

PARODY AND NOSTALGIA:
CONTEMPORARY RE-WRITING OF *MADAME WHITE SNAKE*

by

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ABSTRACT

Between 1950s and 1990s, Hong Kong had a frenzy for writing and re-writing materials from classical literature and myths. The myth of *Madame White Snake* is one of the most well known stories that survived a long period of time. The earliest known version of *Madame White Snake* was a supernatural story in 1550, which later became a prototype of numerous subsequent versions starting in 1624. This prototype was repeatedly re-written throughout history and was also made into different genres including plays, playlets, novels, films and television dramas. One of the latest versions was written by Li Pikwah, a popular novelist in Hong Kong, in 1993, titled, *Green Snake*. *Green Snake* is a parody of *Madame White Snake* written from the perspective of Little Green, the servant of Madame White and an auxiliary figure in the tradition. The novel is also an autobiography of Little Green, who satirically criticizes the story of *Madame White Snake* in retrospect. Little Green's autobiography is a nostalgic reflection of the past as well as a critique of the structure of the story that has survived throughout history. These implications made in the story hint at the author's personal yearning for traditional China as a Chinese resident in Hong Kong. Her nostalgia for traditional China is not idealistic but paradoxical, because her re-writing of the story was an avenue to understand and re-negotiate her identity. Li is also well-known for her other novels, which are parodies of classical literature, traditional myth and legend. Many of these works were also made into films in the 80's and 90's. These novels and films were part of a phenomenon in contemporary Hong Kong literary and popular culture that tried to grasp a cultural connection with traditional China in order to embrace the return to mainland China in 1997 after a hundred years of British colonial rule.

(w.c: 315)

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Myths are foundations of civilization and culture that become part of modern identity. Myths are products of a specific time and cultural condition; they represent fears, values and beliefs under specific social circumstances. Throughout history, myths are often revisited and re-written with new interpretations that are influenced by new social conditions. Repeated in different versions, they become referential materials that comprise the skeleton of the myth. Everything other than the skeleton can be considered as the subtext or metanarrative, which changes over time with each writer's interpretation. *Madame White Snake (Baishe zhuan)*, the subject of this thesis, has been reproduced many times since its first known written version in the 16th Century. The latest version of the story, written in 1993, turns out to be a parody of the text, where the writer critically re-writes the story by problematizing everything from the subtext to the perspective of the narrator. This work of parody is characteristic of postmodern literature and involves both irony and nostalgia, "key components" of contemporary culture.¹ Nostalgia in a work of parody is self-reflective and self-conscious of the irrevocable nature of time. It does not aim to recover the past but rather to better understand a present that is a result of the past. In this latest version, *Green Snake* by Li Pikwah, the myth has become a platform for re-examining traditional culture and values as means to recover an identity in the present.

The earliest extant version of the story of "Madame White Snake" titled "Xihu santaji" (Story of the three pagodas on West Lake), appears in a sixteenth-century collection

¹ Linda Hutcheon, "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern," University of Toronto, English Library, 7 May, 2008 <<http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html>>.

titled *Qingping shantang huaben* (Vernacular short stories from the Clear and Peaceful Studio).²

The story begins with an elaborate description of Hangzhou's West Lake throughout the four seasons, then goes on to tell of a young man's encounter with the uncanny during the Qingming Festival. Xi Xuanzan, the protagonist, takes a little girl home because she is lost.

Accompanying an old woman who fetches the girl home, he is invited to a feast at which he sees the girl's mother devour the heart and liver of another young man. The young man killed before his eyes was the mother's former lover, and Xi is then intimidated into becoming her next husband. With the help of the little girl he saved, Xi escapes the fate of being also devoured by the mother. In the end, his uncle, who is a Daoist priest, captures the old lady, the little girl, and the mother, who revert to their original forms as otter, black hen, and white snake. The priest puts them in an iron cage and builds three stone pagodas to contain them for eternity in West Lake.

Xihu youlan zhi (Guide to West Lake),³ published in 1547 by Tian Rucheng, is a chronicle that has been described as “a mixture of geographical description, local history, lore, and legend.”⁴ In its third chapter, “Wonders of Nanshan (南山),” there is mention of a pagoda named *Leifengta* (雷峰塔, Thunder Peak Pagoda), which is located in front of *Jingcisi* (淨慈寺, Pure Compassion Temple).⁵ Tian points out that the pagoda was built for a queen and is commonly known as *Wangfeita* (王妃塔, The Consort's Pagoda).⁶ “According to folk myths,

²Hong Pian 洪楸, “*Xihu santaji* (西湖三塔記, Story of the three pagodas on West Lake)” *Qingping shantang huaben* (清平山堂話本, *The Clear and Peaceful Studio*) (Taipei: Shijieshuju, 1958) 45-64. I have provided a summary of the story in Appendix II(A).

³Tian Rucheng 田汝成, *Xihu youlan zhi* (西湖遊覽志, Guide to the West Lake). Shanghai, 1958.

⁴Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981) 56.

⁵Tian Rucheng 33. 淨慈寺前，為雷峰塔

⁶Tian Rucheng 34.

there are a white snake and a green fish imprisoned underneath the pagoda.”⁷ This is the first source that identifies *Leifengta* as the place where a demonic white snake is imprisoned.

A later version of the story that builds on *Qingping shantang huaben* and *Xihu youlan zhi* is a vernacular short story (*huaben*) by Feng Menglong dated 1624. It is titled “Bai niangzi yongzhen Leifangta” (Madame White forever confined under Thunder Peak Pagoda).⁸ This version retains skeletal features of Hong Pian’s tale,⁹ such as the figure of Madame White as a snake demon in human form, the original setting in Hangzhou around the time of the Qingming Festival, and the final confinement of Madame White,¹⁰ but substantially changes the narrative. Patrick Hanan identifies elements from the classical tale retained in the vernacular story as “stuff-materials.”¹¹ He notes that “Xihu santaji” and “Bai niangzi” share the same theme and stuff-material, but “undergo a metamorphosis of form and language” when Feng Menglong adapts the tale in 1624.¹² The plot of “Bai niangzi” becomes more elaborated and realistic because events involve civil matters and center upon the human lover, Xu Xuan, and his relations with Madame White. Feng’s version of Madame White is arguably the first that is a parody of “Xihu santaji,” with complete characterizations and detailed accounts of setting and events.

⁷Tian Rucheng 34. 俗傳湖中有白蛇，青魚兩怪，鎮壓塔下。

⁸Feng Menglong (馮夢龍), “Bai niangzi yongzhen Leifengta (白娘子永鎮雷峰塔, Madame White forever imprisoned under the Thunder Peak Pagoda)” in *Jingshitongyan* (驚世通言, Stories to Caution the World) ed. Wu Shuyin (吳書蔭). (Beijing: Beijing Shiyue Wenyi, 1994) 438-467; hereafter “Bai niangzi.”

⁹ Hanan, *Chinese Vernacular* 48-49.

¹⁰ Hanan, *Chinese Vernacular* 48-49.

¹¹ Hanan, *Chinese Vernacular* 18-19, 23-24.

¹² Hanan, *Chinese Vernacular* 24.

Following Feng's novella, a dramatic version of the story in the *chuanqi* form appeared in 1738, titled *Leifengta chuanqi* (Tale of Thunder Peak Pagoda) by Huang Tubi (1700~?).¹³ Unfortunately, the original version of this play is lost, but an adapted version that has two additional scenes can be found in an anthology edited by Fu Xihua.¹⁴ The one closest to this date that survives is an adaption by Fang Chengpei in 1771, also titled, *Leifengta chuanqi* (The Tale of Thunder Peak Pagoda).¹⁵ The story of Madame White takes another leap in this translation from novella to a form of drama where characters and plots must be tightly interwoven into a narrative delivered in action, song, and dialogue.

A dissertation in 1969 by Wu Pei-yi draws on these four versions of the Madame White corpus and one other story,¹⁶ and traces the mutation of the story and White's character. Another study by Hsü Wen-hung carries the evolution beyond 1771 and up to 1972, tracing some of the significant changes and modifications to the tale.¹⁷ A chart of this evolution is attached in the appendix as a reference, but only the versions relevant to Li Pikwah's novel and Tsui Hark's film will be referenced in this thesis.

¹³ Dai Bufan (戴不凡), preface, *Baishe zhuan* (白蛇傳, *Madame White Snake*), by Zhang Henshui (張恨水) (Beijing: Beijing Xinhua Publishing) 2; Wu Pei-yi, "The White Snake: The Evolution of a myth in China," diss., Columbia U, 1970, 86.

¹⁴ Huang Tubi (黃圖秘), "Leifengta chuanqi" *Baishe zhuan ji* (《雷峰塔傳奇》白蛇傳集, *Compilation of Madame White Snake*, "tale of Thunder Peak Pagoda"), ed. Fu Xihua (傅惜華) (Shanghai, 1955) 282-338.

¹⁵ Fang Chengpei (方成培), "Leifengta chuanqi (雷峰塔傳奇, Tale of Thunder Peak Pagoda)," in *Baishe zhuan ji* (白蛇傳集, *Compilation of Madame White Snake*), ed. Fu Xihua 傅惜華 (Shanghai, 1955) 339-419. "Chuanqi" during the period of Song and Ming means "an extensive play," where as it means "a story" in Tang dynasty.

¹⁶ The story is from the same collection of stories edited by Feng, *Jingshi tongyan*, the nineteenth in order. It too is a demon story, titled "Cui Yanei baiyao zhao yao" 崔衙內白鷄招妖 (The White Falcon of Master Cui invites devils).

¹⁷ Hsü Wen-hung, "The Evolution of the Legend of the White Serpent (Part II): *Thunder Peak Pagoda* (雷峰塔), a Story of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)," *Tamkang Review* 4.2 (1973): 121-155.

Wu's study applies the concept of "archetype" as used in Carl Jung's theory of the human unconscious to analyze what is significant in White's representation. "Archetype" refers to "concrete symbols and images" around the character, while "myth" represents the "recurring plot pattern that cuts across different literary genres and modes and underlies a number of stories, folk tales, legends, and plays."¹⁸ According to Jung, myth is an "expression of the archetypes," which reflect a "collective unconscious" or a collective fantasy.¹⁹ Reworking of an existing myth, therefore, is a re-fantasizing and supplementation of the original text with a new-formed collective unconscious due to changes in society. By analyzing the revisions or adaptations of the plot and characters, the analyst unravels the story and its characters in the context of a new epoch, considering both how the author of the new text has rendered the previous text and how the new text is perceived by audiences who have knowledge of the older version. The story by Hong Pian and account of the legend by Tian Rucheng are roughly contemporary, since *Qingping shantang huaben* was published in 1550, just three years after the *Xihu youlan zhi*. Later versions articulated as novellas, operas, plays, and even popular drama and film in the present, point to an established manifestation of collective unconsciousness at the heart of the tale, meriting investigation of the significance of each metamorphosis.

The heart of this thesis will be an analysis of a popular film by Tsui Hark (徐克, Xu Ke) titled, *Green Snake* (青蛇, 1993), which is an adaptation of a popular novel of the same title by Li Pikwah (李碧華, Li Bihua), a Hong Kong writer. Li rewrites the story of Madame White from the perspective of her companion, Green Snake, challenging the representations and characterizations of the traditional narrative in the process. The script of the film version, co-

¹⁸ Wu 7-8.

¹⁹ C.G Jung, *Jung on mythology: selected and introduced by Robert A. Segal*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) 82. From "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious," CW 9 i, par.6.

written by Tsui and Li, generally remains faithful to the novel. However, as a commercial film maker in Hong Kong, Tsui Hark provides entertainment surpassing that found in Li Pikwah's novel. Supplemented by the actors, music, images, costumes and sets, and special effects, his film is a cinematically rich experience. Maggie Cheung (張曼玉, Zhang Manyu) and Joey Wong (王祖賢, Wang Zuxian) portray Green Snake and White Snake respectively, and William Cheung (張淑平, Zhang Shuping),²⁰ an internationally-known art director, designed their costumes. Chiu Man Cheuk (趙文卓, Zhao Wenzhuo) portrays Fahai (法海), the monk who punishes White Snake, and Wu Hsing-kuo (吳興國, Wu Xingguo) is Xu Xian (許仙), the human lover. While Chiu was a veteran actor in films and dramas, Wu was new to films, having been trained in Beijing opera since his youth and still performing internationally when *Green Snake* was filmed.²¹ The choice of the cast is important to the analysis of the visual images as text, which will be discussed in the last chapter. The composers of the score for *Green Snake* were also composers of popular Cantonese music. James Wong (王霑, Wang Zhan) was the number one composer in the history of Hong Kong, who defined local Canton music in the 1970s. The other composer, Ted Lo (雷頌德, Lei Songde), was another top composer in the 1990s who was indispensable in the popular music scene. Needless to say, Tsui Hark is one of the top commercial film makers in Hong Kong since 1980s with an international reputation. The production of *Green Snake* thus gathered the best people in each field, and utilized an intriguing script derived from a historical myth.

²⁰ William Cheung is well known internationally for his artistic talents as an art director. He is an exclusive art director for Wong Kar Wai's films.

²¹ Lu Jianying (盧健英), *The Contemporary Legend of Wu Hsing-kuo* (絕境萌芽: 吳興國的當代傳奇) (Taipei: Tianxia wenhua, 2006).

CHAPTER 2.

Evolution of “Madame White Snake” - from tale, to myth, to story (1540~1624)

The common plot shared by the traditional folktale, “Xihu santa ji,” and the short story, “Bai niangzi,” is that of a young man forced to be the husband of a snake demon in woman’s disguise. The woman is the stronger figure who forces or engages the man to be her husband in both narratives. “Xihu” is, strictly speaking, a demon tale, while “Bai niangzi” describes a romance between a man and a woman who is later found to be a snake demon. Patrick Hanan classifies both tales as “demon stories,” since they follow a pattern and share a common store of “stuff-materials.”²² Recurring “stuff-materials” in both narratives are: encounters between White and Xi/Xu mediated by other non-human companions of White, repeated ensnarement of Xi/Xu, and interventions by Daoist/Buddhist exorcists. The male character in both narratives has no distinctive characteristics other than his powerlessness and dependence on others. However, the character of Madame White greatly differs between the two. In “Xihu,” she is a demon who captures her male lovers and devours their hearts and livers when she is tired of them. In “Bai niangzi,” she is an independent and affectionate woman who takes care of her lover, negotiates her relationship with him, but becomes overbearing when her lover does not do as she pleases. While White is a cannibalistic demon in “Xihu” who needs to be destroyed, in “Bai niangzi,” she becomes a domesticated wife yet suffers the punishment of human laws. While the fundamental components or the “stuff-materials” are the same, the treatments of these stuff-materials are entirely different. What is intriguing about the transition from Hong Pian’s tale to Feng Menglong’s story are the differences in characterization and the meaning of the respective plots.

²² Hanan, *Chinese Vernacular* 19-20.

In the category of “demon stories,” Hanan identifies a common plot pattern shared by folktale and short story adaptation, which involves “three universal actors” and “four universal actions.”²³ Both “Xihu” and “Bai niangzi” fit into this category as well as four other surviving stories.²⁴ In the order of their appearance, the “three universal actors” are “a young man, unmarried; a demon,²⁵ that is, an animal spirit or the ghost of a dead person in the guise of a young girl;²⁶ and an exorcist, usually a [Daoist] master.”²⁷ In “Xihu” and “Bai niangzi,” they are Xi Xuanzan / Xu Xuan, Madame White Snake, and the Daoist/Buddhist respectively. The “four universal actions” are “Meeting, Lovemaking, Intimation of Danger, and Intercession by the Exorcist.”²⁸ Both stories follow the pattern of Xi/Xu meeting White on an outing during the Qingming Festival, becoming lovers not long after, and Xi/Xu being repeatedly endangered by White. In the end, White is punished and imprisoned beneath a pagoda on West Lake by a priest with supernatural power. Repetition of actions is often a persistent feature in both stories stimulating the reader’s imagination and anticipation, and unravelling the identity of Madame White step by step. In Wu Pei-yi’s interpretation, repetition is a device the authors used to engage the reader, as well as a symbol of a snake’s ensnarement of its prey, or a lady’s charm or power that ensnares a man’s heart.²⁹

²³ Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese short story: studies in dating, authorship, and composition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973) 188.

²⁴ The six stories classified as “demon stories.” See Hanan, *Chinese Short Story* 188.

²⁵ Hanan, *Chinese Short Story* 188.

²⁶ Hanan, *Chinese Short Story* 188.

²⁷ Hanan, *Chinese Short Story* 188.

²⁸ Hanan, *Chinese Short Story* 188.

²⁹ Wu, 69-72. Detailed summaries of the two narratives are charted in Appendix II(A) and (B).

With respect to repetition as a motif in the narrative, readers experience the events repeatedly along a linear story line and become as much absorbed by the events as the characters are. The repetitions are deliberately articulated in order to draw a contingent timeline of events and development, and they push the reader toward a foreseeable future and probe the reader's expectations.³⁰ With respect to a psychoanalytic paradigm, Jung regards repetition as a way to tug on the reader's desire to be in the fantasy, luring them to identify and experience the emotions in the text.³¹ Repetition in a mythological story connects reader and author, creating an opportunity for dialectical reworking of the text and characters by the reader as author.³² The cycle of repetition recurs again at the textual level, with the reader as author inscribing new meanings onto the earlier source materials. "Bai niangzi" moves away from both the fantastic realm of "Xihu," and the mythicized story in *Guide to the West Lake*, and develops the demon tale into a form of narrative writing.

Beyond the plot skeleton shared with its source, style, plot, and characterisation in "Bai niangzi" are entirely different from "Xihu." Realism plays a major role in "Bai niangzi," changing the theme from one of gothic fantasy to folklore. The world of "Xihu" is obviously demonic, as White's companions are endowed with traits such as skin like that of a fowl and neck feathers.³³ The setting of "Xihu" also seems to be a place beyond the human realm. The

³⁰ Umberto Eco, *The role of the reader: explorations in the semiotics of texts*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979) 8.

³¹ Jung 82.

³² Roland Barthes, *Critical essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 143-150. Barthes' essay, "Authors and Writers" in *Critical Essays* writes on the discourse of the author, writer, reader and text. The discourse of authorship began with French structuralist, Roland Barthes, suggesting that "text" is a space inscribed with codes and meanings, and is subjected to interpretation by the reader. This thought is later developed by many French post-structuralists such as Derrida, Lacan, and Kristeva for interpretations of literature.

³³ 雞膚滿體, 鶴髮如銀。眼昏加秋水微渾, 髮白似楚山雲淡。形加三月盡頭花, 命似九秋霜後菊。/// 宣贊耳畔只聞風雨之聲, 用手摸卯奴脖項上有毛衣。

narrative only traces Xi Xuanzan to a place called Temple of the Four Sages³⁴, where he suddenly arrives at White's extravagant mansion as if it is "the hidden dwelling of gods and goddesses, and palace of a king."³⁵ The prologue in "Xihu" describes West Lake at length but never mentions this location; nor are descriptions of its location provided after Xi arrives there. The only information provided is its locale somewhere "near" the Temple of the Four Sages.³⁶

What happens in White's residence is certainly far from being human, with descriptions of preparations for the removing of hearts and livers and iron cages that imprison past lovers. When Xi is about to be devoured, the little girl he saved transports him back to his home in return for his favour of providing shelter for her earlier in the story.³⁷ In Feng Menglong's version by contrast, the geography of West Lake is closely integrated into the daily life of the protagonist by careful illustrations. The prologue to the story is much shorter in comparison to "Xihu," and situates the story in the West Lake by lightly describing its landscape. As the story unfolds, more detailed illustrations of the geography are given. Places frequently mentioned in "Bai niangzi" are the market place, and various temples and bridges in the vicinity that can be reached by either foot or boat. Although Xu Xuan's travel to various places occurs with reasonable timing, it is always ambiguous as to *how* White and Green travel in order to reach their destinations.

Realism in depictions of lifestyle and events in "Bai niangzi" is essentially what changes a fantastic tale to a richly localized story. The locales mentioned are very specific and the

³⁴ H.C. Chang, *Chinese literature* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1973) 220. Sishengguan (四聖觀) Temple of the Four Sages.

³⁵ 即如神仙洞府,王者之宮。

³⁶ 奚宣贊隨著轎子,直至四聖觀側首一座小門樓。

³⁷ 卯奴去籠邊道:「我救你。」揭起鐵籠道:「哥哥閉了眼,如開眼,死於非命。」說罷,宣贊閉了眼,卯奴背了。宣贊耳畔只聞風雨之聲,用手摸卯奴脖項上有毛衣。

chronology of events is linear and coherent. Patrick Hanan points out the closeness of the story to the public and community as one of the main features added in the transformation of tale to story.³⁸ White's character and lifestyle in "Bai niangzi" are close to being fully domesticated and humanized, and her life is well integrated into the community. She uses umbrellas in the rain; has Green purchase produce from the market; eats, drinks and dresses like a human; and knows how to provide for her husband and herself. She also knows the customs of the human world: returning favours, using the services of a go-between for their marriage, and paying her respects to Xu Xuan's sister and her husband. There are also scenarios involving crime and punishment that reflect the social structure and the enforcement of order at the time. In "Bai niangzi," White steals money from a treasury and precious jewels from a pawn shop with the intention of providing for Xu. The consequences of her actions redound upon Xu, when he is sent to a prison camp in the first instance and badly beaten in the second. With the help of his brother-in-law who is an official, Xu is able to escape from the prison camp by means of a bribe and a letter of reference to an acquaintance and this enables him to settle in another city. In Feng's story, money and connections facilitate survival, and such conduct and social networking are signs of a modernizing society. Besides assimilating to human society, White also learns to lie, telling Xu after his arrest that the money and the items stolen had belonged to her late husband. Other details that give insights into life at the time are etched onto secondary characters such as Xu's sister and brother-in-law, his dependents, and other parties involved in the plot.

Love and relationship are also fundamental aspects of life in "Bai niangzi." "It was indeed Ch'ing-ming time, and the saying rang true, to hasten the flowers the heavens sent rain;

³⁸ Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981) 25.

and rain fell unceasingly.”³⁹ While the storyteller describes how rain in early spring “hastens” flowers to bloom, the same line also foreshadows the main narrative; a romantic encounter between Xu Xuan and Madame White made possible by the rain. The first rain shower causes White to call for a boat ride with Xu. After they have parted, a second shower leaves White stranded under a roof at the market place whereupon they meet again and Xu lends her an umbrella that he has borrowed saying that he will collect it from her residence the following day. When he arrives, he is invited in for a feast and wine, and he wants to leave and asks for his umbrella. White tells him that her relative has borrowed it and asks him to come back for it another day. Xu again goes to her residence and again he is invited for a feast and wine, at which point White proposes they should pursue their destiny⁴⁰ and unite as husband and wife. Even after their engagement and after Xu is twice charged with crimes, White pursues him, clinging to their relationship by means of threats and compulsion. These repetitions suggest “ensnarement” of Xu’s heart in his relationship with Madame White, and hint at Madame White’s true identity as a snake that ensnares its prey.⁴¹

The love affairs between White and Xi/Xu in “Xihu” and “Bai niangzi” are different since White is a demon who captures her lovers in “Xihu,” and a *woman* who negotiates her relationship in “Bai niangzi.” However, both stories portray women negatively, as *femmes fatales* who destroy men. Xi is almost objectified in “Xihu,” as there is no description of his character and he is a powerless victim of the three demons. From the beginning of “Bai niangzi,” Xu’s is a passive role; he is described as “an honest man who cannot help but be

³⁹ Chang 220, Feng 440. 正是清明時節，少不得天公應時，催花雨下，那陣雨下得綿綿不絕。

⁴⁰ Chang 225, Feng 443. “... it must be that I was pre-destined (宿世姻緣) to be united with you,”

⁴¹ Wu 72.

infatuated by their beauty,” while Madame White and her servant girl are described as “beauties like flower and jade.”⁴² At night, Xu’s desire for Madame White, manifested in his dreams, is metaphorically portrayed in a seven-character poem, “As restless fancy soars and glides, prompted by the eager heart, / So butterflies flutter and bees buzz / in that precious hour before dawn.”⁴³ Xu’s character becomes more and more foolhardy after they are married. He insists on going to local events against White’s wishes, and even betrays her three times. Firstly, he listens to a Daoist priest, who uses charms to try to expose her true form.⁴⁴ Secondly, his uncle and Xu order a snake catcher to try to capture her. And lastly, he begs a Buddhist monk to save him. Meanwhile, White becomes more and more controlling. She continues to try to hold the relationship together with enticing words while hoping for a better outcome. She repeatedly reinstates their status as “husband and wife,”⁴⁵ and trusts this title as true bonding.⁴⁶ Near the end when Xu denies he had ever take a wife, White relinquishes her hopes of love and becomes threatening,

⁴² “Now Hsu Hsuan was an innocent young man and when he saw this flower-like, jade-like, beautiful woman, accompanied by her equally elegant, pretty maidservant, he could not help becoming infatuated.” Chang 221. 許宣平生是個老實人，見了此等如花似玉的美婦人，傍邊又是個俊俏美女樣的丫鬟，也不免動念。 Feng 440.

⁴³ Chang 223, Feng 442. 心猿意馬馳千里，浪蝶狂蜂鬧五更。

⁴⁴ Chang 236, Feng 449. “We’ve been husband and wife all this time, my Master Little Eldest, yet you never cherished me in your bosom. Instead you listen to the idle chatter of others. At midnight you would even burn a charm to exorcise me.” “小乙哥和我許多時夫妻，尚兀自不把我親熱，卻信別人言語，半夜三更，燒符來壓鎮我!”

⁴⁵ Chang 236, Feng 449. “We’ve been husband and wife all this time, ...” “小乙哥和我許多時夫妻,...”; Chang 238, Feng 450. “Don’t be long, husband! Don’t keep me waiting!” “丈夫早早回來，切勿教奴記掛!”; Chang 239, Feng 451. “My husband left early this morning for the monastery, ...” “丈夫去寺中間要,...”; Chang 243, Feng 454. “Lovers for one night, memories for a hundred” “丈夫，一夜夫妻百夜恩,...”; Chang 243, Feng 454. “Since we did have so much in common and were man and wife, ...” “情意相投，做了夫妻,...”.

