

Overcoming Prejudice: On Translating Hong Kong Popular Fiction

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Abstract

Hong Kong popular fiction is an area of study that is often overlooked by both translation scholars and practising translators. There are a number of reasons for this, chief among them being the disdain toward popular fiction frequently found in both academia and the literary world. This paper challenges this attitude, as it often causes translators to ignore the very real value that can be found in popular narratives. The paper begins with an overview of Western and Chinese scholarly writing on how to distinguish popular fiction from “high” or “elite” fiction. Arguments from the fields of popular culture studies and sociology are presented to support the contention that popular narratives can serve as valuable diagnostic tools for studying a society’s attitudes and beliefs. The concept of “worthiness” in translation is then discussed, drawing upon Steiner’s theory of the hermeneutic motion and other sources to examine what (or who) determines whether or not a given work is “worthy” of translation. Such a determination must be based on the interests and needs of the target-language audience, needs which will, by definition, be different to those of the source-language audience. It is argued that translators must avoid falling prey to prejudice against popular fiction if they are to serve their readers and to help preserve the full scope of Hong Kong’s literary heritage.