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The Erosion of Cultural Essence: Translating Mythical Cultural Terms in Classical Chinese Folk Novels

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the challenges and implications of translating mythical cultural terms from the Chinese classical literary work *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*. Drawing on the theoretical framework of cultural loss and compensation, this study employs a comparative analysis of two selected English translations by Herbert Giles and John Minford to identify and evaluate the compensation methods used and their impact on preserving cultural essence. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive methodology, this research analyzes selected stories featuring mythical beings, focusing on the translation of specific cultural terms and the use of annotations and contextual explanations. The study examines the extent to which cultural subtleties are preserved or lost in translation, evaluating the effectiveness of compensation methods and their implications for readers' cultural understanding. By examining the translators' choices and their influence on the portrayal of mythical beings, the study aims to provide insights into how cultural subtleties are either preserved or eroded in the translation process. Key findings indicate that while some translations strive to maintain the original cultural essence through careful annotation and contextualization, others prioritise readability and accessibility, leading to significant cultural loss. The paper concludes with recommendations for translators and scholars to enhance cultural preservation in literary translations and suggests directions for future research. This study contributes to the broader discourse on the translation of classical Chinese literature, highlighting the importance of cultural fidelity in translating mythical beings and the role of translators in shaping cultural understanding and appreciation.

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Keywords: *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*; Mythical Cultural Terms; Cultural Loss in Translation; Compensation Methods; Literary Translation

1. Introduction

Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio^[1, 2], or *Liao Zhai Zhi Yi*, is a renowned classical literary work written by Pu Songling (1640–1715 AD) during the Qing dynasty (1644–1911 AD). This classic collection comprises 491 supernatural stories, anecdotes, and folklore. These tales ridicule corrupt officialdom and expose societal darkness in early Qing society, celebrated for their rich cultural heritage, vivid storytelling, and unique fusion of fantasy and reality^[3]. Pu Songling, renowned for his literary talent, knowledge of folklore, and empathy for the common folk, channels his unfulfilled aspirations and critiques of the establishment through these stories^[4]. The original work's use of scholarly language, interspersed with abundant literary and historical references, presents readers with interpretative challenges. "It's really a crystallisation of shared wisdom"^[5].

Liao Zhai Zhi Yi has been translated into many languages, including Japanese, English, French, German, Russian, and many more, reflecting its international acclaim and the universal appeal of its unique blend of supernatural elements, romance, and social commentary^[6]. It has also been adapted into various art forms, including stage plays, films, and TV shows, both in China and internationally, further highlighting its cultural significance. It offers a window into the social, moral, and philosophical aspects of Chinese society during the Qing dynasty. Despite its widespread appeal, translating such a richly layered text presents significant challenges, particularly in preserving the cultural essence embedded in its mythical terms. Translation studies, ethno-linguistics, linguoculturology and the related fields offer their ways to solve issues related to languages and cultures, interlingual barriers and deviations, etc^[7]. Translators must ensure that both the denotative meaning of the lexeme and the cultural component of the word meaning are accurately reflected in the target text^[8]. This necessity has drawn the attention of researchers and translators to the procedures of rendering specific cultural information encoded in the words.

The translation of mythical cultural terms, such as those related to ghosts, demons, and immortals, is particularly

complex. These terms are deeply intertwined with Chinese customs, beliefs, and historical context, making it challenging to find exact equivalents in English without significant cultural loss. Translation loss refers to the loss of information, meaning, pragmatic function, cultural factors, aesthetic forms, and their functions during the translation process. Translation loss is inevitable^[9]. Due to the different linguistic lineages of English and Chinese, with one belonging to the Indo-European language family and the other to the Sino-Tibetan language family, there are significant differences and asymmetries between the two languages. During the translation process, loss of meaning is common and unavoidable. These differences often lead to various forms of cultural loss, underscoring the inherent challenges in accurately conveying the subtle cultural subtleties between the two languages. Consequently, the rich cultural essence and nuanced meanings embedded in the original text are often diluted or lost in translation.

At the lexical level, the loss occurring during the translation process is also concealed. The semantics of vocabulary in the source and target languages are mostly not completely equivalent. This non-equivalence is often masked by the apparent fixed equivalents in bilingual dictionaries or textbook vocabulary lists. In reality, the meanings of source language words in dictionaries are not as accurate and clear as those indicated by the target language words^[9]. These differences often lead to various forms of cultural loss, highlighting the inherent challenges in accurately conveying the subtle cultural subtleties between the two languages.