⁴⁶ Chang 243, Feng 454. “What about all our vows of eternal fidelity, our oaths of enduring love, our promises of everlasting affection? Husband, think of our days of happy wedlock, and take me back with you to your lodgings. We’ll begin anew a life of bliss. Surely that’s best!” “我與你情似泰山，恩同東海，誓同生死，可看日常夫妻之面，取我到下處，和你百年偕老，卻不是好!”

If you do as I tell you, all shall be well and we may remain the happiest of couples. But if you betray me, this city of yours shall welter in blood-streaked water; men and women shall grapple in vain with the waves, kicking and struggling and clutching at straws, all and each doomed to an untimely death.⁴⁷

From enticing words to threatening statements, the “demon” in White is slowly drawn out by humans who threaten to expose her true identity and by Xu, who is easily influenced by others. Even when her actions causes him harm, her intentions are good since she wanted to provide for him. “Demonic” traits clearly apparent in “Xihu” survive in Feng’s story as vestiges, in Madame White’s form as a snake but not in her initial character.

Unlike White in “Xihu,” who objectifies her lovers, devours them and is punished for her malice, White in “Bai niangzi” is *objectified* under society’s eyes. White in “Bai niangzi” is always being looked at, as a woman and as a snake; she is often described from the vantage point of someone peeking through a crack in the door, or peeking through the bed curtains.⁴⁸ White is a dignified woman who refuses to be recognized as anything less than human when she comes face to face with Fahai. She even begs Fahai to release her companion Green, and takes responsibility for letting Green transform from fish to human. In the marginal note, Feng comments, “Even during hard times Madame White cared for Little Green, she is truly a demon with kindness and morals.”⁴⁹

In Feng’s retelling, Madame White is nonetheless objectified and deemed to be “demonic” and therefore inferior to humans. Fahai casts a spell on White to force her to show her true form before Xu, which degrades and reduces her to the form of a snake on the ground

⁴⁷ Chang 253.

⁴⁸ Feng 455-56, 460.

⁴⁹ Feng 463.

looking up to Xu.⁵⁰ Morality and humanity contend by juxtaposing the qualities of the characters; Green and White as non-humans, Xu and other humans, and Fahai the monk. Although White is “demonic” in form, she has done nothing degrading or inferior to humans in comparison. Contrarily, Proprietor Li tries to set up a trap to rape her,⁵¹ and Fahai is determined to confine White and Green because they are demons who are prone to harm people.⁵² The collective unconscious of “humanity” reflected in the overall narrative assumes “non-humans” are incapable of maintaining morality and thus are inherently evil, even though there are many instances where human characters treat White inhumanely. “Humanity,” thus can be understood on three levels, those of body and flesh, personal principles and values, and the collective unconscious of morality and humanness. While having adequate principles but failing to be human in form disqualifies one from being “human,” humans with malevolence are exempted from punishment and deemed “human” since they satisfy the precondition of having an organic body. “Humanity” is defined by the collective social body, which regards White and Green as creatures other than “human” at the time when Feng wrote the story. However, the identity of White and Green gradually change from one version to another, perceived differently by readers and authors under different social structures.

Although White suffers the same tragic ending as she does in “Xihu,” the narrator in “Bai niangzi” sympathizes with her because she is affectionate and loyal to Xu despite his many betrayals. Moreover, White in “Bai niangzi” does not conform to the expected role for women of that time, but exemplifies a will to resist the existing structure. She desires a fair relationship

⁵⁰ Feng 463.

⁵¹ Feng 455-56.

⁵² Feng 462-63. “... had I not come to the rescue, the white snake would have devoured him.” Hanan, *Chinese Vernacular* 49.

with the man she loves, and takes initiatives to engage in a relationship.⁵³ She also breaks from staying chaste in widowhood, which was once prized as a woman's highest virtue.⁵⁴ However, she ultimately suffers the consequences of being entangled in her relationship with Xu and as a result loses all privileges of being human.

White's spirit of resistance in a phallogentric and hierarchical society carries on in the subsequent versions of the story. She becomes more and more powerful as a *woman* playing the role of the ideal wife, yet she also has an increasing number of superhuman powers. White's independent role in the story and spirit of resistance become crucial elements in later versions. The authors of later versions celebrate White's character and further stretch their imagination of White as both a woman and a deity. White's ending remains unchanged in all of these later versions, yet the structures of justice and moral issues exemplified in Feng's adaptation are challenged. As the story transform from one version to another, sympathy for White increases even as she is repeatedly condemned as an evil spirit. The tale of "Madame White" becomes one of Buddhist karma and romance in future versions throughout the course of its evolution up to the present.

⁵³ Chang 225, Feng 443. "Surely 'tis a case of "two yearning hearts"! Please, my Master Little Eldest, find a go-between and we shall be wedded." "正是你有心，我有意。煩小乙官人尋一個媒証，與你共成百年姻眷。"

⁵⁴ Chang 225, Feng 443. "I have lost my husband, and it must be that I was pre-destined to be united with you." 奴家亡了丈夫，想必和官人有宿世姻緣，一見便蒙錯愛。

CHAPTER 3.

“Madame White Snake” in plays - transgression from non-human to human

Repetition in any form of creative work is symbolic of the journey the author takes in search of an object, a desire, or a missing link between the real and the imagined.⁵⁵ Edward Casey argues in his article, “Imagination and Repetition in Literature: A Reassessment,” that imagination and repetition are “co-ingredient(s)” in literature and are “far from being mutually exclusive.”⁵⁶ “Understood at their most basic level of activity, both repetition and imagination have to do with *absence*. ... The act of repetition represents a response to the absence which haunts human being-in-the-world. Similarly, imagination can be seen as a means of coping with the inevitable unfulfillment of human desires and expectations.”⁵⁷ The plot of the story Feng Menglong wrote in 1624 became a basic plot for subsequent versions. In the 18th century, the story of *Madame White Snake* was turned into a play by several writers. These writers further romanticized the character of White and her passion to love. Ironically, these writers are also influenced by Buddhist philosophy. Their versions show the authors’ imagination of the myth within a Buddhist context.

Feng’s re-writing of “Xihu” as “Bai niangzi” removes the horror from the tale and takes it in the direction of comedy.⁵⁸ He adds a substantial amount of elements in “Bai niangzi” that reflect social realities, such as court-case scenarios, family relationships, and romantic

⁵⁵ Paul Valéry, “The Idea of Art,” trans. Ralph Manheim, in *Aesthetics*, ed. Harold Osborne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).

⁵⁶ Edward Casey, “Imagination and Repetition in Literature: A Reassessment,” *Graphesis: Perspectives in Literature and Philosophy* 52 (1975): 249-267.

⁵⁷ Casey 252.

⁵⁸ Hanan, *Chinese Short Story* 180.

entanglements. “Madame White” draws the world of humans and the world of demons/spirits/deities closer together in a popular geographic location - Hangzhou, and depicts a cohabitation of the two in a familial domestic setting. However, even in fantasy, the communion between humans and non-humans is not tolerated by social standards. A noteworthy difference between the later plays and Feng’s version is that the writers of the plays take a moral stance on the story. Their interpretation of the story with a moralizing perspective saw it as a narrative rather than a myth, and permanently changed a story that was originally a myth into a legend.⁵⁹

The version following “Bai niangzi” is a play entitled *Leifengta*, written in 1738 by Huang Tubi. Its original version consists of 32 scenes and there was also a more popular version with two additional scenes once believed to be lost according to Wu Pei-yi and other scholars of “Madame White Snake.”⁶⁰ The two additional scenes are said to be, “Ducao (Stealing the Magical Herb)” and “Shuidou (Water Battle).”⁶¹ A collection of plays based on the “Madame White” story compiled by Fu Xihua includes the original version of the play by Huang Tubi with 32 scenes, from a printed copy in 1738.⁶² Also in the compilation are a play by Fang Chengpei in 1771 with 34 scenes, and many other versions of selective extracts of the full-length play. A brief summary of each scene in these two plays can be found in Appendix II.

A major difference to the earlier texts in these two plays is the addition of a prologue performed by auxiliary actors, who tell of the karmic tie between White and Xu, and an epilogue that states the Buddhist teachings that are exemplified throughout the play. Soliloquies in both

⁵⁹ Hanan, *Chinese Vernacular* 25.

⁶⁰ Dai 1; footnote 3, 16. Also noted as “inaccessible” in Wu 83. A copy of the play survives in print according to Fu Xihua, *Baishe zhuan ji* (Shanghai: Shanghai Publishing, 1955) 281-338,

⁶¹ Zhang Henshui 張恨水, *Baishe zhuan* 白蛇傳 (Beijing: Tongsuwenyi, 1955) 1.

⁶² Fu 338. 清乾隆三年（一七三八年）看山閣刻本校印。

prologue and epilogue are spoken by an actor who plays the Buddha, and at the end of the prologue, Fahai receives orders to imprison White and bring Xu back onto the Buddhist path once their karma is completed.

[Huang, Act 1 - Prologue]

A white snake and a green fish have been practicing self-cultivation for more than a thousand years. Unexpectedly, they relinquish their quiet life and fancy a life on earth. Xu Xuan is an attendant who holds the bowl of the Buddha. Because he is predetermined by karma to meet with [the white snake], he has to be reborn as a human and fulfill their karma. However, fearing Xu Xuan will be lost and forget his true self, the Buddha orders Fahai to control and contain the demon when the karma is fulfilled, and to bring Xu back to the Buddha after he succeeds in his task.⁶³

[Huang, Act 32 - Epilogue]

(In the Buddhist realm, an old man actor sings to Xu) You can practice the [Buddhist] path conscientiously and be determined to help and deliver laymen from suffering. You can, establish your root of kindness and cultivate the fruit of righteousness.

(Xu replies to the old man) Please have pity on your disciple, I have fallen on earth and suffered. I beg you master kindly to alleviate the devilish obstruction and guide me to be complete and clear, so that I will not lose my intrinsic nature.⁶⁴

Regardless of whether Huang intended to advocate Buddhist teachings in his version or was only using them as devices to open and conclude the play, his addition of the prologue and epilogue in *Leifengta* resembles Buddhist stories with *huatou*, “words to precede,” and *huawei*, “words to conclude.” *Huatou* (話頭) is an opening to a story that will guide a student to awakening.⁶⁵ It lays out the direction of the story in the beginning and projects a message to the reader that is carried through in the story. *Huawei* (話尾) resumes the moral or philosophy laid out in the story, and lets the reader/audience contemplate these teachings retrospectively. Throughout the

⁶³ This is not a translation but a summary of the selected section of the play. Huang Act 1, in Fu 282, 今東溟有一白蛇與一青魚... 遂悟苦修, 今有一千餘載。不想這孽畜, 頓忘皈依清淨, 忘想墮落塵埃。那許宜本係吾座前一捧鉢侍者, 因伊原有宿緣, 故令降生凡胎, 了此孽案, 但恐逗入迷途, 忘卻本來面目。吾當明示法海, 俟孽緣圓滿, 收壓妖邪, 苦行功成, 即接引歸元。

⁶⁴ Huang Act 32, in Fu 337. [外] 汝能苦心修道, 立願濟人, 不滅善根, 合成正果。[小生] 可憐弟子呵, 墮落塵寰遭悽愴, 感蒙師父呵, 慈悲法力消魔障, 苦海得相依傍, 指示我秘密圓明, 方不失原來色相。

⁶⁵ Matthew Lee Duperon, “The contemplative idiom in Chan Buddhist rhetoric and Indian and Chinese alchemy,” thesis, Cornell University, 2006 36-37.

play, there are numerous events that are explicit examples of Buddhist philosophy. In Act 10 and 11 of Huang's play, White punishes fishermen by putting them in nets and setting them in shallow water because they have been making a living off the suffering of other creatures. Fahai saved them from their agony in Act 11, and as a result of this ordeal, the fishermen seek out other means of survival and even become vegetarians. When Fahai saves them from the nets, he paraphrases an old Buddhist saying, "if you wish to know the causes [of effects] in this life, they are what was done in the past life; if you wish to know the causes of your next life, do so in the present."⁶⁶ Needless to say, in the prologue, the connection between White and Xu is described as based on *yuan* (緣) - a popular Chinese belief with roots in Buddhism based on ideas of reincarnation, karma⁶⁷, and *nie* (孽) - an exclusively Buddhist belief in the repayment of debts or faults. Both plays by Huang and Fang follow these threads in Buddhist storytelling and the basic teachings rendered in the plays concern the dangers of *se* (色, beauty, eros), *yin* (淫, promiscuity), *tan* (貪, greed), *chen* (瞋, lack of wit) and *chi* (癡, being besotted or stupefied).

Unlike the wealth of shared "stuff materials" between "Xihu" and "Bai niangzi," "stuff materials" transferred from "Bai niangzi" to these plays are fewer. The plot pattern in the plays basically follow the same pattern as "Bai niangzi," but both playwrights dramatize different parts of the narrative, add and delete elements, and portray White's character differently. White no longer compels Xu into a relationship as in previous versions, but is rather faithful, loving, and rich with emotions. Both playwrights augment to Feng's sympathetic portrayal and turn White

⁶⁶ Huang Act 11, in Fu 300. 自古道：「要知今世因，前生作者是；要知後世因，今生犯者是。」

⁶⁷ Karma can be understood as a predestined course of cause and effect, similar to the idea of *yuan* that can be understood as a destined opportunity or fated happening of something.

into a vulnerable victim of both men and fate, a creature prey to the enchantment of *qing* (情).⁶⁸ Since the prologue already speaks of a preordained entanglement, the interest in both plays lies in how White negotiates the danger of separation and discovery of her true identity, to arrive at a condition that favours and even strengthens her bond with Xu Xuan. In two episodes where Xu was a scapegoat for her theft of silver, garments, and a precious pendant, rather than coercing him into believing it was a mistake and strengthening her powerful status as in Feng's version, White defends her act as a gift of kindness and love and asks Xu why she would want to harm him as his wife.⁶⁹ She also goes into detail to explain why others would think she and her maid are ghosts, and claims no responsibility for the silver and items that belonged to her late husband. Her explanations counter every suspicion of her, and she lowers her head and turns silent, or breaks into tears as if conceding Xu's supremacy. Her utterances thus change, from being intimidating in Feng's version to being flirtatious and indulgent. Moreover, in Huang's play, the episode that follows the one where they reunite as husband and wife after the second arrest of Xu is one of seduction on her part. The rationale for vanquishing White is the threat posed by her powerful femininity and the dangers of female lust more generally, rather than any threat posed by a non-human species, as in "Xihu," or "Bai niangzi."

While Huang's 1738 version uses the story as a vehicle for Buddhist teachings, Fang's re-imagining of the story in 1771 stretches the boundaries of Buddhism and changes the fate of White. White's femininity, as well as her extraordinary power as a non-human, are both stressed

⁶⁸ *Qing* (情) can mean affection, affinity for others, love, and attachment. Because of its variations in meaning, I would like to keep the word in Chinese throughout this thesis.

⁶⁹ Huang Act 7 on stolen silver; Act 14 on the reunion of White and Xu in Suzhou; Act 17 on lost items; Act 19 on Xu being caught; Act 23 on the seduction of Xu in Zhenjiang. Fang Act 8 on discovery of lost silver, Xu flees; Act 11 on their reunion in Suzhou; Act 19 on stolen items, Xu is arrested; Act 20 on his trial, Xu leaves for Zhenjiang; Act 21 on their reunion in Zhenjiang, White cries and swears she would rather throw herself in the river.

in Fang's play. Her identity changes in different stages of the story; from that of a non-human seeking to become human, to a biological woman who is socially accepted as a mother, to a snake imprisoned by Fahai and ultimately received by the Buddha as a deity at play's end. White descends to the human world and subjugates Green by winning a battle against her on West Lake, and is respected by water creatures as a master. She is able to command water, rain and wind as she pleases, and acts as a punisher against the fishermen who harm the ecology of the lake. Fang's additions to the plot are White's pregnancy in Act 16, her quest for the magic herb to revive Xu from death in Act 17, her battle with Fahai in Act 25, and her giving birth to a son in Act 27. Despite being pregnant, White battles Fahai by raising the level of West Lake when he confines Xu in his Jinshan Temple in Act 25. Fahai cannot use his magical bowl to contain her because she bears a human child; hence White's pregnancy empowers her both to bear a human child and to challenge the dogma that non-humans and humans are separate species. These additions suggest that Fang is questioning what constitutes being "human." In Act 29, after the human child has left White's womb, Fahai only succeeds in imprisoning her because she is caught off guard within the comfort of her own room with Xu and unaccompanied by Green. She is reduced to becoming again a snake and buried under the Leifeng pagoda. Her vulnerability creates even more sympathy for her in Fang's dramatic retelling.

Fang's play does not end with White being imprisoned beneath the pagoda. Xu is brought back to the Buddhist path, his karma is completed, and he has no further significant role beyond Act 30. A new character, White's son, is introduced in Act 32, where he pays respect to White after succeeding in the imperial examinations. He cries out at the injustice done to White, and envisions her face in the pagoda as she speaks to him and teaches him as a mother would. The Buddha is moved by the goodness of the filial son and orders Fahai to release White from

the pagoda in Act 34, which concludes the play. In the end, he teaches Xu and White to put aside their worldly desires of love and lust, underscoring the Buddhist philosophy of lust and desire as a form of suffering.

White's power to enchant lies in her feminine allure and her ability to provide for Xu. On the other hand, Xu plays the role of an ordinary man whose only concern is for his own good and well-being. Xu's character emerges more clearly in the dramatic versions, as he is more involved in the plot than in the earlier narratives. As in previous versions, he is dependent on others and easily falls prey to White's beauty and provision of material comfort. His behaviour takes two forms: that of a genuine husband who caters to his wife but betrays the relationship when he feels threatened, and that of a man whose ultimate concern is for his own good. When Xu goes to fetch his umbrella from White the day after they meet on the boat, Green tells him White will propose to him and without any display of passion or infatuation, as was the case in "Bai niangzi," he accepts the offer of marriage and takes the silver White offers him.⁷⁰ When he is subsequently arrested for stealing the silver, rather than begging to be spared the beating as in "Bai niangzi," in Huang's play, he admits to being tempted by greed and claims that he does not truly desire riches. As a result he is spared the punishment.⁷¹ In Fang's play, he simply flees to another city without a second thought for White.⁷² Xu not only depends upon others for his day-to-day survival, he also is lacking in good judgement and is easily persuaded by others, believing White to be a demon on some occasions, and his dear wife on other occasions. He listens to a Daoist who tries to exorcise his wife, orders a snake catcher to capture her, and begs Fahai to

⁷⁰ Huang Act 5; Fang Act 7.

⁷¹ Huang Act 7, in Fu 294. (Xu) To now I am still dependent on others. I was only tempted and foolish, and not truly greedy and self-indulgent. [小生] 小人一身，尚屬寄居他家，不過一時癡念，並非實心貪戀。

⁷² Fang Act 8, in Fu 354. (Xu) Although that lady treats me very well, I cannot care too much for her at this point. [生] 那小姐待我情分不薄，只是於今也顧他不得了！

save him from her. The explanation for why White continues to feel for him and insist on their relationship is the working of karma in both plays.⁷³ As in Feng's story, White has the power to end the relationship or threaten Xu once he acts against her, but she does not do so because she is bound to fulfill her role as wife by karma rather than any deep affinity for Xu. Under this presumption of a karmic-based and loveless relationship, Xu's role then becomes that of an auxiliary being whose purpose is to enable White's transformation into a human woman. As a result, White's identity surpasses that in all previous versions. Xu's reduced role explains the minimal changes to his characterization in the plays, in contrast to the evolution in White's character.

Green, who is an underdeveloped character in previous versions, also receives more attention in the plays. She changes from being a servant and companion who has neither a voice nor an independent role in "Bai niangzi" to being as powerful as White in the battle against Fahai in Act 25. Huang's version is an intermediate stage of Green's development. She is introduced with White in the opening act,⁷⁴ and although she is still a servant she no longer runs errands or takes orders from White. Instead, she shares a sister-like relationship with White and acts as a facilitator between them and the human world. Green complements White in ways that protect them from being exposed or harmed. She also engages in dialogues in a reciprocal yet collaborative relationship. Although her role as the female auxiliary may only be a theatrical device to develop plot lines and complement White's role as the heroine,⁷⁵ their "mission" or

⁷³ Huang Act 3, in Fu 284. (Green) My lady is likely paired with Xu Xuan because of karma... [貼] 我娘因與許宣，應有宿緣...

⁷⁴ Huang Act 1, in Fu 283. (Buddha) Now the white snake transforms into a widow, and the green fish to a servant. [生] 今白蛇化一寡婦，青魚變一侍兒

⁷⁵ Female auxiliary actress, 貼.

“intent” in the human world is forthrightly laid out as a “pleasure trip.”⁷⁶ In Act 3, as they transform into humans to pursue White’s karma on earth, their dialogue reveals the intimate quality of their relationship.⁷⁷

White: I will transform into a young widow, and how about if you were to transform as my maid dressed in green?

Green: That sounds reasonable. My lady, please transform before me so that I can observe.

(Stage direction: Heroine steps down and returns as a widow. She listens in secret.)

Green: We will descend to the laymen’s world because my lady is likely predestined to have a karmic relationship with Xu Xuan, I will change into a servant dressed in green. What happens when the relationship is at hand? How will I be absolved?

Green sings: *Would I solely be making their beds without appraisal while the two of them lovingly enter the bedroom together.*⁷⁸

White: Would I not know your thoughts? If I can share the pillow with him, I would not neglect sharing the love equally with you.

The words Green sings here suggest resentment at being abandoned or treated as little more than a maidservant when White marries Xu. This presumes a pre-existing bond with her mistress that continues even after Xu enters the picture.

Green’s supernatural power is compatible with White’s in Huang’s version and she acts as the one who carries out tasks after White prescribes what should be done. She leads an army of water creatures under White’s command to capture the fishermen in Act 10, and swiftly takes away the Daoist who tried to exorcise White in Act 16, then terrifies him with her abilities to command water. Her power and status escalate further in the subsequent version of 1771, when she appears as a green snake and as the master of West Lake before White even arrives. In Green’s introductory scene, Act 5, she boasts of her ability to govern living creatures in West

⁷⁶ Huang Act 3, in Fu 286. (White) Little Green and I wish to make a pleasure trip to the laymen’s world. [旦] 我與青兒，欲往人間游戲。

⁷⁷ Huang Act 3, in Fu 287.

⁷⁸ Huang Act 3, in Fu 287. 難道他兩兩鴛鴦入洞房，空教我疊被舖床。

Lake and her ambition to become a deity.⁷⁹ Green challenges White to a battle when she comes, only to agree to become White's companion after she is defeated by her.⁸⁰ Although White defeats Green, they both share an identity as snakes and Green consents to accompany White on her visit to the human world. In Fang's play, they share thoughts and negotiate bonding in dialogues as equals and without power tensions. Green respects White because she has become a deity after years of cultivation with the honoured name, "Baiyun xiangu (White Cloud Deity)."⁸¹ She serves White willingly but expresses feelings of being alone.⁸² For her part, White values Green's companionship and cares for her like a younger sister and disciple. The two often share what is on their mind and strategically plot to resolve problems together. This is most apparent in Act 13, when White is alone under the night sky and thinking of the difficulties she encountered so far during her sojourn in the laymen's world. Green comes forth to offer consolation and invites White to speak about her worries. She assures White that she will always support her and curiously asks her reasons for abandoning self-cultivation after so many years of practice. White then shares with Green her insights into self-cultivation, karma, and the pursuit of *qing* in the laymen's world. These conversations show Green as the one who questions White's patience and persistence in maintaining the relationship with Xu regardless of his repeated betrayals.⁸³ White explains her inability to pull away from the relationship, giving the

⁷⁹ Fang Act 5, in Fu 347-348.

⁸⁰ Fang Act 5, in Fu 347. (White) I came from Mount E-wei and wish to seek my destined other. I lack a companion; would you transform into a companion and accompany me? Would you be willing? (Green) Yes, I will to be by your side. [旦] 貧道從峨嵋山到此, 欲度有緣之士, 只是少一隨伴, 你可變一侍兒, 相隨前往, 不知你意下如何? [丑] 願隨侍左右。

⁸¹ Baiyun xiangu, 白雲仙姑

⁸² In Fang Act 9, in Fu 356. Green voices her feelings as a servant girl, "Who pities me, the servant girl, who runs in and out of the hall filling tea and delivering wine, picking dishes and pouring soup. My legs swell from all the hustle and bustle day and night." (誰憐我走堂, 添茶送酒, 揀菜傳湯, 朝夜奔來兩腿脹。)

⁸³ Fang Act 25, in Fu 395. [貼] 娘娘, 官人的磨折, 不是一次了, 為何今番這般著急。

ties of karma and *qing* as her reasons. Their utterances in the form of question and response serve as a subtext that inquires into the workings of *qing*, and the plot questions whether either Buddhism or the rigid moral codes of society are “human” after all. The play as a whole inquires into the extremes of *qing*, as both ultimate sacrifice and utmost selfishness, and questions the authority of religion/philosophy to govern these manifestations.

The role of punisher in versions prior to these plays, whether assumed by Daoist or Buddhist, is to contain “evil,” without questioning whether the relationship between White and Xu *could* be permitted. On the other hand, in the plays the relationship *is* permitted from the beginning by the workings of karma and incarnation. At the end of Feng’s vernacular short story, a four-line poem hints at the possibility of White’s rebirth and implies her being poses a future threat.⁸⁴

When the West lake is drained of its water
And rivers and ponds are dried up,
When Thunder Peak Pagoda crumbles,
The White Snake shall again roam the earth.

These lines appears also in Huang’s play, as words spoken by the Buddha to Fahai before Fahai descends to the human world to honour his duties in Act 1.⁸⁵ The role of Fahai then becomes that of one who strictly enforces Buddhist notions of causation and puts an end to the karmic cycle that holds White and Xu together. In Fang’s play the final act, in which White is released after being imprisoned for eons, extends the frontier of Buddhist teachings. Although the fruit of a forbidden relationship, the son White bears changes her fate and sanctions her existence as a woman, and her persistence in a loving relationship with a human is rewarded. If love is the ultimate goodness, then forbidding love is the utmost cruelty. Fahai is then liable for breaking up

⁸⁴ Chang 261.

