



# Comparative Literature: Exploring Folktales “Ular N’daung Dan Si Bungsu” And “The Legend of White Snake”

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## Abstract

Folktales are one of the widespread literary works in the community. Folktales in one region may differ in themes, storylines, and aspects from the other. Examples of such differences can be seen in the Indonesian folktale "Ular N'Daung dan Si Bungsu" and the Chinese folktale "The Legend of the White Snake." This study aims to describe the division of episodes and socio-cultural factors contained in the two stories. This research uses a descriptive-qualitative approach. The data collection technique used in this research is library research. The research data were analyzed using the structuralism theory and described qualitatively. The results showed that these two folktales both have a similar plot that consists of the initial meeting, conflict, and resolution. The difference lies in the number of episodes and storylines, considering that the length of the folktales is also different.

**Keywords:** Comparative literature; Folktales; Structuralism

## Introduction

Folktales are one of the widespread literary works within the community. Folktales represent the traditional way of life recognized by all community members, even though their opinions may be anonymous (Rifai and Fadhilasari,

2022). Folktales are conveyed through actions, specific symbolic words, and storytelling that include ethics, customs, and norms within the community (Danandjaja, 1997). Folktales from different regions can have different aspects, themes, and storylines.

There are interesting anomalies in the folktales of different regions. Folktales from one region may have similarities, such as in themes, storylines, and other aspects. Even folktales from countries that are far apart can share many similarities. An example of such anomaly is the Indonesian folktale "Ular N'Daung dan Si Bungsu" and the Chinese folktale "The Legend of the White Snake." However, these two similar stories also have differences. This is because each story originates, lives, and evolves in different communities, so despite their similarities, they naturally show differences as well.

This is in line with Khotimah's (2022) research, which highlights some similarities and differences between two folktales, namely Malin Kundang and Batu Menangis. Both convey the moral message that respecting parents is very important and warn about the bad consequences of hurting a mother's feelings. Additionally, the study also highlights the similarities in the extrinsic elements of both stories, especially regarding the socio-cultural background that influences the narrative.

Based on this explanation, this research aims to examine the similarities and differences between these two folktales, not only from their intrinsic elements but also through the extrinsic elements. This is done by explaining the episode division in the two folktales "Ular Ndaung" and "White Snake" and how the socio-cultural factors within them shape the works "Ular N'Daung dan Si Bungsu" and "The Legend of the White Snake."

## **Method**

This research utilizes a descriptive-qualitative approach. The objects of study in this comparative literature research are the Indonesian folktale "Ular N'Daung dan Si Bungsu" and the Chinese folktale "The Legend of the White Snake." The data collection technique used in this study is library research. The research data are analyzed structurally and described qualitatively.

## **Result**

"Ular Ndaung" and "White Snake" are folktales with their own characteristics. Both stories share a common element in using snakes as a socio-cultural symbol within their narratives. However, they differ significantly in their plot structures and settings. "Ular Ndaung" is a folktale from Indonesia, specifically Bengkulu, while "White Snake" originates from China. Despite these differences, the two folktales can be compared and contrasted with one another.

### **Episode Division of "Ular Ndaung"**

To divide each episode in the folktale "Ular Ndaung," it is important to understand the narrative structure beforehand. The narrative structure will be useful for the division of the "Ular Ndaung" episodes. Below is a breakdown of the narrative structure of "Ular Ndaung."

1. The tale originates from Bengkulu. A long time ago, there was a small family consisting of a mother and her three children.
2. For living, si Bungsu helped the mother work on the land left by her late husband. Meanwhile, the two older siblings refused to lend a hand.
3. One day, tragedy hit. The mother got really sick. They called a healer.
4. The healer said that the only way the mother could recover was if they could get a magical ember from the top of a mountain guarded by a snake known as Ular Ndaung.
5. The older siblings refused to get the ember. So, Si Bungsu decided to go alone.
6. When she reached the mountain peak, si Bungsu decided to take a break. That was when she found Ular Ndaung at its resting place.
7. Si Bungsu explained that she wanted to get the magical ember to save her mother. The Ular Ndaung agreed to help with one condition, which was to get married to Ular Ndaung.
8. To save her mother, Si Bungsu decided to agree to the term. She finally got the ember.
9. Si Bungsu rushed home to bring the magical ember to her mother. Then, the mother recovered.
10. Si Bungsu told her mother about the promise to Ular Ndaung and decided to keep it since the mother was saved.
11. Si Bungsu went back to the mountain to meet Ular Ndaung but found a prince

