary implication," and it establishes multiple relations including "texts come first than readers, texts for readers, dialogues between writers and readers, and the sublimation beyond texts" (p. 200). Considering this as the logical premise, we can review the multiple Chinese interpretations of Andersen's fairy tales to uncover the Chinese cultural coat generated by misreading and misunderstanding.

The meaning of the English term misread is "mistakenly reading or interpreting." In the 1960s and 1970s, the objectivity of truth emphasized by traditional literary theories was gradually replaced by diversification and de-centering of deconstructionism. Linguistic turn amplifies the uncertainty of the signifier and the signified, highlighting the dominant position of languages. The "différance" raised by Jacques Derrida (1982) shows the absolute liberation of the meaning of the text. Harold Bloom (1975) proposes the "influence—anxiety—misreading system," and he raised the declaration that reading is always a kind of misreading. Yue Daiyun (1994) holds the idea that "the so-called misreading is to interpret a culture according to one's own cultural tradition and thinking model and to all that he or she is familiar with" (p. 17). In this sense, the Chinese interpretations and acceptance of Andersen's fairy tales are full of misreading. Chinese interpretations and misreading imbue Andersen's fairy tales with unique national and cultural characteristics. In its long history of acceptance, the elements influencing the interpretations and acceptance in China became entangled. To better tackle this complicated issue, we should master the internal power of literary dialogue mechanism, with special focus on both the internal and external level of literary production and consumption.

3. Elements that Influence the Interpretations and Acceptance of Andersen's Fairy Tales in China

Briefly, the changing understanding of Andersen as an author, the age difference between disparate audiences, and the shifting Chinese social context and cultural needs are key elements that influence the interpretation and acceptance of Andersen's fairy tales in China. This first element pivots on the importance of the author, the second element considers the function of readers, while the last element is about the context upon which narratives are produced and consumed.

Although many literature theorists such as New Critics have informed us that the author's life, career, and personality are rarely useful to understand the texts, traditional conventions of examining the author's biography still holds certain currency in Andersen's case. Academic circles generally divide Andersen's creation periods according to the names of his fairy tales, that is, *Fairy tales, Told for Children* to *New Fairy Tales* and to *Stories*. The mystery of Andersen's life and

multiple personalities prove to be an obstacle for the understanding of his corpus, thus restoring a relatively true persona of Andersen is beneficial to its acceptance in China. In this way, Jens Andersen's biography *Hans Christian Andersen: A New Life* (2005) sheds new lights on the fuller understanding of the author's life.

There were ups and downs in Andersen's whole life, and so his words and behaviors sometimes cheer people up and sometimes astonish them. Crazy about dramas, he played various social roles, and "the role that he plays most is a guest" (Jens Andersen, 2005). The word guest has two meanings: one literal and the other figurative. On the one hand, he often showed up in noble families, visited friends whose social positions are higher than himself and was warmly welcomed by them; On the other hand, no matter how hard he tried to be part of the high society, he failed and remained a marginal figure through his life. Andersen left Odense when he was fourteen, so in a sense, he left his familiar living environment and was cut off from the root of humanity that he depended on to survive. Coming to Copenhagen, he struggled to integrate into a city driven by a rigid class hierarchy. The deep-rooted exclusiveness generated from this hierarchy continuously increased his sense of loss.