⁸⁵ Huang Act 1, in Fu 284. [生] 汝須聽著：雷峰塔倒，西湖水乾，江潮不起，白蛇出世。

their relationship because he insists on enforcing orders without making personal judgements. White criticizes Fahai saying, “You are a practicing Buddhist monk! Why is your heart like stone, tearing the two of us apart?”⁸⁶ When Fahai imprisons White, he says to her directly, “When Leifeng Pagoda falls, the water of West Lake dries, and waves of the river cease, you will be allowed to walk on earth.”⁸⁷ These lines reflect Fahai’s arrogance and draw out the contradictions within Buddhism that are manifested in the story.

Although it can be argued that the imprisonment of White must occur before her love can be sanctioned, authors of later versions construct Fahai as a stubborn monk who strives only to earn credit by policing good and evil. His efforts to dictate righteousness outweigh a Buddhist inclination to be compassionate, and this later translates into a desire purely to be a high-ranking monk.

These plays from the 18th century significantly changed the development of the White Snake’s story, from myth, to local history, to a story with moral objectives. In addition to the Buddhist philosophy that informs these plays, new episodes concerning White’s quest to rescue Xu and her roles as a mother and a deity were added to the plays. These added episodes, which focus on the role of women, reflect the increasing acceptance of women as individuals in society. Nonetheless, women are not accepted without conditions. White has to prove herself capable of being a loving wife and give birth to a son before she is fully recognized. Following Fang’s play in 1771, the next surviving play about Madame White is one written by Tian Han (1898-1968) in 1952. Tian Han’s play adopts the major changes of the myth made by Huang and Fang, but simplifies the plot.

⁸⁶ Fang Act 25, in Fu 398.

⁸⁷ Fang Act 29, in Fu 410. 〔外〕白蛇聽著, 雷峰塔倒, 西湖水乾, 江湖不起, 許汝再世。

Tian also extends the ending of Huang and Fang's play. After White has given birth and is imprisoned by Fahai, Green returns and defeats the guardian of the pagoda. She releases White from under the pagoda by leading a troop of water creatures after spending a hundred years refining her powers. The radical change in Green's character from 1738 to 1952 also changes her from an auxiliary figure to one as important as White. While writers of *Madame White Snake* have focused on rewriting White's character, Tian *adds* new episodes and completely re-imagines the role of Green in the story. More effort is also directed towards portraying Fahai's arrogance and deception, while Xu's character remains that of a stereotypical commoner.

Tian's play completely transforms Madame White into a human being. Madame White acquires the name Bai Suzhen (白素貞), which resembles the name of a human; Bai, the last name, White, *su* as in purity, and *zhen* as in chastity. Meanwhile, the green snake also acquires the nickname Xiao Qing (小青) and her role becomes a more significant one. Tian's re-writing of *Madame White Snake* in 1940s and 50s shifts the evolution of the story in the directions of individual identity and social politics. Li Pikwah's novel parodies Tian's play by ironically ridiculing Madame White's story from the perspectives of Little Green. Her novel challenges the themes of love, lust, and power, by subverting presumed narrative development and complicating the relationships between characters.

CHAPTER 4.

Re-writing and Parody of *Madame White Snake* - social discourse in Tian Han's play (1955) and Li Pikwah's *Green Snake* (1993)

Madame White Snake is continually revived up to the present. It is, to adopt Edward Casey's words, "re-imagined by means of repetition both within the work and within the mind."⁸⁸

However, repetition is not a reproduction or imitation of the work but rather an "imaginative poetizing of essentially *unrealized, unperceived* possibilities."⁸⁹ By repetition, the "stuff materials" that are repeated become consistent and are turned into "facts" and set paradigms similar to history and tradition. Therefore, re-writing "Madame White" challenges the preexisting versions since it subverts the paradigm by working within the convention of the story's tradition.⁹⁰

Re-writing the story is a two-fold maneuver that involves repetition and imagination. While repetition is often thought to be "confined to replicating what is past" and imagination is thought to be a projection "towards the future," repetition and imagination in re-writing literature cannot be easily distinguished, because they happen together simultaneously when the author re-writes the story.⁹¹ The imagination of the writer re-writing the story is based on a preexisting story, and is repeating selective parts of the story as s/he re-writes it. Similarly, "parody is repetition, but repetition that includes difference. It is imitation with critical ironic distance,

⁸⁸ Casey 267.

⁸⁹ Casey 266.

⁹⁰ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London, NY: Routledge, 1988) 5.

⁹¹ Casey 249.

whose irony can cut both ways (the past and the present).”⁹² Although parody seems to disrupt the order of things, it also re-evaluates and re-creates a dialogue with the past in light of the present.⁹³ Therefore, it connects past and present, rather than disconnects, which can also be recognized as a sign of nostalgia. However, this is not a nostalgic return to the past but rather is a “critical revisiting” and an “ironic dialogue with the past” that recontextualizes the past as well as problematizing it.⁹⁴ Parody marks both continuity and change in a “self-reflexive discourse that is always inextricably bound to social discourse.”⁹⁵

From the 18th century to the 1950s, China went through radical changes, from dynastic rule to a “People’s Republic” under Mao’s Communist Party (1911-49). Tian Han wrote his version of “Madame White” in 1952 and made a final version in 1955 after enduring war and arriving at a more stabilized society. Tian Han treated the myth of the White Snake as emblematic of tradition and the past and used the story to reflect the changes in society at that time. Although adopting the characters and plot of previous versions, Tian politicized both the story and the characters. He used the relationship of White and Green to bring out the oppressed state of women in the traditional society, and that of Fahai and Xu to exemplify the ruler and the ruled. At the end of the play, Green destroys the pagoda, which symbolizes power and phallocentrism, and freed White. Green becomes a symbol of independence and liberation, and thus reflects Tian’s vision of a free society.

In *Green Snake* by Li Pikwah, the subject of the next chapter, Green becomes the central figure in the retelling of “Madame White.” Furthermore, the destruction of the pagoda is caused

⁹² Linda Hutcheon. *Theory of Parody* (NY: Methuen, 1985) 37.

⁹³ Hutcheon, *Poetics* 19.

⁹⁴ Hutcheon, *Poetics* 4.

⁹⁵ Hutcheon, *Poetics* 35.

by a man with the last name Xu, presumably a descendent of White and Xu Xuan. The young man in *Green Snake* is a Red Guard during the Cultural Revolution in China. The downfall of the pagoda here also symbolizes the overturn of tradition and phallogentrism, which are deemed to be a hinderance to modernization.

Tian Han and "Baishe zhuan"

Tian Han's play, "Baishe zhuan," was first staged as a Beijing opera in 1955. The plot basically follows the version by Feng Menglong, but the characters have been profoundly redeveloped around a theme based on love and freedom. Madame White acquires a human name, Bai Suzhen, and pursues Xu on an equal basis as a human. Green also has a human nickname, Xiao Qing, "Little Green," and addresses White as sister. The play is complicated. The characters and their affairs are described with affection and tension, and the relationship between Xu and White is fully romanticized as a love tragedy.

In a prologue to the play, Tian writes that he took great care with the dialogues so that he could better portray the conflicts and dilemmas between the characters.⁹⁶ He emphasizes the importance of richness of emotions in characters and realism in the effect on stage.⁹⁷ His ambition is for his actors and actresses to be fluent in traditional acting techniques, and also to be able to build and refine continuously a methodology of "socialist realism" in their practice.⁹⁸

"Socialist realism" came to China from the Soviet Union in the late 1920s, claiming to depict the "reality" of life. It then proliferated in the 1930s as an ideology in literature and other

⁹⁶ Shanghai Xijuxueyuan xijuwenxuexi (上海戲劇學院戲劇文學系), ed. *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue yanjiu ziliao - Tian Han zhuanji v.1* (中國當代文學研究資料 - 田漢專集(上)). 1980, 168-171.

⁹⁷ Tian Han zhuanji v.1 168-171.

⁹⁸ Tian Han zhuanji v.1 171.

forms of art, which aims to depict and glorify the united power of the proletariat and the ideals of communism. Tian actively participated in the Leftist Writers Association and played a key role in producing revolutionary plays.⁹⁹ The association was led by several prominent writers, including Lu Xun (1881-1936), and aimed at promoting Marxist ideology through literature and arts. Writers who belonged to this association at one extreme wrote materials that advocated revolution and attacked the state, and at the other extreme embraced socialist ideologies and the life of the proletariat. Tian's "Baishe zhuan" transformed the story into a piece of political theatre that reflected the social turmoil and struggles between individuals and society around that time.

In his *Wenxue gailun* (Concepts of Literature, 1930), Tian illustrates the close-knit relationship between literature, language, and society, and stresses that the purpose of literature and the arts is to represent a nation and a community as of its time. He quotes Sydney Herbert, who noted in *Nationality and its Problems* (1920) that literature preserves a nation's traditions as well as its soul for future generations.¹⁰⁰ Tian then clarifies the differences between a nation and a country by quoting from the work of Sun Yat-sen, whose *Three Principles of the People* affirms that a nation is born from the blood, a way of living, language, religion, and the culture of its people, and is their collective consciousness.¹⁰¹ He concludes that activism may most successfully unite a nation through "oral literature (口頭文化)," because the sense of belonging is strongest among people who speak the same dialect, and because oral literature speaks for the proletariat and voices the real experiences of the society. Tian also wrote in a magazine in 1930

⁹⁹ Itada Emi 板田愛美, "Tian Han no Kyohgeki 'Baishe zhuan' no kaisaku ni tsuite (田漢の京劇「白蛇伝」について)" *Bulletin of the Department of Chinese Language and Literature* 8 (2005): 25-55.

¹⁰⁰ Tian Han 田漢, *Wenxuegailun* (文學概論) (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1930) 96-97.

¹⁰¹ Tian, *Wenxue* 88-95.

that “arts” (film and theatre) are forms that educate and trigger political emotions because of their visual, musical and oral presentation.¹⁰² Tian also wrote songs for the Communist revolution and over ten full-length operas. His oeuvre can be divided into three periods: 1919-1930, when the Kuomintang (KMT) and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) were fighting to dominate China; 1931-1949, when Tian joined the Leftist Writers Association and the Sino-Japanese war took place, and 1950 onwards, when the People’s Republic of China was established. From these writings it is clear that Tian believed a nation could be unified through language and performing arts, and this explains his dedication to creating works that unite the people and help to build a better future for the nation.

Tian’s project to perfect the dialogues and characters in “Baishe zhuan” stretched over more than a decade. “Ten years to sharpen one sword,” as he put it in his preface.¹⁰³ The plot of his “Baishe zhuan” mirrors the social system of the time, with Fahai the monk as the symbol of “feudal” society and governing power, Xu as the commoner and Green and White as “Others” who disrupt social order and must be controlled. Xu, Green, and White form a little community that supports and reinforces its existence under the domination of Fahai. White pursues Xu, becomes his wife, and assists people as a medical healer in Xu’s herbalist shop. Green plays the role of companion to White and is the pivotal figure in her relationship with Xu, both facilitating it and criticizing Xu’s and White’s doings. Her actions are direct, and her criticisms of White outspoken. Xu, on the other hand, is a comical figure who does not have a mind of his own and is conflicted about his relationship to White. As compared to the Xu of previous versions, his character is more complex and realistic, since he is aware of his dependence on Fahai and, later,

¹⁰² Tian, *Wenxue* 107.

¹⁰³ “*Shi nian mo yi jian* (十年磨一劍)” Tian, *Wenxue* 168.

shows sincere gratitude for White's care. On the other hand, Fahai is portrayed as a stubborn dictator whose heart is as hard as stone. Green and White are "Other" in the first instance because they are not human and in the second instance because they are women. Their bonding is strong and their function in the play is constructive as opposed to Fahai, who is destructive, and Xu, who is indecisive.

Tian wrote the play between 1935 and 1955, during a time when revolutionary plays were strongly supported as a way to strengthen identity and nationalism.¹⁰⁴ A lot of factors contribute to the final version of Tian's "Baishe zhuan" in 1955. In 1935, Tian was arrested by the Nationalist Party since he was one of the members actively involved in promoting revolutionary plays.¹⁰⁵ He was exiled to Nanjing half a year later and soon resumed his work promoting revolutionary plays even more vigorously than before.¹⁰⁶ Since revolutionary plays must have a message that is politically correct, Tian wrote "Baishe zhuan" with this in mind. First of all, myth and superstition, love and lust must be clearly distinguished and all traces of superstition and lust must be removed from the play.¹⁰⁷ Thus, "Baishe zhuan" is focused on the struggle between the characters and emphasis is placed on their human characteristics and emotions. Secondly, in 1950, the People's Republic of China announced a marriage law that governed monogamous marriage and the rights of husband and wife. This announcement also led to advocacy for gender equality and freedom of love and marriage, and explains the re-development of Green's character as independent and outspoken; it also accounts for the final triumph of White's release from imprisonment under the pagoda.

¹⁰⁴ Itada 29.

¹⁰⁵ Itada 29.

¹⁰⁶ Itada 29.

¹⁰⁷ Itada 32.

Since the law on marriage was established and desire for freedom of love was promoted, re-writing “Baishe zhuan” also became Tian’s project for depicting ideal love. Writing the character of White also became Tian’s projection of his ideal woman. White is portrayed as having a perfect human character and pursues her own desire, persistently and independently. She is also a perfect woman who is loyal and loving to her husband. While designing her new character, Tian also effaces the uncanniness of her snake nature, enabling the audiences to sympathize with White as a victim in the story.¹⁰⁸

On the Duanwu Festival, Xu is persuaded by Fahai to make White drink orpiment¹⁰⁹ so that she will reveal her true form. In the traditional versions, White drinks the orpiment without opposing Xu’s request and as a result reveals her true form. In Tian’s version, White tells Xu that she is not feeling well and Green further adds that White is pregnant and therefore should not drink. Xu then insists that White drink the orpiment in celebration of the festival and White says, “I really should not be drinking this, but I will drink it for the sake of well-being between us as husband and wife. I know you want to test whether I am real or not.” Xu replies saying, “I only want to prove that he is wrong. Whether you are demon or human, I still love you.” Upon drinking the orpiment, White reveals herself and frightens Xu to death. She then must go to Mount Kunlun and risk her life to steal the magical reishi, an herb that can revive Xu, but when Xu comes back to life he no longer cares for White. This episode depicts Xu as an ungrateful man who does not deserve to be loved by White.

¹⁰⁸ Itada 37.

¹⁰⁹ Orpiment (雄黃酒), is usually drunk on Duanwu Festival (端午節), the fifth day of the fifth month. Orpiment is said to be able to kill bacteria and germs when drunk or applied to the skin. It is also sprinkled around the household to symbolize cleansing of unwanted spirits. Chang 214.

However, near the end of the story, Tian profoundly changed the portrayal of Xu, ending his play with a positive message that promotes a fair relationship between husband and wife. On the verge of being separated by Fahai in Act 14, Xu enunciates his regret for trusting Fahai, and swears that he will be true to White even though she is not human.¹¹⁰ Xu also begs Fahai to sanction their union in Act 15, but Fahai instead imprisons White under the pagoda, ignoring his pleas. In the end, Xu finally converts to loving White and thereby sanctions their communion spiritually. The imprisonment of White under the pagoda and the subsequent toppling of the pagoda by Green symbolizes the end of an old society and reasserts the possibility of a positive future in a new society led by Mao's Communist Party.

In addition to the political dimension in the play, "Madame White" also tackles the role of woman by depicting both White and Green as gaining power and independence in society. White resists separation from Xu and is devoted to her fight for the freedom of love as a liberating force. She resembles the working class that drives the nation forward with labour and a belief in a better future. Hence, her final victory corresponds to the victory of a nation defined and constructed by its people and not by the ruling class. Tian acknowledges women's power and independence in his version of *Madame White Snake*. Even though the power of White and Green surpasses that of Xu, harmony between the sexes is preserved because of White's unconditional love and acceptance of Xu despite his repeated betrayals. When Xu tries to make White drink orpiment, she reverts to her true form as a snake and Xu is frightened to death by the sight. She then goes to a mountain guarded by gods, risking her life to seek the magic herb that will revive Xu. When Xu does revive, Green and White concoct a story to trick him into

¹¹⁰Tian Han 田漢, *Baishhe zhuan* 白蛇傳 (HK: Yih Mei Book Co., 1957) 32.

believing that what he saw was a silver snake that is an omen of prosperity.¹¹¹ This episode of trickery and deceit for the better of the relationship is new to the tradition of the White Snake.

In Act 15, when Fahai contains White with his alms bowl, she sings, “Fahai, you need not be happily laughing, you are bearing a butcher’s knife while chanting the name of the Buddha. Regardless of your golden alms bowl, the love of husband and wife will never be dulled.”¹¹² Likewise throughout the play, White forthrightly condemns Fahai for his biased decisions and judgements. Therefore, the monk appears to be the opposite of White, who is reasonable and just. In the final act, after hundreds of years have passed, Green leads an army that destroys the pagoda and releases White from imprisonment. This final act represents the liberation of the individual from oppression under old society. It also offers hope that survival and freedom are possible when one firmly holds onto one’s faith and untiringly reaches for a better future while enduring hardship.

Tian transformed a piece of traditional theatre and its associated mythologies on the modern stage, at a time when the political climate in China was very volatile. He therefore inspired a hope of freedom and the possibilities of a more humane and passionate relationship between people coming out of feudal society, with its strict control of class and gender. Itada Emi quotes Tian Han’s preface to his version of “Baishe zhuan” in 1955, “... without being pitied by Fahai, the pregnant Madame White and her will to fight Fahai symbolize how people oppressed by feudalism should be determined to fight the system with all it takes.”¹¹³ By re-writing details of the story, Tian’s “Baishe zhuan” becomes rich in its discourse of socialist

¹¹¹Tian, *Baishe* 19.

¹¹²Tian, *Baishe* 37.

¹¹³ Itada 51.

realism. Tian brought the individual characters to the forefront of the narrative, taking them beyond the limited parameters of the “stuff-material,” and re-writing with current notions of social-psychology in mind. At the same time, he injected a ray of hope in the future of a nation unified by the people under Communism. In this way, Tian seamlessly merged politics and humanism into the tradition of Madame White Snake in response to the changes China underwent with the establishment of the Chinese Communist Party in power.

Li Pikwah's Green Snake

Li Pikwah is a contemporary popular novelist in Hong Kong who also writes film scripts, short stories, essays and columns in newspapers. Li began her career as a reporter in 1970s and later advanced to work as a chief editor for a monthly literary magazine. She also had multiple jobs at one time; contributing to the *Oriental Daily* as a columnist, and writing as a scriptwriter for television dramas, films and plays. Li has now published close to sixty books including novels, short stories, essays and jottings. A number of her novels have also been adapted into films. She had an interesting phenomenon in her career path during the 80s when she published a number of novels that were re-writings of traditional stories, myths and historical characters.¹¹⁴

The stories and themes she chose to re-write can be interpreted as cultural signs of collective memories of traditional China as well as her cultural imagination of the roots of Chinese identity. Li tends to apply a mentality that reflects contemporary Hong Kong through the characters and narratives she adopts in her re-writings. These writings are rooted in Chinese literature and history that are recognizable to the contemporary reader, yet these re-writings often turn out differently from the originals in very unexpected ways. Her stories are parodies, with a

¹¹⁴ See Appendix IV.

nostalgic self-reflexivity that “critically confronts the past with the present, and vice versa.”¹¹⁵ Parody and nostalgia work in similar way, as both seek cultural continuity while critically rethinking the past. The intertextuality of past and present in parody is a “desire to close the gap between past and present of the reader and a desire to rewrite the past in a new context.”¹¹⁶ Repeating and re-writing pre-existing materials thus becomes a discourse that problematizes the pre-existing text. It also becomes an attempt to assert the writer’s view through the differences in the text. By means of asserting differences, the writer is able to claim her own interpretation of the story as “the truth,” and thus explore subjectivity and identity.¹¹⁷

Green Snake was first published as a novel in 1986. Li gives a completely different spin to the tradition of the story by writing the story from Green’s perspective. She challenges the scope of human desire by confronting both Xu Xian and Fahai with the temptation of White and Green.¹¹⁸ She writes at the back of the novel,

| | |
|---|--------------|
| This is a story of ‘seduction’: | 一個『勾引』的故事： |
| Suzhen seduces Xiaoqing, | 素貞勾引小青， |
| Suzhen seduces Xu Xian, | 素貞勾引許仙， |
| Xiaoqing seduces Xu Xian, | 小青勾引許仙， |
| Xiaoqing seduces Fahai, | 小青勾引法海， |
| Xu Xian seduces Xiaoqing, | 許仙勾引小青， |
| Fahai seduces Xu Xian | 法海勾引許仙.....。 |
| - This is the absurd truth of <i>chuanqi</i> in the Song Dynasty. | — 宋代傳奇的荒唐真相。 |

(Li Pikwah, *Green Snake*. HK: Cosmos Book, 1993, back cover.)

Li’s re-appropriation of stories of the past for a contemporary context *recreates* history, tradition, and culture, by resurrecting artifacts that belongs to the past in the contemporary world. The act

¹¹⁵ Hutcheon, *Poetics* 39.

¹¹⁶ Hutcheon, *Poetics* 118.

¹¹⁷ Hutcheon, *Poetics* 117.

¹¹⁸ Li Pikwah, *Green Snake* (青蛇) (HK: Cosmos Books LTD., 1986).

of rewriting a story is a sign of nostalgia that is “a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one’s own fantasy.”¹¹⁹ These nostalgic materials become icons of what the author perceives as “Chinese culture” and tradition, which resemble both collective memories and individual memories of “a home.” Li’s re-writings are representations of the past as well as projections and fantasies of “tradition” and “Chinese culture.” The way these materials are re-written reflects the way Li renders the past in order to negotiate a final belonging to “a home” and an identity.¹²⁰

In *Green Snake*, writing nostalgia in search of a belonging in Chinese culture manifests as an enchantment and obsession with “realism.” Li illustrates many details of the past that are extracted from literature, history, and paintings to enhance the richness of the story. These materials, abstracts and themes are like “artifacts” that trigger the imagination of contemporary readers. Together they reflect a collective imagination of what is “Chineseness,” and may also be the roots of a Hong Kong Chinese identity that local people long to discover. For Li Pikwah, “realism” does not lie in the plot or the artifacts; it is “the raw truth,” or “the organic fact” of the story that is subjective rather than objective. In a manner similar to how Green perceives the truth of “Madame White Snake,” Li suggests that the identity and history of Hong Kong should be a subjective and personal undertaking rendered on an individual level rather than that of the collective. In the next chapter, I turn to her retelling of the White Snake story in the form of a novel.

¹¹⁹ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (NY: Basic Books, 2001) XIII.

¹²⁰ Boym XIII.

CHAPTER 5

Deconstruction of *Green Snake* (1993) and Li Pikwah in contemporary Hong Kong

After the Song and Yuan, and with the arrival of Ming, a person named Feng Menglong edited [the story] and included it in *Jingshi tongyan* (*Stories to Caution the World*), giving it a title “Bai niangzi yongzhen Leifengta [Madame White forever imprisoned under the Thunder Peak Pagoda]” I took a look at it; it’s not even close to the story I have in my mind. It conceals the true circumstance. The sourness and jealousy of the entanglement of the four of us, like rain with wind, was completely omitted from the book. I am not satisfied.

宋、元之後，到了明朝，有一個傢伙喚馮夢龍，把它收編到《警世通言》之中，還起了個標題，曰《白娘子永鎮雷峰塔》。竟來一看，喲！都不是我心目中的傳記。它隱瞞了荒唐的真相。酸風妒雨四角糾纏，全都沒在書中交代。我不滿意。

The Ming was short-lived with only two hundred and seventy-seven years and it succumbed to the Qing. A scholar in the Qing dynasty, Chen Yugan, composed *Yiyao zhuan* (Biography of the grateful demoness, 1809), with four volumes and fifty-three chapters, which is followed by another two volumes and sixteen chapters. It portrayed us as “demons with propriety,” and beautified us excessively while the content was anemic. I am not satisfied either.

明朝只有二百七十七年壽命，便亡給清了。清朝有個書生陳遇乾，著了《義妖傳》四卷五十三回，又續集二卷十六回。把我倆寫成『義妖』，又過分地美化，內容顯得貧血。我也不滿意。

----- One day when I have a chance, I will write this myself and set things right. No one is able to present the story of the other correctly, and this has been the condition of China, as well as for all of the records of China where none of the accounts that have come down are true representations of the parties.

——他日有機會，我要自己動手才是正經。誰都寫不好別人的故事，這便是中國，中國流傳下來的一切記載，都不是當時人的真相。(Li Pikwah, p. 240)¹²¹

I will write my story, meticulously carving out the entire story word by word so that there is no more room for change or manipulation. This story will be reborn into a new era.

我把自己的故事寫下來，一筆一筆地寫，如一刀一刀地刻，企圖把故事寫死了，日後在民間重生。(p. 249)

I need to concentrate and recount what happened when I was 500 years old, the story that happened roughly around 1179. This will surely keep me occupied.

我要集中精神，好好寫那發生在我五百多歲，時維南宋孝宗淳熙年間的故事。這已經足夠我忙碌了。

I also plan to submit my drafts to the most popular newspaper “Oriental Daily” in Hong Kong. I heard this newspaper has the most readers, and I hope there are more people who will understand me.

我還打算把我的稿子，投寄到香港最出名的《東方日報》去。聽說那報章的讀者最多，我希望有最多的人瞭解我呢。(p. 255)

¹²¹ All historical references Li Pikwah makes in the novel does not necessary reflect the reality of history. It is the author’s intention to either criticize or exaggerate an aspect in the history.

Green Snake is the story of *Madame White Snake* embedded in the autobiography of Green, the companion of Madame White. The story of *Green Snake* covers the period from the time when the two met before their adventure in the laymen's world and extends beyond the time when White was imprisoned by Fahai. Green decided to write the story when White was released from the pagoda eight hundred years after being imprisoned there. The pagoda, symbolic of the old feudal society in Li Pikwah's retelling, was brought down by a group of young Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution in mainland China (1966-1976). By coincidence, the person who brought down the pagoda had the last name Xu, the surname of Madame White's husband, Xu Xian. The pagoda was a symbol of Fahai's authoritarian power. He condemned White as a harmful non-human who thus had to be contained. It is also a symbol of the story of Madame White Snake, which belongs to a particular time period with its unique epoch of culture and traditions.