Existing research on the cultural loss and compensation methods in the translation of the classic folk literature work *Liao Zhai Zhi Yi* is insufficient. While there is a broad recognition of the challenges in translating Chinese classical literature, specific studies focusing on mythical cultural terms and their translation are limited. This research gap presents an opportunity to explore the compensation methods used in the translation of these terms by comparing two prominent English versions of *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* by Herbert Giles^[1] and John Minford^[2].

This study aims to address this gap by identifying and

evaluating the strategies used to compensate for cultural loss in these translations and assessing their effectiveness in preserving the cultural essence of the original text. By conducting a comparative analysis of selected stories featuring mythical beings, this research focuses on the translation of specific cultural terms and the strategies employed by the translators to convey the cultural context and subtleties of the original text. The study examines the extent to which cultural subtleties are preserved or lost in translation, evaluating the effectiveness of compensation methods and their implications for readers' cultural understanding.

1.1. Research Questions

This study is guided by several key questions:

- a) How are mythical cultural terms translated in these English versions?
- b) To what extent are cultural subtleties preserved or lost in these translations?
- c) What compensation methods do the translators employ to maintain cultural fidelity?

1.2. Research Objectives

Based on the research questions, the objectives of the research are to analyse the translation methods used, evaluate the preservation of cultural subtleties, and assess the compensation methods employed by the translators.

By comparing these translations, this research aims to provide insights into how translation strategies can mitigate cultural loss and enhance cultural fidelity in literary translations. This study will contribute to a deeper understanding of how translation strategies can preserve the cultural essence of classical Chinese literature, offering recommendations for translators and scholars to enhance cultural preservation in literary translations. It also suggests directions for future research in the field of translation studies, particularly in translating culturally rich literary works.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition and Characteristics of Mythical Cultural Terms

2.1.1. General Definition of Cultural Terms

A cultural term refers to a type of word that denotes the concepts, relationships, tools, or phenomena of a partic-

ular society—or, more generally, the physical and spiritual aspects—which are closely related to the specific culture of that group. Most cultural words are easily recognizable through their obvious differences with the target-language culture, being particular to a source language and problematic in the translation process^[10]. Newmark (1988)^[11] believed that certain words could be replicated to represent a specialised language or terminology used by a speech community focused on a specific topic. He classified these into five categories: ecological, material, social, organisational, and gestural and habits cultural terms. In translating cultural terms, the translator may face issues in finding equivalence because the cultural term brought from the source language (SL) could encounter inequivalence due to the absence of the culture in the target language (TL)^[12].

2.1.2. Characteristics of Mythical Cultural Terms

Mythical cultural terms refer to specific words and phrases that are deeply rooted in the mythology and folklore of a culture. These terms often denote supernatural beings, magical objects, and fantastical places that carry significant cultural, historical, and religious connotations^[13]. In the context of Chinese mythology, these terms are integral to understanding the narratives and the cultural values they reflect.

Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio, a classic of Chinese literature, is rich with mythological stories embedded with Buddhist and Taoist religious thoughts and the animistic belief that all things possess a spirit. The idea that everything in the world can transform from one entity to another is rooted in the ancient belief that humans and all things share the same life essence, allowing for transformation between them. This concept reflects a fundamental aspect of natural law in Chinese mythology.

In mythological literature, gods and ghosts often symbolise transformations of humans or animals, moving between the worlds of the living and the dead. The tales in *Liao Zhai Zhi Yi*, written in Classical Chinese, feature fantastical elements such as flower fairies, fox spirits, and other supernatural beings, which are crucial for advancing the plot. Despite their fantastical nature, these stories frequently address real-life social issues and the author's personal ideals. Mythical cultural terms reflect multiple facets of culture, including beliefs, traditions, and worldviews. Terms such as

“鬼” (gui, ghost), “妖怪” (yao guai, demon), and “仙人” (xian ren, immortal) are central to Chinese folklore and classical literature, carrying rich cultural meanings and specific connotations that are vital to the narrative structure of Chinese mythological stories.

Although many scholars have provided comprehensive frameworks for understanding and translating cultural terms, their work often does not specifically address the unique challenges posed by mythical cultural terms in classical Chinese literature. The intricate cultural, historical, and religious connotations embedded in terms from texts like *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* require specialised analysis that goes beyond general translation theories.

2.2. Cultural Loss in Translation

2.2.1. Concept and Impact of Cultural Loss

The complex nature of translation often leads to unavoidable cultural loss. Linguistic and cultural differences present inevitable obstacles during the translation process, making cultural loss an inherent part of translation activities^[9]. Nida^[14] highlights how cultural loss and misinterpretation always affect communication because individuals often have different backgrounds and are influenced by various features of speech, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse. From a hermeneutics perspective, George Steiner^[15] classifies translation into four steps—trust, aggression, incorporation, and restitution. He maintains that translation often results in loss and imbalance, especially when we “come home laden” with elements from another culture.