These may be the reason why his characteristics were so contradictory. He was extremely shy because he looked ugly, which was the trigger of self-contempt. He always felt inferior and undertook an obstinate pursuit for fame. He was extremely sensitive to negative judgement. Even the objection raised by an unknown critic could make him feel pain. In 1867, he was awarded "Honorary Citizen of Odense," but he still thought, "I was inferior, powerless and insignificant... The weaknesses of my thought, speech and behaviors are all before my eyes. All these stand out in my soul and it seems this anniversary is my judgment day" (Ye Junjian, 1978, p. 91). He would burst with joy when he got a slight appreciation, such as when he got a medal from the King. Since he could not control his mood, joy would finally become endless vanity and arrogance until he was criticized again. However, he also resisted the marginalization from others of his own personality, position, and ideals. This kind of rebellion was deeply rooted in his bones, and it became his self-identification when he could not get others' recognition or ego inflation when he was abandoned forever. It was the escape from power and position that gave him the chance to review himself and his country. Andersen is similar with Edward Said's definition of the intellectual, "the principal intellectual duty is the search for relative independence from such pressures. Hence my characterization of the intellectual as exile and marginal, as amateur, and as the author of a language that tries to speak the truth to power" (1996, p. xvi). Such rebellious spirit nevertheless caused loneliness, a kind of melancholy repression that accompanied Andersen for a lifetime. In his last days, he recalled his whole life as no sincerity, gratitude, and patience, which provided a gloomier illustration of one's life. These were only a tip of the iceberg of Andersen's contradicted personality.

Andersen always longed for love. *The Little Mermaid*, *Under the Willow Tree*, *A Story from the Sand-Dunes*, and *The Old Bachelor's Nightcap* all show his longing for love and his loneliness after losing love. Reviewing Andersen's whole life, we can see that his love life was very rich: unrequited love, mutual love, homosexuality, and heterosexuality. His friend Edvard Collin and the opera singer Jenny Lind, "the Swedish Nightingale," were the two he loved most, but both relationships ended in awkwardness. Though many people said that he did not treat love seriously, he still kept behaving in his own way—he treated love with absolute purity beyond carnal desire. He sometimes could not control his physiological impulses and came to the brothel, but at last he controlled his desires and left. In his platonic love, the most important things were the equivalence between men and women and childlike innocence, and he preferred to give up everything to pursue such innocence. In the poem *I Dreamed I Was a Bird*, a bird falls in love with the petal, and he is

willing to die to accompany the flower when he sees his beloved being snatched. This tale could be viewed as a metaphor for Andersen's pursuit of pure love.

Andersen had a life-long fondness for travel. According to incomplete statistics, Andersen traveled abroad thirty times during his whole life. The poem *To Travel is to Live* shows the yearning for distant places and sailing. Sometimes, Andersen traveled abroad to escape from the pressures of the critic circle. Although he got harsh blame, he was very lucky his whole life. With the popularization of Romanticism and the liberation of human beings in the 18th century, aristocrats and noble families are willing to provide financial support to the poor talented artists. Andersen impressed many noble people like Edvard Collin and Hans Christian Ørsted with his outstanding talent, and this made his life poetic just as in his fairy tales. Most of the time, he considered travel as a way to refresh his mood and spirit: "travelling is to me, as I have said, this invigorating bath, from which I return as it were younger and stronger" (Andersen, 1871, p. 235). To Andersen, travel had the more sacred meanings: travel is a part of life; travel is a part of the rhythm of the universe; and travel is a part of the plan that God makes for human beings. Children or adults, the living or the dead, all are making material and mental exchanges all the time. Travel is an important bridge that connects human beings and nature.

Andersen is fundamentally a humanist, and his view on humanity is mostly demonstrated by his attitude towards children. In his poem *Fantasies*, he clearly shows his love for kids and childhood feelings. "I am a child, and I prefer to play with children, because they can understand my fantasy world best" (Jens Andersen, 2005) The poem *The Dying Child* (1827) is such an example: "But promise me that thou wilt leave off weeping, Because thy tears fall hot upon my cheek...Ah, I am tired – my weary eyes are closing – Look, mother, look! the angel kisseth me!" The whole poem is full of pathos, but it is not sad; it is poignant but not gloomy. It elaborates Andersen's infinite love for children. People think death is horrible, but it is not a big issue for children. Even when at the edge of death, the child in the poem is gentle and calm, and he even tells his mother to stop feeling sad. When children face death, they may really see angels with the coat of death, and they will stay innocent even after their death. This may be the real reason that little girls could keep smiling when they were dying in *The Little Match Girl* and *A Leaf from the Sky*. In addition, children's attachment to adults is overturned in this poem, which shows Andersen, following the trend of Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th century, confirms the special value of children. We should know that this poem was published in 1827, and he was a young adult who was still learning grammar then. It is commendable that he had such a profound understanding of children at such a young age.

