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Abstract

As one of the Four Classic Folktales of China, *The Legend of the White Snake*, which happened in Hangzhou, is a representative folktale of Chinese culture. The story has been developed for thousands of years and we see it as a reflection of Chinese history and culture.

The first part of the thesis is going to trace the development of this story back to its origin and analyze the changes in the content of each story version of *The Legend of the White Snake* with respect to its cultural, religious, and social backgrounds. Secondly, it will focus on contemporary writer Gelin Yan's rewrite of the story and analyze how her rewrite reflected her thoughts on feminism. In the third part, the thesis will explore the concept art of an animated modern adaptation of *The Legend of White Snake*. It will explain why the film lost the oriental artistic conception of its original story. Finally, I will show my visual thesis based on stories that originated in Hangzhou. I will share how I researched each of the stories to build a connection between the art, the story, and the historical relics in Hangzhou.

WHITE SNAKE: A REPRESENTATIVE STORY OF THE WEST LAKE

by

Zhiying Chen

B.F.A., Maryland Institute College of Arts, 2019

Thesis

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Master of Fine Arts in Illustration

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White Snake: A Representative Story of the West Lake

Introduction

I was born and raised in Hangzhou, a place that our ancestor poets called “heaven on earth.” Hangzhou was the capital city of the Southern Song dynasty of China from A.D. 907 to 979 ; it was also once the central location economically, politically, and culturally. The development of West Lake was the main reason why this place was called heaven. It is a naturally formed fresh water lake divided into five sections by three causeways. The lake is surrounded by numerous temples, gardens, and pagodas; many of them have a hundred-year history. Poets and writers loved this place; they came here to visit and left treasures like poems, ink paintings, and of course, legends.

I love my hometown not only because of its exquisite scenery, but because of the history and its legends marked by relics that later became landmarks for tourists. Strolling around the lake was one of my weekend routines. Whenever I would take a stroll on the Broken Bridge on a rainy day, I couldn't help thinking of the first time Madam White and Xu Xian met each other in the very same place. During the strolls, I was a part of the story too.

“The Legend of White Snake” was one of the Four Classic Folktales, and is considered the most representative story of the West Lake. By the West Lake, a sacred spirit of a white snake transformed into Madam White, a beautiful woman wearing white clothes. She found Xu Xian, the husband to whom she was spiritually and karmically connected, on the Broken Bridge. Using her supernatural power, she made rain and seized the moment as a chance to meet with Xu Xian. That is the way this fictional romance legend begins.

The development of “The Legend of White Snake” contains information on social, cultural, and ideological trends. Originating from dragon-snake worship in the stone age,

Chinese culture considers snakes a glorious and maternal icon. The story of White Snake first appeared during the Tang dynasty (618-906); but it was during the Song dynasty (960-1279) that it was first tied to the West Lake. Later, during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the story was developed into a novel called: *Madame White Was Forever Kept under the Thunder Tower*; thus, it became recognized as the first version of this Legend.

In the present age, “The Legend of White Snake” enjoys wide circulation across various art forms, including television series, movies, animation, and operas. Every age group can find a version of this story to enjoy.

PART ONE

White Snake from the Han Dynasty (202 BC-220 AD) to the Present-Day

Snake as Icon in Chinese Culture

I first want to analyze how snakes are represented in different cultures because they play significant roles in a variety of legends and mythologies in both Western and Asian cultures. In Western cultures, a snake usually symbolizes an evil, vicious character and possesses an uncanny ability to allure or seduce someone into doing as it instructs or advises. One of the best-known examples of a snake in Western culture is the Biblical story of the snake that lured Eve to eat the forbidden fruit from the “tree of knowledge” in the Garden of Eden. In the story of the Farmer and the Viper from Aesop's Fables, the snake bites its rescuer to death. Greek mythology is replete with female monsters for whom snakes partially comprise their bodies, such as in the case of Lamia and Medusa. These monsters were to be feared. For instance, those lured into the gaze of Medusa were said to turn to stone.

