

Misogyny and Sympathy: Moral Ambivalence in Feng Menglong's Adaptation of the *Tale of the White Serpent*

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ABSTRACT

In reading Feng Menglong's adaptation of the *Tale of the White Serpent*, one often feels moral ambivalence in the narrative stance of the tale: a misogynist tendency mixed with sympathy for women.

Tracing various versions of the tale prior to Feng Menglong's adaptation, this paper tries first to see the changes in Feng's version, and then to place his changes in the context of Chinese literary tradition in its representation of women. The analysis shows that Feng mainly inherited the traditional portrayal of women as a source of evil. However, the intellectual trend for an expression of individual feelings and Feng Menglong's own dealings with women aroused his own sympathy for women at the same time. The moral ambivalence revealed in the tale is precisely Feng's wavering between the two attitudes.

In light of this moral ambivalence, the paper further examines issues concerning the construction of gender and a kind of dual attitude towards women in the late Ming period, which helps us better understand the way female images were represented and the way misogyny was perpetuated in premodern Chinese society.

KEY WORDS

misogyny

gender construction

folk tale

narrative

moral ambivalence

representation

adaptation

qing (emotion)



Dux malorum femina

[Woman is the chief source of ills.]

—Lucius Annaeus Seneca

*It is a general rule that those women endowed by
Heaven with great beauty invariably either destory
themselves or destroy someone else.*

—Yuan Zhen

Misogyny exists in both the West and the East, and its origin can perhaps be traced back to as early as the Biblical times and the Chinese Zhou dynasty (1111-249 B.C.) respectively, as far as the written record is concerned.¹ Love and sympathy for women also abound in literature everywhere, whether woman is designated as a fair, a weaker, or even a “second” sex. This raises an interesting and perhaps perennial question if the two tendencies are found in the same person or in the same piece of writing: are the two opposing views just temporary and alternate moods for a person in one’s life that accord with a man’s biological and psychological needs from one moment to the other? Or does the dual tendency suggest a more fundamental and perhaps also more sinister pattern in the cultural construction of the female gender and its subsequent treatment of the female subject? In other words, could it be that misogyny remains as the underlying philosophy or attitude by the male while love or sympathy for women is adopted as a ploy or a strategy only when his status and rule remain secure, dominant and unchallengeable? This certainly entails detailed and in-depth analysis for specific cases.

In tracing the history of misogyny in Western literature from the ancient myths of the Jews and the Greeks up to the Twentieth Century, for instance, Katharine M. Rogers has noticed that “in most periods

misogynistic writings were decidedly outweighed by expressions of love and praise for women" (xv). Taking Jonathan Swift as an example, Rogers claims that "[e]ven a man like Swift, whose writings incline to misogyny, deeply loved two women and showed in his life and works higher esteem for the sex than was usual in his time" (xv-xvi). As for its cause, she has attributed this curious mixture of love and hatred simply to the duality of man's nature without further elaboration: "Men's love and respect for women . . . have always been accompanied—in the culture as a whole and sometimes within a single individual—by some degree of fear, dislike, or contempt" (xvi).

What about such moral ambivalence in premodern Chinese literature? Are there similar cases? If yes, what do they reveal and how shall we account for them? In the following I will avail myself of a troubling text titled *Bainiangzi yongzhen leifengta* 白娘子永鎮雷峰塔 (Eternal Prisoner Under the Thunder Pagoda) by Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574-1646) of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). The tale is troubling because it presents a more subtle and more complicated case than Swift's writings: readers are often puzzled at the element of *both* sympathy *and* misogyny in the same tale. As will be demonstrated later, it is literally indistinguishable whether the narrative stance sides with Lady White (*Bai niang zi* 白娘子), a white serpent, or aligns itself with Fa Hai 法海, a Buddhist monk, who has suppressed her in the end. Since this is Feng Menglong's adaptation of a popular folktale about a certain white serpent, its moral ambivalence becomes more conspicuous and more significant if it is observed from a historical perspective.

The *Tale of the White Serpent* is a well-known folktale in Chinese literature, particularly popular along the lower reaches of the Yangtze River and its delta area. As with most folktales, its origin has now become obscure with centuries of metamorphosis, but its evolution and changes in its plot over the time remain largely visible. One of the earliest variants of the tale could be traced to a *chuanqi* 傳奇 of the Tang dynasty (618-907), which is a story about the allurements of a white serpent in the guise of an enticing lady. The plot is simple

yet with a catastrophic outcome—the protagonist dies pathetically—and the moral message is also made clear: the hero deserves his death for his obsession with a beautiful lady who is actually a cruel and repulsive white serpent.² A modern rendition of the tale, on the other hand, has entirely reversed its moral emphasis. In *Leifengta de chuanshuo* 雷峰塔的傳說 (Legend of the Thunder Peak Pagoda), a modern vernacular adaptation of the tale after the May Fourth Movement in 1919, Lady White is no longer a serpentine demoness, but rather a virtuous lady of an ancient origin, who has been widowed and who tries to repay a favor by Xu Xuan 許宣, the protagonist in the tale. The Buddhist monk Fa Hai, a figure who did not appear in the earliest versions but was created in later ones to counter the white serpent, becomes someone who, failing to seduce Lady White, angrily retaliates by spreading a rumor that Lady White is a transformation of a white serpent.³ In this version, sympathy lies with Lady White and the Buddhist monk has been condemned as an evil-minded antagonist. Feng Menglong's adaptation, commonly regarded as a prototype for almost all modern versions of the story, stands at a pivotal point in the long and continuing evolution of the tale with its moral ambivalence acting as a turning point for modern interpretations of the tale. Our task is not to seek the historical significance of Feng's adaptation, but rather synchronically to look for and to analyze the reasons behind the moral stance as exhibited in the tale. By anatomizing the moral ambivalence in its social and cultural context, we can perceive not only "a dual allegiance to self and society," as C. T. Hsia rightly pointed out (*Classic* 307), but perhaps more importantly, a kind of dual attitude towards women in the late Ming period, which can in turn help us understand better the way female images were portrayed and hence the way misogyny was perpetuated in traditional Chinese society.

I. Changes in Feng Menglong's Version

To study Feng Menglong's adaptation, one has to distinguish his rearrangement from his source materials. Feng himself has left no indication as to what the major source(s) are upon which he has based

his story and it is still a matter of debate as to the line of descent for the folktale *per se*.⁴ With these problems in mind, I will proceed to enlist all possible known versions or variants of the tale prior to Feng with the assumption that since Feng was both a man of literary accomplishment and an enthusiastic collector of folktales and anecdotes, those staple texts of the folktale, whether circulating orally among country folks or recorded in private journals or books, must have been accessible to Feng Menglong when he traveled or served as a petty official in those areas.⁵

As far as I can ascertain, there are altogether eight versions or records of the tale prior to Feng Menglong's adaptation. They are chronologically listed as follows:

1. *Baisheji* 白蛇記 (Tale of the White Serpent),⁶ a short *chuanqi* form of the story by an anonymous author of the Tang dynasty (618-907 AD);

2. *Yijianzhi* 夷堅志 (Records of Marvelous Anecdotes),⁷ a short anecdote by Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123-1202) of the Song dynasty (960-1279 AD);

3. *Xiaochuang riji* 小窗日記 (Journal Written by a Small Window),⁸ a very brief mention of the event by Wu Congxian 吳從先 of the Song dynasty;

