



# A Review of the Research on the Legend of the White Snake

Bingying Chen, Xinyang Liu

College of Education, Zhejiang Normal University, Jinhua, Zhejiang

Email: cby200152@qq.com

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## Abstract

As one of the four major folk legends in China, the Legend of the White Snake has undergone a long period of development and evolution. The culture of the spirit snake is deeply rooted in the soil of Chinese culture, with its image constantly changing and its form constantly enriching. This article will review the relevant discussions on the Legend of the White Snake by different scholars in the last century and this century. By sorting out the relevant research results, it strives to comprehensively reflect the relevant issues about the Legend of the White Snake and lay the foundation for further research. The specific contents are as follows: First, the author will sort out the development and evolution of the Legend of the White Snake from the perspective of ancient and modern dynasties, based on the works of different eras, and take into account the discussions of authors of various eras. Secondly, the transformation of the image of the White Snake and its cultural connotations, as well as the main characters in the Legend of the White Snake, are reviewed. Finally, based on classic White Snake films and television works, the characteristics of character creation are briefly take into account, and the gains of the character image are discussed.

## Subject Areas

Literature

## Keywords

The Legend of the White Snake, Development and Evolution, Cultural Connotation, Character Image, Film and Television Works

## 1. Background

Folk tales and myths and legends embody a nation's thinking habits, knowledge

and wisdom, moral norms, spiritual outlook, and imagination. They carry the nation's excellent spiritual genes and are the "foundation" for the nation's subsequent development. Their cultural charm has been subtly infiltrated into the bones of this nation, especially for comprehensively improving the national cultural literacy, cultural confidence, and language literacy. In 2021, the widespread dissemination of "White Snake: Origin" has once again attracted public attention to the folk legend of the white snake, which has a certain topic. "White Snake: Origin" is an animated film jointly produced by Light Chaser Animation and Warner Bros. The film was directed by Huang Jiakang and Zhao Ji, written by Damao, and dubbed by Zhang Zhe, Yang Tianxiang, Tang Xiaoxi and others. The film innovated on the basis of the Chinese folk legend "The Legend of the White Snake", telling a touching love story between Bai Suzhen and Xu Xian's predecessor A Xuan five hundred years ago. The film was released in the mainland of China on January 11, 2019 and in Japan on April 21, 2022. After its release, the film was well received by audiences and critics, and was considered to be a visual feast of oriental beauty for the audience. This is not only a continuation and innovation of Chinese traditional culture, but also a promotion and deepening of folk novels. However, there are very few systematic studies and reviews of folk tales and myths and legends in the academic community. This study focuses on the Legend of the White Snake to fill this gap. The Legend of the White Snake, as one of the four major folk legends in ancient China, has developed over a thousand years. From the "Li Huang" chapter in the Tang Dynasty's "Bo Yi Zhi", to the Song and Ming Dynasty vernacular novels "Records of the Three Pagodas of West Lake" and "White Snake Forever in Leifeng Pagoda"; Fang Chengpei's "Leifeng Pagoda" legend in the Qing Dynasty, to today's Qinqiang opera "Leifeng Pagoda", Peking opera "The Legend of the White Snake", to the film and television dramas "The Legend of the New White Snake" and "The Origin of the White Snake", literary and artistic works on related themes have been endless from ancient times to the present, and their vitality is vigorous. Works on the theme of the White Snake are like shining stars in the history of Chinese literature, opera, and film and television. The study of the Legend of the White Snake began with Lu Xun's essay "On the Collapse of Leifeng Pagoda" in 1924, and later works such as "Research on the Legend of the White Snake", "Speculation on the Origin of the Legend of the White Snake", and "Evolution of the Legend of the White Snake". [1] From the founding of the People's Republic of China to the early 1980s, political interpretations had distinct characteristics of the times, such as "Exploring the Origin of the Legend of the White Snake" and "On the Legend of the White Snake". From the 1980s to the present, with the continuous advancement of reform and opening up, the introduction of Western literary theory has brought about multi-perspective interpretations, and the study of the Legend of the White Snake from the perspectives of ethics, anthropology, aesthetics, etc. is booming. This article summarizes the research results on the Legend of the White Snake in the 1980s, 1990s and this century. It collects dozens of papers based on different viewpoints.

