

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Reception of Giles' and Minford's English Translation of *Liaozhai Zhiyi*: A Sentiment Analysis Perspective

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Abstract:

The overseas reception of the Chinese literary classic *Liaozhai Zhiyi* (*Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*) is largely related to readers' attitudes toward different translations of the classic. The evaluation of readers' attitudes toward the English translations can help researchers probe the reception of the novel in the English world. Based on Python, sentiment analysis is applied into the study of readers' reviews from Amazon and Goodreads on two most-read English translations: Herbert Giles' and John Minford's translations. This article finds that *Liaozhai Zhiyi* is well received in the English world due to three main factors. First, the book, composed of diverse short stories, caters to different readers' preferences. Second, the Chinese elements in the stories meet the needs of readers' curiosity about Chinese culture and customs. Lastly, Minford's well-crafted translation and comprehensive peritexts facilitate the acceptance of the book. This article argues that Giles' relatively rigid translation, outdated peritexts, and clumsy formatting may hinder its acceptance.

Keywords: *Liaozhai Zhiyi*, readers' reviews, sentiment analysis, reception

1. Introduction

Sentiment Analysis, also called Opinion Mining or Comment Mining, is one of the most prominent branches of natural language processing. It deals with the text classification to determine the intention of the text. The intention can be of admiration (positive) or criticism (negative) type (Tripathy et al. 2015: 821). With the constant development of reading terminals, more and more readers tend to post real-time reviews on relevant works through professional online platforms. As platforms for readers to buy books and share their reading experiences, professional book-selling and book-reviewing websites contain a large number of readers' reviews. This subjective information more or less contains the readers' emotional orientation, expressing their reading taste for certain works. By analyzing these reviews with specific tools, it is easy to find out how well different readers accept the same work.



As one of the best collections of short stories in classical Chinese, *Liaozhai Zhiyi* enjoys a good reputation worldwide. Ma Ruifang (2001), a famous expert on *Liaozhai Zhiyi*, once pointed out that “Among the classics of Chinese literature, *Liaozhai Zhiyi* has been translated into the most foreign languages.” Among all translations, English translations not only make the largest percentage but also have the biggest impact in the world (Sun 2016: preface). On Amazon, the largest e-commerce platform, and Goodreads, a book review website, there are 12 English translations of *Liaozhai Zhiyi*. Herbert Allen Giles’ version (1880) and John Minford’s version (2006) are reviewed by 34 and 189 readers respectively, with a total of 5,396 and 19,160 English words, far more than other translations’ reviews in total. Liu (2020: xi) held:

“opinion and sentiment and the related concepts, such as evaluation, appraisal, attitude, affect, emotion, and mood, are about people’s subjective feelings and beliefs. They are central to human psychology and are key influencers of people’s behaviors. People’s beliefs and perceptions of reality, as well as the choices they make, are to a considerable degree conditioned on how others see and perceive the world. For this reason, people’s views of the world are very much influenced by others’ views. Whenever people need to decide, they often seek out others’ opinions.”

When choosing the English translations of Chinese literary works to read, the potential readers may first read others’ reviews on these translations to decide whether to read them or not. There is a reasonable prospect that these reviews on the content, translation quality, and peritexts of the two most-read English versions of *Liaozhai Zhiyi* will be important factors influencing some readers’ choices. Hence, it will be of great significance to clarify readers’ reception of the two translations of *Liaozhai Zhiyi*. On the one hand, the publisher can choose and publish the stories in *Liaozhai Zhiyi* that attract Western readers in accordance with readers’ positive reviews on the themes and content of the book. On the other hand, translators can make further revisions of their translations and peritexts according to readers’ feedback, with an attempt to improve reading experience and facilitate *Liaozhai Zhiyi* and other classical Chinese literature going out. For these reasons, this paper uses sentiment analysis technique to mine readers’ sentiments and attitudes on the two translations, and examine the readers’ reception of the two English versions, with a view to provide insights for the retranslation of this classical Chinese work.

2. Literature Review

Text sentiment analysis can be applied to harmful information filtering, social public opinion analysis, product real-time online tracking and product quality evaluation, movie and book reviews, blog reputation monitoring, news report reviews, event analysis, stock reviews, book recommendations, hostile message detection, enterprise intelligence analysis and so on. Nowadays, there has been a surge of research on text sentiment all over the world. Many research teams, scientific research institutions, and companies have carried out research on text sentiment (Zhu 2015: 4). A few scholars and research teams have focused on literary text sentiment analysis. Jacobs et al. (2016b) analyzed factors shaping poetry reception at multiple levels. The results are in line with all three hypotheses: the multilevel hypothesis, the mood empathy hypothesis, and the aesthetic trajectory hypothesis, and raise several questions for future research on poetry reception. Jacobs (2019) found that an easy-to-compute lexical



text feature (valence) can very well predict a complex human performance, for instance, when readers rate whether a text (segment) is “fearful,” “happy,” or “neutral.” In doing so they rely implicitly or explicitly on a great number of interacting lower and higher-level text features that cannot all easily be computed, but, at least in some contexts, approximated well enough. Jacobs et al. (2020) tested the prediction—children and youth literature (CYL) should also show a Pollyanna effect—applying an unsupervised vector space model-based sentiment analysis tool called SentiArt (Jacobs, 2019) to two CYL corpora. Their sentiment analysis results support the findings reported by Dodds et al. (2015), showing that international classical and contemporary CYL generally exhibits the Pollyanna principle as hypothesized by Boucher and Osgood. A thorough review of relevant literature shows that rarely are there Western scholars paying attention to sentiment analysis of Chinese literary texts or reviews on translations of Chinese literature.

