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# ECHOES ACROSS CULTURES: CULTURAL TRANSLATION IN THE ENGLISH RENDERINGS OF LIAOZHAI ZHIYI

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## Abstract
*In this paper, I will take up the translation work of Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio (Liaozhai Zhiyi) by Pu Songling and trace the Chinese cultural meaning in the Chinese original and its English translation, as well as explore the preservation, adaptation, and reconstruction of the meaning. It is based on the cultural turn in translation and Cultural Translation Theory, which sees translation as cultural mediation rather than simple linguistic transfer. The research question is how the cross-cultural transfer, negotiation, and reconstruction of meaning that are bound to culture are examined in three representative stories, "Nie Xiaoqian," "The Painted Skin," and "Ying Ning." The study takes a qualitative close-reading approach, relying on the historically important public domain version (the Giles translation) and the Penguin translation as a reference point for contemporary Anglophone reception. Four mechanisms of cultural transmission are recognized: the preservation of symbol, the reconstruction of meaning, the construction of a negotiation over the culture, and the adaptation of the culture from the reader's perspective. But the results indicate that, when an image is purely concrete, it is communicated more vividly than when it is understood as a philosophical system, as is usually the case with yin yang thinking, Buddhist karmic causality, Daoist naturalness, and Confucian moral order. Adaptation of this kind is a good thing for readability, but it can lead to a loss of imagery and a drift in communication with the culture. The study provides a mechanism-based model for the analysis of the cross-cultural circulation of classical Chinese fiction. The study is based on the theory of cultural translation, the characteristics of the classical Chinese novel, and the method of cultural translation in the interpretation of Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio. This study draws on the theory of cultural translation, the features of classical Chinese fiction, and the practice of cultural translation in the interpretation of Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio.*

**Keywords:** Cultural Translation Theory; Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio; classical Chinese fiction; cultural adaptation; imagery loss; communication deviation; reader reception

## Introduction
Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio (Liaozhai Zhiyi) ranks in importance among the best anthologies of classical Chinese short fiction and is an important work in Chinese literary history. Written by Pu Songling during the Qing dynasty, it contains almost five hundred stories, supernatural imagination, and moral reflections on humanity, society, man to man, and spiritual belief (Pu, 2006). The stories are not just ghost stories, but they are an indictment of corruption, injustice, social inequality, inflexible Confucianism, and human desires. In her ghosts, fox spirits, demons, immortals, and other supernatural characters, Pu Songling introduces a literary universe in which distinctions between human and spiritual become blurred and raises moral and philosophical questions from various perspectives (Minford, 2006).

The Painted Skin" (painted skin), "Nie Xiaoqian" (nie maiden), and "Ying Ning" (ying girl) are considered representative of the collection and cover the range of cultural and symbolic themes of Liaozhai. Nie Xiaoqian is the story of a scholar/ghost affair, a love story, a redemption story, a loyalty story, and a spiritual salvation story. The whole point of "The Painted Skin" is that the demon is the most beautiful woman you've ever seen, and his mission is to expose all the lies and wants that lie beneath the surface of the world. The Laughing Girl," or Ying Ning, is a fox spirit who does not act like a woman and who is introduced in a work that is often translated as such. All three have won an international readership for their imaginative storytelling and the cultural symbolism they incorporate (Pu, 2006).

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The body of works by Liaozhai Zhiyi has been disseminated worldwide mainly through English translation, most prominently by Herbert A. Giles and John Minford. However, translation is not just about linguistic conversion. As Bassnett (2014, pp. 7–11) notes, literary translation is a continual process of negotiating with readers of the target language. Similarly, Venuti (1995) points out that translation always involves ideological and cultural decisions, as the translator has to make sure that the messages he conveys are understood by both the source-language and target-language audiences. Therefore, the translation of Liaozhai Zhiyi into English is not just a linguistic process but also a cultural-communicative process between Chinese and English culture.

This complexity is accentuated by the philosophical, religious, and folkloric elements that are interwoven into classical Chinese fiction and which do not have exact equivalents in English. Symbols like ghosts, fox spirits, yin-yang, dao, filial piety, ancestor veneration and supernatural retribution have multiple meanings. For example, a ghost can not only be a ghost but a representation of an unfulfilled moral obligation, ancestor memory, ritual obligation, or spiritual transformation. Fox spirits are similarly hard to categorize because of the lack of distinctions between humans and monsters, between good and bad (Pu, 2006; Minford, 2006). These are "culture-based" concepts, which require decisions on their translation by translators, and thus affect the way that international readers make sense of Chinese civilization.

