ABSTRACT

*Liaozhai Zhiyi* 聊斋志异 is hailed as one of the world’s famous compilation of short stories in classical Chinese. Although many stories contain mythological themes, they nevertheless feature ordinary folklore, which reflects the author’s own life and philosophy. The author, Pu Songling 蒲松龄 (1640-1715) places a great emphasis on social and family life by portraying human relations from different social strata.

*Pu* promoted traditional values of filial piety, brotherly love, loyalty, trust, propriety, righteousness, integrity and humility between the basic five relationships of ruler-subjects, parents-children, husband-wife, siblings and friends. Based on these values, *Pu* criticizes abnormal family relations and immoral acts of shrewish wives, abusive mother-in-law, heartless and ungrateful husbands, unchaste widows as well as rival siblings. For example, the abnormal social phenomenon of shrewish wives in the Ming-Qing period was typically characterized by Jiangcheng 江城 and Yinshi 尹氏.

By examining four types of human relations (excluding that of ruler-subjects), I attempt to reveal the author’s ideals on ethics through analysis of the characters’ psyche. A deeper appreciation of *Pu*’s stories is also achieved through the application of modern psychological theories such as Walter Cannon’s fight-or-flight-response and B. F. Skinner’s learning theory.

My findings are that Pu Songling’s views on ethics did not differ from those of Confucius and Mencius. However, his literary achievements in successfully describing the complexities of human’s inner psyche deserve wider recognition. Through the use of concise expressions, *Pu* elevated his literary creation to a new height.