In essence, the English translation of literary works is a kind of commodity. As a commodity, there must be consumer feedback, that is, reader reviews. If experts want to figure out the dissemination of an English translation of a Chinese literary work, sentiment analysis techniques can be used to assess readers’ reviews of the translation. Zhang (2019: 80-86) wrote the paper *Python Sentiment Analysis Based Reception and Criticism on English Translations of Chinese Literature: Taking the Three Body Problem as an Example*, which opens a door for Chinese scholars to do research on book reviews with sentiment analysis techniques. Her study shows that Chinese literature will be well received and appreciated by Westerners only if they are expressing both cosmopolitanism and nationalism. Shi and Deng (2020: 58-66) analyzed the readers’ comments on *Happy Dreams* by Jia Pingwa on Amazon. Their study shows that Western readers have positive attitudes toward the Chinese regional culture conveyed by some local-culture-loaded words, but hold negative views on others. Based on the examples in *Happy Dreams*, they discovered that the translation of some local-culture-loaded words did not convey the original meaning equivalently, which is the main reason for readers’ criticism. Shi and Deng (2020: 91-96) analyzed the readers’ online reviews of eleven English versions of Mo Yan’s novels, quantified their sentiments and attitudes, sorted out their representative comments, and explored their acceptance of Mo Yan. The results show an overall acceptance of Mo Yan’s novels among Western readers and the acceptance attitudes are: positive attitude 76.5%, negative attitude 18.84%, and neutral attitude 4.66%.

The attempts of the above scholars show that sentiment analysis techniques can be applied to examine the emotional attitude of English readers toward specific Chinese literary works and reveal the reception of the literary works in the English world, crystallizing the successful translation and dissemination and the lessons drawn from some unsuccessful points. A close reading of the research by Chinese and international scholars shows that few scholars use text sentiment analysis techniques to study readers’ reception of English translation of classical Chinese literature. *Liaozhai Zhiyi*, one of the best classical Chinese *Zhiguai* (Minford calls it the Weird Account which might best be described as a pithy narrative of some strange events, a laconic record of some grotesque creature, of a haunting, a bizarre person, a peculiar phenomenon or coincidence) novels well-known to Chinese people, has also been introduced to many other countries. Its reception outside China, however, remains unknown. Thus it is necessary to examine how English (as a lingua franca in many parts of the world) readers see *Liaozhai Zhiyi* and its two most-read translations by analyzing their reviews using sentiment analysis



technique. It is anticipated that the findings with regard to readers' reception of "different figures", "storyline" "subject of story", "translation quality" and "peritexts" will contribute to the retranslation and the dissemination of this classical Chinese novel in the English world.

3. The Two Translators and their Translations

3.1 Giles and *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*

Herbert A. Giles (1845-1935) was an English scholar of Chinese language and culture, who helped to popularize the Wade-Giles system for the romanization of the Chinese languages. Educated at Charterhouse School, London, Giles joined the consular service and spent the years 1867–92 in various posts in China. Upon his return, he lived in Aberdeen until 1897, when he was appointed professor of Chinese at the University of Cambridge, succeeding Sir Thomas Francis Wade; he retained the chair until 1932.

Giles can be considered a scholar who has a deep understanding of Chinese history and culture in both Victorian and present times. Over the years he published a variety of books on Chinese language and culture that were popular into the second half of the 20th century, including *Chinese Without a Teacher* (1872), *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* (1880), *Gems of Chinese Literature* (1884), *A Chinese Biographical Dictionary* (1898), *A History of Chinese Literature* (1901), *An Introduction to the History of Chinese Pictorial Art* (1905; 2nd ed. 1918), and *The Civilization of China* (1911). His *Chinese-English Dictionary* (1892; 2nd ed. 1912) firmly established the Wade-Giles romanization system, which had been developed by Wade. Wade-Giles remained the most popular system for English-speaking scholars until the official promulgation of Pinyin in 1979. *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* was published by Thos. De la Rue in London in 1880. Giles admitted in the introduction of his translation that his purpose of translating the book is on the one hand to arouse somewhat deeper interest than is usually taken in the affairs of China; and, on the other, to correct at any rate some of the erroneous views, too frequently palmed off by inefficient and disingenuous workers, and too readily accepted as fact. The translation was reprinted many times, and the latest version was published by Tuttle Publishing House in 2010.

3.2 Minford and *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*

John Minford, born in 1946, is a sinologist and literary translator. He is primarily known for his translations of Chinese classics such as *The Story of the Stone* (《红楼梦》) and *The Art of War* (《孙子兵法》). John's recent work includes a translation of the famous Chinese divination text, the *I Ching*, published in October 2014, and a new version of the *Tao Te Ching* published in December 2018.

John Minford was educated at Winchester College and Balliol College, Oxford, where he graduated in 1968 with a first-class honors degree in Chinese Studies. Over the subsequent 15 years, he worked closely with David Hawkes on the Penguin Classics version of the 18th century novel *The Story of the Stone*, translating the last forty chapters. He went to Canberra in 1977 and studied for his PhD under the late Liu Ts'un-yan (柳存仁). He went on to translate for Penguin a selection from Pu Songling's *Strange Tales* (《聊斋志异》) in 1999. In 2006, his translation titled "*Strange Tales from a Chinese*



Studio” was published by Penguin Books. Minford once said in the introduction of his translation, that he appreciated the translation of Giles’, but after careful study, he believed that Giles’ translation was full of the bond of the Victorian era, especially Giles’ adaptation of erotic description in the original text. He decided to translate these erotic descriptions the way they were presented. Minford also has followed two modern editions: that of Zhang Youhe (1962; many times reprinted), which adheres to what he considers to have been something close to the author’s original order, collating several traditional texts and commentators; and the more recent edition of Zhu Qikai (1989), which paraphrases into modern Chinese the old glosses, adding valuable new matter from time to time.

4. Research Design

4.1 Date collection

On March 30, 2022, by using Python, reviews on Amazon and Goodreads about Giles’ and Minford’s English translation of *Liaozhai Zhiyi* were collected. Giles’ translation got 14 and 20 reviews on Amazon and Goodreads respectively, while Minford’s got 63 and 120 ones respectively. 217 comments were sorted and put in a xlsx file in the order of ID, rank, brief comments, nations, time, and content as shown in Figure 1. Reviews on two translations were saved as two docx files separately for research.

