

Between Femininity and Animality – The Metamorphosis of the White Snake Legend in Sinophone Film and TV

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines three different adaptations of the traditional Chinese White Snake legend in three Sinophone visual productions: the Taiwan TV *Madam White Snake (Qingshe yu baishe)* in 2001, the Hong Kong film *Green Snake (Qingshe)* in 1993, and Chinese animation *Green Snake (Qingshe jieqi)* in 2021. Specifically, this paper discusses the homoerotic romance between the White Snake and the Green Snake, two animal/female protagonists in the traditional legend which focuses on the heterosexual romance between the White Snake and a human scholar. By tracing the genealogy of the metamorphosis of the traditional White Snake Legend in contemporary China and across Sinophone regions, this paper investigates the following issues: first, the development of the female consciousness and new woman in contemporary China; second, the advances in gender theories and the homoerotic relationship in the adaptations of the White Snake tale; third, the contribution of animality in conveying homoerotic messages across Sinophone regions; fourth, the important role of Chinese animation in articulating (homo)sexuality across different locales and against different sets of social relationships. By combining methodologies of critical adaptation studies, female consciousness, new woman, theories of gender and sexuality, female same-sex love, animal studies, the repression theory, Sinophone articulation and digital media, this paper points out the intersection between animal studies and feminist and lesbian studies. Meanwhile, this paper demonstrates the persistence of the tale across Sinophone regions and highlights the role of Chinese animation in articulating (homo)sexuality across different locales and against different sets of social relationships.

Keywords: female homoerotic feelings, theories of gender and sexuality, animal studies, the White Snake Legend, Sinophone film and TV

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the box office of Chinese movies of summer 2021, the animated film, *Green Snake (Qingshe jieqi)*, ranks the third place with 562 million yuan. It reveals the facts that now animation, in many Chinese's eyes, can be appreciated by both kids and adults, and that Chinese animation is trying to catch up with other animation and comic giants, like Japan, the USA and Canada. Moreover, this animated movie appeals to a new wave of critical adaptation of traditional legends and folklores in contemporary era. This phenomenon testifies to the continued interest in harnessing Chinese traditional tales to create a uniquely "Chinese" animation. In recent years, many Chinese animated films have made a lot of achievements in designing characters, stories, images, actions and make-believe worlds with continuing

improved technologies, and *Green Snake* is definitely one of the brilliant examples.

Green Snake is adapted from the White Snake lore which is about a heterosexual relationship between Bai Suzhen (Xiao Bai), a female white snake, and Xu Xian, a human scholar. The villain in the tale is called Fa Hai, an eminent Buddhist monk who opposes to the human-monster love and imprisons the White Snake under the Leifeng Pagoda. The White Snake has a close sister - Xiao Qing, a green snake who is straightforward, brutal, and courageous. She admires, accompanies and assists the White Snake, and in the end rescues the White Snake from the pagoda together with the son of the White Snake and Xu Xian. The Chinese animation uses the characters of the Green Snake, the White Snake and Fa Hai to create a brand-new story in a new world, concentrating on the

homoerotic feelings between the White Snake and the Green Snake.

To many, *Green Snake* is a pioneering and innovative film that embodies a reasonable, novel and contemporary story adapted from an old and classic Chinese folklore with a subversive, grand and brand-new world. As Xinhuanet, one of the most influential social media in China, comments: The film presents a totally different world, Asuro which used to be a dystopian world in Buddhism, but now is transformed as a Hunger-game setting full of sci-fi ambience. While all characters in this film are wearing modern costumes, the film carries on the traditional principle and spirit of the White Snake Legend [1]. As the film director Huang Jiakang says: We try to keep the original personalities of each character, making Xiao Bai (the White Snake) a tender figure and Xiao Qing (the Green Snake) an independent, brave and rebellious fighter. And we pay much attention to protect and pass down the humanistic spirit of the conventional White Snake tale, which are understanding human nature, respecting personal affection, resisting darkness, and pursuing freedom.