## 2. A Review of the Research on the Evolution of the Legend of the White Snake

### 2.1. A Review of the Research on the Development of Story Versions by Scholars of Various Dynasties

From the last century to the present, the development and evolution of the White Snake legend has been the most studied topic among scholars. In 1994, Shao Shixuan proposed in “Exploring the Origin of the White Snake Story and Recent Related Works” that the earliest record was the “Li Huang” chapter in the Tang Dynasty legendary novel “Bo Yi Zhi”, also known as “The Story of the White Snake”. In 2002, Ma Zichen put forward similar views in “The Current Research Status and Origin of the Story of the Legend of the White Snake”, Zhang Hong’s “Evolution and Development of the Legend of the White Snake” in 2008, and Yuan Yimei’s “Tracing the Origin of the Story of the White Snake” in 2011. In 1995, Long Yongqian proposed in “The Evolution and Recent Works of the Story of the White Snake” that after the legend of the Tang Dynasty, other forms of scripts appeared in the Song Dynasty, such as “The Three Pagodas of the West Lake” with beautiful writing style; “Yijian” in the late Song Dynasty. There are five more stories about the white snake in “Zhi”. In 2011, Liu Xiaojia put forward a similar point of view in “On the Evolution of the Legend of White Snake”. [2] In 1998, Wang Li pointed out in “On the Evolution of “The Legend of the White Snake”” that after the evolution of the Tang and Song Dynasties, the novel “The White Snake Forever Suppresses Thunder” was carefully created in the Ming Dynasty based on “The Story of the Three Pagodas of the West Lake”. “Peak Tower” appears, it has been polished by Feng Menglong, with a complete plot and distinctive characters. [3] In terms of operas in the Ming Dynasty, there are the drama “The Story of the Three Pagodas of the West Lake” and Chen Lulong’s legend “The Story of the Thunder Peak “. In 2002, Li Yun put forward a similar point of view in his article “Research on the Evolution of the Story of the White Snake”. In 2000, Li Dongjun proposed in “The Evolution of the Legend of the White Snake in China and Japan” that in the early Qing Dynasty there was a script “The Legend of Leifeng Pagoda “, which was later adapted into “The Miracle of the West Lake “, and “The Legend of the Jade Master” was expanded into a novella. “The Legend of Leifeng Pagoda”, also known as “The Legend of White Snake”. [4] Chen Yuqian’s “The Legend of the Embroidered Image of the Righteous Demon” and “The Newly Engraved Legend of the White Snake in the Lei Feng Pagoda of the Eastern Diao” was published during the Jiaqing period. As for legends, there was “Leifeng Pagoda” by Huang Tujue in the early Qing Dynasty, and later “Leifeng Pagoda” revised by Chen Jiayan and his daughter and Fang Peicheng’s abridged version “Leifeng Pagoda”. In 2004, Chen Yiqin’s “Literary and artistic works are a mirror of society—Re-discussing the evolution of the story of “The Legend of White Snake”” and in 2005 Wang Li and Liu Yingying proposed similar views. In 2016, Zhang Xuewei proposed in “A Preliminary Exploration of White Snake-themed Operas”: In addition to Peking Opera

“The Legend of White Snake”, local dramas in modern times include Sichuan Opera, Yunnan Opera, Fujian Opera, Chu Opera, Yue Opera, Cantonese Opera, Lu Opera, Ping Opera, Yang Opera, Xi Opera, Wu Opera, Huangmei opera, shadow play “The Legend of White Snake”, Qin opera “Leifeng Pagoda” Lu opera “Water over Jinshan” “Broken Bridge gives birth to a child”, Hengyang Hunan opera “Water over Jinshan” and “Broken Bridge Party”. In 2014, Gao Yanfang pointed out in “Construction and Interpretation of Chinese Classics of White Snake”: Relevant sequels include “Xu Yi Yao Zhuan”, “Xu Yi Yao Zhuan”, “Xu Yi Yao Zhuan”, “Xu Ben Bai’s Complete Biography of Sui Marriage”, “Hou Ben Bai’s Complete Biography of Sui Yuan” and “Hou Bai Snake Complete Biography” in 2014. “Biography”, the legend includes “Xinxinyuan” by an unknown person, and the Peking Opera includes “The Legend of Hou Yi Yao” written by Fan Zengxiang in the Qing Dynasty. In 2016, Sun Jing put forward a similar point of view in the “Review of the Research Literature on the Legend of White Snake in the Past Ten Years”. The author concludes: Scholars of all ages have basically reached a consensus on the version of the White Snake story and its development and origins. After additions and improvements by different people, the evolution of the White Snake story has been basically sorted out clearly.