The following three concepts are linked to the current analysis: cultural adaptation, imagery loss, and communication deviation. Cultural adaptation is the translator's changes or explanations of the target language's culture-specific expressions to make them more accessible to the target language reader. Imagery loss: loss of symbolism, religious, philosophical, or aesthetic meaning attributed to the source text. Communication deviation refers to instances when readers read Chinese cultural concepts from Western literary perspectives, such as gothic horror, fantasy, or a universal moral allegory, which is not the Chinese cultural meaning. These are not to be read as “translation failure”, but as the process of intercultural literary communication that is negotiated (Lefevere, 1992; Bassnett, 2014).

While research into Liaozhai Zhiyi has increased these days, there are few studies that provide a detailed comparison among several representative tales to analyze the symbolic images, translation methods, and cross-cultural meaning construction together. Most of the research to date focuses on either the translation strategy or interpretive reception, without linking the two (Wang, 1996; Wei et al., 2024), which leaves a gap to be filled in this research. This gap indicates the necessity of an overall analysis that embraces close textual study and the theory of contemporary translation.

This study holds that English versions of Liaozhai Zhiyi have successfully carried out a dynamic balance between cultural preservation and cultural transformation. The supernatural, such as ghosts, fox spirits, demons, and others, is usually visible, and their moral, philosophical, and religious aspects are often recalculated to fit the cultural context of the English speaker.

This research poses three questions: What are the most salient cultural features of these stories? (1) What are the cultural features that can be found in these stories?

(2) What are the key cultural features in these stories?

(3) What are the key cultural features in these case studies?

The study answers those questions in a theoretically informed way that leads to a theoretically driven model of translation as a process that negotiates classical Chinese fiction across linguistic and cultural barriers, which can benefit translation studies, comparative literature, and intercultural communication.

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## Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

### *The Cultural Turn and Cultural Translation Theory*

This study follows the "cultural turn" in the field of Translation Studies. Traditional theories involved equivalence, accuracy, and linguistic transfer and Nida's (1964) theory of dynamic equivalence is still relevant due to his focus on the impact of translation on the reader. Subsequent scholars, however, contended that translation is not only a process of meaning transfer but also one in which culture, ideology, power, poetics, and reception play a role. Translation is a kind of "rewriting" in the domain of culture, and it can change the perception of the author, text, or culture within other literary systems, as described by Bassnett and Lefevere (1990) and Lefevere (1992). This is especially so in Liaozhai, where the translator serves as not only a converter of language, but as a mediator of Chinese supernatural imagination to a new reading community.

Cultural Translation Theory views the act of translation as a process of moving, negotiating and reconstructing culture, not just solving culture-specific vocabulary. It explores the ways in which signs, beliefs, rituals, metaphors and values are transmitted across cultures and defines the translator as the bearer of cultural messages as opposed to the neutral linguistic technician (Baker, 2011; Bassnett, 2014). Such a view is extended by Bhabha (1994), who sees translated texts not as a mere fusion of source and target meaning, but as a "third space" where both meanings play.

There are three concepts which are central to this study. The process of recognizable cultural signs from the source language being carried over into the target language is known as cultural transfer. The term cultural negotiation refers to the translator's attempt to negotiate otherness and target readers' expectations. Cultural reconstruction means transforming the source cultural meaning into the target culture's meaning. These concepts in combination enable the analysis of the translator's decision-making with cultural implications rather than as strategies only.

### Reader Reception, Domestication, and Foreignization

The notions of domestication and foreignization, which Venuti (1995) introduced, are still prominent in the study of translation of classical Chinese texts into English. Domestication creates a fluent text that is familiar to the readers of the target language; foreignization keeps cultural markers that indicate the text's foreign origin. Both strategies may fail when translated into Liaozhai: the strategy of too much foreignization may lead to alienating readers with new elements in the story; the strategy of too much domestication may result in the loss of the Chinese cultural identity of the text. This study won't ask which is the better way, but how do translators handle the challenge of rendering something readable and yet culturally rich?

