

A Study on the Narrative of Jiutian Xuannv in Water Margin from an Intertextual Perspective

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Abstract. In this study, the narrative of Jiutian Xuannv (Mystic Goddess of the Nine Heavens) in *Water Margin* (Shui Hu Zhuan) is used to examine the interplay of inheritance and innovation within the traditional Chinese “divine female” narratives. The research aims to reveal the text's hidden symbolic logic and metaphorical dimensions. An intertextual framework is applied, and a comparative analysis is done with Song Jiang's encounter with Jiutian Xuannv in *Water Margin* and Cao Zhi's poetic dialogue with Fu Fei (Goddess of the Luo River) in *The Goddess of the Luo River* (Luo shen Fu). This comparison points out the similarities and differences in the dreamlike locations, the ceremonial patterns, and the shifting power relations between the human main characters and the godly ones. The focus is mainly on deconstructing Song Jiang's paradoxical identity—his dual acceptance of Confucian loyalty and subversive rebellion—and on questioning its compatibility with Jiutian Xuannv's validation of the righteous resistance as both a heavenly decree and political allegory. By connecting mytho-literary archetypes with socio-historical critiques, this research presents interdisciplinary contributions to the reinterpretation of *Water Margin* while also suggesting new paradigms for the analysis of gender, agency, and heavenly intervention in the premodern Chinese narrative tradition.

Keywords: Shen nv Fu (Rhapsody on the Goddess), Luo shen Fu (The Goddess of the Luo River), *Water Margin* (Shui hu Zhuan), narrative mode, intertextuality

1. Introduction

The Goddess archetype stands as a fundamental element of traditional Chinese culture, which has maintained its core position in literary and artistic expressions throughout all dynastic periods. The first depictions showed these divine beings as distant cosmic powers, but later versions created more human-like female characters who showed their equality to mortals. The transformation reveals how social values have shifted, while showing how writers adapt their writing methods to these changes.

The depiction of Jiutian Xuannv (Mystic Goddess of the Nine Heavens) in the classic literary work *Water Margin* (Shui Hu Zhuan) signifies a major turnaround in the representation of Goddesses in general. Through a comparison of the classical literary prototypes such as Song Yu's *Shen Nv Fu* (Rhapsody on the Goddess) and Cao Zhi's *Luo shen Fu* (Ode to the Luo River Goddess), the present study raises questions about the narrative function, symbolic duality, and socio-political implications of Jiutian Xuannv. The study's results show that her characterization is

different parts of projective authority (through heavenly orders and prophetic ceremonies) and a not so straightforward re-creation that highlights the themes of just uprising and moral ambiguity in the critique of the society and politics of the time represented in the novel. This character's synthesis of the symbolic duality of heavenly power and human frailty makes her surpass the traditional types, depicting the whole retrogression and advancement aspect of the time.

This research advances nuanced interpretations of *Water Margin* while proposing a critical framework for examining the interplay between mythopoetic archetypes and historical-literary transformations in premodern Chinese discourse.

2. An intertextual examination of archetypal evolution and literary innovation

2.1. The goddess trope in Chinese literary tradition: a conceptual overview

The “Goddess” (Shen Nv) narrative tradition primarily stems from the depiction and narration of divine feminine figures in classical Chinese literature. This tradition traces its origins to The Rhapsody of Gaotang (*Gao Tang Fu*) and The Rhapsody of the Goddess (*Shen nv Fu*) by Song Yu of the Warring States period. Notably, the figure of the Gaotang Goddess across these two poetic works does not constitute a unified or harmonious archetype: in The Rhapsody of Gaotang, the goddess is portrayed as alluring yet licentious, whereas in The Rhapsody of the Goddess, she embodies beauty coupled with chastity [1]. The former establishes a “feminine temptation—masculine succumbing” narrative pattern, while the latter evolves into a tripartite structure of “feminine temptation—masculine succumbing—transcendence of desire.” Significantly, The Rhapsody of Gaotang pioneered an emotive narrative framework rooted in mortal-deity erotic encounters, wherein the Wushan Goddess came to function as a literary metonym for courtesans.