## 2.2. A Review of the Research on Case Analysis of Stories by Scholars of All Ages

Sorting out the development of the story and grasping the similarities and differences in the evolution of the plot in different eras is the key and foundation for in-depth research on the social background and ideological implications behind the legend of the White Snake. In 1994, Chen Yongchao proposed in “The Formation Process of the Legend of the White Snake” that the earliest white snake story in the literature is the Tang Dynasty legend “The Story of the White Snake”. Li Huang from Longxi was seduced by a beautiful woman in white mourning clothes on the street: “I went to her house for three consecutive days, drinking and having fun everywhere.” On the fourth day, when he returned home, “his body was heavy and his head was spinning, and his body turned into blood.” His family went to look for the beautiful woman in white, but found that she was a “snake demon”. In 2000, Gong Haoqun proposed a similar view in “From Snake Demon to Snake Fairy—Analysis of the ‘Beautiful Snake’ Story”. [5]

1997, Chen Yunfa summarized the plot of another story from the Tang Dynasty in “Snake Demon·Snake Spirit·Snake Fairy: On the Sublimation of the Image of the White Snake from Evil Charm to Personality Beauty”: The young Li Guan was attracted by a white ox-drawn cart and two white-dressed women outside Anhua Gate. He followed it into the garden and slept with the white-dressed beauties. The next day, he returned home and died of a splitting headache. The family looked for the white-dressed woman and learned that Li Lang died of the “snake demon”. The author concludes: It’s about the mutilation of women, but what is revealed behind the stories is the concept of sex. As an in-

instinct, sexual attraction is inescapable. Therefore, the mixed feelings of instinctive attraction gave rise to hatred and fear, which was projected into the story, and the white snake became a weird and unpredictable snake demon with evil spirits.

Later, in 1998, Liu Shouhua summarized a story from “Yi Jian Zhi” in the late Song Dynasty in “The Story of the ‘Snake Wife’ in the Song Dynasty and the Composition of the Legend of the White Snake”: Sun Zhixian, an ordinary citizen outside Danyang County, married a beautiful local woman. As a wife, women like to wear white clothes. One day ten years later, Sun Zhixian peeked at his wife Xiluan, and what he saw was a big white snake coiled in the bathing room. From then on, there was a doubt in his heart. His wife came to persuade him and they reconciled. But from then on, Sun Zhixian suffered from difficulty in seeing and soon became ill, and died within a year. In 2004, Pei Xiangyu summarized another story in “The Story of the White Snake”: a scholar named Qian Yan in Guangzhou was studying in a temple. One night a beautiful woman came to visit, and Qian Yan moved in with her. The woman was pregnant, and Qian Yan was losing weight day by day. Later, he went to find the mage. The mage saw that the beautiful woman was a snake spirit and gave Qian Yan a talisman. After the woman read the talisman book without saying a word, she turned into two snakes, big and small, and wandered out. In 2004, Li Lidan summarized the Ming Dynasty Feng Menglong’s novel “The White Snake Forever Towns Leifeng Pagoda” in “From “Sexual Seduction” to “Sacrifice for Love”—Feng Menglong’s Contribution to the Development of Plot and Theme of The Legend of White Snake: During the Shaoxing period of the Southern Song Dynasty, Nanlanggezi Xu Xuan, brother-in-law of the treasury official Li Ren, worked as a drug store supervisor. One day, he came back from worshipping his ancestors. On a ferry in the rain, he met a woman (Snake Spirit Bai Niangzi) who claimed to be the sister of Bai Dianzhi of Bai Sanban and the widow of Zhang. After the umbrella was returned, Snake Jing wanted to marry Xu Xuan, and asked the maid Xiaoqing (who was transformed from the West Lake herring essence, not the green snake) to give him 10 taels of silver. Little did he know that the silver was from the government treasury. After it was discovered, Xu Xuan was sent to Suzhou, where he met and married a snake spirit. Later, Xu Xuan was implicated in the theft of goods by the White Snake, so he was sent to Zhenjiang again. Xu Bai met and reunited in Zhenjiang. Fahai recognized that this beauty was a snake spirit, and asked him to Xu Xuan told the truth. After Xu Xuan learned that White Snake was a snake spirit, he was horrified and asked Fahai to accept him as his apprentice. With the help of Zen Master Fahai, he suppressed the snake spirit Qingyu Jing. Xu Xuan went to Gai Leifeng Pagoda for alms, practiced Zen for several years, left a warning to the world, and passed away overnight. In 2013, Jin Meiqian also summarized this plot in “The Story Evolution and Literary Value of the Legend of White Snake “.