In particular, what I want to investigate in the radical animation is the homoerotic romance between the two female/animal protagonists: the Green Snake and the White Snake. The traditional narrative focuses on the heterosexual romance between the White Snake and a human scholar. Yet, the animation challenges the traditional plot-line and digs out more sexual romance between the Green Snake and the White Snake by using the special effect brought by animation. This radical adaptation is made possible not only by the vitality of the traditional folklore and the neoteric world setting in the movie, but by the former adaptations of the tale in China and across Sinophone communities.

Therefore, considering the fact that the White Snake has been a popular tale for contemporary media adaptation across the Sinophone world, this paper, with a special emphasis on the Chinese animation *Green Snake*, will investigate other two Sinophone TV and film adapted from the White Snake Legend, which are the Taiwan TV *Madam White Snake (Qingshe you baishe)* in 2001 and the Hong Kong film *Green Snake (Qingshe)* in 1993. By tracing the genealogy of the metamorphosis of the traditional White Snake Legend in contemporary China and across Sinophone regions, this paper will look back on the development of the feminist studies, homoerotic relationships and gender theories in contemporary China. Besides, this paper will discuss the intersection between animal studies and feminist and lesbian studies. In the end, this paper will illustrate the important role of Chinese animation in articulating (homo)sexuality across different locales and against different sets of social relationships.

2. BACKGROUND

As is mentioned, the widely accepted version of the White Snake Legend is about a snake that transforms into a woman and devotes herself to her husband, her family and her community, becoming a kind, helpful and caring lady, wife and mother in the human society, which is in accordance with the traditional Chinese ethics.

The Taiwan TV series produced in 2001 conforms to the traditional legend and focuses on heterosexual romantic stories. The theme is in line with the ideal traditional Chinese womanhood, which is being a considerate, tender and affectionate lady, wife and mother. The relationship between the White Snake and the Green Snake is antagonistic at first. Then the Green Snake is defeated by the White Snake and finally becomes a friend and an ally of the White Snake.

The Hong Kong film released in 1993 is adapted from Chinese female author Li Bihua's novel *Green Snake (Qingshe)*. The book and the film adopt a new perspective of the Green Snake when narrating the traditional tale. By accentuating the emotional entanglement among the White Snake, Xu Xian, the Green Snake and Fa Hai, the film discusses questions like what is human nature, what are love and lust, and do humans really have love? Apart from the traditional plot-line, the movie adds stories and scenes like the Green Snake seducing Xu Xian in order to figure out what is human love, the Green Snake kissing the White Snake and persuading the White Snake to give up being a human and staying with her forever, and the Green Snake stabbing Xu Xian to death in the end for his inability, selfishness and unfaithfulness.

The Chinese animation screened in 2021 is about the Green Snake, who falls into the city of Asuro after failing to rescue the White Snake from the pagoda, clings on to the obsessed belief of defeating Fa Hai and rescuing the White Snake, and successfully escapes away from the city of Asuro with her growing strength. During the process, the Green Snake meets with several men, only to find that they are either weak, deceitful or unreliable. Finally, she develops a homo/heterosexual feeling for the male version of the White Snake because of reincarnation and makes out what true love is and who is her true lover.

In conclusion, we can see that there are abundant subversive adaptations of the White Snake Legend. It has something to do with firstly the enriched connotation in the original folklore, secondly the changing social ethnics during the years, thirdly the extensive, multidirectional travels of the tale within Asia and across the globe. A special book *The Global White Snake* uncovers how the White Snake legend often acts as an unsettling narrative of radical tolerance for hybrid sexualities, loving across traditional boundaries, subverting authority, and valuing the strange and the uncanny [2].