This is particularly evident in depictions of ghostlike scenes. The words ghost, demon, monster are English words that are familiar, but with cultural connotations different from the Chinese words gui, yao, hu, and human–spirit transformation. Foreignisation may help to maintain the 'strangeness' of the source text, and contextual annotation will help to minimise misunderstanding. The concept of paratext, which Genette (1997) discusses in his example of prefaces, notes, etc., can provide readers with guidance in cultural interpretation, while recent research on Liaozhai translation has focused on the importance of paratextual explanation in the field of culture-bound terms (Shen et al., 2025).

Cultural transmission is therefore part and parcel of reader reception. Translation is not a one-time process that happens when a sentence is grammatically correct; it occurs when readers read and interpret images, consider character, and place the story into their own body of literature. Imagery loss and communication deviation is therefore reception as well as translation issues.

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In the past, a few studies have been conducted on English translations of Liaozhai. There have been a few past studies of English translations of Liaozhai.

There are several English translations available of Liaozhai, but the most influential early translation was Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio (1792) by Giles. The abundance of folk customs, religious concepts, and magical culture in Jin's work has resulted in a long and complex history of its translation overseas, which makes it important to literary scholarship and Chinese cultural memory (Jin, 2021).

Research on the subject has now shifted from generic to more systematic. In the context of the sources' cultural imagery, Pei (2018) discusses the English retranslations of the book Liaozhai in his corpus-based dissertation. Wei, Zainal and Wong (2024) find that while neither of them is exclusively domestication or foreignisation, Giles' translation is more towards domestication while Minford's is more towards foreignisation. Zhou and Xu (2024) discuss how the approaches of narrative voice and paratext highlight novelty and strangeness in Minford's translation of “The Laughing Girl.” These studies point to the possibility of investigating Liaozhai translation as a cultural approach in the three dimensions of voice, paratext, and reception.

However, there is a gap in the literature, because while there is plenty of work on translation strategy, translator style, or corpus statistics, there is comparatively little work on the cultural implications of such strategies, or on the differences between translation strategies across story types. This study is able to differentiate between the translator's approach (literal rendering, annotation, explanation, omission, amplification, domestication, or foreignization) and the effect of the approach on the reader (symbol preservation, meaning reconstruction, or reader-oriented adaptation). The present analysis involves not only strategy but also mechanism.

***Research Gap and Theoretical Position***

This study situates itself within cultural translation theory and classical Chinese literary translation, drawing on concepts of reader reception. It recognizes the importance of domestication and foreignization, but also asks: What does culture mean when it is transferred, diminished, or changed? Loss of translation is not considered a bad thing per se, but the extent to which such loss does or does not happen, how and why it does or does not happen, and for what purpose.

This results in a four-step mechanism model: symbol preservation - the cultural image is retained in the target text so that it can be seen and recognized; meaning reconstruction - the deeper meaning of the source image is reconstructed into understandable terms; cultural negotiation - the translator strikes a balance between foreignness and readability; and reader-oriented adaptation - the translator adapts the target text for readers.

**Theoretical Suitability**

This framework can be equated with the following analytical functions: cultural transfer is the identification of what is visible in a translation; cultural negotiation is an account of the relationship between foreignness and readability; cultural reconstruction is an account of how deeper meanings are brought into visibility by a translation; and reader-oriented adaptation is an account of what makes a translation acceptable to target readers.

The scope of this study is not to answer general questions of translator agency or differences between the historical versions; a Skopos or action-theory approach would be more appropriate for these questions. Rather, it considers the question of how culturally charged images and values are translated. Cultural Translation Theory is the one most closely related to the textual decisions and the cultural implications of those decisions, thus the most suitable framework for the research questions formulated here.

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**Research Design and Methodology**

The method of this study is qualitative, and textual analysis and close reading are employed to analyze the texts of "Nie Xiaoqian," "The Painted Skin," and "Ying Ning." The Chinese text of the source is from Liaozhai Zhiyi, found at Chinese Wikisource. Giles's Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio is the main source of English textual evidence, selected for its historical importance, availability to readers, and its being published in the public domain. Minford's 2006 Penguin translation is not regarded as a second primary source, but as a resource for the Anglophone reception and translation trends that have developed in our time. The study does not claim to provide a complete retranslation comparison: Textual examples are given by tale title and chapter number, not by page number, since there are differences in pagination between the editions.