In 2006, Yuan Yimei and Wang Zhao proposed in “The Cause of the Image of White Snake in Fang Chengpei’s Legend of Leifeng Pagoda” that the plot of Fang

Chengpei's Legend of Leifeng Pagoda in the Qing Dynasty changed again. The author deleted and added scenes of the play and redefined the drama structure. Several insignificant plays such as "Depicting the Reality" were deleted, and several new plays such as "Night Talk", "Duanyang", "Seeking Grass", and "Broken Bridge" were added. The plot was enriched and the play was greatly enhanced, especially the focus on the word "emotion", which made the whole play ups and downs with the ups and downs of the characters' emotions, greatly enhancing the watchability of this play.

The author concludes: The author has reshaped the artistic image of White Snake. The White Snake in Fang's writing is no longer a passionate, brave, kind and lovely female image. At the same time, it reflects that White Snake is a rebellious woman. In pursuit of love, she actively courts Xu Xian, suffers torture and remains loyal, and dares to fight the evil forces represented by Fahai. This deeply reveals the oppression of women by the male-centered feudal patriarchal system.

### **3. A Review of the Research on the Ideology and Culture of the White Snake Legend**

This aspect of research is the essence of the White Snake Legend. Scholars from different eras have made unique analyses and in-depth studies, each with its own merits.

#### **3.1. A Review of the Research on the Origin of Snakes by Scholars of All Ages**

In 1990, Fang Mei proposed in "Cultural Psychological Analysis of the Evolution of the Legend of the White Snake" that the white snake is cruel and terrible, and it wanders between snake nature and human nature. He is a cunning, cold and hateful alien, but when he is full of human brilliance, he becomes admirable and worshipful. The complex psychology of snakes is essentially a subtle psychology of sexual phenomena. In 2003, Yuan Yimei also proposed a similar view in "The Cultural Origin of the Legend of the White Snake". In 1999, Wang Yibing proposed in "The Cultural Implications of the Legend of the White Snake" that the image of the snake is mysterious because the snake flies without wings and walks without feet, which coincides with the feelings of the ancestors about reproductive phenomena. In 2018, Ma Yimin proposed in "The Transformation of the Theme of the Legend of the White Snake and Its Cultural Connotation": In addition to physiological reproductive worship, there is also totem worship. This is the primitive people's explanation of the unknowable forces and phenomena of the universe and nature. For example, the images of Fuxi and Nuwa, two snake gods with human faces and snake bodies, were created in this way. The author concludes: The complex and contradictory aesthetic psychology towards snakes has accumulated and blended in folk culture and the cultural background of each era, so the image of the white snake continues to develop and change, while human nature continues to be enriched and the image becomes more vivid.

### 3.2. A Review of the Research on the Background of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism by Scholars of All Ages

2007, Zhang Li pointed out in “Exploration of the Story of the Legend of the White Snake” that the White Snake has undergone three stages of evolution since the Tang and Song Dynasties: the first is the story of a snake demon turning into a beautiful woman and harming men, represented by the Tang legend The Story of the White Snake and the story of the Three Pagodas at West Lake; the second is the story of Feng Menglong, The White Snake is imprisoned in Leifeng Pagoda forever, which is a work of the Song Dynasty that shows the nature of snakes and is recommended for deletion. This work can be regarded as a transitional work; the third is the story of the Leifeng Pagoda by Fang Chengpei in the Qing Dynasty, which concentrates on the excellent qualities of the White Snake in one person. This type of work is the final achievement of the evolution of the White Snake story. In 2015, Cui Yunwei and Sun Xubo put forward a similar view in “A Brief Discussion on the Theme Evolution of the Legend of the White Snake”. [6] The author concludes that these three stages are actually based on the development of cultural and moral concepts. In Confucianism, the son does not talk about ghosts, gods, or monsters. Confucianism usually transforms the underworld into human ethics and etiquette. This cultural atmosphere also affects other aspects, such as the later Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism, which preserves the principles of heaven and eliminates human desires. Therefore, it is not surprising that the image of the white snake with strong sexual behavior is no longer pleasing to people in the Song Dynasty.

2008, Geng Qingzhi proposed in “Cultural Interpretation of the White Snake Story”: Taoism originated in China and Buddhism was introduced from foreign countries, but the two were integrated with each other and developed their own unique ideological connotations. This integration is actually the integration of Confucianism and Buddhism, which has a great influence on the performance of the White Snake story. For example, the unity of Confucian asceticism and Buddhism’s view of color and emptiness makes the White Snake become a lustful alien in the White Snake story, and the monk becomes the savior.

