



Prano Dovydaičio premijai
For the Award of Pranas Dovydaitis
<https://doi.org/10.24101/logos.2023.79>

Gauta 2023 10 14

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GYVATĖS PASAKOJIMAI: EGLĖS IR BAI SUZHEN TARPKULTŪRINĖ HARMONIJA

Serpent Narratives: Eglė and Bai Suzhen
in Cross-Cultural Harmony

SUMMARY

This paper delves into the captivating parallels and unique cultural narratives surrounding the human-snake family myth in Lithuanian and Chinese folklore. Concentrating on the tales of *Eglė the Queen of Serpents*, and *The Legend of the White Snake*, the study employs a comparative folkloristic approach to scrutinize the plot characteristics, narrative structures, and cultural symbolism embedded within these stories. By discerning common themes and notable differences, the research unveils shared motifs and divergent cultural interpretations between the Lithuanian and Chinese accounts of human-serpent unions.

SANTRAUKA

Šiame straipsnyje nagrinėjamos įspūdingos paralelės ir išskirtiniai tiek lietuvių, tiek kinų kultūriniai pasakojimai, susiję su žmogaus-gyvatės šeimos mitu. Tyrinėjami pasakojimai *Eglė žalčių karalienė* ir *Baltosios gyvatės legenda*, taikant lyginamąjį folkloristinį metodą. Analizuojami šių pasakojimų siužetiniai elementai, naratyvų struktūros bei kultūriniai simboliai. Atskleidžiami lietuvių ir kinų pasakojimų apie žmogaus-gyvatės sąjungas motyvai ir esminiai kultūriniai skirtumai.

The tale of “*Eglė, the Queen of the Serpents*” (alternatively known as “*Eglė, the Grass Snake Queen*,” in Lithuanian, “*Eglė žalčių karalienė*”) is a story familiar to any traveler or cultural researcher who has ventured into Lithuania. Even

today, the saga of the Queen of Grass Snakes stands out as one of the most captivating cultural symbols within Lithuanian heritage. Surprisingly, despite the vast geographical separation between Lithuanian and Chinese cultures, the

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: Eglė žalčių karalienė, Baltosios gyvatės legenda, folklorinė komparatyvistinė analizė, mitologija.

KEY WORDS: Eglė the Queen of Serpents, The Legend of the White Snake, folklore comparative analysis, mythology.

story resonates with any Chinese individual who encounters it, creating an inexplicable sense of kinship. Whether through characterizations or plot development, the tale of the Queen of Grass Snakes induces a feeling of *déjà vu* among the Chinese, inevitably drawing parallels to “*The Legend of the White Snake*” (白蛇传) in Chinese culture (also known as “*Xu Xian and Lady White*”).

Parallel to “*Eglė, the Queen of the Serpents*”, “*The Legend of the White Snake*” similarly narrates a tale of love between a human and a snake, the formation of a family, and the continuation of their lineage, culminating in rejection by society. In contrast to the diverse and variable depictions of snake deities across various human cultures, there exist few

comprehensive and impactful narratives depicting snake-human families. “*Eglė*” and “*The Legend of the White Snake*” can be regarded as representative works from the East and West, respectively.

This article aims to explore the cultural symbolism and meanings encapsulated in the concept of the “human-snake family” within Chinese and Lithuanian cultures. Employing a folkloristic framework to analyze and compare the plot characteristics and narrative structures of “*Eglė the Grass Snake Queen*,” and “*The Legend of the White Snake*,” the study seeks to unveil both shared meanings and distinctive evolutions of the snake image as a cultural symbol in the context of cross-cultural exchanges.

I. THE STORY UNFOLDING AND EVOLUTION OF “THE LEGEND OF THE WHITE SNAKE”

The tale of Eglė and Žilvinas is well-known among Lithuanian readers. In this context, I aim to provide a brief introduction to the plot of the Chinese legend “*The Legend of the White Snake*” for Lithuanian readers.