Andersen not only proposes for a more equal relationship between children and adults, he also believed that the division between the rich and poor should be demolished. Pu Manting pinpoints the essence of his views in her book *On Andersen* (1984): "the starting point of Andersen's road is the demand for equality, and his method is the pursuit for art" (p.24). Although Andersen came from a poor family, he always looked forward to upper class life but paid little attention to the differences between the rich and poor. After all, "in terms of noble characters of human beings, whether they are shown by the nobility or poor people, they have close connections. As for good qualities, they are similar among everyone" (Andersen, 1872, p. 249). From the perspective of creation, writers often simplify contradictory and complex human being" in an artistic way. *She Was Good for Nothing* clearly shows that there is no difference between the rich and poor. The prince and poor kid in *The Bell* both finally find the bell. All kinds of people are crowded in one cart entering heaven in *Removing Day*. In *Who was the Luckiest*, Andersen denies "the luckiest" directly; and especially in *The Candles*, "But the stars overhead shone on all the

houses, rich or poor, with the same light, clear and kind”. Whether it is the high-class candle or the cheap tallow candle, as long as it can lighten a beautiful life, the rich and poor can enjoy the same happiness.

Andersen has a complex but pure opinion on religious beliefs. In a sense, Andersen’s religious belief is one of the core elements of his works. However, we must admit that religious elements have not been taken into consideration for a hundred years in China. Andersen was swinging between religion and knowledge all his life. His mother was a devout Christian, but his father always doubted its doctrines, and so Andersen had a dialectical knowledge of Christianity since he was a little kid— he had entered missionary school to learn grammar and religious knowledge, which enriched his feelings for religion. His horizon was expanded after he met some scientists like Hans Christian Ørsted, and then he tried to use the scientific and rational thinking model to explore the essence of religion so as to build a close connection between material and human thinking. Meanwhile, he saw the drawbacks of rapid social growth, and so he believed more in God and pursued the fusion of ideals and beliefs. Although he also knew that God was not omnipotent and although he showed his gloom and loss in some of his works, he was solidly and without hesitation believed in God throughout his whole life.

Paul Hazard (1948) describes the distinct imagination of North European children’s literature represented by Andersen’s fairy tales as spiritual languages, and he thinks they are private, meticulous, and faint, that they are not so bright but exquisite, less logic but imaginary. Certainly, this kind of imagination is based on painful comprehensions of lofty propositions like beliefs and thoughts. Andersen’s fairy-tale-like life went through many stresses, and so he had a special understanding of sufferings. He thought that suffering bring people positive meanings and they can purify our souls. From a religious perspective, mental crisis and life sufferings are necessary periods the disciples must go through for their salvation and ascension. Only by sacrificing ourselves in these experiences can love and forgiveness be spread. Actually, the experiences of love and recalling of memories are also experiences of sufferings. The above are explained well in Andersen’s fairy tales.