In 2015, Jiang Zhiyuan proposed in “A Review of the Themes in the Evolution of the Legend of the White Snake and Its Literary Significance and Cultural Connotation”: In works after the Tang Dynasty, such as Feng Menglong’s vernacular novels in the Ming Dynasty, a huge Confucian system with moral order as its core was formed under the background of Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism, which advocated the preservation of heavenly principles and the elimination of human desires. The feudal ethics and political system with the relationship of superiority and inferiority as its content devoured and strangled the youthful vitality of women, and finally reflected the persuasion of people to abstain from lust. From the perspective of the Buddhist worldview, the white snake should be killed for transforming into a human to pursue happiness in the world, not to mention that it was born as a demon and broke the order prescribed by Budd-

hism. This is a harsh religious concept. [7]

2020, Qi Jing proposed in “Analysis of the Origin and Development of the Legend of the White Snake in Leifeng Pagoda”: In the novels of the Qing Dynasty, the White Snake became strong and brave, and she was born and died in Fahai. The fight to the death in Jinshan was the result of love. Such a passionate and emotional White Snake still had no escape from fate. Her love had long been disillusioned, and Xu Xuan had also comprehended the right way and left the world. The White Snake was listed in the immortal class, which was just to show the great grace of Buddha. The White Snake finally cleared her mind and comprehended the principles of heaven. It can be seen that the rational net of heaven is ultimately sparse and leaky, which reflects the author’s worldview contradictions and the ideological reality of the Qing Dynasty.

### **3.3. A Review of the Research on Local Customs and Folklore by Scholars of All Ages**

2007, Tang Xia proposed in “An Analysis of the Folk Cultural Connotation of the Legend of the White Snake” that the evolution of the White Snake story reflects social customs, and the recipients transform and supplement the content of the story to make it similar to the customs of their surrounding environment, so that it can be widely understood, accepted and spread. In 2020, Sun Tingting proposed in “An Analysis of the Folk Cultural Factors of the Legend of the White Snake in Historical Evolution”: Fang Chengpei’s Leifeng Pagoda Legend depicts the scenery of Hangzhou from many aspects, such as the scenery of West Lake, Leifeng Pagoda, Jingci Temple, Broken Bridge, etc. A tortuous and bizarre story, integrated with the scenery of West Lake. The author concludes: The customs added to the story, such as tomb sweeping on Qingming Festival, drinking realgar wine on Dragon Boat Festival, marrying to ward off evil spirits, and using prostitution as betrothal, have enriched the plot, fit the customs of the time, and make the story real and vivid.

### **3.4. Other Distinctive Arguments**

2012, Li Xia proposed in “On the Evolution and Cultural Implications of the Image of the White Snake”: The work shows certain historical limitations. People are helpless against the decline of benevolence and morality, and turn to religion and other idealistic things for help. The idealism that what you do in this life must be repaid in the next life, because the little shepherd boy saved the little white snake’s life a thousand years ago, so Bai Suzhen came to the world to repay the favor and the old snake catcher made soup for the little white snake, so Bai Suzhen stole Fahai’s first play, and because of the perspective fairy, Fahai harmed Bai Suzhen and broke up Xu Xian and his wife. All the things explained in the text were destined in the previous life. It over-promoted Buddhism and fatalism.

2014, Xue Li proposed in “The Evolution of the Legend of the White Snake and Its Causes from the Perspective of Media Changes”: In the Legend of the



White Snake, the White Snake has changed from a strange and bizarre character to a beautiful and lingering love story and a beautiful and kind fairy. It embodies people's yearning for a better life and is permeated with the belief that the way of heaven is impartial and always favors the good. This is in line with the practical and rational spirit that Chinese culture has always adhered to, emphasizing more on the union of lovers and a world bound by emotions, the world and real life, allowing people to express their satisfaction in their daily hearts and permeating the educational role of the rulers. [8]

The author concludes: The Legend of the White Snake changed from a legend to a love story, Bai Suzhen changed from a villain to a kind fairy, and the ending changed from tragic to happy, with a happy ending becoming inevitable. At the same time, the turning point of the contradiction naturally turned into theocracy and secular power under the infiltration of educational factors.

#### **4. A Review of the Research on the Characters in the Legend of the White Snake**

Characters are the core of literary works such as novels, legends, and operas. The characteristics of different characters show the light and darkness of human nature, and the collision and changes of ideas.

