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Ye Xian and her sisters

The role of a Tang story in the Cinderella Cycle
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The role of a Tang story in the Cinderella Cycle

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Doctoral thesis

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To my boyfriend and my mum, who are always there.
To my friends and family, who have always been there.
To my tutors who were always there.
To my dad, who is no longer there.

Abstract and key words

Ye Xian is the protagonist of a story written in the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE) which has been defined as "the Chinese Cinderella" and "the first written Cinderella". I have carried out an analysis of the tale to demonstrate that the motifs, which have been ascribed to Tang culture are in fact hardly compatible with it. Moreover, the story presents a broken narrative structure and unclear elements which disclose the difficulties of adaptation of foreigner motifs. These data indicate that this text is a combination of previous narratives containing Cinderella motifs, thus making Ye Xian the first version containing all the elements present in the modern Cinderella. In order to complete this analysis I have utilised three methodological perspectives, Classicists', Sinologists' and Folklorists' approaches, according to the three different types of narratives investigated, to study this story and its role in the Cinderella cycle. This tripartite methodology is therefore tailored to the case, combining the epistemological approaches to create a paradigm functional for future research where tales are hardly connectible to a precise literary system and whose genre represents a crucial key to interpretation.

Key words: Cinderella; Ye Xian; Tang Literature; Comparative Studies; Folklore; Interdisciplinarity; Zhiguai; Folk tales in the Ancient World; Genre.

Abstract and key words [Italian]

Ye Xian è la protagonista di una storia scritta durante la dinastia Tang (618-907 DC) che è stata definita "la Cenerentola Cinese" e "la prima scritta versione di Cenerentola". Ho intrapreso un'analisi del racconto per dimostrare come gli elementi costitutivi, ascritti alla cultura Tang, siano in realtá poco compatibili con essa. La storia, inoltre, presenta una struttura narrativa interrotta ed elementi di dubbia chiarezza,che indicano una difficoltá nell'adattare elementi stranieri. Questo dimostra come questo testo sia la combinazione di narrative precedenti, rendendo Ye Xian la prima versione contenente tutti gli elementi presenti nella Cenerentola moderna. Al fine di eseguire questa analisi mi sono avvalsa di tre prospettive metodologiche, ovvero il punto di vista di classicisti, sinologi e folkloristi,

secondo i testi trattati,per studiare questo racconto e il suo ruolo nella storia di Cenerentola. Questa metodologia tripartita è quindi studiata specificamente per questo caso, combinando approcci epistemologici per creare un paradigma funzionale alla futura ricerca dove le storie siano difficilmente ascrivibili ad un preciso sistema letterario e il cui genere rappresenti una cruciale chiave di interpretazione.

Parole chiave:: Cenerentola; Ye Xian; Letteratura Tang; Studi comparati; Folklore; Interdisciplinarietá; Zhiguai; Fiabe nel mondo antico; Genere letterario.

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Introduction

If asked to define what "Cinderella" is, most people would probably answer that it is a fairy tale in which a noble, orphan and beautiful girl is mistreated by her stepmother and by her ugly step-sisters, dressed in rags and confined to do menial work; the girl is invited to a ball in which the prince of that country is supposed to find his bride and to which all the women of the realm have been invited. She manages to attend the ball with the help of her fairy godmother who gives her a dress, glass shoes, a carriage and servants, under the conditions that she should go back home by midnight. She dances all night with the prince, and she is hardly able to make a quick exit before midnight, leaving behind one of her precious shoes. The prince is desperate and wants to find her and marry her; the shoes is taken all around the kingdom and tried on all the girls, but it does not fit any of the girls until it is the turn of our heroine, who is recognised as the prince's true love, married and restored to her status.

This would be the universally accepted description of Cinderella, and it does not come as a surprise: this version is the one produced by Disney and known by the general public. The story depicted in the famous cartoon is not very dissimilar from the version written, or rewritten, and adapted by Perrault in the 17th century; and the choice of this version is not coincidental, being his version by far the most softened, compared to the previous and some of the following variants.

What happens to our tales is that they are no longer orally transmitted and that the most famous version is usually the one made and adapted for the cinema and the television screen and for the mass market; the phenomenon is so widespread that, even when people were told the "traditional" story when they were kids, they can hardly remember it without mixing it with the Disney one [Tangherlini, 1994:287]. The process is not new, and the new generations do not actually know "their" version of the story, that is, the version produced by their culture, with witch it would probably share· psychology, nature, aesthetic taste, cultural model and moral attitude": it is astounding, nonetheless, to find out that what is known as Cinderella has changed so much throughout the centuries and has been through a process of formation, disintegration, agglomeration, hybridisation and

mutation that it would be very hard to recognise our heroine in a tale in old Greece, where she was a courtesan, or in the Italy of the 17th century, where she was a cold-blooded murderer.