In a religious sense, sufferings are often closely connected with death. Like most devout disciples, Andersen thinks that death is sweet, which is a reward for the pain of life (Jens Andersen, 2005). Since life is eternal in a religious sense, it is acceptable when we are treated unfairly in the present world. After all, people can redeem themselves so that they can get happiness in the next life. For example, in Andersen’s famous fairy tales that talk about death, including *Auntie Toothache* and *The Story of a Mother*, death becomes rebirth and thus becomes noble. The logic of life and death was extended infinitely by Andersen. His fairy tales also have many explanations of the spirit. In *The Last Day*, facing the humble disciples, God raises the fallen heart with his love and praises “The soul of man, you will always be holy, happy, kind and indestructible!” In *Comet*, when children meet in the future, when memories remain in bubbles, a comet with a long life opens the long way for spirits in huger space. In *The Little Mermaid*, the spirit becomes more concrete, and the pursuits for love, morality, persistence are defined as sacred. Besides, Andersen treats the spirit as the continuation and extension of mortal life. Human beings are just like earth and seed. Joys and sorrows, reunions and separations, birth, death, illness, and old age are all the external formations of the seed. Only souls are the internal cores of the seed. Therefore, God has special features in Andersen’s eyes. God is beautiful and ethereal. God is children-centered (the nature of God is similar to that of children, and only those with a childlike spirit can enter heaven). God is game-oriented (God deduces the connotations of fairy tales, and he creates the whole world by means of a game). God is pure and tolerant (God loves his disciples like a loving father, and he is dignified,

solemn, and respectful and clean; he gives salvation to any suffering and gives sublimation to all humble things). God is developing (in the life process, the knowledge of God is continuously renewed and purified). God is also independent (God is not everything; while he acts as the assistant and comfort of self-salvation, individual independence and strong will are needed, and there is no pure freedom). God is the same as nature (People's cognition of God is actually the illumination of people's nature and natural properties. We can say that a smile from God can bring people endless affection).

Andersen is thus an eternal idealist. Georg Brandes (1886) concludes Andersen's legendary life with this sentence: "Talented people should also have courage," and this is just to the point. Andersen is born with talents, and his talents originate from pure childish spirit and are crazily pursued and worshiped by him. Freedom, sincerity, and kindness generate distinct life feelings. Brandes argues that Andersen's fairy tales "will almost invariably be distinguished by such distinctly poetical qualities as fancy, feeling, whimsicality, gaiety, youthful freshness and aplomb, but the philosophy is too often as primitive as a child's" (1923, p. 6). In the trend of Romanticism in the 19th century, he was the first to talk about pure emotions and absolute truths in a child's spirit, and he received positive feedback. This kind of hidden worship of children is as good as the rationality in the process of civilization according to Brandes, and they are just the two sides of one coin of the integration of meaning made up by concepts and experiences when people are faced with the unknown. "Fairy tale poems" with a sentimental side reveal the nature of inclusiveness, morality, poetics and beauty produced by fairy tales and poems together. In a word, being full of the nature of children, Andersen is an eternal idealist.

Readers' reading acceptance plays a great part in "the four literary activities" identified by Abrams. Roland Barthes (1967) even argues that "the birth of the reader should be at the cost of the author's death." Although the judgment of author's death may seem too extreme, it can highlight the unique value of the reader's recreation of texts. The audiences of Andersen's fairy tales are at the same time diversified and similar. If we put Andersen's fairy tales into children's literature in the narrow sense, we can easily classify audiences into children and adults. Seen from reading practice, children and adults do have different focuses on Andersen's fairy tales. Just as Andersen himself said, "children like fancy decorations in fairy tales, while adults are more interested in the profound implication hiding behind the stories" (1871, p. 325). We may as well contrast adults' and kids' views on *The Emperor's New Clothes*. Adults usually stick to the point of satire, and although they will discuss artistic features as child-centeredness and repetition, they will focus on revealing the ugly nature such as luxury and hypocrisy and the self-deception of the ruling class. Children generally consider it to be a funny story, given that the behavior of the emperor and the liars seem both stupid and cute. Seeing Andersen's fairy tales from a broader view, from a literary view or even from the view of anthropology, this difference will decrease when different audiences meet their satisfactions simultaneously and separately. Starting with the requirements of children, then adjusting the depth of the work, and finally meeting all readers' requirements are the original pursuits of Andersen's creations. There is more evidence for his balance of audiences: the names of his fairy tales in the three major periods—from *Fairy tales, Told for Children* to *New Fairy Tales* and to *Stories*. Zhou Zuoren (1922) evaluated Andersen's fairy tales in his letter to Zhao Jingshen as follows: "they are beyond the worlds of adults and children, or they are the fusion of the two worlds." This confirms the balance between adults and children of Andersen's fairy tales.