In recent years, the contemporary adaptation focuses

more on the used-to-be supporting character, especially on the Green Snake, because compared to the White Snake which has been gradually rewritten as the model traditional woman in China due to the character's popularity among folks and the attribute of early folklores of presenting purely good and evil[3], the Green Snake carries on the nature of the aggressive snake, which is unrestrained and having dichotomous attitudes towards love and hatred, corresponding to the theme of the time, which is the liberation of women and all genders with relatively radical approaches. Also, the storyline assigns less weight on the heterosexual romance, but more on female self-consciousness and female homoeroticism, since in this way more daring interpretations in various visual carriers can be possible.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many researches about the metamorphosis and the rewritings of the White Snake Legend. Just as the book *The Global White Snake* asserts: the inter-Asian voyages and global circulations of the White Snake legends have enabled them to become repositories of diverse and complex meanings for a great number of people, serving as reservoirs for polyphonic expressions ranging from the attempts to consolidate authoritarian power to the celebrations of minority rights and activism [2].

Some researchers point out the change of the White Snake from being a monster to an embodiment of female virtue in the Qing dynasty, as Aaron Balivert states in the dissertation "The Many Transformations of White Snake: Gender, Ritual, and Performance in Late Imperial China." [4] While others associate the White Snake to the new woman in modern China, as Jiang Guo charts the metamorphosis of the White Snake in print, on stage, and on the screen from the late imperial era to the mid-twentieth-century, and from the Cold War to the postmodern transformations of the contemporary Sinophone world (Shih et al, 2013) [5] in "The White Snake as the New Woman of Modern China" [6].

Several scholars find that gender and animals are enchanting to the lore. Many associate the White Snake with material feminism and ecocriticism. In "Material feminism and ecocriticism: Nu Wa, White Snake and Mazu," Eastern female deities are analyzed as age old "material feminist" and "material ecocritical" models of living and being in the world. The "body without organs" of Mazu, Nu Wa and White Snake embodies a radical Deleuzian subjectivity that lies outside of the body as "the body" speaks for obsolete policings and constructions of subjectivity and individuality, yet inside "the body" as it points to material feminist and ecocritical arguments that express that humans are always and already a composition of embodied nonhuman and human matter inclusive of inorganic and organic matter, human-made and nonhuman-made material, and natural and cultural "matter." [7]

As gender and sexuality are centered in the tale, we can find queer Chineseness in the White Snake Legend, as illustrated in "Queering Chineseness: The Queer Sphere of Feelings in Farewell My Concubine and Green Snake" [8] and relate the tale to *The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-Sex Desire in Modern China* in which several works about the homoerotic feelings between females in the ghost stories by Pu Songling of the Qing Dynasty are discussed [9].

Also, there are other interesting and important investigations. Liang Luo in "the Global White Snake as Digital Activist Project" [10] highlights the alien identity of the White Snake to human society, making the White Snake a metaphor of immigrants in the United States before they receive their "Green Card." Such alien identity frees the snakes from conventional social norms, whether in gender relationship or sexual orientation. Tarryn Li-Min Chun in "The Legend of the White Snake across Mediums" [11] analyzes the benefits of multimedia technologies such as large-scale screens, mechanical stages, and interactive projections in performance, believing the addition of the technological nonhuman creates a more equal alignment between the human and nonhuman on both the narrative and performance levels. The analysis towards technologies and media again strikes the traditional society ethnics, such as the human-animal relationship and the gender relation.

Rather than conducting comprehensive research into the transformation of the White Snake Legend, this paper intends to examine the homoerotic message, mostly delivered by the character of the Green Snake, in the three Sinophone visual works through visual and textual analysis and by combining methodologies in animal studies, feminist studies, gender/sexuality studies and media studies.

4. FEMALE CONSCIOUSNESS AND NEW WOMAN

Since 1898 when the first Chinese-run girls' school was opened in Shanghai during the Hundred Day's Reforms, women began to be freed from foot-binding and have access to education, a liberation to both the body and the mind. The feminist text *The Women's Bell* published in 1903 ushered in a period of women's publication and activism. The spread of female consciousness called for women suffrage, economic rights and education. Finally, during the May Fourth movement, debates on women's problems entered the mainstream media. Male and female mixed student groups were formed in many cities and women's emancipation became the hallmark of the era, as is evidenced in women's consciousness in patriotism, body and sex.[12] The liberation of women continued to be a rallying cry for revolutionaries in the early days after the founding of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921. And

female consciousness gradually became the main discussion in literary works. In general, the history of Chinese feminist literature in the 20th century can be divided into five stages: the "May Fourth Movement", "from 1930s to 1940s", "17 years after the founding of the People's Republic of China", "from 1980s to 1990s" and the "first decade in the New Century," with a literary topic gradually shifting from gender equality and gender norms to modern humanism and female consciousness.[13]

