ABSTRACT

Chinese literature was vastly enriched in the seventeenth century by a collection of tales in classical prose by Pu Songling (1640-1715). In the collection, Liaozhai Zhiyi, the author weaves web of enchantment round the happenings he recounts, enabling readers to step into a magical world, drinking in fascinating and strange experiences.

According to one of the apocryphal anecdotes that later sprang up around Liaozhai and its author, Pu Songling never passed the higher examinations because when he entered the examination hall, fox spirits and ghosts jealously crowded to prevent him from writing anything but them. This colorful legend contains an important insight: the tales grew out of the author's life-long obsessions with the strange, which were translated with great art into fiction.

Liao, as a classic, was not originally written for young audience. However, it was rewritten and adapted to children's needs. This study on children's literature in Liao was prompted by the need to provide an insight into the tales that can be regarded as literature suitable for, or satisfying to children.

The study examines five kinds of children's literature found in Liao, mainly fantasies, fables, myths, legends and folklore. In addition, it provided a comprehensive view of humans, animals, insects, flowers and the supernatural enmeshed in the tales.

The results of this study show that fantasies fascinate the children; fables educate them because of their moral values; myths, legends and folklore provide useful information about nature and human activities. As for characterization, apart from truthful portrayals of children, teenagers, adults and the handicapped of different social strata, we see a full splendor of Pu Songling's imagination emerging while portraying the supernatural realm, thereby raising the supernatural tale to a new height, crowning the author's magnificent achievement.