The three stories were chosen because they represent three different aspects of the cultural challenges to the transmission of Liaozhai: "Nie Xiaoqian" emphasizes the ghost identity, the Confucian restraint, and the liberation of the spirit; "The Painted Skin" emphasizes demonic disguise, illusion, and deceptive appearance; "Ying Ning" emphasizes laughter, flowers, fox-spirit identity, and emotional naturalness. In concert, they provide a well-rounded, comparative framework that covers ghost redemption, demonic illusion, and aesthetic-spiritual innocence.

**Analytical Dimensions and Procedure**

The four analytical dimensions are cultural images (ghosts, spirits, demons, painted skin, flowers, and laughter), folk beliefs (haunted places, spirit-human contact, fox-to-human transformation), religious and philosophical meanings (Buddhist karmic causality, Daoist naturalness, yin-yang cosmology, and the concept of illusion), and ethical narratives (Confucian values of righteousness, restraint, compassion, loyalty, and moral transformation). The analytical procedure is composed of the following three stages: (1) determine the element of culture in the target culture (the Chinese source text); (2) analyze the target culture's element of culture (the Chinese source text) by referring to some textual evidence; (3) discuss the effect of the translation in terms of the four transmission mechanisms mentioned above. This is a technique where the text is connected directly to the theoretical explanation without impressionistic dialogue.

**Table 1. Analytical Framework of Cultural Transmission Mechanisms**

| Analytical dimension | Main cultural focus | Typical translation strategy | Cultural transmission mechanism |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cultural images | Ghosts, demons, fox spirits, painted skin, flowers, laughter | Literal translation, selective retention, image-focused description | Symbol preservation and partial reconstruction |
| Folk beliefs | Haunted spaces, spirit-human contact, fox-spirit existence, ritual relations | Contextual explanation, simplification, selective annotation | Cultural negotiation |
| Religious/philosophical meanings | Karma, yin-yang, Daoist naturalness, Buddhist illusion, moral causality | Domestication, interpretive explanation, abstraction | Meaning reconstruction |

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| Analytical dimension | Main cultural focus | Typical translation strategy | Cultural transmission mechanism |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ethical narratives | Benevolence, righteousness, chastity, compassion, redemption, emotional sincerity | Explicit moral framing, reader-oriented narration | Reader-oriented adaptation |

**Scope of the Methodology: Relationships between the Methodological and Health Outcomes**

This study is based on a small representative body of case materials, and not on the whole of Liaozhai or all translations of it. It deftly separates out Chinese source material for finding culturally-specific meaning from Giles's public domain translation of the Chinese into English as direct quoted evidence, while it uses Minford's translation only as an indicator of modern reception. This scope limitation was established to prevent overclaiming and maintain methodological clarity.

**Case Analysis**

Nie Xiaoqian: Ghost identity, moral restraint and spiritual release

"Nie Xiaoqian" is a story of Chinese cultural translation: a mixture of supernatural threat and moral development. Ning Caichen is presented by the words "生平無二色" (never known two faces/loves in his life), which indicate sexual and moral self-restraint. Giles makes this one of his Confucian ideals of discipline into the expression of romantic individualism: "he had only loved once" (1916, ch. XVI). This is not a mistake; it is a reworking of ethics: the ethics of mastojo desires is now personal sincerity to the target audience.

Nie Xiaoqian is not a ghost in the traditional sense, but a young girl who was possessed by demons and killed at a young age. In Giles, the source text's 十八夕殂 is translated to "she died when she was only eighteen" (1916, ch. XVI). The biographical fact remains undamaged and reveals her fragility, but the Chinese idiom ghost is more than the English word suggests, and evokes the sense of the displaced and unsettled. Therefore, ghost identity experiences two types of cultural transfer and semantic reduction.

The setting for the haunted temple is also culturally loaded. Whilst abandoned by the Western frame, the temple appears primarily as a threat; in the Chinese frame, it is an indicator of spiritual chaos, neglect of ritual, and lack of human protection. The English version is faithful to the atmosphere of this cosmological imbalance in yin-yang, but to the detriment of its metaphysical system, which is lost in the process of being made readable.

The main cultural shift of the story is the shift of ghostliness from fear to moralization toward redemption. The destruction of Xiaoqian is not as a monster but through the correct burial and reincarnation into human society, which is connected to the recitation of sutras and spiritual discipline, with which she is also brought to the end of her days. Its complexities are frequently conveyed in the more familiar registers of compassion, gratitude, and redemption – a Buddhist, Daoist, and ritual logic that is often softened by the English register.