According to Yue Daiyun's words in *The Awakening of Chinese Female Consciousness* [14], women's consciousness should be awakened in three dimensions: first in the social context, women should realize the oppression from the social class structure and start to oppose the oppression of women; second in the natural environment, women should be aware of their distinctive physical and physiological characteristics, such as menstruation, impregnation and reproduction; third in the cultural level, women should develop their unique spiritual culture, a marginalized culture beyond the mainstream patriarchal culture, with special values, receptions and narrations.

The different layers to the awakening of female consciousness are illustrated differently in the three Sinophone visual works. In the Taiwan TV, there is little sign of the awakening of female consciousness in all female characters. The White Snake strives to accommodate herself to human society, becoming a loyal, caring and sacrificing woman rather than continuing her spiritual cultivation as a supernatural creature. Whoever transgresses the ideal womanhood, such as the Green Snake who is depicted as a vicious siren, is doomed to end in misery. Later, in the Hong Kong movie, there is some evidence of the awakening of female consciousness in the social level. At first, the Green Snake reveals her admiration for Fa Hai because of his superb power and asks the White Snake why she is in love with an unfaithful and coward human. Then, being confused about the White Snake's decision of becoming a human, of being a member in the human society, and of never leaving Xu Xian just because she is pregnant, the Green Snake's female consciousness is displayed by her opposition against the imbalanced gender relationship in which women must be weaker and be obedient to men, and by her courageous fight against Fa Hai even though she holds romantic feelings to him and has weaker supernatural power than him. The awareness of female's unique physical, mental and cultural characteristic is not evident, merely demonstrated in the Green Snake's emphasis on the difference between humans and monsters. She believes that she herself and the White Snake are superior than ordinary humans. She often tries to persuade the White Snake into returning to the forest and states that the two of them together would be happier. In the end, she takes the White Snake's child away, raising the child alone in the wild, not in the human

society. Finally, in the Chinese animation, the female consciousness is showcased more thoroughly. At the very beginning, the Green Snake yells at Fa Hai: The only reason why you can imprison my sister, the White Snake, and beat me is because you have greater power! Throughout the movie, the Green Snake never understands why the White Snake would fall in love with a weak human, believing the White Snake is too good for Xu Xian. Till the end of the film, the only objective of the Green Snake has always been stronger and even the strongest, defeating Fahai and all males. In this manner, we can conclude that the Green Snake realizes the fact that women are often suppressed by men in power, and discovers the unequal social class structure in which women, no matter how capable they are, should obey men and sacrifice themselves to the men she loves. Consequently, the Green Snake wants nothing of a man but the greatest power. However, during the process, she finds that even the most powerful men is unreliable. There is nothing that can be comparable to her firm love for the White Snake. In this way, we might find some traces of the awakening of female consciousness in the natural and cultural level. Combined with the lines from the animation *White Snake*, the prequel of the animation *Green Snake*, which say that sister, we have been close to each other and accompanying each other for hundreds of years; that Xu Xian, you just met my sister by chance. You do not love my sister. You are just attracted by her physical appearance; that men are unreliable. Do not believe them, sister, we may say that the Green Snake distinguishes the love and affection between females from those between males and females. She not only recognizes the differences between humans and monsters, but the distinctive spirits and cultures, motivated by their special physical and mental states, shared by females.