2.2.2. Cultural Loss in the Chinese Context

In the Chinese context, significant research has highlighted the extent and impact of cultural loss in translation. Dao An proposed the “Five Losses of Source Texts” and “Three Difficulties in Translation” in Buddhist translation, referring to aspects likely to be lost in translation^[16]. Xia Tingde^[9] identifies translation loss as including the loss of information, meaning, pragmatic function, culture, and aesthetics, which are all inevitable. Translation loss can occur at both the earlier and later stages of translation. And he also defined cultural loss as the phenomenon in translation where the cultural specifications present in the source text cannot be fully reflected in the translated version due to differences between languages and cultures. Sometimes, loss

is inevitable and not caused by the translator’s competence but rather by the lack of equivalents in the target language.

With the development of China’s economy, politics, culture, education, and other sectors, cross-disciplinary research on translation loss has proliferated, especially regarding culture-related translation loss. Reducing cultural loss in translation is crucial for China’s cultural image.

2.3. Compensation Methods of Translating Mythical Cultural Terms

2.3.1. Translation Strategies of Compensation

Different strategies have been proposed to address cultural loss in translation. Nida and Taber^[17] highlight that any translation entails semantic loss, and idiomatic expressions offer a technique for compensation. Wilss^[18] suggests that “compensation” addresses internal and external linguistic differences in both micro and macro contexts. When there is no direct equivalent in the target language, paraphrasing or explanatory translation may be used as compensation methods. Peter Newmark (1988)^[19] discusses compensation in the context of translation principles, suggesting it can be adopted when part of a sentence’s meaning, sound effect, metaphor, or pragmatic effect is lost. Hatim and Mason^[20] argue that compensation methods can achieve equivalent value in different contexts.

2.3.2. Representative Studies on Methods of Compensation

The most representative and influential study on translation compensation is by Sandor Hervej and Ian Higgins^[21]. Their detailed discussion of translation compensation principles and strategies classifies compensation into four categories: compensation in kind, compensation in place, compensation by merging, and compensation by splitting. Baker^[22] claims that compensation methods are not limited to idioms or fixed expressions, and they can be used to compensate for meaning, emotional power, or stylistic effect. Keith Harvey^[23] proposes three positions for cultural compensation in translation: parallel, contiguous, and displaced compensation. Steiner^[15] emphasises that a translation without compensation is a failure. According to his hermeneutics, the last step is restitution, meaning compensation, which reduces cultural loss in translation. Studies of domestic translation compensation have also yielded fruitful

results.

In the Chinese context, several methods for compensation have been identified. Wang Enmian^[24] argues that translation compensation involves using the target linguistic form to address semantic loss in the source linguistic form, proposing six frequently used techniques for semantic equivalence. Ke Ping^[25] discusses compensation techniques for contextual equivalence, highlighting the inevitability of cultural loss and the need to balance cultural differences. Ou Hong^[26] focuses on functional equivalence, finding that cultural constraints influence translation and that translators' cultural heritage affects their work. Sun Yingchun^[27] suggests aesthetic compensation methods to faithfully reproduce the original content, style, and artistic conception. Tu Guoyuan^[28] explores cultural transplantation, emphasising the importance of adopting cultural information compensation methods.

2.3.3. Xia's Methods of Compensation in Translating Cultural Terms

While scholars acknowledge the existence of cultural loss in translation and mention the concept of compensation, there is a lack of in-depth exploration into specific compensation methods and their effectiveness in addressing cultural loss. A pioneering study by Xia Tingde^[9] established a comprehensive theoretical system for translation compensation, proposing "eight categories, six principles, and two levels." Chen Jirong^[29] praised Xia's work for its academic and historical value, highlighting four innovative points, including the theoretical construction model and the applicability of taxonomy methods. Xia's 2009 article refined his compensation theory, proposing an eight-point framework that covered linguistic and aesthetic fields^[30]. This framework has been applied in broader fields, as demonstrated by Zhang Liyu^[31] and Yu Xin^[32], who adopted Xia's principles in their studies on aesthetic compensation and functional equivalence.