4. *Shuangyu shanzhui* 雙魚扇墜 (Tale of a Fan Pendant with Double Fish),⁹ a vernacular story by an unknown author during the Song dynasty;

5. *Xihu santa ji* 西湖三塔記 (Story of the Three Pagodas on the West Lake), another vernacular story version of the Song dynasty according to some scholars;¹⁰

6. *Jinshanzhi* 金山志 (Local Records of Jinshan), which contains a legend about the story of the white serpent attested to by a poem of Zhang Shangying (1043-1122), a prime minister of the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127 AD);¹¹

7. *Baisheji* 白蛇記 (Tale of the White Serpent), a story recorded by Zheng Guoxuan 鄭國軒 in the early Ming dynasty;¹²

8. *Xihu youlan zhi* 西湖游覽志餘 (Travel Notes at the West Lake), which mentions very briefly the legend of the Thunder Peak

Pagoda which is related to the story of the white serpent.¹³

One more note needs to be made before our analysis of Feng's adaptation. According to Patrick Hanan's textual studies of the story in terms of stylistic variants of the time, Feng's version was believed to be a story written in the early Ming (in his judgment before 1450), but adapted by a late anonymous editor.¹⁴ Without further evidence enabling us to determine the components of the story which may belong either to an oral tale or to the anonymous editor or possibly to Feng, I will in the following simply refer to Feng Menglong's version as a narrative of the period that incorporated Feng's own voice. The narrative is worth studying because it may not only reveal Feng Menglong's own thought and ideology, but also reflect broadly the ideological as well as the cultural trend of the day. The changes which we will see in the following, therefore, may or may not be attributed directly to Feng Menglong himself, but they could nevertheless show us the social and cultural attitude or perhaps the intellectual confusion and thought conflict of the time with reference to women, which is our ultimate purpose. Toward this end, I will try to pursue both the life and thought of Feng Menglong, the adapter, as well as the social and intellectual milieu of the time in general.

Let us first take a look at the changes wrought into the adaptation. Of the eight previous versions,¹⁵ *Xiaochuang riji* and *Xihu youlanzhi* were very simple descriptions of the legend, which provided no more than a skeleton of the story such as the brief entries in the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. Besides, since the two versions carry only minimal information regarding the story line, they could have supplied at the most a basic plot for Feng Menglong's story. In view of this, Feng's adaptation could have mainly come from his selection of elements from the other six versions, on which we shall focus our attention. The noteworthy features in Feng Menglong's adaptation can be summarized as follows:

First, Feng Menglong's version keeps to the basic element that the white serpent was eventually imprisoned under the pagoda. However, it rejects the depiction of the white serpent as a brutal temptress plotting to hurt or kill the protagonist as in *Baisheji* of the Tang dy-

nasty and *Xihu santa ji*; neither does it, on the other hand, endorse the image of the white serpent as a righteous demoness (*yiyao* 義妖) who generously reciprocates the male protagonist's previous help as in Zheng Guoxuan's *Baisheji*. Between the two extremes in the portrayal of the white serpent, Feng's version seems to have struck a middle path.

Secondly, following many of his predecessors, Feng Menglong keeps the central plot of a protagonist falling in love with a beautiful lady and there is no happy reunion at the end as is depicted in Zheng Guoxuan's *Baisheji*. In order to render the storytelling more attractive, Feng greatly played up the atmosphere of the romance, the purpose and effect of which will be dealt with towards the end.

Thirdly, Feng Menglong turns Xu Xuan, the male protagonist, into a Buddhist convert at the end in his own version instead of a Taoist proselyte as in *Xihu santa ji*.

Besides, a quick look at the eight versions prior to Feng Menglong's adaptation will show that where there is a depiction of the white serpent as a cruel and heartless demoness, there is either an absence of the plot involving a priest (Taoist or Buddhist) subjugating the demoness (as in *Baisheji* of the Tang dynasty), or a Taoist/Buddhist monk helping the victim of the demoness by fighting against and finally suppressing the demoness (as in *Xihu santa ji* or *Jinshanzhi*). On the other hand, where the white serpent is delineated as a character with human feelings (as in *Yijianzhi* or in Zheng Guoxuan's *Baisheji*), there is no existence of a holy man trying to subdue the serpent. The reason is of course simple: there is no need to counter a kind-hearted serpent, even if a demoness. In Feng Menglong's version, however, one finds *both* a white serpent delineated with human feelings *and* a Buddhist monk trying to help the protagonist by fighting the serpent temptress. Both appear to be positive characters worthy of our moral endorsement.

Of course, Feng Menglong made some alterations in Lady White's personality. In contrast to the characters in *Baisheji* of the Tang and *Xihu santa ji*, who accost and seduce the protagonist just for their own pleasure and finally bring disaster to the protagonist,¹⁶ Lady

White appearing in Feng Menglong's version genuinely loves Xu Xuan as she confesses to Fa Hai, the monk, towards the end: "I never expected to meet Hsü Hsün [Xu Xuan], but meet we did, and I fell in love with him" ("Eternal" 377).¹⁷ Her plea is emotional and truthful, for her obsession with Xu Xuan comes only from her love for the man without any intention of either hurting his feelings or devouring him in the end. As a demoness, on the other hand, Lady White still retains something demonic that proves repulsive to the audience. For example, when she tries to teach Xu Xuan, her husband now, she "glared at him with witchy eyes" and yelled: "Here and now let me tell you: listen to what I say and we shall be happy, past issues brushed aside. But if you've other thoughts, I'll cause this entire town to be flooded with blood, and the deluge will drown all the townspeople and bring them the most horrible of deaths" ("Eternal" 375). Threatening as this is, it is only Lady White's retaliation against the plotting of Xu Xuan and the monk. She would not have threatened this if she did not feel herself to be menaced first. Apparently while the image of Lady White is indeed much more fleshed out than those in the previous versions, it has at the same time incorporated the dual characteristics of passion and monstrosity. This dual aspect interestingly coincides with what Nina Auerbach describes as the eternal types for women in Victorian imagination: the angel and the demon (63). This will be discussed in greater detail at a later point.

Finally, unlike its predecessors, Feng's version has made explicit the moral purpose of the story, the admonition against being attracted by a female beauty: "The world should heed my advice: love not the beauty of women,/For beauty casts spells on beauty's lovers./Be pure in mind—that will ward off evil spirits; . . ." ("Eternal" 378). Also, Feng's version is tinted with a Buddhist coloring. Although in *Xiaochuang riji* or *Jinshanzhi*, there already appears a Buddhist monk, it is in Feng's version that the Buddhist teaching of distinguishing *se* 色 (*Rupa*) from *kong* 空 (*Sunya*) is explicitly illustrated at the end ("Eternal" 378).

II. Misogynic Aspects of Feng Menglong's Adaptation

An adaptation of a legend or a tale is a literary recreation. It always entails ideology and hence reflects social trend. The alterations shown above in Feng Menglong's adaptation of the legend of the white serpent bespeak not only the social and cultural ambiance in general, which will be discussed in the next section, but also the construction of gender and the male attitude towards the female in specific, which will be illustrated below.