The universality of this tale is what first attracted me to it.

In 2008, while I was working at Ca Foscari's library, I got to meet a very cultured librarian, with whom I spent time talking about international stories that had travelled around the world in ancient times. He was versed in Greek and Latin literature, which has always been a great interest of mine, and he maintained that only two narratives could be found in the tradition of many countries around the world: one was a tale he defined as *Turandot*, in which a princess avoid marriage by posing riddles or administering tests to her suitors, killing them when they failed; the other was Cinderella.

That, with the fact that I have two older sisters with whom I grow up sharing love but also a healthy siblings rivalry, interested me to the point I started investigating the Cinderella tale type when I had to present a paper for the Korean course I was doing at the university. When I had to choose the topic of my graduation thesis, the choice fell again on Cinderella, because in the meantime I had discovered Ye Xian, a Tang story contained in a Miscellanea of unusual facts collected and recorded by the court intellectual Duan Chengshi. This tale had been deemed as the first Cinderella story ever written, and many scholars had decided that the shoe was the incontrovertible evidence that the story had a Chinese origin, because of the traditional Chinese practice of foot binding. Nonetheless, my studies had taught me that the custom had become common in China among wealthy people only during the Song, while this story had been written during the last period of the Tang and did not depict a girl from an aristocratic family, but a peasant girl from a southern tribe. That stirred my interest even more, and spurred my later studies.

The incredible value of Ye Xian is that it represents an example of the relationships of human societies across the world.

Born as a narrative of a girl who loses her parents and is mistreated by her stepmother, toils under her orders, receives affection from an animal, and strives to achieve a marital status which would save her from the abuse, this story has had for millennia a global significance, as it illustrated the struggle of every young girl of low, rural extraction.

At the same time, though, this story was adapted to fit different cultural system, to entertain its audiences and to correspond to their different expectations.

While the message was universal, then, the single motifs, as often happens with folk tales, changed to adjust to different societies.

Storytellers, sailors, slaves, nurses, merchants and soldiers who had heard this story added particulars according to their fantasy or confused it with other stories and mixed them, and their listeners did the same, misunderstanding words or failing to comprehend concepts absent in their cultural system, thus redesigning it according to their needs and the expectations of their hearers.

Ye Xian, in fact, far from being a simple story forgotten for centuries in a huge book by a Chinese literatus, is an incredible example of adaptation of a narrative which shows us how human societies communicated because their shared the same needs, they would go through the same hardships and they needed the comfort of a tale of a destitute girl who recuperates her status through patience and hard work. At the same time, however, it also shows how different cultural systems had to modify this story to make it fit with their particular environment, showing this process of harmonisation of migrating stories. From universal necessity to specific adaptation, this story is the epitome of cultural interaction and adaptation across time and space.

From global to specific, and then back to global was also the movement the study of this story needed. Originated in sparse motifs, coalesced into a Chinese *zhiguai*, and then present in European narrative in modern time, it needed analysing from different perspectives which would take into account this double character, universal and specific. The version I have chosen to specifically analyse is Ye Xian, because in my previous studies I had grown familiar with it and understood that it was the first organic Cinderella. It shows, however, too many controversial elements, both structural and of content, which indicate an oddly patched combination of motifs from older narratives. Along with foreign elements, it also suggests the effort of both the teller and the writer to adjust it to their cultures; the former to the southern Chinese Yue tradition, and the latter to Han literature. The single motifs, then, can and have to be studied according to these two cultural systems in order to single out their accordance to the different social organisation, and that will be feasible using the framework of ancient Chinese literature and culture.

In order to study the motifs from a global perspective, nevertheless, a broader approach is needed. The first, obvious choice would have been the folklorist method, as folklore studies has been isolating and comparing motifs and tale types for over a century, and Ye Xian has already been study as a folk tale by more than one scholar.