According to Xia's two-level methods of compensation, which are the linguistic level and the aesthetic level, this paper focuses on the discussion of compensation methods in the lexical aspect of the linguistic level. The methods of compensation include amplification, specification, generalisation, intensification of contrast, annotation within the text, and annotation outside the text.

a) Amplification

Amplification, also known as addition, contextual ad-

dition, etc.^[25], refers to the strategy of adding appropriate words in the target language when translating a source text term. This is done to convey information that is implicit and obvious to the source language readers but not readily understood by the target language readers. This technique is often used to clarify the cultural connotations of the source text term or to provide necessary information for understanding the term^[9]. For instance, translating "嫦娥 (Chang e)" as "the goddess Chang E."

b) Specification

Specification involves converting a superordinate term (general term) in the source text to its hyponym (specific term) in the target language, or transforming a vague concept into a concrete one^[9]. Translating "缘 (yuan)" to "good karma," which encompasses both good and bad karma, but specifying it as good based on the context.

c) Generalisation

Generalisation refers to using summarization, word reduction, or omission to convey meanings that are implied in the context, meanings that are self-evident in the source language, or components that are obligatory in the source language but redundant in the target language^[9]. For instance, translating "妖 (yao)" "魅 (mei)" "鬼 (gui)" into "evil spirits," provides a broad term that captures the general essence of these beings without specifying their unique attributes.

d) Intensification of contrast

Intensification of contrast involves replacing a source text term with a target language term that has a similar contextual meaning but a higher degree of intensity or strength. This compensates for the weakened semantic contrast caused by linguistic or socio-cultural differences, restoring the relative intensity of the original term's meaning. This compensation method aims to ensure that the expected effect of the target term is as close as possible to that of the source term^[9]. For instance, translating "月殿仙人 (yue dian xian ren)" to "Cynthia," a poetic reference to the moon goddess, which captures the celestial and ethereal nature of the original term while providing a culturally familiar name for the target audience.

e) Annotation within the text

Annotation within the text refers to placing the compensatory content inside the translated text, marked by punctuation or parentheses in the target language to indicate that the inserted elements are added by the translator^[9]. For instance, translating "迷魂汤 (mi hun tang)" into "the fabled Soup of

Oblivion, the potion given to the spirits of the dead to render them oblivious of their past” provides further explanation to clarify its cultural significance and role in the narrative.

f) Annotation outside the text

Annotation outside the text includes footnotes, endnotes, and other forms that are spatially distinct from the original text. These annotations are used to explain difficult points in the source text, provide necessary information for understanding the meaning of the source text terms, and appreciate the artistic and aesthetic value of the original. Sometimes, they also include the translator’s interpretation of the annotated content [9]. For instance, when translating “生气 (sheng qi)” into “influence of surrounding life,” a footnote can be added for explanation: “These disembodied spirits are unable to tolerate the light and life of this upper world, as darkness and death are necessary for their existence and comfort.” Through this explanation, readers understand that “生气 (sheng qi)” refers to the breath of the living, better conveying the original intent of the term and aiding readers in comprehending the narrative.

Despite the comprehensive understanding provided by existing literature on translation compensation methods, there is a need for further exploration and application of these methods in the context of classical Chinese literature to ensure that the cultural essence is preserved and the translated texts are accessible to the target audience. Based on the identified research gap and the detailed review of existing literature, this study will explore the compensation methods used in translating mythical cultural terms in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*. By focusing on specific strategies such as amplification, specification, generalisation, intensification of contrast, and annotation, this research aims to mitigate cultural loss and enhance the fidelity and readability of translated texts.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to explore the translation of mythical cultural terms and the compensation methods used to mitigate cultural loss. Specifically, it conducts a comparative analysis of two prominent English translations by Herbert Giles^[1] and John Minford^[2] to identify and evaluate the compensation methods employed

by the translators. The research design incorporates textual analysis, comparative analysis, and descriptive translation analysis to comprehensively analyse the compensation methods used by both translators in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*. This structured approach ensures alignment with the research questions for a thorough examination of the translation process.

3.2. Data Collection

The data collection process began with a thorough reading and comprehension of the original text, *Liao Zhai Zhi Yi*, to gain an in-depth understanding of the stories and the subtleties of mythical cultural terms. Specific data were then selected, focusing on identifying all relevant mythical cultural terms for analysis. These terms were mapped to their corresponding translations in the English versions by Herbert Giles and John Minford. This mapping process facilitated the creation of paired terms, essential for the subsequent comparative analysis of how cultural subtleties are preserved or lost in these translations.

From the 31 stories translated by both Giles and Minford, 103 mythical cultural terms were identified, and their corresponding translations were arranged in parallel lists. This arrangement allowed for a direct comparison of the translators’ choices, highlighting instances of cultural loss. The comparative analysis examined the compensation methods employed by the translators, providing insights into their effectiveness in conveying cultural elements. Several compensation methods based on Xia’s model were identified to address cultural loss, including amplification, specification, generalisation, intensification of contrast, annotation within the text, and annotation outside the text.

