

CHAPTER 5

Angels, Temptresses and Beyond

5.1 Introduction

There are certain prominent archetypal characters that reveal themselves as charismatic influences upon which the fates of other characters hinge in the magical realm of folklore: angels, temptresses and celestial women. Angels, by the very nature of their goodness and heavenly grace, often fulfil the roles of teacher or guardian and render protection and guidance to those in need. Their nature is so otherworldly; thus, it radiates innocence and morality; they stand for righteousness within the convoluted framework of folklores (Eberhard, 1965, p. 45). Their counterparts are the seductive sirens, so tantalizingly attractive, holding both heroes and heroines with the allure of their fleshly attractions and unfair tactics (Lyngdoh, 1991, p. 27). These compelling personalities set against the moral mettle of both heroes and heroines, position them as the antagonists in this endless battle of good vs evil. They work together to craft a complex web inside the structure of folktales—the perpetual playing out of light and darkness, morality and immorality (Nongkynrih, 2007, p. 81).

In most folktales, angels are supernatural beings that play a role of heavenly messenger or protector of some kind (Eberhard, 1965, p. 57). They must generally give way to offer people guidance, assistance, and protection. They symbolize, for the most part, other values within the story: kindness, compassion, and wisdom (Yang & An, 2005, p. 93). In folktales, the angels are always considered protectors who could provide counsel, defense, and even magical aid to the hero. They are messenger or influencers of the heavenly to the humans; sometimes, they bring messages while other times they grant (Eberhard, 2003, p. 117). They are basically associated with the heavens or heavenly states and are regarded for having their intrinsic purity and virtuousness (Davis, 2001, p. 142).

Helpers and protectors are sometimes depicted as selfless angels who assist and protect the protagonist (Bareh, 1985, p. 101). They provide direction and motivation and sometimes supernatural aid to make the journey or a quest of the protagonist easier.

Angels have been the go-between who delivers an important message or prophecy from heaven to the protagonists (Wu, 1984, p. 60). They can also be used as a way of establishing communication between man and the higher powers (Lyngdoh, 1991, p. 120).

Angles are associated with ideals of good, righteousness and morality (Nongkynrih, 2007, p. 88). They epitomize those virtues of pity, truthfulness and goodness. In many folk stories, they are said to reward people who have them or punish those who embrace vices that are known to be immoral (Gurdon, 1907, p. 64).

A temptress is usually described as one who uses her physical beauty and grace to lure others into her trap or away from their righteous path (Rafy, 1920, p. 33). Such a character is considered to be seductive and charming; therefore, she can control the emotions and desires of another person, mainly that of the male gender (Sawian, 2007, p. 215). Temptresses are linked to ideas of temptation, sex, and sometimes even maliciousness (Yang & An, 2005, p. 136). Folklore plotlines often take a tale that tends to judge the moral character or loyalty of the protagonist and then gradually steer him into dangerous or immoral territories (Roberts, 2015, p. 53). The temptresses have typically been presented as a *femme fatale*: splendid in their attraction and charm but ultimately taking advantage of weaknesses of individuals or causing their downfall (Eberhard, 1965, p. 92).

A vast majority of folktales use the temptress as a warning to alert audiences to the dangers of succumbing to temptation or making impulsive decisions based on desire (Pu, 2010, p. 121). These characters seem to test the moral fibre and integrity of the protagonists, questioning their ability to resist temptation and remain true to their goodness (Lyngdoh, 1991, p. 87). Conversely, angels symbolize such virtues as protection and intervention by God, for it inspires people to do right and make decisions that please God (Werner, 1922, p. 105).

The common modelling of temptresses is by women who entice the heroes to abandon their duties using their physical attractiveness and persuasive forces, leading them away from their duty (Bareh, 1964, p. 154). They exploit needs and weaknesses of human nature, play on individuals to give up principles or behaviour that might harm them.

The temptress usually poses a test of the protagonist's character, one that gauges his moral fibre and his resistance to temptation (Gurdon, 1907, p. 84). Resisting the temptress's seduction is to make a leap forward in the process of the hero's moral growth as well as the conquest of his flaws or weaknesses (Roberts, 2015, p. 72).

These symbolic representations of the temptress typically embody a variety of undesirable qualities or moral defects such as, but not limited to: lust, greed, vanity, and mendacity (Wu, 1984, p. 180). They thus typify humanity's worst elements, even while the figures serve as warnings in order to point out all the perils that iniquity or destructive actions may incur (Lyngdoh, 1991, p. 150).

They are fairies or temptresses that have their usual place in a fairy tale; they can be some sort of magical beings that help the main characters or guide them, while temptresses often test the resolve of the characters or lead them into dangerous situations (Eberhard, 1965, p. 75). There are lots of stories included in the anthology of Grimm's Fairy Tales written by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm wherein angels and temptresses show up to play major roles. To mention a few, "Cinderella" has the good fairy godmother, and "Beauty and the Beast" has the enchantress, a character similar to a temptress, who tests the goodness of the protagonist.

Most religious texts mention angels and temptresses throughout various contexts to show the connection of these creatures with their people on ethical and spiritual matters (Davis, 2001, p. 56). Many stories have been mentioned in the Bible that depict the role of both angels and temptresses (Eberhard, 1965, p. 39). The story of the first humans, Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis, is one such example where the serpent played its role of a temptress to influence Eve's mind to disobey the instruction given by God (Roberts, 2015, p. 61).

5.2 Role of Angels, Temptresses and Celestial Beings in Chinese Folktales

Han Chinese folklore is full of stories with heavenly creatures and temptresses that have captivated many generations. These are stories of gods and spirits that seduce humans, bringing fortune and calamity (Eberhard, 1965, p. 120). In Chinese mythology, angels and temptresses function as important figures in many stories; they often symbolize contrasting qualities and motivations (Eberhard, 2003, p. 45). Angels are mythical beings associated

with benevolence, protection, and mystic intercession, better known as Tian Shi or "Heavenly Beings." Temptresses, on the other hand, are enchanting creatures with phenomenal capabilities, magic good looks, and the ability to seduce and manipulate humans (Yang & An, 2005, p. 74). The temptresses are better known as Mojie or 'Enchantresses,' possessing magical beauty, charm, and supernatural skills. Seduction artists often rely on their charm to deceive others into doing something for them. The portrayal of female seductresses in Chinese mythology also bears a moral function: they warn about lust, desire, and betrayal (Davis, 2001, p. 185).

In Chinese folklore, the functions of the angel and temptress are often interwoven and multi-dimensional, representing various aspects of human nature and challenges faced by humans (Eberhard, 2003, p. 60). These archetypes pop up in a wide variety of tales, ranging from mythology to legends and traditional folklore. While specific traits and portrayals do differ, the angel and temptress generally personify opposite forces that influence choices and actions taken by the protagonists. The character represented in Chinese mythology embodies such attributes as compassion, wisdom, and moral guidance. They often provide comfort and aid to the protagonist, guiding them down righteous paths and helping them overcome difficulties (Wu, 1984, p. 213). In many other stories, heavenly beings or gods serve the purpose of angels, protecting and watching over humankind. A very good example is the Chinese mythological being Guanyin, better known as Avalokitesvara, who often appears as a kind god that rescues people in distress and grants them blessings (Werner, 1922, p. 148).