Actually, the independent and powerful Green Snake also reflects the new woman image in modern China and the Sinophone communities. The term "new woman" was born in Japan at the beginning of the 20th century. It aimed at traditional women who followed old ideas, ethics and morals. The term represented the pursuing of individual emancipation, freedom and happiness. In the 1890s, Japanese newspapers and magazines began to introduce western feminist movements, which later ignited discussions about women's suffrage, political and economic rights in Japanese society. The term "new woman" first appeared in a speech entitled "The New Woman in Modern Dramas" by Tsubouchi Shōyō in July 1910. In his speech, he not only introduced the heroine in the drama "A Doll's House", but the western feminist movements, asserting that Japan would soon usher in the era of woman's awakening. In 1911, Tokyo Asahi Shimbun serialized an article titled "New Woman". In November of the same year, the performance "A Doll's House" was on in Japan, thus the image of new woman, as was embodied by the leading character Nora who rebelled against her husband and left the family with her

awakened female consciousness, became a hit in Japan. The substance of the new woman, as was illustrated in the Japanese feminist magazine *Bluestocking* (*Seitō*) in September 1911, was the desire for economic independence and self-realization, the criticism about marriage and traditional family structure, and the struggle to seek a balance between family responsibility and individual value. As female authors wrote in the first volume of the magazine: Primitive women are the sun, and they are the real people. Nowadays, women are the moon, relying on others to survive. The poem "New Woman" written by Hiratsuka Raitō was seen as the declaration of new woman in Japan, in which the poet said: We are new women, the sun, and persons, hoping to have a life that belongs to us, and we work hard for those to happen. The new women will not only destroy the old morals and laws that build on the self-interest of men. We must also build our new religion, new morality, and new law with our souls, following the sun's wisdom which is renewed day by day, in order to create a new world.[15]

The magazine *Bluestocking* attracted the attention of the world since its inception and greatly influenced Chinese women after 1920s. In 1923, the female writer Chen Xuezhao published her debut novel "The Ideal New Woman in My Eyes" in the newspaper *Eastern Times* in Shanghai. In 1926, the Chinese Women's Research Society founded the "New Woman" magazine in Beijing. The main authors included Zhou Zuoren, Lu Xun, Ye Shengtao, etc. The term "new woman" became popular in China ever since.[16] It referred to those thinking women who made their own living and led a fashionable life which was totally different from that of traditional housewives. The new woman accentuated woman's self-esteem and self-reliance, an epitomize of the time. One thing to notice that there was no standard definition about new woman in China. The concept of new women could be interpreted and developed in various ways, such as the urban modern girls.

The White Snake Legend has long been associated with the new woman. As is concluded in "The White Snake as the New Woman of Modern China" [17], from the Late Imperial Era to the Mid-Twentieth-Century, the highlighting of the lustfulness in the White Snake Legend had much to do with the "modern girl fever" in both Japan and China at the time. Being shorthaired, educated, aggressive and erotic, the "modern girl" was a pleasure seeker in Tokyo cafés, who changed men as if changing her clothes. Modern girls made their own living and represented modernity of the time. After Tian Han, the renowned Chinese playwright, finished his Tokyo sojourn from 1916 to 1922 and his return visit to Japan in 1926, he conceived the idea for *Lakeshore Spring Dream* (*Hubian chunmeng*), a film featuring a modern femme fatale in Shanghai with the same love encounter of a young scholar and a snake-woman by the lake as happened in the White Snake tale. So, we can see the "new woman" at that time resembled the Hollywood

"vamp" tradition.

During the later rewriting of White Snake Legend, the Green Snake gradually becomes the new symbol of the new woman, because it is more aligned with the new woman image whose origin in Japan, as is explained before, centers on independence, self-realization and the criticism about marriage, compared to the destiny of the White Snake of being a wife. As a result, the free, fiery and unruly single lady, the Green Snake who used to be a supporting character, gradually comes under the spotlight, being molded as a new woman. For instance, in the following three contemporary fictions: Li Bihua's novel *Green Snake* (*Qingshe*), Geling Yan's novella *White Snake* (*Baishe*), and Li Rui's novel *The Human Realm: Legend of the White Snake Retold* (*Renjian: chongshu Baishe zhuan*), the Green Snake as the leading protagonist is foregrounded and the themes of "love, hatred, and lust beyond redemption" (Tian and Li, 21-24 March 2013; Hong Kong Arts Festival program) becomes salient.