Bai Suzhen 白素贞 was a white snake spirit who, through a thousand years of practice and cultivation, had attained great power. Half a millennium prior, a young boy had rescued her. After mastering potent magic over the ensuing 500 years, she chose to descend to the human realm to express her gratitude to the boy who had saved her. Along the way, she encountered another spirit, Xiaoqing 小青, in the form of a green snake. The two spirits transformed into beautiful women, became sworn sisters, and embarked on their journey together. Eventually, they located the

boy, Xu Xian 许仙, in Hangzhou, who had undergone several reincarnations.

Using her magical abilities, Bai Suzhen met and married Xu Xian, establishing a medicinal herb business in Hangzhou. However, their peaceful life was disrupted when Fahai 法海, a monk from Jinshan Temple 金山寺, encountered Xu Xian during a business trip to Zhenjiang city. Detecting a demonic aura on Xu Xian’s face, Fahai deceived him by persuading him to administer realgar wine¹ to Bai Suzhen during the Dragon Boat Festival. Consuming the poisoned wine, Bai Suzhen had no option but to reveal her true form as a white snake, leading to Xu Xian’s death out of fright.

In an attempt to resurrect Xu Xian, Bai Suzhen ventured to the palace of the Jade Emperor 玉帝, stole the elixir of life, and

successfully revived him. The resurrected Xu Xian, enlightened by the events and realizing Fahai's deception, harbored no fear of Bai Suzhen's serpent form, reaffirming his belief in their enduring love. Unwilling to accept this, Fahai deceived Xu Xian once more, bringing him to Jinshan Temple and confining him there. Fahai hoped that Xu Xian would come to understand the true essence of Buddhism and resist the allure of snakes and women.

Bai Suzhen, accompanied by Xiaoqing, journeyed to Jinshan Temple in an effort to rescue Xu Xian. Employing their magical abilities, they engaged in a confrontation with Fahai. In a bid to compel Fahai to release Xu Xian, Bai Suzhen summoned a flood with the intention of submerging Jinshan Temple. Despite her efforts, Fahai's magic proved superior; as the floodwaters surged, Jinshan Temple rose even higher. Weakened significantly by her pregnancy, Bai Suzhen ultimately fell short of defeating Fahai. The flood, a consequence of their intense battle, resulted in the tragic drowning of numerous innocent people in Zhenjiang city. Bai Suzhen, due to this violation of heavenly laws, faced imminent punishment.

During the conflict between Bai Suzhen and Fahai, Xu Xian clandestinely escaped from Jinshan Temple and eventually rejoined Bai Suzhen at the Broken Bridge near Hangzhou's West Lake. Following the birth of a son to Bai Suzhen and Xu Xian, Fahai, acting on behalf of the Jade Emperor, arrived to mete out punishment for her perceived transgressions. On this occasion, Bai Suzhen did not resist and was ensnared by Fahai in a Buddhist alms bowl. Subsequently, the bowl, containing Bai Suzhen, was sealed beneath the Leifeng Pagoda 雷峰塔 in Hangzhou 杭州.

Twenty years later, Bai Suzhen's son, Xu Shilin 许仕林, matured and excelled in

the imperial examination. He visited his confined mother at the Leifeng Pagoda, profoundly moving the Jade Emperor. Ultimately, the Jade Emperor decided to release Bai Suzhen, allowing the family to be joyously reunited.

In the legend of "Eglė", the grass snake king Žilvinas finds a contrasting counterpart in the female serpentine protagonist depicted in "The Legend of the White Snake". Unlike a "myth" embedded in the formal records of Chinese literature and cultural history, this tale exists as a widely disseminated "folklore" among the people. It holds a significant place among the Four Great Folktales of China, standing alongside stories like "Lady Meng Jiang" 孟姜女, "The Cowherd and the Weaver Girl" 牛郎织女, and "The Butterfly Lovers" 梁山伯与祝英台. The written manifestation of "The Legend of the White Snake" can be traced back to the Southern Song Dynasty 南宋 during the 11th to 13th centuries, or potentially earlier. Its narrative framework matured and took its current form during the Qing Dynasty². This legend emerges as a collective creation of Chinese folklore, reflecting the perspectives of Chinese folk society on romantic relationships between humans and serpents, coupled with a yearning for a happy resolution.