In contrast, within Chinese cultures, the character of the snake is more complicated and multi-faceted. On the one hand, snakes are believed to have a close relationship with dragons and are worshiped in ancient Chinese texts and folklore. For instance, Nüwa, the mother goddess in Chinese mythology, is the creator of mankind. The appearance of Nüwa was depicted as a woman with a snake's lower body (see figure 1). Chinese poet and scholar, Wen Yiduo, explains in his research on Fuxi that the original word for dragon (Long in Chinese) was originally a big snake. The formation of dragons that we see now was caused by the merging of tribes. Each Tribe had its unique totem which usually represented an animal. When the tribes merged, each tribe took a part from their totems and, together, formed a new totem. That explains why a Chinese Dragon (Long) has a horse head and mane, snake body, eagle claws, and deer horn. On the other hand, similar to its depiction in western culture, because of its slithering moves, fatal venom, and ability to eat prey heavier than itself, the snake can also be an emblem of evil, greed, cunning, and sycophancy.

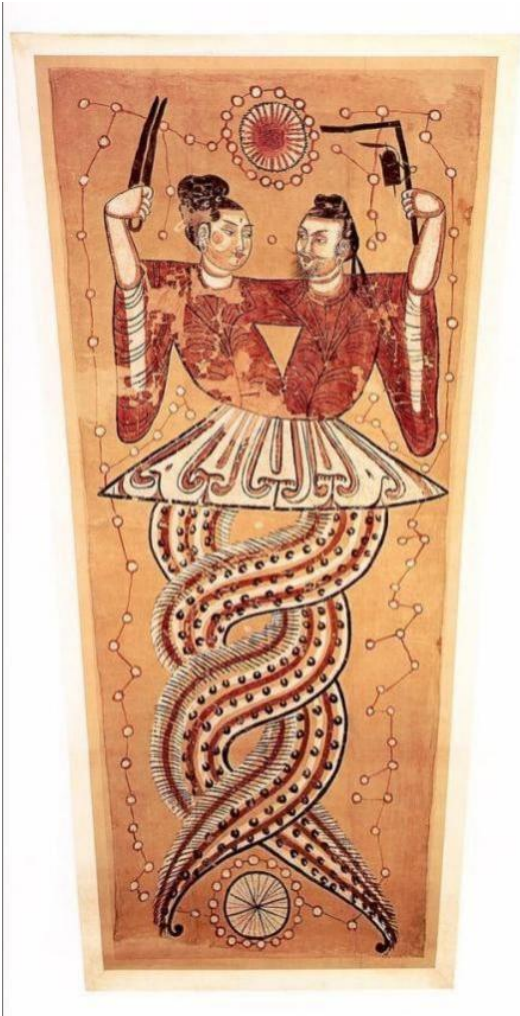


Figure 1: painting of Fuxi and Nuwa, Fuxi and Nuwa, Artstor.

Buddhism, first introduced to China during the Han Dynasty (202 B.C.-A.D. 220), was also one of the reasons for the creation of spiritual animal stories. Buddhist monks used allegory to aid the public in interpreting profound doctrine. In these allegories, if a man did something bad, he would return as an animal in his next karmic cycle. Buddhist allegories influenced people's acceptance of human-animal transformation, setting the stage for spiritual animal stories. Later, during the Weijin Dynasty (220-589 AD), many stories of spiritual animals, such as snakes, foxes, rabbits, and yellow weasels, were in circulation in both written and oral forms. In Chinese culture, spiritual animals are generally considered animals with supernatural powers

that can transform into humans. People like to associate human characters with certain spiritual animals based on their behavior in nature. For example, rabbits represent purity in the story “Rabbits Working for Goddess in Moon Palace”¹, while oxen represent royalty, wealth, and industry in the story “Legend of the Golden Ox”². Not surprisingly, a snake is often connected to sex, given its similarity in appearance to a man’s sexual organ. Additionally, there is the goddess Nüwa, who represents fertility. As a result, most spiritual snakes are depicted as seductive females to encourage the audience to associate them with sensuality or sex, as is the case with Madam White, the main character in “The Legend of White Snake”.

Li Huang as the prototype of the White Snake

The story of Li Huang from *Boyizhi* (translated as *Vast Record of Strange Matters*), written by Gushenzi in the Tang dynasty (618-907), was considered the prototype of White Snake.

In the City of Changan (the capital city of China in the Tang Dynasty), a married rich man named Li Huang saw a woman in a white dress in a carriage. He was told that the woman was a widow, and she needed money to buy new clothes as her mourning period was over.³ Li Huang was seduced by her beauty, gave her money, and followed her to the house. Encouraged by an old woman in green clothes who claimed to be the widow’s aunt, Li Huang spent three days in the house with the widow (a sexual relationship is strongly implied). After arriving

¹ *Mythistory: The Legend of the Jade Rabbit*, <https://www.shenyunperformingarts.org/>

² Walls, Jan. *West Lake a Collection of Folktales*. Joint Publ. Co, 1980.

