

Reviews

BOOK

Representing Children in Chinese and U.S. Children's Literature

Edited by Claudia Nelson and Rebecca Morris

New York: Routledge, 2016, 250 pages

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Scholars of children's literature assert that the importance of the genre of children's literature is due to its large readership of children. Author, writer, and editor M. Daphne Kutzer (2002) says, however, that the influence of this genre goes beyond the child consumer if one sees that child as a "future adult" who will shape future society. Professor of Children's Literature Kimberley Reynolds (2011) contends, however, that the category of "children's literature" does not even technically exist, as adults are not prevented from consuming such literature as well. Both Kutzer and Reynold—as well as the editors of this volume, Claudia Nelson and Rebecca Morris—therefore propose that the study of children's literature requires not only the close reading of a text, but rather the attempt to see how authors have been influenced by their circumstances in the writing of their work. In other words, these scholars suggest that children's literature has the potential to influence future citizens of a particular society.

Scholarship in children's literature, however, is still predominantly focused on studies on children's literature from the West, but not because the earliest works come from the West. Literature for children regardless of provenance, as a matter of fact, has been utilized in many cultures

worldwide as a primary method for attaining literacy. What is being asserted, rather, is that the frameworks on reading and understanding children's literature began in Western scholarship. This has led to some difficulty in the field regarding the study of non-Western texts.

Representing Children in Chinese and U.S. Children's Literature is divided into five sections: "Theorizing Children's Literature: Journey as Metaphor and Motif", "Chinese Children's Literature and the May Fourth Movement", "Studies of American Authorship", "A History of Didactic Children's Literature", and "Themes in Children's Literature". An advantage of the book's expansiveness is the privilege it provides to analyze Chinese children's literature, which has its own rich history, and compare it with children's literature from the US. Since few have undertaken such a task, the editors admit to the difficulty of compiling a volume, which discusses the two cultures in a comparative way, and so fell into the convenience of compiling the articles under a broad theme.

The first section shows the stark contrast of literary themes between US and Chinese works by discussing the common motif of adventure. Due to the historical contexts of the US, adventure is often used in children's literature, especially in stories for boys, to convey not only a particular historical moment, but also a particular agenda. The use of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) is an example of how a text not only depicts the issues of slavery the US had to deal with after its recently ended civil war, but also presents a possibility for future adults in the US to support slavery. This is shown in the dilemma of Huckleberry Finn who wants to help liberate Jim, even as he himself needed a partner for his own escape and adventure. While this is a common theme among adventure narratives in other countries, Roberta Seelinger Trites in her chapter titled, "Images of Growth: Embodied Metaphors in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*", underscores how this theme may portray the concept of growth—physical, emotional, or cognitive. In the attempt to find a similar trajectory in Chinese children's literature, a mismatch is seen instead, as most Chinese adventure literature often deal with actual physical movement and the absence of growth in the characters—qualities similarly found in travel narratives. This mode of analysis also falters because of historical contexts; the prominent children's texts for the Chinese were set during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), which was marked by insularity rather than expansion beyond its borders. This insularity is further manifested in children's literature of the period, which prescribes desirable actions and behaviors for children, or what Ming theorists such as Feng Menglong, Chinese vernacular writer and poet of the late Ming Dynasty, labeled as a "behavioral taboo system". Such children's literature conveys to its readers, for instance, certain behavioral prescriptions, seen in such works as *Children's Necessary Reading*, *The Three-Character Classic*, and *The Bible for Girls*.

The second section focuses on Chinese children's literature and identifies the May Fourth Movement, also known as the New Culture Movement, which

features an intellectual and socio-cultural revolution beginning in the 1920s, and is considered a catalyst that shaped change in Chinese society. This period is marked by the disillusionment of the Chinese studentry with how China handled the post-World War I treaties with Western nations, along with the weakening of the Qing dynasty, the rise of local warlords, and the rising popularity of communism. In this period of flux, future members of Chinese society were made to come to terms with these changes. As a result, Chinese translations of Hans Christian Andersen and the Brothers Grimm flooded the intellectual sphere of China, replacing the earlier prescriptive children's literature with texts that promoted individualism.

Rather than a unifying move to influence children with Western ideas, the Chinese Communist Party utilized children's literature in order to introduce their own version of children's literature. In Chapter 3, "On the Image of Children and the Three Stages of Transformation in 100 Years of Chinese Children's Literature", Wang Quangen takes the story of *Dalin and Xiaolin*, which emphasizes the opposition between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. (These orphaned brothers, adopted separately, live very different lives—Dalin who is adopted by a wealthy family dies on an island since he does not have survival skills, while Xiaolin experiences hardship and grows up respected by his peers.) This phenomenon of allowing translations of foreign texts, the creation of communist children's literature, and the re-discovery of traditional children's literature in China present the contradictions within the May Fourth Movement. What was portrayed as a need for change did not just allow the entry of literature from countries which had betrayed China, but also the emphasis, to a large extent, to hold on to contested ideologies such as Confucianism. Despite these contradictions, however, the May Fourth Movement paved the way for children's literature in China to accommodate a multiplicity of styles.