- who was cursed to turn into Ular Ndaung during the day.
12. Si Bungsu and the prince grew close through their talks.
  13. The older siblings, curious about what happened and whether si Bungsu really married the snake, followed and saw Si Bungsu with the prince.
  14. Jealous, the older siblings went to the snake's lair, found its skin, and burned it, hoping the prince would hate the youngest kid.
  15. Instead, burning the skin broke the curse and turned the prince back to his true form.
  16. The prince took back his throne from his uncle.
  17. He and Si Bungsu got married, and their mom moved to the palace with them. The older siblings did not come along because they were too ashamed of what they had done.

Based on the storyline, the folktale "Ular Ndaung" can be classified into four major episodes.

Episode I serve as the setting introduction. Episode I include events points 1 to 5. From this episode, the readers or listeners can get an understanding of how this story is constructed in a folktale and the portrayal of the condition through the place, time, and atmosphere. This episode also introduces the conflict, which is the mother falling ill. The inner conflict of si Bungsu is highlighted, encouraging her to take the magical ember alone, without the help of their siblings.

Episode II is about the meeting with Ular Ndaung. Episode II consists of the events points 6 to 10. This episode shows the main character meeting Ular Ndaung. It reveals the internal struggle of si Bungsu, who wants to save their mother but must marry Ular Ndaung as a condition. Si Bungsu agrees to the condition to achieve her goal and fulfills their promise.

Episode III is about the conflict that appears when she is about to fulfill the promise. Episode III covers events points 11 to 15. Si Bungsu, while trying to fulfill the promise, discovers that Ular Ndaung is a curse placed on the prince. The older siblings, curious and jealous of her, decide to go to the mountain peak. They burn the snake's skin, unintentionally breaking the curse.

Episode IV is the resolution. This episode consists of events points 16 and 17. In the end, the prince gets his throne back and marries si Bungsu.

### **Episode Division of "White Snake"**

To divide each episode in the folktale "White Snake," it is important to understand the narrative structure beforehand. The narrative structure will be useful for the division of the "White Snake" episodes. Below is a breakdown of the narrative structure of "White Snake."

1. The film began with a battle between the royal troops and a centipede demon in the marketplace. The troops struggled to defeat the demon.
2. One of the royal soldiers asked Xu Xian for help, but he refused to fight the demon. Later, Master Dang Tou who has the power to take out demons showed up.
3. Master Dang Tou sent Xu Xian to find the white snake demon while looking for herbal medicine. Xu Xian stumbled upon a cold snake, which turned out to be the white snake demon.
4. Xu Xian was startled by the green snake demon, causing him to faint.
5. The white snake demon turned into a human, and Xu Xian met this human form for the first time. Then Xu Xian headed back home.
6. Xu Xian went back to the city and saw his grandmother to cure her illness.
7. The white snake demon (Bai She) met Xu Xian, and they started getting to know each other.
8. Xu Xian was told to heal Master Dang Tou, who was sick. Master Dang Tou
9. recovered with Bai She's help.
10. Xu Xian and Bai, she got invited to a banquet by Master Dang Tou, who suspected Bai She might be the white snake demon.
11. After drinking some special wine, Bai She got dizzy. The green snake demon helped Bai She make a getaway.
12. While escaping, Bai She ran into demon hunters who were after her. Master Dang Tou helped chase them off, and Bai She and Xu Xian got separated.
13. Xu Xian found his grandmother who got better with Bai She's help.
14. Xu Xian and Bai, she talked and walked through a flower garden, falling in love.
15. Bai, she admitted she's a demon. Xu Xian was initially shocked and tried to let
16. go of her hand.