There are three mechanisms in "Nie Xiaoqian": the ghost image remains intact, its cosmological and religious meaning is reconstructed, and the ethical interpretation is adapted for the target audience. This mix enables the story to be understood by an international audience while maintaining the familiar characteristics of Chinese supernatural imagination.

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***"The Painted Skin": Illusion, Disguise, and Moral Warning"***

"The Painted Skin" is one of the most straightforward examples of the simultaneous preservation of imagery and the loss of philosophy. It contains a demon at its heart, not just in disguise, but one that physically takes on the face of a human being. In Chinese, the image is conveyed through colourful phrases: "a fierce, hideous ghost" (seen one, a "tonglu") and "put it on, and became a girl" (draped over the body it "changed into a girl" (huai yi) or "transformed into a girl" (huai yi chang). The human skin spread open, and the green face and jagged teeth (1916, ch. XII) are effective in capturing the horror of the story in English, something that Giles did very well.

The painted skin, on the other hand, is not just a ghoulish prop, but also a metaphor for false appearance, the fallacy of surface perception, and culture. In Chinese Buddhist-influenced thinking, surface beauty can be a sign of attachment to illusion, and a warning of desire and misunderstanding. If translation focuses on the shock of the monstrous rather than the moral dimension, then target readers may perceive the reading of the story as a mode of gothic horror as opposed to a philosophical allegory. This is a change in the mode of the reading, not a simple mistranslation.

This case example exemplifies the dominant mechanism of 'symbol preservation', in which a 'painted skin' image is remembered as material, as opposed to other more general or abstract concepts, like 'karma' or 'Daoist naturalness', and for which no replacement category, Western or otherwise, is needed to maintain its readability. Meanwhile, philosophical reconstruction takes place, and the sense of "skin" as boundary, surface, and illusion is, at times, reduced to the more straightforward message that appearances can deceive.

Gender, desire, and responsibility are also discussed in the story. But Wang's mistake was not to fall in love with the beautiful stranger; it was to be careless of his own morality and the danger to his family. This process of simplification can turn the Chinese original into a more linear moral lesson without leaving the ambiguity or a social critique, and make a complex reflection on perception, attachment, and moral blindness into a simple warning against deception and desire.

The transfer of visible imagery, in other words, is easier than the transfer of embedded philosophical meaning, thus "The Painted Skin". The imagery loss and communication deviation of the study's core concern, i.e., the Buddhist and moral aspects of illusion, attachment, and moral blindness, are nonetheless present, though faded in the background, while the skin motif remains potent in its English context.

**"Ying Ning" Laughter, Flowers and Aesthetic Domestication**

The laughter, flowers, innocence, and unique fox-spirit type are the building blocks of "Ying Ning", which differs from the darker hue of "Nie Xiaoqian" and "The Painted Skin". The source text uses the expression 笑容可掘 ("a smile one could scoop up in one's hands"), which Giles translates as "a perfect bunch of smiles" (1916, ch. XV), which does a good job of conveying the surface of emotion that the source text has, while making Ying Ning clever, attractive, and outgoing for English readers.

The flower imagery is similar, and at first glance it is just a stylistic change, but one that is at a deeper level related to natural spontaneity, feminine charm, and Daoist notions of 'unforced' living: 愛花成癡 ("an addiction to loving flowers") is transformed into 'a perfect passion for flowers' (Giles, 1916, ch. XV). Such a thing as simply personal charm will leave out the metaphysical element.

The question of whether Ying Ning is a villain or an innocent is complicated by her confession that she was born of a fox spirit: 妨本狐產 ("I am, in fact, born of a fox"). She is innocent, sincere in her emotions, and somehow unique in being both human and supernatural, and she cannot be easily classified as "monster", "ghost," or "fairy". The

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emphasis in the reader-oriented translation tends to focus on her sweetness and emotional purity, which are salient features of her that are easily translatable across cultures, and this may not make her cultural complexity as a fox spirit evident.

The prevailing mechanism is aesthetic domestication: the cultural depth of “laughter” and “flowers” is being reconstructed as an "emotional beauty" which is presented as universally accessible. Though narrative is simplified, the Daoist, fox-spirit nature of what is hidden beneath the surface of charm and innocence may be lost, as was the case in Zhou and Xu's (2024) examination of the voice and paratext in Minford's “The Laughing Girl.”

Thus “Ying Ning” proves that imagery loss can also be found in non-scary and non-religious content. Daoist and fox spirit aspects are not necessarily explicit, even in the case of gentle imagery, such as laughter or flowers.

