

# Barbarians and Monstrosity: A Thematic Study of the Representation of Foreignness in Early Chinese Vernacular Stories

Isaac Yue <sup>1\*</sup>

## *Abstract*

The intention of this paper is to consider the influence of China's strained relationship with, and conception of, its foreign neighbours on the development of Chinese vernacular stories during the Song dynasty, and the way this social attitude is reflected in the genre's distinctive presentation of the trope of monstrosity. Besides demonstrating the benefits of a thematic study as an effective means to determine the chronologic origin of some of these works, by contextualizing their representation of monstrosity in a Neo-Confucian framework, this paper further draws attentions to the importance of these stories in terms of the dissemination of the idea of otherness, as well as their role in the development of Chinese cultural identity.

蠻夷與怪異：早期話本小說的外族主題研究

余文章

透過分析宋代話本對怪異（monstrosity）的展現和描寫，本文試圖探討當時中原人士對外族的看法，以及種族問題對話本故事形成的影響。本文之作，用意有二：其一是藉著主題分析來尋找故事產生年代的佐證；其二是從理學角度理解故事對怪異現象的處理手法，以確立這類作品在中國文化身份的發展中所扮演的角色，以及對「他者」（otherness）思想傳播的影響。

---

\* Isaac Yue is assistant Professor in the School of Chinese at the University of Hong Kong. Besides serving on the editorial board of several international journals, including *The Journal of Chinese Literary Studies* (文學論衡) and *The Journal of Oriental Studies* (東方文化), he has published extensively in both Chinese and English, with a focus on topics concerning literature, culture and identity in both an eastern and western context. He is currently completing a book on the literary representation of monstrosity from the Tang to the Ming period, and is concurrently editing a collection of essays on Chinese food literature.

Since the mid-twentieth century, the dating of the early vernacular Chinese stories, or *huaben xiaoshuo* 話本小說, has been a subject that has evoked much controversies. Despite efforts by scholars such as Yue Hangjun 樂衡軍 to prove the pre-Yuan origin of some of the extant stories, critics like W. L. Idema remain unconvinced. What is less disputable, however, is the belief that the genre first gained widespread popularity and became assessable to the general public during the Song dynasty. Patrick Hanan, for example, in spite of his conviction that “the earliest possible date for the first stories *as a group* is circa 1250”,<sup>1</sup> acknowledges the possibility of an earlier “origin” of some of these stories when he writes:

[The] sources were themselves derived from authentic Sung [Song] works of history or biography. Some of the original expressions showed through, enough to produce the impression that the vernacular stories were themselves of Sung origin.<sup>2</sup>

Given the unmistakable presence of Song dynasty names and expressions in some of the extant vernacular stories, it seems logical to consider them to have developed in the Song dynasty and to have been modified in the later dynasties. The difficulty, however, is in determining which extant stories fall into this category. The purpose of this study is to make the argument that a thematic examination of the stories (aside from tracing the expressions and names used) can be a fruitful method in identifying elements to substantiate the proposition that some of these stories did originate in the Song dynasty.

Of all the multifarious themes that can be identified, monstrosity<sup>3</sup> is

---

<sup>1</sup> Hanan Patrick, *The Chinese Short Story: Studies in Dating, Authorship, and Composition*, Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1973, p. 152.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> The term “monstrosity” will be used throughout this paper to refer to anything of supernatural origin, from ghosts to animal spirits, and in general can be interpreted as a reference to fictional characters that are non-human. Although the three main stories which are the focus of this study have been categorized by Hanan under the label of “demonic,” the term “monstrosity” is chosen in order to avoid future confusion. For example, because the aim of Hanan’s categorization is to allow better comprehension of the genre by locating “formulas” within the structure of these stories, the story “The Jade Bodhisattva” (*Nian yu guanyin* 碾玉觀音) does not qualify as a “demonic” story for the fact that the “demonic” trope of the story

chosen because, as will be shown, it is a trope that is traditionally considered to represent foreignness, and one of the most unique social imprints of the Song dynasty is its distinct anti-foreign stance. Three stories in particular constitute the focus of this study: “The White Falcon of Master Cui Invites Demons” (*Cui yannei baiyao zhaoyao* 崔衙內白鷓招妖),<sup>4</sup> “The Three Monsters of Luoyang” (*Luoyang sanguai ji* 洛陽三怪記),<sup>5</sup> and “The Three Pagodas on the West Lake” (*Xihu santa ji* 西湖三塔記).<sup>6</sup> My argument will be made in three parts. First, historical information will be provided in order to demonstrate how the severe and constant threat from the north generated among the Song populace a negative impression of the foreign, and evidence will be presented to demonstrate the potential influence of such xenophobia in the development of the Chinese vernacular stories. Next, detailed considerations will be given to the way such feelings are articulated in the stories through the trope of monstrosity, and the possible reasons behind them. The last part of this study will focus on the issue of cultural identity at large, in which I will consider the development of China’s oral tradition in parallel with the emergence of Neo-Confucian philosophies, and discuss their respective roles in the development of Chinese cultural identity (or the concept of *hua* 華). This study will then conclude with a return to the interconnectivity between

---

is overshadowed by its romantic elements. As such, it is duly listed by Hanan under the “romantic” category, which should not deter us from analyzing this story from the angle of “monstrosity”.

<sup>4</sup> “Cui Yanei baiyao zhaoyao” 崔衙內白鷓招妖 (The White Falcon of Master Cui Invites Demons), in Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (ed.), *Jingshi tongyan* 警世通言, Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1983, p. 241-253.