The role of angels can also be akin to wise mentors by offering advice and teaching moral lessons (Roberts, 2015, p. 102). They provide guidance and reveal hidden truths to help the protagonist out of a problem. One such example of this role can be identified in the story of *Journey to the West*, wherein the monk Xuan Zang, also known as Hiuen Tsang, is accompanied by the heavenly character of the Monkey King, Sun Wukong, playing the dual roles of both protector and mentor. In some stories, angels play their role as harbingers of doom or destiny, revealing prophecies or warnings to the protagonist. These messages often have a huge impact on the behaviour of the protagonist and can change circumstances in that path for the character. The popular Chinese novel, *Honglou Meng* incorporates heavenly beings who communicate with earth and play pivotal roles in the lives of the protagonists (Pu, 2010, p. 53).

The seductress has been associated with pleasures of all types, lust, and earthly desires. She often misleads the character away from his path of righteousness or places him in difficult moral decisions (Yang & An, 2005, p. 92). While an enchantress may appear impressive and sophisticated, her intentions are ultimately self-serving or destructive. Through many folktales, female characters sometimes play the role of temptresses by using their good looks and charms to lure or manipulate the protagonist. They seduce such men into reneging on their moral obligations or embarking on a risky quest. A notable example is *Baishe Zhuan* or the story of the White Snake, where the snake spirit transforms into a beautiful woman to seduce a mortal man (Eberhard, 1965, p. 202). The temptress can also represent a test or trial for the protagonist, challenging their moral fibre and resolve. By presenting temptations, the character's true nature is revealed through their choices and actions (Davis, 2001, p. 233). This role is often seen in stories involving cultivation and spiritual journeys, where the protagonist must resist temptations to achieve enlightenment. In some narratives, the temptress embodies desire and attachment to worldly pleasures, distracting the protagonist from their true purpose. By succumbing to temptation, the character may experience setbacks or moral decline. *Niúláng Zhīnǚ* or the Legend of the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl presents a temptress-like figure in the form of the jealous and vengeful Xi Wangmu or Queen Mother of the Western Heaven, who tries to separate the two lovers (Werner, 1922, p. 178).

5.3 Selected Chinese Folktales

5.3.1 The Cowherd and The Weaver Girl

Narration

A Chinese folktale, this classic story revolves around the love between two heavenly beings: Zhinü, the Weaver Girl, and Niulang, the Cowherd. The story tells of how a beautiful heavenly weaver fell to earth and met a poor cowherd named Niulang. They fell in love, married, and lived with their two children in blissful happiness. However, their happiness was not to last when the Queen Mother of the West was angry with Zhinü for abandoning the weaving work. She therefore created a large river of her own between them-known as the Milky Way, so that the two could not meet for the rest of eternity. Every year, on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month, magpies build an arch across the river to make the couple meet for a little time. This is the story connected with Qixi

Festival also known as the Double Seventh Festival. It is actually China's Valentine's Day and represents love, sacrifice, and eternity that connects the heavenly and mortal realms. The story dates back and continues to be an integral part of Chinese folklore.

Interpretation

Traditionally it is a sad tale of Zhinü rich in cultural symbols and meanings. The central plot revolves around the love affair of heavenly beings, yet the female characters are crucial for the development of the storyline and deeper meanings. Zhinü is the main female character, representing heavenly beauty and skill in weaving. Her descent to Earth and subsequent love affair with Niulang introduce themes of cross-boundary love and social transgression. The heroine sacrifices her important role in heaven for true love and displays courage and free will. Her character highlights the role of women's characters and the transformative power of love.

On the contrary, the Queen Mother of the West is depicted powerful and commanding, and hence an antagonist. Much of the conflict that infuses the plot can be traced back to her anger and punishment of Zhinü for not carrying out her duties. The Queen Mother represents the societal demands placed on women and their punishments for not adhering to cultural expectations. The section of the story draws out the conflicts between societal pressures and personal fulfilment for female protagonists.

The transformation of the Milky Way into a cosmic river also symbolizes the enforced severance between the lovers. The action of the Queen Mother metaphorically constrains the lovers, as she does with many others and especially women, from finding love. The annual assembly on the seventh day of the seventh month through a bridge made of magpies symbolized the power of love and hopes for overcoming obstacles.

The various portraits of women in this Chinese fairy tale bring depth and richness to the cultural meaning of the story. Zhinü's story is one of resistance, a defiance on the imposition by the Queen Mother. This story continues to attract modern-day audiences with the range of themes and colourful characters, standing as a timeless testament to the power of love.

5.3.2 The White Snake

Narration

"The Legend of the White Snake" is a centuries-old folktale from Chinese history that has been widely circulated throughout generations. There is this beautiful white snake spirit named Bai Su Zhen, with her companion known as the Green Snake Spirit or Xiao Qing, who falls deeply in love with a handsome young scholar named Xu Xian, then gets married with him and lives happily forever. But their love arouses the interest of Fahai, a monk who believes their union goes against natural law. Despite the flood and her imprisonment, Bai Suzhen never gave way to her love for Xu Xi'an. It has been widely adapted in literature, drama, and other Chinese art forms, forming an important and significant part of Chinese cultural heritage.

Interpretation

"The Legend of the White Snake" is one of the most intriguing folktales in Chinese folklore in terms of love, sacrifice, and the eternal battle of supernatural forces against human interest. The story is centered upon Bai Suzhen, a spirit of a white snake as a young woman. Thus, the story unfolds with the disguise of Bai Suzhen as a beautiful and angelic woman who meets Xu Xian, a young scholar. Their love story intertwined between the world of social norms and intervention by Fahai, the strict monk. When Bai Suzhen took on the forms of a snake and also that of human, that duality exemplifies what has been eternal for the ages – the conflict between nature and supernatural. Bai Suzhen, who falls in love with Xu Xian and gets married to him, assimilates power of love for transformation. She is no ordinary myth, but rather a symbol to this universal theme of love, to suffer and endure hard conditions. Fahai, although failing to weaken the love in Bai Suzhen's heart, showed a lot of resilience that broke open both social and supernatural barriers to approach Bai Suzhen.

5.3.3 The Peach Blossom Spring

Narration

This is a traditional Chinese folktale that dates back to the Eastern Jin Dynasty, which ruled from 317 to 420 A.D. It is often attributed to the poet Tao Yuanming. The story is about a fisherman

who, while sailing on a river, gets lost and stumbles upon a hidden utopian paradise. As he travels upstream, he unexpectedly encounters a dense forest filled with peach blossoms. He becomes intrigued by the blossoms and delves deeper, only to find a hidden entrance. Going further, he was struck by a beautiful view as he suddenly saw a landscape that caught his breath. The dwellers of Peach Blossom Spring live in harmony and leads a peaceful life. These people have no knowledge about the problems and wars plaguing others. When the fisherman asks about their history, he discovers that they have lived there for centuries. At first, he did not want to share with anyone where this paradise was; but later decided to tell other people about it. But when they tried to find the entrance again, it eluded them as if to show that paradise is always elusive and fleeting. It addresses the issues of utopia, the impermanence of ideal worlds, and longings for a peaceful asylum from the complications of the world. The story gained remarkable acknowledgment within the sphere of Chinese literature and has been widely used in different adaptations and analyses over time.