The above images of new woman do not exist in the Taiwan TV, for both the White Snake and the Green Snake choose to sacrifice themselves to the man they love. But the Green Snake in the Hong Kong film and the Chinese animation embodies the characters of the new woman for being independent, being suspicious about men, and never relying on any male human. What's more, in the Chinese animation which creates a modern setting, the Green Snake even dresses like a modern new woman, wearing a crop top, a bib overall and martin boots. Such an image coincides with the modern girl (*modan gaaru*) in Japan who being influenced by popular culture, including the US movies and jazz, and by availability of cheap commodities, such as fashionable clothing and cosmetics, is recognized by her bobbed hair, Western clothing, and transgressive behavior, like smoking, dancing and fighting [18].

In summary, with the development of female awareness and new woman in modern China, East Asia, and across Sinophone regions, the Green Snake gradually becomes the epitome of the new woman with awakened female consciousness in the contemporary adaptations. Such a stronger personality in the Green Snake may be helpful in conveying homoeroticism in later rewritings.

5. FEMALE HOMOEROTIC RELATIONSHIP AND QUEER THEORY

Female homoerotic relationship refers to the romantic love and erotic relationship between a female and another female. Its emergence comes with the advancement in gender/sex theories.

Queer theory is a theory about sex and gender that became popular in the West in the 1990s. It is a theory based on feminism, which is different from the binary gender theory in patriarchal theory. It originates from the

gay movement. Queer theory holds that gender identity and sexual orientation are not "natural", but formed through social and cultural interactions. Queer theory uses deconstruction, post structuralism, discourse analysis and gender research to analyze and deconstruct gender identity and power relations. The core of queer theory lies in its assertion that sexuality is not fixed but fluid.

Looking at the three Sinophone visual works, we can find two examples of homosexuality, which helps to identify the homoerotic relationship between the Green Snake and the White Snake. The first one is the character of Hei Feng in the Taiwan TV. Hei Feng is a black male snake which has known the White Snake for a long time. He loves the White Snake and is willing to do anything for her. However, the White Snake treats Hei Feng as a big brother and loves Xu Xian deeply. In the end, Hei Feng dies in order to save the White Snake. Hei Feng is actually the prototype of the Green Snake in the traditional Sichuan opera. It is said that the Green Snake is originally a male snake who falls in love with the White Snake at first sight and tries to marry her by defeating her with superpower. However, the White Snake wins in the end and the Green Snake has to transform into a girl in order to serve the White Snake and keep her in company. [3] So, by adding the character of Hei Feng in the story, we can feel the hidden romantic love that the Green Snake holds for the White Snake.

The second is the male version of the White Snake due to reincarnation in the Chinese animation. Undoubtedly, the Green Snake possesses obsessed affection for the White Snake because that is the reason for her falling into the city of obsession, the city of Asuro. By the end of the animation, the Green Snake, contrary to her former conviction of being with the man with the strongest power in the world, falls in love with the masked man who is weak, deceitful yet kind and selfless, and later discovers that the masked man is the reincarnated White Snake who also holds strong obsession of finding out the Green Snake. The once-again-falling-in-love-with-the-same-person plot reinforces the idea that the Green Snake does have a homoerotic feeling for the White Snake and the homoerotic relationship between the Green Snake and the White Snake, under the disguise of the heterosexual relationship, is possible.

Except from the above two visual works, homoeroticism also exists in other textual adaptations of the White Snake Legend. Chinese American female writer Geying Yan's novella *White Snake* is set during the Cultural Revolution. It is about a female fan's infatuation with the actress/dancer famous for her role as the White Snake. The female fan would imagine herself as a transgendered Green Snake in real life, protecting the White Snake from any harm. [17]

The female authorship and feminist transgression so

prominent in the White Snake-themed fictions and media works point out the significant change in the social realities and cultural representations surrounding the Chinese new woman in the post-Mao and postmodern Sinophone world. Unlike previous texts and visual representations created by men, these female-authored texts made possible the emergence of alternative voices and interpretations of transgressive female sexuality, especially those not fitting the heterosexual norms. [17]

To sum up, along with the advancement in gender and sex theories, such as the queer theory, the adaptation of the White Snake Legend can be bolder, expressing the underlying homoerotic relationship between females in Chinese and Sinophone societies. By combining trans with feminism, transfeminism can add impetus in producing art and literary works against the oppression of gays and lesbians, enriching the Chinese and Sinophone cinema with more homoerotic elements.