³ In traditional Chinese culture, white is the color of mourning. In ancient China, people wore white during a period of mourning, which lasted 49 days after the funeral.

home, Li Huang found himself having a severe headache. He was found on the bed with only a head still intact, the rest of his body was melted under a blanket, and only a puddle of water remained. His family went to look for the widow's house but only found an empty garden. The neighbor said a huge white snake was often seen at the base of the tree.⁴

Li Huang has many similarities to the White Snake: both stories happened in a capital city (Changan and Hangzhou); both involved a man, a beautiful woman in white, and a woman wearing green clothes who accompanies the woman in white. In both stories, a woman was asking a man for a favor (in Li Huang, a woman in white asks for money; in White Snake, she asked for an umbrella). The symbolic meanings in Li Huang are easy to understand. The woman in white took advantage of her beauty while the woman in green negotiated with Li Huang for money like a procuress. Li Huang traded money for sex and then he fell ill; this illness represents sexually transmitted diseases. The author wrote this story to warn men not to be deceived by women, especially women in brothels.

West Lake's Three Stupas: connecting The White Snake to the West Lake

The novel West Lake's Three Stupas, written later in the Song Dynasty (960-1279), was the key to developing the White Snake in the future, as it first linked the story with the West Lake in Hangzhou. The novel was found in a collection of stories titled Qingpingshan Tang Huaben (Vernacular Stories from Qingping Mountain Studio), and it spread mainly through oral storytellers. Compared to Li Huang, it added more entertaining details and plot twists.

⁴ Translated from Taiping Guangji; A Collection of Ancient Novels in China; The Volume of Immortals and Fairies (Vol. 1 - 70). N.p., DeepLogic.

During the Song Dynasty, a man named Xi Xuanzan visited West Lake during the Qingming festival and found a young girl who had lost her way. This kind-hearted man took the girl home. Ten days later, the girl's grandmother, an old woman in black, visited his home to look for the girl. She invited Xi Xuanzan to their home for dinner. After they arrived, a beautiful woman in white (who claims to be the girl's mother) joined and had drinks with him. During the dinner, the woman in white killed her precious husband and ate his heart and liver in front of Xi Xuanzan. She asked Xi Xuanzan to be her next husband and locked (kept, jailed) him in the house. Half a month later, a new man was brought in to replace Xi Xuanzan. The girl, who was helped by Xi Xuanzan, took him back to his home safely, before he was killed by the woman in white.

One year later, again during the Qingming festival, Xi Xuanzan was captured by the woman in black and brought back to the woman in white. He was kept as her husband for another half of a month, and once again was saved by the girl. Xi Xuanzan's uncle, a Daoist master, used his magical power and captured the woman in black, the woman in white, and the girl. Xi Xuanzan and the Daoist master found out that the women and the girl were all spiritual animals: the woman in black turned out to be an otter, the woman in white was a white snake, and the girl was a black chicken. The master built three stupas to jail the three demons under the west lake.⁵

⁵ Author's translation from Qingpingshan Tang Huaben, <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&res=575039&remap=gb>

The cultures and scenery of the West Lake were portrayed, in detail, in the *West Lake's Three Stupas*. The stupas were originally built around the Northern Song Dynasty (1086-1094) by Governor Su Shi as a mark to prevent the accumulation of sediment in the lake which later became one of the ten views of the West Lake and inspired writers to create related legends (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Photograph of Three Stupas by Linghong Zeng, National Geography, <http://www.dili360.com/cng/article/p5350c3da3d9c580.htm>

Madam White Is Kept Forever Under Thunder Peak Tower: The first version of the White Snake

The three stupas were destroyed in the Hongzhi period during the Ming Dynasty (1489-1506), causing *West Lake's Three Stupas* to lose their support as landmarks. Soon, the Thunder Peak Tower, a new landmark nearby, attracted the attention of writers, which could be one of the reasons for the creation of *Madam White Is Kept Forever Under Thunder Peak*

Tower. This story written by Feng Menglong in his book *Stories to Caution the World*, published in 1624, was the first standard version of the White Snake.