Interpretation

Female roles in the classic Chinese folktale of Peach Blossom Spring are subtle and vital, as they add significance to themes of utopia, the transience of an ideal world, and seeking peace and refuge. The story began in the Eastern Jin Dynasty, in which a utopian land is discovered by a fisherman. However, to keep alive in the peach blossomed spring, isolated within tranquil living, these occupants make a story essential to convey. The women in the tale are not highlighted, as no detailed description of them is hinted. However, those were the women in such isolation who made the Peach Blossom Spring. And though peaceful and closer to the heart of nature, they are instrumental. Their roles include nurturing the community, fostering relationships, and maintaining the delicate balance that defines their environment. Although the women are not explicitly detailed, they represent the essence of paradise, enhancing the overall harmony and peace of the setting.

This subterranean world, where the fisherman chanced upon, offers some fascinating glimpses into the wishes of its citizens to live sheltered from the rest of the world. The female figures in Peach Blossom Spring, although not at the center-stage, embody an ideal society in which gender roles align harmoniously with the rhythm of nature. Their positions transcend conventional societal frameworks, resulting in a balance that finds harmony with the natural world.

As the fisherman nervously exposes the secret of Peach Blossom Spring to the world, the narrative itself points out that utopia is a will-o'-the-wisp. The more this paradise, veiled and unseen, stays out of the way, the more its mystery becomes an attractive enigma. It is this elusiveness that is made difficult for those seeking an ideal life by the fact that entrance is said to elude those who look for it. In their silent power, the women of Peach Blossom Spring are the realization of the ideal world.

5.3.4 Nüwa and the Creation of Humans

Narration

Nüwa and the Creation of Humans is a Chinese myth that describes the origin of humans. In this myth, the world was empty and lifeless, and thus Nüwa, who had the body of a snake and a human head, undertook the responsibility of infusing life into the desolate land. She took clay from the Yellow River and shaped figures resembling humans, then breathed life into them with a gentle blow. She created humans to populate the Earth and ensure its vitality. This myth highlights her role as both a creator and a nurturer, linking humans to the divine. The story will also represent the Chinese understanding of the origin of mankind and the balance or harmony of the natural world. Nüwa's act of creation relates to human beings and nature; consequently, this myth is very important for Chinese mythology and folkloric practices.

Interpretation

The story "Nüwa and the Creation of Humans" is the tale of the goddess Nüwa who created the human race. Right from the outset, Nüwa is described as an entity having the body of a serpent with the human head – an intriguing mix of God and man. She perceives that the world she created was empty, lifeless. She decides to populate this dead world with living things. She is able to mould figures resembling humans by using mud from the Yellow River. This makes her connected to nature. This act symbolizes the coming together of divine and earthly elements, which is a key theme in Chinese mythology that interlinks the spiritual with the physical. When Nüwa breathes life into the mud figures, it emphasizes her role as a creator. In it, the breath is what enlivens the newly created human and also represents a direct connection between the spiritual and the human world. This act of creativity sets Nüwa out to be the nurturing goddess, who brings life and productivity to

the earth. Therefore, this myth embodies such deep cultural significance since Chinese people believed in living at peace with nature. Creation with mud and water by Nüwa means balance between the heavenly order represented by the goddess and earthly order, that of the mud figures. It is a central feature in Chinese philosophy-the world requires harmony and balance. In the role of the goddess, Nüwa deviates from traditional expectations surrounding male creators in the rest of the world mythology. Her role was that of a creator, as well as a caretaker. She defies stereotypes by being a wonderful representation of feminine strength and creativity. Her actions emerge from the desire to see the earth thrive, which makes her benevolent and caring in the interest of the well-being of her creations.

5.3.5 Miaoshan the Filial Daughter

Narration

This is a traditional Chinese folktale that focuses on the central character, Miaoshan, and her supreme dedication to serve mankind and her devotion towards her father. Miaoshan is a benevolent and chaste young lady with supernatural powers. Her father opposes her decision to live a life of celibacy and accept Buddhism; however, she is determined and keeps on helping people and relieving them of their sufferings. The story speaks about filial piety, sacrifice, and compassion. Miaoshan's adherence to her thoughts and convictions ultimately leads to miracles; for instance, she cures many people who are ill and restores the living to life from death. Her methods abide by the Confucian virtue of filial piety or showing respect to the parents and giving tribute to one's elders. Many Chinese conventional moral teachings and values appear in this story, including sympathy and altruism. Miaoshan's story is an ageless tale of a life lived in devotion to others' welfare.

Interpretation

A powerful female character surfaces in this Chinese folktale as Miaoshan challenges societal norms, demonstrates compassion, sacrifice, and filial piety, thus making her a compelling manifestation of feminine virtues. Miaoshan's character is built by her extraordinary devotion to Buddhism, which is antithetical to the expectations of her father and traditional gender roles. The femininity of Miaoshan is not bound by the typical

conventional expectation but is empowered by her spiritual commitment. She doesn't fit into the mould of women in society but preferred the life of celibacy and serve her mother; such testimonials indicate a sense of self-conviction and determination. Resilient in following the path chosen, Miaoshan contested normative expectations placed on women within the given culture that often sets great value on women's obedience and conformity.

The story of Miaoshan is pivoted on the theme of filial piety. Miaoshan's choice to follow her path in Buddhism against her father's will marks commitment to a cause even larger than the expectations of a family. This challenges the previously monolithic narrative of filial piety—one in which there is complete acceptance and no question of any opposition. Miaoshan's idea of filial piety is more complex—it involves holding onto one's ideals despite adversity.

The story also depicts Miaoshan's supernatural powers as a metaphor for the natural strength and resilience of women. Her ability to heal the sick and bring the dead back to life not only depicts her compassionate character but also defies the limitations of women in traditional societies. Miaoshan's powers contradict the typical stereotype of a woman being inactive and weak; they emphasize the fact that feminine strength can be transformational and life-giving.

In addition, the story of Miaoshan carries within itself the very seed of selflessness and compassion. Her actions are impelled by her true desire to alleviate the pain of others, cementing the message that women can be potent agents of change. The story of Miaoshan highlights that even in a society that often demeans women's contributions, they can have a profound impact when engaged in causes grounded in compassion and altruism.

These are but a few examples of the many Han Chinese folktales that involve angels and temptresses. They reveal deep cultural beliefs, values, and moral lessons within Chinese folklore and shed light on the complex relationship between humans and celestials.

5.4 Role of Angels, Temptresses and Celestial Beings in Khasi Folktales

The mythology of the Khasi is an oral tradition replete with myths and folktales (Bareh, 1964, p. 22). Their mythology is not as well recorded or known as some other cultural traditions, but it does contain elements including angels and temptresses or supernatural

beings. Khasi mythology is varied, and interpretations vary from community to community and on the storyteller (Gurdon, 1907, p. 58).

The traditional tales of the Khasi are intertwined in intricate narratives with mysticism, moral lessons, and cultural insight (Sawian, p. 19). Perhaps one of the dominant motifs that run through Khasi folklore is the contrast between angels and temptresses, the eternal battle that symbolizes a timeless conflict between virtue and temptation, righteousness, and allure (Bareh, 1985, p. 45).