The choice of Herbert Giles and John Minford as the translators for this study is based on their significant contributions to the English translations of *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*. Herbert Giles’ translation^[1] is one of the earliest and most influential English versions, providing a historical perspective on the translation of Chinese classical literature. John Minford’s translation^[2], on the other hand, represents a more contemporary approach, incorporating modern translation theories and techniques. Comparing Herbert Giles and John Minford is particularly valuable because they represent two different eras: the former in the Victorian Age and the latter in modern times. The contrast between

these two translations offers a valuable opportunity to explore how translation strategies and cultural perceptions have evolved over time, making them ideal subjects for a comparative analysis focused on cultural loss and compensation methods.

This comprehensive approach facilitated a detailed examination of cultural loss in translation and the effectiveness of various compensation methods, assessing their impact on preserving the cultural essence of the original text.

3.3. Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study utilised Toury's descriptive translation analysis framework to systematically examine the translations of the mythical cultural terms in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*. According to Toury, translations are influenced by various factors, including norms, constraints, and strategies, which shape the translator's decisions throughout the translation process. Descriptive Translation Analysis (DTA) within Toury's framework involves analysing translations in terms of shifts and patterns observed between source and target texts, aiming to uncover the norms and strategies employed by translators within a given cultural and historical context.

Using Toury's framework, the translation of mythical cultural terms in these English versions was first identified, which involved determining whether each translator's approach was more source-oriented (focused on fidelity to the original text) or target-oriented (focused on readability and cultural relevance in the target language). The cultural loss that occurred during the translation process was then analysed. Furthermore, the specific methods used to compensate for this loss, such as amplification, specification, generalisation, intensification of contrast, and annotation, were examined. Finally, by comparing the paired terms to identify instances of cultural loss where the translated term failed to convey the full cultural meaning of the original, the effectiveness of the compensation methods in mitigating this cultural loss was assessed.

4. Results and Discussion

Following the study's methodology, a total of 103 mythical cultural terms were collected from the 31 stories translated by both Herbert Giles and John Minford. These terms

were identified based on Birrel's^[13] definition of mythical cultural term. The subsequent analysis focuses on how these cultural terms were translated by Giles and Minford, examining the extent of cultural loss and the effectiveness of the compensation methods employed. This section discusses the findings in the context of the translation strategies outlined in Xia's model, highlighting key patterns and trends observed in the translations. By evaluating the translators' choices and their impact on cultural preservation, this study aims to provide insights into the complex dynamics of translating mythical cultural terms in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*.

The total instances of mythical cultural terms are 103 from the 31 stories translated by both translators. Taken from the definition of mythical cultural terms mentioned, it is definitely a challenging task faced by translators to produce translations of mythical cultural terms, considering lexical and cultural gaps. In this translation practice, loss is often encountered due to the unique characteristics and particularities of languages, while gain occurs when the translation product (TL) exhibits greater richness in expression^[33]. Translators have the ability to choose the translation they prefer and to add additional information, which most likely involves employing cultural terms^[19].

In **Table 1**, the instances of cultural loss in the translations by Giles and Minford are presented, along with the compensation strategies they employed. This analysis aims to assess whether their translations effectively convey the meaning and elements of the source language culture. Among the 103 mythical cultural terms, not all could be identified with a direct compensation method according to Xia's model, as some terms were either translated using a sense-for-sense method or a word-for-word method. For example, the term “寿籍 (shou ji),” which refers to “a thin booklet in Chinese superstitions and legends that records people's lifespan,” was literally translated as “term of life” by Giles and “longevity file” by Minford. Despite using different words, both translations convey a similar meaning to the original term. “寿籍 (shou ji)”, also known as “命籍 (ming ji)”, is believed in Chinese superstition to be a celestial register that records the fortunes, misfortunes, life, and death of individuals. These booklets symbolise the concept of predestination and the belief that one's fate is controlled by heavenly beings. In Chinese culture, it is thought that these records are main-

tained by deities who influence human life and destiny.

Additionally, the term “玄海 (xuan hai),” where “玄 (xuan)” means “colour russet black” [34] and “海 (hai)” means “sea,” was paraphrased as “great sea” by Giles and “dark sea” by Minford. This comparison illustrates that while both translators opted for different lexical choices, their translations aimed to capture the essence of the original terms. Similar translation methods were used in Giles’ translation in 46 out of 103 instances, while Minford used them in 45 out of 103 instances. This indicates that both translators frequently employed similar approaches to address the challenges posed by mythical cultural terms, albeit with slight variations in their execution.