In the Shaoxing period (1132-1162), an herb store assistant named Xu Xuan went to visit West Lake during the Clear and Bright Festival (the beginning of the fourth solar month). Caught by heavy rain, he went on a boat to his destination. A beautiful woman in white with her maid in green called the boatman for a ride. She introduced herself as White and explained she had come here to visit her deceased husband. Xu shared the boat with the two women and lent an umbrella to White. The next morning, Xu went to White's home to take back the umbrella. White served him dinner and drinks, and asked Xu if he would marry her. Xu hesitated for lack of money. White gave a package with fifty taels of silver (one tael equals 50 grams) to Xu for their marriage.

Xu arrived home and spoke about the marriage to his sister's family. His brother-in-law found out the money given by White was part of that missing from the government. Xu was caught by police and confessed what happened to him and White. The officers went to White's address, which turned out to be a deserted house. In the house, a woman appeared and suddenly vanished, leaving the rest of the stolen money on the bed. Xu was exiled to hard labor in the Suzhou prison camp. Six months later, in Suzhou, Xu met White and Green again. Deceived by White, Xu forgave her for putting him in jail. They got married and Xu soon fell into delirious pleasure with White. On Sakyamuni's (the founder of Buddhism) birthday, Xu asked if White would see the Buddhists gathering in

Chengtian Monastery with him. White refused, but she brought new clothes and jewelry to dress up Xu before letting him go. Xu was later caught in the Monastery for wearing stolen property. Once again, White disappeared when the officers tried to find her but left the stolen jewelry in her house with Xu.

Xu met White and Green again after he was exiled to Zhenjiang. Xu was severely angry at first, but seduced by her charm, Xu once again forgave White. Xu went to Li Keyong's herb shop as an assistant and settled down there with White and Green. Li Keyong was a lusty man who coveted White's beauty. One night, he peered through the crack of her doors, but instead of seeing a pretty woman, he saw a coiled-up white snake with its body thick as a water bucket. Li Keyong quickly ran away. Being afraid of Li speaking the truth, White gave money to Xu to move out of Li Keyong's house and open an herb shop of their own.

On the seventh of July, Xu Xuan visited the Golden Mountain Monastery and encountered a Buddhist monk named Fahai. The monk told him his wife and her maid were evil spirits. Xu Xuan went home and found White and Green had once again disappeared. Realizing that they were spiritual animals, Xu Xuan went back to Hangzhou for his sister. His brother-in-law invited a Daoist man to capture the spirit. However, White scared away the Daoist man and threatened Xu Xuan if he treated her like this again, she would kill all the people in the city. Xu Xuan found Fahai for help. Fahai trapped White in his golden alms bowl. White, turned out to be a white snake, and her maid Green, a fish. Fahai laid the bowl in front of the Monastery and built a pagoda which later was called

the Thunder Peak Tower on top of it. Xu Xuan joined the Buddhist order and became Fahai's follower.⁶

Compared to *Li Huang* and *West Lake's Three Stupas*, the white snake appears to be a richer character and acts more humanly in *Madam White Is Kept Forever Under Thunder Peak Tower*. Although she stole things and deceived Xu, the white snake never intended to hurt Xu Xuan. She stole money for marriage; and the jewelry was to dress up her beloved husband.

In *Madam White Is Kept Forever Under Thunder Peak Tower*, White acts as an obedient, royal wife in her relationship with Xu, generating sympathy from readers. Having been rewritten and retold numerous times, people have added content to *Madam White Is Kept Forever Under Thunder Peak Tower*. Thus, the tale has since come to be known throughout Chinese folk literature as the Legend of White Snake.

As a result of the stories' evolution, the Legend of White Snake does not have a fixed plot or ending. In the book *West Lake: A Collection of Folktales* (published by Joint Publishing on January 1980), the unknown author gave the story a different ending.