Among the various sections of the volume, Chapter 11, titled, "Children's Disposition and Children's Views", caught my attention. In this chapter, Cao Wenxuan brings forth an often ignored area in the scholarship of children's literature—the reader's response. Rather than approach this angle empirically by surveying children's responses to texts, Cao defines the difference between "children's disposition" and "children's views". This distinction highlights the use of a psychological approach to perceiving "children's disposition" as the perception of the authors regarding their audience, while "children's views" is the result of children's consumption of literature. Cao then categorizes three types of children's authors, namely: those who write based on children's dispositions, those with the purpose of shaping "children's views", and those who integrate the former with the latter. Cao is not only an author of children's literature; he is also a Professor of Chinese and Children's Literature who has successfully brought global attention to children's literature written by Chinese authors. By introducing these categories to theorise on the subject, Cao has provided a template for scholars to study Chinese literature for children.

Overall, the entire volume is important as it attempts to engage two literary contexts (the US and China), not only through the close reading of texts, but also with clear use of the historical contexts surrounding the creation of the works. While the volume is a single compilation, the structure and order conveys a sense that the book could actually consist of two different compilations. The works cited also reveal an obvious gap in this area of study, thus revealing this area's young stage. Nevertheless, *Representing Children in Chinese and U.S. Children's Literature* is the only book, thus far, which uses the comparative approach in analyzing children's literature from China and the US. Hopefully, this book may encourage more scholars to critically engage these literatures in the future.

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REVIEWER

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BOOK

Hidden Lives, Concealed Narratives: A History of Leprosy in the Philippines

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As an affliction saturated with metaphors and social and cultural meanings, Hansen's disease has long captured the attention of missionaries, charity workers, philanthropists, scientists, and social scientists. *Hidden Lives, Concealed Narratives: A History of Leprosy in the Philippines*, is an ambitious attempt by a team of thirteen Filipino scholars, mostly historians, to reconstruct the history of Hansen's disease over the longue durée of the last four centuries in the Philippines. As indicated in the preface, the history of Hansen's disease, is "intrinsically tied into the larger history of the country but has remained silent for much too long" (p. ix). The book is thus a timely volume that enriches not only the national history of the Philippines, but also the history of health and medicine in Southeast Asia.

In this 11-chapter volume edited by Maria Serena I. Diokno, the stories of Hansen's disease begin with the Spanish religious missionaries' encounters with it and end with the oral histories of survivors. The narratives are not just

chronologically ordered, they are also thematically arranged into three parts, “Charity and Care in the Treatment of the Afflicted”, “Controlling the Spread of Leprosy: Culion as a Prime Example”, and “Toward Desegregation: The World of Hansenites”.

Drawing from dictionaries and accounts of Spanish missionaries and foreign travelers, Chapter One reconstructs the local people’s understanding of and responses to the disease in pre-colonial Philippines, noting how Hansen’s disease was already prevalent before the arrival of Spanish missionaries; it was thought to be at once a hereditary disease and a divine punishment, and commonly treated with herbs and physical regimens. The locals practiced abandonment and isolation as a form of treatment, highly regarding physical perfection and treating physical abnormalities as taboos (p. 31). The second chapter argues that the treatment for Hansen’s disease characterized by active engagement, free medicine, unconditional service, and the spirit of charity—constituting a holistic approach and a paradigm of care—was introduced and established by Franciscan missionaries. Contrasting treatment, however, was also recorded in some accounts; for example, withholding assistance until the afflicted were converted and baptized (p. 41).

The third chapter, focusing on the mid-nineteenth century, shows the evangelizing care regime of the Spanish being expanded beyond Luzon with the building of a new hospital in Cebu. Another significant development in the same period was the rise of a new class of medical professionals or *medicos titulares*, as health became more significant in the Spanish government’s priorities. *Medicos titulares*, who “served as the eyes and ears of the colonial government”, were interested not only in treating the condition, but also in seeking a secular understanding and explanation of the disease, such as the natural causes of the fatalities of Hansen’s disease (p. 73).

The second part of the volume focuses entirely on the American public health regime. In Chapter Four, Rene R. Escalante chronicles the evolution of the American public health policy on Hansen’s disease for almost half a century, from 1898 to 1941. In contrast to its Spanish predecessor, which emphasized spiritual comfort to the sick, the American public health regime focused on sanitation and the management of the population’s health by providing hospital care, introducing quarantine measures, launching mass health education campaigns, and carrying out research.