From **Table 1**, it is evident that both translators utilised a variety of compensation methods to handle the remaining mythical cultural terms. However, their frequency of each compensation method varied significantly.

4.1. Giles’ Compensation Methods

Giles’ approach often favoured broader generalisations (25.2%, 26 out of 103) and annotations outside the text (10.7%, 11 out of 103) to simplify and explain cultural terms for the target audience. For example, when translating “散花天女 (san hua tian nü),” Giles used the summarising word “fairies” to represent the “Goddess in Buddhist sutra stories.” This term originates from the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, where it is described that “there was a heavenly maiden in Vimalakirti’s chamber who, upon seeing the heavenly beings listening to the teachings, manifested herself and scattered heavenly flowers over the great disciples and bodhisattvas. The flowers fell off the bodhisattvas but stuck to the great disciples and would not fall off.” Additionally, the mythical palace “广寒宫殿 (guang han gong dian)” was generalised as “paradise,” which omitted its mysterious meaning as “a celestial realm in Chinese mythology where the lunar deity Chang’e is said to reside.” In Chinese mythology, Chang’e is a legendary figure who is said to have been the wife of Hou Yi. According to the legend, she ascended from the human world to the moon. The story originates from *Soushen Ji* (In Search of the Supernatural), which recounts: “Hou Yi obtained the elixir of immortality from the Queen Mother of the West, but Chang’e stole it and fled to the moon.” Among the 26 instances of generalisation, 9 terms were omitted without translation, including “魔襪 (yan rang),” which refers to a

Taoist magical practice for exorcism and disaster prevention, aimed at suppressing evil spirits and warding off calamities; “九泉 (jiu quan),” which signifies the underworld or the realm of the dead; “福籍 (fu ji),” which denotes a register of human fortune and prosperity; “三山 (san shan),” which refers to the “Three Sacred Mountains” in Chinese myth; and “阳气 (yang qi),” which represents positive energy or the life force associated with living beings. When facing these non-equivalent words, Giles chose to omit them to streamline the text, suggesting a deliberate choice to prioritise readability or adhere to target language norms. This approach, while making the text more accessible, sometimes sacrifices the depth of cultural meaning inherent in the original terms, leading to cultural losses in translation.

However, Giles also made significant efforts to maintain the cultural and religious connotations embedded in the original terms. He added footnotes to further explain the mythical terms, with 17 out of 103 terms being accompanied by footnotes. For example, the term “生气 (sheng qi),” which refers to “human vitality or life force,” was translated by Giles as “influence of surrounding life,” accompanied by a footnote for further explanation. Even for native Chinese readers, initially encountering the term might lead to a misunderstanding, as it could be interpreted as “angry,” a meaning not applicable to English readers. To dispel any confusion, Giles added a footnote: “These disembodied spirits are unable to tolerate the light and life of this upper world, as darkness and death are necessary for their existence and comfort”^[1]. Through this explanation, readers understand that “生气 (sheng qi)” refers to the breath of the living, better conveying the original intent of the term and aiding readers in comprehending the narrative.

Similarly, “城隍 (cheng huang)” was translated as “Guardian Angel,” with a footnote providing further explanation: “The tutelary deity of every Chinese city”^[1]. This explanation is consistent with the term’s originality, which refers to the guardian deity of a city or town in Taoism. The term “九幽 (jiu you)” was translated as “nine sections,” with a footnote stating, “Literally, the ‘nine dark places,’ which will remind Dante of the nine ‘bolgie’ of the Inferno”^[1]. This also conveys the original meaning of the term, which refers to the deepest and darkest parts of the underworld. Through these footnotes, Giles ensured that the cultural and religious subtleties of the original terms were preserved and

Table 1. Distribution of mythical cultural terms and their translation methods in Giles’ and Minford’s English translations.

Cultural	Amplification	Specification	Generalisation	Intensification of Contrast	Annotation within the Text	Annotation outside the Text	Total
Giles’ Proposition	5 4.8%	1 1.0%	26 25.2%	7 6.8%	1 1.0%	17 16.5%	57 55.3%
Minford’s Proposition	13 12.6%	3 2.9%	11 10.7%	4 3.9%	2 1.9%	25 24.3%	58 56.3%

clearly communicated to the readers.