Let us first examine a popular interpretation of the tale. The choice of a Buddhist monk instead of a Taoist master to subdue the white serpent has often been interpreted as expressing the omnipotence of Buddha or to imply the superiority of Buddhism over Taoism in the adaptation.¹⁸ Given the historical reality about the two religions, this could be a possible explanation. The political conflict between Buddhism and Taoism has been a prolonged process in Chinese history ever since the importation of Buddhism during the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220 AD).¹⁹ It reached its culmination during the Yuan dynasty when the Mongol rulers, following the practice of their Great Chinggis Khan, favored Taoist masters who then rode roughshod over Buddhist monks. This eventually caused two great debates between the two religions and the burning of a number of Taoist scriptures afterwards.²⁰ With the founding of the Ming Empire by Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328-1398), who used to be a Buddhist monk himself and who therefore temporarily abolished the license system—*dudie* 度牒—for people who wanted to become Buddhist monks or nuns, the Buddhist influence quickly recovered and spread.²¹ Since folktales enjoy a wide audience, it is well imaginable that it could be utilized by some storytellers who may have Buddhist or Taoist affiliations for very efficient religious preaching while entertaining their audience. If this is the case for Feng Menglong's story, Feng as an adapter simply took over the story line. On the other hand, like his contemporary Li Zhi 李贄 (1527-1602), Feng was an iconoclast and was openly opposed to various religious doctrines. In his preface to *Guangxiaofu* 廣笑府, he ridiculed both Taoism and Buddhism in a sarcastic man-

ner: "I laugh at Li Lao Dan and his five-thousand-character *Dao De Jing*; I laugh at Buddha together with his five thousand volumes of scriptures; they only made it possible for Taoist priests to hit gongs of cloud and for monks to beat the wooden fish and to do some other tedious work. There are not any truths about the green ox or the white elephant!" (qtd. in Lu Shulun 33) Given this attitude, it is unlikely that Feng would have been engaged in religious promotion or favoritism in his adaptation of the tale.

Religions aside, how then should the features illustrated previously about Feng Menglong's adaptation be interpreted?²² Specifically, if there is a misogynic element in the tale, how does it reveal itself in the tale and what is the cultural heritage in terms of gender construction that could help us see the misogynic depiction in a better light? It seems to me that all these have to be understood in the context of the traditional representation of women in Chinese culture and literature in general. If we take a look at how women were typically represented prior to or around Feng Menglong's time, it can highlight Feng's adherence to and deviation from the convention in literary misogyny.

One way of representing women characters was to depict them as constant, generous and virtuous figures, who endured hardships and prejudices without much complaint and whose courage and moral conduct formed a contrast with their male counterparts in the narrative. *Ren Shi* 任氏 (Ren the Fox Fairy) and *Li Wa Zhuan* 李娃傳 (The Biography of the Courtesan Li Wa), two *chuangqi* stories of the Tang dynasty, could be relegated to this category. For both these female protagonists were really model figures for women: Ren loved her husband dearly, and for him she would even sacrifice her life as a fox. She was constant and would not be insulted and molested with force as was exemplified by her encounter with her husband's friend Wei Yin 韋崑. Li Wa, on the other hand, in the beginning deceived the son of the Duke of Xingyang 滎陽公子, a scholar who fell in love with her on his way to a civil examination. But it was Li Wa also who, upon seeing the scholar down and out because of her, stood out to rescue him from the brink of death. In both stories, the female

protagonists were characters to be eulogized and respected, since they were almost an embodiment of female virtues as stipulated in the Confucian prescription.²³ It is precisely here, however, that the patriarchal discourse demonstrated its force: seemingly applauding the female characters, those stories were actually honoring the virtues that were deemed by society as appropriate for women: female constancy or female sacrifice for the sake of male spouse as demonstrated in Ren; or female generosity, sense of honor and friendship as shown in the character of Li Wa. In commenting on the ideal woman being docile, passive and selfless creatures, Gilbert and Gubar remark:

To be selfless is not only to be noble, it is to be dead. A life that has no history, like the life of Goethe's Makarie, is really a life of death, a death-in-life. The ideal of 'contemplative purity' evokes, finally both heaven and grave. (25)

This is a poignant criticism on the representation of women in Chinese traditional culture as well.

What was implied or presupposed in the two stories was that neither of the stories really faced women as a class with its own characteristics. Instead, they employed a male discursive language to regulate or to prescribe female conduct or, more exactly, female moral propriety by portraying some sub- (courtesan) or super- (ghost) female paragon as a moral guide for women. By creating those supernatural female characters with admirable moral behavior, as some critics point out, the writers really wanted to show the lack of this type of virtuous women in reality, and those female figures really betrayed "the standard for some 'perfect female' in the eyes of the Chinese males" (Zheng 9).

Another way of portraying women, a method further along the line in the above treatment, was to make a militant, adventurous, chivalric and justice-upholding character out of a woman, or to make females masculinized, as I would call it. Hua Mulan 花木蘭 of the Northern dynasties (386-581 AD), Hong Xian 紅線 and Hong Fu 紅

拂 in the *chuanqi* stories of the Tang dynasty and the Women Generals of the Yang Family 楊門女將, popular stories since the Song dynasty, can all be assigned to this group. They either pretended to be a male (Hua Mulan) or a male in previous life (Hong Xian) or acted and fought as a male (Women Generals of the Yang Family). In short, they performed the same as men, if not better. Some critics hold that “the careers of those heroines are not what the feudal society expected of them; they are male fantasy about themselves, because those women generals have taken over the ideal positions for male careers in the feudal society.” (Meng 20) In other words, those female characters deserved our praise and respect only because they had occupied the positions usually taken by the male or been engaged in some male enterprises. This was again to evaluate the female conduct by applying a standard prescribed by the male outlook, for it was not the female gender that won recognition and respect in its own right but rather female figures in male clothing or with masculine behavior that assured public approval.

A more common treatment of female figures that was in opposition to the above two representations was to regard a woman as a source of peril, a *femme fatale*, who would bring disasters to men. In fact, the Chinese expression for an exceedingly beautiful woman is precisely *qingcheng qingguo* 傾城傾國, meaning to topple a city and a country. Its earliest reference comes from a song recorded in *Qian han shu* 前漢書 by Ban Gu 班固 (32-92 AD):

In the north there is a beauty,
 She shines without peers.
 One glance from her will topple one's city,
 Another glance will topple one's country. (730d)

Such is the traditional cultural attitude toward women, a largely male view. Regardless of its rationale, which is rarely explained explicitly, Scholar Zhang's comment on Ying Ying in “The Story of Ying Ying 鶯鶯傳” during the Tang dynasty provides perhaps the best footnote to this type of the male consciousness:

It is a general rule that those women endowed by Heaven with great beauty invariably either destroy themselves or destroy someone else. If this Ts'ui woman [i.e. Ying Ying] were to meet someone with wealth and position, she would use the favor her charms gain her to be cloud and rain or dragon or monster—I can't imagine what she might turn into. Of Old, King Hsin of the Shang and King Yu of the Chou were brought low by women, in spite of the size of their kingdoms and the extent of their power; their armies were scattered, their persons butchered, and down to the present day their names are objects of ridicule." (144-45)

Suffice it to say, therefore, that influenced by this misogynic ideology, the orthodox ideas and textbooks have always taught people to avoid infatuation with sex; here sex refers specifically to the female sex (*nüse* 女色). Various characterizations of the female figures in Chinese history and literature such as Zhao Feiyan 趙飛燕 in *Feiyan waizhuan* 飛燕外傳 (Unofficial Biography of Zhao Feiyan) of the Han dynasty (206 BC-220 AD),²⁴ Da Ji 妲己 in *Fengshen yanyi* 封神演義 (Investiture of the Gods) or Pan Jinlian 潘金蓮 in *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 (The Golden Lotus) of the Ming dynasty could therefore all be taken as admonitions in one way or another against the danger of a *femme fatale*.