<sup>5</sup> “Luoyang sanguai ji” 洛陽三怪記 (The Three Monsters of Luoyang), in Hong Pian 洪楗 (ed.), *Qingping shantang huaben* 清平山堂話本, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987, p. 67-78.

<sup>6</sup> “Xihu santa ji” 西湖三塔記 (The Three Pagodas on the West Lake), in Hong Pian, *op. cit.*, p. 22-32. It should also be noted that the three stories analyzed in this paper all belong to the “early” group of extant vernacular stories, as determined by Hanan, who, by examining criteria such as diction, style, and idioms, categorizes all extant stories into three groups chronologically in terms of early (before circa 1450), middle (between circa 1400 and 1575), and late (after circa 1550) periods.

monstrosity, foreignness and Chinese cultural identity and demonstrate how the three vernacular stories not only carry unique cultural ideologies that are reflective of society's belief during the Song dynasty, but more importantly serve as a vehicle for the preservation of Chineseness through its systematic denigration of the foreign as a monstrous "other".

## The Conception of Foreignness during the Song Dynasty: An Overview

When Zhao Kuangyin ascended the throne in 960, the Song dynasty found itself in an unfamiliar situation: it was no longer the "Middle Kingdom" surrounded by innocuous neighbors, but the "barbarians"—in particular its northern neighbors—were actually capable of threatening it economically, politically, and militarily. As F. W. Mote notes, of "the five or six major Chinese dynasties, only the Song existed under the ever-present threat of military invasion and conquest".<sup>7</sup> Such realization of its weakened position forced the Song dynasty to reverse the practice of Tang dynasty, which strived for cosmopolitanism and embraced foreignness, and adopt the opposite course of advocating self-enclosure, as evidenced in the regime's apparent eagerness to devise ways to demarcate the Chinese from its foreign neighbors in both physical and cultural terms. In 1048, for example, Emperor Renzong 仁宗 (r. 1023-1063) explicitly ordered that "both the literati and the peasants are to be forbidden from wearing clothes of the Khitan fashion and using saddle and bridle on a horse; women are to be prohibited from wearing rabbit pelts or garments that contain the color bronze green."<sup>8</sup> The implementation of such policy not only reveals the endeavor to bring about the easy identification of the Chinese from a

---

<sup>7</sup> Mote F. W., *Imperial China 900-1800*, Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 112.

<sup>8</sup> Tuotuo 脫脫, *Songshi* 宋史, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977, p. 3576. The implementation of such type of law, in fact, occurred frequently between 1048 and 1120. For example, in 1117 and 1119, the court declared similar laws to outlaw specific Khitan-style accessories such as a particular type of straw hat and female stockings. The declarations specifically cite "the disallowance of foreign influence in China" as the reason for enacting the laws (Xu Song 徐松, *Song huiyao jigao* 宋會要輯稿, Taipei: Xinwenfeng chubanshe, 1976, p. 1783).

visual standpoint, but more importantly betrays the regime's sense of insecurity concerning its own cultural identity and its keenness to redress it.

Although such an attitude was initially brought about by the perceived threat of the “barbarians” from the north, anxious feelings on the part of the Song populace quickly extended to incorporate all foreigners in general.<sup>9</sup> For example, during the northern Song period, it was common for captured foreign chieftains, regardless of ethnicity, to be sent inland to live among the Chinese. In 1099, for instance, the captured Tangut general Eboer 額伯爾 was ordered to relocate to Tanzhou 潭州, where he was “given an official residence, and each month received ten strings of cash plus three *shi* 石 of rice and wheat”.<sup>10</sup> The aim was probably as much to separate these foreign military leaders from their own people, in order to prevent uprising, as to “curb” their barbaric nature through the resettling of them among the Chinese and their “positive” influence. However, as is evidenced in the case of Shu Guangyong 舒光勇, the experience was not always pleasant:

Shu Guangyong, of Li 黎 descent, was a barbarian leader from the Xidong 溪洞 region. He resembled a demon because of his face, which was as dark as paint, and his voice, which was distinctly barbaric. When he surrendered to the Hunan 湖南 province, besides having his life spared, he was offered employment as an officer of the third *ban* [*sanban* 三班].<sup>11</sup> His duty was to collect tax on alcohol in Anzhou 安州, where he became a colleague of Zheng You 鄭猷. Zheng considered Shu to be someone

---

<sup>9</sup> Since the late Tang dynasty, there are indications that the term *hu* 胡 was beginning to lose its specific meaning as reference to people who came from the northwest of China. For example, in *Taiping Guangji* 太平廣記, the term *hu* has been employed to describe a multitude of ethnicities, ranging from Persians (*Jingcun zhu* 徑寸珠, *Guangyi ji* 廣異記) to Moslems (*Cui Wei* 崔煒, *Chuanqi* 傳奇) and to people from Southeast Asia (*Lu Yong* 陸顯, *Xuanshi zhi* 宣室志). Such development signals the transition from identifying foreignness in terms of an individual foreign entity to the homogenization of a number of foreign ones, and importantly paved the way for the widespread homogeneous conception of the foreigner during the Song dynasty.

<sup>10</sup> Li Tao 李燾, *Xu Zizhitongjian changbian* 續資治通鑑長編, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004, p. 12272.