1	ID	Rank	Breif Comment	Nation	Time	Content
2	BAZZ	5.0/5	DELIGHTFUL & MAGICAL	U.K.	2022	Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio by Pu Songling (1640-1715) is a delightful book of short, some very very short, stories- "Here in the civilized world, Strange events by far occur..." of vixens, fox-spirits that have imbued the Chinese male imagination for centuries, angels, ghosts, thumb sized humans, dragons, snakes, sultry concubines, erotic encounters, poets, dreamers, Taoist priests, warriors, and much more..... with beautiful lithographs as illustrations, one for each of the stories, from the publication printed in Shanghai in 1886. The translation by John Minford is excellent, as is his highly informative Forward.
3	Cooper Sharp	5.0/5	Excellent Collection of Chinese Stories	U.S.	2021	Delightful collection of short stories for anybody interested in old Chinese literature or simply looking for strange stories to enjoy during moments of relaxation. The writing style is perfect for the general reader, while included inside are a few illustrations copied from original woodblock paintings, which makes up for the rather delicate
4	Julian Waldron	5.0/5	A Collection Of Short Stories	U.K.	2021	Firstly, this was not the book I reviewed, the review of which was rejected - The Kalevala. This is a completely different book from the Orient consisting of many short tales of magic. It is illustrated, but, reading on Kindle, these are in mid-chapter and spoil the flow. An excellent book.
5	M. Abrams	5.0/5	Wonderful Chinese Folklore	U.S.	2021	A fun read of short folklore stories from rural china. Intriguing and paints a very different world that what I was expecting. Wonderful read.

Figure 1. Readers’ Reviews on Two Translations on Amazon and Goodreads

4.2 Data cleansing

The non-English reviews and Chinese characters are first deleted from the texts. Then the misspellings are proofread: “nolstagia” is changed into “nostalgia”, “stortytelling” into “storytelling”, “Thats” into “That’s”.



4.3 Sentiment analysis process

The research team downloaded Sklearn¹ in GitHub (an open-source platform) and uploaded it into Python Programmer. Afterward, Naïve Bayes Classifier² in Sklearn was applied to analyze the English reviews on *Liaozhai Zhiyi*. Pang’s labeled movie review corpus—polarity data set v2.0 was used as the training set to finally determine whether a book review is positive or negative. Polarity dataset v2.0 (3.0Mb), containing 1000 positive and 1000 negative processed reviews, was introduced by Pang/Lee. Pang and Lee (2004) indicated this dataset represents an enhancement of the review corpus v1.0. It contains more reviews, and labels were created with an improved rating-extraction system. Be it movie reviews or book reviews, they are essentially the same with regard to emotions and attitudes movie audiences or book readers express using English words. Given its reliability and applicability, polarity dataset v2.0 can be used as the basis of evaluation for book reviews to a great extent. For this study, all reviews are regarded as subjective reviews by the algorithm, and each review is endowed with a positive value and negative value, totaling 1. If the positive value is above 0.5, the review is considered a positive review. If the negative value is above 0.5, the review is considered a negative one. If the positive value is equal to the negative value, the review is seen as a neutral one (Zhang 2019, 81). The last two decimal points are retained, as in (1).

$$\text{Sentiment} = \begin{cases} \text{Qpos} & (\text{Qpos} > 0.50) \\ \text{Qneu} & (\text{Qpos} = \text{Qneg} = 0.50) \\ \text{Qneg} & (\text{Qneg} > 0.50) \end{cases} \quad (1)$$

Through the sentiment analysis of 217 reviews, the readers’ sentiments and attitudes on the two translations as a whole can be detected. To further examine the distribution of readers’ sentiments in different aspects of the novel, a detailed reading of all reviews reveals that many readers on Goodreads or Amazon express their love or hate for certain content of the novel itself and two translated texts such as “different figures”, “storyline” “subject of story” and “translation quality”. Given that the above-mentioned elements play an important role in readers’ reception of the novel, the research extracts reviews related to the above four dimensions with “character, women, men” “story, plot”, “theme, subject, motif” “translation” as lexical entries, then conducts sentiment analysis on reviews extracted to look into the readers’ sentiment on the specific parts of the novel and translation quality of the two versions.

What’s more, “peritexts” like the introduction, notes, illustrations, and formatting surrounding the two translations are also a factor that influences some readers’ reception of the book. But the reviews of peritexts are much less than reviews on the above-mentioned four factors. In addition, the words

¹ Sklearn (full name Scikit-Learn) is a machine-learning tool based on Python language. The Sklearn toolset provides the Naïve Bayes Analyzer. (Download link: <https://pypi.org/project/scikit-learn/#files>)

² The Naïve Bayes Classifier is one of the most widely used classifiers based on the Naïve Bayesian Model. It is used in this article to train the movie review data so as to produce a computational model for classifying book reviews.



these readers use to review the peritexts (see Table 3) are easy. Given that, a small amount of data will be analyzed using human intelligence.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Sentiment analysis of two translations as a whole

As shown in Figure 2, there are 199 positive reviews, 4 neutral reviews, and 14 negative reviews on these two English versions. Through calculation, the average positive emotion value is 0.84, the average negative emotion value is 0.16. It can be concluded that the two translations of *Liaozhai Zhiyi* are highly accepted by English readers.