17. Demon hunters showed up to attack Bai She. She fought back, but Xu Xian fell into a ravine and was saved by Bai She.
18. Bai She was weak from saving Xu Xian. Despite knowing she was a demon, Xu Xian helped her because he loved her.
19. Xu Xian went to a lake and met a mysterious man who told him where to find a cure for Bai She.
20. The man turned out to be Master Dang Tou, who attacked Bai She and the green snake demon. They could not fight him off.
21. Xu Xian asked Master Dang Tou to stop attacking and decided to join the royal troops under his command.
22. Demon hunters attacked the kingdom looking for the white snake demon, and Xu Xian got knocked out.
23. The demon hunters found Bai She and the green snake demon's hideout after
24. getting a tip from Xu Xian, who was tricked by Master Dang Tou.
25. Bai, she reunited with Xu Xian, who apologized.
26. Bai She and the green snake demon got captured. Bai, she helped the green snake demon escape.
27. Bai She averted the Green Snake Demon from escaping.
28. The green snake demon asked Xu Xian for help to fight the demon hunters.
29. They fought the demon hunters together. Master Dang Tou helped them, realizing his mistake.
30. Xu Xian confronted the leader of the demon hunters, who turned out to be a demon. Xu Xian saved the white snake, while the green snake demon and Master Dang Tou took on the leader.
31. Xu Xian sacrificed himself to save Bai She. Bai She then defeated the leader of the demon hunters.
32. The story ended with Xu Xian's death and his reincarnation appearing in the
33. future.

Based on the storyline, the folktale "White Snake" can be classified into nine major episodes.

Episode I is the setting scene. This episode consists of events points 1 and 2. The centipede demon attacks and the kingdom's setting set up the story's background.

Episode II is about the first meeting. This episode covers events points 3 to 5. Xu Xian and Bai She meet for the first time, starting their love story.

Episode III is the second meeting. This episode consists of events points 6 to 8. Xu Xian meets Bai She again, who has come to the kingdom seeking Xu Xian, who had helped her when she was cold.

Episode IV is where the first conflict arises. This episode consists of events points 8 to 11. Master Dang Tou becomes suspicious of Bai She, suspecting her to be the white snake demon. Bai She manages to escape but encounters demon hunters. She eventually escapes from them.

Episode V is the next meeting. This episode consists of events points 12 to 15. This encounter is the foundation for their love. However, Bai She is attacked, and Xu Xian is also targeted. Xu Xian is saved by Bai She when he almost falls into a ravine, and she faints from the effort.

Episode VI is the manifestation of love. This episode includes events points 16 to 19. Despite knowing Bai She is a demon, Xu Xian continues to love her. He tries to heal her but ends up joining Master Dang Tou's royal troops to save her.

Episode VII is the beginning of the battle. This episode covers events points 20 to 23. Xu Xian, tricked by Gao Jin, reveals Bai She's hiding place. Bai She and the Green Snake Demon get attacked and captured, leaving Xu Xian filled with regret.

Episode VIII is the final battle. This episode consists of events points 24 to 27. The Green Snake Demon asks Xu Xian for help to save the dying Bai She. They fight the demon hunters with Master Dang Tou's help. The demon hunter leader turns out to be a demon, and a battle ensues, leading to Xu Xian's death.

Episode IX is the resolution. This episode consists of events points 28 and 29. The story ends with Xu Xian's death and a scene showing his future reincarnation, hinting at Bai She's continued wait for him despite their separation.

## **Discussion**

The story of "Ular Ndaung" tells of a mother who is helped by her youngest child to work in the fields. However, a tragedy occurs when the mother falls ill. Many healers are called, but only one healer says that they need a magical ember from the top of a mountain. The youngest child decides to go get it, even though their older siblings do not want to help. When the youngest child is almost at the peak, she takes a rest and is suddenly surprised by Ular Ndaung.