The origins of "The Legend of the White Snake" story showcase characteristics of multicultural integration. Some scholars propose that the narrative might represent a fusion of indigenous Chinese storytelling and Indian serpent mythology, although the evidence and clues supporting this assertion remain somewhat unclear. Nevertheless, essential elements

of the story, including giant snakes, white snakes, floods, human-serpent love, and the confrontation between monks and snakes, started to emerge during the prosperous Tang Dynasty³ along the Silk Road. This suggests profound historical roots within Chinese culture. The narrative is documented in the “Old Book of Tang – Volume 37”:

During the reign of Tianbao 天宝 (Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty), a colossal snake, over one *zhang* in height and one hundred *chi*⁴ long, manifested at the base of Mount Mang in Luoyang. A monk from India, undeterred by fear, observed the serpent and remarked, “It is attempting to flood the city of Luoyang.” Unfazed, the monk recited a Buddhist mantra to the serpent, and within a few days, the snake perished (Liu, 1975:1371).

Later, in the literati novel “*Story of White Snake*” 白蛇记 during the Middle Tang Dynasty, another tale surfaced involving the tragic consequence of a human’s demise due to a romantic involvement with snakes:

The son of Tang Dynasty official Li Xun, Li Huang by name, encountered an exceptionally beautiful woman dressed in white one day at the market to the east of Xi’an. He followed her home and spent three days reveling in her garden before returning to his own residence. His servant, who had waited for him outside, noticed an animal-like stench emanating from Li Huang but refrained from commenting out of respect for his master. The servant then escorted Li Huang home.

Upon reaching home, Li Huang felt extremely unwell, experiencing a heaviness in his head and a lightness in his feet. Collapsing onto his bed, he was unable to rise. When his wife came to care for

him, all he managed to utter was “I can’t get up,” before falling silent. When they uncovered his blanket, they discovered that his body had transformed into a puddle of water, leaving only his head intact. Shocked, everyone quickly summoned the servant to explain what had occurred, and the servant truthfully recounted the events.

Following the servant’s guidance, Li Huang’s family went to the white-clad woman’s garden, finding it long abandoned with only a large tree in the courtyard. Nearby neighbors mentioned that no one lived there, but occasionally, they observed a large white snake moving through the branches of the tree (Lu 陆 Ji 楫 1968: 1368).

By the time of the Song Dynasty⁵ folktale “*Tales of the Three Pagodas at West Lake*” 西湖三塔记, a connection had been established between Lady White Snake and Hangzhou’s West Lake. The essential plot of the Legend of the White Snake formally surfaced in the 28th volume of Feng Menglong’s “*Stories to Caution the World*” 警世通言, titled “*Lady White Forever Imprisoned in Leifeng Pagoda*” 白娘子永镇雷峰塔, during the late Ming Dynasty⁶. In these folktales, the image of the White Snake gradually shed its Tang Dynasty motif of being harmful and transformed into a positive figure known for gratitude and loyalty.

In 1771, Fang Chengpei 方成培 published the opera rendition titled “*The Legend of Leifeng Pagoda*” 雷峰塔传奇. Later, around 1910, novelist Jiang Yinxiang 江荫香, drawing on earlier works, revised and released “*The Complete Tale of the White Snake*” 白蛇全传. This revision solidified the plot and character relationships, establishing the foundation of “*The*

白蛇精記

BLANCHE ET BLEUE,

OU

LES DEUX COULEUVRES-FÉES;

ROMAN CHINOIS,

TRADUIT

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DE FRANCE.



PARIS.

LIBRAIRIE DE CHARLES GOSSELIN,

RUE SAINT-GERMAIN-DES-PRÉS, n° 9.

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Legend of the White Snake” 白蛇传 as recognized by Chinese audiences today.