<sup>11</sup> A fairly low-ranking position.

who habitually dines on snakes and worms, thus every time he treated Shu to a meal, two types of provisions would be prepared and they would dine together on different food. Shu was dissatisfied as he never got to taste a regular meal as eaten by the Chinese literati. Whenever he finished such a meal, he would order a *lantou* 攔頭 [a servant of a tax collector] to purchase two pepper biscuits [*hubing* 胡餅], costing four *qian* 錢 in total, in front of the office. Having eaten them, Shu would praise their fine taste and exclaim how he had never tasted anything comparable in his life. One day, when he told Zheng of this, Zheng replied, “you, a gamy and odorous southern barbarian from Xidong, are uneducated in the ways of eating and drinking. You taste such a lowly object and think the world of it. This may be a small matter, but it has immense implications. I declare anyone who makes a claim out of ignorance to be no better than Shu Guangyong.”<sup>12</sup>

The attitude of the Song populace toward foreigners such as Shu, as reflected in this passage, is a distinct feeling of condescension and superiority, and one which presumed the possession of knowledge over another ethnic entity. Not only did Zheng, in spite of being constantly in contact with Shu, make no effort to get to know his foreign colleague and ignorantly presumed him to be “someone who habitually dines on snakes and worms” (which was not the case), but by denying Shu the chance to “taste a regular meal eaten by the Chinese literati”, his action (or non-action) was directly responsible for the sustainment of such misunderstandings. The prejudicial comment by Zheng toward the end of the passage concerning Shu’s fondness for the pepper biscuits further reflects the typical Chinese attitude that assumes “a barbarian will always remain a barbarian”, in which Shu’s palatal taste was perceived as a sort of confirmation of the barbaric foreigner’s innate inferiority.<sup>13</sup> Compared to the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the preceding Tang dynasty, the attitude toward foreigners had indeed shifted to the opposite end of the spectrum during the Song dynasty.

---

<sup>12</sup> Wang Zhi 王銍, Zhu Jieren 朱杰人 (ed.), *Moji* 默記, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997, p. 33-34.

<sup>13</sup> The name of the pepper biscuit, *hubing*, denotes more than just its ingredient as the Chinese character for *hu* also connotes the concept of “foreign”. In fact, throughout the Tang and Song dynasty, there are indications that society perceived a clear connection between this type of food and foreignness. “The Tale of Ms Ren” (*Renshi zhuan* 任氏傳), for example, is just one of the many contemporary stories that feature a foreigner selling this particular type of food.

After the fall of the northern Song capital, Chinese hostility toward the foreign not only intensified to bring about such laws as “as a foreigner, the law stipulates that they should not live in a city”,<sup>14</sup> but the literary conception of the “barbarian” also became increasingly unanimous in the association of the foreigner with physical violence and sexual licentiousness, as opposed to the traditional practice of attributing to them general and non-specific negative traits. The timing of this development was not coincidental and stemmed largely from the blunt observations of the commitment of such acts by the invading Jurchen army during the siege of Kaifeng. For example, it is documented in *Events from the Xuanhe Period* (*Da Song Xuanhe yishi* 大宋宣和遺事) that:

Under the order of [Yuanyan Zonghan 完顏宗翰], more than 100 armored soldiers were stationed at the Tianjin Bridge 天津橋. The peasant dared not approach. The soldiers striped strong men of their clothes and killed them. They also detained women who were beautiful.<sup>15</sup>

And:

On the twenty-first day of the twelfth month, Jurchen representatives entered the city to declare the ruler’s mandate to select 1500 females, of eighteen years or younger, from the capital to serve in the harem. The officials immediately set about the task of gathering and selecting peasant women. Parents wailed tumultuously as their daughters went on to suffer abuses and sexual violations at the hands of the Jurchens.<sup>16</sup>

Such emphasis on the physical aggression and violations of Chinese women by the Jurchens illustrates a typical perspective of the way the invasion was interpreted in contemporary reports. Besides *Events from*

---

<sup>14</sup> Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Hui'an xiansheng Zhu Wengong ji* 晦菴先生朱文公集, Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu yinshuguan, 1965, p. 1750. According to Zhang Shen 章深, while this law may have been implemented some times prior to the fall of Kaifeng, likely in response to society’s increasing anxiety of the foreign, there is no record of its being taken seriously until after the court’s relocation to the south. For more information, see Zhang Shen, “Songdai waishang chengshi juzhuquan tanxi” 宋代外商城市居住權探析, *Kaifang shidai* 開放時代, 2002-6, p. 62-68.

<sup>15</sup> *Xinkan Dasong Xuanhe yishi* 新刊大宋宣和遺事, Shanghai: Shanghai gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1955, p. 94.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

the *Xuanhe Period*, similar accounts can also be found in texts such as *The Compilation of Documents on the Treaties with the North in Three Reigns* (*Sanchao Beimeng Huibian* 三朝北盟會編) and *The Accounts of Jingkang* (*Jingkang baishi jianzheng* 靖康稗史箋證), which are written from both the Chinese and Jurchen perspectives.<sup>17</sup> In addition to offering a glimpse into the horror which the Chinese must have experienced, these documents were also instrumental in the dissemination of such notions into contemporary society. The result is the consolidation of the perception of a parallel between foreignness and sexual licentiousness—a notion that largely dictated the outlook of the southern Song populace. Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), for example, in his endeavor to differentiate the Chinese from foreigners, displays a proclivity that is characteristic of the time to conceive of the foreign (along with the pro-foreign Tang regime) in sexual terms:

The Tang culture originated from the *yi* 夷 and the *di* 狄 barbarians. For this reason, it did not consider shameful misdemeanor within a lady's chamber unwelcoming and offensive.<sup>18</sup>

Besides its obvious influence on the Neo-Confucian stigmatization of sexual matters, Zhu's assertion is important for two reasons. Firstly, it summarizes for us the sentiment of the time and sets the tone both for the formulation of Chinese cultural identity and the public's imagination of foreignness. Secondly, his eagerness to separate the "self" from the "other" is a state of affairs which transpired concurrently with the evolution of vernacular stories, in which parallels can be observed between the fictional treatment of the theme of monstrosity and the perception of foreignness (in sexual terms) in real life. Indeed, although the history of vernacular Chinese literature is traceable to as early as the Han dynasty, there is no indication of its flourishing as a genre and becoming an acces-

---

<sup>17</sup> *A Translator's Observation of the Green Palace* (*Qinggong yiyu* 青宮譯語), for example, is written by Wang Chengdi 王成棣, a translator who worked for the conquering Jurchens. The text is devoted almost entirely to the ordeals of Chinese women of royal blood who were captured in Kaifeng and transported to the north, (in Jue An 確庵 and Nai An 耐庵 (ed.), *Jingkang baishi jianzheng* 靖康稗史箋證, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988, p. 176-191).