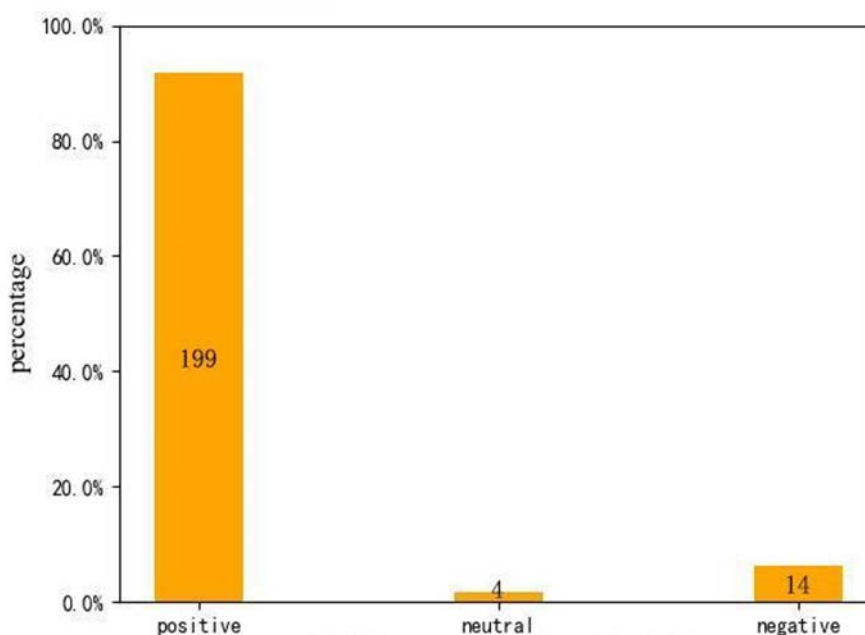


Figure 2. Sentiment Value on Two Translations as a Whole

Liaozhai Zhiyi consists of more than 400 short stories with different plots and characters. To gain an in-depth understanding of readers' sentiments and attitudes toward different aspects of *Liaozhai Zhiyi*, the research samples 199 positive reviews and extracted the top fifty high-frequency words in these reviews with Wordless (a corpus tool).

"Chinese" is the most frequently used content word except "story". Thus, it can be inferred that English readers are first attracted by Chinese elements in Pu's stories. Alison (Goodreads, 2012) commented that "The two abridged English translations of the *Liaozhai Zhiyi* unfold a brilliant and weird collection of tales to Westerners and give them a fascinating insight into Chinese folklore and superstitions." Neil (Goodreads, 2008) said "This is a very fun read. For those of you interested in Chinese culture - especially the wild and woolly stuff like fox spirits, ghosts, charlatan Buddhist monks and Taoist priests, Chinese monsters, and the like - this is a good read." Eustacia Tan (Goodreads, 2017) stated "if you're looking for Chinese folklore to read, this is worth reading at least once." As the



pinnacle of Chinese *Zhiguai* fiction, *Liaozhai Zhiyi* has attracted and will attract many overseas readers with its unique Chinese cultural elements, spreading Chinese folk stories and culture.

Besides, the stories and characters in the book are bizarre to both Chinese and international readers. According to the data, “strange” is the second most frequently used adjective in positive reviews. Thus, it can be inferred that readers are really amazed by *Liaozhai Zhiyi*. As a fiction with nearly 500 stories, *Liaozhai Zhiyi* includes Chinese and non-Chinese anecdotes both in heaven, hell and the land of the living, grotesque transformation of animals and plants as well as some odd stories about natural disasters and customs. This book is an artistic achievement which is not only Pu’s innovation of expressing self-emotion through fantasy stories but also a development of the excellent tradition of Chinese literature. Mike (Goodreads, 2011) commented “The patterns of Chinese narratives vary greatly from Western ones, despite the same universal topics of love, war, horror, wealth, and morals being the central foci of these stories.” Some stories, such as *Generosity* (《丁前溪》), are not about the supernatural or horror at all, while others take on an obviously fantastical trajectory. Vanessa (Goodreads, 2016) stated “This is indeed a collection of *strange tales*: marvelous, elaborate fairy tales; odd vignettes and anecdotes, some only a page long; morality tales and descriptive fragments, all written by scholar Pu Songling in 17th century China. In this Penguin Classic edition, translated by John Minford, Pu’s stories are told in an exquisitely mannered, delicate, elegant voice. Fox spirits and ghosts vie for the lives of hapless scholars; Taoist monks perform miracles; lovers return from the grave to meet in life after life. There’s subtle (and not so subtle) humor and melancholy.”

Finally, English readers are more interested in stories about fox spirits than any other ones. Statistics show that “fox” is the only content word related to ‘characters’ in the top 50 high-frequency words in positive reviews. T. Hooper (Amazon, 2008) acknowledged that “Most tales center around fox spirits or ghosts. They carefully explore the characteristics of some foxes and believe that fox spirits are shapeshifters that can take the form of humans. Most are malicious, using humans to create magical elixir to achieve their goals of eternal life, but some can be kind and sympathetic to the humans around them.” Mike (Goodreads, 2011) agreed that “The fox spirits that are central to several stories are also a lot of fun and a window into traditional Chinese mythos.”

5.2 Analysis of distribution of readers’ sentiments

With the help of Python, the distribution of the reviews and the average of the readers’ emotion value on characters, stories and themes of *Liaozhai Zhiyi* are gained, as shown in Figure 3.



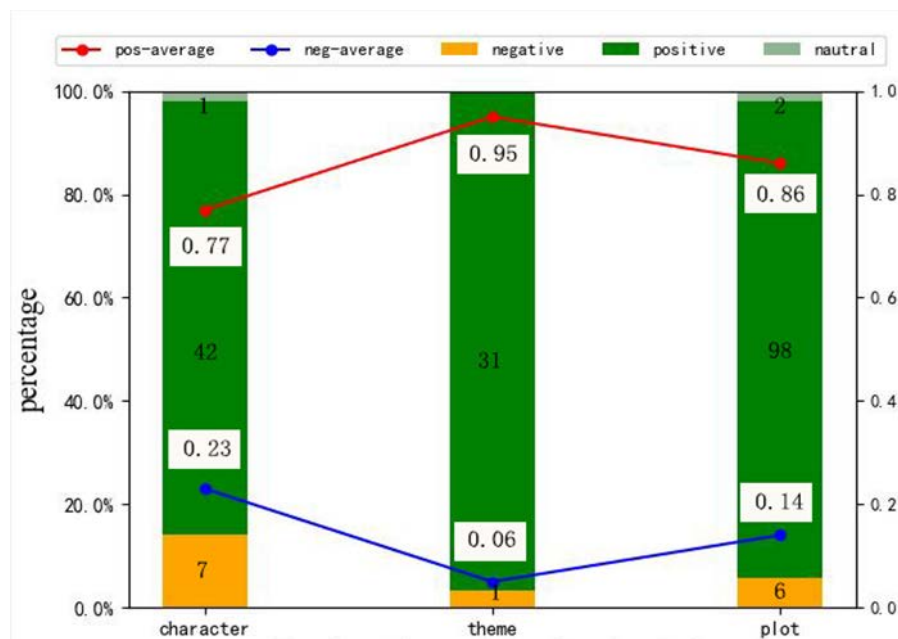


Figure 3. Distribution of the Readers' Reviews and the Average of the Readers' Sentiments on Characters, Themes and Plots of *LiaoZhai Zhiyi*

Figure 3 shows that readers are most satisfied with “theme” followed by “plot” with the pos-average reaching 0.95 and 0.86. The neg-average of “Character” is 0.23, higher than that of the other two.