The principle of “ganwu erxing” (stimulus from external phenomena) represents a prevalent creative motivation among classical literati, wherein “writers, inspired by external stimuli, cultivate creative interest and impetus, thereby forming the psychological drive for artistic production” [2]. This paradigm is exemplified in Cao Zhi’s The Rhapsody of the Luo Goddess (*Luo shen Fu*). The preface explicitly delineates this mechanism: “In the third year of Huangchu (222 CE), I journeyed to the imperial capital and later crossed the Luo River. Ancient texts recount that the deity of these waters is named Fufei. Moved by Song Yu’s accounts of divine maidens for the King of Chu, I composed this rhapsody.”

Cao Zhi starts the story with a spatiotemporal shift (“departing the capital, traversing the Luo River”), which puts the work in the concrete time markers (Huang chu three year), places (Luo River), and persons (the journey). These features set off associations to mythological stories. The poet's personal sufferings—more specifically the psychological cracks caused by his rise to power in the princely succession contests and his political isolation under the reign of Cao Pi—also come together to form the latent psychological tensions of suffering, fear, and buried outrage. Such tensions are the driving force behind the internal creation, with the artistic impulse becoming stronger in direct relation to his suffering.

Cao Zhi insists with symbolic implications of the return from the imperial center to the feudal periphery twice in the rhapsody (in both preface and main text). Although this displacement presents different perspectives of the poet, in comparison to the early “Ode to the White Horse” (Bai Ma Fu) where he was presented as gallant, it was merely the embittered resignation through which a prince exiled from power still managed to talk that was the case here. Assuming his character, through the beauty of goddesses, blush of spring girls or by the lonely women in high towers—the images of his ecstatic birth are, no doubt, beyond fiction. Such images may not correspond to historical facts, yet

they appear to be projections reflecting the psycho-social dilemmas of the time that are somehow rooted in the intimate realities [3]. Consequently, *The Rhapsody of the Luo Goddess*, although telling a sorrowful story of a love between a human and a god, finally exposes the emotional logic of artistic necessity rather than the mythological retreat of the olden days.

2.2. The narrative of Jiutian Xuannv in the Water Margin

Water Margin (Shui Hu Zhuan), one of the four great classical novels of China, was written by Shi Nai'an around the turn of the Yuan and Ming dynasties (Some versions ascribe it to Luo Guanzhong or co-authored). The novel, which is divided into chapters, narrates the revolt of the heroes of Liangshan against the authorities, their growth in number, and later on, their acceptance of the emperor's pardon (zhao'an) and finally their death in military actions, thus giving a thorough account of the rise and fall of Song Jiang's uprising.

The episode having Jiutian Xuannv (the Mystic Lady of the Nine Heavens) as its central figure carries a lot of thematic significance. This deity, who is very knowledgeable in military strategy, gives Song Jiang three celestial texts (tianshu) and instructs him to "act on Heaven's behalf" (ti tian xing dao). The heavenly command given by God makes the actions of the Liangshan heroes legitimate and serves to increase the complexity of the plot as well as to show the author's Daoist influence and the prevailing belief of the society in celestial beings. Jiutian Xuannv's intervention grants the revolt the status of a saintly cause, gives the rebels the divine authority and the feeling of destiny is heightened among the protagonists.

Dream-mediated communication (tuomeng) in ancient Chinese culture was not only a way for gods to talk to humans but also a favorite theme in literature. Gods would often through dreams to mortals convey their fate, give solutions to crises, or provide sacred objects. Besides, *Water Margin*, through the character of Song Jiang, makes a lot of use of this device. In the Chapter 42 of the book, Song Jiang while running away from the pursuers has a dream in which he meets Jiutian Xuannv, the goddess who welcomes him like a guest. The story precisely describes the divine meeting and the ritual surrounding it. Calling him by the name "Star Lord Song" (Song Xingzhu), she gives him three heavenly texts ordering him to "act on Heaven's behalf (ti tian xing dao), uphold loyalty and righteousness as a leader, govern peacefully as a minister and eradicate corruption to restore virtue"[4]. This balmy revelation is very important for establishing the theology behind Song Jiang's "divinely authorized" (shenshou) leadership [5], thus, His authority is firmly rooted in divine support.