The point is, though, that Ye Xian is not a folk tale: it belongs to a specific genre and when it was written this influenced its structure and modified its content, reshaping it into a form which was familiar to the author and complied what Jauss defines as "Horizon of Expectations" of its audience. Ignoring all this information, then, would mean misrepresenting the cultural environment where this story has been taken down in writing. At the same time, though, I do not want Ye Xian's genre and its author's culture to prevent the comparative study of this tale, necessary to highlight differences and analogies with older themes contained in the most diverse piece of literature, and with the later, organic fairy tale of Cinderella.

In order to do that, I borrow the concept of *genre variance* by scholars who had both a classicist and a folkloric background, functional for the isolation of motifs regardless the genre a tale was narrated.

I have proven, then, through this study which is at the same time genre-specific and genre-non specific, that Ye Xian is the link between ancient accounts that contain some motifs of Cinderella, and the formed tales we find in the modern era in Europe (in China, as we will see, Cinderella was not a very successful folk tale).

The three different perspectives used here, reflect the history of this tale, which also corresponds to the different genres these stories belong to.

The ancient stories are various in form and content, and they appear in diverse works which range from historiography to the Bible; Ye Xian is a *zhiguai* which appears in a miscellaneous book on the most heterogeneous topics; the medieval and later stories are considered fairy tales: this term, according to Jack Zipes, [Zipes, 2015] can be applied to narratives that had belonged for centuries to illiterate, rural communities, when they were put into writing and somehow mellowed by removing their harshest characteristics; they are also called *märchen* which is the specific denomination of narratives with no exact definitions of time or space, magic elements and a hidden pedagogical purpose.

There are proofs that such narratives existed long before they were put in writing, and Cinderella elements appear in Ancient Greek literature.

To prove the key role of Ye Xian in the history and diffusion of Cinderella — the so-called Cinderella cycle — I have carried out this interdisciplinary study, whose object spans two millennia and extends across three continents.

I hope my work will help to promote methodological interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinarity as fundamental tools to extrapolate multi-layered information while avoiding, as much as possible, biased treatment of the collected data.

I also aim to raise interest towards this story, and to communicate the fascination that Ye Xian can exert as both an example of overcoming hardship through resilience and resourcefulness, and as part of the Cinderella cycle, a splendid example of cultural exchange and adaptation.

1 Ye Xian

1.1   Object of study: aim and rationale

Ye Xian is the name conventionally given to a story found in the 酉阳杂俎 *Youyang zazu,* the Miscellaneous morsels of Youyang, a book written in the 9th century by the Tang intellectual 段成式 Duan Chenghsi. The story does not have an original title, as it was only one of the many entries of the 支诺皋 *Zhi Nuogao ,*the Nuogao Extension; it is named after the protagonist of the story, a girl called 叶限 *Ye Xian*. The tale is considered the first written Cinderella story, and is also known as the Chinese Cinderella, yet, oddly, it is virtually unknown to people around the world and to most Chinese people. It is, however, an extremely important piece for the reconstruction of the origins of the Cinderella story and for its influence on later versions of the tale. This is why it has been studied by quite a few scholars in the last century.

a)   *Objective: to prove that Ye Xian is the link between ancient narratives and the modern Cinderella*

My aim, which I attempted to achieve through the methodology briefly described below, is to demonstrate that Ye Xian, despite being defined as such, is not a Chinese Cinderella, nor is it the first Cinderella, nor proof that Cinderella comes from China.

My thesis is that this narrative can be considered the link between the classical pre-Cinderella stories and the modern tale as we know it, as popularised by Perrault and especially by Grimm.

There are two narratives to which this text can be related: Rhodopis, an Egyptian story recorded by Greek historiographers, and Rooth's A1, which we know to be ancient due to

the presence of the spirit of the mother who comes back as a tree. This animistic trait would not be tolerated by Islam, the religion in force in the territory that Rooth considered the birthplace of this model; it is clearly rooted in the animistic substratum shared by all civilisations before the advent of monotheistic religions. Even Buddhism, which has been used by some scholars as proof of the Chinese origin of Cinderella, because usually the animal helper is connected to the deceased mother, is on the contrary an element pointing to another origin, as we will see in the analysis of the motifs. Ye Xian is therefore more recent than this narrative because she is only incidentally mentioned to be found hugging a tree, and in no part is her fish said to be her reincarnated mother. Moreover, Ye Xian contains two elements that can be found in a 6th century Jewish tale called *Joseph and Asenath.*

Many aspects of Ye Xian point to faraway roots, and some to the Middle East. There is a stratification of elements which not only are not exclusively Chinese, but display a foreign origin altogether.