<sup>18</sup> Zhu Xi 朱熹, Li Jingde 黎靖德 (ed.), *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類, Taipei: Zhengzhong shuju, 1962, p. 5268.

sible form of entertainment, capable of reflecting mainstream thoughts and values, until after the “Jingkang incident”. This is not coincidental but represents an evolution that is triggered partially by the loss of northern China and the imperial court’s retreat to Linan 臨安. Of the historical mass migration of the northern soldiers to the south, *Records of a Dream* (*Menglianglu* 夢梁錄) relates that:

During the Shaoxing period [1131-1162], Yang Yizhong 楊沂中 realized that the stationed army was largely comprised of men who came from the northwest, thus on the outskirts of the city he erected a *washe* 瓦舍 [a tiled hut built with a makeshift stage].<sup>19</sup>

Importantly demonstrated in the above passage is the relation between the development of vernacular stories and China’s southward demographic shift, and the correlation between the number of the retreating soldiers and the maturation of the genre. In particular, the erection of the *washe*, where many of these stories were originally recited, shows the development of the genre to be directly related to the necessity of preventing the retreating troops from the north from being overtaken by idleness. As the “exile” of these migrants prolonged and their longing to return home intensified, their aversion to the foreign, together with their observation of their aggression and predilection to violate Chinese women, expanded naturally and helped shape the perception of the entire populace. Such historical background has serious implications for the thematic turns of the vernacular stories at the time, in the sense that the mentality of these migrants—as the target audience of the storytellers—would have undoubtedly influenced the central concerns of these stories. However, that the trope of monstrosity became an important subject in these stories is not only attributable to its synonymy with foreignness. It also has to do with the fact that it represented a useful vehicle for the “othering” and denigration of the foreign which, at the same time, contributed to the consolidation of the perceived superiority of Chineseness. The shift of China’s political center from north to south therefore represents an important backdrop to the understanding of the central concerns of the vernacular stories—a historical context behind the development of the genre which traditional scholarship has tended to overlook.

<sup>19</sup> Wu Zimu 吳自牧, *Menglianglu* 夢梁錄, Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 1980, p. 179.

## The Imagination of Monstrosity from *zhiguai* to *huaben*

As a literary theme, monstrosity has long been associated with the supernatural (*zhiguai* 志怪) genre, which is instrumental in establishing the conventional monstrosity-foreignness connection through its depictions of animal demons and ghosts.<sup>20</sup> Although it seems indisputable that the vernacular storytellers took inspiration from the supernaturalists and used their tradition of linking foreignness to monstrosity as a basis, their approaches are in fact very different. The most significant point about the Song storytellers' usage of the monstrosity theme is the introduction of their own cultural ideologies to the trope, which leaves behind an unmistakable imprint that differs not only from the supernatural tradition but also the later Yuan and Ming vernacular conceptions. For example, although it is not uncommon for the monsters in the supernatural texts to be portrayed as hostile and a threat to human society, there are also ample stories, such as "The Tale of Ms Ren" (*Renshi zhuan* 任氏傳), which depict them in a highly positive and sympathetic light. This shows that while the supernatural stories do display a tendency to equate the foreign entity with monstrosity, they do not consciously seek to impose any negative implication on this relationship. By contrast, although the Song vernacular stories demonstrate a similar inclination to depict monstrosity as an extension of foreignness, their unanimous and conscious conception of this connection as threatening and decadent closely mimics society's generally unfavorable perception of foreigners.

In "White Falcon", "Three Monsters", and "Three Pagodas", we find confirmation of this change of attribution of characteristics onto the fictional monsters through the storytellers' insistent and characteristic desire to depict the monstrous as both a foreign and threatening presence, and the insinuation of the danger it poses to the existence of Chineseness. Besides the portrayal of the protagonists' encounters with monstrosity as life threatening, in "Three Monsters" and "Three Pagodas" in particular, the protagonists' inability to return home for prolonged periods, out of fear of the threat of the monsters, remarkably parallels the social atmo-

---

<sup>20</sup> For more information, see Campany Robert Ford, *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China*, New York: SUNY Press, 1996 and Kang Xiaofei, "The Fox [*hu*] and the Barbarian [*hu*]: Unraveling Representations of the Other in Late Tang Tales", *Journal of Chinese Religions*, 1999-27, p. 35-67.

sphere of the southern Song period and reflects the psychological state of the populace in relation to their inability to reclaim the north. In “Three Pagodas”, for instance, although the protagonist Xi Xuanzan 奚宣贊 is twice able to escape from the clutches of the monsters, the threat of monstrosity persists: he is quickly recaptured after his first escape, and is only able to avoid recapture the second time by hiding at home and refusing to set foot outdoors. Pan Song 潘松, the main character in “Three Monsters”, fares somewhat better in that he is able to avoid recapture for an extensive period of time after his initial escape. This, however, is accomplished by his self-imposed confinement within a Daoist temple, and his life is henceforth relentlessly shadowed by his fear of the monsters. For example, when fishing in a pond one day, he either dreams of or is truly attacked by the monsters (the ambiguity appears intentional on the part of the author). The narration goes that “when the water parted, an old woman appeared with a hook between her teeth. Pan was so frightened that he immediately dropped his fishing rod, let out a scream, and fell dead on the floor”.<sup>21</sup> The protagonists’ inability to escape either psychologically or physically from the monsters’ clutches reflects the way these vernacular stories echo society’s dread of further defeat at the hands of the Jurchens and the political situation under which the threat of the northern barbarians lingered all the way to the end of the Song dynasty.