The celestial beings, or angels, represent the ultimate in good deeds and divine intervention in the Khasi folklores (Nongkynrih, 2007, p. 112). These celestial beings are guardians, helping people through their lives on earth. This is exactly what is found in the U Thlen legend, where a celestial being thwarts the evil plan of an evil serpent to win over good over evil (Lyngdoh, 1991, p. 69).

On the other hand, in Khasi folktales, temptresses are actually very interesting beauties and wicked charms which deceive the unsuspecting mortals (Rafy, 1920, p. 45). Enchanting and beautiful, they lead heroes away from the right path.

The play of angels and temptresses in Khasi folktales is also an expression of the values and morality of the Khasi people (Sawian, p. 34). These stories are not only for mere entertainment but contain within themselves valuable lessons about either dire consequence of succumbing to temptation or rewards for the path of virtue. Skies and earth come together as an exciting narrative canvas that has continued to make sense to Khasi as these eternal stories are passed from one generation to the next (Nongkynrih, 2007, p. 137).

Khasi folktales are largely transmitted orally by the traditional tellers (Gurdon, 1907, p. 98). The angel and temptress roles can add flesh to cultural identity and provide insights into the Khasi worldview (Lyngdoh, 1991, p. 82).

In a nutshell, the angels and temptresses in Khasi folktales play important roles in teaching moral lessons, examining the dynamics of good and evil, and reinforcing cultural values (Bareh, 1985, p. 51). These heavenly beings and supernatural creatures add colour

to Khasi folklore, reflecting the community's conception of the mystery of human nature and the challenge laid before an individual in his journey in the world.

5.5 Selected Khasi Folktales

5.5.1 What Causes the Shadows on The Moon

Narration

In ancient times, a family of gods lived together in harmony. This family consisted of a mother and four children, three daughters – Ka Um, Ka Ding, and Ka Sngi – and one son, U Bnai. The family was regarded as beautiful and of noble stock. However, the youngest son, U Bnai, became wayward, refusing to listen to his family and indulged himself in the pleasures of life. U Bnai soon went down to the netherworld, a land of goblins and vices. He tarried in that dark land for a long period of time. But then, overcome by longing for home, he left the dark land and his unsavoury friends. As he went back, he was immediately struck by the beautiful radiance of his sister, Ka Sngi. But his sense of duty and honour had been corrupted because he demanded her hand in marriage from his mother. This brotherly request caused the mother grief, and in shame, she sent away U Bnai. Ka Sngi, in anger, chased after him and, in her rage, threw a handful of hot ashes that burned deep into U Bnai's face. The blemishes that are left on his face account for the moon's pale light and dark shadows as U Bnai, now the moon, refuses to show his face during the day.

Interpretation

This is the old tale of a family of gods, in which much attention is paid to the female characters, particularly to Ka Sngi. The harmony of this family is destroyed by the youngest son, U Bnai, who becomes wayward and goes to the dark realm. When U Bnai comes back, he, being under the influence of the beauty of his sister, Ka Sngi, becomes perverted in his sense of duty and proposes marriage to their mother.

The female characters, most particularly Ka Sngi, are at the center of it all. Ka Sngi's beauty becomes one of the focal points of the story, and her reaction to her brother's unbrotherly proposal showcases her strength of character. Instead of meekly submitting to the dishonourable request, Ka Sngi acts. Incensed, she seeks out U Bnai and metes out her anger by throwing hot ashes on his face, leaving deep scars.

Her action, done in retaliation against the brother's inappropriate advances, evidences strength and will not to take dishonour lying down. It is a form of justice to herself but also to the family as a whole. The aftermath of Ka Sngi's action is, of course, huge, which turns U Bnai to the moon, finally accounting for the pale light and the dark shadow the celestial body displays. Ka Sngi's strength and being resolute in an adverse situation help out in solving the family conflict and determine her position as a strong and honoured female figure in this tale.

5.5.2 How the Peacock got his Beautiful Feathers

Narration

This Khasi folktale tells a story about U Klew, a peacock who lives in a time when animals spoke the language of mankind. U Klew is originally an ordinary grey feathered bird, but he is characterized by pride and vanity. He struts with an erect tail and a long graceful tail, and, because of that, he thinks of himself as royal. His long tail, however, is an unaccommodating neighbour because he could not fit into any other house other than his. Nevertheless, he goes to the courts of the great and is entertained by wealthy birds at jungle festivals, which does not do anything to diminish his pride. His haughty manner of carrying himself made him disliked by his neighbours, and to humble him, they played jests on him. In a prank, his neighbours pretend that he has been elected as the ambassador of the birds to convey greetings to Ka Sngi, a beautiful maiden ruling in the Blue Realm. U Klew, on being told that he had been selected, boasts not only of his diplomatic mission but of his intention to win and marry Ka Sngi. His neighbours laughed at him, thinking of the idea as ridiculous, and expected him to realize the jest and return with embarrassment etched on his face. But U Klew is different. He expresses his intention to really visit the Blue Realm. As he soared higher than anyone expected, his neighbours were in awe and fearful of the consequence of their prank. U Klew's determination takes him to the palace of Ka Sngi, hoping to win her as his wife. The story culminates with the peacock having achieved the unexpected, amazing his neighbours and the readers with his courage and perseverance.

Interpretation

Despite her little presence in the story, Ka Sngi, the female character in the Khasi folktale of U Klew, assumes a significant role. Ka Sngi is the beautiful maiden who is ruling in the Blue Realm, and the character assumes a pivotal role in the development of the story.

From the beginning, U Klew's story is about his pride and vanity, added by his looks and his interaction with other birds. The opportunity to send greetings to Ka Sngi is used as a prank by the neighbours of U Klew, who intend to humble him. But what is interesting is the genuine determination U Klew has to undertake his journey to the Blue Realm without knowing that he has been fooled.

Though limited, the portrayal of Ka Sngi adds a layer of depth to the story. She represents an unattainable goal—an object of desire that U Klew lays his eyes on. The story tacitly brings out the theme of ambition and the lengths to which one would go to attain aspirations.

Although the story revolves around U Klew's journey, the role of Ka Sngi is symbolic. She symbolizes a challenge, the ultimate prize that U Klew is determined to win for himself. With regard to the folktale, the character of Ka Sngi is somewhat enigmatic, and ruling in the Blue Realm gives her mystery and grandeur.

The surprising turn of events, in which U Klew could make it to the palace and win over Ka Sngi for his wife, contradicts the expectations formed through the initial portrayal of U Klew's arrogance and the jest played by his neighbours. This unexpected turn of events surprised the characters inside the story but actually works as a metaphor for the unpredictability of life and how positive change may happen in adversity.

To sum it up, although Ka Sngi may seem to appear for a rather limited period in the narrative, her role is core to the course of U Klew's journey and the overall message of this folktale. She represents aspirations and the unexpected opportunities appearing before a person when one desires and strives for something with unrelenting courage.