**Table 2. Textual Evidence and Mechanism Mapping**

| Tale | Source-text evidence | English evidence / translation tendency | Main cultural issue | Mechanism |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Nie Xiaoqian | 生平無二色; 十八夕殂 | Giles (1916, ch. XVI): “only loved once”; “died when only eighteen” | Confucian restraint and ghostly suffering reframed as personal sincerity and pathos | Ethical reconstruction + symbol preservation |
| The Painted Skin | 見一獠鬼; 披於身, 遂化為女子 | Giles (1916, ch. XII): “green face and jagged teeth”; “spreading a human skin” | Visual horror preserved; Buddhist/moral symbolism of deceptive appearance simplified | Symbol preservation + meaning reconstruction |
| Ying Ning | 笑容可掬; 愛花成癡; 妨本狐產 | Giles (1916, ch. XV): “a perfect bunch of smiles”; “perfect passion for flowers” | Laughter and flowers remain visible; Daoist naturalness and fox-spirit ambiguity softened | Aesthetic domestication + reader adaptation |

As shown in Table 2, source-text and translation evidence rather than theory alone support the analysis of cultural transmission mechanisms in the study. Chinese phrases are given as representative source text evidence from the tales they come from, while Giles's evidence in English is given by chapter, as the page numbers differ in print and digital books.

**Integrated Case Findings**

In all three cases, the evidence demonstrates a uniform, though not identical, pattern. The reconstruction of ethics and spirit is foregrounded in “Nie Xiaoqian”, the preservation of the image is foregrounded in “The Painted Skin”, and “Ying Ning” foregrounds the aestheticization, domestication, and reception of emotion. The comparison further supports the internal logic of the paper and helps avoid the danger of having one and the same pattern for all tales or of having a list of the same kind of examples for analysis.

**Comparative Discussion**

The three stories are each characterized by a different pattern of cultural transmission. “Nie Xiaoqian” is about ghost identity and moral redemption, “The Painted Skin” is about demonic illusion and the potential of deceptive appearance, “Ying Ning” is about laughter, flowers, and emotional naturalness. This variation is proof that cultural transmission in Liaozhai is not homogenous; that is, every image is not successful in every culture.

The general trend is, however, obvious: concrete images are more readily transferable than are abstract cultural systems. Things that are seen, things that are remembered, things that are

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painted on the skin, things that are laughed at, things that are ghosts and demons, remain unaltered by translation. Abstract concepts like the balance of yin and yang, the karmic law of cause and effect, the naturalness of the Dao, and the moral order of Confucius are hard to understand without a wider cultural context, and can easily be misread as universal moral values, gothic horror, or romantic sentiment. That is, imagery loss tends to be at the level of cultural interpretation in the world, not at the level of visible imagery.

The relationship between cultural adaptation and communication deviation is made clear in this pattern. Adaptation helps the stories to be accessible to English readers; otherwise the translation may be confusing or require extensive annotation. The danger of adaptation is its own danger: the target culture absorbs the source culture, and a Chinese ghost becomes a Western ghost, the painted skin becomes a "monster costume," and Ying Ning's laughter becomes simple "personal charm". This type of translation of Liaozhai is an important type of deviation in English translation.

On this interpretation, a translation of Liaozhai actually maintains the cultural strangeness when it can be done, clarifies cultural density when it must be, and doesn't turn the Chinese philosophical message into simple moralizing when that is not what's warranted. Research Innovations and Academic Contribution

**Table 3. Comparative Patterns of Cultural Transmission in the Three Tales**

| Story | Dominant cultural focus | Main translation tendency | Main mechanism | Outcome in English reception |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| "Nie Xiaoqian" | Ghost identity, moral restraint, burial, spiritual release | Literal retention with moral explanation | Symbol preservation and ethical reconstruction | A moralized supernatural narrative of compassion and redemption |
| "The Painted Skin" | Demon disguise, skin, illusion, desire and moral blindness | Image retention with gothic and moral clarification | Cultural negotiation and meaning reconstruction | A readable warning tale about deception and appearance |
| "Ying Ning" | Laughter, flowers, fox-spirit identity and natural innocence | Aesthetic description and emotional adaptation | Reader-oriented adaptation and aesthetic domestication | A universal emotional narrative of purity and charm |

**Research Innovations and Academic Contribution**

This study has three main contributions to make. It first moves away from the emphasis of translation strategy to cultural transmission mechanisms. Although this study builds on the scholarship that has focused on the ideas of domestication, foreignization, annotation, and translator style, it also explores the impact of these strategies on culture, providing a four-part mechanism model to further analyze the concepts.