Besides alluding to society’s fear of attack from the “barbarians” and the lamentation of being driven away from home, further parallels between the vernacular monsters and the contemporary view of foreignness is found in the physical depictions of and names given to the monsters, which are consistent with how the Khitans or the Jurchens were commonly understood during the Song dynasty. For example, in many vernacular stories which deal with the subject of monstrosity, the male monsters are often attributed physical appearances which feature dark skin, full beard, and outlandish attire in contrast to the Chinese’s more refined and sophisticated look. Besides the fact that the Song regime considered the choice of garment to be an important separator between the Chinese and the foreign, as exemplified by the law decreed by Emperor Renzong, compared to the descriptions of foreigners from the Tang dynasty, the vernacular stories’ depictions are not only more detailed and specific, but echo the popular

---

<sup>21</sup> “Three Monsters”, p. 81.

portrayal of a typical Khitan or Jurchen in contemporary paintings such as the “Khitan Falconry Hunt” (*Qidan jiaying chulie tu* 契丹駕鷹出獵圖), which portrays the Khitan hunter to have unmistakable dark skin and a full beard.<sup>22</sup> On the one hand, this demonstrates the correlation between the trope of monstrosity and foreignness to be an intentional and conscious process—apparent in the fact that the storytellers had the specific image of the “northern barbarians” in mind when they conjured up their monsters, on the other hand, such association also corresponds with the social imprint of the Song dynasty, which had good reasons to channel their perception of foreignness through their understanding of the Khitans and the Jurchens. It is a conscious allusion that is further substantiated in the nominal context. For example, in “Three Monsters”, one of the male monsters is explicitly referred to as “the great king of red earth” (*chitu dawang* 赤土大王). The “great king” (*dawang*) component is particularly interesting because of its insinuation of titles that were commonly bestowed upon Jurchen princes who invaded China. For instance, Xiebao 斜保, who was one of the chief Jurchen officers in charge of escorting captured Chinese princesses to the north after the raid of Kaifeng, is officially known by the title of “the great king of the treasure mountain” (*baoshan dawang* 寶山大王); Yema 野馬, who was later awarded one of the captured Chinese princesses, was known as “the great king of the real pearl” (*zhenzhu dawang* 真珠大王). Other Jurchen princes with titles that follow a similar semantic pattern include “the great king of the entire sky” (*gaitian dawang* 蓋天大王), “the great king of pearl” (*zhenzhu dawang* 珍珠大王) and “the great king of the *pulu* tiger” (*puluhu dawang* 蒲魯虎大王). The application of the title “great king” to the monster, thus, is unmistakably reminiscent of this Jurchen custom and designates a Jurchen connection to the monster that the contemporary audience would likely not have missed.

---

<sup>22</sup> For more information on the representation of foreigners during the Tang and Song dynasty, see Abramson Marc Samuel, “Deep Eyes and High Noses: Physiognomy and the Depiction of Barbarians in Tang China” in Di Cosmo Nicola and Wyatt Don J. (ed.), *Political Frontiers, Ethnic Boundaries, and Human Geographies in Chinese History*, New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 119-159 and Leung Irene S., “Felt Yurts neatly Arrayed, Large Tents Huddle Close: Visualizing the Frontier in the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127)”, in Di Cosmo N. and Wyatt D. J., *op. cit.*, p. 192-219.

As stated earlier, the public's imagining of foreignness throughout the southern Song period is to customarily associate foreigners with physical violence and sexuality because of what transpired during the siege of Kaifeng. This association is clearly presented in both "Three Monsters" and "Three Pagodas", in which the male protagonist's attempt to escape from the clutches of monsters after having been sexually violated during captivity represents a central thread of the story. For example, in "Three Monsters", when Pan is captured by the female monster and forced into having sexual intercourse with her, in spite of her unworldly beauty, Pan remains "suspicious and unhappy"<sup>23</sup> throughout the ordeal. Similarly, in "Three Pagodas", when Xi is retained by the female monsters and forced into sexual intercourse, within half a month, his health deteriorates visibly and "his flesh loses its plumpness and his skin takes on a yellow hue".<sup>24</sup> Such negative portrayal of the protagonists' sexual ordeal echoes the contemporary view of the "barbarians" as sexual aggressors and invaders. Although the fact that, in the stories, the sexual relation seems to have been reversed in that the protagonists/victims are Chinese men whereas the monsters (which, as has been argued, represent foreigners) are women, this gender reassignment actually presents another level of significance in relation to the Chinese's formulation of cultural identity—an important facet which denotes the growing social desire to establish substantiations of Chinese superiority over the "other".