5.5.3 The Legend of Ka Lidakha

Narration

Woh Ryndih is a lonely farmer in the early days of Ri Pnar, who narrates the folktale of Ka Lidakha, a magical being, with whom he had a chance to meet. Woh Ryndih once went fishing and eventually caught a fish that turned into the most beautiful maiden. Realizing that she was a fairy or *puriblei*, he outwitted her attempt to escape him and got to know that she was the daughter of a river nymph. Ka Lidakha expressed her desire to be Woh Ryndih's wife, and the latter, after showing her to his relatives, was ready to marry her. The couple begot two daughters, Ka Rytong and Ka Rnga, who grew up to be exceptionally beautiful. As they grew up, they got married to chosen few admirers for them. However, being called by the call of her magical realm, Ka Lidakha would decide to go back to the pool, leaving her family in a state of disbelief. She is insistent that it was her nature to be called as a being from the magical realm. Woh Ryndih, unable to cope with this loss, becomes despondent. Overwhelmed with sadness and longing, Woh Ryndih comes back to the pool with his fishing rod to try his luck once again to win back his love. But a big fish takes his bait and whisks him inside the pool to indicate a supernatural reunion with Ka Lidakha, contrary to his expectations.

Interpretation

From the folktale of Woh Ryndih and Ka Lidakha, there emerges as a story that dwells on the spellbinding and powerful role of the female character, Ka Lidakha. The story begins with Woh Ryndih, a lonely farmer, chancing upon a magical being while fishing. The enchantress Ka Lidakha's transformation from a fish into a stunningly beautiful woman is symbolic of a figure of enchantment and mystery. Ka Lidakha's identity as the daughter of a river nymph and then her subsequent desire to be the wife of Woh Ryndih reflects the extent of her agency and choices. Her readiness to embrace the human world and become part of Woh Ryndih's life denotes her character's independence and the acceptance of love transcending magical and earthly realms. The birth of their two daughters, Ka Rytong and Ka Rnga, further adds another layer to the narrative in that it bears testimony to the continuation of the enchanting legacy of Ka Lidakha. Their description as exceptionally beautiful further underlines the magical and ethereal qualities inherited from their fairy mother.

However, the story takes a turn for the pathetic when Ka Lidakha, despite the tie of family that came into being, feels an irresistible pull of her magical realm. Her decision to return to her pool indicates the conflict between her human connections and the inherent calling of her mystical origins. The determination of Ka Lidakha to follow her nature as a being from the magical realm establishes her strong sense of identity and inevitability of her return to her origins.

The story's emotional core tightens as Woh Ryndih struggles to come to terms with his missing magical wife. His despondency says much about how deep their bond was and how hard it might be to cross over from the ordinary and magical. His attempt to win back Ka Lidakha—symbolized by coming back to the pool with his fishing rod—conveys the universal theme of love resiliency and how far one might go to get back the lost beloved.

The unexpected twist towards the end, when Woh Ryndih is pulled into the water by a huge fish, proposes a mystical reunion transcending expectations. The ending has a bit of fairy dust and mystery, which finally leaves the reader with the feeling of wonder and the possibility of transcending boundaries between the worlds of human and magical. The female characters in the folktale embody magic, agency, and the intricate play of both earthly love and mystical destinies.

5.5.4 Ren and the River Nymph

Narration

In this folktale, when a young man Ren's takes home his fairy queen to his mother's house, she, in her excitement, breaks an old tradition of pulling out the broom from her house, which is a bad omen. The fairy queen, seeing the broom, is overtaken with grief and faints. Ren wants to take his wife back to the river, her home. The broom serves as the omen for a broken promise. Ren has to make a difficult choice between his mother and his fairy queen. And though his mother selflessly encourages him to follow his happiness, Ren cannot just leave his mother. His mother asks him to go with his wife, saying that she loves him and will accept any decision made by her son. Ren, before leaving, douses his mother with much love and gives her a stone to comfort her, saying, "As long as the river roars, you will know I am alive". Ren then plunges into the depths of the river with his fairy queen, which later came to be known as River Ren. The mother was left alone, and

knowing that the roar of the river meant that her son was alive, she keeps listening to the sound of the river. But she died in her later years, and the significance of Ren's life was lost with the passing of time. But because of this story, the Khasis learned the ritual of driving away spirits with a broom, which they still practice.

Interpretation

The story of the female character, a mystical and enchanting fairy queen, tells of Ren's marriage with her and the trials Ren faces due to a broken promise symbolized by a broom. The fairy queen's characterization is marked by her deep emotional feelings towards traditional customs. When Ren's mother breaks a cultural norm by leaving a broom inside the house, the fairy queen is overcome with grief. This suggests that the fairy queen's attachment to cultural traditions is strong and that she can be vulnerable at times when those traditions are overlooked.

Even though the fairy queen is of supernatural origin, her humanly emotions about the breaking of the promise brings forth some human qualities in her nature. Her fainting shows a point of fragility, contrasting with the otherworldly aspects of her personality, therefore making her a complex and realistic character in the story.

Ren is torn between his mother and his fairy queen; that he has to make a choice is also significant because it shows that women play a central role in the story. The mother is a central character too; hers is a selfless job of encouraging Ren to find his happiness. She does not oppose Ren. Hers is a supportive role, which brings a new kind of motherly love to the story.

Finally, Ren gives way to his mother's persuasion and renounces the broken promise symbolized by a broom and opts for his fairy queen. The touching moment of Ren showering his mother with love and gifting her with precious stone adds a new dimension to their relationship. The mother relating her son's existence with the roaring sound of the river creates a powerful connection between the characters and the nature that surrounds them.

The story ends with the mother dying and, therefore, a certain age coming to an end. The importance of Ren's life, plunged into the magical depths of the river with his

fairy queen, fades into oblivion. The cultural activity of keeping the evil spirits at bay with a broom was what remained with the people from Ren's broken promise. In the end, the female characters, especially the fairy queen and Ren's mother, cast a long influence on the culture of the Khasi, raising the folk story to another level by adding emotion and depth to it.

5.6 Comparative analysis

In this chapter, the representations of angels and temptresses in Chinese and Khasi folktales are explored. In this section, the defining characteristics of the major roles played by these angels and temptresses in the Chinese and Khasi folk stories previously discussed are analysed. Also, this chapter attempts to understand how these characters have developed in the stories. The defining characteristics of the angels and temptresses in Chinese and Khasi folktales are stated below, followed by discussions in the succeeding paragraphs.

THE COWHERD AND THE WEAVER GIRL (Chinese Folktale)

1. **Beautiful and Talented:** Zhinü is beautiful and a very good weaver with celestial beauty.
2. **Courageous and Independent:** She is bold in choosing to leave her heavenly calling for love, thereby defying gender roles.
3. **Defiance to Social Norms:** This case of Zhinü and Niulang being love affairs is a defiance of the social norms and sets emphasis on love as being able to transform and move through boundaries.
4. **Symbol of Love's Resilience:** Her every year reunion with Niulang on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month formed by the magpie bridge symbolizes that love persists and difficulties can be handled.

THE WHITE SNAKE (Chinese Folktale)

Bai Suzhen:

1. **Complex Duality:** Bai Suzhen lives between a snake spirit and an ethereal human form, thus showing eternal conflict between the natural and the supernatural.
2. **Transformative Power of Love:** Falling in love and marrying Xu Xian, Bai

Suzhen becomes a symbol of the transformative power of love—passion, commitment, and readiness to face difficulties for love.

3. **Resilience:** No matter how much she is pressured—both from the supernatural and society—her love for him does not bend. Here, resilience would be seen as against social norms and even against the intervention of the Buddhist monk Fahai.