In the 106 stories translated by Giles, 759 footnotes were added to explain cultural references and provide background information and references for further reading. These footnotes serve as a micro-encyclopedia of Chinese society, covering various aspects such as Chinese character, philosophy and religion (Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism), education, literature, judiciary, ethics, customs, medicine, social hierarchy, military, beliefs (feng shui, fatalism, superstition), administration, officialdom, economy, history, clothing, entertainment, divination, and the calendar^[35]. Giles employed footnotes as supplementary tools to provide readers with additional context, aiding in a better understanding of the cultural connotations of the terms.

Other methods like amplification (4.8%, 5 out of 103) and intensification of contrast (6.8%, 7 out of 103) were also used to translate certain cultural terms. For example, “神魂 (shen hun)”, which in Chinese describes a state where one’s soul or spirit is unsettled, was translated as “as if he had lost his wits” to further depict a person’s condition as being like a lost soul. This translation uses amplification by adding contextual information to convey the sense of confusion and disorientation implied by the term, which in its original context refers to the idea of a disturbed or wandering soul, reflecting traditional Chinese beliefs about the spirit. Another term “蛇精 (she jing)” was translated as “young lady of being a serpent,” adding the context of youth to clarify that the lady was originally a snake who transformed into a human. This term highlights a common theme in Chinese mythology that often symbolises the interplay between the natural and supernatural, reflecting deeper themes of transformation, immortality, and mystical beauty. The use of amplification provides additional detail to help readers understand the mythical and cultural connotations of the original terms. Examples of intensification of contrast include translating “冥狱 (ming yu)” as “Purgatory,” which in Western culture refers to Hell. In Chinese culture, “冥狱 (ming yu)” refers to a part of the underworld where souls

are judged and suffer, somewhat similar to but not entirely the same as the Western concept of Purgatory. Similarly, “月殿仙人 (yue dian xian ren)” was rendered as “Cynthia,” which is the Goddess of the Moon in Western mythology. In Chinese mythology, “月殿仙人 (yue dian xian ren)” refers to celestial beings associated with the moon, particularly the goddess Chang’e, who is a central figure in Chinese lunar legends.

From these examples, it is evident that Giles’ compensation methods for handling cultural loss, including generalisation, annotation outside the text, amplification, and intensification of contrast, aimed to make the text more accessible and relatable for the target language readers. While these methods helped in aligning the text with the cultural understanding of the readers, they often resulted in the dilution of original cultural specifics. This shows that Giles’ translation process involved a choice between fluency and cultural preservation, inevitably requiring a trade-off between readability and cultural fidelity.

4.2. Minford’s Compensation Methods

Compared to Giles, Minford predominantly favoured the method of annotations outside the text (24.3%, 25 out of 103). He preferred to translate the mythical cultural terms literally and add an endnote to further explain the cultural connotations of the terms. For example, when translating the term “散花天女 (san hua tian nü),” instead of Giles’ generalisation method of translating it as “fairies,” Minford renders it as “Apsaras Scattering Flowers, beautiful fairy like beings.” He further explains in the endnote:

The Apsaras (tian nü) are Heavenly Maidens, in Buddhist iconography female devas, or angels, to be seen (for example) in the cave-temple murals of Dunhuang. “Apsaras Scattering Flowers” is a popular motif in Buddhist art, having its origin in the Vimalakirti Sutra^[2].

His translation reflects his significant effort to maintain the cultural and religious connotations embedded in the orig-

inal term. In his endnote, he elaborates further, providing readers with the significance of the term in Buddhist religion. He explains that the Apsaras are “Heavenly Maidens or female devas” in Buddhist tradition, often depicted in cave-temple murals such as those found in Dunhuang. The motif of “Apsaras Scattering Flowers” holds particular importance in Buddhist art. This additional context not only enriches the reader’s understanding of the term but also enhances their aesthetic experience.

His translation reflects a significant effort to maintain the cultural and religious connotations embedded in the original term, enhancing the reader’s understanding and aesthetic experience. Another example is the term “青帝 (Qing Di),” which Minford translated as “Green Emperor” with an endnote explaining its origin in mythology:

In one version of the legend, the Five Chinese Emperors and their elements and planets comprised the Green Emperor of the East (wood, Jupiter); the Red Emperor of the South (fire, Mars); the White Emperor of the West (metal, Venus); the Black Emperor of the North (water, Mercury); and the Yellow Emperor of the Centre (earth, Saturn)^[2].

By comparing these deities to Western counterparts, Minford helps readers understand the term better. This approach allows Minford to retain the cultural essence of the original text while providing the necessary context for readers unfamiliar with Chinese culture.