Indeed, concurrent with the imagining of foreignness in licentious terms, the Chinese also wrote of the emergence, during the Southern Song period, of sexual interest in Chinese men by foreign women to provide superior bloodline to their progenies. For example, the *Random Miscellanies of the Clear Ripples* (*Qingbo zazhi* 清波雜誌) reports the following story of a group of Japanese women who came to China by boat:

The females, who allow their hair to rest on their shoulders, will selectively bed handsome Chinese men whom they encountered. This custom is called "lineage-borrowing" (*duzhong* 度種).<sup>25</sup>

In the *Records of the Pine Tree and the Desert* (*Songmo jiwen* 松漠紀聞), a similar account is found which describes the custom of a particular

<sup>23</sup> "Three Monsters", p. 81.

<sup>24</sup> "Three Pagodas", p. 29.

<sup>25</sup> Zhou Hui 周輝, Liu Yongxiang 劉永翔 (ed.), *Qingbo zazhi xiaozhu* 清波雜誌校注, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994, p. 174.

group of Uyghur in the Qinchuan 秦川 region:

The unmarried daughters would have sexual intercourse with Chinese men, and not wed anyone of their own ethnicity until they have borne a few children and are close to thirty in age. When a matchmaker comes and makes enquiries about a daughter, the parents would mention the parties with whom the daughter has been involved. Their custom dictates that the more the better.<sup>26</sup>

Equivalently found in these two passages is the idea that foreign women were preoccupied with the desire to have their children fathered by Chinese men. The reflection herewith of the Chinese's perception of the superiority of their lineage no doubt stemmed from society's growing xenophobia and the concurrent need to solidify their sense of cultural identity (and superiority). Reading these non-fictional documentations alongside the vernacular stories, it is evident that the perceived superiority of the Chinese lineage, as highlighted in the former, are echoed in the latter, in which the monsters (foreigners) are not only sexually licentious, but fixatedly sought to unite with Chinese men. Thus, by effectively combining sexual licentiousness attributed to foreigners (which was originally targeted at the Jurchens after the invasion, but came to be attributed to foreigners in general) and the belief in Chinese superiority through descriptions of the foreigners' desire for the Chinese bloodline, the vernacular stories were able to function as the platform which enabled the further dissemination of such thoughts into society. That the theme of monstrosity in these stories contains elements that correspond with the perception of historical events and social attitudes of the Song period further substantiates the premise of their being developed during the southern Song period.

To sum up, the vernacular stories' monsterization of the foreign not only discloses a shift in society's view of foreignness from ambivalent to malevolent, which coincides with historical events that occurred during the Song dynasty, but more importantly hints at a cultural purpose on the part of these stories to serve as an important vehicle to promote the otherization of foreignness, as well as the Song populace's inherent desire to reinforce a Chinese cultural identity that is superior to its "monstrous"

---

<sup>26</sup> Hong Hao 洪皓, "Songmo jiwén" 松漠紀聞, in *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu guji jicheng* 中國少數民族古籍集成, Chengdu: Sichuan minzu chubanshe, 2002, vol. 18, p. 343.

and “barbaric” neighbors. As we have already observed in the regime’s endeavor to outlaw foreign clothes, it is evidenced that, concurrent with the increasing feeling of xenophobia, the Song populace were also experiencing an identity crisis in which they were desperate to not only distance themselves from the foreigners, but to prove their moral and cultural superiority. The thematic focus of the three vernacular stories studied here importantly represents part of the attempt to do so, in their constant denigration of the monsters as uncivilized and morally corrupt. In “White Falcon,” for example, although the monsters are adept at disguising themselves as humans, suspicion is raised when they attempt to serve the protagonist a bowl of wine that is “too red to be natural”.<sup>27</sup> Details as such are more than a symbolization of the “bloody” (contentious and warring) relationship between China and the “barbarians”, as it further denotes a typical imperial attitude on the part of the Chinese to denigrate the non-Chinese through the insinuation of them as uncivilized blood-drinkers. For similar reasons, it is also customary for these stories to further debase the monstrous in animalistic and decadent terms. For example, in “Three Monsters”, the monsters’ habitat is given the description of having “dark, overcastting clouds hovering around the sacred idols through the curtains. Strange beasts clinging onto pine trees behind the main hall, and the ancient conifers in front of the steps resemble worms and snakes”.<sup>28</sup> Such a setting, which emanates an air of decadence and anarchy, also echoes the Chinese tradition of comparing foreigners to savages, and can be considered archetypical of the Chinese view regarding foreigners who, as implied in the term “barbarians”, were generally perceived as uneducated and uncivilized.

Compared to the earlier supernatural stories, the three vernacular stories studied in this paper reveal a unique awareness of Song historical events and social psychology on two aspects. Firstly, their tendency to depict both the foreign and the monstrous as a dichotomizing force to the humanness of the Chinese is important because it demonstrates a conscious desire to contextualize these elements according to contemporary perception, through which a parallel can be drawn between the hostility toward foreignness and the political situation between China and

<sup>27</sup> “White Falcon”, p. 244.

<sup>28</sup> “Three Monsters”, p. 74.

its northern neighbors. Secondly, the fact that the vernacular stories were created as entertainment for the mass means they had to be attuned to the beliefs of the populace. On both levels, the three vernacular stories examined so far demonstrate a unique affiliation to the cultural ideologies of the Song dynasty that is not found in any other historical period. Thus, although the convention of perceiving monstrosity as an extension of foreignness originated from the supernatural tradition, the vernacular stories' denigration of it as undesirable and threatening is important in that they not only reveal contemporary society's perception of the uncivilized "barbarism" of its neighbors, but more importantly contributed to the construal of Chinese cultural identity as the opposite of such elements.