Placed in this cultural context, the various versions of the *Tale of the White Serpent* (except *Baisheji* by Zheng Guoxuan) presumably accessible in Feng Menglong's time can also be viewed in this vein. Narrating an encounter between a male store clerk and a wicked white serpent in the guise of a heavenly beauty and the final destruction of the clerk as a result of his irresistible infatuation with the beautiful lady, these stories actually serve as a warning against the possible danger brought about by women, especially beautiful women. If the tale really originated from certain Buddhist legend, as some scholars have maintained,²⁵ then the misogynic element of the tale advocating abdication of human desires, especially male desire for sexuality, is unmistakable.

Feng Menglong's adaptation, in my view, largely inherits the traditional depiction of women as a source of evil as illustrated above. His choice in following *Xihu santa ji* by presenting an innocent man succumbing to the temptations of a female beauty instead of observing the plot in Zheng Guoxuan's *Baisheji* by showing the white serpent's reciprocation of a farmer's help implies his motivation of offering some warning to people against indulgence in female sexuality. The title of his collection of stories wherein the tale appears readily illustrates the message: "Comprehensive Words to Admonish the World (*jingshi tongyan* 警世通言)." Actually the text *per se* betrays a certain misogynic message. Xu Xuan, the protagonist, is portrayed throughout the story as an innocent and yet gullible person. Innocent in the sense that Xu is not a lascivious lady-killer skillful at flirtation and seductive in his behavior. It is only at Lady White's repeated sexual temptations that Xu surrenders: "When they had settled down, the woman [Lady White] kept ogling at Xu Xuan again and again. At the sight of such a fine beauty and her pretty attendant, he could not help feeling attracted, though he had always been innocent and inexperienced" (Feng, "Eternal" 357). Apparently it is Lady White who acts as a temptress and who therefore confesses at the end: "Upon meeting Xu Xuan, I could not help falling in love with him" (377). While all the previous versions of the tale only describe Xu Xuan's captivation by the white serpent as a result of her beauty, it is in Feng's adaptation that Xu Xuan has been depicted in more detail as a largely gullible character who has been *manipulated* time and again by Lady White. Twice deceived by her as to the source of the fortune she has provided him with, Xu Xuan finally realizes the real identity of Lady White, but he felt too scared to resist when threatened by her: "This announcement [to cause the entire town to be flooded with blood, if he does not obey] made Xu Xuan tremble all over. For a moment he was speechless. He dared not reply or walk away" (Feng, "Eternal" 375). To make the readers realize further Lady White's control over Xu Xuan, Feng Menglong has even made it explicit by using directly the pejorative word *pian* 騙 (to deceive) to refer to Lady White's successful strategy on Xu Xuan.

This may be part of a trend in the increasing number of narratives on henpecked husbands during the Ming-Qing period,²⁶ but as an adaptation of a folk tale, it retains its own implications. First, it could be merely for the purpose of entertainment by adding more interesting details for a storyteller, making the tale longer so as to achieve some possible financial goal, which was definitely important during the late Ming period. Besides, as an adapter, Feng has to achieve novelty in recasting the tale vis-à-vis the rich cultural heritage of all the previous versions.²⁷ Granting the purpose for entertainment, however, it is still arguable that Feng Menglong has made Xu Xuan what he is in order to highlight the power of Lady White in seducing an innocent person. At least readers have the impression that without Lady White, Xu Xuan would not have had so much trouble. Unlike the depictions in previous versions, the female seductive power has been much magnified here in Feng's narrative. Also, such an arrangement of the plot makes it apparent that Xu Xuan does not really *love* Lady White with all his heart. What he falls for is only her appearance, her seductive beauty, which may very well serve the theme of guarding men against female sexuality discussed above. This is also totally in tune with the Buddhist message given out in Xu's poem at the end:

My master delivered me from this vainglorious world;
Like an iron-tree in blossom, I am finally reborn.

.....
For the two, beauty and vanity, are interchangeable,
But between vanity and beauty, the line should be clearly
drawn! ("Eternal " 378)

Furthermore, from a feminist perspective, to make a demonic figure a female beauty who succeeds in enticing a male may reveal, on the levels of semiology and psychology, a deep-rooted male fear of the potential power held by female sexuality. Misogyny, as some critics put it, is exactly an obverse picture of the male fear of the female powers.²⁸ The step by step retreat, so to speak, of the male in the

face of female advances as demonstrated in Feng Menglong's recast of the characters Xu Xuan and Lady White dramatizes this male-female encounter which puts the female on the side of a demoness that tries to defeat the innocent male in this mythological tug-of-war. The result is of course predictable from the start: not only is Lady White forever suppressed under the Thunder Peak Pagoda (雷峰塔), a phallogocentric symbol in total control of female rebellion, bespeaking the triumph of patriarchal power and the unchallengeable status of its dominance over the female, but a warning is also issued to all males against female sexuality (*nüse* 女色) and hence feminine danger. The male nature of the text is well borne out by Lady White herself when she confesses to Fa Hai at the end: "Unable to control myself, I violated the rule of Heaven" (Feng, "Eternal" 377-78). If her falling in love with Xu Xuan is regarded as a violation of the rule of heaven, is it because she is a supernatural being who is not supposed to have any contact with a human being? Or rather, is it because being a woman, she is not supposed to step out of her boundary to seek love herself, which is almost a sin for a lady in traditional Chinese culture? To be fair to the story, I think both are plausible but the latter apparently weighs more, for there are quite a few Chinese short stories and dramas that depict in a positive manner love and passion between a man and a ghost or a marriage between human and superhuman beings (e.g. *Liu Yi Zhuan* 柳毅傳 (The Story of Liu Yi) of the Tang story, *Zhang Sheng Zhu Hai* 張生煮海 (Zhang Sheng Boils the Sea) in Yuan drama, *Mudan Ting* 牡丹亭 (The Peony Pavilion) by Tang Xianzu (1550-1616) or *Hong Yu* 紅玉 (Red Jade) in Pu Songling's (1640-1715) *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋志). Furthermore, that Lady White herself confesses such a violation indicates the male manipulation of female voice and even female consciousness, rendering women forever the slaves of the male-controlled ideology. The "rule of Heaven" here is certainly not some impartial power arbitrating worldly disputes, but rather a repressive male discursive force working in the name of heaven to hold women forever under its sway. Understood in this context, even the *shi* 世 in Feng Menglong's title for his collection of stories *jingshi tongyan* 警世通言 may refer mostly, if not exclu-

sively, to male readers or audience, since women had minute restrictions on their behavior and their education during the Ming and few women could actually have an access to story-telling, nor were they encouraged to read those stories.²⁹