2.3. The transmission and innovation of the two traditions

On one hand, there is the aspect of cultural inheritance. *Water Margin* preserves the conceptual framework of the Goddess of the Nine Heavens (Jiu Tian Xuan Nv) from the Taoist divine pantheon. This deity retains her mystically sublime characteristics and supernatural capabilities while perpetuating classical functional traditions - serving as both spiritual guide to mortal heroes and transmitter of military wisdom. Her role substantially enriches the characterization of Song Jiang. For instance, the Goddess of the Nine Heavens makes two direct appearances in Chapter 42 of the novel. The first occurs when Song Jiang, fleeing official pursuers in Huandao Village, takes refuge in her temple and is guided by divine attendants to meet the goddess in her celestial realm. The goddess immediately establishes his celestial mandate: "Has the Star Lord fared well since our last meeting?" and "The Jade Emperor temporarily banished you to the mortal realm due to lingering worldly attachments and incomplete spiritual cultivation, but you shall soon return to the Purple

Palace. Maintain steadfast resolve without slightest wavering.” [4] The designation “Star Lord” explicitly confirms Song Jiang’s divinely ordained leadership over the 108 Stars of Destiny. The pronouncement “temporary banishment” and “return to the Purple Palace” simultaneously outline his future trajectory and present mission. Following this celestial audience, the goddess bestows upon him three volumes of celestial texts with explicit instructions: “Execute Heaven’s Mandate with loyalty and righteousness as subjects, eliminate corruption and restore order in governance. Study these scriptures diligently, but only share them with the Star of Heavenly Secrets (Tianji Xing). Destroy them upon completion of your mission.” [4] The conferment of “celestial texts” constitutes the goddess’s primary traditional function. Transcending ordinary military treatises, these scriptures contain cosmic principles that empower Song Jiang’s faction to challenge imperial forces and eventual formidable adversaries like Fang La. Numerous strategic deployments and tactical decisions throughout Song Jiang’s campaigns trace their origins to this celestial endowment.

Conversely, though *Water Margin* does not explicitly present a love story involving the Goddess of the Nine Heavens and Song Jiang, their chatting is a de-eroticized, highly political version of the human-divine romance that has been altered a lot in its aspect and concept. Divine-mortal relationships that are characterized by desire and unrequited love, like the one between Cao Zhi and Fufei in “Ode to the Goddess of the Luo River” or the King of Chu’s meeting with the Goddess of Wu Mountain, focus on the emotional exchanges. On the contrary, the Song Jiang-Xuan Nu relationship is very much symbolic. Their meetup is through a roused set of rules, not exchanging love tokens but rather symbolic mandates and divine artifacts. The core of their union is in the passing and receiving of power rather than the giving of love. The theological considerations about the goddess’s practicing of Taoism are also a reason for the couple’s inability to engage in romance. Being a high-ranking goddess in the Taoist hierarchy, her holy status and religious duties call for a total sanctity and authority that is to be maintained at all times. Any representation of the goddess having a romance with a mortal would automatically lead to a loss of her divine reliability, thus going against the very nature of Taoist teachings that hold the celestial beings as pure and free from earthly desires. Still, the granting of divine favor and help by this high goddess to Song Jiang is a way, though modified, of leading the persistent tradition of the human-divine interaction in Chinese mythological stories.

In the first place, there is the unparalleled creative aspect. *Water Margin* is so creative that it connects the arrival of the Mystic Queen of Ninth Heaven to Song Jiang’s crucial life changes, and this is already a great achievement in terms of the narrative structure. The heavenly maiden’s giving of the divine scripts and showing the way during Song Jiang’s hard times shows to be no less than a great literary through. Not only she helps with the military strategies, but she also hints at the proposition of “Executing the Dao on Heaven’s Behalf” (titian xingdao), thus including moral teaching, which is going far beyond the emotional motifs of the traditional divine maiden stories. The crisis of Song Jiang, which is basically a matter of political survival, not that of love, calls for the timely coming of the Mystic Queen for the very reason of attending to the existential needs. She does not offer emotional comfort but rather the divine command: “Proclaim the Dao on Heaven’s Behalf. As a ruler, be always loyal and just; as a subject, defend the nation and the people. Avoid what is wrong, and do what is right.” The simplistic order gives the highest authority to Song Jiang’s venture at Liangshan and at the same time it sets the final operational framework for it.