The research took “character”, “women” and “men” as items, then collected the five-span words on the left and right of these items in 217 reviews using the KWIC (Key-Word-In-Context) of AntConc and sorted out the key expressions and adjectives. Adjectives and expressions about characters are “outstanding” “realistic”, “great and lovely”, “well-crafted” and the like, which indicates that characters are not only real and rich in personality, but also fit into different stories. Rare though they are, disagreements are worth paying attention to. Amazon Customer (Amazon, 2016) commented that “A collection of short stories that seem to feature ghosts, the dead, and the supernatural. No plot. No memorable characters. Probably important to read from a historical standpoint. Since the Chinese viewpoint of the supernatural is different from ours, prepare for surprises.” Helen Luo (Goodreads, 2020) wrote that “For a reader already familiar with the concepts of fox demons, pious monks, Confucian scholars and dutiful housewives (amongst an array of standard Chinese mythology tropes), the way these characters interact with each other is mostly one-dimensional and un compelling.” Other than the overall reviews on the characters, some readers also show their attitudes toward specific characters in the stories, for example, Letitia (Goodreads, 2014) expressed that “Some of these stories bring us outstanding heroes, someone to really bite your nails for and thrill about: *The Merchant's Son* 《贾儿》, *Grace and Pine* 《娇娜》, *The Magic Sword and the Magic Bag* 《聂小倩》, *Ghost Foiled, Fox Put to Rout* 《捉鬼射狐》, *The Southern Wutong Spirit* 《五通》, etc..” This article speculates that this is because in *LiaoZhai Zhiyi* Pu Songling wrote many stories featuring fox spirits and ghosts, who often transform into young and beautiful women to chase after the male protagonists, revenge on people who harmed them or just obtain the *Yangqi* (In Chinese philosophy, medicine, etc., it refers to the positive life force.) from the living to strike a balance Between *Yin* and *Yang* (The former, in Chinese



philosophy, medicine, etc., refers to the female principle of the universe, represented as dark and negative; the latter, the male principle of the universe, represented as light and positive.). In contrast, Letitia (Goodreads, 2014) pointed out that “These being more in the genre of fairy tales and mythology, they don't offer much in the way of characterization. Most protagonists are pretty ordinary men: they are lecherous (*The Painted Skin* 《画皮》, *Fox Enchantment* 《董生》, *Snake Island* 《海公子》 and countless more), greedy (*Raining Money* 《雨钱》, *Silver Above Beauty* 《沂水秀才》, *Duck Justice* 《骂鸭》), life-preserving a.k.a. cowardly, and in many ways simply mortal.” Although these reviews are negative, they, on the other hand, prove that the male characters portrayed by Pu are distinctive and leave a strong impression on readers.

Taking “story” and “plot” as items and sorting out the key expressions and adjectives on stories and plots from readers’ reviews, it is found that lots of readers regard *Liaozhai Zhiyi* as a treasure because of interesting and fascinating stories and well-conceived plots with ups and downs. Some readers deem that *Liaozhai Zhiyi* is a fabulous book. Pu fused the everyday with the supernatural and otherworldly, in an accepting and magical way. Each tale is short and told without judgment or authorial comment. They read, in fact, as modern short stories. Quite a few readers mention the stories or plots they love in reviews. Eustacia Tan (Goodreads, 2017) wrote: “As for the tales themselves, quite a few of them were very short and I didn’t really get them. I did, however, really enjoy the longer tales, especially those about foxes. Stories that I particularly enjoyed include: *The Painted Skin* (《画皮》): about a man who ‘rescues’ a beautiful girl only to find that she’s hiding a very dark secret; *Miss Yingning* (《婴宁》); or, *The Laughing Girl: a Surprisingly Happy Story* and so on.” Some readers are not satisfied with the plots in certain stories. Aarti (Goodreads, 2020) commented “Stories are somewhat repetitive and quite focused on men having their way with women and that stories are so short that there isn’t much room for character-building or plot development.” Apart from the above-mentioned demerits, some readers deem certain stories erotic and suggest that they are not appropriate for children (T. Hooper, Amazon, 2008; Rin Penner, Amazon, 2015).

Despising the evil, freeing himself from secularity, and seeking spiritual freedom, Pu Songling wrote his ideals into *Liaozhai Zhiyi*. Some chapters in the book vaguely or indirectly show the hardships of the people in the early Qing dynasty who had to endure war, some expose the drawbacks and dark side of the imperial examinations, and some praise independent marriage. Do English readers get these themes from the stories? What are their attitudes toward these themes? Taking “theme” and “motif” as items, the research retrieves and collects the main expressions on themes from readers’ reviews. In terms of themes, most readers can recognize the themes of Pu’s stories and think the book covers a wide range of themes that will interest readers. Meanwhile, plenty of readers focus on “sex” in the book. A few readers criticize the erotic description in the book. For example, Customer (Amazon, 2019) gives a brief review of Minford’s translation: “Stories of Perversion, glorified beyond comprehension - Unfathomable! Don’t buy, thank me later.” This reader then wrote specifically: “This collection is made of 104 out of the original ~500 or so Pu Songling stories, based on the ones selected here by the translator, one would either assume Pu Songling or the translator himself was a pervert with an obsession with sex, which happens to be the overriding theme of this book page after page, with the occasional few which deviate from the norm.” Some maintain a neutral attitude toward these