Xiaoqing:

1. **Loyalty and Friendship:** Xiaoqing is described as such, embodying the ideals of loyalty and friendship as the green snake spirit and Bai Suzhen's companion. It's an integral addition to deepen the plot and make light of the strength from sisterhood and the importance of bonds beyond romantic love.

Common Themes:

1. **Sacrifices:** The tragedy that befalls Bai Suzhen brings into focus the sacrifices women make either in the face of society or supernatural powers.
2. **Enduring Strength:** The folktale is a timeless portrayal of femininity, love, and womanly endurance in the face of challenges—Bai Suzhen personifies this idea.
3. **Challenges to Established Norms:** The storyline reveals how one faces challenges in disregarding established norms, with the character of Bai Suzhen challenging both social as well as supernatural forces.

THE PEACH BLOSSOM SPRING (Chinese Folktale)

1. **Harmony with Nature and Peaceful Coexistence:** Female residents likely are involved in tending the community and building relationships that sustain the delicate harmony characteristic of the utopian world. Their work is above each of their specific contributions, but it is for the group to maintain the idyllic way of life.
2. **Nurturing and Community Building:** The women are probably part of the community's nurturing aspect and helping to keep up with relationships and balance the fragility that the utopian atmosphere requires. They nurture each other for a larger group to be able to support the perfect life.
3. **Integration of Gender Roles into Natural Order:** The women in Peach Blossom

Spring are manifestations of the idealized society where gender roles are naturally integrated into the natural order. The balance in the secluded realm reflects a harmonious state of being.

4. **Symbolism of Utopian Ideals:** Though not individually highlighted, the women symbolize intangible elements of utopia, which add to the appeal and mystery of the hidden paradise. Their unobserved influence becomes a part of the larger pursuit of the desire for an abode free from the complexities of the external world.
5. **Contribution to Enchantment and Mystique:** Contribution to Enchantment and Mystique: The women contribute to the enchantment of Peach Blossom Spring, and their mysterious presence adds depth to the overarching themes of the tale. Their role extends beyond the explicit narrative, emphasizing the ephemeral nature of an idealized existence.
6. **Essential to the Exploration of Utopianism:** The folktale does not clearly convey personal experiences, but in fact, the women who stay at Peach Blossom Spring are integral to that ideal of utopian serenity and peace. They give depth to the quest of human beings for such an idyllic respite.

NÜWA AND THE CREATION OF HUMANS (Chinese Folktale)

1. **Unique Physical Attributes:** Nüwa has a body of snake and a human head- unique and mythic forms of the physical kind.
2. **Creative Agency and Power:** Nüwa is the most powerful god with an ability to breathe life into an inert world. The fact that she uses yellow river clay to fashion figures which are as if of men makes it a show of creative agency and association with elements in nature.
3. **Integration of Divine and Earthly Realms:** This plot line indicates how the divine world interacts with the earthly materials, which gives a symbol of how Chinese mythology creates a strong relationship between the spiritual and material realms.
4. **Breath of Life and Nurturing Nature:** While the process of breathing life into clay figures establishes a very close connection between the celestial and human worlds, with all the attention to herself being a creator, Nüwa also exhibits aspects of nurturing and care with taking responsibility for Earth to inhabit and prosper.
5. **Symbol of Harmony and Balance:** The myth suggests Chinese beliefs that human beings are connected to nature. Nüwa's creation symbolizes the balance and

harmony of the divine with the earthly, drawing special attention to the natural world in terms of balance and harmony.

6. **Challenging Gender Norms:** Being a female deity, Nüwa challenges so well the archetypal male creator figure of other cultures. Being both a creator and a nurturer, it appears she represents feminine power and creativity.
7. **Benevolence and Care:** Her work requires that the powers from the earth be conserved; this primarily focuses on her benevolence while taking care of the well-being of the newly established beings.

MIAOSHAN THE FILIAL DAUGHTER (Chinese Folktale)

1. **Compassion:** Miaoshan is an embodiment of deep compassion, which is attested to by supernatural powers to heal the sick and bring back the dead to life. Her actions are motivated by a genuine will to alleviate the suffering of others.
2. **Sacrifice:** Miaoshan represents the virtue of sacrifice, most especially when she chose to follow the path of Buddhism over her father's will. She is committed to higher principles than mere familial expectations in order to make personal sacrifices for the greater good.
3. **Independence and Determination:** Miaoshan's character shows an act of defiance against the traditional roles of gender and societal norms. She renounces the life of celibacy for serving Buddhism, showing that she is independent and determined in her ability to pursue her path, regardless of the stereotypical expectations that are placed on women.
4. **Resilience:** Miaoshan challenges the normative expectations put on women in a culture that so much emphasizes obedience and conformity. Her ability to stand against societal pressures, and in the face of opposition from her father, makes her resilient.
5. **A Critical View Towards Filial Piety:** filial piety is just the heart of Miaoshan's story. But its interpretation that Miaoshan exercises in filial piety goes beyond the scope of unquestioning obedience. She did not deviate from the path of her conscience when the society around her confronted her, going against the commonly told myth that filial piety speaks about.
6. **Empowerment through Spiritual Commitment:** Miaoshan's femininity is not conditioned by the traditional expectations that bind women; instead, it's further

empowered by her commitment to Buddhism. The decision to lead life in a manner that is dedicated to spiritual pursuits challenges stereotypical roles assigned to women in traditional societies.

7. **Supernatural abilities as metaphor for strength:** Supernatural abilities of Miaoshan will be metaphors for inbuilt strength and resilience among women. Her power is against the limitations imposed on women in traditional societies that defy the stereotype of women in society as being rather passive and powerless.
8. **Message of Selflessness and Altruism:** The story of Miaoshan tells the message of selflessness and altruism; it reminds one that women if motivated by a pure urge to serve others, were powerful instruments of positive change in society.

WHAT CAUSES THE SHADOWS ON THE MOON (Khasi Folktale)

1. **Strength and Resilience:** Ka Sngi is being cast as a strong and resilient female character. With that, one has shown, in response to the offending marriage proposal made by the brother, a response or reactivity of inner strength when she refuses to give way to dishonourable treatment and stands up by acting against that unacceptable treatment.
2. **Assertion:** Ka Sngi also in her act of rebuke and revenge, pours her ash on the brother over advances has marked her assertive move. She does not tolerate things going wrong to hang around but acts about wrong matters to protect her dignity with justice to the family at large.
3. **Sense of Justice:** Every action that Ka Sngi undertakes has, as its ground sense, a just view. She, in fact solves the conflict between the two siblings and saves family dignity by confronting her brother and meting out punishment for his unacceptable marriage proposal. Her act goes on to transform U Bnai into the moon which bears some semblance of cosmic justice.
4. **Instinct of Protection:** Ka Sngi refuses not for her self-respect to take in a life that has been dishonoured but also on account of the family's towards their well-being and nobility. The strong positive tenacity presents the instinctive protection on behalf of the family regarding the protection of harmony and dignity in them.