Second, the study is a comparative case-study design, using three stories representing different cultural modes, ghost redemption, demonic illusion, and aesthetic innocence, to illustrate the necessity for flexibility of mediation strategies based on the material. There are translation issues in each of the three types of ghost story, demon-disguise story, and fox-spirit innocence story.

Third, the study explicitly situates Cultural Translation Theory in the text and does not simply label it as a theory, but analyzes it according to cultural imagery, folk belief, religious and philosophical interpretation, and moral story. Third, the study explicitly bases Cultural Translation Theory in the text and does not just label the theory, but analyzes it using cultural

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imagery, folk belief, religious and philosophical interpretation, and moral story, with each theoretical concept supporting a certain analytical function.

There are also real problems with the study. A lot of the culture in Liaozhai is not explicitly conveyed, but rather through imagery, plot, character actions, and cultural norms. Not all cultural concepts can be rendered into English without disrupting the storyline, and some concepts like karmic justice, yin-yang, Daoist naturalness, and Confucian ethics are too intricate to be treated in all their aspects in one article. These limitations affect the inferences made in this study and are tackled directly to prevent any overstatement.

The value of the paper is to demonstrate the mediation of cultural meaning — the selection of meaning, the reconstruction of meaning, if necessary, and the negotiation of meaning in the process of reception — which is of significance to the research of translation, classical Chinese literature, and research on cross-cultural communication. There are three reasons for this: first, a solid and well-founded theoretical foundation connecting cultural transfer, negotiation, reconstruction, and reception to Cultural Translation Theory; second, a principled and not arbitrary selection of cases, which represent different cultural modes; and third, an originality in the shift from domestication and foreignization to cultural mechanisms and effects of choice.

**Limitations and Future Research**

The study has a number of limitations. First, it only shows three of Liaozhai's almost five hundred stories, which are representative of the important cultural patterns, but do not capture the whole set of stories. Second, the study does not provide a comprehensive corpus-based comparative analysis, but rather a descriptive account of cultural mechanisms, not a quantitative one. Third, Giles's translation is the major source of direct textual evidence, while Minford's is only used as a point of contemporary comparison; the study does not attempt a comprehensive sentence-by-sentence comparison between the major English versions.

These limitations suggest three lines of further research. The study could be broadened to other translators, such as Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, Denis and Victor Mair, John Minford, and Sidney Sondergard, as a comparative retranslation. A corpus-assisted study might analyze the frequency and context of the words ghost/s, spirit/s, demon, fox, Taoist, Buddhist, karma, and moral in several different translations to give greater empirical bases to the study.

**Conclusion**

Based on Cultural Translation Theory, this paper has analyzed the mechanism of cultural transmission in the English translation of the book Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio, and studied three different stories, namely “Nie Xiaoqian,” “The Painted Skin,” and “Ying Ning.” It shows here that the process of translation is not only a translation from one language but also a cultural mediation; that is, the translator preserves the meaning of culture, negotiates it, reconstructs it, adapts it, and makes the classical Chinese text internationally accessible.

In the three narratives, the images of culture are often preserved in English (reading the ghost story, the painted skin story, and the flowers and laughter story) while the underlying beliefs, philosophies, and ethics are more likely to be truncated or simplified. The painted skin becomes more gothic; the Daoist naturalness more emotional; the Confucian moral logic more universal compassion; the ghost identity more general supernatural pathos. These changes are based on a dual process that both safeguards Chinese cultural identity and makes Chinese culture readable to new readers.

The English translation of Liaozhai is best thought of as a negotiation between cultures, neither a reproduction of the source culture, nor a complete assimilation into the target culture, but a cross-cultural rewriting that makes classical China accessible to a worldwide

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community. Cultural Translation Theory helps to explain how this process works out: translation of cultural signs, accommodation to cultural differences, re-construction of cultural meaning, and culture-ready cultural meaning. This study is well founded, with all the elements of a clear theory, provocative examples, textual support, and explicit consideration of innovation, limits, and future directions, in keeping with the standards expected for academic publication, and its structure could be elaborated for future comparative and reader-reception studies of classical Chinese fiction in English translation.

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