descriptions but are skeptical about whether they are proper for young readers to read. For instance, Rin Penner (Amazon, 2015) commented “The stories themselves are entertaining, eerie and present the reader with an interesting view of Chinese folklore and the extraordinary. Sex is a major theme, so perhaps it is not the best for younger readers.” Though criticized by some, the frank sexual descriptions in the book are also praised by some. Tom (Goodreads, 2021) wrote “That’s the beginning to the final story in this collection, but it epitomizes what any reader of this translation of the *Strange Tales* can expect throughout: opening paragraphs that sidle into their plots; simple, to-the-point sentences; plain presentation of Chinese culture - and no prevarication about sex.” Larou (Goodreads, 2017) expressed the same view: “*Strange Tales* shares another trait with that novel, namely that it is very frank about sexuality; the sex is not as explicit, but it occurs rather more often.” What’s more, Pu’s depiction of certain sexual idiosyncrasies also interests a few readers. Cory (Goodreads, 2020) said “One thing that struck me as particularly interesting—besides the whole otherworldly creatures like fox spirits and the imaginative fusion of the mundane and the supernatural—is the exploration of sexuality, especially sexual perversions and pathologies, that prevails in a lot of the tales here.”

What is worth mentioning is that all discussions about “sex” are from reviews on Minford’s translation because Giles either deleted the sex-related contents or replaced them with his own adaptation due to the limitations of the taste of his time.

5.3 Sentiment analysis on the translation quality

Among 217 reviews, 70 reviews concern the translation quality, accounting for 32% of the total reviews. It is evident that some readers also concern themselves with the translation quality. In an attempt to identify the readers’ attitudes toward the translation quality, reviews on the translation quality of two versions are collected respectively for the study. According to the analysis by Python, the distribution of the reviews and the average of the emotion value on translation quality of Giles’ and Minford’s translations are shown in Figure 4.



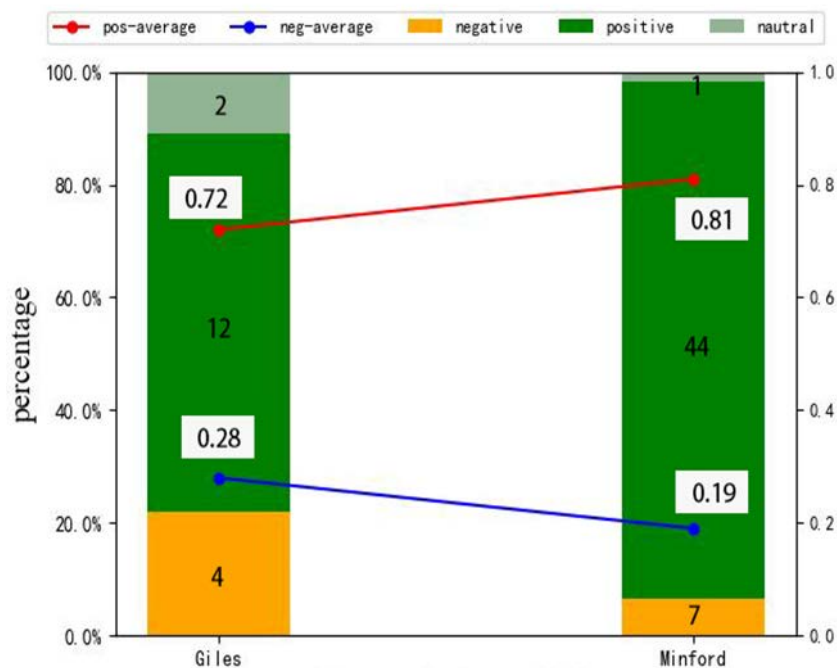


Figure 4 The Distribution of the Reviews and the Average of the Readers' Sentiments on the Translation Quality of Giles' and Minford's Translations

As shown in Figure 4, 12 reviews are positive with regards to all 18 reviews on Giles' translation and 44 reviews are positive regarding all 52 reviews on Minford's translation. It is obvious that readers' reviews of the two versions' translation quality are generally positive. Readers, however, are more satisfied with Minford's translation. To further explore readers' attitudes toward the translation quality of the two versions, the research takes "translation" as an item to retrieve and collect key expressions and adjectives on translation quality from readers' reviews.

Readers give more positive reviews on Minford's translation quality, finding his translation accurate, fluent, readable, and pleasing. Tracy (Goodreads, 2012) commented "For a translation, the style of Minford's translation is appealing, which shows the power of the original." Will (Goodreads, 2016) stated "Minford' version is the best translation edition of the book so far". Part of the readers compare the two translations carefully, concluding that the translation quality of Minford's version is better than that of Giles' version. Saïd (Goodreads, 2021) reviewed: "The Giles edition is not great; Minford himself calls the translation 'prudish'. The Minford edition is not only much more accurate to the original text but also includes many of the more potentially scandalous parts that were censored either by Giles or by contemporary publications." Anisha Inkspill (Goodreads, 2019) wrote: "This Penguin edition has 104 of the 550+ of these tales available in two volumes on Gutenberg, translated by Herbert A. Giles. The bookish in me compared the two translations between some tales, and I got to say this Minford one I connected to all the subtleties of drama and charm better. IMHO, in comparing these translations, Minford brings out the subtle tones and nuances he says are in Songling's work, Giles translation was for an audience of another time which to my modern eyes are not as smooth in reading as Minford's."



In contrast, Meghan (Goodreads, 2012) wrote “That said, I hated, hated, hated, hated the translation. I know Giles is one of the leading Chinese translators of his time. The Wade-Giles system is one people still use today. And I have no issue with his accuracy as I don’t know enough Chinese to say otherwise. That said, at least in this book, the way he translated is not how I appreciate translations. There was far too much translating not just the words, but actual meaning.” The reader’s complaints about the Giles’ translation focuses on two aspects:

There are some Western elements in the text. The point will be illustrated with a story that is translated by both Giles and Minford.