The snake has the ember and will give it to the youngest child if she agrees to marry the snake. After the mother is completely healed, the youngest child returns to meet Ular Ndaung. Instead of a snake, she finds a handsome young man. The older siblings go to the mountain and are shocked to see the youngest child with a handsome man, not a snake. They are jealous and go to Ular Ndaung's place, burning the snake's skin. This act breaks the prince's curse. The prince and the youngest child get married.

The film "White Snake" is a famous Chinese folktale. It tells the love story of Xu Xian and Bai She. The romance between Xu Xian and Bai She begins when they meet in the snake's den. This first meeting makes them fall in love with each other. Bai She then looks for Xu Xian. However, their love is forbidden because Bai She is a demon, while Xu Xian does not like demons. In the end, Bai She and Xu Xian cannot be together as Xu Xian sacrifices his life for Bai, She.

### **Social-Cultural Aspects in "Ular Ndaung"**

To understand the social and cultural aspects of the film "Ular Ndaung," we need to look at the social and cultural elements in the literary work, which include the setting of the story and mystical phenomena.

This story originates from Bengkulu. It portrays the life of society in ancient times. The story is assumed to take place in the 13th century and onwards. This is evident from the prince's name, Prince Abdul Rahman Alamsyah, which is associated with Islam and a kingdom. Considering that the first Islamic kingdom in Indonesia, Samudera Pasai, was established in 1267, the story's setting must be after the 13th century. The story depicts the simple life of people living at the foot of a mountain.

This folktale includes intriguing mystical phenomena. Two mystical phenomena stand out in "Ular Ndaung." The first phenomenon is the magical ember. Logically, an ember does not have medical benefits that can cure a disease, especially an unknown one. However, this story describes a magical object with the power to heal the sick. This suggests a belief that certain magical objects were considered healers by the people of that time.



The symbolism of the magical object reflects the community's belief in the existence of supernatural powers. In the 13th century, besides the influences of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, there were animistic and dynamistic beliefs. These beliefs are often related to the existence of supernatural powers in certain objects. Even today, the use of objects considered supernatural, such as amulets, still exists. This shows that there is a belief among people in the manifestation of magical powers within certain objects.

### **Social-Cultural Aspects in "White Snake"**

To understand the social and cultural aspects of the film "White Snake," we need to consider the elements that correlate with social and cultural themes in literature, such as the setting and mystical phenomena. The story is set in an ancient Chinese kingdom during the Song Dynasty, which ruled China from 960 to 1279. Therefore, the folk tale in "White Snake" takes place between 960 and 1279. During the Song Dynasty, people still believed in the existence of demons. This belief is evident in various calligraphy and paintings from that era. Even today, Chinese society continues to believe in the existence of demons, including snake demons.

The mystical phenomenon depicted in the film is the portrayal of demons. The story features demons who are considered good because they help humans and others who are bad. This portrayal of demons reflects the creative imagination of society regarding demon stories. Typically, demons are depicted as spirits that attack humans, not help them. In addition to the mystical aspect of demons (whose existence is only believed by certain groups), the film "White Snake" also features the mystical phenomenon of a human falling in love with a kind-hearted demon. Thus, it creates the idea that two different worlds (humans and demons) can unite.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the research conducted, it can be concluded that the literary works depicted in these two stories can be classified into several episodes that construct the storyline. Both folktales have similar plot structures, including an initial meeting, conflict, and resolution. The differences lie in the number of episodes and the plot details, given the varying lengths of the folktales. This episode classification helps in understanding the phenomena occurring in each literary work.

Another difference is seen in how the social-cultural phenomena are portrayed: "Ular Ndaung" involves the belief in magical objects rooted in the Nusantara society, while "White Snake" involves the belief in the existence of demons that transform into humans. This reflects how societies believe in these social phenomena.

For future research, it is recommended to add other structuralist perspectives. Future researchers can also use other theories to evaluate these two literary works, as comparative literature is not limited to intrinsic and extrinsic aspects. It is also suggested that readers watch the two films discussed in this study. Watching the films while reading the analysis can enhance the understanding of comparative literature more accurately. This will also broaden the viewers' perspectives and deepen their literary knowledge.

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