6. ANIMALITY AND HOMOEROTIC MESSAGE

Since we have mentioned the metamorphosis of snake-woman and of male-female, let's not forget other crucial attributes of the Green Snake and the White Snake: they are animals and they are monsters with superpower. According to Willis, the apparent universality of animals is both within human beings, and outside and beyond human society. In this Anthropocene, animals are metaphors as the White Snake is used to refer to immigrants in the United States in "the Global White Snake as Digital Activist Project." This human-centric view in the West dates back to the Medieval and Renaissance theology and philosophy, believing men, made in the image of God and bedewed with reason, is fundamentally different in kind from other forms of life, and every animal is intended to serve human purpose, if not practical, then moral or aesthetic. (Thomas, 1983, p.9). Later, following the advances in researches in animal behavior, animal consciousness, ethology, sociobiology and psychology, there are new battles about the human-animal relationship. Philosophers like Midgley and Clark hold the opposite view. [19]. As Midgley writes in her book *Beast and Men*, there are conceptual problems in believing human as an unusual species and we should see the roots of human nature in our brother species. [20]

Among all the distinctive characteristics of animals, animality is a salient one. What is animality? It is a kind of third gender that blurs the binary between masculinity and femininity. According to *Animals, Ethnic Minorities, and Villains in Animated Film during the Cultural Revolution* by Professor Daisy Yan Du from HKUST, animality is a category of third gender between masculinity and femininity and it's crucial in understanding animal figures in art works. [21] Such non-binary and de-sexualized category would provide more

possibilities for the character and the story of the Green Snake and the White Snake, such as the homoerotic messages between them.

On the one hand, being snakes, the Green Snake and the White Snake often intertwine with each other during fights, sleeps and other activities. The interweaving or fighting scene of two naked snakes itself conveys hidden erotic messages. For another, being wild animals, they are not familiar with human morality and ethnics. They often do things without considering if it is appropriate. For example, in the Hong Kong movie, the Green Snake and White Snake bathe together. Being both naked, they touch each other's body and kiss each other in order to imitate humans. The reason behind the Green Snake and the White Snake sticking together is that it is their animal nature. The natural animal behavior, seen as a metaphor in human society, would lead to the conclusion that there are homoerotic feelings between the Green Snake and the white snake.

The cases in the last paraphrase regard animals as metaphors and analyze their meanings in human society. But as illustrated before, the root cause is the Anthropocentric view in the relationship between humans and animals, which echoes the imbalanced relationship between men and women in the patriarchal human society. The conventional representation often reduces women to a quasi-animalistic being, as is evidenced by the image of the Green Snake in the Taiwan TV, a femme fatale. But lately, with the improvement of the female and animal studies, cultural production in the late 20th and early 21st century witnessed drastic changes in terms of how women are represented in vis-a-vie animals. As a result, there may exist a vast land in the intersectional research between animal studies and feminist and lesbian studies. Currently, there are several researches in the relationship between feminism and animal studies, which can be divided into two trends. The renowned researches for each trend include "Intimate Familiarities? Feminism and Human-Animal Studies" [22], and "Animal Rights and Feminist Theory" [23]. But still, animals are absent from much modern feminism. As a consequence, this paper may be able to make contributions in the inter- and cross-discipline research in the relationship between animality and feminist and lesbian studies.

7. LESBIANISM AND ANIMATION

Animality could be conducive to generating and conveying female homoerotic messages. Moreover, animation can be a perfect device to support more aggressive lesbian love adaptations.