Despite contested views over the contagiousness of Hansen’s disease, compulsory segregation was implemented to eradicate it, which culminated in the 1906 establishment of a Hansen’s disease colony in Culion—with a budget that was disproportionately larger for only 6,000 Hansen’s disease patients as compared to the budget for the prevention of other diseases, such tuberculosis, which was killing 30,000 Filipinos a year (p. 102). Without ignoring the resistance of the segregated colonists in Culion and the abnormality in budget allocation, this chapter concludes that the anti-Hansen’s disease program is “a success” that “could

serve as paradigm or model of an effective response to a similar health problem at present and in the future” (p.105).

Both Chapters Five and Six seek to understand the meaning of human actions through reading the physical spaces and the intangible social and cultural barriers in Culion and other leprosaria. Chapter Seven provides a narrative of the experience of the Hansenites by retelling how they were “collected” from their communities and how they formed and transformed the community in the Culion Hansen’s disease Colony. Adopting the method of discourse analysis, Francis A. Gealogo and Antonio C. Galang Jr., argue that government reports “made it appear that the patients took segregation positively implying that the colonial project was triumphant and successful” (p. 181).

Contrary to Escalante in Chapter Four, Gealogo and Galang Jr., are more reserved in calling the American anti-Hansen’s disease program a “success”. Rather, they read the theatricality of imperial power into the anti-Hansen’s disease program: Culion was “a community to be viewed by the world” and “a showcase of American achievement in science and medicine” (p. 183). In other words, it portrays Culion as reflective of the “micropolitics of subject formation” in public health (Anderson, 1998, p. 708). The authors, however, do not view patients of Hansen’s disease as totally passive subjects of colonial segregation. Rather, they see the colonists as historical actors, who not only received and reacted to rules and requirements imposed on their lives in the colony, but also revolted against them when the condition called for such a response.

The final section of the book consists of four different themes: the Culion Hansen’s disease Colony as manifestation of the global history of medicine and imperialism, the control of Hansen’s disease after 1946, voices of afflicted women, and life stories of afflicted men. In Chapter Eight, Ma. Mercedes G. Planta illustrates the multiple theatricalities of American public health efforts in the Philippines against the background of inter-empire competition. The Culion Hansen’s disease Colony was not just what may be called “a colony within the American colony”, it was also a site for the performance of a “miraculous” American sanitary regime in the larger theater of imperialism in Southeast Asia (p. 207), an arena of imperial rivalry in the early twentieth century. Chapter Nine charts the evolution of Hansen’s disease control after independence, which is characterized by deinstitutionalization, with a focus on the roles of state and non-state actors. The final two chapters utilize the method of oral histories to visit the psyche—emotional, mental, and psychological worlds—of afflicted women and men and their stories about what it means to live with Hansen’s disease and the different gendered experiences of the ailment.

Altogether, the book is a thoughtful and comprehensive volume on the history of Hansen’s disease in the Philippines. There are, however, several incongruities that remain to be reconciled. The first contradiction lies in the tension between two different paradigms, as proposed by Maria Eloisa G. Parco de Castro in Chapter Two and Escalante in Chapter Four. Can a paradigm premised on the

reductionism and objectivity of biomedicine be reconciled with the holism and subjectivity of religiously informed healing? The second incongruity lies in the differing interpretations—between Escalante on one hand, and Gealogo and Galang on the other—regarding the American public health regime: is Culion a successful public health experiment or a failure? To ask this question, one perhaps has to define what constitutes a successful public health program in the first place, without ignoring the inherent tensions between the rights of each individual and the collective health of a population in such a program, and also the fact that people are differentially affected by the same program.

Another question that remains unresolved after reading the entire book is: why was the American colonial government so fascinated with Hansen's disease, when other communicable diseases were more deadly and contagious? Imperialism and its theatricality was the background, but this does not adequately answer the question. The careerism of an individual scientist, who already had a stake in a certain field of science and had been placed in a powerful position to decide the direction of this science, is perhaps no less significant than the structural force of imperial expansion in determining why Hansen's disease was chosen. Along this line, I find Warwick Anderson's (1998) observation of Victor Heiser a more satisfactory answer to this question than what this volume has offered: Victor Heiser was a "shrewd self-publicist" who "had taken a special interest in Hansen's disease while [being a] director of health in the Philippines", fashioned himself as a "secular Damien", and "regarded the scientific treatment of leprosy at Culion as his major legacy to the islands" (p. 710).

As this volume is "a history"—rather than "the history"—of Hansen's disease in the Philippines, it humbly leaves the narratives and dialogues open for more discourses on the history of Hansen's disease in the Philippines, while offering an intellectual paradigm that critically interrogates the power relations in modern public health regime.

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