### **Monstrosity, Foreignness and the (Re-)Conceptualization of Chinese Cultural Identity**

As demonstrated, in the three stories that are the focus of this paper, the evolution of the trope of monstrosity from the supernatural genre to the vernacular fictions, which takes on a distinctive Song imprint in the association of malevolent monsters with the foreign, provides a strong piece of evidence to the argument that these stories are of Song origin and not of any other dynasty. Furthermore, the cultural issues which are the concern of these texts demonstrate the importance of these stories as cultural records capable of offering a glimpse into the mentality of the populace during the southern Song period, one of the most significant being their internal struggle and uncertainty regarding the notion of Chinese cultural identity. In addition to using a more indirect and subtle method of analogizing monstrosity and foreignness to deal with the problem of cultural identity, these stories also more directly respond to this issue through advocating and adhering to the principles of Neo-Confucianism.

The development of Neo-Confucianism during the Song dynasty can be interpreted according to different means. However, in a cultural context, part of its importance stems from its being reflective of society's perception of the urgent need to confront the feelings of insecurity regarding cultural identity. Mote, for example, points out:

The Neo-Confucian project was a reassertion of Chinese values. It defined those at this point in China's long cultural history as transcending Chinese

ethnic identity, its thinkers believe that its truths had universal validity which made them suit the needs of all humans, especially those whose cultural levels enabled them to enter into the spheres of civilized human company.<sup>29</sup>

The above quotation aptly points to Neo-Confucianism as a “reassertion” of traditional Chinese values. However, more than just an impulsive and arbitrary interest in its past, the desire for such a revival should more accurately be interpreted as a meditated means to counter the perceived threat of the “barbarians”. Indeed, as is evidenced in the development of some of its more important philosophical assertions, the development of Neo-Confucianism, in many ways, was as a direct response to the perceived negative characteristics of the foreign. Its taboo of sexual matters, for instance, importantly constitutes a rejection of foreignness in terms of its being the embodiment of sexual aggression and licentiousness. Thus, on a cultural level, one of the important functions of Neo-Confucianism’s “reassertion” of Chinese values is its reflection of the collective desire that sought to otherize the non-Chinese—a process which effectively enabled the Chinese to mentally dissociate themselves from the “barbarian other” and ensured the preservation of the purity and moral superiority of their own cultural identity. The vernacular stories’ presentation of the foreign/monstrous and their advocacy of Neo-Confucianism is not only an extension of this thought, but a vehicle that enforces the two together into an inseparable and dichotomizing relationship, through which the superiority of Chineseness is further affirmed.

To better illustrate this point, let us turn our attention to the story “White Falcon”. The story’s aversion to the foreign is clearly detectable early on in the prologue (*ruhua* 入話), which prefigures the threat of the “barbarians” in the story proper through a deliberate attempt to ridicule the attire and shamelessness of An Lushan 安祿山 (703-757) and to emphasize his ethnic identity as a “barbarian” (*huer* 胡兒).<sup>30</sup> The more significant aspect of this story, however, is the fact that it displays a blatant and indisputable awareness of the ongoing cultural discourse regarding foreignness, in that the plot is underlined by a conscious desire to advocate the teachings of Neo-Confucianism. The story proper begins with a scene

<sup>29</sup> Mote F. W., *op. cit.*, p. 145.

<sup>30</sup> “White Falcon”, p. 241.

in which the emperor of China receives an exquisite gift from a foreign kingdom—Silla (Korea)—in the form of a white falcon, and decides to give it to his prime minister. The prime minister's son, Cui Ya 崔亞, takes an immediate liking to the falcon and decides to take it with him on a hunting expedition. However, instead of game, the falcon leads Cui to a den of monsters where his ordeal begins. It is at this point in the narration that the storyteller recites the following poem:

An external lust for game bird to an internal lust for sex,  
How about a little taste of each?  
To depart with an eagle in the morning,  
To return to the scent of rouge in the evening.<sup>31</sup>

By explicitly comparing “game bird” to “sex” and paralleling “eagle” with “rouge”, this commentary poem draws heavily on Neo-Confucian ideology, in particular the notion which considers leisurely activities (including hunting and the pursuit of the opposite sex) as detrimental to the attainment of the ultimate goal in life—the achievement of literary and political excellence. This connection is considered by Hanan to be typical of the Song's critique of the corruption of the Tang regime, in which the falcon is symbolic of “a token that ties [sex and hunting] together” and that “the Emperor's excesses have upset the natural order and given license to demons”.<sup>32</sup> Although Hanan pertinently points to the degenerative activities of both hunting and sex (as “excesses”), he fails to identify the important component that connects the two elements together, namely, their association to foreignness and monstrosity. Indeed, besides designating hunting as associated to sexuality, the fact that the foreign white falcon is unmistakably presented as the catalyst directly responsible for Cui's encounter with monstrosity demonstrates the storyteller's deliberate intention to otherize foreignness and presents an important piece of evidence to support our reading of the negative presentation of monstrosity as a conscious and strategic trope, which aims to portray a degenerate foreign other that is to be used as a contrast to Chineseness.<sup>33</sup> The story, in

---

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 243.