III. Moral Ambivalence in the Adaptation

As was indicated in our previous comparison, Feng Menglong in his adaptation has created two opposing positive figures: Lady White the serpent and Fa Hai the monk. Consequently in reading Feng Menglong's tale of the white serpent, one often wonders at its moral ambivalence or moral tension between the two. On the one hand, Lady White is a mere embodiment of a white serpent with a thousand years of spiritual cultivation, who has actually brought more harm than good to Xu Xuan and who as a consequence deserves subjugation at the end; on the other hand, however, one also feels compelled to show one's sympathy towards Lady White and regard Fa Hai's help as senseless meddling in others people's business, although to consider it rationally, one knows that Fa Hai is to deliver Xu Xuan from some potential disaster that may have been brought about by the white serpent. Thus Lady White and Fa Hai stand at the two extremes of a moral scale, representing fulfillment of one's passion and the observance of moral order in the tale. Neither seems willing to give in. As a general rule in traditional Chinese story-telling, readers' moral choice should be directed towards either one of them and not be divided between the two. In fact, all the versions prior to Feng's adaptation are morally unambiguous. Aside from *Xiaochuang riji* and *Xihu youlan zhi*, which are merely factual statements about the legend, *Xihu santa ji* sides with the Taoist holy man, who rescues his nephew from the schemes of the white serpent. *Jinshanzhi* is in praise of the Buddhist monk for his driving away the white serpent which devours people. Zheng Guoxuan's *Baisheji*, on the other hand, apparently aligns itself with the white serpent, the transformation of a heavenly dragon, for its reciprocation of a timely assistance it received previously. As for *Yijianzhi*, although the narrative does not render the

white serpent a brutal demoness, neither does the reader get the impression that Sun's wife is a loving one for its being all too brief an account. The undertone of the narrative, however, does seem to alert readers to the danger that may accompany a beautiful woman.

It is true that the image of Lady White is much improved in Feng Menglong's narrative. As I stated earlier, one of the major changes in Feng Menglong's version is to make Lady White more of a woman with flesh and blood who falls incurably in love with her beloved than of a demoness who ardently desires the young man only to ruin him in the end. Lady White does bring Xu Xuan trouble in Feng's version, but she does not harbor any wicked intention as described in some previous versions. Even in the end when Lady White has to reveal her original form—a three-foot-long white serpent, she “still raised [her] head and fixed [her] gaze on Xu Xuan,” as if she was still reluctant to take leave of her lover (Feng, “Eternal,” 378). Compare her with her images in some previous versions such as *Xihu santa ji* or *Baisheji* and one can see that although Lady White still retains some animalistic characteristics, which cause social disturbances (e.g. her magic theft of gold and silver from some government officials' residences), those characteristics are quite understandable, given her own circumstances: she resorts to theft as a means to pay for their married life, as Xu Xuan, her husband, is an impecunious store clerk. This is apparently Feng Menglong's addition to his version, whereby he renders Lady White's illegal conduct reasonable and accountable in a larger context. The fact that Lady White has to go to these extraordinary means in order to secure her marriage has demonstrated exactly her sincerity and urgency for human love. Relatively speaking, compared with her images in most previous versions, Lady White appears much more benign and her previous monstrosity has been much more toned down. “Unlike the other demon-girls,” remarks Patrick Hanan, “she is a sympathetic person, mischievous yet devoted to her husband” (*Short Story* 193), and hence he calls her “a benign demon” (*Vernacular* 49). It is surely these qualities that earn readers' sympathy for her and it is these characteristics that make her a somewhat positive figure in the story.

After the death of Emperor Shizong 明世宗 in 1566 as a result of his consumption of the minium, his son Zhu Zaihou 朱載堉 (1536-1572) was enthroned; but he, too, died at the age of merely 36 as a result of taking the red lead (Liu Dalin 710). Accompanying the court practice was the booming business of prostitution at the time, which reached its peak toward the end of the reign of Wanli 萬曆 (1573-1620) (Liu Dalin 768-770). “[T]he general trend,” remark Chun-shu Chang and Shelly Chang in their study of the crisis and transformation during the Ming-Qing period, “was toward a more relaxed attitude toward sex and . . . a sharp increase in prostitutes during the late Ming in the early Sseventeenth Century”(275). Indeed, according to some local records, Hangzhou became an area of hustle and bustle ever since the Song period, where “loiterers and deceptions abounded” and there were even “some so-called places for beauty where courtesans, players and concubines tried to attract youngsters”(Tianyige 984-85). “The people in Hangzhou,” according to the same records, “were fond of luxury and extravagance so that there were no more than two or three honest men out of ten; and women were lazy at their own work but were greedy for food” (Tianyige 985). With this situation, moral decline was almost inevitable. One reads the following in another record:

The most deceptive among the local customs in the provincial capital [i.e. Hangzhou] were the practices of the monks and nuns. Among the North and South Mountains there established thousands of private monasteries which attracted stupid men and women in every way to worship and to take the monks and nuns there as their priests. Among the people there, there were only one out of a hundred or even a thousand who really intended to learn about the scriptures. The rest of them were there either to steal or to commit adultery. (*Hangzhou fuzhi* 1365-66)

The above information was recorded during the reign of Wanli 萬曆 (1573-1620). One should perhaps read the record with a grain

of salt because compilers of local gazetteers were usually conservative literati who tended to exaggerate the situation in order to call for public attention, especially on moral issues. Despite this reservation, there should be little doubt that people's attitude towards sex became more open along with the fact that morality was on the decline. This would certainly cause concern from Confucian scholars. "The deterioration in manners and in the political climate, the advance of corruption, and the irresponsibility of the imperial authority were in fact keenly felt by some of the literati" (Gernet 440). As one traveling frequently between Suzhou, Hangzhou, and Zhenjiang for some time and collecting materials for his tales there, Feng Menglong must have been aware of these social and moral upheavals.

This mixture of both strict enforcement of women's chastity and the lessening of moral conduct in general was perhaps also the natural growth of the intellectual thought at the time. During the late Ming period, amidst a series of social, political and economic transformations, Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 (1139-1193) and Wang Yangming's 王陽明 (1472-1529) philosophy, with its emphasis on 致良知 (*zhi liangzhi*, to gain innate knowledge), replaced the hitherto orthodox philosophical thought represented by Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032-1085), Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1107) and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) who proposed to "understand the principles of Heaven and to suppress the desires of man (*ming tianli, mie renyu* 明天理,滅人欲)" (207). Instead of seeking knowledge outside of oneself and hence to abide by the rigid moral principles stipulated by the ancestors, the disciples of Wang Yangming, especially people of the Taizhou School 泰州派, fervently advocated gaining knowledge inward in oneself since our cognitive faculties are innate. Hence they affirmed the potential sagehood in everyone, especially in common people, and greatly valued one's spontaneous action because it is innate and natural. Consequently the philosophical reorientation taking place during the mid to the late Ming period moved to value the material aspect of human nature and to the affirmation of individual feelings and desires as fields of knowledge.

This intellectual trend for individuality led to the discussion of

and the emphasis on *qing* 情 by a number of scholars at the time.³¹ For our purposes, we can just cite two who are contemporaneous with Feng Menglong: Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 (1550-1616) and Li Zhi. The former is always regarded as the champion for the supremacy of *qing*, although he never had a clear definition for the term. Taking over the philosophy of his teacher Luo Rufang 羅汝芳 (1515-1588), who replaced 心 (*xin*, mind) with 身 (*shen*, life, body) as the ultimate force of the universe,³² Tang Xianzu proclaimed *qing* as the ultimate generating power in human world in his preface to his celebrated play *The Peony Pavilion* (*Mudan Ting* 牡丹亭):

Love is of source unknown, yet it grows ever deeper. The living may die of it, by its power the dead live again. Love is not love at its fullest if one who lives is unwilling to die for it, or if it cannot restore to life one who has so died. (ix)

Here in the context of the play, Cyril Birch has translated Tang Xianzu's *qing* as "love," but it can refer to feelings and emotions in other contexts.³³ In whatever the case, it is obvious that what Tang Xianzu advocated was a strong passion such as love which to him could work wonders. This is in total opposition to Zhu Xi's proposal of mediating or suppressing human feelings and desires (*renyu* 人欲) by the principles of heaven (*tianli* 天理) and it called for the liberation of one's natural feelings.