White, a spiritual snake with a thousand years of cultivation found Xu Xian in West Lake to repay Xu for helping her in his previous life. Accompanied by her maid Green, a green spiritual snake, White played a little trick to meet with Xu. She created rainfall using her supernatural power and asked Xu for an umbrella on the broken bridge. White and Xu fell in love at first sight, quickly got married, and opened an herb shop in Hangzhou. One day, Monk Fahai came to

⁶ Author's translation from *Jin Shi Tong Yan (Stories to Caution the World)*, written by Menglong, Feng <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=307330&remap=gb>

Xu and told him that his wife was an evil spiritual snake. Being suspicious, Xu secretly put the realgar wine (a Chinese medicine usually used as insect and snake repellent) given by Fahai into White's drink. White was forced to transform back to her animal appearance. Unfortunately, Xu was shocked to death after seeing a giant white snake in his wife's place. White was heartbroken about Xu's death; she stole a magical herb from the palace in heaven and brought Xu's life back. Fahai cajoled and imprisoned Xu in the Golden Mountain Monastery. White and Green had a fight with Fahai which caused a flood in the Monastery. White was punished by God in heaven and kept under The Thunder Peak Tower. After decades of cultivation, Green finally destroyed the Tower and brought her sister White back. The beloved couple finally reunited and lived happily ever after.⁷

As one of the Four Classic Folktales, *White Snake* is a story known by almost all Chinese people. I asked my Chinese friends to recall the ending of White Snake. As far as they could remember, it ends with Madame White's captivity under the Thunder Peak Tower. Although the modern version of the story ends with the couple reuniting, it would seem the audience often focuses on the tragedy of White's imprisonment. This may be because the rest of the Four Classic Folk Tales all end with tragedy.

For instance, in the story of "Butterfly Lovers", Zhu Yingtai jumped into her lover Liang Shanbo's tomb. They transformed into butterflies and flew out of the tomb. Similarly, in the story of "The Cowherd and the Weaver Girl", the weaver girl was forbidden to live with a normal cowherd because she was the daughter of the Jade Emperor. They became the star Vega and the star Altair separated by the Milky Way, allowed to meet each other once a year. In the

⁷ P13-43, Walls, Jan. *West Lake a Collection of Folktales*. Joint Publ. Co, 1980.

story of “Lady Meng Jiang”, part of the Great Wall collapsed, revealing her husband’s bones in front of Lady Meng Jiang. It would seem that fictional romances that end tragically leave a stronger impression on audiences; a couple forced to separate evokes audience sympathy for the characters. Such phenomena can also be applied to classic stories in Western cultures, such as William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

Most tragedies were caused by inequality between couples’ families. To some extent, Madame White destabilizes the stereotype that couples from different backgrounds can’t be together. White is an independent woman chasing her love, which represents an awakening feminist consciousness fighting against the feudalism that Fahai represents. Xu Xuan, on the other hand, was a man that had “female” characteristics. Compared to Madame White, Xu is physically and mentally fragile, needing protection from his wife. His cute and delicate appearance and suspicious behavior contrast with traditional masculine norms.

PART TWO:

A Modern Retelling of the White Snake and Women’s Liberation

Gelin Yan, in the short novel *White Snake* (1998), tells her version of the White Snake in modern contexts. Gelin is a Chinese-American writer who immigrated from Shanghai. Her novels mainly portray the life of social minorities, especially migrants; many of them have been adapted to films and TV productions. The *White Snake* portrays a romantic story between an imprisoned dancer and a young queer woman. Gelin narrated the story from three different perspectives: “official accounts” (newspaper reports), the “popular accounts” (people’s rumors), and the “untold story” (details only known by two main characters).

The 34-year-old Sun Likun was famous for her original choreography and for rearranging “The Legend of the White Snake.” She was imprisoned for being “a decadent bourgeois element, a suspected Soviet-trained spy, a seductress, and a “counter-revolutionary snake-in-the-grass.”⁸ During her imprisonment, Sun was treated with no dignity or privacy; she got out of shape and became a vulgar woman. One day, a young officer came to the jail and met Sun privately. The officer introduced himself as Xu Qunshan. Sun fell in love with this man and started practicing dancing again in the jail; soon she turned back into the beautiful snake that she used to be. After several meetings, Xu found an excuse to take Sun out of the prison. At the hotel, Sun found Xu, the person with whom she fell in love, was a woman. This discovery caused Sun to go insane and she was sent to a mental hospital.

Xu became obsessed with Sun after seeing her perform the Legend of White Snake around the age of 11. In Sun’s performance, the Green Snake was a man before he met the White Snake. He transformed into a woman and became White’s maid because Green Snake lost a game. Xu felt upset by this story, as she felt the life of White Snake would be much better if she married Green Snake.