<sup>32</sup> Hanan P., *op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>33</sup> At one point in time, this story is believed to have gone by the title “the White Falcon of Silla” (*Xinluo baiyao* 新羅白鷁), in which the focus on foreignness is

other words, connects the issues of Neo-Confucianism, foreignness, and Chinese cultural identity through the deliberate association of anti-Neo-Confucian values to foreignness and the monstrous. It is a strategy that is also employed in “Three Monsters” and “Three Pagodas”. In the very beginning of the story proper of “Three Monsters”, for example, we find the following paragraph:

[Pan Song] saw that the Qingming festival was here and the entire city had gone to the countryside to admire the flowers and to play, so he informed his parents that he would do the same. He first went to the Dingding Gate to look for his friend, Weng Sanlang. At the doorstep, Pan enquired, “Is Weng home?” to which Weng’s wife answered, “Seeing that it is the Qingming festival, my husband has gone out to the Huijie Garden to admire the flowers. He hasn’t departed long so if you hurry, you might catch him.” Hearing this, Pan exited the Dingding Gate by himself and promenaded (*yili* 迤邐) toward the Huijie Garden.<sup>34</sup>

In this passage, Pan’s mood is depicted to be visibly leisurely and relaxed, and the narrator’s inclination to use descriptive words such as “promenades” (*yili*) further serves to illustrate this sense of lightheartedness.<sup>35</sup> Since during the Song dynasty, the term *yili* was commonly used in association with the enjoyment of scenic pleasure, its usage here is thus important because, under the influence of Neo-Confucianism, contemporary society would interpret such a pastime as indolent and backward, hence condemnable. Moreover, the object of Pan’s pleasure—flowers—was commonly associated with guilty pleasure and corruption throughout the Song dynasty.<sup>36</sup> The usage of the term “flower” in this story, there-

---

further insinuated.

<sup>34</sup> “Three Monsters”, p. 69.

<sup>35</sup> Considered by Hanan as one of the important criteria for identifying the story as belonging to an “older group”, the term *yili* originally denotes the meandering of a path or a river and did not become a common synonym for “promenade” until some times during the Song dynasty. Both Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101) and He Zhu 賀鑄 (1052-1125) used this term in their poems to convey a leisurely and pleasant atmosphere. See Hanan P., *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>36</sup> The title of the text *Among Flowers* (*Huajian ji* 花間集), for example, was derived because the theme of the publication predominantly concerns prostitution, love and sexuality.

fore, is to be metaphorically understood as a symbol of corruption and licentiousness, and importantly establishes another point of connection between the protagonist's suffering and the threat of non-Chinese qualities (from a Neo-Confucian perspective). Similarly, in "Three Pagodas", we find this same criticism of the destructiveness of idleness in the portrayal of the mood of the protagonist, who "saw the approach of the Qingming festival and decided to journey to the West Lake for some idle play. He soon landed in trouble".<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, the diction of the original Chinese term "idle play" (*xianwan* 閒玩) echoes the identical Neo-Confucian premise which sees the concepts of idleness and play as invitations to corruption. The insertion of the verse "Spring is the scholar of flower, wine is the matchmaker of sex"<sup>38</sup> in the story further consolidates this reading and identifies the parallelization of flower and sex as a deliberate and strategic medium that enables the otherization of the foreign and the construction of a moralistic Chinese cultural identity.

The fact that in all three stories, the pursuit of anti-Neo-Confucian pleasures leads the protagonists to their respective encounter with monstrosity importantly indicates a striking corresponding moral message in which play, whether in the form of hunting or sexual pleasure, is considered anti-Chinese in the sense that it draws one toward the "barbarians" and away from the morally superior Chinese. The recognition of such underlying historical motifs in these stories is significant because they not only demonstrate their connection to the southern Song period, but perhaps more importantly reveal a cultural importance to their recital—the conscious endeavor to address the anxiety in one's cultural identity in the face of foreign threat through the diffusion of Neo-Confucian ideals.

## Conclusion

In this paper, in order to reassess the social and cultural significance of the vernacular Chinese stories, attempts are made to demonstrate the existing parallel between these stories' fascination with the trope of monstrosity and society's reception of the notion of foreignness during the southern

---

<sup>37</sup> "Three Pagodas", p. 26.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

Song period. My original aim is twofold: to show how injured national pride and society's lamentation for the loss of the north influenced the presentation of foreignness by the storytellers, and to contest the popular assumption that the vernacular stories' fascination with monstrosity is simply a more complex extension of the supernatural tradition—a theory that fails to take into full account the unique historical circumstances under which the development of these stories took place. While this paper considers three stories specifically—"White Falcon", "Three Monsters", and "Three Pagodas"—it should be noted that the theory is applicable to a multitude of extant vernacular stories featuring the trope of monstrosity, which follow comparable patterns in the projection of contemporary society's growing apprehension of foreignness, in particular the looming threat of the Jurchens, onto the conception of the monstrous. For example, in "A Den of Ghosts" (« Yikugui Lai daoren chuguai » 一窟鬼癩道人除怪), the protagonist's ordeal begins with his sexual impropriety, when his obsession with the monster's sexual beauty leads him to secretly make "a hole on the rice paper window with his tongue"<sup>39</sup> in order to spy on her. In "Yang Siwen's encounter with an old acquaintance in Yanshan" (« Yang Siwen Yanshan feng guren » 楊思溫燕山逢故人),<sup>40</sup> this connection is made even more explicitly through the attribution of the protagonist's ghostly encounter to the fall of Kaifeng. By highlighting such relationship between the vernacular stories' portrayal of monstrosity/foreignness and the Neo-Confucian ideologies that underline these texts, besides hoping to supply a historical context through which the development of these stories may be traced, a more significant outcome of this study may be the demonstration of the stories' importance, in their insinuation of a larger social issue concerning the Middle Kingdom's germinating desire to reinterpret and redefine its understanding of cultural identity according to the discourse of otherness.

---

<sup>39</sup> "Yikugui Lai daoren chuguai" 一窟鬼癩道人除怪, in Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (ed.), *Jingshi tongyan* 警世通言, Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1983, p. 177.

<sup>40</sup> "Yang Siwen Yanshan feng guren" 楊思溫燕山逢故人, in Feng Menglong, *op. cit.*, p. 366-383.