In the context of the Cultural Revolution, the pagoda symbolizing Fahai's power is recognized as a symbol of "the old society." The absolute destruction of the pagoda signifies the coming of a new era and an overturn of the totalitarian regime that ruled the society it symbolizes. However, this political uprising under the Communist Party also utterly destroyed tradition and sought to obliterate history and as such is a perfect replication of Fahai's absolute power. Thus the destruction of the pagoda in *Green Snake* also contradicts the reasons for Fahai to imprison White. By re-appropriating the story of Madame White in the context of contemporary literature, the pagoda in the context of *Green Snake* is a symbol of "tradition," "past" and "Chineseness". Expanding on these symbolic meanings, the novel as a re-writing of a

pre-existing myth is an attempt to revitalize the tradition and transform it into an icon of Chineseness. The story in itself *is* a symbol of “tradition,” “the past” and “Chineseness.”

Green Snake goes beyond *Madame White Snake*, with the story of Green enveloping the original story. While Green reconstructs White’s story from her personal perspective, she also reconstructs her life and character in response to events that happened throughout her entire life. The story is told from a subjective point of view and Green is highly self-aware and self-critical of what she writes. It is written in retrospect and leads towards the time of the Cultural Revolution, when White is freed from the imprisonment under the pagoda and goes off to repeat in a new life the experience she had with Xu centuries earlier. At the same time White decides to pursue another man in her second life on earth, Green decides to write the manuscript of *Green Snake* and send it off to *Oriental Daily*, a newspaper in Hong Kong, so that more people can read the story in serialized form. The act of writing the story serves as a platform, upon which Green reconstructs herself as an individual by deconstructing the story of White. Therefore, the story should be teased apart as two strands: Green’s recollections and Green’s critical perspective. The process of recollecting the story of her life is marked by nostalgia. However, Green’s nostalgia is not a longing for a time and place that is lost; instead, it is a conscious reconstruction of time and place by means of imagination.

Green Snake and nostalgia

As characterized by Svetlana Boym, nostalgia is a longing for a time or a space that is gone. It is often a “mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values, ... a nostalgia for an absolute.”¹²² Nostalgia is

¹²² Boym 8.

constituted of a complex matrix of individual and collective memories, which are intertwined with one another while reacting with time and space. Moreover, there are two kinds of nostalgia: “restorative nostalgia,” and “reflective nostalgia.” “Restorative nostalgia” is “a reconstruction of the monuments of the past” that emphasizes a return to the past by restoring physical objects and mending fragments of memories.¹²³ It aims to restore traditions and customs of the past and give a new meaning to its symbols and icons.¹²⁴ “Reflective nostalgia,” on the other hand, “lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time.”¹²⁵ Unlike restorative nostalgia that aims to recover “what is perceived to be an absolute truth,” reflective nostalgia “suggests new flexibility” and aims to “meditate on history and passage of time.”¹²⁶

“Nostalgia tantalizes us with its fundamental ambivalence; it is about the repetition of the unrepeatable, materialization of the immaterial.”¹²⁷ An obsession with the ambivalence of longing for an irrevocable time and a space is a romance with one’s fantasies, where the desire to return to or to resurrect the past is impossible. Knowing the impossibilities of nostalgia, “the romantic nostalgic insist[s] on the otherness of his object of nostalgia from his present life and kept it at a safe distance. The object of romantic nostalgia must be beyond the present space of experience, somewhere in the twilight of the past or on the island of utopia ...”¹²⁸ While longing for the past is an individual’s endeavor as “romantic nostalgia,” time and space are shared by

¹²³ Boym 41.

¹²⁴ Boym 42

¹²⁵ Boym 41-42.

¹²⁶ Boym 49.

¹²⁷ Boym XVII.

¹²⁸ Boym 13.

people. These collective memories of the past actualized as “cultural signs”¹²⁹ are shared by people as reminiscence of a shared identity. Nostalgia as a “public discourse” is about “progress, community and heritage.”¹³⁰

Memories are connected to perception, experience and imagination.¹³¹ A nostalgic in modernity critically reflects on the nature of time in response to modernization and the outcomes of the modernizing process.¹³² The modern nostalgic is self-conscious and self-contradictory in the process of reflective longing so to not confuse the home and identity at the present with the imaginary ideal one.¹³³ The final objective of reflective longing in modernity is to rediscover an identity by recollection of fragmented memories and understand them by critical inquiries.

The way the story *Green Snake* is written self-reflectively by Green, who reconstructs her life in an idealized fashion, accords well with Boym’s category of “reflective nostalgia.” Reflective nostalgia is concerned with historical and individual time and seeks to reconstitute it, which is what Green does in Li’s retelling.¹³⁴ In *Green Snake*, Green rethinks her past and constructively pieces together her story by engaging in critical and imaginative thinking. The process of reflective nostalgia is a mediation between history and the individual’s passage of time. It is a form that boldly and consciously reconstructs the past in one’s favour while using identical materials such as memories, symbols and plots.¹³⁵ *Green Snake* follows the basic plot

¹²⁹ Boym 13, 52.

¹³⁰ Boym 16.

¹³¹ Boym 22.

¹³² Boym 22.

¹³³ Boym XVI.

¹³⁴ Boym 49.

¹³⁵ Boym 49-51.

of *Madame White Snake* and adopts many details from the original story. Episodes are elaborated with Green's provocative thoughts and observations to give a fuller picture of the story. In addition, new episodes are added to accentuate themes in the original, the better to bring out the characteristics of each character.¹³⁶ Green claims her version of the story to be the complete one, because hers is presented through critical perspectives after the narrative is complete.

Green starts by introducing herself as a snake that has been engaged in self-cultivation for the past one thousand three hundred years on West Lake. She quotes a poem written in the Southern Song Dynasty that portrays the beauty of West Lake and the leisurely life of the surrounding area:

Green hills after hills, and houses after houses,
When would music and dances end on the West Lake?
Warm breeze intoxicates the travelers,
Who now take Hangzhou as Bianzhou.
- *West Lake* (西湖) by Lin Sheng (林昇, 960 - 1279)¹³⁷

山外青山樓外樓，
西湖歌舞幾時休？
暖風薰得遊人醉，
直把杭州作汴州。

She remarks how blank and uninteresting West Lake is, noting that the way her life unfolded around West Lake was never as poetic as was depicted in the poem. She claims, “If I have the choice, I would rather nothing ever happened,” and begins her story at the time when she was five hundred years old, living as a snake in the lake. It was then that she met White, when White saved her from a poisonous fish in shallow waters. The two became sworn sisters and decided to make a trip to the world of humans for pleasure and to kill time since neither of them could ever die.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ See Appendix III for concise summary of *Green Snake*.

¹³⁷ This poem is found on a wall of a house in Linan by a poet Lin Sheng who lived during Southern Song Dynasty. The exact date is unknown.

¹³⁸ This seems to contradict the reason why she had to be “saved” by White, but this was the author’s doing.

Although Green seems to be disappointed by everything that has happened in her life, she does not ramble on or dwell on her disappointments, but tackles them with irony and sarcasm, in an effort to alter her perception of the past. She goes back in time and reconsiders the reasons behind each of her actions. The story is thus built on her active reconstruction of her thoughts so as to re-interpret the past. It largely unfolds through dialogues with other characters and Green's observations. Nostalgia first surfaces in Green's descriptions of items and settings that belong to a specific time in the past. For example, she gives detailed descriptions of the articles and hair accessories that she and Madame White wore in the late Tang Dynasty, when they transformed into humans and first arrived in the human world.¹³⁹ She goes on to depict a scene at the market place, and later on expands on this scene to illustrate the geography of West Lake.¹⁴⁰ These illustrations are artifacts belonging to the history of China and as such are part of a collective memory. But, they are personal memories of Green, "cultural signs" that are not stimulated externally but generated from within herself and inscribed with emotions and attachments.¹⁴¹ They are part of Green's identity. These cultural signs are the materials from which Green develops the complete story of her life.

The majority of the story is comprised of Green's commentaries on situations and dialogues between characters. That the story is largely based on her thoughts and dialogues is another sign of her attempt to piece together the fragments of her memories. While White remains a central figure to the plot, her character and story emerge from Green's perspective. Green's observations, which are ironic and humorous, often contradict White's rationale for her

¹³⁹ Li 12.

¹⁴⁰ Li 15-16.

¹⁴¹ Boym 52.

actions, which is grounded in traditional values and cultural ideals. Green's criticisms of White are thus direct attacks on these traditional and cultural attitudes. On the one hand, Green goes to great lengths to recollect the story and recreate the past; on the other hand, she relentlessly criticizes everything that happened in that reconstructed narrative. Her criticisms of White, and of traditional values and customs, contradict the idea of conventional nostalgia as a longing to return to the past. While longing for the past and at the same time criticizing it seem to be conflicting, they can coexist in reflective nostalgia and serve as valuable insights. The "truth" or "reality" of what the past seems to be is obscured by simultaneous longing and critical thought.¹⁴² Reflective nostalgia reveals more details about the past and possible unrealized outcomes from the course of the past.¹⁴³ The act of reflective longing as "affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgement or critical reflection,"¹⁴⁴ but rather opens up ways to look at the past in search for new possibilities. By reflective longing, the nostalgic reconfigures and manipulates the past as means to understand the outcomes of the past. Consequently, reflective nostalgia can also shine a light that enables better understanding of one's current identity in modernity.

One reason for Green's nostalgia is her desire for White. Reflectively thinking about the past and reconstructing her memories are a romantic gesture in remembrance of her time with White and a rediscovery of White at the same time. Green's reminiscences are triggered by White's release from imprisonment under the pagoda. Despite her relationship with Xu Xian, which caused her to spend eight hundred years under the pagoda, White begins to repeat her

¹⁴² Boym XVIII.

¹⁴³ Boym XVIII.

¹⁴⁴ Boym XVI, 50.

drama, by searching for another love affair in the modern era as soon as she is released. Green, on the contrary, decides to stop being involved in any affairs with men and only retain her relationship with White, as “sisters.” However, her feelings for White go beyond the sisterhood and companionship of the past, being a mixture of love and envy. In Li Pikwah’s retelling, when White first seduced Xu Xian, Green had watched their affair from above on a cross beam in the room.¹⁴⁵ She had thought to herself, “They are now a pair; like every flower will have one butterfly, but what do I get? What do I get in return for my endeavour and sincere devotion? --- I have never experienced such an abrupt and intense feeling of loneliness. (他倆便是一對了，每朵花都有一隻蝴蝶，我不知道我有甚麼？我的落力和熱誠，有甚麼回報？一從未試過像此刻突然的寂寞。)”¹⁴⁶ In the novel, regardless of White’s lack of interest in Green, Green shows strong desire for White without any explicit indication of sexual desire. She tries to please White, get her attention, and protect her from being hurt emotionally but gets no appreciation in return.

In this respect, Boym’s formulations are germane to Li Pikwah’s project. In nostalgia, Green, “the romantic nostalgic,” keeps the object of desire at a distance because “romantic nostalgia” is a “longing for uniqueness” that is utopian.¹⁴⁷ The romantic nostalgic prefers to long for the desirable object for the sake of longing and to desire it for the sake of desiring; it never reaches the desirable object and instead always lingers in the mode of desiring. Writing White’s story is thus a romantic gesture of desire by which Green can always be in the mode of desiring White and possessing her in memory.

Unlike White, who repeats her earlier story, Green refuses to fall into the trap of repetition and decides to create a new story for herself by means of writing:

¹⁴⁵ Li 59.

¹⁴⁶ Li 59.

¹⁴⁷ Boym 13.

The reason why I am tirelessly writing my autobiography is not because of remuneration for submitting it to the newspaper, but strictly because of loneliness. Because of loneliness, I cannot help but have a good deal of memories. But what is good about memories? In remembering, you create a second chance for remembering.
 萬一收不到稿費也就算了，銀子於我而言不是難題。我那麼孜孜不倦地寫自傳，主要並非在稿費，只因為寂寞。因為寂寞，不免諸多回憶。
 ——然而，回憶有甚麼好處呢？在回憶之際，不若製造下一次的回憶吧。(p. 256)

The condition of Green's nostalgia manifested in her writing seems to be a result of "loneliness"; a sense of lack, dissatisfaction with the past. However, her mentality suggests a desire for change, and thus a will to "shed the inertia of the past."¹⁴⁸ This is a sign of longing for a time that is gone, while embracing the progression of time into the future. The passing of time is inevitable. In response to time as always irrecoverable and always in motion, the "modern nostalgic," while longing for the past, is also ambivalent about time's ability to comprehend the present.¹⁴⁹ The modern nostalgic is "nostalgic for the present, yet strive[s] not so much to regain the present as to reveal its fragility."¹⁵⁰ Green's "autobiography" is an autobiography insofar as it serves the purpose of discovering herself based on the past in preparation for a modernized era that is unpredictable. Her obsession to rediscover White and their relationship and her final decision to remain a sister to White do not signify a return to the past or an attempt to restore their past. They rather signify an attempt to possess White absolutely by writing nostalgia, in a manner similar to mounting a specimen in a collector's box.

In the process of writing nostalgia, writing also serves as a platform for discovery of Green as an individual. The process of writing helps Green to identify her perceptions and distinguish individual identity from social and cultural identity. In *Green Snake*, social and

¹⁴⁸ Boym 21.

¹⁴⁹ Boym 21-23.

¹⁵⁰ Boym 22-23.

cultural identity are obviously represented by White and are integral to Green's story. Green shares a lot of memories with White and her life and character are inseparable from hers. In order for Green to understand herself as an individual, the identification process requires an understanding of collective memory, which constitutes the shared social frameworks of individual recollections.¹⁵¹ By remembering her story with White and re-imagining her relationship with White, Green establishes an understanding of the traditional values and the social framework that White represents. Her critical thinking in writing nostalgia enables her to perceive and internalize her shared experience with White in the past and allows her to reconstruct her independent identity in the modern social framework. Social and collective frameworks such as "customs" and "traditions" are intrinsic to social and collective memories, which continue to exist as part of the structure of the present.¹⁵² They become building materials from which individual identity is constructed. However, individual identity can only be constructed by self-conscious thinking and self-conscious exploration of the past. As a result, thinking and remembering are inseparable in the process of discerning one's identity. This process is at the same time retrospective and prospective.¹⁵³

Social memories and individual identities in Green Snake

The notion of shared social frameworks of memory is rooted in an understanding of human consciousness, which is dialogical with other human beings and with cultural discourses. ... what makes us human is not a "natural memory" close to perception, but a memory of cultural signs that allows meaning to be generated without external stimulation. Remembering doesn't have to be disconnected from thinking. I remember therefore I am, or I think I remember and therefore I think. (Boym, 52-53.)

¹⁵¹ Boym 53.

¹⁵² Boym 41-43; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983) 11.

¹⁵³ Boym XVI.

In *Green Snake*, relationships between the four main characters, Green, White, Xu and Fahai are more complicated than in previous versions. Since the time White saved Green from the poisonous fish, Green was committed to White. However, their reasons for becoming human clearly differ. White aspired to become a woman because she wanted a taste of love, while Green only became human to follow White, since she had saved her life.¹⁵⁴ Green took the form of a woman to accompany White, but was aware that their status will always be that of snakes and they will never be equal to humans.¹⁵⁵ Since they are partners in life, they share many stories and memories. While memories, colored by emotions, help map out a personal story in relation to collective memories and historical events, everyday events and common places tend to slip through the cracks and fall out of memory.¹⁵⁶ The only way to recall these memories is through “imaginary dialogues” with others, which also reconstruct and decipher the shared social framework.¹⁵⁷ In writing the story, Green takes White as her dialogical “other” in an effort to understand human consciousness. Xu and Fahai are the human models on which Green and White also practice their feminine roles.

Little Green and Madame White

Since the beginning of the story, the purpose of becoming human is clearly different for Green and White. While White is driven by her desire to find a man and fall in love, Green is driven by her curiosity to understand what is good about being human and what is the goodness

¹⁵⁴ Li 22.

¹⁵⁵ Li 20.

¹⁵⁶ Boym 52.

¹⁵⁷ Boym 52-53.

of a man. White's character preserves the traditions and customs of being a Chinese woman, while Green's role is that of a creative critical thinker of tradition who demands a "revolution." In Boym's view "revolution" means both "cyclical repetition and radical break" where "tradition and revolution incorporate each other and rely on their oppositions."¹⁵⁸ Critical thinking of revolution is a way to think about the *process* of modernity as a move away from tradition without disapproving or going against tradition.¹⁵⁹

What inflects Green's reflections of the past are unpleasant memories, since White again and again has betrayed their life-long relationship and desires to be with a man who is less devoted than she is. When White is released from the pagoda in the modern era, she again plunges into a search for love with a man.¹⁶⁰ Green questions her, "Have you already forgotten the lesson you learned?" White replies in haste, "Little Green, life is too long and too boring. ... I am on a date with him to go dancing at a disco." Without further confronting White's decisions, Green criticizes her choices in her writing. While White repeats her past in a cyclical manner, Green repeats her past and breaks with it in her contemplation of it. White follows the codes of the human world and so does Green; the difference being that Green criticizes and contradicts these codes in her writing. Green's mode of thinking is therefore a response to the condition of modernization, between the time when she was five hundred years old and the time when she was one thousand three hundred years old. The representations of Green and White depend on each other just as modernity depends on tradition and the contemporary depends on the past. Therefore, Green and White are "dual images" that make up a whole.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Boym 19.

¹⁵⁹ Boym 19.

¹⁶⁰ Li 253. This is unique to Green Snake and stretches beyond the scope of the traditional novel.

¹⁶¹ Boym 19.

In the novel, “traditions” and “customs” are constantly at odds in the dialogues between White and Green. While White often explains and follows the rules of the human world, Green often questions the rationale behind these rules and even mocks them in the course of retelling the story. In the scene where Green and White see Xu again after their initial meeting, White cannot make a decision to approach Xu directly and asks Green if she is willing to act as a go-between. Green then criticizes her for her foolishness and taking up human’s bad habit of being indecisive and roundabout.

I said to her without patience, “Go up to him and tell him you like him and wish to be together with him for the rest of the life...”

She said, “How can I be so despicable?”

“Despicable? If you like him, why go around in circles? Won’t you end up in the same place anyway? ... You are a snake with a thousand years of practice, not a superficial and unintelligent laymen. Why do you pick up the bad habits of laymen and complicate simple things? I don’t understand why you cannot directly tell him that you like him.”

我沒好氣：“上去告訴他，你喜歡他，願與他長相廝守……之類。”

她躊躇：“我豈可以如此輕賤？”

“輕賤？如果你喜歡他，繞甚麼曲折的圈子？到頭來還不是一樣的結果？... 你是一條千年道行的蛇，不是膚淺無聊的人。怎麼會沾染了人的惡習，把一切簡單美好的事弄得複雜？你喜歡他何以不直接開口告訴他？” (p. 40-41)

To have someone as a go-between is typical in literature and exists in all previous versions of *Madame White Snake*. Green however, attacks this practice as a vulgar human practice. In *Green Snake*, Green often plays the role of antagonist and argues to overturn the conventional reality.

Not only does Green question the human order, she also humourously reveals the reality of human anatomy from her non-human perspective. In the beginning when Green took human form, she asked why humans have five little toes on each foot with nails on them and walk

upright.¹⁶² It is clear Green is very precise and observant. White replies saying, “How hard is that? Look, just straighten up and thrust yourself forward. (這有何難? 看, 挺身而出不就成了?)”¹⁶³ In Chinese, the word “straighten up (*tingshen* 挺身)” has an idiomatic meaning “to thrust oneself forward and face a challenge” or “to stand up for one’s opinion.”¹⁶⁴ Green uses this word in the idiomatic sense in response to White and says, “All humans like to stand up for themselves and mindlessly act brave. (人都愛挺身而出, 瞎勇敢。)”¹⁶⁵ She returns to these comments in the later part of the novel when they boarded Xu’s boat on the day they met on West Lake. Xu helped White onto his boat but did not help Green. Green thought to herself, “A couple of missteps and I would fall into the water. Even though I grew up in the water, should I have revealed my tail in such a situation? I quickly used *my toes* to hang on for dear life. (行差踏錯, 幾乎一跤跌下水裡, 雖則我自小便在水中長大, 難道在這關頭現出尾巴來划戲麼? 急忙用腳趾抓牢立定。)”¹⁶⁶ At the end of the novel when Xu begged Fahai to spare White’s life, he stood between White and Fahai and acted bravely for mere seconds before retreating behind Fahai when Fahai called him. The way Green interprets human behaviour and her human body is amusing and playful. She reduces the human body to simple utility functions whether they be physically walking and eating, or emotionally feeling happy and sad.

¹⁶² Li 9. “I really don’t understand why humans walk upright. It is very hard and tiring! ... Look at these legs! And at the end of these legs are ten toes that are useless, and on these toes there are toenails! They really make a big deal out of small things and complicate simple matters!” “我真不明白, 為甚麼人要直著身子走, 太辛苦了, 纍死人! ... 唉, 這腳! 還有十隻沒用的腳趾, 腳趾上還有趾甲, 真是小事化大, 簡單化複雜!”

¹⁶³ Li 9.

¹⁶⁴ “Straighten up” is “挺身”. The idiomatic saying for “to stand up for one’s opinion,” or “to thrust oneself forward and face a challenge,” is “挺身而出”.

¹⁶⁵ Li 9.

¹⁶⁶ Li 42-43.

Although Green repeatedly criticizes and judges humans when she tries to comprehend their world, she uses their faults to her advantage. She freely uses them to subvert her position as man's inferior, or to subvert the status quo of human superiority. Green grasps humans' vulnerability to greed, desire and lust, and uses these shortcomings in her favour. For example, at the point in the original story where Green steals fifty silver coins for White and alarms the officials, Green bribes the official leading the investigation team with another fifty silver coins and tells him to dismiss the case. She says to the officer, "All people wallow in fame and practical benefits. You will only earn a little prestige for finding a thief, but here is another fifty shining silver coins. You can take them and use them immediately, if only you agree to dismiss the case... Just say you made a mistake when identifying the coins. (世人都不在名利中打滾。你緝捕到賊人，不過立點小功，但這裡另有五十兩銀子，燦白燦白的，你接過去，馬上花得快活。只要大哥諸事不提。... 說看錯了便是。)"¹⁶⁷ The officer silently agrees and withdraws his troops. Green then writes, "If the person is not a stupid coward, he will surely make the right choice. Fame is an empty abstract while benefit is tangible and practical. Those who condemn money as evil do so only because they do not have any. (任何一個人，只要他不是窩囊廢，也一定會得選擇。名是虛幻，利才實在。說金錢萬惡的人，只因他沒有。)"¹⁶⁸

This occasion marks the first time Green uses her feminine charms to buy her way out of difficulty with men. When the investigator and his troops arrive at the door, White says to Green that she must use her "feminine charms" wisely. Green then tries to imitate what White did when she first met Xu and flirts with the investigator. However, she does not succeed in the end and ponders why she has failed to seduce the man and in addition has lost the bag of silver coins

¹⁶⁷ Li 72-73.

¹⁶⁸ Li 73.

she just stole.¹⁶⁹ The second man she tries to seduce is Xu Xian. She is in the garden dancing about when Xu catches sight of her. Since he is alone, Green seizes the chance to practice being human. She flirts with him, telling him she remembered what he wore the day they met and asking him to recall what she wore. Getting little response, Green proceeds to pass Xu a grape with her lips, which he swallows in a panic without even chewing it.¹⁷⁰ In the end, Green's seduction fails on both occasions because she consciously thought about what to do while the man is in front of her. This is the fundamental difference between Green and White. White has internalized the role of being a woman, while Green is highly self-conscious about playing the role of a woman.

Green and White reflect opposing attitudes towards being a woman. Looking beyond their true identities as non-humans, White exists as a woman because of men, while Green exists as a woman for herself. Everything White does stems from her intention to satisfy the man she loves so that she can fulfill her own desires in return. Her way of acting submissively fits into the gender hierarchy in so far as autonomy is not an issue. Green, on the other hand, strongly resents submission and rejects hierarchy. In an episode where the three of them are out on an excursion, Xu asks White to guess what he has brought back as a treat.¹⁷¹ Although White knows exactly what is in the bag, she chooses to participate in Xu's guessing game and act as if she were inferior to him. Green finds the game boring and meaningless, and gives out the answer in detail, down to how the treat was made. She then comments in hindsight, "A smart woman knows when she should act ignorant, but this is such a tiresome gesture. I do not know

¹⁶⁹ Li 73.

¹⁷⁰ Li 102-106.

¹⁷¹ Li 94-96. This episode is added onto the story's tradition.

when the timing is right since I am not smart enough. (聰明的女人曉得在適當的一刻裝笨。但這是多麼的費力。我不知道何時是適當的一刻，我不夠聰明。)”¹⁷² This excerpt illustrates how Green debunks the traditional values of femininity, revealing them to be superficial and performative. However, it does not posit a hierarchy between submission and independence, nor does it suggest that a reform of either past or present social expectations of woman is needed, but merely states the difference. This episode marks the point where Xu begins to take an interest in Green for her rebellious character and wit.

From cover to cover, Green is self-conscious about her status in between the human and non-human realms. She is also cynical about her story starting from the time when she was five hundred years old and continuing up to the time when she writes it, eight hundred years later when White is released from the pagoda. With White being the icon of tradition and custom, Green represents “modernity” as she tries to ““represent the present””¹⁷³ by contextualizing the modern mentality in response to traditions, customs and conventions.¹⁷⁴ Therefore, both *Green Snake* and Green are hybrids of past and present. By being fully conscious of herself, Green succeeds in becoming an autonomous being. Her awareness of social standards and her identity enables her to be neither bounded by the rules of human beings, nor bounded by being the subordinating role to White as a non-human. Green’s identity is fluid or, to put it differently, she is without any particular identity. Her representation of herself and her derivation of *Madame White Snake* also become free from the constraints of time because *Green Snake* is based on thoughts and nostalgia that are unconstrained by time. Green and her story are therefore *equally*

¹⁷² Li 96.

¹⁷³ Boym quoting Baudelaire on his essay “The Painter of Modern Life” (1859-60) 19.

¹⁷⁴ Boym 19-30.

about the past and about the present. “Reflective nostalgia” involves “a complicated process of critical reflection on the modern condition that incorporates nostalgia ... (that) makes us explore sideshadows and back alleys rather than the straight road of progress; it allows us to take a detour from the deterministic narrative of twentieth-century history ... (where) reflection and longing, estrangement and affection go together.”¹⁷⁵

Lust, love, jealousy

People, in fiction or reality, always cross boundaries and Xu Xian in *Green Snake* is no exception. While Xu’s character in the tradition is built around *caizi jiaren* (才子佳人) romances where the male character is a literate and a refined gentleman, Xu in *Green Snake* is lustful and self-concerned. Although he betrays White and suspects her true identity in previous versions, he has never been disloyal to White. According to Green’s version of the story, Xu takes interest in her and eventually has a sexual affair with her. Lust, love and jealousy are at the core of *Green Snake*, as part of Green’s critical journey backwards in time. Emotions are intensified in her imagination and justified because everything is viewed in retrospect. These emotions and reasons may even be added as she writes the story and pieces together the fragments of her memory.