After Sun was sent to the hospital, Xu removed her camouflage and went to take care of Sun. They were recognized as best friends, but indeed they loved each other. One day, the Performing Arts Commission sent someone to get Sun from the hospital and told her that she had been exonerated. She left Shanghai and returned to a “normal life.” One day, Sun received a letter informing her that Xu

⁸ p12, Yan, Geling, and Lawrence A. Walker. *White Snake and Other Stories (Bai She)*. Aunt Lute Books, 1999.

was getting married. Before Xu's marriage, Sun met Xu again, they said farewell at a bus stop, knowing that they would never see each other again.

The story is set mostly during China's Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-76) when the social order was turned upside down. Sun Likun represents the character of White Snake not only because she successfully acts as though she is someone else, but also because she is able to change back to her original appearance, similar to the metamorphosis of a snake. Xu Qunshan, representing the green snake, shows up in the story appearing as a male, eventually dresses up like a female in the hospital, and becomes Sun's "maid." In the original story of "the White Snake," Green rescued White from the Thunder Peak Tower. In Yan's story, Xu not only liberated Sun from a physical jail, but brought light to Sun's heart which became her reason to return to dancing.

Yan's *White Snake* challenges tradition by changing an originally heterosexual romance into a homosexual one. Both Sun and Xu rebel against female gender norms and patriarchy, as Meng Xia indicates: "White Snake Sun strays from her assigned gender role according to social stereotypes with her bold expressions of sexual and bodily performance, while Xu follows a similar path to that of Green Snake: from rebellion to compliance with conventional values on gender performance."⁹ The multi-perspective of telling a story also gives us a new way of looking at the original "White Snake": what happens beneath the "official and popular accounts"? Will there be a different story?

PART THREE: *The White Snake Enchantress* (1958)

⁹ Meng Xia (2020) Gender Myth and Disciplined Sexuality in Geling Yan's *White Snake*, *Journal of Language, Literature and Culture*, 67:2-3, 172-189, DOI: 10.1080/20512856.2020.1851156

An Animated Modern Adaptation of *The Legend of White Snake* by Touei Animation

The Legend of White Snake inspired not only writers in China, but artists in eastern Asia. In Japan, Touei animation released *The White Snake Enchantress*, the first color anime feature film, in 1958, inspiring the great animator, director Hayao Miyazaki to work in the animation-film industry.¹⁰ This hand-drawn animation took a staff of 13,590 people, and a 2-year production period.¹¹ Overall, it was considered a disappointment and became the so-called "Disney of the East."

From my perspective, one of the reasons that this film did not win favor with Western audiences is because it relied too heavily on Disney animation, thus, it lost the Asian artistic conception of the original story. The film set the story in an isolated town with dilapidated houses. However, according to *Madam White Is Kept Forever Under Thunder Peak Tower*, the story took place in the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279). The commercialization of Southern Song dynasty affected its capital city, Hangzhou. There was rapid development and a local culture that consumed mainly luxury merchandise, which drew wealthy families to the capital. Madam White met Xu Xian during the Clear and Bright Festival. At that time, residents of the capital gathered on the causeway for sightseeing activities such as drumming, dance performances, and decorated dragon-boat races.¹² In the scroll painting, "Along the River During the Clear and Bright Festival" (see figure 3), painter Zhang Zeduan depicted people's life on the day of Clear and Bright in Binjiang during the northern Song dynasty. The bustling

¹⁰ Farley, Christopher J. "Culture: Mundane Yet Magical --- Japanese Animator Hayao Miyazaki Draws on His Own Life for 'Ponyo'." *The Wall Street Journal Asia*, Aug 14, 2009. ProQuest,

¹¹ Organized by JFKL, Japanese Animated Film Festival, <https://www.jfkl.org.my/japanese-animated-film-festival/>

¹² P23, Duan, Xiaolin. *The Rise of West Lake: A Cultural Landmark in the Song Dynasty*. University of Washington Press, 2020. EBSCOhost

groups of people and crowded buildings indicate a prosperous society, not the quiet, desolate town portrayed in the movie.



Fig 3 Zhang Zeduan, Along the River During the Qingming Festival. The Palace Museum.

Due to a lack of research, *The White Snake Enchantress* movie chose background, architecture, and costume references from a variety of periods. In the film, Madam White's house is decorated with colorful decorations of glazed tiles and painting beneath the roof (see figure 4), which would only have been found in the houses of imperial families (see figure 5).