HOW THE PEACOCK GOT HIS BEAUTIFUL FEATHERS (Khasi Folktale)

1. **Beauty and Majesty:** Ka Sngi is portrayed to be that beautiful girl ruling in the Blue Realm. Beauty of her body and magnificence show beauty being luring and mystery for she is a character.
2. **Elusive Goal:** Ka Sngi is the emblem that is unreachable by the man, U Klew. She represents an unreachable goal which is always placed above a desiring subject, in that respect driving U Klew in his merry chase and fuelling his aspiration.
3. **Mystical Presence:** Since the character of Ka Sngi is not much brought forth in the story; mystique is surrounding this character. Along with those judgments within the Blue Realm, some mystery and grandeur are added to that character.
4. **Central Symbolism:** Ka Sngi becomes the center figure in the symbolic field as the story progresses. She is the challenge, and the ultimate prize, to be fought for and won over by U Klew. This furthers the general theme of ambition and pursuit of aspirations.
5. **Unpredictable:** At the time when U Klew brings himself to the palace successfully as Ka Sngi brings as his wife, it challenges everything that had been so well established by that time in the story. That also complicates the character Ka Sngi to talk about unpredictability in life and omnipotent power of change.

THE LEGEND OF KA LIDAKHA (Khasi Folktale)

1. **Enchanting and Powerful Presence:** The personality of Ka Lidakha is said to be enchanting and powerful. A fish that turns into the most beautiful woman, is a wonder and mystery.
2. **Agency and Independence:** Ka Lidakha's identity as being the daughter of a nymph of a river and her need to be the wife to Woh Ryndih show agency and choice. She showed readiness to come into this human world and become the wife to Woh Ryndih's life with her love that bridged the magical and earthly world.
3. **Maternal and Legacy Traits:** Ka Lidakha gives birth to two daughters, Ka Rytong and Ka Rnga. Her bewitching legacy is continued by the birth of her two daughters. The daughters were considered spectacularly beautiful and also inherited the magical and ethereal qualities of their fairy mother.
4. **Conflict and Determination:** Ka Lidakha's conflict is between her human bonds and inevitable and irresistible calls back into her magical world, giving her a firm

sense of identity. The determination Ka Lidakha has, to follow the nature being a creature in the magical world, also shows the inevitable return to the origins for her.

5. **Love and Resilience:** The love between Ka Lidakha and Woh Ryndih is the emotional core of the story. Despite all the tests and the loss, an attempt by Woh Ryndih to win Ka Lidakha back illustrates the universal theme of how love endures and goes to any length to recapture a lost lover.
6. **Mystical Reunion:** In the story, the twist is when Woh Ryndih is dragged by an enormous fish into the water. It is as if it had some mystical reunion. The magic and mystery create the feeling of wonder and also provide the possibility of crossing over the human and magical worlds.

REN AND THE RIVER NYMPH (Khasi Folktale)

Fairy Queen:

1. **Mystical and Enchanting:** the fairy queen portrays magic and enchantment in the folktale through her character.
2. **Deep Emotional Attachment to Tradition:** She is highly emotionally attached to cultural norms. This is well depicted when she gets angry at the thought of violation of a cultural norm related to the broom.
3. **Vulnerability:** Exposure of vulnerability and emotional fragility of fairy queen by breaking the promise; she has revealed the action which has given to her human quality and makes it complex yet relatable simultaneously.
4. **Otherworldly Qualities:** In the process, as vulnerability has come into consideration, the otherworldly qualities have remained with which has made the character not a single-line character. The mixture of magic in that of human emotions had resulted in the complexity.

Ren's Mother:

1. **Selfless and Supportive:** The mother of Ren is very supportive to her son's happiness. She convinces Ren to hold onto a relationship with the fairy queen. The mother's role is not opposing; it is more an understanding and supportive one.
2. **Nuanced Portrayal of Maternal Love:** The selfless support of the mother

provides nuance to the depiction of maternal love. She agrees with Ren's decision to deepen their relationship.

3. **Symbolic Association:** In this, the association of the mother with the existence of her son and the roaring sound of the river create a powerful symbolic association of the characters and elements of nature.
4. **Legacy:** She was giving her last gift in life, yet she would be alive in eternity in the cultural practice promised, now broken by Ren. Long-lasting effects of her presence on this folktale and the cultural tradition of the Khasi are important.

5.7 Observations and Inferences

Table 1 below summarizes the major characteristics exhibited by angels and temptresses in Chinese and Khasi folktales, with their frequency of occurrence shown to reveal interesting patterns and differences. Angels in Chinese folktales are described as beautiful and talented beings; the power of love to change anything, everlasting strength, and harmonious relationship between people and nature. Temptresses in Khasi folktales are depicted as beings with an extraordinary capacity for bravery, independence, and mystery. Shared themes across the board include resilience, loyalty, sacrifice, and a call against the status quo. The chart shows a variety of themes on cultural narrative and filial piety, empowerment through spiritual dedication, and integration of the divine and earthly realms. The contrast in characteristics emphasizes the differences in approach to storytelling in Chinese and Khasi folklore to understand their mythologies.

Traits Highlighted		Frequency of Occurrence	
		Chinese Folktale	Khasi Folktale
1.	Beautiful and Talented	3	3
2.	Resilient	3	2
3.	Strong	3	2
4.	Selfless	3	1
5.	Courageous	1	0
6.	Independent	1	0
7.	Rebellious	3	0
8.	Determined	2	2
9.	Pivotal	2	2
10.	Creative	1	1
11.	Motherly	2	2
12.	Mystique	1	1
13.	Conformist	0	3
14.	Loyal	1	0
15.	Benevolent	1	1

Table 1: Chart of Major Traits and Frequencies in Chinese Folktales on Angels and Tempresses

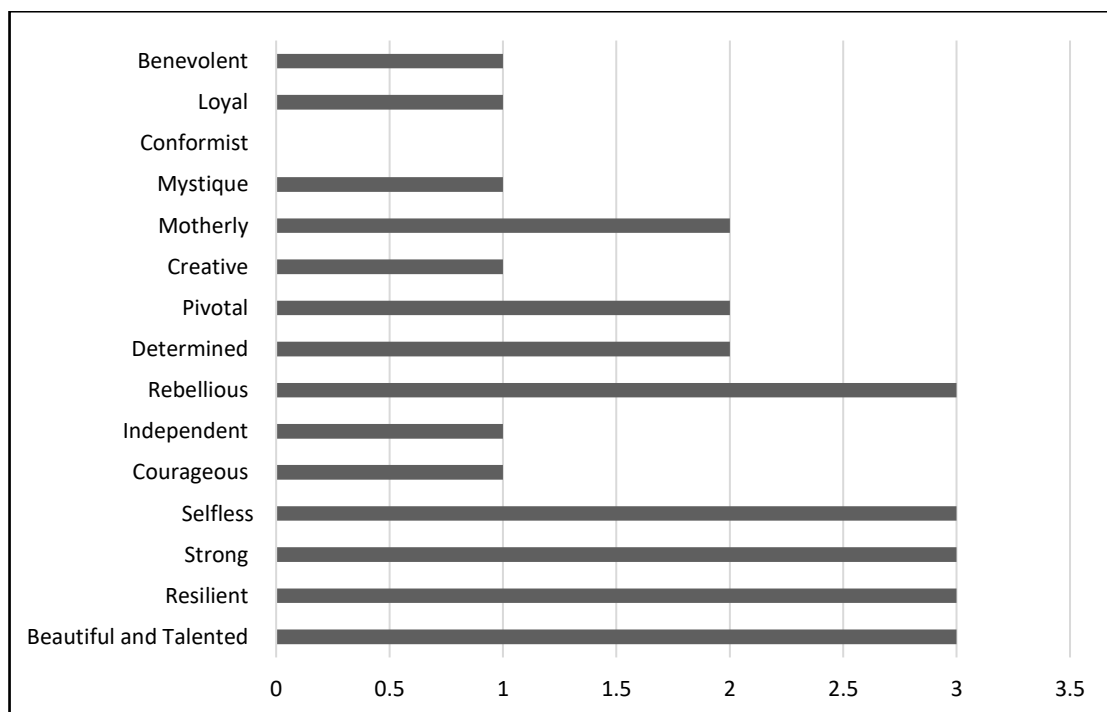


Figure 1: Assessment of Major Traits in Chinese Folktales on Angels, Tempresses and Celestial Beings