Li Zhi went even further in terms of individual feelings. Not only did he advocate spontaneity so as to defend the legitimacy of natural human desires and feelings by proposing the theory of a childlike mind (*tongxin shuo* 童心說) and claiming that nothing is as pure as a child's mind, but he also held out the view that the relationship between husband and wife is the basis for all other relationships:

Husband and wife comprise the beginnings of human life. Only after there has been a husband-wife relation can there be a father-son relation; only after the father-son relation, can there be an elder-younger relation between

brothers; and only after the elder-younger brothers' relation has been established, can there be a distinction between superior and subordinate. Should the relationship between husband and wife be proper, then all the relations among the myriads of living things and nonliving things will also be proper. Thus it is evident that husband-wife is actually the beginning of all things. (qtd. in Mowry 6)

What is important about the above view is not really the proper relationship between man and woman as the passage seemed to comment upon or as modern people may come to view it, but rather that it affirmed the natural and spontaneous feelings or emotions *between* man and woman, which may have influenced Tang Xianzu's proposal on *qing* as a motivating force discussed above and which also actually opened the door for all kinds of intellectual speculations. That is part of the reason why his theory was constantly regarded as a heresy, for which he was persecuted to death.

The fertile intellectual ground for individual desires and voices and the emphasis on *qing* during the late Ming must have influenced the thought and literary activities of scholars such as Feng Menglong, who was just such a believer in individual values in this ferment. In the preface to his *Qingshi leilue* 情史類略 (A Classified Brief History of Love), Feng emphasizes the importance of *qing* 情³⁴ in this way: "Had heaven and earth had no *ch'ing*[*qing*] they would not have produced the myriad of things. Had the myriad of things had no *ch'ing* they would not have eternally given each other life. Life gives birth to life, and never is extinguished because *ch'ing* itself never becomes extinguished. The four great elements all are but illusion; only *ch'ing* is neither empty nor false" (*Qingshi leilue* 1).³⁵ Sharing with many intellectuals who felt dissatisfied with a strictly controlled Confucian ethical codes concerning individual behavior, Feng Menglong enthusiastically called for a free vent for individual feelings, because those personal emotions reflected best what people truly thought and felt. His purpose in compiling collections of short stories was, in his own words, precisely to "expose the falsehood of the Confucian ethical

codes by expressing the genuine feelings of men and women" (qtd. in Lu Shulun 45).

From the above analysis, one can see that the moral ambivalence in Feng Menglong's adaptation of the white serpent legend may be viewed partly as a product of the larger social and cultural milieu which was characterized by an intense ideological conflict between the upholding of the traditional Confucian ethics and thought on the one hand and a strong call for the liberation of instinctual emotions and of private and genuine feelings on the other. The dual social and cultural emphasis on individual emotions and on moral order and societal control discussed above explains the ensuing dual social attitude towards women. While affirming the traditional Confucian view towards women that was mixed with misogynic as well as patronizing elements, the social and intellectual trend also revealed its understanding of and its sympathy towards women for all their physical and intellectual hardships. In other words, while women were warned against for their sexual appeal, the social attitude also found it natural and irresistible once the individual feelings were to be stressed and respected as was so much of the fervor during the late Ming period. This can explain the dual characteristics of passion and monstrosity in the creation of the figure of Lady White in Feng Menglong's adaptation as mentioned earlier. Women were needed for one's natural impulse or physical desire and they were also feared for their potential influence or power. This is a dilemma. The wavering of the social attitude and the tightrope it tried to walk became an issue at stake here.

Apparently this understanding of women as reflected in the term *qing* was only partial, near-sighted, and very often it was perhaps a mere strategy. For the much acclaimed trend for individual feelings (*qing* 情) during the time is itself subject to scrutiny: whose *qing* really was it that was voiced for by those male literati and scholars? Was this *qing* a universal element applicable to anyone, male or female? Moreover, given the social and cultural situation of the late Ming, whose *qing* was it that got really promoted in reality? Although no one has made this distinction and perhaps many had and would

still regard *qing* as a universal characterization devoid of any gender coloring, I for one tend to think that it was implicitly the male *qing* that was called for while the female *qing* was largely forgotten or neglected at the time. So far as the extant records are available for the actual practice of those late Ming scholars such as Li Zhi, Yang Shen 楊慎 (1483-1559), Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568-1610), or even Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610-1695), for all their efforts at advocating the necessity of individual desires and expressions, they all stopped short at voicing support for the liberalization of women who were still intellectually yoked in the irrational cult of female marital fidelity.³⁶ What about Feng Menglong who, as we have already seen, was much in sympathy with the female? In the volume on *Guijie* 閨誡 (Admonition for the Boudoir) in his *Gujin tangai* 古今譚概 (Anecdotes Past and Present), Feng has the following comment:

Ziyou [*i.e.*, Feng Menglong] says there are no female moral qualities worse than lasciviousness and jealousy, but jealousy is dependent on lasciviousness, just as in the case of those officials, if they are not avaricious, they will surely be not jealous of other people's talent or virtue. Then how is it that most husbands fear their wives since this is so from the emperor down to the common people? It is said that a husband should be decisive [in dealing with his wife], otherwise he will only be pestered with her. (*Gujin tangai* vol. 19)

Apparently, the main purpose for Feng Menglong to collect those anecdotes about various henpecked husbands in history was not just to entertain people, but rather to teach them (especially husbands) an effective way in dealing with women by citing some negative examples. The misogynist implication in this comment forms a contrast to his sympathetic attitude toward women expressed elsewhere. Feng Menglong's ambivalent view on women is also well borne out in his *Qingshi teilue*, where he has registered quite extensively stories about women's love, their feelings (*qing*) or their sorrows in various con-

texts. In this book which is mainly to extol the free, individual feelings and desires as his preface sets out to show, he ironically devotes the first volume to a set of 48 stories about the chastity of women under the general title of *qingzhen* 情貞 (Chastity), where he comments that the best thing for a widow is to commit suicide (Mowry 39). That's why after translating a selection of Feng Menglong's *Qingshi leilue*, Hua-yuan Li Mowry also couldn't help expressing her puzzlement at the conflicting ideas therein: "the compiler on the one hand extols individualism and spontaneity, while on the other hand he pleads with his reader to be mindful of traditional moral concepts and the teachings of the ancient sages; he encourages the young to challenge authority or to disregard tradition, yet he also urges parents to keep a close watch on their children; he sometimes condones adultery, although he insists that the best thing for a widow is suicide" (Mowry 29).