To begin with, as explained in the beginning, the film sets a Hunger-Game like setting, the city of Asuro, a dystopian world in Buddhism which operates on the law of jungle. Four calamities: wind, water, fire, and air will

periodically strike the city of Asuro and everyone needs to protect themselves and restore enough life necessity. Such a world provides a subversive social configuration and a strong masculinity ambience for the Green Snake to develop lesbian romance. For one thing, unlike human society outside Asuro which conforms to the traditional patriarchal structure, the city of Asuro operates Darwinism. The strong will survive and the weak will die. Such a free and just atmosphere subverts the Confucianism society, discards human morality and ethnics, allows for any idea and behavior, and even encourages craziness and wildness, since it is always the brutal force that prevails. Under such circumstance, the emergence of lesbianism has a social foundation. For another, in the jungles, the masculine characters like being vicious, brutal and aggressive matter. So, we can sense the growing masculinity in the Green Snake. Comparing to the tender White Snake, the relationship between the Green Snake and the White Snake now has more chances to develop into lesbianism.

Besides, the magical power of the monsters in the animation gives the Green Snake the ability to transcend the basic gender structure in the society. In the traditional patriarchal society, the social status of men is higher due to physical strength and social ability, which can be testified by the supreme power of Fa Hai. But the Green Snake, being a monster, also has strong supernatural power and can keep improving her strength. In the end, she is even stronger than Fahai and defeats him, successfully proving that she does not need a man and could protect the White Snake better than anyone else. So, the traditional sexual relationship of women depending on men for living is broken and lesbianism can be allowed with the growing ability of women.

As a matter of fact, before May Fourth, the female same sex desire has become a problematic issue requiring public discussion in Chinese society. Yet, female-female intimacy usually appears to be negligible and insignificant in the patriarchal familial organization in traditional China. Men often trivialize female-female intimacy rather than treating it punitively or prohibiting it. In fiction, drama and autobiography, female-female sex is not recognized as authentic sex. Female-female affection enjoys legitimacy in writings as sisterhood and female-female intercourse is viewed as a secondary, substitutive practice. [9] The fact that mutual longings and pleasure among women are rendered harmless by the male polygamous imagination has a lot to do with the uneven social power between male and female. In that sense, by creating a subversive Asuro and increasing the masculinity of the Green Snake, the animation successfully conveys lesbian ideas to the public. With the special technological and media effect, animation has a special role in the emerging and developing lesbianism in China.

8. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the 2021 Chinese animation *Green Snake*, leaves much room for academic research. Together with the 2001 Taiwan TV *Madam White Snake* and the 1993 Hong Kong film *Green Snake*, we can discover more feminist ideas about female homoerotic feelings in the traditional White Snake Legend. By focusing on the growth of the new protagonist, the Green Snake, this paper looks back on the development of female consciousness, new woman and gender theories in modern China, East Asia and across Sinophone regions. By analyzing the animality of the Green Snake, this paper expands the research of feminism and lesbianism into the field of animal studies. With an emphasis on the speciality of the medium, animation, this paper accentuates the importance of animation in expressing ideas and theories in female consciousness and homoerotic relationships.

There are three contributions that this paper may be able to make. First, it makes an endeavor in combining methodologies of animal studies with feminist and lesbian studies, broadening the intersectional research between the three academic fields. Second, this paper attaches great importance to Chinese animation in awakening female consciousness and making a change in Chinese social gender configuration by making more cutting-edge feminist ideas and gender/sex theories works in the animated world. Third, this paper again showcases the persistence of the traditional White Snake Legend in China and Sinophone communities and encourages more critical, novel and innovative adaptation of animal metamorphosis folklores in Sinophone cinema, which is beneficial to the literature, the visual culture and the overall heterogeneous "Chinese" culture in the Sinophone region.

Admittedly, due to limited length and time, this paper could not expound many ideas and theories in the emerging animal studies and the relationship between feminist and lesbian studies with animality is far from being examined thoroughly. The attempt of conducting inter-and cross-discipline researches in feminism and animal studies is just my initial step which will be enriched by more investigations.

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