Additionally, *Water Margin* provides a multifaceted and complicated representation of the Mystic Queen. She shows God’s capability to be different at the same time: keeping the mystical power of omnipotence around her while showing at the same time wisdom and justice by giving literary guidance to the author. A particular part of the text expresses this: “The hall was in an overwhelming

golden light from the dragon lamps and phoenix candles. Azure-robed maidens were standing on both sides, holding tablets, jade insignia, banners, and feather fans. The divine matriarch was seated in the middle of a seven-jeweled nine-dragon couch.” [4] This ritualistic depiction creates an atmosphere of sacredness and a powerful sense of solemnity, placing the queen not only as the beneficiary but also a great tactician. She draws a full plan for Song Jiang: the first step of “Heaven-ordained justice” is done now, he is to surrender to the emperor eventually, and after that, he will become a minister of high rank because of his good deeds. Her prophetic insight goes as far as leaving mysterious lines: “Meeting Su brings manifold blessings; encountering Gao holds no calamity. Against foreign foes and domestic rebels, marvels shall be achieved at multiple fronts.” In Chapter 88’s “Marshal Yan Deploys the Chaotic Celestial Array; Song Jiang Receives Mystic Queen’s Teachings in Dream,” her return to teach battle tactics against Wuyan Guang’s star-army formation is a case of continued heavenly protection. The whole situation resembles the teacher’s constant support, stepping in at the most desperate times and situations when the student seems to possess no solutions. Unlike in the case of typical divine maidens, she is characterized as the spiritual leader-guide and protector, thereby creating a new and unique divine archetype in the Chinese literary cosmology.

3. Comparative analysis of Water Margin and ode to the goddess of the Luo River

3.1. The bleak circumstances of Song Jiang and Cao Zhi in their encounters with the divine feminine

The scenery in *The Rhapsody of the Luo River Goddess* by Cao Zhi deserves the deepest reflections: "When the sun casts its rays on the west, the horse and the carriage also slow down. We make a stop at the nice-smelling marshes, and the horses eat the mushrooms and stay with us in the shadow of the trees, and we look at the Luo River. Then the spirit is uneasy, the mind is troubled, and the thoughts are suddenly scattered. Looking down, I see nothing but when I look up, I see a really beautiful place next to the cliffs." The tired horses and the setting sun at dusk together convey the journey's weariness and doubt and set a sad tone. *The Rhapsody of the Luo River Goddess* builds up such a scene in which, while at first, nothing but the author's despondency over lost political power is sorrowfully hinted at. The expression "the sun slants westward" has a double function: first, it describes the physical evening and second, it refers to the end of life, which can be interpreted through the classical motif that relates sunset to the aging process and thus to human suffering and sorrow. The expression "Carriage and horses falter" illustrates vividly the difficulties of traveling: "falter" indicates the movement of the carriage becoming slower and slower until it stops, and "the agitation of the horses" is the result of the long and tiring journey which is very much like the process of coming to terms with one's inner conflicts, in this case, that of Cao Zhi. He can no longer bear the combination of physical and psychological tiredness when the disillusionment of his political aspirations has reached its highest point. He can no longer travel through the dusk of the day without getting his unfulfilled desires to disrupt his mental calm. At this intersection of physical tiredness and existential despair at sunset, he sees the Luo River Goddess, Fu Fei. So, this environmental picture is shaping his pre-oceanic psychological state.

In *The Outlaws of the Marsh*, chapter 42, Song Jiang's dream-like perception manifests through his unfortunate situation. He gets anxious because he knows that his family is going to be arrested imminently and he is particularly afraid that his old father will be harmed. Consequently, he becomes very anxious: he cannot eat, sleep, or breathe properly; he has not only nightmares about his family being taken away or dying but also wakes up every morning drenched in cold sweat. This

kind of mental torture that lasts for a long time prepares the way for the Mystic Lady's prophetic dream. He cannot sleep at all—whether sitting or lying down, he suffers, his hands are white from gripping hard. The fear of his father's safety and his outlaw status keep him in a state of high alert; this eventually leads to his fainting when he is chased to Huandao Village. He goes into an old temple by accident, and he falls in front of an altar and he is out of his senses. The Ninth Heaven's Mystic Lady gives him the heavenly writings during his sleep, thus offering him both an escape and the ideological ground for the revolt: "righteous causes on behalf of Heaven." This heavenly visitation symbolizes that personal disaster and the needs of history have come together at an important moment.