Besides, whenever we read Andersen's fairy tales, we get something new, and individual comprehensions vary significantly. In a sense, people are growing during their whole life, and with the enrichment of life experiences and inspirations, their reading experiences and emotional

resonance must be different in different periods and the reading of Andersen's fairy tales is no exception. Bi Shumin (2005) reveals the periodic experiences of Andersen's fairy tales in her article *The Little Mermaid – Ten times reading, ten different gains*. From age 8, 18, 28, 38 to 48, she gets “pure sensation,” “poignant love,” “noble kinship,” “miserable ending,” and “exchange between life and spirit” from *The Little Mermaid*. Obviously, classical works urgently need to be reread, because repeated readings can bring us different emotional experiences. In other words, ten times reading, ten different gains is the fundamental driving force that makes works classical. Aged readers generally believe that children cannot understand the profound meaning of Andersen's fairy tales, but this does not stop children from loving to read them. Undoubtedly, the thoughts and artistic air of Andersen's fairy tales have the possibility to be examined infinitely from a simple level to profound level. Meanwhile, the growing space of children makes its meaning more diversified; however, the acceptance potential of children is often undervalued.

Apart from the changing understanding of the author and the diverse readers, the historical and cultural context with local characteristics also plays an important role in the acceptance of Andersen's tales in China. The previous section has already discussed the history of Andersen's fairy tales in China in a hundred years and we should notice that the main contradiction was the tearing down of artistry and instrumentality of the texts in the acceptance way with Chinese characteristics. In several main phrases before the new era, Andersen's fairy tales were introduced and accepted as ideological tools of a new cultural transformation, children's literature innovation, political hierarchy, and mental education. Because of the intervention of politics, the artistic features of texts did not get the attention they should have. It is no wonder that religious elements are decreased or even ignored in most Chinese interpretations. This can be seen from the exaggeration and apotheosis of Andersen's life experiences. In Ye Junjian's comments on Andersen, the emotion of class struggle and standing up to be the master is strong, and the personality cult is obvious. Until the new era, this kind of cultural bias had been corrected. However, the pressure of the times changed into other elements from ideology. For example, with the progress of science and technology, traditional print reading has turned to electronic reading, and more and more rush elements have defused people's reading energies, causing the integration of texts to fall apart under the environment of fast reading. With such severe challenges, most children and parents and even researchers imagine and suppose Andersen and his fairy tales only through several textbook selections and fairy tale anthology, and so its authenticity and vitality cannot be ensured.

Cultural resistance and cross-culture adaptation are the fundamental elements that influence the introduction and spread of foreign literature, including Andersen's fairy tales in China. Throughout the whole history of the interpretation and acceptance of Andersen's fairy tales in a hundred years of China, the models of Zhou Zuoren, Ye Shengtao, Ye Junjian, and Cao Wenxuan all seem to be the negotiation and reconciliation between children-centeredness, poetics, reality and fantasy. Actually, a deep-rooted traditional Chinese cultural principle of “writings are for conveying truth” (*wen yi zai dao*) is behind the resistance of Western Romantic and exotic culture represented by Andersen's fairy tales. Exotic cultures may be suppressed by local cultures in one period, and in another, they may stand out. Which culture is the mainstream depends on whether the exotic cultures meet the expectations and revolution needs of local cultures and on whether exotic cultures have profound meanings and can be renewed. We have no doubt that the core position and cultural inertia of local cultures largely control the process of culture acceptance most of the time. The cultural psychology of the interpretation and comments on Andersen's fairy tales can be deduced from the interpretation of *The Little Mermaid* in the first part. Everyone will read a narrative with his or her own experiences and knowledge, and so there are 28 interpretations above, or even 280