The story of “*The Legend of the White Snake*” was translated and introduced to the Western world relatively early. In 1834, the French sinologist Stanislas Aignan Julien translated this Eastern tale into French, drawing from popular op-

eratic scripts of the time, and titled it “*Blanche et Bleue*” 白蛇精记. To this day, “*The Legend of the White Snake*” remains a central focus in the realms of folklore and cultural studies. Scholars maintain a profound interest in exploring the origins, evolution, and interpretations of the story within various cultural contexts.

II. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF EGLÉ AND BAI SUZHEN NARRATIVES WITHIN THE ATU INDEX FRAMEWORK

The Aarne–Thompson–Uther (ATU) classification model stands as a widely embraced typology system in folklore studies. It comprehensively spans nearly all themes, plots, and narrative types found in European and American myths and folktales, organized meticulously through its coding system. The ATU Index divides tales into three fundamental categories: Animal Tales (1–299), Magic Tales (300–749), and Realistic Tales (750–849). A distinctive aspect of the ATU system is its openness and cross-cultural applicability. Despite variations in form and detail, folktales from different regions and cultures can find categorization under the same ATU type, provided they share fundamental narrative structures and themes. This flexibility in classification aids in the nuanced exploration of common narrative patterns across diverse cultures, offering insights from the vantage points of comparative literature and folklore studies.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that the ATU Index is primarily designed for the European folktale tradition. While there are comparable types for non-European stories, these classifi-

cations may not always fully and accurately capture the regional characteristics and cultural nuances of the tales. Within the ATU Index, certain Chinese myths are incorporated, drawn from sources such as Chavannes’ “*Cinq cent contes*,” Werner’s “*Myths and Legends of China*” (which lacks explicit chapters about “*The Legend of the White Snake*” (Werner, 1915:260) and Ferguson’s “*Chinese Mythology*” (Ferguson, 1964: 13–199). Additionally, some tales are sourced from Scott’s “*Indo-Chinese Mythology*.” However, it’s important to recognize that all these works represent Western translators’ introductions, selections, and translations of Chinese mythology. Although Ferguson’s “*Chinese Mythology*” mentions parts of “*The Legend of the White Snake*” in “*Folk-Lore*” (ibid, p. 158–159), the intricate plot development, character relationships, and unique cultural elements, along with the philosophical implications of the legend, may present challenges for its seamless integration into a specific ATU category.

Nevertheless, within the ATU framework, a closer examination of the narrative structure of the “human-snake fam-

ATU Index	Motif	Eglè the Snake Queen	Legend of the White Snake
425	Search for lost Husband	Eglè reached the sea and called out to her husband, but unfortunately, only blood froth returned from the waves.	Bai Suzhen, the white snake, journeyed to Jinshan Temple in search of her husband, Xu Xian.
425A	Animal as a Bridegroom	Eglè (human) marries Žilvinas (animal)	Bai Suzhen (animal) marries Xu Xian (human)
433B	The Lover's Tasks	Eglè transforms herself and her children into trees, bearing the burden of her husband's death, which occurred through no fault of her own.	Bai Suzhen ascended to heaven to save Xu Xian's life, seeking reparation for a calamity that was not a consequence of any error on her part.

ily" and a comparison of the thematic elements between the story of "Eglè" and "The Legend of the White Snake" reveal numerous similarities and parallels.

Within the ATU indexing system, both "Eglè the Queen of Serpents", and "The Legend of the White Snake" can be classified under motif number 425, which pertains to "The Marriage of Human and Animal." A more in-depth analysis of the intricacies of these two stories unveils similarities in plots and character settings, indicative of a deeper cultural resonance.

In terms of emotional disposition, both the Lithuanian tale "Eglè the Queen of Serpents" and the Chinese "Legend of the White Snake" portray the snake as a positive figure with human traits, rather than as an embodiment of evil. This stands in stark contrast with the Judeo-Christian perspective where the snake tempts humans into committing the original sin. These stories commence with the snake's love for a human, encompassing a wide range of themes from

romance to family responsibilities. In the Lithuanian story, the grass snake king Žilvinas displays profound paternal love for his wife and children. Despite foreseeing future tragedy, he fulfills his wife's wish to return to the human world. Bai Suzhen, in gratitude, marries Xu Xian and, when he suffers misfortune, risks her life to steal the elixir of life from heaven to save him. In both tales, the snake is depicted as a being of deep emotion and loyalty, faithful in love.