Viewed in this vein, it became quite ironic and paradoxically natural that when the slogan for *qing* became a battle cry for the male writers with its generalization and its applications, it became even more suppressive for the female as a whole. For with the male finding more avenues for their individual emotions, it was only the females who mostly fell victim to this mental liberalization on the part of the males. That was perhaps why the rapid increase in female chastity and female sacrifice as mentioned earlier came with the increasingly louder cry for a free vent to one's individual *qing* by those literati during the late Ming;³⁷ and that was also why the misogynic attitude was found even in a work that may have been purported to show sympathy towards women such as Feng Menglong's *Tale of the White Serpent*. Even a radically iconoclastic scholar such as Li Zhi, as we mentioned above, was "never as yet audacious enough to cast doubt upon the irrational cult of female marital fidelity"(T'ien 94). While one need to be prudent not to label any individual writers as male chauvinistic, for they might have genuinely voted for individual emotion, be it male or female, what they did, however, or what they have implicitly created and carried out as a whole, was nevertheless a drive mainly for the benefits of the male. Feng Menglong's adaptation of

the tale here serves as a good case in point.

Aside from the social and cultural factors that may have contributed to the changes in the adaptation, we can also take a look at the personal life of Feng Menglong, the adapter, which can perhaps throw more light on the moral ambiguity in his adaptation. As one of the writers bent on ideological reform at the time, Feng Menglong was not only eager for any individual desire and emotion, but he was particularly sympathetic with women and their plight in society. He made friends with a number of courtesans from whom he came to know their worries and miseries and for some of whom he even offered to write their biographies.³⁸ In one of his comments included in his *Qingshi Leilüe*, Feng says:

Amidst a career that promises hardship and difficulties, men of ability cannot tell what lies ahead but women can; when poverty-stricken and in emergency, men of wealth and power do not make an effort but women do. When it comes to the question of honor and reputation, those who used to claim themselves as saints or sages will not care to keep them when their own interests are at stake, but women will. (qtd. in Lu Shulun 40)

Obviously, Feng Menglong here regarded women not only as men's equal, but perhaps even as superior to men in many aspects. As a result, he was emphatically opposed to the traditional marriage system, looking upon the Confucian moral precepts as a great hindrance to genuine human feelings (Lu Shulun 41).

Is it then a contradiction for Feng Menglong, an avowed spokesman for individual feelings and for the sufferings of women in society, to write an ultimately misogynic piece indicating, consciously or unconsciously, avoidance of female sexuality? The answer, I think, is a complicated one and it has to be sought from all the analysis given above. There is no question that Feng Menglong came to realize the inequality of women in traditional Chinese culture and he was fully aware of both mental and physical hardships borne by

women at his time. He would not of course *consciously* write against women. On the other hand, in adapting previous stories for present use, Feng Menglong had to take over a bulk of past legacy which contained not only the plot of the tale, but more importantly the ideology that went with it. Feng Menglong could certainly make some changes as discussed in section 1. Yet, so far as the *Tale of the White Serpent* is concerned, what we see is that Feng followed the predominant versions of the tale (i.e., all the versions except Zheng Guoxuan's *Tale of the White Serpent*) and that he further detailed the seductive power, the deceptive strategy and the threatening tone of Lady White in his adaptation. In this way, Feng Menglong's story continued this misogynic trend in Chinese literature.

Secondly, and this is related to the above argument. Feng Menglong's iconoclastic attitude towards the Confucian moral stipulation as illustrated previously may not mean that he totally forsook the orthodox rule and the orthodox position of the Ming emperor. This is perhaps best reflected in his "untold grief and indignation" over the fall of the Ming empire by the peasant rebellion led by Li Zicheng 李自成 (1606-1645) and in his unswerving efforts in reviving the reign of the Southern Ming dynasty (Lu Shulun 27-28). After all, Feng was one of the literati class who merely had their ambitions thwarted. His political ideal was certainly not a radical social revolution but the establishment of a benevolent government with its power based on justice and genuine emotions of the officials. As he explained, "a benevolent rule is based on true human feelings. Without these feelings, an emperor cannot be an emperor" (qtd. in Lu Shulun 35). That is perhaps also the reason why at the same time when he followed the basic plot of his predecessors, thus unintentionally subscribing to their ideology of regarding women as a source of evil, he could not help adulterating it with some redactions of his own that have rendered Lady White more humane and more worthy of our sympathy. In a society too long dominated by Confucian ideological codes, an effective reaction is often just to push these codes to the other extreme to attempt an overcorrection (*jiaowang guozheng* 矯枉過正). Feng Menglong's literary creation may also be viewed as part of this social

temperament and it was certainly a reaction against the age-old orthodox ideas. However, this is not to throw out the baby together with the bath water. Some essential elements in Confucianism such as *zhongxiao jieyi* 忠孝節義 (loyalty, filial piety, moral integrity and sense of justice) were still respected and observed by Feng Menglong. As a county magistrate of Shouning 壽寧 in Fujian Province, for instance, he still advocated those Confucian elements by commending the filial sons and virtuous wives on their conduct in the official county records that he himself composed (*Shouning daizhi* 104-7). In proposing *qing* 情, therefore, Feng Menglong was certainly not advocating *se* 色, at least not intentionally, although the demarcation between the two was not always clear-cut. The former denotes some genuine feelings and emotions that are yet to be distinguished from purely carnal infatuation which is commonly regarded as *se* and which has always been condemned by the Chinese literati in history. This being the case, the moral principle of keeping wary of some possible danger in the female sex which was deep-rooted in traditional Chinese culture may still be acceptable to him, especially in a time when there was a decline in morality as shown earlier.

C. T. Hsia in analyzing the short stories of the Ming period remarks that those storytellers often adopted an ambiguous position between instinctual feeling and societal moral codes, which stems from "the storyteller's dual allegiance to self and society" (*Classic* 307). The moral ambivalence as is found in Feng Menglong's adaptation of the *Tale of the White Serpent*, I think, can eventually be traced to the conflicting attitudes towards women largely held in the late Ming society and culture. Feng Menglong's attempt to emphasize the legitimacy of and the urgency for individual emotion as shown by Lady White is in conflict with his ultimate acquiescence in the orthodox ideology that constantly bewares the potential power possessed by women, which is exemplified in the basic plot line he inherited from his predecessors. This moral ambivalence, by way of a final example, can find a structural equivalent in Feng's text as a further illustration of its *raison d'être*.

Framing is an important device for short stories. In the context

of Chinese vernacular storytelling, the framework serves the purposes of attracting the audience's attention, explaining the gist of the story and reviewing its messages at the end.³⁹ In Feng Menglong's story, its frame can be divided into two parts, the beginning and the ending, which form quite a contrast. To see alterations on Feng's part regarding his frame, I would like to compare it with a similar framing passage in the version in *Xihu santa ji*:

Today I am going to tell of a lad who, while roaming about the West Lake during the Qingming Festival, caused something to happen, which people today still talk about when they visit those ancient sites and relics on the West Lake. (qtd. in Fu Xihua 297)⁴⁰

Today I am going to tell of a handsome lad who, while roaming about the West Lake, met two women, an event that led to a great scandal in a number of counties and towns and created a furor in the pleasant quarters. A man of talent was induced to take up his brush and make the event into a romantic story. (qtd. in Hanan, *Vernacular* 48) (Feng Menglong's version)