##### **4.1. A Review of the Research on the Image of White Snake by Scholars of All Dynasties**

2008, Wang Chengxia proposed in "The Cultural Connotation of the Legend of the White Snake and the Modern Interpretation of the Image of the White Snake" that the White Snake has a beautiful figure. She flirts with Xu Xuanping and actively strikes up a conversation with him, which makes Xu Xuan's heart and soul so excited that butterflies and bees flutter in the early morning. [9] This is the beauty of the White Snake's appearance when she first appears. Then, she shows the answers to the questions of the world. In order to dispel Xu Xuan's doubts, she first flatters Wang Jia's mother and lets her indirectly persuade Xu Xuan to marry her. Finally, she and Xu Xuan get married.

In 2010, Li Qianyan summarized in "Analysis of the Female Image of White Snake in the Legend of White Snake": The storybook does not express the passion, tenderness and kindness of women. Although White Snake's love-to-hate relationship is also long-term, she behaves extremely well. Fierce: "You said that if you listen to my words, you will be happy and everything will be over. If you have an external heart, you will be filled with bloody water. Everyone will climb the waves with their hands and step on the muddy waves. If you look at me with the eyes of a proud Buddha, if you don't "Good times bring suffering and death to the people of a city." I can't help but think of the deadly poison of snakes, and I feel frightened. This is also a full manifestation of his demonic nature.

2012, Li Xia pointed out in "On the Evolution of the Image of the White Snake and Its Cultural Implications": The White Snake in "Leifeng Pagoda" already had her own name, Bai Suzhen, and added extremely important plots,

“stealing grass”, “water fight”, and “broken bridge”, which perfected the character image of the White Snake. [10] At this time, the White Snake had completely shed her evil spirit and became a completely kind person.

#### **4.2. A Review of the Research on the Image of the Green Snake by Scholars of All Dynasties**

2007, Zhang Wanli proposed in “The Evolution and Interpretation of the Image of Green Snake in Legend of the White Snake”: Green Snake was not given much attention in the early stories, and it can even be said that she was dispensable and only needed symbolically. In “Leifeng Pagoda”, Qing’er was positioned as a green snake spirit, which brought her closer to the White Snake. In 2017, Gu Peichong proposed in “Exploring the Phenomenon of ‘Supporting Roles Becoming Protagonists’ in Literary History from the Evolution of Green Snake’s Image”: Although they are master and servant, they are as close as brothers. In terms of personality, one is gentle and virtuous, the other hates evil, is innocent and straightforward, impulsive, loyal, and a bit willful and lazy. In 2020, Xu Yan proposed in “On the Evolution of the Image of Green Snake—From Li Huang to Green Snake”: She is immortal, but she is Bai Suzhen’s most loyal sister. Xiaoqing warned Suzhen: “Human beings are worse than the previous day, and each generation is more cunning than the previous one. There is no true friendship anymore—but I will always have it.” Xiaoqing at this time should be a pioneer figure, a woman who is affectionate, reasonable, capable and decisive.

#### **4.3. A Review of the Research on Xu Xian’s Image**

2017, Yang Min proposed in “A Brief Analysis of the Image of Xu Xuan in the Evolution of the Legend of the White Snake” that although he is relatively honest and kind, he is also cowardly and selfish. He dares not take responsibility and keeps escaping. Therefore, his happy life with White Snake is easily alienated and destroyed. Wang Meng created Xu Xuan, a key figure in the tragic fate of White Snake. He is also the focus of the struggle between Fahai and Bai, that is, the focus of the struggle between heaven and human desire. Although Xu Xuan is also full of desire for wealth and honor, and the desire for food and sex between men and women, there is inevitably a contradiction between heaven and human desire in him. [11] The author concludes: This small supervisor of the herbal medicine shop has the side of a young, pure and loyal boy, so he has fallen in love with White Snake at first sight. Xu Xuan’s rationality succumbed to the pomegranate skirt of White Snake. After Fahai warned him, he was driven by primitive reproductive instincts and afraid of the consequences of indulgence.