In the legends of China and Lithuania, snakes are perceived as creatures closely associated with the element of water, and their demonstrated magic often revolves around controlling floods. In the legend of Eglè, the grass snake king Žilvinas employs threats of drought, flood, and famine, having been deceived three times in a row, to compel humans into submission and ultimately win Eglè's hand in marriage. In "The Legend of the White Snake", the classic scene "The Flood Over Jinshan Temple" depicts Bai Suzhen, enraged by the imprisonment

of her husband by the monk Fahai, flooding the city surrounding Jinshan Temple. The snake's predominant power lies in its control over water, and human apprehension of this power serves as the source of the snake's mysterious magic.

In both Eastern and Western societies, the union between humans and animals is regarded as taboo and unacceptable. Consequently, both Eglė and Bai Suzhen's marriages encounter opposition from prevailing human ethics, ultimately resulting in the tragic conclusions of both stories. Žilvinas, initially deceived by Eglė's family, is later lured out of the lagoon, and killed by her brothers, with Eglė's marital happiness deemed inconsequential in the face of family ethics. In *"The Legend of the White Snake"*, the monk Fahai, disregarding Bai Suzhen and Xu Xian's merits in medical practice and indifferent to Bai Suzhen's pregnancy, forcefully separates the couple. Bai Suzhen, in her anger, subsequently causes harm, leading to the drowning of innocent people. Despite this, all blame is placed on Bai Suzhen, who is imprisoned under Leifeng Pagoda, while the monk Fahai, representing human order, serves as the judge and executor of this outcome.

In these stories, the offspring of humans and snakes play pivotal roles, significantly influencing the development of the plot. In both the Chinese Legend of the White Snake and the Lithuanian Eglė's tale, the children's actions shape the narrative. In the "Queen of Serpents," the inquisitiveness of the eldest son, Ažuolas, prompts Eglė to lead her children back to the human world. Meanwhile, the youngest daughter, Drebulė,

out of fear, reveals the secret password for returning, leading to Žilvinas's tragic death. In *"The Legend of the White Snake"*, the appearance of Bai Suzhen's son, Xu Shilin, becomes a driving force in the plot's climax. Bai Suzhen's pregnancy renders her incapable of resisting Fahai, resulting in the failure of her attempt to flood Jinshan Temple. As an adult, Xu Shilin, upon becoming an imperial scholar, unravels the mystery of his origins. His filial visit to his mother has a profound impact, moving heaven and earth, and ultimately leading to the reunion of the family.

Interestingly, the spruce tree that Eglė transforms into and the Leifeng Pagoda where Bai Suzhen is imprisoned share a striking resemblance in appearance. Both feature a prominent triangular shape and towering presence, serving as monumental cultural symbols. This suggests that as the physical form perishes, a spiritual emblem achieves eternity, becoming a distinctive marker within their respective national cultures.

Upon further exploration of the similarities between the ancient cultures of China and Lithuania, one can discern significant differences in narrative structures between the traditional stories concerning "human-snake" kinship. These differences highlight distinct cultural thinking patterns of the two nations within the context of anthropological, folkloristic, and comparative cultural studies. Such differences provide a unique perspective for understanding the respective social structures and value systems.

The Lithuanian tale of Eglė preserves the pre-Christian Indo-European Baltic regional folk belief system. In its narra-

tive structure, magic and spells play a significant role in propelling the story forward. Eglė can only return to human society by completing three seemingly impossible tasks under the guidance of a witch and must use a specific spell to reunite with her husband, Žilvinas. These elements emphasize individual control over natural forces and the intimate connection between the individual and the natural world.