Anderson affirms that most of the elements were already present in ancient times: "a small cache of 'modern' fairy tales in antiquity is indeed known […] but textbooks continued to echo the claim that Cinderella occurred in ninth-century China"[Anderson, 2003:86]; Cinderella, despite the ideas of some scholars and laymen, shows elements connecting it to ancient times and to the Middle East, and the cultural analysis of this text can prove it. The object is therefore to disprove the Han Chinese origin of the tale, analysing the connection with previous, classical stories, availing myself of a genre-specific and a genre a-specific analysis and the approaches of Classicists, Sinologists and Folklorists.

Such an interdisciplinary methodology has never been utilised: the first narratives should be examined out of the boundaries of genre, Ye Xian should be investigated through the lens of Tang culture in order to single out local and foreign elements, and the comparison between the different stories should be implemented using the folklore comparative method.

To sum up the necessity of such a study, I will borrow Victor Mair's comment on his contribution to this tale;

"Although an enormous amount of excellent research has been done on the various types and complicates distribution of the Cinderella story, the "Chinese" version presented here- because it is the earliest extant written version to be discovered anywhere- is important for understanding the development of this famous fairy tale. Unfortunately the "Chinese" story is poorly known outside of the small circle of Sinologists. Those intrepid folklorists who have endeavoured to make sense of it in terms of the overall evolution of the Cinderella story worldwide have been hampered by inadequate, inaccurate translations and mistaken assumptions about its cultural specificity"[Mair, 2005:364].

b)   Rationale: Ye Xian as a zhiguai. Genre-specific and genre-non specific analysis

The aim of this thesis is to point out that Ye Xian, apart from being a retold orally transmitted text susceptible to translation and interpretation, and an essential part of the Cinderella cycle, is a：志怪 *zhiguai*, and should be studied accordingly. At the same time, this tale is what Hansen calls "international migratory tale" [Hansen, 2002:11], with profound connections to texts found in the ancient Greek literature.

These two definitions might seem to be in apparent opposition, the first being genre-specific and the second non-specific, but both will prove crucial for the study of this text. The authors who have studied the Cinderella tale have proposed hypotheses on its origin based mostly on folklore research. As we will see, the comparative method most extensively used implies the collection of hundreds of versions, usually with no author, followed by the analysis of their motifs in order to identify their movements and diffusion. Some of the authors who compiled extensive works on Cinderella knew Ye Xian, but they were not Sinologists, and therefore could not deepen its study. They considered it a fairy tale or a folk tale, and comparatively analysed it as such.

They were not aware of the peculiar traits of Chinese literature, its different genres and the quite rigid rules their use entails. Ye Xian was written by a Tang intellectual who knew that his story needed credibility, as the genre he wrote, the 志怪 *zhiguai,* a "record of the strange" was intended to have a historiographical character. The *zhiguai* is generally considered a form of novel, or 小说 *xiaoshuo*; the "little discourse", so defined because historiography and poetry were considered the important genres, while fiction was seen as a minor form.

The *zhiguai* maintains undeniable resemblance to what can be considered a wonder tale, and, as such, it has been studied; for example, Zhao Xiaohuan states that during the Tang, *zhiguai* works started to be read as fiction more than fact [Zhao, 2005:85] and, hence, he applied Propp's functions, connecting this genre to the Western folk tale and fairy tale; others scholars, though, believe that *zhiguai* tales should be considered an historical genre, and that their authors perceived themselves as scribes or reporters instead of writers [Chun, 2013]; generally speaking, narrative in ancient Chinese literature is more connected to transmission, while in Western culture it is related to imitation [PU, 1996].

Therefore, this ancient version of Cinderella, or better, of type AT510A according to the Motif-Index, is found in a "record of the strange", a text that was produced in order to transmit information on a particular real fact, or believed to be real, or at least probable, by the teller. In this particular case, the author stated that he was retelling what was believed by the tribes of the South, told to him by his servant, Li Shiyuan, who came from that territory.

There is an evident paradox, then; a history-related text has been treated as a fairytale or a folk tale in the comparative study of the Cinderella type. Moreover, only few authors have taken into account that we can find some elements of this type in the works of two historiographers of the Ancient Greek world, and even in a Jewish-Egyptian tale related to the Bible. The question, then, is whether it is possible to establish a framework to study and analyse tales coming from different traditions, different cultural systems and belonging to genres very distant from one another. While Folklorists tend to treat narratives as folk

tales, and Sinologists are usually aware of the linguistic and cultural connotations of the story as far as Chinese tradition is concerned, the scholars that have studied the presence of elements in ancient times and classical literature are usually Classicists. Nonetheless, no classicist has yet ventured to analyse this ancient Chinese tale which, moreover, belongs to a precise genre, the *zhiguai.*

The comparison of classic texts, *zhiguai* and folk tales would be unreliable without a paradigm of study that would combine these three points of view, and this was the challenge of my research.