At first, Green tries to seduce Xu as a test to his loyalty to White. However, it is Xu who tips the scale when he finally betrays White, following Fahai’s instructions and letting White drink orpiment, which leads to the exposure of her true form. Xu dies of fright at the sight, and White and Green together go to Mount Kunlun and fight the deities guarding the magical plant *reishi*, which can be used to revive Xu. White decides to stay behind on Mount Kunlun to fight

¹⁷⁵ Boym XVI - XVII.

the guardians of the plant and let Green go home with the *reishi*. However, when Xu wakes up and sees Green, he explicitly shows his desire for her.¹⁷⁶ In a split-second, Green decides to respond to his advances and succumb to his seduction. After intercourse, she boldly claims, “I am different from [White]. You were chosen by her, while I am the one you chose.” Without responding to Green’s remarks, Xu gets dressed and returns to his rational state of mind. This episode, where he breaks his commitment to White and denies responsibility for his actions, gives a new face to Xu’s character in the tradition. In *Green Snake*, Xu is more complicated and cunning than before. He is no longer the ignorant layman who is “the victim” of White’s seduction, but is a cautious and greedy man who knows exactly what he wants. He wants to have both White and Green, both riches and beauty. In front of White, he swears to be faithful for as long as he lives,¹⁷⁷ yet in front of Green, he tells her he loves her and would rather leave White and run away with her.¹⁷⁸

The relationship between Green and White is not simple either. Green’s love for White is more than the love of a sister. Her love for White is unique, unconditional, and yet possessive. In the beginning of the novel, Green and White are supposed to be a pair for eternal life because of who they are. They are both snakes who are able to turn human, and their mission is to cultivate themselves to become human beings. After White marries Xu, the only time that Green and White could be together as partners with mutual goals is when they fight for their own safety and for the sake of Xu. There are times when they fight together, against the Daoist who first causes Xu to suspect White’s identity, and against Fahai, who has compelled Xu to be a monk.

¹⁷⁶ Li 141-42.

¹⁷⁷ Li 73.

¹⁷⁸ Li 173-76.

However, as Xu starts to have feelings for Green and Green discovers her desire for Xu, White discovers their affair. She picks up one of the pair of swords that symbolizes Green and White's unity and uses it to fight against Green.¹⁷⁹ This pair of swords had been a symbol of their victory against the Daoist who tried to harm them. Because of Xu, the pair of swords becomes a weapon that harms their relationship.

Green's desire for Xu is not love or lust for him but desire for White in disguise. She wants White absolutely to herself and the only way to possess White is to break off White's relationship with Xu. In order to fulfill her desire to have White to herself, Green conceives a plan to prove to White that Xu is unreliable, so that she will leave him. On the fifth of May when it is a custom to drink orpiment, Green anticipates that White will lose control of herself and expose her form as a snake while intoxicated. Before that day, Green pierces seven needles through the skin of White's snakeskin, which is kept under her bed. By doing so, the needles will force White to remain in her original form as a snake until someone removes them.¹⁸⁰ On that day, Xu under Fahai's orders persuades White to drink several cups of orpiment. White cannot withstand the poison and reverts to her original form. As a result, Xu is terrified and dies at the sight of her in her transformed state. When Green returns from a retreat for the day, she finds White as a snake on her bed and removes the seven needles she placed. While thinking this would end the relationship between White and Xu, she did not think that White would risk her life to save Xu by stealing the magical *reishi* from Mount Kunlun.

Lust for Green is not desire for sexual pleasure, but empowerment. For Green, lust is a game between two people and whoever succumbs to the other is the loser. To be desired is a

¹⁷⁹ Li 155.

¹⁸⁰ Li 133-34.

hallmark of triumph and a sign of superiority in the game of desire. In *Green Snake*, Green challenges the ability of Fahai to resist her seduction.¹⁸¹ When she chases after Xu at an end of an intimate quarrel, Green runs into Fahai, who is blocking her way. She asks Fahai to move out of the way and goes on to tell him that Xu and White are “in love” and he should grant their union. Fahai disagrees and Green accuses him for not knowing what “love” is. She challenges him to resist her seduction.¹⁸² In the end, Fahai cannot resist and begins to attack Green for attempting to seduce him. However, Green cunningly reaches for his penis and finds that he had an erection, which seals her victory. In the end, after Fahai imprisons White under the pagoda and Green kills Xu because he has betrayed them, Fahai turns away and leaves without punishing Green for killing Xu. A likely reason why he decides not to imprison Green as well is that he has some residual feelings for her. However, because he must abstain from intercourse in order to be a monk, Fahai’s desires translate into absolute power and control over White. His stubbornness and persistence in coercing Xu and containing White could also be interpreted as envy for of Xu’s life, which involved two beautiful and exceptional women.

Green concludes her understanding of human love after the story of White has ended: White gives birth and is imprisoned; Fahai turns away and leaves without a word; Green kills Xu and is left with White’s child.

Every man wishes there are two women in his life: White snake and Green snake. ... When he succeeded in attaining White snake, she then gradually becomes unwanted dust that is left at the side of the door. As for Green snake, she is the crisp new leaf on the tip of the tree. Once he succeeded in attaining Green snake, she nonetheless becomes an aging herb left in the drawer. ... Every woman wishes there are two men in her life: Xu Xian and Fahai. Fahai is the gold-plated figure of a god that you endlessly try to get a smile out of Xu Xian is the one you can easily hold hands with, ... and the one who will speak tender words to you and

¹⁸¹ Li 180-86.

¹⁸² Li 182-83.

warm your heart. Yet once you have him in your hands, he doesn't say anything that is appropriate, and doesn't do anything that is good. ...

每個男人，都希望他生命中有兩個女人：白蛇和青蛇。... 當他得到白蛇，她漸漸成了朱門旁慘白的余灰；那青蛇，卻是樹頂青翠欲滴爽脆颯辣的嫩葉子。到他得了青蛇，她反是百子櫃中悶綠的山草藥 ...

每個女人，也希望她生命中有兩個男人：許仙和法海。是的，法海是用盡千方百計博他偶一歡心的金漆神像 ... 許仙是依依軟手 ... 給你講最好聽的話語來熨帖心靈。但只因到手了，他沒一句話說得准，沒一個動作硬朗 ... (p.235)

Morals and Betrayal

A theme that accompanies that of love, lust and jealousy between the three characters is the pairing of righteousness and justice, which divides each from the other. In *Green Snake*, none of the characters is absolutely good; they all have skeletons in the closet that come between their relationships and haunt them at night. Li Pikwah developed a complete profile of each character in the novel by meticulously describing the events of the story, and that in turn reveals an alternative reality in the story's tradition.

The exploration of morality is most apparent in the depictions of Xu and Fahai. In *Green Snake*, Xu's betrayal and distrust of White is much elaborated. Xu is easily swayed by what others say. Although White is committed to him and provides for him, Xu doubts her goodness when a Daoist tells him he must be possessed by a demon because he has "a cloud of dark air 頭上一道黑氣" hovering over him.¹⁸³ The Daoist gives Xu two charms: one to put in his hair and one for White to drink. Up to this point, Li's telling of the story follows previous versions. White figures out what Xu plans to do and questions him about whether he suspects that she is a demon. Xu replies, "Regardless of whether [the Daoist] is good with his practice or not, he didn't charge me a cent. He let me try it out so I thought why not. Since you are obviously not a demon, why not take it for fun? (管他靈不靈? 他又不要錢。他讓我試一試, 又有何妨? 娘子既

¹⁸³ Li 110.

不是妖精，就當是一場玩笑吧？)”¹⁸⁴ Xu not only suspects that White is not human, he also wants to test his hypothesis, which is based on what the Daoist has said to him. White is disappointed not only because of his distrust of her despite their relationship as husband and wife, but also because he has responded to her in this way without grounds for doing so. As Green puts it, “(her) disappointment was not acted out, but was nonetheless for real. (素貞的失望，倒不是裝出來的。)”¹⁸⁵

The second time that Xu betrays White, by letting her drink orpiment, his betrayal leads to the end of their relationship. Not long after Xu and Green have their affair while White is battling at Mount Kunlun, Fahai takes Xu away to his Jinshan temple, telling him that this was for the better because his life was endangered by White. Xu’s reply reveals his essential egoism and self-concerning character because he indulges in his comfortable and lustful life around White and Green : “I am not afraid, let me go back. Master, I am the master before the non-humans, yet before you, I naturally must take second place. (我不怕，我要回去。師傅，在妖面前，我是主；在你面前，不知如何，我成了副。)”¹⁸⁶ Self-love comes before love for either White or Green.

Fahai goes on to preach the meaning of nirvana to Xu and forces him to become a monk despite his resistance.¹⁸⁷ White and Green arrive at the temple, prepared to snatch Xu away, but before they can do this White starts having contractions and has to retreat to West Lake to give birth. Soon after, Xu finds her there and tells her that he sneaked out of the monastery in order to be with her. However, Fahai arrives not long after, bent on reclaiming his errant disciple: “You

¹⁸⁵ Li 110.

¹⁸⁶ Li 190.

¹⁸⁷ Li 204.

snake-demon, I let you come back so that you can give birth to your child who is the Star of Knowledge. Now that the divine child is born, you can no longer escape your fate. I released Xu Xian from the temple on purpose so that Xu can lead my way. (你這蛇妖，我看你身懷文曲星，才讓你回來產了，現他骨下凡，你也劫數難逃了。許仙是我故意放來查探的。)¹⁸⁸ Xu, “mixed with fear and embarrassment (他驚羞交加),” falls on his knees and begs Fahai to let White be.¹⁸⁹ Just as Fahai is about to imprison White, Xu retreats behind Fahai in a cowardly manner.¹⁹⁰ The “truth” was that Xu was leading Fahai to White, not running away to be with her.¹⁹¹ This final act of betrayal leaves White utterly disillusioned with Xu. She begs Fahai at the least to spare her child, “[her] myriad of thoughts turn to ashes, but a glimmer of calmness never before experienced appeared on her face. The glitter in her eyes gradually faded and her demeanor became pure, like that of a nun who has retreated from the world. (她萬念俱灰，反有從未試過的從容。雙眸光彩漸漸地，漸漸地淡了，一片清純，宛如出家人。)”¹⁹²

In *Green Snake*, Fahai falls from being a figure of justice and morality, as portrayed in the story’s tradition, and ends as a monk who was aroused by sexual desire and made Xu a monk against his will. Fahai forced Xu Xian to become his disciple as a way to punish and correct Xu’s indulgence in the relationship with White. Green, for her part, accuses Fahai of being jealous of Xu and because as a monk he should be free of desire.¹⁹³ She engages in a game of temptation with him to test how well he can avoid being aroused. However, when Fahai fails to

¹⁸⁸ Li 221.

¹⁸⁹ Li 222.

¹⁹⁰ Li 225.

¹⁹¹ Li 221.

¹⁹² Li 225-26.

¹⁹³ Li 179.

control his desire, he denies that he has been defeated. Instead, he accuses Green of seducing him and ruining his endeavor. His intent had been to “rescue” Xu from lust, and was based on phallogocentric and misogynistic attitudes rather than Buddhist principles. As he puts it to Xu, “[everything is an illusion], women are filthy creatures who confuse the order of the world and distort the clarity of peoples’ hearts. Laymen are hurt by their superficial goodness and fake generosity. (女人是驚擾世道人心的濁物，眾生都為虛情假意所傷。)”¹⁹⁴

Fahai uses Xu as bait to capture White and insists on punishing White in order to “prevent her from harming people and seducing Xu. (免得她害眾生，迷惑施主。)”¹⁹⁵ He deviously plots to release Xu so that he can find his way to White. Men in *Green Snake*, both Fahai and Xu, are rigid and only self-concerned. Xu Xian is a man without an independent mind, who does not have the integrity to determine what is right and wrong. Fahai is a man who wants to enforce what is “just” in his view, without taking a broader perspective. In *Green Snake*, Xu and Fahai are less refined in their actions than Green and White; Xu does not honour his ties either with White nor with Green. Neither does Fahai honour his Buddhist vows and cut himself off from his desires. Their characters reveal the ugly qualities of both men and humans, which subvert the conventional disposition of good and evil between humans and non-humans.

Conversely, Green as a non-human faithfully honors ties of friendship (*qingyi*, 情義¹⁹⁶), accompanying White ever since White saved her life. She cares for White, follows her wishes, and protects her from harm in a manner that exceeds what Xu is able to offer. However, as White becomes attached to Xu, Green’s love becomes obsessive and she schemes to tear them

¹⁹⁴ Li 192.

¹⁹⁵ Li 222.

¹⁹⁶ *Qingyi* (情義) - ties of friendship

apart so she can have White to herself. She seduces Xu only to prove that Xu is unworthy of White's love. However we judge these actions, they arise from a desire to possess White exclusively. White, for her part, breaks her tie to Green in order to be with Xu. Knowing that Green has seduced Xu, White picks a fight with Green, who promises that she will no longer come between the two of them.¹⁹⁷

Even earlier, however, the love between White and Xu was already marred by distrust and deceit. Xu has betrayed White first by listening to the Daoist, then by listening to Fahai. Knowing her vulnerability, White has warned Xu when he went out on Duanwu Festival, telling him not to go into temples or talk to priests, but he failed to follow her instructions. From Green's point of view, each person has a hidden agenda and a trick up his or her sleeve. Xu's trick was to test whether White was in fact a snake; Green's was to use the occasion of the festival to break them apart; and White's test of Xu's loyalty. Green comments, "I find it funny deep inside. Neither one of us trusted the other, and yet we pretended to be intimate and friendly. How did things turn out this way? I really don't know. (我暗自好笑。我們全都互不信任，但又裝作親熱和諧。事情怎的演變成如此局面？真不明白。)"¹⁹⁸

Green Snake and beyond

By writing the story of *Madame White Snake* from the auxiliary position of Little Green, Li Pikwah reflects on her identity as a Chinese person living in Hong Kong, on the periphery of China. Green wrote in the novel, "if one day I have the opportunity, I will write the story myself.

¹⁹⁷ Li 150-55.

¹⁹⁸ Li 132.

(他日有機會，我要自己動手才是正經。)”¹⁹⁹ She further makes a comment, “No one is able to present the story of the other correctly, and this has been the condition of China, as well as for all of the records of China where none of the accounts that have come down are true representations of the parties. (誰都寫不好別人的故事，這便是中國，中國流傳下來的一切記載，都不是當時人的真相。)”²⁰⁰ She makes these statements boldly through the character Green, implying that the narratives of China and Hong Kong have always been written by outsiders who fail to accurately represent the stories, traditions and value of the place. Green and Li echo the past in a similar way by parody and irony that both connects to and transgresses against what went before. As informed by Hutcheon’s idea of “postmodernist parody,” postmodernist parody recontextualizes the forms of the past ironically in order to find “continuity and change” to change the outcomes of the past.²⁰¹

Green’s nostalgia is a longing for the past and at the same time a dream of freedom from the past. It suggests a longing for the past but at the same time a yearning to break from the cyclical movement of the past. Reflective nostalgia allows the nostalgic to long for and to criticize the past without interfering with the linearity of time between past and present. The nostalgic subject re-interprets the present by means of understanding and subverting a past that was thought to be “unchangeable.” The process of reflective nostalgia introduces new ways of understanding the past and offers new insights to explain the present.

Green’s negotiation of an identity that is neither human nor non-human also reflects the position of Hong Kong people with respect to their identity. While the official language in China

¹⁹⁹ Li 240.

²⁰⁰ Li 241.

²⁰¹ Hutcheon, *Poetics* 34-5. 125.

is Putonghua, the official language in Hong Kong during colonialism was English and the spoken language was Cantonese. Although written forms for both Putonghua and Cantonese are nearly identical, the spoken languages differ greatly. These differences affect the trajectory of the cultural industry, social values, and Hong Kong's collective identity. Hong Kong before 1997 has always been in between "Chinese" and "not Chinese" because of its colonial history. However, "in-betweenness" cannot be realized as an identity in itself. In the case of Hong Kong literature, writers came to realize they can have a unique identity as "Hong Kong Chinese," in negotiation with the culture, history, traditions and customs in China. Green's self-critical autobiography reflects Hong Kong's search for identity through literary writing. In the process of remembering, Green does not define herself by her body or her status. Instead, she shapes her identity through a process of writing nostalgia reflectively. Similarly, Hong Kong Chinese finds an identity by piecing together fragments of the past while criticizing the prescribed values and customs of the past.

Hong Kong people under colonial rule were not strongly rooted in the Chinese community. They existed superficially by maintaining the structure of the written language and observing customs and traditions. In reality, Chinese in Hong Kong are detached from an authentic Chinese identity but are connected to an "aura" of Chinese culture; language, history, religion, literature, and customs. Fragments of these "cultural signs," which make up Green's memory in the novel, also assume values as "icons" of "Chineseness" to the author Li Pikwah. Her re-writing of the past is a form of "reflective nostalgia," in the sense that it regenerates cultural icons without retracing the footsteps of the past. Like Green, Li likes to attack conventional values with sarcasm in order to stress the differences between past and present, and

to reinterpret the past with a modern mindset. This critical mode of engaging the past in her novels has become a hot commodity in the contemporary Hong Kong cultural marketplace.

“The nostalgic hold on history, tradition, and culture has made way for the endless production of commodities.”²⁰² Besides commodities of the past that become recycled in flea markets and popular tourist shops, commodification of the past in literature and film has been a popular way to seize fragments of the past. Li Pikwah’s re-writings and the subsequent film productions of them by different directors are examples of the way Hong Kong commodifies the past.

In an essay by Chen Yi-Fen titled, “Mass Culture and Imaginary History,” Chen points out the close resemblance of Li’s characters and narratives to the “spirit of ‘Hong Kong’.”²⁰³ She comments that Li’s work is clearly a product of Hong Kong because the values of Hong Kong culture are very well integrated and actualized through the characters and narratives of her stories. Li is good at exploiting the images and cultural values of Hong Kong at face-value, in ways that diminish their traditional cultural significance. By re-appropriating these raw materials in the contemporary world, Li turns them into valuable tokens of nostalgia, and such tokens are popular in the market. Chen terms Li’s style “self-commodification (自我商品化)” - turning herself (the writer), her work, the characters, and even issues of history and identity portrayed in the novels into commodities.²⁰⁴ Li’s work internalizes an ambivalence about being pushed forward into an unknown future ruled by a completely different government, while also

²⁰² Rey Chow, “A Souvenir of Love” in *Ethics after idealism: theory, culture, ethnicity, reading*, ed. Rey Chow (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998) 132.

²⁰³ Chen Yi-fen, “Mass Culture and Imaginary History” in “*Literary Hong Kong*” and Lilian Lee, ed. David D.W. Wang (Taipei: Rye Field Publications, 2000) 129.

²⁰⁴ Chen, *Mass Culture* 129-130.

struggling to hang on to the colonial history of Hong Kong. This ambivalence also translates into an identity crisis and ambiguity of “Hong Kong identity.”

Ambiguity of identity is a common theme in her works. In *Green Snake*, Green re-establishes her identity by reflectively thinking back on her past. However, she is nevertheless a snake with a human body and a human consciousness. In the past, she easily transformed between being a snake-demon with magical power and a woman who lusts and loves. Her awareness of her identity is not firmly established until the end of the novel when she claims and accepts herself as both a snake and a human. Green’s uncertainty about her identity as a snake or a human is similar to the uncertainty of Chinese who grew up during the colonial period in Hong Kong and were confronted with the return to China in 1997. Chinese in colonial Hong Kong, like Li Pikwah, needed to re-establish an identity by means reflective nostalgia in order to arrive at a final acceptance of their dual identity as colonized Hong Kong citizens with a Chinese identity.

CHAPTER 6.

Analysis of Tsui Hark's *Green Snake*: film style and representations of "Chineseness" from the periphery

The script for the film *Green Snake* released in 1993 was collaboratively written by Li Pikwah and Tsui Hark, based on Li's novel. Similar to Li who likes to re-write and adapt traditional stories and traditional characters in her contemporary novels, Tsui also likes to direct films that are adaptations of traditional stories such as *Liang Zhu* (1994),²⁰⁵ *Green Snake* (1993),²⁰⁶ and the series of *Wong Fei Hong* that is better known as *Once upon a time in China* (1991-1992)²⁰⁷ among Western audiences. These films that portray a mythical and legendary China are manifestations of a nostalgia that fantasize the past. Nonetheless, these films that are rooted in the past bridge to the present by making references to earlier history and cultural beliefs.

Tsui Hark is very well received in Asia and has continuously enjoyed good returns at the box office. Up to the present, his films based on Chinese pre-modern materials outnumber his films in other genres. These films are "intensely Chinese in theme and design"²⁰⁸ and may be less well-received by Western audiences because of their cultural specificity. As in the case with Li Pikwah, Tsui's films go beyond simple nostalgia and become a way for him to revitalize Chinese tradition and its legacy. Ironically, Tsui is not a "pure" Chinese who was born and raised in China. He is a complicated figure in terms of identity because he was raised in

²⁰⁵ *Liang Zhu* (梁祝), sound filmstrip, dir. Tsui Hark, 1992. *Liang Zhu* is based on the story of "Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai (梁山伯與祝英台)," a romance between a male student and a female student in male's disguise.

²⁰⁶ *Green Snake* (青蛇), sound filmstrip, dir. Tsui Hark, 1993. *Green Snake* is based on the story of Madame White Snake.

²⁰⁷ *Once upon a time in China I, II & III* (黃飛鴻 I, II & III), sound filmstrip, dir. Tsui Hark, 1991-1992.

²⁰⁸ Lisa Morton, *The cinema of Tsui Hark* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2001) 1.

Vietnam, moved to Hong Kong for his secondary education, and then went to the United States for his higher education. He only returned to Hong Kong in 1976 and produced his first feature in 1979. Given a background that provides an alternative lens for viewing Chinese tradition and culture, we can expect Tsui to be a highly self-conscious director when he recreates a China in his films. Judging from his oeuvre to date, film seems to be a medium through which he can explore and extend his Chinese roots and actualize the fantasies inherent in China's mythical stories.

Green Snake (1993) - textual analysis

The spotlight of the film is unmistakably on Green and White. However, they should not be treated as two unique characters, but rather as a composite with two distinct elements, like *yin* and *yang*. While White is strictly feminine in both the novel film and novel versions, Green's androgynous characteristics are highlighted in Tian's film. The camera often zooms in on Green's and White's faces and body and also lingers in long shots outlining their silhouettes. Although their figures are frequently eroticized, White and Green are portrayed differently at different stages of the film. These depictions of them are enhanced by make-up, lighting, filters, special effects, and music.

Green and White first appear with a human upper body and reptilian lower body on the roof top of an entertainment parlor on a stormy night. In a close-up, Green appears to be sexually aroused and a following shot captures Green and White intimately coiled together with faces touching. Several subsequent shots further suggests a queering of Green's sexuality and interpret the relationship between Green and White as one that goes beyond the intimacy of companions, sisters, or master and disciple.

Sexual vigor is associated with youth and beauty when a brief take of an old man sleeping outside of the entertainment parlor is contrasted with the glamour inside. The young men and ladies within are lustful and extravagant, enjoying wine, food, and drugs while exotic dancers dance to arousing music. As Green and White observe these humans beneath them, they decide to venture into the human world. Green slips into the entertainment parlor by pretending to be a naked exotic dancer who has fallen from the roof top. In the meantime, White takes an interest in a group of students reciting poetry into the night at a nearby school. Green lands in the midst of the dancers and commences dancing as if she was one of them, turning her body and tossing colourful silks coquettishly. In a medium shot, Green has wrapped her leg around the lead dancer from behind and sexually aroused her using her heel. The lead dancer is alarmed at first, but then welcomes her actions as the two of them gaze at each other and enjoy the dance. The camera captures the erotic responses of their bodies from top to bottom, ending with a close-up of their facial expressions.

Green Snake centres on two main themes, lust and desire. When White first had intercourse with Xu Xian, Green observed her movements and tried to perceive her feelings from afar. A shot reverse shot between Green and White is used to suggest that the two are connected emotionally, showing how Green responds to White's arousal. A similar shot happens again when White successfully fetches the magical reishi plant home to revive Xu while Green tries to seduce Fahai on Mount Kunlun. Although they are miles apart, White and Green are deeply connected. Their intense relationship from Green's perspective can be broken down into three aspects; the first being her personal lust and desire, the second her jealousy of White, and the third a rivalry for power against White.

Besides filming techniques, acting, and music, special effects are also used to stimulate feelings of lust and desire. Lust and desire are often suggested by using a blue-purple haze. The forms of desire differ for each character. For Fahai, desire is related to power, because failure to control desire means a step backward from the level of leadership he has attained in the monastery. For White, desire is love and transcendence, as her goal is to become human and have a family with a human being. On the contrary, Green's desire is to understand and have access to the myth that human beings are supreme beings. For Xu, desire is material and the comfort that White provides.

The connection of desire and lust with colours is first introduced in Fahai's encounter with a villager who is giving birth in a bamboo forest, and colours reappear in his fight against temptation while meditating at Jinshan Temple. Water, coinciding with the themes of blue and purple, is also often associated with lust and desire. Fahai comes across the villager on a rainy night as he pursues what he senses are non-humans, who happen to be Green and White in their snake forms. They are huddled above the forest to shield a woman while she gives birth. Fahai sees the naked woman and retreats muttering, "Amida Buddha, monks must guard against lust." However, as he turns and walks away, he halts and the camera jump cuts to the naked villager and back to Fahai's back. In a later scene, Fahai secludes himself inside a cave in the temple to meditate but is troubled by his thoughts of the naked villager. His desire manifests as beasts with female faces and the cave is flooded with a blue and purple aura. Interrupted by raging desires, he abuses his power to destroy harmful spirits and uses it to save himself from falling for lust. As opposed to water as a symbol for lust and desire, fire is Fahai's tool for overcoming temptations. His wand and his magic dragon, which he uses against "evil," are both associated

with fire. In his final scene where he fights White and ultimately realizes his faults, the colours of his costume are red and gold, which symbolize power.