In stark contrast, the narrative framework of *"The Legend of the White Snake"* is rooted in a mythological system unique to China, combining Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist teachings. Within the story, the white snake is characterized by selfless gratitude (Confucian thought), a reunion through reincarnation (Buddhist philosophy), and the concepts of destiny and divine retribution (Taoist philosophy) that permeate the entire narrative. This blend of philosophical and religious elements endows the characters with moral complexity and depth.

A closer examination of the characterizations and resolutions in both stories further underscores the differences in the folk psychological cultures of the two nations. The ethical conflicts in the tale of Eglė are primarily internal to the family, with main conflicts arising from Eglė's relationships with her family members, especially her brothers and children. This

reflects the characteristics of early Lithuanian society, which was predominantly agrarian, with the family or clan as the principal social structure. In contrast, *"The Legend of the White Snake"* introduces an impartial "arbiter" figure; the confrontation between Bai Suzhen and moral judges like Fahai and the Emperor of Heaven reflects the tension between "emotion" and "reason," also highlighting the importance of the collective and authority in Chinese culture.

It is worth noting that although both stories have tragic endings, over time, and particularly through the widespread dissemination of *"The Legend of the White Snake"* in Chinese folk opera, the connotations of the story have evolved. Chinese audiences often struggle with purely tragic conclusions and tend to favor the romantic and idealistic elements within the story. Consequently, adaptors in the later Qing Dynasty added a happy reunion to the ending of *"The Legend of the White Snake"* to cater to Chinese audiences' psychological desire for harmonious families, highlighting the enduring pursuit of harmony and fulfillment in Chinese culture. This adaptation practice not only reflects changes in social values but also provides a path for the evolution of cultural expression, revealing the multiple meanings that stories carry in different cultural contexts.

III. EXPLORING INTRIGUING CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

The power of folk narratives stems from the storytelling traditions and collective will of the people, encapsulating an understanding of their own way of

life and the achievements of social practices in cultural transmission. Through the adoption of a comparative perspective that contrasts stable structural rules

with textual variants, one can unveil the underlying connections and differences in cultures and popular ideologies.

Tales of human-serpent romance are a recurrent theme in the folklore of the Nordic and Baltic regions, manifesting in various forms across different countries and languages. Galina Kabakova, in her article, notes that most variants involve a serpent-shaped husband, which could take the form of a snake, python, winged serpent, or even a dragon (Kabakova 2018: 60–61). In other iterations, this character is portrayed as the king of snakes or a spirit of water (Bliujienė 2011: 33, footnote nr. 82), residing in underwater palaces within lakes, rivers, or lagoons (Kabakova 2018: 61, 64). Folklorist Jūratė Šlekonytė has delved into the Indian origins of this story theme and explored a series of Russian variants, suggesting that a deep exploration with semiotic concepts to uncover the text's underlying meanings may trace the origins of the story back to the Orient (Šlekonytė 2015: 130).

“The East” serves as a distant and somewhat elusive backdrop, yet within the early Indo-European cultures of India, Persia, Russia, and Armenia, we encounter numerous examples of snake cultures. However, as we traverse the Tibetan Plateau and venture into the far East, specifically among the minority cultures of the Tai-Kadai language family in southern China⁷, we discover a wealth of tales depicting human-snake romance, closely aligned with the thematic essence of the Eglė story. In the myth of the Dong people, the tradition of “Deng Sui” 登隨 finds its origin in the offspring of humans and snakes:

In ancient times, a father and daughter resided in the mountains. During one of their journeys up the mountain to gather firewood, they encountered a large, flowered snake that persistently followed them, leaving them with no means of escape. Addressing the father, the flowered snake said, “Do not be afraid. If your daughter becomes my wife, your lives will improve day by day!” Ultimately, with no alternative, the daughter entered the cave and married the flowered snake, eventually giving birth to a boy and a girl (Chen 1982: 76–82).

