

# Representation of China in the Victorian Context: Herbert A. Giles's Choices in the Translation of *Liaozhai zhiyi*

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The British knowledge of China before and after the two Opium Wars is mostly acquired through the writings of British missionaries, diplomats, merchants, and even their family members living in Chinese port cities. Their view of this oriental country is largely negative and erroneous, tinted by their biased perspective of nationalism and patriotism. Herbert A. Giles, then a British consular officer, realized the discrepancy between the prevailing British image of China and the China he witnessed. Influenced by Herbert Spencer's study of sociology, Giles decided to resort to translation as a venue to let the Chinese speak for themselves. This essay intends to examine one of his earliest translations of Chinese literature, and arguably the most important, namely *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* (1880) from Pu Songling's *Liaozhai zhiyi*. The translator's job begins with what to translate and why his choice matters. Therefore, this essay contextualizes Giles' translation choices in the nineteenth-century Victorian Britain so as to gain a more informed understanding of its objective and significance. It probes into Giles's choices in his translation of *Liaozhai* by expounding on three specific topics: first, translation as a venue to let the Chinese speak for themselves; second, Giles' choice of *Liaozhai*; and third, Giles' selection of the 164 *Liaozhai* stories out of the original four-hundred-plus tales. It is supposed to shed light on how, through translation, Giles could counterpoise the popular but distorted image of China.