Xu's character is simple compared to the rest of the main characters. He is passive throughout until the point where he is taken to Jinshan Temple and White has to fight Fahai for his freedom. In the beginning of the film when he teaches at the school, Xu disapproves of love and intimacy until he experiences the care and comfort White provides. Encountering a sudden rain caused by White's magic, Xu is invited aboard White's boat to cross West Lake since all other boats have been rented. He is enchanted by White, whose hair and body are lightly soaked by the rain. The camera traces Xu's scrutiny of White's face and follows a strand of wet hair curving along her neck, ending just at the beginning of her cleavage. The following day, Xu visits White to retrieve his umbrella and White invites him inside to dry his clothes because of another sudden rain shower. She puts him into a bath with floating flower petals while she dries his clothes. The camera captures Xu enjoying his bath and then assumes his point of view and frames White drying his clothes to one side. White has him stay for a meal and seduces him. From this point onwards, Xu indulges in being in love and fails to concentrate and fulfill his teaching duties at the school. He and White open a medicine shop in town and become well-known because of White's efforts. Xu enjoys the comfort of living well, the fame of White, and the love and care she gives him as a wife. Nonetheless, his weaknesses persist. He does not have his own independent thinking and hungers for Green after he is married to White. He is bewitched by Green's character and beauty and fails to stay loyal to White. His lack of judgement ruins him completely when Fahai takes him off by force to Jinshan Temple, and White and Green have to fight Fahai viciously in order to rescue him. Although he begs Fahai to end their fight by agreeing to become his disciple, he betrays White's love for him and indirectly

causes her death because of his lack of good judgement. Xu's character and his encounter is represented in neutral colours to represent the world of human that is used pervasively in the film, and consistently in his case.

The relationship between White and Xu is much more complicated in the film version than in the novel, and this is suggested by colours and techniques Tsui employs in the shots. In this latest version of the story, White is completely humanized in appearance and in nature, yet Tsui decides to add a twist to her demeanor. In the first half of the film, before she is pregnant with Xu's baby, she acts in a performative way that is excessively feminine. Since the film is already shot methodically to represent the theatre, Tsui further uses acoustics to enhance the theatrical effect and has White act and speak the way performers would on stage. In the scene where Xu goes to White's home to get his umbrella back and White puts him in her bath, she uses hot coal on a flat pan to dry his clothes and explains to him the reason why there was a Daoist priest making a scene about getting rid of snakes with sulfur powder. Her utterances are interlaced with acoustic effects that break the sentences up as in *yueju* performances, where percussion instruments indicate breaks and add emphasis. White's sentences are also spoken with an intonation that resembles the art of speech in *yueju*. After Xu's clothes are dried, she invites him for a meal at a low table and then delivers a piece of food to his bowl with her chopsticks. After a long still shot of the two at the table, White takes Xu to bed and intimately makes love to him. However, while they are dining at the table, the camera never frames White in a shot-reverse-shot that would suggest that Xu is attracted to her. The camera only frames Xu squarely in the middle from White's perspective, and in reverse, White's framing is always to the side. This suggests White's unilateral desire for Xu is not reciprocated. However, when White seduces Xu, the aura that appears in the *mise-en-scène* is not blue and purple, which would

suggest White's desire. The scene is infused with warm colour tones of orange and yellow, which suggest Xu's lust for women. The same colours appear whenever he looks at Green, when they first meet in front of the house as she dances in the garden, and when Green and White bathe together. Therefore, Xu's desire is purely sexual and without any attachment to love. Moreover, between Xu and Green, the shots are always arranged in shot-reverse-shot that convey his gaze at Green. What is illustrated in these scenes is the triangular relationship between Xu, White and Green. White "loves" Xu and wants him to fulfill her desire to be a human. Xu, on the other hand, is split between White and Green. He agrees to be with White because he was pursued by her, yet he feels desire for Green.

For her part, Green tries hard to maintain her human form but often reverts back to her nature as a snake. Since the beginning, she has been juxtaposed with White to contrast their proficiency at being a human. However, Green is inclined to do as she likes and enjoys catching insects and chasing rats in a form half-snake, half-human. The critical difference between White and Green in the film is Green's shifting identity between human and snake. She does not particularly favour one form over another, but uses different attributes of each identity for different purposes. As a woman, she enjoys seeing men make fools of themselves as she flirts with them and challenges the virtues of being human. She seduces Xu as well as Fahai and criticizes Fahai for not being any more superior than other humans because he too could not restrain himself from lust. Moreover, she points out to him that he is blinded by the rules of righteousness and is not flexible enough to make appropriate judgements in different cases. Fahai only realizes that he has made a mistake at the last minute, when he sees White has given birth to a baby. As a non-human, Green likes to mock the behaviour of human beings and point out their many flaws. She tries to persuade Xu that what he thought was a snake is in fact a piece

of fabric. In a conversation between Green and White after they have persuaded Xu of the “truth,” Green emphasizes the complex nature of lying and accentuates the simplicity of the non-human realm. As a snake-human, she viciously avenges those who try to harm herself and White, people such as the Daoist and Xu Xian who ends by betraying them. Green’s character brings out the many flaws of humans by criticizing and mocking their behaviour in a sarcastic way.

At the very end, when Green and White fight Fahai to rescue Xu from Jinshan Temple, Green dramatically changes to become completely human in form yet possessed of a uniquely non-human perspective on the world. When White suffers from giving birth, Green stays close by her side, and yet White asks her to leave her and go find Xu inside the temple. Green agrees to do this but asks, “You’ve always said there is love in humans; don’t you think non-humans have love too? Have you thought about the five hundred years we’ve been together? Isn’t there love between us too? Have you ever thought of me like you thought of humans?” She then goes inside the temple and when she finds Xu, the tears that roll down her cheeks indicate that she has achieved a higher level of cultivation. She gracefully smiles and wipes the tears away as a key light floods her face and the camera frames her in close up. She takes Xu with her to join White, but White has been killed by the collapsed pagoda, knocked down by Fahai. Before Green leaves, she comments, “I came to this earth and have been misjudged by humans. I heard there is something called love in the human world, yet what is ‘love’? It is ridiculous. Not even you humans know what love is. When you have figured out what it is, maybe I will return.” After delivering this final speech, Green spins off into the sea and Fahai calls her human name, “Little Green.” Fahai has finally recognized “her as herself” by calling Green by her human name. The film closes with Fahai holding White’s child in his arms, then fades into the scenic background

of the bamboo forest on a cry of the newborn. The closing shot closes up and focuses on one of the bamboo leaves among the bamboo forest with a warm filter. A water droplet slides down the leaf and makes a simple yet distinct sound to fade out into ending credits. This last shot pairs with a shot very early in the film that frames a water droplet falling into still water, creating ripples with the same distinct sound.

In Tsui Hark's film, the conventional expectations toward the two sets of characters "human and non-human" are inverted. The matrix of character, set, and film stylistics make the theme of the film one that interrogates human morality and challenges the assumption that human behaviour is morally superior. In the film, neither Xu Xian nor Fahai present themselves as any better than Green or White. Fahai is obsessed with following rules without considering the whole picture, while Xu Xian is prey to many desires and unfaithful to White. Although he realizes he has done wrong in the end, his regrets come too late. On the contrary, White and Green, non-humans who know nothing of morality, observe and achieve more than either Fahai or Xu.

Music and sounds have significant presence in *Green Snake*. The function of music and sound in film is to create ambience and to make an emotional appeal to the audience in connection with a sequence of images. Music and sound can elicit elemental feelings such as suspense and excitement and connect different frames of the film, while songs with lyrics can reinforce images and storyline. In addition to conventional uses of music and sound that create feelings of suspense, excitement, or sadness, song lyrics reinforces particular shots. Tsui Hark uses specific sounds and musical phrases to mark the entrance of characters, and dialogue is dramatized to match the tempo of delivery used in traditional Chinese theatre. For example, chants and brass instruments often mark the entrance of Fahai, who symbolizes power and male

dominance, while strings, wind instruments, and percussion complement the feminine beauty of White and Green. Wooden temple drums and percussion instruments are used sparingly to signal abrupt shifts from one scene to another. However, music is overused in the film, which diminishes the impression and impact on the audiences. Where silence can be just as effective in heightening suspense and introducing unexpected events, the use of music with quickened tempo to signal anxiety is normalized when used repeatedly. Although it is difficult to state what constitutes “good” film music, such explicit overstatements of music drown the primary intention of film music as a sensory *supplement* and a stimulant in the film.

The music in *Green Snake* is formed entirely of original compositions by James Wong, who is by far the most prominent song writer in the history of Cantonese pop music. He used many typical Chinese instruments but his efforts to create a score with Chinese characteristics was undercut by his expertise in popular music, and the result was music with commercial appeal as well as a score that suited this film in particular. Wong composed three feature songs for *Green Snake* whose lyrics are part of the film’s diegesis. The main theme song²⁰⁹ accompanies shots of the daily life of White, Xu and Green and is juxtaposed to the changing seasons and rising tensions between White and Green. This theme song can be extracted and appreciated independently since it is produced like a popular music video with a pictorial narrative illustrating the lyrics.

Similarly, the second theme song, “Life,”²¹⁰ which is used in the opening and closing credits, rhetorically inquires into the marvelousness of *yuan*, *qing* and life.²¹¹ A loop is created

²⁰⁹ See Appendix V(A).

²¹⁰ See Appendix V(B).

²¹¹ *Yuan*, could be understood as “karma,” or the attraction between people; *qing*, as previously defined in footnote 60, could be understood as enchantment, love, feelings, and attachment.

by this simple and repetitive melody and lyrics, which functions on several levels. First, the song draws a strong association between the film, the song, and the audience and primes the listener to interpret the film in terms of its lyrics. Because its melody appears at the beginning of the film, it makes an impression that is recalled when it is used again at the end of the film. Second, this use of the song makes a continuous loop of the narrative, as though the story of *Madame White Snake* has to be repeated continuously throughout history and will do so into the future. Third, this repetition proclaims the story as a narrative space like history that is repeatedly revisited, reinterpreted, and recreated by individuals.

While the process of revisiting and reinterpreting the past is always self-conscious, reconstructing the past has the aim of understanding the relationship between the self and history.²¹² Since Tsui Hark worked from a contemporary text of a traditional story, his personal recreation of the past in an effort to rediscover his roots as a Chinese is done by experimenting with filming techniques. Although he works in Hong Kong's commercial film industry, he attempts to create a unique style by reapplying traditional elements in his films.

Green Snake (1993) - film stylistics

First of all, Tsui adopted a style that supports both the theatrical and mythical aspects of the tradition. Second, lighting and staging accentuate lust and sensuality in the depiction of characters. Tsui also added comic touches that match the witty sarcasm of Li Pikwah's novel, and James Wong's original music adhered to Chinese traditional music and yet adopted contemporary lyrics.

²¹² Hutcheon, *Poetics* 41, 111-12.

The film opens with a series of still shots and the theme songs that loops from beginning to end. The backdrop to the opening credits is a stream that runs over rocks and green grass. The opening music sets the film in an exotic world constituted by fantasy. The title of the story also immediately gives the film away as a mythical tale that falls in the category of *guzhuang*, where characters are dressed in pre-modern clothing. Throughout the film, Tsui uses a misty lens filter to soften the images and make them seem more dream-like. In scenes where he wants to convey different perceptions of the three worlds - lay, superhuman, and non-human. Tsui uses colour filters with either a warm or cold tone, to set them apart. He uses a warm red and orange tone to imitate images of hell in Buddhist iconography and convey suffering in the laymen's world from Fahai's perspective. In contrast, the world of Green and White is evoked with green, blue or purple tones that represent them as extraordinary beings. Clouds of mist and fog are often used in their scenes to enhance the mystical quality of the images and define them fantastic. Although Tsui is very particular about colours and themes in *Green Snake*, he rarely uses key lighting on the characters, in the film with the exceptions of Green and White. Lighting often falls onto the background or the set and the resulting image becomes more subtle in colour. Contrast is also compromised because of the lighting, which causes a flattening of depth perception. These effects create images that closely resemble Chinese water colour paintings, one of the oldest forms of traditional Chinese art. Major backdrops in *Green Snake* are the bamboo forest, White's home, the market place along the river, and Fahai's monastery, and all are "naturalistic" by and large. Framing is often in wide angle to take in a large field of vision, which allows more of the background to be seen even if the subject's face is in close up. The use of filters and light to dampen the colours show Tsui intentionally uses them to resemble

traditional Chinese water colours, since these paintings are mostly of nature and still lifes.

Harmony between the subject of the painting and its setting is crucial in this particular art form.

Although colours may appear pale in the film because of the number of filters used, this does not imply that the film lacks variation of colours. In fact, each colour has a very rich spectrum. For example, one of Green's outfits has several shades of green, yellow, and a couple of aqua colours to emphasize the green colour. In addition to the outfit, Green and White both have a number of hair accessories, waist adornments and hand fans. The male characters are not any less elaborate in their looks, especially Fahai, who has several outfits and accessories that symbolize his different levels of power. These details in character design and symbolism are part of Tsui's attempt to assimilate the art of Chinese theatre and the contemporary film medium.

Aside from the appearances of the characters in relation to Chinese theatre, the framing and setting also suggest the *mise-en-scène* of the theatre stage. For instance, a lot of shots take place inside White's house. The interior of her house has wooden flooring and a simple layout with only one or two pieces of furniture at most. Space in the house is divided by gauze, thinly spaced wooden strips, and circular doorways, in order to create depth of view and a sense of spacial relations. Moreover, the interior and exterior of the house are not sharply defined as the interior transitions into the exterior with an extension that overlooks a lotus pond. These settings in White's house reflect a tranquility typical of water colour painting, assimilating nature with subject. The room divisions and positions of furniture also resemble objects on the theatre stage in their spacing and symmetry.

The camera often frames the picture at eye level, with the boundaries of the room set outside of the frame. In White's house, framing often hides the edges of the walls and blends the area of the image with the area of the audience. This technique blurs the boundary between the

world of the film and the world of the audience, by creating an extended field of view on the screen, similar to that of an audience watching a play in front of the stage and sharing the same space. There are occasional pans and tilts that also make the film experience even closer to that of the theatre. Thus, the fantastic world of *White*, which is the fantasy of Xu Xian, also becomes the fantasy of the film audience. Tsui was successful with *Green Snake* since he was able to replicate the fantasies of the story for the audience by dissolving the barrier of the film medium.

Green Snake (1993) and Hong Kong

Green Snake by Tsui Hark is a film deeply rooted in Chinese history and culture. It visually and acoustically represents Chinese traditions in arts and music, and the way he used to represent the story is a unique expression of Tsui's style. In Lisa Morton's words,

(The film has) a sort of epic playfulness that would have been unimaginable in an English film. It took me to another realm, one where torn-up love poems became cherry blossoms, where a cup of tea hurled heavenward invoked a rainstorm, and snakes transformed themselves into lovely women. It was positively heady in its beauty. (Morton, 103)

From a Chinese audience's perspective, the various subtexts brought out in the film's subject and in Tsui Hark's cinematography are worth investigating for metaphors of Hong Kong's cultural condition. Evidently, Green's ambiguous figure is representative of Hong Kong people's ambiguous identity, as Chinese who are disconnected from cultural developments in the mainland. As a paired figure, White is the idealized woman who bears the traits of a traditional woman. She is the projection of the imagined Chinese from the perspectives of Hong Kong Chinese; one who is traditional, elegant, and sophisticated. The make-up and acting of Green and White were also done to conceptualize the traditional aspects of the story both in literature and theatre.

While Morton sees *Green Snake* as artistic and even compares Tsui's film styles to British directors such as Peter Greenaway,²¹³ Tsui's films are regarded as commercial ventures that guarantee economic returns by Chinese in Hong Kong. However commercial his films may be, the entertainment value in them reflects the tastes of the population. His films are rich with representations and embedded with cultural meanings that are echos of the past of Hong Kong audiences.

²¹³ Morton 103.

CHAPTER 7: Conclusion

Nostalgic seduction, *Green Snake* - novel and film in contemporary Hong Kong

Hong Kong, which is now a Special Administrative Region under Chinese rule, was a colonial city from 1898 to 1997.²¹⁴ Even though Hong Kong is on the periphery of China, its history, politics, population, language and culture have diverged in many respects. During the colonial period, Hong Kong was made up of Chinese who speak different dialects, expatriates from across the world, and refugees from Southeast Asia. Hong Kong experienced a radically different political and economic growth under the colonial government, yet just north of the border during the same period, China went through tremendous changes as the Communist Party came into power. The sharpest divergence was during the controversial period of the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976. However, by the time China stabilized and began to grow economically in the 1980s, Hong Kong had already become a global city and financial hub, which was supported by an independent economy. It had also become culturally distinct from mainland China because of a full-fledged media industry and a popular culture deeply rooted in the spoken Cantonese dialect.

In 1984, a declaration was signed between the British and the Chinese government for Hong Kong to return to Chinese rule in 1997. Because of the gap in history and culture, people in the local arts industry, including artists, writers, film makers, and popular song writers began to search for the roots of Hong Kong identity in the 1980s and 90s. The task was not easy because Hong Kong is an incredibly hybridized place in terms of population, education system, socio-economic distribution, and language. Even Chinese who were born and educated in this

²¹⁴ The island of Hong Kong was ceded to the British government in 1841. Subsequently, Kowloon and the New Territories were leased from the Chinese government in 1898.

hybridized space find it difficult to define a common identity. Anticipation of Hong Kong's future after the declaration was signed induced local people to embark on a nostalgic journey in search of their roots. At the same time, people in Hong Kong were also eager to preserve aspects of colonial Hong Kong that they feared would soon disappear. For at least a decade, a psychological tension existed between going backwards to understand the past as a way to make sense of the future, and moving forward to embrace the future by shedding the burden of the past. Either way, the essence of this struggle with time is that the individual has to come to terms with a sense of being rooted in the past, in order to discover an association with the Hong Kong today. "[Nostalgia] is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nation, between personal and collective memory."²¹⁵ The nostalgic journey thus gives people the opportunity to reinterpret the past and re-negotiate an identity in relation to a social body situated in the present.

Given the differences in culture and politics between Hong Kong and mainland China, Chinese in Hong Kong can only understand their roots by *imagining* the culture and history of China through literature and history. Materials in literature and history become icons of Chinese identity and tradition, which can act as a framework for imagining a future identity after Hong Kong returns to China. The first sign of imagining culture and history of China was in *wuxia* narratives, which were serialized in the supplementary section of the local newspapers. *Wuxia* fiction is the author's fantasy of history, traditional arts, culture and philosophy. Writing *wuxia* fiction required a wealth of knowledge of history and culture and an imagination that could entertain as well as recreate the past. For both Li Pikwah and Tsui Hark, re-writing and filming *Madame White Snake* required similar skills: familiarity with the traditional text and the ability

²¹⁵ Boym XVI.

to imagine the historical and cultural background of the original story. However, both Li and Tsui took a new approach and presented *Madame White Snake* from the perspective of Green, the auxiliary figure in the traditional story. They likely did this because Green's identity as an auxiliary figure with an ambiguous identity corresponds remarkably to the situation of Hong Kong, especially in relation to mainland China.

For both Li and Tsui, the original story is a vehicle for rediscovering and re-identifying with a collective past; at the same time, it facilitates an attempt to negotiate an individual identity in the present. Both novel and film are products of nostalgia since they revitalize a story with a deep history, and yet they are also critical reconstructions of the story. Li's novel reinterpreted the story by revealing an alternative past from Green's perspective. Tsui's film then builds upon Li's novel and reproduces the story visually with a set and characters that actualize the themes in the story and evoke earlier theatrical treatments of it. His film also used acoustics and visual effects extensively, to accentuate the themes of lust and desire that are central to Li's novel.

In *Green Snake*, Li uses Green as the reference point to write about individual and collective memory by piecing together fragments of time and space. As Svetlana Boym suggests, reflective nostalgia is an investigation into the past from the individual's point of view by means of longing and critical thinking.²¹⁶ While there may be only one point of reference, narratives of collective culture do not coincide with personal accounts and may confuse the understanding of the individual identity.²¹⁷ Li included many facts from literature and history to give the story a nostalgic connotation and presented an array of possibilities to comprehend these artifacts. Such artifacts are poetry, excerpts from classical literature, historically famous

²¹⁶ Boym 49.

²¹⁷ Boym 49.

locations, and historical figures with extensive stories and myths gathered around them. These details are comprised of factual and cultural meanings that are shared by individuals as a common cultural ground. To give an example from *Green Snake* by Li Pikwah, at the beginning of the story when Green and White were trying to figure out what is a human and what is a man, they came across Su Xiaoxiao's grave. White read the poem "Tong xin ge (同心歌)" out loud,²¹⁸ and told Green the stories of four other legendary women and their experiences with men; Yang Yuhuan, Yu Xuanji, Huo Xiaoyu, and Wang Baochuan.²¹⁹ Although these stories of women were all tragedies, White fantasizes their love stories as ones that are worthy of envy because they were glorified by history. Using these fragments of history, Li subverts these idealized love tragedies by criticizing them and pointing out their reality as tragedies.

These references to historical figures and classical literature have contradictory effects. First, they allow readers who are familiar with the history to appreciate Li Pikwah's parody. Second, they trigger a nostalgic imagining of a collective identity and renewed appreciation for these classical texts. Li's use of historical materials can also be overwhelming and intimidating. Among these five women that White mentions, Su Xiaoxiao, Yang Yuhuan (Lady Yang), and Huo Xiaoyu are ones that should be familiar to the average reader. However, mentions of Yu Xuanji and Wang Baochuan stretch the knowledge of the reader. Contemporary Hong Kong

²¹⁸ Li 11. "Su Xiaoxiao, 'Song of the heart': The mistress rides the decorated wagon, her lover on a stallion. Where will the two hearts meet? Underneath the pine and cypress tree in the far west. (蘇小小, 同心歌: 妾乘油壁車, 朗騎青驄馬。何處結同心? 西泠松下。)" Su Xiaoxiao is a courtesan in Hangzhou in the South Qi dynasty (AD 479-502). Her tragic love story has been written by poets such as Li He (AD 791-871) "Song of Little Su's Tomb (蘇小小墓歌)" and Bai Juyi (AD 772-846) "Spring in Hangzhou (杭州春望)".

²¹⁹ Li 11. Yang Yuhuan (楊玉環), Yu Xuanji (魚玄機), Huo Xiaoyu (霍小玉), and Wang Baochuan (王寶釧). Yang Yuhuan is better known as Yang Guifei, a famous consort to an Emperor in Tang Dynasty who is considered one of the greatest beauties in ancient China. Yu Xuanji is a talented poet with a complicated love life that ends in the death of her maid because she suspected she had an affair with her lover. Huo Xiaoyu is a courtesan who fell in love with a man who left her and she made a vow to wreak vengeance on her lover's wife and mistresses after she dies. Wang Baochuan is a princess who waited eighteen years for a lover who never returned.

readers who have little exposure to Chinese history and classical literature may miss these layers of the novel. Whether or not the contemporary Hong Kong reader recognizes these artifacts as signs of “China,” their aura and the mystery can satisfy a longing for rootedness in traditional China. These details also allow the reader loosely to identify with the China depicted in Li’s novel through the familiarity of the story.

Common artifacts from different time periods in *Green Snake* are identified as the story progresses in a linear timeline. Li Pikwah uses aspects of daily life such as food and clothing to illustrate the lifestyle of a different time, and these allow the reader to track the trajectory of Green’s personal story. However, Li tends to be densely descriptive and the wealth of detail sometimes end up mythicizing and distancing the past rather than giving a clear image of it. For example, she renders items such as food, clothing design, and textiles from the Tang and Song dynasties, which the readers can imagine in their mind’s eye. She also recreates lost traditions such as local customs around the West Lake and shamanic practices. These nostalgic restorations expand the imagination of the reader but at the same time suggest history and culture is ambiguous and abstract, since literature and historical accounts are the only sources that can attest to the past.

As Green’s story progresses from pre-modern China to modern China, reminiscences of modern history also became increasingly recognizable to the reader. The latest time period that Green’s story traces is the time of the Cultural Revolution, when White is released from under the pagoda. Li utilizes transformations of clothing and the seasons in the story to create a three-dimensional relationship between time, space and individuals. When White is finally released, She begins her search for another lover in the modern era dressed in the latest fashion:

She quickly adopts the latest fashion. In an instant, she had her hair permed with the ends curled upwards.²²⁰ She changed into a pair of flared jeans and wore translucent nylon stockings that went up three inches above the ankle. She put on sandals with thick soles. Her blouse was multi-colourful with neon colours intermixed. At her waist, she tied the ends of her blouse into a knot. She wore a thick-banded silver ring on her finger and had a pair of earrings in a similar style. Her face was caked with makeup with bright coloured lipstick applied. Although it was a rainy day, she kept a pair of sunglasses tucked away in the pocket of her blouse - the price sticker had not even been removed... She even carried a little leather purse that was a knock-off of a famous brand.

她趕忙地適應潮流。一旅身，燙了發，額角起了幾個美人鉤。改穿一條寬腳牛仔褲。腳上換了絲襪，是那種三個骨肉色尼龍絲襪。高底涼鞋。上衣五彩繽紛，間有熒光色，在腰間以T恤衫下擺結了個蝴蝶結。手指上戴了指環，銀的，粗的。耳環也是一般式樣。臉上化好妝，塗上口紅。雖然是雨天，上衣口袋中也帶了個太陽眼鏡——並沒有把商標貼紙撕下來。... 還背了個冒充名牌的小皮包。(p. 253)

This vivid description of White's new look is stereotypical of the 1960s and likely would be familiar to the reader as such. A linear progression of time is clearly drawn out by attention paid to items of clothing. This latest addition to the story of Madame White Snake brings the myth closer to the contemporary world and carries on the tradition of the story. Therefore, not only is *Green Snake* a restoration of the myth, it is also a new invention that may act as one of the sources for future versions.

At the end of the novel, Green claims herself to be a worker in the factory of Zhang Xiaoquan (張小泉) who is writing her story for a newspaper in Hong Kong. Zhang Xiaoquan in Hangzhou was established in 1663 and has since been a well-recognized manufacturer of quality scissors and cutting utensils still in use today.²²¹ The brand, Zhang Xiaoquan, is extremely popular among Chinese people, including those in Hong Kong. This particular brand and White's latest style of dressing, which closely connect with everyday life, induce a sense of intimacy that can relate personal identity with time. Including these tangible daily items in the

²²⁰ This refers to the omega hairstyle that was fashionable in the 60s.