Apparently these two passages are almost identical in their basic contents except for some stylistic features. While the story in *Xihu santa ji* merely states some fact about a forthcoming event without much emotive elements, Feng Menglong has added some romantic coloring to his passage by depicting the lad as "handsome," the event "a great scandal" that created "a furor in the pleasure quarters." What is more, a "man of talent [*cairen* 才人]" even bother to set it down to make the event into a "romantic story." What interests me here is not merely the number of details that Feng has added to the original tale, but rather the coloring and the emotive elements that have come with Feng's augmentation. Compared with the version in *Xihu santa ji*, Feng's version appears especially emotional and those words utilized

such as *junqiao* 俊俏 (handsome), *huajie liuxiang* 花街柳巷 (pleasure quarters) and *fengliu* 風流 (romantic) were all positive and complimentary in that context, indicative of the narrative appreciation of such "romance." Such a tone of appreciation of passion and of romance set up in the beginning is surprisingly reversed at the end with stern Buddhist teaching of abstinence from female sexuality illustrated earlier. This tonal reversion in framing could convey two indications. Given the common story-telling convention at the time, it could of course mean that prior to the story proper, the narrator need to demand the audience's attention and the little romantic and sensational prologue may prove to be an effective strategy in getting the audience's attention. Towards the end of the story, however, a sort of moral message needs to be passed around in order to show storyteller's adherence to orthodox moral stand. This is true even for many an erotic story, towards the end of which there usually appears some rather serious moral explication. As Patrick Hanan points out with regard to *Carnal Prayer Mat*, however, such moral explications "cannot be taken at their face value as the dire warnings they profess to be" since the story was told in such a gusto that "we are surely meant to enjoy it" (*Carnal* viii). Hence there is "an inevitable tension" in the story. On the other hand, this reversion in Feng's case may also suggest the narrative's, not necessarily the storyteller's, vacillation between its adherence to individual emotion, *qing* 情, and its allegiance to social moral order, *li* 禮, a conflict in ideology during the composition of the tale. As he started the tale, Feng might still be quite committed to the depiction of individual experience and of the event as a "romance" much to be appreciated; when he approached the end, however, he may have realized the necessity and the importance of putting in some moral edification in line with the orthodox cultural tradition, which may still be too important to be done away with entirely. Whatever explanations, the framing itself betrays a sort of internal tension in the tone of the story and this helps accentuate the curious admixture of both misogyny and sympathy for women in Feng Menglong's adaptation.

NOTES

¹ See Rogers x; Yenna Wu 35.

² See Pan 25-27.

³ See Pan 67-68.

⁴ See Ting, esp. 145 & 188-91.

⁵ According to some local records, Feng Menglong was brought up near Suzhou 蘇州, appointed a petty official in Zhenjiang 鎮江, and traveled frequently to Hangzhou 杭州. See Wang Xiang 王驥 181.

⁶ See Pan 25-26.

⁷ In volume 21 of this book there is an entry titled "Sun Zhixian qi 孫知縣妻 (The Wife of Prefect Sun), which records a tale about a white serpent. See Hong 361.

⁸ See Zhao 1a & 2. Also see Pan 28-29.

⁹ See Tian Rucheng 田汝成 481; or Xiong Longfeng 熊龍峰 63-71.

¹⁰ See Fu Xihua 傅惜華 26-27.

¹¹ See Wang Xiang 178.

¹² See Jiang Ruizao 蔣瑞藻 432.

¹³ See Tian Rucheng 田汝成, 34.

¹⁴ See Hanan, *The Chinese Short Story: Studies in Dating, Authorship, and Composition* 126 & 241.

¹⁵ Drama versions of the tale in general originated after Feng Menglong's adaptation. There are two plays, however, that predate Feng's story. One is a *zaju* titled *Xihu santaji* 西湖三塔記 by Zhu Jing 鄭經 during the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368); and the other is *Leifengta chuanqi* 雷峰塔傳奇 by Chen Liulong 陳六龍 during the reign of Wanli 萬曆(1573-1620) in the Ming dynasty, neither of which is, however, extant. See Pan Jiangdong 74-75.

¹⁶ See, for example, Pan Jiangdong 26-27 and Fu Xihua 300, 303.

¹⁷ I have made some slight textual changes, wherever I deem appropriate.

¹⁸ For a detailed discussion on interpretations of the tale in terms

of religious conflict, see Pan Jiangdong 252-55.

¹⁹ See Daniel L. Overmyer 43.

²⁰ See Fu Qinjia 傅勤家 203-06.

²¹ For the contention between Buddhism and Taoism during the Ming, see also Wu Han 吳晗 24-26. According to Wu, Buddhism gained favor during the reign of Zhengde 正德 (1506-1522), Taoism obtained its complete control during the reign of Jiajing 嘉靖 (1522-1567) and Buddhism once again recovered its force in the reign of Wanli 萬曆 (1573-1620).

²² For various interpretations of the tale, see, for example, Pan Jiangdong 252-255; Yen Yuan-Shu, 227-243; and Chen Bingliang 99-128.

²³ Namely, “the threefold obediences to father, husband, and son and the four areas the woman had to pay special attention to: virtue, speech, appearance, and needlework.” (qtd. in Chung 82)

²⁴ According to Lu Xun, this is a book composed during the Han dynasty. See his *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilue* 中國小說史略 46.

²⁵ Tian Han 田漢, for instance, says in his “Zenyang xie *Jimboji* 怎樣寫金記” that “since this tale evolves originally from some Buddhist legend, those young men and young women dared not revolt, when the feudal forces were still powerful in China; as a result, the revolt took a non-realistic form.” (438)

²⁶ See Yenna Wu 51.

²⁷ According to Andrew Plaks, “much of the cultural activity of [the sixteenth-century] . . . reveals a struggle to define the relationship of the latter-day artist to his ancient heritage. . . . [The] self-conscious artists of the period [labored] under a strong pressure to restate their own position vis-à-vis a cultural heritage that had already become too massive for any individual to wholly master.” (50-51)

²⁸ See Bloch 21; Rogers 270 & 275.

²⁹ See Chen Dongyuan 陳東原 173-220.

³⁰ See Carlitz 139-141; Elvin 134.

³¹ For a more detailed discussion of various scholars on the issue of *qing*, see Mowry, esp. 5-7, 15-22.

³² See Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 vol. 34.

³³ In discussing Tang Xianzu's plays, for instance, C. T. Hsia uses the term *qing* in the sense of love and feelings. See his "Time and the Human Condition in the Plays of T'ang Hsien-tsu," *Self and Society in Ming Thought*, 249-290.

³⁴ It is difficult to find an adequate English equivalent to the word *qing* 情 as meant by Feng Menglong. The word could refer to, *inter alia*, feeling, emotion, love and passion. Those feelings or passions, however, should be genuine, natural, without any artificiality or falsehood.

³⁵ The English translation comes from Mowry 13.

³⁶ See T'ien 94-97.

³⁷ As an example, according to T'ien Ju-k'ang's survey of the situation in the three regions of Huizhou 徽州 in Anhui 安徽, Quanzhou 泉州 and Zhangzhou 漳州 in Fujian 福建 during the late Ming, "there is a distinctly prominent, positive correlation between the proportionate increase in the number of female suicides and the proportionate increase in the number of scholars obtaining the title of chü-jen. The more chü-jen, the more suicides, and vice versa." See T'ien 87.

³⁸ See Lu Shulun 13-19.

³⁹ See Sun Kaidi 孫楷弟 9.

⁴⁰ English translation is mine.

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