

Final Project Report 2: PhiloLogic Explorations

In searching and browsing my corpus, PhiloLogic indeed provides some insights in text search and analysis, yet it is uncertain to declare if they are necessarily “interesting”. That is, these outcomes, though useful, do not tend to be thrilling or unexpected for me. This might be attributed to my personal familiarity with the topic, which allows me to quickly grasp an underlying logic once a certain correlation is found. In subsequent passages, I will temporarily put the judgment of interestingness aside, exemplifying several observations that are worth looking at.

One observation in searching for Concordance is the word “temple”--- as shown in the screenshot below, it is found in thirteen out of fourteen texts and appeared 481 times. This resonates with the assumption I suggested in Task 1, that they are always closely related to Buddhism. The concordance search informs that their ways of approaching this is always setting a scene in temples. I have further checked their relative frequency in including this word, and it demonstrates a descending trend, roughly in the order of time period. The temple scene has appeared in most of those prototypical medieval tales, then those modern renditions largely based on medieval tales, and lastly fictions in modern urban contexts. This suggests the almost essential role of Buddhist elements in such a genre (as, indeed, temple is where grotesque surrounds in Japanese tradition), and implicitly reflects a sometimes unconscious inheritance.

In Keyword in Context (KWIC) searching the word “death”, I didn’t apply any filter except for lowering the similarity to 80%, as I want to see a general feedback on the setting of a death scene/ whatever related to death. Appearing in all fourteen works as expected, it is delighted to see the portrayal of death often intertwines with themes of love, intimate connections, unusual beauty, visions, and the decay of the body. This is the most intuitive demonstration of the *ero guro* genre, and many of them are helpful in locating the climax of the story. Their relative frequency by title is notably balanced, mostly ranging from 20-60 depending on the length of the work. In addition, if looking at the Aggregation, with results grouped by authors, this has also informed the writing style as per authors in dealing with the scene. For example, Lafcadio Hearn always tends to explicitly point to death in his works, as this word has appeared on average in his three works, 57 times in total. Murasaki Shikibu, by contrast, only uses the word 21 times, despite the long length of her work.

Most informative is the Collocation, which provided special insights together with the information from the other three sections. As Collocation informs you of those more or less relevant combinations by nature, this is also the one that is relatively illuminating. For instance, my search for “lantern” was initially motivated by the well-known short story “Peony Lantern,” as I was curious to explore its adaptations. While the most common collocations are indeed “light” and “peony,” one informs its actual utility and the other emphasizes the image *per se*, it is

demonstrated that “lantern” is equally collocated to words like “magic”, “ghosts”, “strange”, “dead”. Looking back to KWIC, one can soon realize that “lantern” is an important image in evoking a sense of uncanny or predating the appearance of supernatural entities/phenomena. It was also after “Peony Lantern” that this image became closely related to ghosts, or sometimes even an incarnation of ghost. Another noteworthy observation through navigating different sections of the database emerges in the search of the word “demon”, where the Collocation section informs it has an overwhelming connection with the word “female”, and similar words such as “empress”. The concordance then further affirms this correlation, that most works (ten out of fourteen) tend to situate women in the demonic role rather than men. Similar results can also be found in homogenous words like “ghost”. This recurrent motif of monstrous feminine reflects not only the narrative’s atmospheric tension but also the cultural perception and societal views on gender and the supernatural.

In my search for subtle adaptations, I have not yet uncovered significant findings, with the exception of the “lantern” example previously mentioned. This lack of results stems from two main issues: firstly, literary adaptations are diverse and nuanced, demanding an in-depth understanding of each text. This necessitates either a more thorough and expansive search or more sophisticated methods. Secondly, the choice of medieval prototypes may be problematic. Despite the abundance of short tales, the sources used in adaptation might be discrete and only a small part of one compilation is absorbed. Given the limited amount of English translations of these tales, further improvement may require a database reconstruction in Japanese, which is outside the scope of the project.

Note: I omitted the time series analysis initially because it does not significantly enhance my research. The stories from the medieval period we have today are modern recompilations, all published recently. Additionally, these narratives were originally released within a relatively short and concentrated period, making the precise order of their publication not particularly revealing or valuable for my study’s purposes.