²²¹ Zhang Xiaoquan, a manufacturer of scissors that started in 1663 and is still existing today. It has now grown into a corporation and achieved international standards. See: <http://www.zhangxiaoquan.com.cn/>

story, which have a clear historical and socio-cultural background, turns them into cultural signs that function as a common framework for social and individual memory to build upon.²²² They create a sense of continuity in history and strengthen the sense of a common cultural background shared by Chinese in mainland China and in Hong Kong.

In the novel, Li used everyday items and memories as markers of common cultural signs that trigger individual memories of the collective social body. She situated these items along a continuum of time and space to create a sense of continuity and identification with the social body. The more distant these representations are from the modern reader, the more abstract and more alluring they become. Tsui Hark then took this fascination with a mythical China and yearning to find roots in traditional China and projected it onto the theatre screen. Not only did he adapt Li's novel and retain Green's playful and humourous perspective, he even mimicked the art of traditional theatre and watercolour paintings to enhance the effects of nostalgia already present in Li's novel. Tsui carefully designed the characters and set to portray the time period of the story, and even used original music to accompany the *mise-en-scène*. Nonetheless, film is a contemporary medium that involves acting, music, and dialogue. Nostalgia in his film version of *Green Snake* acts in two directions in the film. On one hand, the set and character designs exemplify nostalgia, yet on the other hand, the dialogues and provocative mentality of Green subvert nostalgia and primarily promote entertainment values.

There was no perfect way to translate *Green Snake* onto film because its contents provoked senses of nostalgia but at the same time contradicted them. Working in light of this fact, Tsui chose a playful approach to realize the impossibility of exemplifying nostalgia. Instead of trying his best to provoke nostalgia by design or filming techniques, he purposefully chose to

²²² Boym 42.

downplay a use of details that make references to history and location. Most of the film is shot in medium shot with only a limited number of identifiable backgrounds: White's home, the bamboo forest, the village, the lake, and Fahai's monastery. Although the film sets may be loosely designed to give a rough sense of the overall story, Tsui evokes a sense of nostalgia by carefully designing his framing to imitate the style and effects of Chinese traditional theatre. He also spent considerable energy designing colour-coordination for the characters, especially Green and White. As humans, both have several costumes with beautifully coordinated colours and extravagant make-up and hair accessories. However, their non-human forms were less expertly done. The snake body of Green and special effects used in her non-human scenes were extremely fake, and haze filters and soft focus lens were used to convey the sense that this portion of the story is nothing more than a myth. Attempts to capture *Green Snake* visually thus undercut the seductive effects of nostalgia rather than enhancing them. By and large, nostalgia thereby only lies in the basic plot of *Green Snake*. As a result, the film is better classified as a contemporary film with nostalgic elements, rather than a film that satisfies a longing for a past.

The essence of Tsui's *Green Snake* thus lies in the comical and entertainment value of the film, which he did exceptionally well. In the first place, the script of *Green Snake* with Green's provocative mindset is a source of amusement. For instance, at the beginning of the film, when Green complains how different it is to get used to having legs and walking like a human, Tsui shows her with spongy legs that can even be tied into a knot. Since Green is not yet skillful using her new body, her upper body is upright like a human's while her lower body slithers along the ground. She and White walk hand in hand along the stream and try to imitate elegant ladies who lightly swing their hips as they walk. Tsui shoots them from behind at a low angle to exaggerate the swaying of their hips. As Green slithers by on one side and White walks with

exaggerated movement, two boats crash into each other and all the male passengers are thrown overboard.

The representations Tsui used throughout the film are not always consistent. In the beginning of the film, he clearly distinguished lust from love visually by using colour themes, yet as the film progresses, the distinction becomes ambiguous. Lust and love were sensuously depicted with distinct colours and visual designs, however, the actresses act overtly feminine, which in turn ridicules romance and makes the scene comical. As a result, the scene also criticizes an idealized image of the traditional female and breaks with an idealized imaging of nostalgia. Tsui juxtaposed representations of traditional elements with contemporary film styles and as a result offered entertainment while answering to latent longings for the past. The entertainment value of the film drew attention away from the story and redirected undercurrents of nostalgia to the immediate enjoyment of it as a consumer product. Entertainment in *Green Snake* is value-added, and satisfies a curiosity about the myth and its traditions that is not culturally informed.

Entertainment is a crucial factor when it comes to consuming popular culture in Hong Kong. Li Pikwah's work is a hybrid of entertainment and literature, which has attracted attention in academia.²²³ Similarly, Tsui's film provides instantaneous enjoyment of narrative and image at the same time. The story and visual content of the film triggers a nostalgia that is at the core of Hong Kong entertainment and consumer culture. As Rey Chow suggests, nostalgia is a consumer product in Hong Kong culture that offers an "alternative temporality for fantasizing a 'community' amid the identity-in-crisis of contemporary Hong Kong."²²⁴ *Green Snake* as a

²²³ Chen Yanxia, "Paradox of popular culture: cultural criticisms of Li Pikwah's phenomenon" in "*Literary Hong Kong*" and *Lilian Lee*, ed. David D.W. Wang (Taipei: Rye Field Publications, 2000) 141.

²²⁴ Chow 134.

contemporary re-writing of *Madame White Snake* is a “Hong Kong production” with its newly inspired perspectives on the novel, its language, and its song writers, actors, and production crew members who identify with Hong Kong and make their home there.

Nostalgia in Hong Kong arose from a need to make sense of the present and to secure a collective identity because of the anticipated political change in 1997. However, because Hong Kong has practically no historical roots in China and no immediate past that can prepare them for a future linked to that of mainland China, people who identify with colonial Hong Kong are always in-between past and future, being Chinese and “not-so-Chinese”. Hong Kong at the end of its colonial period, and even nowadays as a Special Administrative Region, is in an intermediate state where anxieties about the future are high. As Boym suggested with her idea of “reflective nostalgia,” nostalgia is a mode of understanding the present state through reinterpretation of the past. Similarly, parody of a literary work that involves critical reading and re-writing of the nostalgic text reconfigures the past in order to reach a new understanding of the relationship between the nostalgic text and the present.

For Tsui Hark, nostalgia meant a rediscovery of China’s mythical past and a revitalization of these stories in his films, which entertain while answering to the public’s nostalgic longing for a traditional China. Similarly, Li Pikwah chose to reinterpret traditional stories with a contemporary mindset and re-write them with irony and humour. She chose the perspective of Green as an anchor to reflect upon the story from a position inside it but also auxiliary to it, which allows both an objective and critical deconstruction of the story. *Green Snake* as an autobiography of Green is also a self-inquiry into personal identity. In the end, Green regards herself as a snake-human who will always be a snake without a true human identity. She is always an imitation of human, a mere mirror-reflection of the human at any given intersection of

time and space. Green's position resembles the marginal identity of Chinese in Hong Kong in the geo-political arena, and as a social body who is Chinese yet lacks a Chinese history.

Ultimately, Green's identity also resembles Hong Kong people's identity as "in-between" Chinese, a "Chinese," and "not-so-Chinese."

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Appendix I: Madame White Snake - Timeline of Evolution

| Year | Format | Title and Description | Cited in |
|-----------|-------------|--|--|
| 1368 | play | 白蛇記 written by 鄭國軒 (Zhang, Guoxuan) ▶ protagonist saves a white serpent which turns out to be the princess of the Dragon King. | Hsu (II) 121 |
| 1378 | print | ▶ 牡丹燈記 in 剪燈新話 published by 瞿宗吉 (Qu, Zonji) ▶ 雙魚墮記 in 四種小說 published by 熊龍峰 (Xiong, Longfeng) | Hsu (II) 121 |
| 1541-51 | print | 西湖三塔記* in 清平山堂話本, Story 3 ▶ White devours the liver and heart of her human lover alive ▶ three demons are: a white snake (mother), an otter (child), a black hen (old woman) ▶ all three are imprisoned under three pagodas on West Lake by a Daoist ▶ the male lover is named, Xi Xuanzan (奚宣贊) ▶ summary of plot by Hanan in Appendix IIA | Chang 206* Dai, 1* 15-16* Hanan 191-92 Hsu (II) 121* Wu 13 |
| 1547 | annotation | brief annotation in the third <i>juan</i> , “Wonders of Nanshan” 南山勝蹟, in <i>Guide to the West Lake</i> 西湖遊覽志 by Tian Rucheng 田汝成 ▶ sites the imprisonment of the spirits of a white snake and a green fish as a local myth | Chang 205-6 Tian 34 |
| 1547 | annotation | <i>Supplement to the Guide to West Lake</i> 西湖遊覽志餘 by Tian Rucheng 田汝成 ▶ Tian “authenticated that among the titles of the blind storytellers’ Taozhen 陶真 in the city of Hangzhou there was a title, the <i>Leifengta</i> (Thunder Peak Pagoda)”* during the Southern Song period | Hsu (II) 122* |
| 1573-1620 | play (lost) | 雷峰塔傳奇* / 雷峰記 by Chen Liulong 陳六龍 | Chang 213* Hsu (II) 122* Wu 83 |
| 1619 | annotation | reissue of 西湖遊覽志 by Shang Weijui ▶ added that three demons are confined under the pagodas because they come out to lead those who are lost | Chang 207 |

| Year | Format | Title and Description | Cited in |
|---------|--|---|---|
| 1624 | novella | 白娘子永鎮雷峰塔 in 驚世通言 28 by 馮夢龍 ▶ first complete tale of Madame White that survived ▶ White and Little Green leads a domestic way of living; retains uncanny with unexplained disappearance, riches and ability to tell the future ▶ two antagonists: first a Daoist who failed to reveal White's true form, and later a Buddhist monk (Fahai) who successfully confined her and Green under the pagoda ▶ Madame White reveals her true form as a white snake, Little Green reveals her true form as a green fish ▶ the name of the male lover becomes Xu Xuan (許宣) | Chang, 216-61 (translation) Dai 1 Feng 438-467 Hsu (II) 123-128 Wu 49-80 Zhang 1-2 |
| 1673 | novella | 雷峰怪跡 in 西湖佳話 by 墨浪子 ▶ White portrayed as more “charming and accessible,” considerate and caring* ▶ brings out <i>qing</i> 情 (love, care, compassion) as a theme ▶ largely based on CSTY 28 | Chang 213 Hsu (II) 128-130* Zhang 1 |
| 1738 | play (original is lost; adopted version survives in print) | 雷峰塔傳奇 by Huang Tubi 黃圖珙／蕉窗居士* ▶ originally contains only 32 playlets; copied version has 34 playlets^ ▶ adds two significant details, “Stealing Reishi (盜草)” and “Water Battle (水鬥)”； each is presented as an individual scene* ▶ Green becomes more significant in the play; has a solo that reveals the emotions of White ▶ White is domesticated, caring, kind and loving* | Chang 213 Dai 2-5* Fu 281-338 (copy of a print in 1738) Wu 86-97^ Zhang 1^ `靈芝 |
| 1738-71 | play (lost) | 雷峰塔傳奇 by 陳嘉言父女 ▶ 40 playlets* ▶ adds White's giving birth to a son* | Dai 1 Hsu (II) 136* Zhang 1 |
| 1771 | play | 雷峰塔傳奇 by Fang Chengpei 方成培 ▶ 34 playlets ▶ Green is a green snake, not a green fish as in previous ▶ in Scene 25 “Water Battle,” White floods Golden Mountain where Fahai has taken Xu Xuan* ▶ White gives birth in Scene 31* | Chang 213-14 Dai 2-6 Fu 339-419* (copy from manuscript) Hsu (II) 137-40 Wu 100-39 |

| Year | Format | Title and Description | Cited in |
|------|-----------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1806 | novella | 雷峰塔奇傳 in 章回小說 by 玉山主人 ▶ Xu Xuan (許宣) becomes the name known today, Xu Xian (許仙) ▶ Green falls in love with a human | Hsu (II) 140-42 |
| 1809 | play (lost) | in 義妖傳 by 陳遇乾 ▶ Green fights Fahai and burns the pagoda* ▶ White becomes “very humane and sympathetic” ▶ Hsu found this play “very sentimental, humorous, interesting, and very easy to read” ▶ Zhang found a copy in Suzhou dialect` ▶ Zhang bases his version on this novella`` | Dai 11* Hsu 142-3` Zhang 1-2`` |
| 1955 | Beijing opera | 白蛇傳 by 田漢 ▶ White gains the name, Bai Suzhen (白素貞) ▶ Green challenges the guardian of the pagoda and releases White ▶ Green calls White “sister,” rather than “my lady” | Hsu 147 Tian (1957) |
| 1955 | novel | 白蛇傳 by 張恨水 | Hsu 147 Zhang (1955) |
| 1955 | anthology of opera | 白蛇傳集 edited by 傅惜華 ▶ collection of plays, including a copied version of Huang (黃圖珌) and an original version of Fang (方成培) | Hsu 147 Fu (1955) |
| 1965 | novel | 白蛇傳 by 陳秋帆 (Taiwanese novelist) | Hsu 148 |
| 1971 | short story | 白蛇精 by 杜貴恆 ▶ short fairy tale | Hsu 148 |
| 1983 | novel | 青蛇 by 李碧華 (Hong Kong novelist) | Li (1993) |
| 1993 | novel (revised) | 青蛇 by 李碧華 | Li (1993) |
| 1993 | film | 青蛇 by 徐克 (Hong Kong director) | Xu (1993) |

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Appendix II: Summaries / Plot lines

A. Plot line of “Xihu santaji (西湖三塔記)” (Story of the Three Pagodas on the West Lake)

- from Hong Pian 洪楸. Qingping shantang huaben (清平山堂話本) (Vernacular short stories from the Clear and Peaceful Studio), ed. Ma Lian (Taipei: Shijieshuju, 1958) 45-64.

Meeting. Xi Xuanzan(奚宣贊)²²⁵ is in his early twenties, and the only son of an official. He lives with his mother, his wife and uncle who is a Daoist training away from home. (His wife is only mentioned here in passing.) On a visit to the West Lake on Qingming festival, he meets a little girl with the surname White, who says she is lost. He takes her home with him. An old woman arrives to fetch the girl home some ten days later and invites Xi along. They arrive at a gorgeous home as fancy as a palace, and Xi is invited to sit down for a feast.

Intimation. Two servant girls dressed in green serves the party. One of them asks the mother whether they can replace the old one since a new one arrived. The mother agrees and asks the old one be brought out for Xi to serve with wine. A young man was brought out and tied to the pole with a silver bowl placed in front of him, and with a sharp knife his heart and liver was taken out alive to be offered to the mother before the eyes of Xi. The mother then offers some of the heart and liver with some wine to Xi. Although Xi refused to have some, both the mother and the old lady ate them.

Lovemaking. The mother says to Xi, “Now that I am without a husband, and you, Xuanzan saved my little girl’s life, I wish to be married to you.”

Second Intimation. Xi falls ill after only a little over half a month. Another man is brought back and the servants ask whether they can now replace the old one, referring to Xi. Although the little girl whom Xi saved begs her mother to spare his life, the mother imprisons him beneath an iron cage. The girl says she would save him, but he must close his eyes and promise not to open them, otherwise he would die of an unexplained cause. She puts him on her back and flew him home. Although Xi closed his eyes, he felt there are feathers around her neck. When she dropped him off at his home and he opens his eyes, she is no longer there. His mother sees he is home and said he has been away for two weeks and is worried sick. Upon seeing his sickened health, Xi’s mother decides to move to another part of the city.

Second Meeting, Third Intimation. The following year, he again goes out on Qingming festival. He shoots a crow, which turns into the old woman, and he is captured and taken away in a chariot. The little girls mother orders him to be imprisoned in a cage so his heart and liver may be served later. The little girl begs for his life but was refused, so she takes him on her back again and drops him off in town. Two people found Xi and took him home.

²²⁵ Hanan uses Wade-Giles for Chinese names. For the purpose of this thesis, I have changed them into *pinyin* for coherence.

Intercession. The following day, his uncle, the Daoist master, arrived at their home and sensed evil in the air. He sets up a ceremony to exorcise the evil spirits. He orders Xi to rinse his mouth with a potion to spit out the evil, and at midnight to burn incense and burn a charm over the fire while chanting some spells. A servant of the spirits arrives before the uncle and receives his orders to capture the three spirits. Not long after the servant returns with the three of them. The uncle orders them to show their true form. The three of them beg for their life and claim they have not harmed Xi. The little girl further pledges she has never done wrong to Xi and should not have to show herself. The uncle orders the servant to beat them. Upon beating, the little girl turns into a black hen, the old woman an otter, and the mother a white snake. He then calls for a metal cage to have them captured and placed into the lake. In the end, the uncle orders three pagodas to be made of stone to secure the imprisonment of the three spirits in the lake. Xi then follows his uncle to become a practicing Daoist.

- based on Patrick Hanan, The Chinese Short Story: Studies in Dating, Authorship, and Composition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973) 191-92 with modifications.

B. Plot line of “Bai niangzi yong zhen lei feng ta (白娘子永鎮雷峰塔) (Madame White forever imprisoned under the Thunder Peak Pagoda)”

- from Feng Menglong (馮夢龍). *Jingshitongyan (驚世通言)* ed. Wu Shuyin (吳書蔭). (Beijing: Beijing Shiyue Wenyi, 1994) 438-467.

First Meeting Xu Xuan goes to pay respect to his late parents on Qingming festival. He lives on West Lake with his older sister and brother-in-law. Light rain falls unceasingly during his outing. Xu Xuan is riding on a boat to cross West Lake when a lady in white (Madame White) and her servant dressed in green calls for a ride. Xu tells the boatman to pull over to the shore and give them a ride.

Boat ride Madame White asks for Xu’s name and White tells him she is a widow. When White gets off the boat, she insists that Xu goes to her house so that she can repay him for giving her a ride.

Meeting at the market They found each other again in the market as White awaits her servant to return with an umbrella. Xu lends her his umbrella and says he will go to her house to get the umbrella the following day. During the night, Xu was infatuated by her beauty.

Meeting at White’s Xu arrives at White’s place. Green urges him to enter their home. White tells Xu that a relative has borrowed his umbrella and he should come by again the following day. Meanwhile, she insists Xu stay for some drinks. Xu goes to White’s place the following day. Again, White asks him to stay for a meal she has prepared. White reveals to him that they must be destined to be together. She wants him to get a go-between so that they can be married and gives him fifty silver coins to make necessary arrangements. Xu takes the coins and left.

Stolen coins Xu goes home with wine and meat which he bought with the coins. His brother-in-law asks what the occasion was and Xu tells him about his plans to get married. He reveals that he has the necessary money to take care of things, but when the brother-in-law examines the coin, the coins turn out to be those stolen from the Grand Marshal’s Treasury.

Investigation/Uncanny Xu informed the Constable the way to White’s home. The Constable then leads a group of people to investigate White’s home. However, upon arrival, the neighbours tell them there is no such person and that the house has been empty since five or six years ago because the family died from illnesses. Since then, the neighbours report seeing ghosts coming in and out even during the day time. Regardless of what the neighbours say, they enter the house to investigate the matter. They find White sitting on her bed, but suddenly, she disappears and the investigator finds forty-nine coins on it. They closed the investigation but arrested Xu for doing “what he ought to have known not to do.”²²⁶

Suzhou Xu is taken to Suzhou as a punishment. On the way there, his brother-in-law bribed the people transporting him and arranged for him to stay with an acquaintance.

²²⁶ Chang, 231.

Reunion at Suzhou White arrives and Suzhou and finds Xu to give him an explanation. White claims that the coins were left by her late husband and she does not know the origins of those coins. She tells him that she only gave it to him because she loved him. The landlord whom Xu stays with urges Xu to uptake his promise to marry White.

Marriage The two of them bonded as husband and wife with the help of the landlord in Suzhou.

First Betrayal Xu goes out to see the Reclining Buddha, a local Suzhou festival. White urges him not to go yet Xu insists. Xu runs into a Daoist priest and he gives Xu two charms to expel any evil spirits following him. One of the charms is to be put into his hair, the other to be burnt at midnight. Xu follows his instructions and White wakes from her sleep. White sighs at how Xu has betrayed her. However, Xu blamed it on the Daoist who claims that Xu is surrounded by evil spirits.

Revenge White goes and find the Daoist the following day and proved him wrong in front of a crowd of villagers.

Stolen items/Uncanny Xu goes out to celebrate the birthday of the Buddha Shakyamuni. White asks him not to go but Xu insists. Since Xu insists, White dresses him in new clothes and accessories. Out of surprise, an officer arrested him because the items he has with him were missing items from Zhou's pawnshop. Xu says these items came from his wife and leads them to investigate the matter at their home. However, when they arrived, White has already left the house to find Xu. Xu is again arrested and brought to Zhou's pawnshop. When he arrived, a servant said to Zhou that all the items were in the chest where they belonged. Since none of the items are missing, Zhou releases Xu.

Second Betrayal With the help of Xu's brother-in-law, all the charges relating to the missing items are blamed onto White. However, Xu is charged with "not reporting the presence of evil spirits."²²⁷ Xu is to be taken to a prison at Zhenjiang, yet again, with the help of his brother-in-law, he escaped and finds shelter in a herbalist shop back in Hangzhou.

Reunion White finds Xu in Hangzhou and explains the story behind the clothes and accessories she gave to Xu. She proclaims her love for him and moved into his place.

Trap Propriety Li, the owner of the herbalist shop where Xu works, plotted an occasion to trap White and rape her. He had White drink some wine and told the maid to take her to a quiet room when White wants to rest. Indeed, White seeks a place to rest after a couple of drinks. Instead of finding White in the room he has set up for her, Propriety Li finds a white snake coiled on the bed. Li fled with fear and White returns home and tells Xu about the incident.

²²⁷ Chang, 240.

Resistance / Acceptance Xu tells White to put up with it since Li is his employer. White on the other hand resists and suggests they can open their own shop.

Monk A monk arrives at Xu's new shop to ask for an offering. Xu gives him some of his best incense and the monk asks him to offer it himself at Jinshan temple.

Jinshan temple A few days later Xu decides to go to the temple. White asks Xu to promise a few things on his trip; first not to enter the Abbot's cell, second, not to speak to any monk, and third, to come back right away. Despite White's warnings, Xu broke his promises.

White's identity revealed White and Green went to look for Xu at Jinshan temple. White calls for Xu to board her boat and leave. Upon seeing Fahai, White and Green went under water and disappeared. Fahai tells Xu these women are not human.

Denial When Xu went back to his sister's place, his sister tells him a lady claiming to be Xu's wife and a maidservant have been here since a couple days ago. Xu denies he has ever took a wife. When White meets Xu again, Xu kneels on the ground and begs her to spare his life.

Disappointment White is disappointed but asks Xu why he says such a thing since they are husband and wife. Green further explains White's love for him.

White Snake At night, Xu's brother-in-law peeks inside the room where White stays for the night and finds a snake rather than Madame White. He asks Xu about her background and Xu tells them the full story. The brother-in-law suggests they hire a snake catcher to capture her using orpiment. However, he fails to capture her.

The truth White calls Xu to her room and says to him, "Be true to me, and I will be your good fairy. Play me false, and there is not a soul in this city but shall perish."²²⁸ Xu leaves the house and runs for a nearby temple to ask for Fahai but fails to find him. As he almost gives up hope to live, Fahai appears and gives him his elm bowl. He then teaches Xu to use the elm bowl to contain White when he gets home.

Last betrayal White awaits at home wondering why Xu does not love her anymore. Being caught off guard, Xu forces the elm bowl on her head from behind and White "vanished inch by inch into the descending bowl."²²⁹

Final moments White confesses that she is a white snake and Green is a fish who are cultivating to become human. Fahai demands that she reveal her true self and she "shook her

²²⁸ Chang, 257.

²²⁹ Chang, 258.

C. Summary of scenes in Huang Tubi's "Leifengta chuanqi" in 1738

- from *Bai she zhuan ji* 白蛇傳集. Comp. Fu Xihua. (Shanghai, 1955) 282-338.

1. Compassionate words (慈音): The Buddha Shakyamuni tells the background of White Snake and Green Fish who has been cultivating over a thousand years but was tempted back into layman's suffering. Xu Xuan is an attendant to Shakyamuni with an unfinished karma and thus is reincarnated into the human's world. Fahai is instructed to restrain the two demons and bring Xu Xuan back onto the Buddhist path once the karma is complete. Fahai is given a magic bowl and he leaves for his duty in the human world.
2. Visit to the Grave (薦靈): Xu Xuan, age 22, goes to pay respect at his parents' grave on Qingming. Rain falls.
3. Meeting on the boat(舟遇): White introduces herself and Green. White wishes to go to West Lake and suggests they appear as humans. White disguises as a widow and Green as her maid. White asks Green to borrow money for a boat ride from Xu who has gotten off the boat. Seeing the rainfall, Xu lends his umbrella to them and promises to collect it at their residence the next day.
4. Order of arrest (榜緝): 50 coins are missing from the treasury without signs of being tempered. An order of arrest begins.
5. Xu's marriage (許嫁): Xu visits White's residence, and speaks of his affection for White in a soliloquy. Xu is invited for food and wine. White proposes their marriage and offered him some coins to prepare.
6. Discovery (贓現): Sister of Xu has a husband, Li Ren, who works for the Treasury. Xu discusses the matter of marriage with them and presents the coins White has given to him. Li sees them and tells the truth to his wife.
7. Court session (庭訊): Xu is called to court for the stolen coins and tells the story of how he met White and where she lives. A search at her place is ordered.
8. (邪祟): People arrive at where White is supposed to live. Neighbours say that those who lived there were long dead from a plague and ghosts come in and out even during the day. They found the coins on the bed. White and Green could not be found.
9. Return to the Lake (回湖): White and Green return to the lake. They found their "children," the water creatures, are killed in great numbers by the fishermen in the area and laments the lost.
10. Punishment (彰報): Fishermen at sea could not catch anything after long hours in the lake and strong wind and rain made them cease their catch for the day. Two fishing boats crash into each other. Green leads the troop of shrimps to catch the fishermen. The fishermen beg for their lives and promises not to fish and kill living creatures anymore. White punishes them by dressing them like water creatures and throw them into a net at shallow waters.