3.2. The fatigued states of Song Jiang and Cao Zhi during their encounters with divine women

Cao Zhi, first of all, the landscape of the Luo River and the tale of its goddess lured him in, he then found, though, the environmental stimuli, that is to say, he got artistic epiphany. The lines "lingering in Yanglin woods, surveying the Luo River" demonstrate resplendently, Cao's attention to detail in nature, which, on its own, brought the goddesses' fable to mind. Especially, the phrase, "when suddenly my senses shifted and spirit startled" points out the poet's movement from the realm of objective perception to that of subjective contemplation wherein he started the process of mixing external impressions with internal emotions that caused the creative urgency to come forth [6]. The turn of the phrase "senses shifted and spirit startled" indicates a sudden psychological displacement - probably resulting from long travels, complete weariness, and extreme sensitivity to the environment - that opened the entrance for great meditative absorption. The use of the word "suddenly" at the beginning of the adverb gives the idea of the very quick burst of the creative impulse, while the word "abruptly dissipating" denotes the very fast release of mental tension, which is like the case of being momentarily enlightened.

Contextual analysis indicates that Cao's journey during daylight hours was brought to an end by the setting sun along with the physical exhaustion of the "weary carriage and horses". This setting created a psychic state that was suited for hypnagogic transitions. The border state between wakefulness and sleep, perhaps caused by the physical exhaustion or the active subconscious, acted as a catalyst for the visionary experience that followed. The dream-narrative with the Luo River Goddess Fu Fei turning out to be an archetypal "divine-human dichotomy" through its portrayal of exquisite beauty, spiritual closeness, and necessary separation. This dream-like scenario is at once the poet's spiritual longing and the world's limitations, and it acts as a form of psychological compensation by way of imaginative transcendence.

In contrast, the case of Song Jiang highlights petrophysical sinking after a life-threatening emergency. Right at the start of the chapter when darkness falls and the day's tiredness is usually at its highest, he suffers autonomic reactions to fright and depletion which are marked by the physiological descriptions of "slack hands and numbed legs." The phrase "mental exhaustion" makes it more than clear that there was a psychological decline due to the combination of physical strain and a long period of anxiety which led to the need for a very deep sleep to recover first. His unusual sleeping position - "sleeping in his clothes, reclining against a low table" - gives the reader three interpretations at the same time: urgency (clothes not removed), extreme fatigue (makeshift bed), and subconscious vigilance (half lying down). It is a hypnopompic condition of lessened sensory awareness that was advantageous for the Mysterious Maiden's dream to come, thus showing how these boundary states of awareness can be utilized for supernatural literary devices.

4. The characterization of Song Jiang's literary persona

4.1. The contradictory characterization of Song Jiang

Song Jiang, one of the main characters in *Water Margin*, was well done to be a complex and layered character. His literary complexity is based mainly on the contradictions that are part of his character. These internal dualities under the specific sociopolitical conditions of his time, developed at the same time his character became more and more complicated. Besides, the external environment went through great changes and this caused deep reconfigurations in his ideological frame and behavior. His gradually developing resistance mentality and insurgent consciousness became so strong that they finally led him to be forced to go to Liangshan. However, after this point, the radical change of his environment and relations was not presented in the story. The text does not provide much analysis to support the psychological aspect of his ideological development, and it also does not go into the details of how the Mystic Goddess of Ninth Heaven's "divine decree" influenced his cognition changes.

Initially, the opposing forces of the sovereign's loyalty and insurrectional resistance: Song Jiang, the chief of the Liangshan rebels, through his speeches and actions, exhibits a duality that cannot be reconciled. By the principles of Confucianism, he always lived by the principle of "loyalty to the emperor and love for the people," hoping all along for pardon from the government and for working in the state. The command of the Mystic Goddess of Ninth Heaven to "execute Heaven-ordained justice" was an important reinforcement of this ideological drive, making his uprising a holy war to get rid of the corrupt and to restore political purity. On the other hand, Song Jiang was forced to face the harsh reality of leading the armed struggle against the emperor's oppression - a conflict which intensified the clash between his moral beliefs and revolutionary actions. His continual uncertainty over whether to maintain the uprising or to seek pardon during the height of Liangshan's power symbolizes his torturous inner conflict.

Second, the paradox of benevolent virtue and political stratagem: Renowned as the "Timely Rain" for his egalitarian camaraderie, Song Jiang's reputation as a paragon of *ren* (benevolence) and *yi* (righteousness) was consolidated only after relocating his family to Liangshan and receiving the Mystic Goddess' three celestial texts — artifacts that cosmologically bridged divine mandate and mortal agency, thereby nullifying the rebels' earlier defiant maxims of "fearing neither heaven nor earth." [7] Yet, as a leader, he simultaneously deployed calculated Machiavellian tactics to consolidate authority and mediate factional interests. While the Mystic Goddess sanctified his mission, her divine imprimatur paradoxically necessitated intensified political maneuvering to sustain the rebellion, rendering his moral identity profoundly polyvalent.