Minford also utilised amplification (12.6%, 13 out of 103) and generalisation (10.7%, 11 out of 103) to convey the connotative meanings of the original terms. For example, the term “冥王 (ming wang),” which refers to “the King of the underworld” in Chinese mythology, was amplified as “Yama, King of the Underworld” to include the name Yama, thereby introducing the cultural connotation of the term. Similarly, “王母 (wang mu),” a prominent goddess known for her role as the ruler of the Western Paradise in Chinese Taoist mythology, was specified as “the Queen Mother of the West” to supplement information in the context of the story.

Generalisation is also frequently used to address lexical gaps between cultures. Terms such as “妖 (yao),” “鬼 (gui),” “怪 (guai),” and “精 (jing)” frequently appear in Chinese Taoist culture, each possessing unique meanings and cultural backgrounds. “妖 (yao)” typically refers to natural beings with supernatural powers, often animals or plants, associated with beauty, enchantment, or magical abilities. “鬼 (gui)”

usually signifies the soul or spirit after death, often related to unsatisfied spirits lingering in the human realm. “怪 (guai)” describes bizarre, unusual, or inexplicable phenomena or creatures, often referring to inanimate objects that attain human form. “精 (jing)” describes creatures that have gained spiritual or magical powers through long-term cultivation or under special conditions, like the fox spirit or snake spirit, who acquire supernatural abilities through such practices. These terms, all related to supernatural phenomena and mystical beings, each carry their unique cultural connotations and images. “妖 (yao)” leans towards mysterious beings in nature, “鬼 (gui)” is associated with the afterlife soul, “怪 (guai)” emphasises

The lack of direct equivalents in English for these terms poses a challenge for translators. Thus, Minford used the generalisation method to translate terms like “妖物 (yao wu)” and “鬼魅 (gui mei)” as “evil spirits.” While this translation captures the general supernatural and mysterious attributes of these words, it may not fully convey their unique meanings in Chinese culture. For example, “妖物 (yao wu)” in Chinese tradition often relates to complex characters and motives in folklore and mythology, which might be lost when simplified to “evil spirit.” Similarly, “鬼魅 (gui mei)” is more than just a symbol of evil or horror in Chinese; it carries complex and multi-layered cultural meanings that may be overlooked when translated as “evil spirits.”

Although specification was not frequently used by Minford (2.9%, 3 out of 103 instances), it conveyed contextual information effectively. For example, “神 (shen),” generally referring to “deity,” was rendered as “Pantheon of Examiners” to explain the deity’s function, aiding reader comprehension.

In summary, both Giles and Minford employed distinct methods to address the challenges of translating mythical cultural terms. Giles favoured generalisation and annotations outside the text, prioritising readability and accessibility. In contrast, Minford preferred amplification and literal translations with detailed endnotes, aiming to preserve cultural authenticity and exoticism. These efforts illustrate that translators must balance between linguistic accuracy and cultural significance, striving to reproduce the cultural depth and subtlety of the source text in the target language as much as possible.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the translation of mythical cultural terms in Pu Songling's *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, focusing on the English versions translated by Herbert Giles^[1] and John Minford^[2]. The analysis revealed distinct methods used by both translators to handle cultural loss and preserve the original text's cultural essence.

Giles frequently employed generalisation and annotations outside the text to simplify and explain cultural terms for the target audience. By favouring broader generalisations, Giles aimed to make the text more accessible to Victorian-era readers with limited exposure to Chinese culture. In contrast, as a contemporary sinologist, Minford predominantly favoured amplification and literal translations with detailed endnotes to preserve the cultural authenticity and exoticism of the original text. Both translators faced the challenge of balancing linguistic accuracy with cultural significance. Effective compensation methods, such as annotations and amplification, significantly enhance the cultural richness of the translated text.

As cultural exchange and international collaboration continue to deepen, translators increasingly aim to retain cultural elements in translations. This includes incorporating annotations outside the text to provide supplementary cultural information, helping to preserve the original text's cultural essence and facilitating cultural transmission. This trend reflects a shift toward conveying not just literal meaning but also the cultural and emotional connotations of the source text.

Based on these findings, further research is needed to assess and improve translations of classical Chinese literature, particularly culturally rich texts like *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*. Future investigations could develop more effective strategies for mitigating cultural loss, producing translations that better capture the original's cultural and emotional nuances. This research underscores the importance of refining translation methods to faithfully represent the intricate cultural elements of source texts.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, M.W. and L.W.; methodology, M.W.; validation, M.W., Z.I.Z. and L.W.; formal analysis, M.W.; investigation, M.W.; resources, M.W.; data curation,

M.W.; writing—original draft preparation, M.W.; writing—review and editing, M.W.; visualisation, L.W.; supervision, Z.I.Z. and L.W.; project administration, M.W.; funding acquisition, M.W. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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