and 2,800 interpretations. Just as the well-known Asian proverb says, “there are a thousand Hamlets in a thousand people’s eyes,” and so the ultimate aim of reading is to reshape the inter-subjectivity in one’s own mind. It is not the key point to guess the writer’s aim, and it is great that we have the same idea as the writer, but the primary purpose of literary study is to feel the influence of words. With the influence of different cultural backgrounds, contexts of times and psychological elements, we can better understand narratives. The reason that these classics remain so is that they are open to different interpretations for different readers in different environments. In a word, literary works that are touching can make readers find themselves in them.

4. Conclusion

The article studied Andersen’s fairy tales and biography, and the history of its acceptance in modern and contemporary China. It also surveyed the Chinese explanations over a hundred years, as well as the misreading and misunderstanding of Andersen’s fairy tales. Based on the rereading of *The Little Mermaid*, this article then summarized four modes, namely, Zhou Zuoren, Ye Shengtao, Ye Junjian, and Cao Wenxuan. It also analyzed the three elements that influence the Chinese explanation and acceptance of Andersen’s fairy tales, including the changing understanding of Andersen as an author, the age difference between disparate audiences, and the shifting Chinese social context and cultural needs.

At present, a repeated reading of the authentic and complete translations of Andersen’s fairy tales will give readers different gains each time. Meanwhile, if it is possible, reading Andersen’s autobiography, biography, fictions, travel notes, dramas, and poems are all effective ways to improve our reading comprehension. Further, the “acceptance paradox,” generated from the dominant concept of “children-centered theory, is an urgent issue in studies on Andersen’s fairy tales. Of course, this may be the common problem of the development of children’s literature around the world. Since the interaction of “adult consciousness of children” and “children spirit of adults” is ignored, the premise of the paradox is formed—children, who should be dominant in children’s literature, have become the recipients, and so they have descended to the object of symbolization. In this prison of the imagination, it is the impatient parents, reading promoters, and experts in charge that are the ones who have the right to decide. Parents are education oriented and have high expectations for their children, while reading promoters and experts master the evaluating principles and selection rights of classics. Adults imagined and built the creation and acceptance of children’s literature with the standard of catering to their own taste and demand. To take children’s reading requirements into full consideration is a formidable challenge, and for Andersen’s fairy tales to be accepted by them is also a formidable challenge. This article tries to be comprehensive, but it inevitably or shows a restricted adult-centered cultural vision.

Research in this area is becoming diverse, and thus more breakthroughs can be achieved in Chinese acceptance of Andersen’s fairy tales from various perspectives. In terms of translation, it is useful to closely compare the original Danish texts with Chinese translations and find the differences, or compare several Chinese translations and find their differences. From a comparative perspective, putting Chinese acceptance in parallel with Andersen’s reception in Denmark, UK, German, and other Asian nations would be helpful to provide a cross-cultural picture of his legacy. In addition, empirical research is also needed since the first-hand statistics and concrete feedback from readers could supplement the theoretical discussion of Andersen’s fairy tales. In a word, the endless love and exploration for nature, love, children, life, travel and death manifested in Andersen’s fairy tales, which are also the ultimate statements regarding humanity, souls and spirituality. His legacy is carved on the monument of the progress of civilization forever, and also facilitates multiple cultural innovations in the world.