#### **4.4. A Review of the Research on Fahai’s Image**

2009, Jiang Chuanzi pointed out in “A Brief Analysis of the Characters in the Legend of the White Snake”: In the early stories, Fahai’s mission was to exorcise demons. If viewed from the perspective of a snake demon, Fahai is a positive

character. However, when the snake demon transformed into a righteous demon and was widely loved by readers, Fahai's behavior was no longer to exorcise demons, and his role was transferred to a negative meaning. The Legend of Leifeng Pagoda changed the past moral orthodoxy and instead sang praises to this unfavorable love. Fahai gradually evolved from a compassionate monk to a sinister and cruel feudal ruler, becoming the embodiment of feudal power. In order to maintain feudal ethics, he was unwilling to let Bai Suzhen and Xu Xian enjoy a happy life, and used all kinds of pressure to persecute them. The author concludes: Fahai is considered a villain in the traditional story of the Legend of the White Snake, but in "Green Snake" he is given the humanity he deserves. At this time, Fahai is young, and although he has many years of experience in subduing demons, he cannot resist the temptation of the green snake and becomes a man with six roots that are not pure. In the end, he even becomes angry and brings harm to the people for personal grudges, but he keeps saying that he is doing justice for the people, becoming a hypocritical and pretentious moralist.

### **5. A Review of the Research on Film and Television Works about the Legend of the White Snake**

2012, Yang Xinlei pointed out in "Twenty-three Film and Television Versions of the Legend of the White Snake and Their Multi-dimensional Exploration": As a folk story, the Legend of the White Snake has undergone great changes from the earliest discovered version to the White Snake story that people are familiar with today. This is because of the variable characteristics of folk literature. The development of history, the changes of the times, and the differences in natural and social environments will always cause folk literature to change. Different times and different people will always look at the problem from a specific era background when retelling a well-known story, and reinterpret the essence of the story. The legend of the Legend of the White Snake has experienced the passage of time and the rendering of the times. From a book story to a larger screen with a larger audience, it is inevitable to select fragments according to the public's preferences. In 2015, Xu Chen had a similar view in "The Modern Communication of the "White Snake" Story—The Legend of the White Snake in Film and Television". In 2015, Shang Liping wrote in "A Study on the Transmutation of the Image of the White Snake in Film and Television" that the White Snake in "The Legend of the New White Snake" has become the synonym of the most perfect woman in the hearts of the people. She is as close to Xiaoqing as a sister, gentle and considerate to Xu Xian, and respectful and humble to her husband's relatives. At this time, the image of the White Snake is also the most humane, a product of the development of the times, and fully reflects the ideology of people in today's society. In this drama, Xiaoqing is much simpler and cuter. She is an image of affection, righteousness, courage to love and hate, and loyalty. Her straightforward and lively personality forms a sharp contrast with the charm and gentleness of the White Snake. In 2016, Zeng Yan summarized the plot of the

movie “Green Snake” in “Mass Consumption and the Evolution of the Legend of the White Snake”: It is difficult to distinguish between humans and demons. The monk Fahai, who takes it as his responsibility to enforce justice on behalf of heaven, exorcises demons and demons, and is cold and ruthless. The spider spirit was mistakenly collected on a night of lightning and thunder. The green snake and the white snake, who had been practicing at the bottom of the West Lake for a hundred years, were confused by the spiritual light of the goblin’s Buddhist beads and suddenly became enlightened. They transformed into beautiful women and wandered around the world. They met the white-faced scholar Xu Xian by chance, and seduced Xu Xian into being infatuated and falling in love, but were unexpectedly destroyed by the monk Fahai’s spell. Thus, a tragedy-comedy of human beings with blurred desire, lingering love, and sorrowful twists and turns was performed. In 2020, Wei Shenglan pointed out in “A Study on the Image of Xu Xian in Domestic Film and Television Works”: In terms of the image creation of the protagonist Xu Xian, the film magnified the traditional image of Xu Xian’s lust, highlighting his obsession with Bai Suzhen and the green snake. The love that is originally difficult to extricate oneself should be praised by people, but it must be based on unswerving determination, loyalty, and willingness to sacrifice everything for it. However, Xu Xian’s so-called love is a wavering emotion—a lustful evil emotion—he was seduced by Bai Suzhen’s beauty on the cruise ship on West Lake and indulged in it, but he could not help himself in the face of the green snake’s teasing and throwing himself into her arms.

## 6. Conclusions

The story of the White Snake is a treasure that has yet to be fully mined in the history of literature and folklore of our nation. Scholars of all generations have conducted very detailed research on the different stages of the development of the story of the White Snake, as well as the textual characteristics and aesthetic features of the story of the White Snake, and there are many valuable conclusions. However, the research has not stopped. Further research can focus on the following deficiencies in order to improve the depth of related research.