Fig 4: Screenshot of *The White Snake Enchantress* (1958)



Fig 5: Photo of Jiyun Floor in the Imperial Gardens, built in the Ming dynasty

Artist depiction of the environment in the animated version did not match the original story either. The original story took place in Hangzhou, which is a city surrounded by mountains in southeast China. The weather in Hangzhou is humid and warm, which makes this city green in all seasons. Yet, in the film, there is a lack of trees and mountains in the background. Instead, its landscape and architectural style is indicative of Northern China. (see, figure 6)



Fig 6: Screenshot of The White Snake Enchantress (1958)

As for costume design, the film mixed aesthetics from different periods. In the scene of the dragon dance (fig. 6), some onlookers in the background are wearing round-shaped hats that

were popular during the Ming dynasty—200 years later than the original story. In figure 7, the cone-shaped hat that adorns police was a feature characteristic of the official uniform during the Qing dynasty. This mixing of periods constitutes a definite failure in the animation’s concept-art design. Researching and depicting the cultural background of the original story would, instead, have afforded audiences the opportunity to engage with the unique features of this Asian story, providing them with a different experience from watching a Disney film.

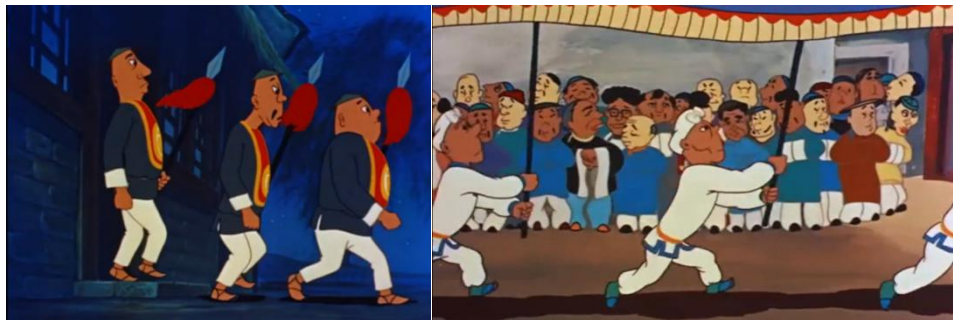


Fig 7-8 screen-shot of The White Snake Enchantress (1958)

PART FOUR: The Visual Thesis

Growing up in a city with such a rich cultural background, I wanted to share some of its treasures with people around the world. Millions of travelers come to visit Hangzhou but few of them know the story behind the landmarks in their photos. Thus, I chose a thesis topic that would promote the cultural and historical background of my hometown, Hangzhou. While doing the research, a fourteenth-century scroll painting attracted my attention. In the scroll, “Scenic Attractions of West Lake,” which is preserved in the Freer Gallery of Art (see figure 8), the unknown author illustrates a painted panorama of West Lake. The full scroll is 16 meters long, starting from Qiantang Gate, circling the West Lake anticlockwise. It features famous landmarks, including the Su causeway, the Thunder Peak Tower, and the Broken Bridge. Viewers of the

painting can catch a glimpse of the Hangzhou landscape. Although, technically, this scroll was not well painted, it does provide a first-hand record of landmarks.



Fig 9: Part of Scenic Attractions of West Lake, ca. fourteenth-century depiction of the scene in the mid-thirteenth century. Ink and color on paper, 33.3 × 1849.8 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC: Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1911.209.

Inspired by this painting, for my visual thesis I decided to illustrate a digital version of the map for tourists. To make this map a handy tool for everyone, I pitched my map in the form of a smartphone application. Landmark stories will be icons on the map. By clicking the icon of the landmark, users can view a pop-up of a story that took place in or related to this landmark, providing interesting cultural background while sightseeing. For example, users can see the story and illustration of *the Legend of White Snake* by clicking the icon of the Broken Bridge on the map.

For the story portion, I created four long illustrations and two spot illustrations for five landmarks. As all of the illustrations will be viewed from a phone screen, I constructed them all in vertical format. Some of the illustrations comprise more than one screen. Users will only be able to view complete works by scrolling down the screen, providing a chance for me to play some storytelling tricks as well.



Fig 10: Illustrated map for the West Lake



Fig 11: Illustration of the *Legend of the White Snake*

Conclusion

By retracing a folk tale to its early origins, I was amazed at how much information I was able to find about just one—enough information to write a paper. There are many legendary stories like *the Legend of the White Snake* in Hangzhou, and many historical cities like Hangzhou in China. Along the long river of history, many unknown cultural treasures are waiting to be discovered and explored.

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