11. Repentance (懺悔): Fahai visits West Lake and finds the fishing boats overturned and fishermen are no where in sight. A person says they have been punished by the Snake Goddess and Fish Monster in the lake for their killings. Fahai orders him to haul them ashore. The fishermen promises to hold a religious fasting as a repentance.
12. Farewell (話別): Xu sent off to Suzhou.
13. At Suzhou (插標): Wang, owner of a herbal shop in Suzhou, has a quarrel with his attendant. Wang accuses him of being lazy, and he accuses Wang of cheating his customers.
14. Marriage (勸合): White and Green finds Xu at where he lives. Xu accuses them to be demons, and refuses to let them in. White defends herself and Wang suggests they should hold the promise of marriage.
15. To seek profit (求利): A quarrel between a Daoist and a Buddhist about using the Buddhist temple to sell his Daoist charms. The Daoist sold a charm to Xu.
16. Swallowing charms (吞符): It is a month after they are married. White knows by occult means that Xu was given two charms by the Daoist in the temple; one for the hair, and one for burning. White confronts Xu about the charms and then goes to the temple to confront the Daoist. The Daoist dares her to swallow the charm he writes, but White did not change her form after doing so. White sends Green and some water creatures to take him away. Green exercises her power over the command of water and frightens the Daoist.
17. Lost items (驚失): Crab-demon and Turtle-demon claim they have been stealing things to present to White, their goddess of the lake, ever since she moved to Suzhou. Constable Zhou found many of his precious garments and a fan with a coral pendant stolen.
18. Buddha's Birthday (浴佛): Eighth day of the fourth month; birthday of the Buddha. A celebration is held at Chengtian temple.
19. Caught (被獲): Xu goes to the celebration with the fan White has given him in his hand. An officer sees him with the fan and immediately arrests him for theft.
20. White flees (妖遁): White orders Crab-demon and Turtle-demon to return the stolen items, and orders Green to find Xu. Xu returns home to find White but the housekeeper says they have gone out looking for him. Xu becomes the scapegoat for the stolen items.
21. Rearrangements (改配): Xu is trailed and will be sent away to Zhenjiang. Wang comes to tell him that his brother-in-law has helped him set up a connection with Li who owns a herbal shop in Zhenjiang.
22. Arrival at the shop (藥賦): Xu arrives at Li's herbal shop and Li asks for his expertise in herbal medicine.

23. Seduction (色迷): White finds Xu at Zhenjiang and plots to reestablish the bonds. She cries and begs to be together, and swears to hold fidelity to him. White seduces him to bed.
24. Revealing herself (現形): Li plots to take advantage of White but finds a big white snake in the room instead and fainted to the ground.
25. Coverup (掩惡): White tells Xu how Li tried to rape her and cries as she speaks. She suggests he starts his own business with some money she has saved from selling woven fabric.
26. Jinshan temple (棒喝): Seventh day of the seventh month; birthday of the dragon deity. Xu visits Jinshan temple for the celebration. Meanwhile Fahai arrives at Jinshan temple and senses there is an air of evil in the area. White and Green follows Xu to Jinshan temple and hope to take him home by boat. Fahai raises his scepter and gestures to hit White and Green. They flip the boat to escape. Xu is astounded and begs for Fahai's guidance.
27. Return to West Lake (赦回): White arrives at the home of Xu's sister. Xu returns to his sister and brother-in-law. He denies he took a wife when his sister asks, and his sister leads White to him. White becomes extremely upset and cries as Xu denies they are husband and wife. Xu tells his brother-in-law that White is in fact a snake in disguise. The brother-in-law suggests they hire a snake catcher to capture her. Xu agrees with delight.
28. Snake catcher (捉蛇): Xu and the brother-in-law invites the snake catcher home to capture a big white snake. The snake catcher fell asleep after several cups of wine and almost forgot to catch the snake. He finds a two-headed snake, the most poisonous kind, and shouts this must be the bad karma their family of snake catcher has accumulated, and resigns the job and runs. He suggests them to find a priest to perform a ceremony or write charms to repel the snake. As the snake catcher describes the appearance of the snake, White steps up and confronts Xu for hiring a snake catcher. Xu begs her not to harm him and asks her to leave him alone.
29. Capture (法勦): Xu believes White will one day harm him and sees himself buried in West Lake. He thought of throwing himself into the lake and drown, and begs Fahai to save him from White. Fahai uses the precious pagoda and the bowl to capture White and Green. They revealed their true form as a White snake and a Green fish.
30. Burial (埋蛇): Fahai and Xu goes to Leifeng temple and buries them under the precious pagoda. Xu becomes a monk under Fahai.
31. Dharma (募緣): (Xu's solo) Xu praises the power of the Great Buddha.
32. Completion (塔圓): The pagoda is completed on West Lake. Xu is now the attendant to Fahai. A deity appears and leads Fahai and Xu back to Nirvana.

* Scene titles in English are not necessarily the translation of the original scene titles.

D. Summary of scenes in Fang Chengpei's "Leifengta chuanqi" in 1771

- from *Bai she zhuan ji* 白蛇傳集. Comp. Fu Xihua. (Shanghai, 1955) 341-419.

1. Opening (開宗): Narrator tells audiences that the White snake demon has an unfinished karma on earth with Xu, and Fahai will imprison her under the Leifeng pagoda. The filial son will move the Buddha and release White to join the Buddha.
2. Supplements (付鉢): Discussions among monks including Fahai regarding the karmic cycle of White. Fahai receives orders to imprison White and convert Xu back to a Buddhist practitioner.
3. Leaving the mountain (出山): White is addressed as Baiyun xiangu (白雲仙姑). White has been successfully cultivating herself and wishes to seek a mate in the layman's world. Another higher ranked deity cautions her not to fall for desires. White leaves the mountain.
4. Visiting the graves (上塚): Xu goes to worship his ancestors on Qingming.
5. Subjugating Green (收青): Green (青青) is the ruler of West Lake who has been cultivating for a thousand years. White thinks it is a good idea to subdue Green and make her a mate. White changes into human disguise and Green follows. White gives her the name, Little Green (青兒). [Green is a comedian 丑 in this act.]
6. Meeting on the boat (舟遇): White noticed Xu and brings rain with her power as an excuse to board his boat. When they leave, Xu lends his umbrella and will collect it the following day. [Green is an auxiliary female character 貼 from this act onwards.]
7. Promise and proposal (訂盟): Green tells Xu that White told her she has deep feelings for him and wishes to be married to him. She asks him not to tell White what she said. After White invites him inside, she told him her likes for him and offered him some money to prepare for their marriage.
8. Flee (避吳): Xu gave the silver to his sister and brother-in-law to hold the marriage. The brother-in-law who works for the Officer Li found the coins to be the ones stolen. Xu runs away to Suzhou and the brother-in-law will put the blame on White.
9. Preparations (設邸): Wang and his employee has an argument at the time of opening the shop. Wang accuses the employee for being lazy and untidy.
10. Found (獲贓): An order for arrest of White and Green is executed. Their residence were searched, but the officer reports it to be empty and deserted, but they found the chest of silver in the room.
11. Visit afar (遠訪): Xu believes White to be a demon in human disguise. White arrives at Suzhou and seeks Xu. She cries as she explains why people would think they are ghosts or demons. With the help of the shop owner (Wang), they clarified the misunderstanding and wedded.

12. Store opening (開行): While Xu went out for the day, White and Green fixed up a shop from an empty house. Xu praises White for her talents and efficiency.
13. Night talk (夜話): White is alone thinking by herself. Green joins her and asks her why she left her practice to be a goddess and suddenly felt humanly desires. White does not know the answer to it either. Xu comes along and spoke of his love for White.
14. Gift of Charms (贈符): A Daoist gives Xu two charms; one to put in the hair, and one to be burnt and drank by White.
15. Chase off the Daoist (逐道): Xu gave White the charm to drink but she was not affected. The Daoist arrives at their door and White instructs Green to attack the Daoist. The Daoist said he would polish his skills and come back to subdue the two of them.
16. Duanwu Festival (端陽): White is pregnant. Xu offers her a drink of orpiment to celebrate.²³¹ White falls ill and retrieves into the bedroom. Green comes in and finds Xu dead on the ground and White awakes from sleep. White decides to go to steal the magic herb that could revive him from death. This herb is in the premise of Southern Star, and guarded by White Crane. White asks Green to look after Xu and wait for her return.
17. Quest for magic herb (求草): White asks White Crane to spare some magic herb and starts fighting because White Crane refuses. This event aggravated and attracted other deities to take part in the dispute. In the end the deities pity White and give her the herb.
18. Recovery (療驚): White returns home with the herb and lets Green brew it for Xu. Xu is fed the medicine and revives.
19. (虎阜): White dresses Xu in fine garments with a handkerchief decorated in pearls. These items are the missing items from Xiao's collection, and Xu is again arrested.
20. Relocation (審配): The items are turned in to Xiao, and Xu decides to leave for Zhenjiang to avoid White and Green. Wang helps him return to Zhenjiang.
21. Revisit (再訪): White and Green finds Xu in Zhenjiang. White explains the mistake in tears and begs for their reunion on behalf of their title as husband and wife. Xu forgives and the inn keeper also asks them to stay.
22. Seduction (樓誘): The inn keeper has an eye for White and plots to seduce her on his birthday. A mate leads White to an isolated room and when the inn keeper looks for her, he found a large snake.

²³¹ Orpiment (雄黃酒), is usually drunk on Duanwu-festival (端午節), the fifth day of the fifth month. Orpiment is said to be able to kill bacteria and germs when drunk or applied onto the skin. It is also used to sprinkle around the household to symbolize cleansing of unwanted spirits. Chang, 214.

23. Offer of incense (化香): Fahai finds Xu and suggests he offer incense at Jinshan temple to ward off the devils. He also invites him to come for a talk to offer revelation.
24. Chan teaching (謁禪): Xu is led to Fahai at Jinshan temple.
25. Water battle (水鬥): White is angered since Fahai led Xu to his temple. White and Green decides to bring Xu out of Jinshan. Fahai tells White that Xu knows she is a demon in disguise and is afraid to see her. White reasons that she has never done harm to him and swears to battle him. Green fights along side with White against Fahai. Fahai finds out White is pregnant with a human and cannot finish her. He tells Xu their karma is not completed yet, and must wait for her to give birth.
26. Duanqiao (斷橋): Fahai leads Xu back to Hanzhou. At the same time White and Green arrives at Hanzhou and comes across Xu. Xu wants to run away from her, but is held back by White's tears. White utters their oaths as husband and wife, Xu softens as she speaks. Suddenly, White feels pain in her abdomen and prepares for labour.
27. Marriage (腹婚): Xu and White makes the marriage official before his sister and brother-in-law before she gives birth.
28. Repeated calling (重謁): Xu seeks Fahai at Jinshan and told him White has given birth for about half a month. He wants him to put an end to White so to avoid future disasters. Fahai tells him to take the magic bowl and put it over her head when she is not aware. Xu cowardly says he is likely not be able to conquer White who is capable of raising water levels and bringing on disasters. Fahai decides to subdue her.
29. Raising the pagoda (煉塔): White gave birth to a son and is happy to carry a heir to Xu's family. As Xu enters White's room, Green leaves. Fahai arrives and places the bowl on her head and turns White to a snake. Green heard White's cry and enters the room. She cries unjust and escapes. Fahai announces the devil is contained and will be buried under Leifeng pagoda. (*410 - different ending poem)
30. Return to the Buddhist path (歸真): Fahai brings Xu to the higher monks.
31. Talk at the pagoda (塔敘): One of White's companion when she was cultivating came to the pagoda and speaks to White. White pokes her head from beneath the pagoda and tells him she has given birth to a son who should be sixteen years of age. She laments when they will meet again.
32. Offerings at the pagoda (祭塔): White's son who has become a scholar comes to the pagoda to pay respect. He cries over the wrongs his father and Fahai committed, and wishes to order the pagoda be eradicated. He cries "mother" over and over, and envisions an image of a lady's face in the pagoda. White delivers kind words and motherly advise to him. White bids farewell.

33. Marriage (捷婚): White's son, Xu, brings his partner to be wedded before the sister and brother-in-law.
34. Completeness (佛圓): Fahai victoriously contains a demon, teaches another a fine lesson and spares her life. Xu is converted to Buddhist, and their filial son moves the heavens. Green and Fahai arrives at the pagoda. Fahai lifts the pagoda and releases White so she may ascend to heaven. White earns the name of 白雲仙姑. She is allowed to see her son one last time when Xu and his wife come to pay respect on Qingming before she leaves.

* Scene titles in English are not necessarily the translation of the original scene titles.

Appendix III: Synopsis of Li Pikwah's *Green Snake* (1993)

* The story of Madame White Snake is embedded in an autobiography of Little Green. It starts in the present, and tells the story in retrospect which ends in the present.

** (+) new addition to previous versions; (*) modification and adaptation of previous versions.

| page | Episodes | new | old+ |
|------|---|-----|------|
| 1 | Green (G) is a thousand three hundred years old and lives on West Lake. | + | |
| 2 | G was attacked by a fish and White (W) came to rescue her. | + | |
| 9 | G and W turned into humans for the fun of it. | + | |
| 11 | [G and W's discussion about men and human.] | + | |
| 12 | G and W met a Daoist who sold them sweet dumplings. | + | |
| 15 | [The sweet dumplings turns out to be ones that provoke thoughts of lust and desire. W and G's conversations brought out the simplicity of human love, yet the simplicity could also be read as superficiality.] | + | |
| 22 | [W decided to settle into the human's world; G decided to follow W.] | + | |
| 23 | W and G ran into a monk (reveals to be Fahai later in the story) who is chasing after a non-human. | + | |
| 25 | [G asked W what a monk is. W explained monk is a human, but superior to layman.] | + | |
| 30 | Fahai (F) captures the non-human. | + | |
| 32 | W and G discovered an entertainment parlor. Green went in as one of the dancing performers. | + | |
| 33 | W left G and found a study where she first saw Xu Xian (X). | + | |
| 39 | On Qingming festival W and G ran into X on West Lake. | | * |
| 41 | W asked G to act as a go-between after a long conversation on why couldn't she go talk to X herself. | | * |
| 43 | [Introduction of X through a comical exchange of dialogues.] | | * |
| 48 | X lent his umbrella to W. | | * |
| 50 | W busied herself for X's arrival while G lounges about eating flies. | | |

| page | Episodes | new | old+ |
|------|--|-----|------|
| 52 | X arrives at W's home. W said she lent the umbrella to a relative and asked him to stay for a few drinks to wait for the relative to return. | | * |
| 53 | A blind Daoist (B) arrived before X did and sprinkled sulfur around the house. When X arrived, B told X there are two snakes in human disguise in the house. | + | |
| 55 | W made up an excuse to explain the sulfur to X. | + | |
| 57 | W seduced X. | | * |
| 58 | G chased after B and punished him. | + | |
| 60 | G went home and found W and X making love. | + | |
| 62 | [Side episode of someone forced into an arranged marriage.] | + | |
| 64 | W and X enjoyed an outing on West lake. | + | |
| 67 | W gave X fifty silver coins to arrange their marriage. | | * |
| 69 | Investigator and his troops arrived to investigate their stolen silver. | | * |
| 70 | W told G to use her feminine beauty wisely. | + | |
| 71 | G cried and plead innocent. | + | |
| 72 | G bribed investigator with another fifty silver coins. Investigator retreated his troops. | + | |
| 74 | G tired to convince W X is not a good man. | + | |
| 77 | X arrived at W's and explained the story behind the investigation. | + | |
| 79 | X swore he will be good to W hereafter. | + | |
| 80 | W, G and X moved to Suzhou. | | * |
| 85 | W and X opened a herbalist shop. | | * |
| 87 | X was alarmed to see W sweats on a busy day at the shop. | + | |
| 93 | W, G and X went on an outing in Suzhou. [Discussion on Suzhou's geography.] | + | |
| 95 | X brought a treat to W as a surprise and let her guess what it is. W acted innocent and played along in his game. | + | |

| page | Episodes | new | old+ |
|------|--|-----|------|
| 96 | G jumped into their game and gave them the answer. It was a specialty sweet treat made with different types of flower essence. | + | |
| 100 | [G applauded how W increasingly looked like a “woman” W day after day. In comparison, G finds herself to be nothing close to a “woman.”] | + | |
| 101 | X caught G dancing around in the garden. | + | |
| 102 | G flirted with X and tried to seduce him. She fed him a grape with her lips. | + | |
| 107 | The fourth month came around. W decided to ask G and X to go to the temple and offer some incense. [This is the temple of the Daoist who sold them the sweet dumplings earlier.] | + | |
| 109 | X came back acting more talkative than normal. W suspected he has something up his sleeves. On the way to the temple, X met a Daoist who offered him two charms. | | * |
| 110 | W was disappointed that he distrusted her. | + | |
| 112 | W and G went to find the Daoist to teach him a lesson. They won their battle and took his pair of swords. | | * |
| 112 | [This pair of sword reappeared in the later part of the story when W and G fought each other over a quarrel about X. This pair of sword was a symbol of their unity that became separated because of X.] | + | |
| 115 | W suspected G has been flirting with X and asked G to swear not to flirt with X. G contradicts W and said she was only testing how faithful X is. | + | |
| 119 | G and W broke out into a fight. X heard their commotion and came to find out what it was. | + | |
| 121 | W asked G to go back to West Lake. | + | |
| 123 | The fifth month came around. | + | |
| 125 | F came to W’s door and spoke to X. F told X that W is a thousand year old white snake and G is a five hundred year old green snake. | | * |
| 126 | F taught X to give W three cups of orpiment on the fifth day of the fifth month. | | * |

| page | Episodes | new | old+ |
|------|---|-----|------|
| 129 | W warned G that she should leave town on the fifth day of the fifth month. | + | |
| 132 | G pierced seven needles into W's snake-skin that was hidden under her bed. By piercing these needles in her skin, this will trap her in her original snake form once she turned back into a snake. | + | |
| 134 | G came back from hiding for the day. As she has plotted, W reverted back to her snake form once she drank the realgar wine X offered. However, unintentionally, X was frightened to death when he saw W in her real form. G removed the needles she planted and W returned to her human form. | | * |
| 136 | W decided to go to Mount Kunlun to steal the magical reishi that is said to have powers to bring someone back to life. | | * |
| 137 | G gave W one of the swords to take along. G thought for a moment and decided to go with W to fight for X's life. | | * |
| 138 | W and G arrived at Mount Kunlun and fought the two guardians of the reishi. The guardians are the companions to the Star of Longevity, Crane-spirit and Deer-spirit. | | * |
| 139 | W told G to take the reishi to save X while she stayed behind to fight. | | * |
| 141 | X approaches G and made love to her. | + | |
| 143 | X and G had an intimate conversation about their relationship. | + | |
| 146 | X remembered what happened before he "passed out." | + | |
| 147 | W came back from Mount Kunlun and tried to convince X what he saw was a piece of cloth and not a snake. | + | |
| 149 | W was extremely tired from "fighting the snake" and X acted caring for her. | + | |
| 150 | W knew about G and X's affair and the two fought each other with the paired sword. | + | |
| 157 | W told G that she is pregnant with X's baby. | | * |
| 159 | G swore she will never allow X to be close to her again. | + | |
| 162 | X approached G and said he loved her and that their affair was real. | + | |

| page | Episodes | new | old+ |
|------|---|-----|------|
| 166 | W, G and X went to a temple and W and X swore their love in front of Guanyin. | + | |
| 168 | [G elaborated on the meanings of the fortune telling X obtained in front of Guanyin.] | + | |
| 171 | [G elaborated on the meanings of customs and beliefs, and love being one of those customs and beliefs.] | + | |
| 175 | X suddenly told G that he knew of their true identity. | + | |
| 176 | G yelled at X and told him to leave them forever. | + | |
| 178 | G ran into F and F persuaded them to leave X and cultivate by themselves. G condemned F for not understanding what is the meaning of “love.” | + | |
| 183 | G began to seduce F to test how well he can stay focused in meditation. F failed to stay focused and in turn tried to harm G. | + | |
| 187 | F left G and went after X. G went home to tell W X went away with F. | | * |
| 188 | G and W went off to find X. W told G to concentrate so that they could hear where F and X are. They overheard their conversation about “lust” and “desire.” | | * |
| 189 | F was taking X to Jinshan Temple. | | * |
| 194 | G and W arrived at Jinshan Temple and decided to snatch X from F. | | * |
| 195 | W kindly spoke to a monk guarding the gate and F came out and said he forbade X to come out. | | * |
| 199 | G criticized F for being authoritarian. | + | |
| 200 | W begged F to let X go and threatened to flood Jinshan Temple. | | * |
| 209 | W started contraction and decided to retreat to West Lake to give birth. | | * |
| 210 | The Star of Longevity came to intervene the fight. | | * |
| 213 | X sneaked out from Jinshan Temple and arrived at West lake. | + | |
| 218 | W started to give birth. Green acted as the midwife. | + | |
| 221 | F arrived immediately after W gave birth. The truth was, F let X leave the cave so that he can lead the way to White. | + | |

| page | Episodes | new | old+ |
|-------------|---|------------|-------------|
| 225 | X stood between F and W. At the last minute, he retreated behind F. | + | |
| 226 | W begged F to spare her child. F imprisoned W under the pagoda. | | * |
| 226 | G decided to kill X because he betrayed them. | + | |
| 230 | F looked at G and then turned away. | + | |
| 233 | G held W's child in her arms and decided to leave it on the door step of a household. She watched the people take the baby in before she turned away. | + | |
| 235 | [G commented on the "love."] | + | |
| 241 | Time elapsed quickly and is now in the Cultural Revolution. A young man with the surname Xu came and destroyed the pagoda and released W. | + | |
| 243 | G and W met again. | + | |
| 246 | [G commented on "revolution" and "politics."] | + | |
| 247 | G lied to W about the life of X after W was imprisoned. | + | |
| 249 | G decided to write the story on W and her autobiography. | + | |
| 250 | G and W observed a couple having an argument under the moonlight on West Lake. | + | |
| 253 | W decided to adopt the latest fashion and search for a new lover. | + | |
| 255 | G is determined to concentrate on writing the story rather than following W around. | + | |
| 256 | G claims herself as W's sister, but also a girl who works at the local factory (Zhang Xiaoquan's scissors manufacturing). | + | |

Appendix IV: Li Pikwah's novels with traditional themes and characters

| First Published | Chinese Title / (English Title) | Synopsis | Movie adaptation (Director, year) |
|-----------------|--|--|--|
| 1985 | 胭脂扣 (<i>Rouge</i>) | A prostitute (Fleur) who died in 1930s came back to earth in 1987 to search for her lover. | <i>Rouge</i> (Stanley Kwan, 1987) |
| 1987 | 糾纏 - 梁山伯自白書; 祝英台自白書 (<i>Entanglement - Soliloquy of Liang Shanbo; Soliloquy of Zhu Yingtai</i>) | Based on the love story of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai. Zhu was a female in male's disguise at the study where she fell in love with Liang. | |
| 1989 | 生死橋 (<i>Bridge between Life and death</i>) | Story involving traditional morals and Buddhist karma. | |
| 1989 | 潘金蓮之前世今生 (<i>Pan Jinlian's life before and after</i>) | Pan Jinlian from the story of <i>The Golden Lotus (Golden)</i> reincarnates into the times of the Cultural Revolution and repeats the same fate as in <i>Golden</i> . | |
| 1989 | 秦俑 (<i>The Terracota Warrior</i>) | A warrior in the Qin Dynasty fell in love with the daughter of King Qin. King Qin made him into a terracota and the lover reincarnates twice in the 20th Centuries to continue his love. | <i>The Terracota Warrior</i> (Siu-Tung Ching, 1990) |
| 1990 | 川島芳子 (<i>Kawashima Yoshiko</i>) | Kawashima Yoshiko is a spy during the Sino-Japanese war. This novel explores issues of gender identity and political identity. | <i>The Last Princess of Manchuria</i> (Eddie Fong, 1990) |
| 1990 | 天安門舊魄新魂 (<i>Ancient and new spirits at Tiananmen</i>) | Short stories with political themes in response to June 4th incident in 1989. | |

| First Published | Chinese Title / (English Title) | Synopsis | Movie adaptation (Director, year) |
|-------------------|--|---|---|
| 1991 | 誘僧 (<i>Temptation of a Monk</i>) | Short stories adapted from <i>Zhiguai</i> | <i>Temptation of a Monk</i> (Clara Law, 1995) |
| 1993 (new ed.) | 青蛇 (<i>Green Snake</i>) | Reinterpretation of the traditional story of <i>Madame White Snake</i> from Little Green's perspective. | <i>Green Snake</i> (Tsui Hark, 1993) |
| 1993 (new ed.) | 霸王別姬 (<i>Farewell My Concubine</i>) | A story of the lives of two male actors, one playing the male role, and one playing the female role. They have been partners on stage and brothers off-stage. Their relationship and life became complicated as the Cultural Revolution began and the queering of the male playing female became more apparent. | <i>Farewell My Concubine</i> (Kaige Chen, 1993) |

Appendix V: Lyrics in *Green Snake* (1993) by Tsui Hark

A. As time flies (流光飛舞)

半冷半暖的秋
靜靜燙貼身邊
默默看著流光飛舞
晚風中幾片紅葉
惹得身心酥軟綿綿

An autumn neither cold nor warm
Creeps up near the body.
Silently observing the time passing by
Red leaves are swept up by the night wind
Letting the body and heart soft and tender

半醉半醒之間
認認笑眼千千
就讓我像雲端飄雪
冰清輕輕吻臉
帶出一波一波纏綿

In between being intoxicated and sober
I try a thousand times to hide my smile
Allow me to be like snow flakes among the clouds
Cold clean water kissing my face
Inducing intimacy over and over again

留人間幾迴愛
迎浮生千重變
與有情人 做快樂事
未問是劫是緣

Remaining on earth for love again and again
Embracing a thousand of changes in life
Making love with my lover
I have never asked whether it is fate or calamity

似柳也似春風
伴著你過春天
就讓你埋首煙波裏
放出心底狂熱
抱一身春雨綿綿

Like willows, like wind in spring
I accompany you in the spring
Let you be submerged in haze
Releasing the inflamed passion within
Embraced by the light rain in spring

B. Life (人生)

人生如此 浮生如詩
緣生緣死 誰知 誰知?
情終情始 情真情癡
何許? 何處?
情之至!

Life is as such, like dream is to poetry
Karma comes and go, who knows? who will know?
Love ends and begins; real and blinded feelings
How to accept? How to deal with?
The extremes of love and feelings