1) One-sided interpretation of cultural connotations: Although “The Legend of White Snake” is one of the important representatives of Chinese classical literature and carries rich cultural connotations, current research often only focuses on one aspect or one level of its cultural significance, such as love, morality, religion, etc., but fails to fully and deeply explore its multi-level and multi-dimensional cultural connotations.

2) Simple analysis of characters: The characters in The Legend of White Snake are very distinctive, such as White Snake, Xu Xian, Xiaoqing, etc. However, current research often only stays on the surface analysis of the characters’ personalities and behaviors, and fails to dig deep into the deep meanings such as the values and cultural symbols represented by them.

3) Insufficient comparative studies with other cultural traditions: As an important part of Chinese traditional culture, The Legend of the White Snake must have connections and differences with other cultural traditions. However, current research often only focuses on The Legend of the White Snake itself, and fails to place it in a broader cultural context for comparative study, so as to more fully understand its cultural value and significance.

4) Insufficient use of modern communication methods: With the development of digitalization and new media technology, the way of cultural communication has undergone profound changes. However, current research on “The Legend of White Snake” often fails to make full use of these new technologies, such as big data analysis and social media communication, to better promote and inherit this traditional culture.

5) Singleness of research methods: Current research methods on The Legend of the White Snake are often relatively single, mainly relying on traditional methods such as literature analysis and text interpretation. Although these methods have certain effectiveness, they may not be able to fully and deeply explore its cultural connotations. Therefore, future research needs to explore more diversified and comprehensive research methods, such as interdisciplinary research and field investigations.

The research outlook on The Legend of the White Snake is diversified, interdisciplinary and global. Future research can further explore its historical and cultural connotations, explore its artistic and cultural values, pay attention to its global dissemination and influence, explore how to use new technologies to promote its inheritance and development, and explore how to combine it with modern society and modern culture to create new works with innovation and a sense of the times. This article makes a comprehensive, dynamic and coherent summary of the previous research on The Legend of the White Snake. Understand the Legend of the White Snake itself from a literary perspective. The White Snake story is widely accepted in the academic community. This research method is a summary of the literary and cultural phenomena of previous generations. Explore the development context and explore the laws of evolution, so there is no lack of academic value.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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## Appendix

Only works shot based on true film and television thinking can be regarded as movies and TV series of “The Legend of White Snake”. According to historical records, there have been many versions so far. The following are representative works:

- 1) In 1926, Shanghai Tianyi Film Company released *The Legend of the White Snake*, also known as *The Righteous Demon White Snake*;
- 2) In 1939, Shanghai Huaxin Film Company released *The Legend of the White Snake*, also known as *The Wrongful End of the Pagoda*;
- 3) In 1949, Hong Kong (China) released *The Night Sacrifice at Leifeng Pagoda*;
- 4) In 1952, Hong Kong Fuhua Film Company released *The Legend of the White Snake (sequel)*;
- 5) In 1953, Hong Kong (China) director Wang Feng released the black-and-white film *The Return of the White Lady*;
- 6) In 1955, Hong Kong Taishan Film Company released *The Legend of the White Snake*;
- 7) In 1956, Japan’s Toho Film Company released *The Demonic Love of the White Lady*;
- 8) In 1958, the film was adapted into an animated film of the same name by Toei Film Company of Japan, written and directed by Yabushita Yasushi. It was 79 minutes long and was the first full-length color animated film in Japanese film history, a milestone in the history of Japanese animation. However, the film portrayed Xiaoqing as a fish instead of a snake, which was too sloppy and the meaning was greatly reduced. It was simply called the “1958 version”;
- 9) In 1962, Hong Kong Shaw Brothers produced the Huangmei Opera film “*The Legend of the White Snake*”;
- 10) In 1962, Hong Kong Xingfa Film Company produced the Cantonese opera film “*Shilin Sacrifice Pagoda*”;
- 11) In 1975, Taiwan (China) released the film “*White Snake Makes Trouble in Heaven*”;
- 12) In 1978, Hong Kong (China) director Chen Zhihua used rising star Lin Qingxia to star in the film “*The True Legend of the White Snake*”;
- 13) In 1980, Shanghai Film Studio produced the Peking Opera film “*The Legend of the White Snake*”;
- 14) In 1990, Hong Kong TVB produced the 20-episode TV series “*Fantasy World*”;
- 15) In 1992, the 50-episode TV series “*The Legend of the New White Snake*”;
- 16) In 1993, Tsui Hark’s film “*Green Snake*”.