Example (1): 《考城隍》

Giles’ translation: Examination for the Post of Guardian Angel

Minford’s translation: An Otherworldly Examination

Online Etymology Dictionary explains that “angel is one of a class of spiritual beings, attendants and messengers of God,” a c. 1300 fusion of Old English *angel* (with hard -g-) and Old French *Angele*. Giles in the footnotes of his translation explained ‘Guardian Angel’ to readers: The tutelary deity of every Chinese city. It can be inferred that the image of ‘Guardian Angel’ in the Western context differs considerably from that of “城隍” in the Chinese context. The domestication strategy adopted by Giles makes the translation understandable for most English readers but loses Chinese cultural elements embodied in the source language and culture. Meghan (Goodreads, 2012) commented “This man translated this back in the 1800s, so I’m thinking a modern translation is needed here. Maybe not so much of the actual text, but at least removing the Western elements (or placing them firmly in the footnotes only).” In Minford’s translation, on the other hand, the translator translated the Chinese title as “*An Otherworldly Examination*”, based on the main content of the story. By simply using the word “otherworldly”, the translator manages to hold the reader’s attention, making readers wonder what an examination this is.

Giles’ translation uses Wade-Giles for personal names, places, etc.

Example (2): 长安士方栋，颇有才名，而佻脱不持仪节。（长安有个书生，名叫方栋，很有些才华和名气，但是为人很轻佻不守规矩。）

Giles’ translation: AT Ch’ang-ngan there lived a scholar, named Fang Tung, who though by no means destitute of ability was a very unprincipled rake,...(1880)

Giles’ translation: AT Changan there lived a scholar, named Fang Dong, who though by no means destitute of ability, was a very unprincipled rake... (new version, 2010)

Minford: In the city of Chang’an there lived a man by the name of Fang Dong, known as a gentleman of considerable accomplishments, ...

Giles’ translation published in 1880 uses Wade-Giles for all personal names and places, and the 2010 version, although improved, is still not standard modern Chinese pinyin. Minford’s version, however, uses standard modern Chinese pinyin for all names. Meghan (Goodreads, 2012) argues that “I will say that my edition, the publisher went through and changed the names of the people and places



into proper putonghua (today’s Mandarin--the official language of PR China). This at least made it easy for me to know where these stories took place. (Giles was British and the system he co-developed is based on Cantonese, which was spoken more in the South/Hong Kong. This, however, is a regional dialect and is very confusing to today’s students of the Mandarin-based official language.)”

5.4 Readers’ attitudes toward the peritexts

“Paratexts” was put forward by Gérard Genette in the late 1980s. A paratextual element, at least if it consists of a message that has taken on material form, necessarily has a location that can be situated in relation to the location of the text itself: around the text and either within the same volume or at a more respectful (or more prudent) distance. Within the same volume are such elements as the title or the preface and sometimes elements inserted into the interstices of the text, such as chapter titles or certain notes (Genette, 1997: 4-5). Genette gave the name “peritext” to this first spatial category and discussed it in Chapters 2-12 of his book *Seuil (Introduction to Paratexts)*. The distanced elements are all those messages that, at least originally, are located outside the book, generally with the help of the media (interviews, conversations) or under cover of private communications (letters, diaries, and others) (ibid.:5). This second category was called “epitext” by Genette and was dealt with in Chapters 13 and 14 of the book. According to Genette, peritext is usually within the same volume and will pose a great influence on readers, whereas epitext has distanced elements and has little influence on readers. This part focuses on the impact of the peritexts in two translations on English readers.

To make clear of readers’ attitudes toward the peritexts in the two versions, it is essential first to identify the peritexts strategies adopted by the two translators. Giles’ translation was published by Thos.de la Rue & Co. in London in 1880. *Historic China and Other Sketches* written by Giles was also published by the same company in 1882. In contrast, the peritexts in the two translations vary greatly. A conclusion may be drawn that the publishing house exerted no influence on Giles’s peritexts strategy. A close reading of Minford’s work shows that his peritexts strategy strictly abides by the Penguin norm. Apart from prefaces, introductions, and afterward, Penguin Classics translations are characterized by the extensive use of notes and appendixes, which provide a wide range of information in the form of chronology, maps, tables of weights and measures, further reading lists, glossaries of personal and place names, Chinese names and pronunciation, discussions of the works’ themes, key terms, basic concepts, and so on (Qian 2017, 305). By comparison, it is obvious that peritexts in Minford’s translation are more diverse. The peritexts strategies adopted by the two translators are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Giles’ and Minford’s Peritexts Strategies

Peritexts Types	Giles’s Version	Minford’s Version
Cover	√	√
Introduction about Author and Translator	√	√
Acknowledgments and Self Preface/Preface by others	×	√



Introduction	√	√
Notes	√	√
Illustration	×	√
Appendix	√	√

“√” means the entry is in the corresponding versions, while “×” means the opposite.

Following that, among 34 and 183 reviews on Giles’ and Minford’s translations, 9 and 56 reviews regarding peritexts in two versions are sorted out. According to the data, it is apparent that peritexts affect only some readers. This is also in line with Genette’s description (1997, 4) that “just as the presence of paratextual elements is not uniformly obligatory, so, too, the public and the reader are not unvaryingly and uniformly obligated: no one is required to read a preface (even if such freedom is not always opportune for the author), and as we will see, many notes are addressed only to certain readers.” The number of readers’ reviews on different types of peritexts in the two translations is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The Number of Readers’ Reviews on Peritexts in Two Translations and the Percentage of Peritexts Reviews to Total Reviews

Peritexts Types	Giles’ Trans.	Percentage of Peritexts Reviews to Total Reviews	Minford’s Trans.	Percentage of Peritexts Reviews to Total Reviews
Notes/Footnotes	6	17.6%	31	16.9%
Introduction	0	0	32	17.5%
Illustration	0	0	18	9.8%
Format	3	9%	0	0
Format	1	3%	0	0
Total	9	26%	56	30.6%

Next, using “introduction”, “footnotes”, “annotations”, “illustration”, “forward” and “notes” as lexical items, the KWIC (key-word-in-context) tool in AntConc was used to retrieve the five collocations in the left and right sides of lexical items, and the key collocations were collected and sorted out, as shown in Table 3.