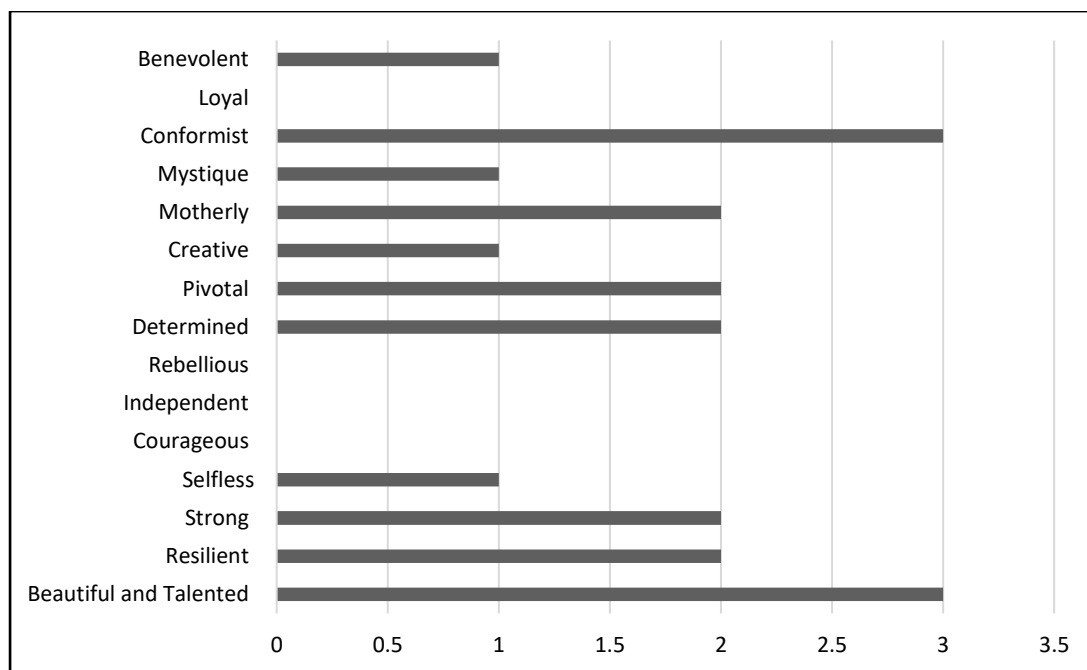


Figure 2: Assessment of Major Traits in Khasi Folktales on Angels, Tempresses and Celestial Beings

5.7.1 Cultural Context

Chinese Folktales:

Chinese myths assume a world view based on harmony with nature, a concept borrowed from Daoist philosophy in which the equilibrium and interdependence characterize existence (Kohn 67). Women characters in them will tend to function as mediators between human and natural planes, portraying both weakness and strength, which is characteristic of Jungian archetypes of the anima as a threshold between worlds (Jung 196). These stories hence embody cultural virtues of harmonious living and balance, and not conquest over nature.

Khasi Folktales:

Khasi folktales, born of a matrilineal society, maintain tradition in thickly symbolic stories. The stories are cultural vehicles of intergenerational continuity, connecting past and present while establishing the legitimacy of maternal lineage (Nongbri 120). This cultural communication of values illustrates the sociological importance of folktales in matrilineal

society, where women figures tend to represent heritage, continuity, and communal identity (Gough 733).

5.7.2 Characterization of Celestial Beings

Chinese Folktales:

Chinese mythological heavenly figures—angels or courtesans—come to represent boldness and change. Their mythological action and line crossing appeal to feminist theory in folklore, which sees such characters as inversions of patriarchal contexts through their establishment of autonomy (Haase 28). Such images confirm both cultural reverence of toughness and concern about women's independence, evoking Jung's "shadow" complex where the mystical feminine threatens and empowers (Jung 132).

Khasi Folktales:

In Khasi mythology, gods are forces of justice and symbols of arbitrary but equal power. Their duality—both able to create and destroy—is fitting with matrilineal cosmologies where females are the strong figures of defence and power (Pakyntein 54). Here, the divine feminine symbolizes shared values of power, justice, and moral order, maintaining Khasi cultural respect for mother figures in both the earthly world and the supernatural realm.

5.7.3 Themes and Lessons

Chinese Folktales:

Love transformation is a common theme in Chinese folktales, with love going beyond interpersonal relations to represent endurance and group cohesion. The tales typically subvert fixed gender identities by situating females as sites of transformation, which aligns with feminist reinterpretations of folklore as spaces of negotiating the boundaries of patriarchy (Warner 88). On the other hand, the focus on harmony aligns with Daoist and Confucian philosophy, where gendered relations promote cosmic equilibrium (Kohn 72).

Khasi Folktales:

Khasi folk tales prioritize romance, sacrifice, and generational continuity. Their focus on relations of feeling brings the social labor of women to centre stage in the management of

cultural tradition among matrilineal kin (Nongbri 122). The tales cast a shared ethics of duty and care, illustrating how sacrifice by individual works to maintain communal values—a feminist critique of folklore would identify this as empowering and socially restrictive, in that women are tasked with cultural continuity (Haase 33).

5.7.4 Narrative Structure

Chinese Folktales:

Narrative motifs of Chinese folktales turn gender stereotypes upside down with self-reliant female protagonists sacrificing for greater harmony. From a Jungian point of view, such sacrifice equates to archetypal tests of individuation wherein the heroine bursts through societal constraint to find her alignment with a higher cosmic order (Jung 214). Feminist theoreticians of folklore would respond that such disturbance of gendered normalcy opens up symbolic space for female subjectivity in patriarchal narrative structures (Warner 91).

Khasi Folktales:

In contrast, Khasi tales thrive on ambiguity and supernatural ambiguity, blending the mythic and the historic components to evoke a vision of the world in which the profane and the sacred are not sharply separate. Narrative preference for ambiguity mirrors the Khasi cultural need for matrilineal continuity, where mother-right guarantees stability in uncertainty (Gough 738). These stories affirm women's symbolic power as mediators between order and disorder, a position at the centre of both Khasi cosmology and feminist interpretation of myth.

Chinese and Khasi folk tales alike show love, resistance, and subversion of norms but in culturally different ways. Chinese mythology presents love as an energizing, dynamic force in an ordered balance of nature, whereas Khasi mythology is more focused on tradition, matrilineal inheritance, and mythic power of female characters. From feminist folklore theory, matrilineal sociology, and Jungian archetypes, the stories show not just cultural values but also contested terrain on which gender, power, and identity are constantly negotiated.