Introduction - Gender Dynamics and Connecting Comparisons

For a hundred years or more, The Nightingale and other fairytales by Hans Christian Andersen have fascinated readers in China and Denmark and bound them together in a corresponding set of values and preoccupations. Not only do the tales make use of poetic, ironic and humorous means to make a strong claim for the value of social justice, which continues to feature strongly in both regions, but throughout the 20th century the tales have also linked the vast empire of the east with the tiny kingdom of the north as imagined communities (Anderson 1983). In H. C. Andersen’s eyes, China features as a refined land of porcelain, while Denmark is portrayed as a bucolic haven of peace. Beneath the polished surfaces, however, unruly and unjust social conditions prevail, and, according to H.C. Andersen, both societies stand in need of moral and ethical guidance. In both regions these tales have contributed to creating values and ethics for more than a century now, and the ugly duckling and the nightingale have remained well-loved figures, sending the message that there is an answer to the evils of unjust and societal hierarchies and a hope for social transformation.

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