Table 3. Key collocations in Peritexts of Giles' and Minford's translations

Expression Types	Giles' Trans.	Minford's Trans.
Positive Expressions	highly informative/generous/ valuable/wonderful/interesting/outstanding/ interesting/extensive/wonderful/invaluable and even amusing/enjoyable striking/ beautiful highly informative	comprehensive/interesting /helpful
Neutral Expressions	/	placid
Negative Expressions	highly informative/generous/ valuable/wonderful/interesting/outstanding/ interesting/extensive/wonderful/invaluable and even amusing/enjoyable striking/ beautiful highly informative	outdated; badly formatted; small/poorly formatted; hilarious/clumsy

As is shown in Table 3, readers make positive, neutral, and negative reviews for peritexts in Giles' translation while making positive and negative reviews for those in Minford's translation. It is clear that some readers are influenced by peritexts in the two translations. The "introduction", "footnotes/notes/annotations" and "illustration" have the greatest impact on readers. Nigel Jackson (Amazon, 2012), Alwynne (Goodreads, 2012) and Anisha Inkspill (Goodreads, 2019) all agree that illustrations, an outstanding introduction by the translator Minford, glossary, bibliography, and extensive background notes on most tales add to the fullness of the reading experience. Bucky K (Amazon, 2013) wrote, "Minford's version is a very enjoyable and readable English translation with wonderful background notes and annotations. The background info alone in this book is worth the purchase." Ming Yen PHAN (Goodreads, 2018) said, "the annotation, scholarship and notes in Minford's translation certainly enrich the reading experience and provides a historical and literary context to the stories." Gabrielle (Goodreads, 2019) reviewed, "John Minford, as translator and editor was up to the job of placing these short stories of the Supernatural and Strange their proper context, no small feat. His explanation of later commentaries and thoughtful translation of the author's prologue poem were very useful in understanding the world these tales emerged from. The reproductions of late 19th century woodcuts for each of over a hundred stories was a real bonus, making this edition truly enjoyable." Based on the above reviews, a conclusion can be made that peritexts in Minford's translation have a more positive impact on readers. In contrast, only a few readers believe that the footnotes in Giles' translation are comprehensive, interesting, and helpful. Elizabeth Bennet (Goodreads, 2020) commented, "Keep in mind that Giles' notes are a bit outdated as regards to political correctness though." HK (Amazon, 2021) pointed out, "Giles provides a short bio of himself as an introduction before his biography of Pu Singling. The intro and the stories are poorly formatted. Multi-page tales are one continuous paragraph. There are also no page numbers. If the reader can endure these inconveniences this print edition is acceptable,"

Generally, readers' positive reviews on the peritexts in Minford's translation are far more than that in Giles' translation, and there are more negative reviews on the peritexts in Giles' translation than that



in Minford's. It can be inferred that readers are far more satisfied with peritexts in Minford's translation. Readers are most concerned with the notes, introductions, and illustrations in both versions.

6. Conclusion

In terms of the two translations of *Liaozhai Zhiyi*, readers' reviews are mostly positive. Negative reviews include: (1) There are erotic descriptions in Giles' translation that perhaps are not the best for younger readers. (2) Giles' translation is hard to understand; (3) Giles' notes are a bit outdated as regards to political correctness and Giles' translation is in a clumsy format. Although some demerits are in the two translations, it is undeniable that the two translations are well received by most readers. This article attributes the acceptance of the book by English readers to the following four factors.

First, the book amounts to nearly five hundred items of greatly varying lengths, from short anecdotes and jottings to fully-fledged stories, on a wide variety of "strange" themes. The stories with different themes and dramatic plots will certainly attract a great number of readers. Giles and Minford in their translations respectively choose 164 and 104 stories they thought fox are representative, which basically show English readers the various subjects in *Liaozhai Zhiyi*. Stories about the fox spirits are most welcomed by readers. Second, Pu Songling, the author of these extraordinary tales, was born in the summer of 1640, four years before the final collapse of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) and the arrival of the Manchu conquerors from the north. From the age of nineteen to the age of seventy-two he was a perpetual student, locked into the "examination hell" of the Chinese civil service recruitment system. His failure as a Mandarin was a source of deep personal disappointment, but it did at least leave him with ample leisure for traveling, reading, and writing. Due to a wealth of life experiences, his version is full of Chinese cultural elements which also become one of the important factors making the translations favored by readers. Third, considerable peritexts in the two translations offer readers auxiliary material to appreciate Chinese customs and culture in each story and grasp the implications behind each one. Fourth, Minford's translation is highly praised by readers because Minford does a good job of capturing the essence of the language while tailoring it sufficiently for a modern readership.

Over the years, *Liaozhai Zhiyi* has been translated into English by different translators at different times. Among these translations, Minford's version is the most popular one according to our findings. It is hoped that later translators when deciding to retranslate this classical Chinese novel, can refer to our findings regarding the translation quality and peritexts of the two versions so as to know what kind of translation most readers like. This article believes that quality translation, together with appropriate promotion, will make this Chinese classic known to more readers worldwide.

This article, however, is not flawless. In terms of the movie review corpus used, it is proved by some Chinese researchers that the corpus can be used as training data to determine whether a book review is positive or negative. This study on the one hand confirms to a great extent the corpus's applicability in sentiment analysis of book reviews, on the other hand finds its limitations. The analyzer, with the movie review corpus as the reference, gives the wrong sentiment value to a few English reviews on the two translations. This situation may be caused by the limited amount of reviews the corpus contains. In 2004, Pang and Lee, the developers of the corpus, updated the corpus from v 1.0 to v2.0 which contains more reviews. Ever since, the corpus was not expanded again. It is strongly believed that the more



reviews the corpus includes, the more accurate the rating the analyzer will produce for sentiment analysis of book reviews.

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