Third, the conflict between individual ambition and collective welfare: Song Jiang harbored profound personal aspirations for self-actualization through meritocratic service, yet as Liangshan's chieftain, he was obligated to prioritize communal interests. Post-epiphany, the Mystic Goddess' decree to "embody perfect loyalty" and "guide righteousness through fidelity" — directives that reinterpreted rebellion as a teleological path toward orthodox realignment — became the doctrinal foundation for both his conduct and the Liangshan movement's ultimate trajectory [8]. This tension crystallized in the amnesty debates: while factional elements opposed capitulation, Song Jiang perceived state reconciliation as the optimal route to fulfill individual ambitions and patriotic ideals, forcing him into recurrent ethical quandaries when balancing personal and collective imperatives.

4.2. Analytical exposition of Song Jiang's ideological motivations

Song Jiang's ideological motivations emerged as the product of the interwoven forces of Confucian ethics, existential predicaments, religious beliefs, and heroic aspirations. While constrained by traditional values, these motivations concurrently sought to forge legitimate pathways for both personal and Mount Liang collective survival amidst sociopolitical turbulence, with the Jiutian Xuannv (Mystic Lady of the Ninth Heaven) narrative serving as their critical spiritual nexus.

The Confucian teaching of "self-cultivation, family regulation, state governance, and universal peace" was the key notion in Song's outlook. He could never let go of the "serving the nation" slogan even when he was forcibly exiled due to the unintended homicide of Yan Poxi and later getting outlawed. His commitment to the Confucian ideal of benevolent governance was so strong that he managed to change the narrative of the Mount Liang rebellion from insurrection to heaven's agent; this constituted a major conceptual transformation. Song's view was that it was the power of the heavenly mandate given to him by Jiutian Xuannv that made it possible for him to elevate "royal loyalty" from private morality to God's predetermined fate.

Song's ideological transition was mainly influenced by the changing circumstances and demonstrated the twofold traits of being reactive and adapting and being proactive and strategizing. At first, he was content to play the minor role of chief clerk of Yuncheng County, but soon his accidental murder cut his socio-institutional identity off from him brutally. The crisis led to his first real meeting with the system's corruptness—his observations of the people's suffering during exile not only intensified his criticism of the ruling class and he lost faith in the bureaucratic justice system.

When he took over Mount Liang, the increasing pressures changed his operating logic. With military battles at the same time against the imperials and internal divisions within the bandit groups, Song went beyond just aspiring to be a bandit leader. His plea for imperial amnesty was not just a matter of personal survival but characteristically a rational contingency planning under existential threats—a combination of individual fate thinking and collective stewardship responsibilities.

Notably, Song's hidden heroism went through different stages of development. His early manifestations of selflessness via the nickname Timely Rain aimed at recognition that was not more than Jianghu-level, that is, very basic. When he became the leader of the rebels this desire was transformed into the pursuit of becoming a hero in history—the want to get a great legacy by "pacifying the realm and helping enlightened rulers". The Jiutian Xuannv revelation was a turning point of this transformation's climax: the given heavenly texts not only improved military planning but also created in Song's mind the awareness of being in the universe-sanctioned mission of "stabilizing the nation", thus his self-image went up even higher than that of the ordinary hero.

5. Conclusion

By doing a careful study of the Jiutian Xuannv (Mystic Lady of the Ninth Heaven) story in *Water Margin* and looking at the similarities and differences of the divine feminine archetypes in *Rhapsody on the Goddess of the Luo* and *Water Margin*, this research finds out that there are major similarities in the main narratological aspects—mortal-divine love story, deep emotional poetics, and meaning loaded with symbols—although the different settings, dream encounter structure and ways of feeling showed the divergence of the two narratives. Not only do these common features represent the retention of the heavenly feminine narrative tradition in classical literature, but they also reveal the cross-temporal and cross-authorial dialogues in re-inventing this convention.

In a manner that far exceeds just sticking to outdated motifs or coming up with new ones, the narrative structure serves as a major critical tool for the lifting higher of the themes and the deepening of the characters' multiformity. The authors, by using this model, combine historical knowledge with great artistic expression, thereby creating sharp reflections on timeless humanistic questions—being, belief, and fate. The current study not only increases the interpreting activities with *Water Margin* but also opens up new ways of looking at the heavenly female symbol within the larger scope of premodern Chinese literature.

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