In Dong legend, the offspring of humans and snakes, known as Deng Sui, hold reverence for the snake god. The Deng Sui lineage follows a matrilineal system, passed down from mother to daughter. The Dong people adhere to strict taboos against catching or consuming snakes, firmly believing that harm to snakes can bring epidemics to the entire village. During every Spring Festival, they commemorate their snake ancestor “Sa Tang” 萨堂 through elaborate snake dances and torchlight celebrations. Beyond the Dong, snake worship is also deeply ingrained among other rice-cultivating minority cultures in southern China, including the Miao 苗, Yao 瑶, Tujia 土家, Zhuang 壮, and Yi 彝. This stands in contrast to the transformation of snake imagery into dragons in the Yellow River basin of northern China; in the southern Yangtze River basin, snake myths more often preserve the serpent's original identity and biological characteristics.

Within the matrilineal inheritance of Deng Sui culture, a natural connection between the feminine serpent and women becomes evident. The human-serpent

family likely retains some memory from a matrilineal era of the tribe. Consequently, when these implicit themes converge into a complete story, they often embody a struggle for female empowerment against patriarchal norms, social structures, and ethical morality. A thorough examination of both “Eglė” and “*The Legend of the White Snake*” unveils expressions of women’s rights.

Examining the matrilineal inheritance characteristics within Deng Sui culture reveals a profound association between the snake as a feminine symbol and women. This connection is evident not only in the religious and mythological narratives across various human groups but may also represent a historical recollection of communities during periods of matrilineal social structures. As implicit themes of matrilineal narratives gradually coalesce into complete storytelling systems in subsequent generations, the narrative discourse often articulates the challenges, resistance, and subversion faced by women against patriarchal social norms, structures, and ethics. These expressions of female rights are distinctly present in both the Lithuanian myth of “Eglė” and the Chinese story “*The Legend of the White Snake*”.

Both Lithuania and the southern regions of China boast numerous lakes, giving rise to a rich tapestry of human-snake tales that have become cultural classics in their respective areas. The

story of Eglė, the Queen of the Serpent, akin to *The Legend of the White Snake*, has been transmitted through folklore over an extended period, spawning multiple variants before being crystallized in the form we recognize today. It wasn’t until 1837 that M. M. Jasavičius published the tale in the *Biruta* magazine, solidifying the story’s structure as familiar to us now. Interestingly, the French translation of *The Legend of the White Snake*, titled *Blanche et Bleue*, introduced the Eastern tale of the white snake to Europe in 1834, creating a captivating resonance as if guided by some mysterious design.

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Endnotes

- ¹ *Realgar* is an orange-red mineral, a form of arsenic sulfide. It has been historically used in traditional Chinese medicine and folklore practices, including the production of realgar wine. Realgar wine is believed to have properties that repel snakes and insects.
- ² The Qing Dynasty, also known as the Manchu Dynasty, ruled China from 1644 to 1912.
- ³ The Tang Dynasty in China lasted from 618 to 907 AD. It is considered a golden age in Chinese history, known for its economic prosperity, cultural flourishing, and advancements in various fields such as art, literature, and technology.
- ⁴ In modern terms, the Chinese unit of measurement “*zhang*” is equivalent to approximately 3.58 meters or 11.75 feet. “*Chi*” is equivalent to approximately 0.33 meters or 1.09 feet.
- ⁵ The Song Dynasty in China lasted from 960 to 1279 AD. It was divided into two main periods: The Northern Song (960–1127) and the Southern Song (1127–1279). The Song Dynasty is known for its cultural and technological advancements, including developments in arts, science, and governance.
- ⁶ The Ming Dynasty in China lasted from 1368 to 1644. It was founded by Zhu Yuanzhang, known as the Hongwu Emperor, after the overthrow of the Mongol-led Yuan Dynasty. The Ming Dynasty is characterized by its economic prosperity, cultural achievements, and the construction of the Great Wall of China. It came to an end with the rise of the Manchu-led Qing Dynasty in 1644.
- ⁷ The Dong-Tai language group includes the ethnic languages of Dong, Zhuang, Dai and other ethnic minorities in southern China, and is homologous with the Thai language.

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