References

- Abrams, M. H. (1953). *The mirror and the lamp: The Romantic theory and tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Andersen, H. C. (1871). *The story of my life*. Trans. Mary Howitt. Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company.
- Andersen, J. (2005). *Hans Christian Andersen: A New Life*. Trans. Tina Nunnally. New York: Overlook Duckworth.
- Bi, S. M. (2005). *My Stories*. Beijing: Chinese Youth Press.
- Bloom, Harold. (1975). *A Map of Misreading*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brandes, G. (1886). *Eminent authors of the nineteenth century: Literary portraits*. Trans. Rasmus B. Andersen, New York, NY: Thomas Y. Crowell Co.
- Brandes, Georg (1923). *Main currents in nineteenth century literature, vol. 2, The Romantic School in Germany*. Trans. Diana White, Mary Morison. New York, NY: Boni & Liveright.
- Cao, W. X. (2014). *Cao Wenxuan's views on children's literature*. Beijing: Dolphin Publishing House.
- Chen, H. (Ed.) (2011). *Reading world children's literature canon*. Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press, pp.12-22.
- Cui, D. & Zhang, Y. (2012). Liberated Seaspray--Study of Andersen's The Little Mermaid from Feminist Perspective, *Journal of Chongqing Jiaotong University (Social Science Edition)*, 1, 71-74.
- Dahlerup, P. et al. (1990, Autumn). Splash!: Six views of "The Little Mermaid". *Scandinavian Studies*, 62(4), 403-429.
- Dong, C. Chinese translations of Andersen's fairy tales: Foreign sinologist's comments. In Q. G. Wang (Ed.), *The hundred years of the study of Andersen in China*. Beijing: China Peace Publishing House.
- Farquhar, M. A. (1999). *Children's Literature in China: From Lu Xun to Mao Zedong*. New York, NY: M. E. Sharpe.
- Haase, D. (2000). Feminist fairy-tale scholarship: A critical survey and bibliography. *Marvels & Tales*, 14(1), 15-63.
- Hu, H. (2004, August). A tragedy of the alien class from the human center: An allegorical analysis of The Little Mermaid by H. C. Andersen. *Journal of Zhaotong Teacher's College*, 26(4), 16-20.
- Huang, Y. S. (1988). From the sea to the land: Reading Andersen's fairy tale The Little Mermaid. *Masterpieces Review*, 1, 67-71.
- Li, H. Y. (2005). *The interpretations of Andersen's fairy tales in China*. Beijing: China Peace Publishing House.
- Paul, Hazard (1948). *Books, Children, and Men*, Boston, MA: Horn Book.
- Pu, M. T. (1984). *A Brief Discussion on Hans Christian Andersen*. Chengdu: Sichuan Juvenile and Children Publishing House
- Said, E. W. (1996). *Representations of the Intellectual*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Tong, Q. B. (1992). *Literature Theory Course*. Beijing: Higher Education Press.
- Wu, D. (2007). Explanation on the mankind center consciousness of The Little Mermaid, *Journal of Hunan Institute of Humanities Science and Technology*, 5, 23-26.
- Ye, J. J. (1978). *The Son of the Shoemaker*. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House,
- Yue, D. Y. (1994). Cultural differences and cultural misreading. *Chinese Culture Research*, 2, 17-19.

Zhou, Z. R. & Zhao, J. S. (2005). Comparison of Fairy Tales of Andersen and Wilde. In Q. G. Wang (Ed.), *The hundred years of the study of Andersen in China*. Beijing: China Peace Publishing House.

Zhou, Z. R. (2005). Reading Andersen: Nine of ten. In Q. G. Wang (Ed.), *The hundred years of the study of Andersen in China*. Beijing: China Peace Publishing House.

Zoran, G. (1984). Towards a theory of space in narrative. *Poetics Today*, 5(2), 309-335.



Guolong, ZHANG (b. 1972) received his PhD in School of Chinese Language and Literature from Beijing Normal University (2006). Now he is a professor of children's literature in School of Chinese Language and Literature, Beijing Normal University, China. His current research interests include young adult literature, essay writing in contemporary China, children's literature on war and trauma. He has (co-) authored four academic books and more than 70 papers. He is also a creative writer of several award-winning children's novels and essays.

Tangjun, SU (b. 1992) received his MA in School of Chinese Language and Literature from Beijing Normal University. He has published several academic articles in Chinese language journals.