Although there is at least one scholar who has used Propp's functions to study the *zhiguai,* Xiaohuan Zhao, the fact that he virtually ignores their possible connections to foreign literature suggested the need to find a different theoretical justification for the use of Folkorists' material in the study of Ye Xian's correlations with classical narratives.

To sum up, the Classicist approach is applied due to the ancientness of the text, and because it is normally used to deal with texts that do not belong to any special genre. This framework is therefore functional for identifying ancient Cinderella stories on a global, international level, and connecting them to Ye Xian, as the intent is to preserve the most unbiased possible perspective on this text.

The Sinologists' point of view, on the other hand, is fundamental to linguistically and culturally analysing Ye Xian, its structure — which depended on a precise genre — and its historical and social contextualisation. The author was a Tang intellectual, and his work was influenced by Chinese theory of literature; on the other hand, Chinese theorists assume that Western theory is universal and, since Propp's functionalism is the tool that seemed to best suit this analysis, Western theory has been used too.

Folklore theory, then, is fundamental for any comparison, as not only does it investigate the possible origin of folk tales, but also stipulates the need of a unit of measurement for a more scientific investigation. In synergy, the three of them would avoid ethnocentrism, as the sphere of study ranges from the Mediterranean basin to Vietnam, from Han China to Europe.

The significance of this thesis, therefore, is represented by the interdisciplinary utilisation of different approaches coming from three different fields of study in order to provide the most complete analysis of this particular tale from a global point of view, which comprehends the investigation in a folkloric framework of stories of the ancient Greek literature and of a specific version in the context of ancient Chinese literature, and of the modern Cinderella collected and published by the Grimm brothers in the 19th century. This tripartite framework provides useful tools of analysis, as at the same time it broadens the horizons of research, it contextualises the single version, and enables us to see the progression of a tale type in place and time. The importance of this research can be summed up as follows:

- The Cinderella cycle, the theoretical construction of a traditional comparatist, is expanded to include ancient stories from different parts of the world. This means that the long-established, Euro-centric perspective is challenged and a tale's more realistic progress in time and space is revealed;
- The profound analysis of a single version contextualises its content and its role in a specific cultural system, which enables to identify its additions and modifications of the travelling tale;
- The discussion of the traditional tools of research in traditional folklore methodology, such as the comparative method, avoids the theoretical restrictions of a single field of study: the validity of premises and instruments is called into question and their applicability in international context is examined;
- The usage of three different perspective highlights the respective shortcomings and enhances their effectiveness in the study of both the Cinderella cycle and Ye Xian.

The three perspectives, the Classicist's, the Sinologist's and the Folklorist's, will be explained in the following chapters; the validity of their synergistic application will be evident through the analysis of the single elements.

1.2   State of the field

For its categorisation as a Cinderella tale, Ye Xian has been studied in comparative studies on that tale type. It would extremely difficult to separate the works that focus on Ye Xian from those treating this tale along with other versions of Cinderella in comparative studies. In order to enumerate organically the writers who have studied either Cinderella or Ye Xian, or both, a division is needed.

The most relevant writers who cited Ye Xian in their comparative works are: Anna Birgitta Root, Ding Naidong and 刘晓春 Liu Xiaochun .

Rooth is the author of the most complete compilation of Cinderella stories from around the world, in 1951, *The Cinderella Cycle*.

Ding Naidong published in 1974 *The Cinderella cycle in China and Indo-China*, in which he identifies Ye Xian as the first version of the "Ancient Tradition".

Liu Xiaochun discusses this story among with other variants disseminated in various regions of Asia in two articles, published respectively in 1995, and 1997: 多民族文化的结晶 *Duominzuwenhua de jiejing* and 灰姑娘故事的中国原型及其世界性意义 *Huiguniang gushi de Zhongguo yuanxin jiqi shjiexing yiyi.*

The scholars who focused their studies mostly, or exclusively, on Ye Xian, are: Jameson, Waley, Mair , 王青 Wang Qing, and Beauchamp.

R.D. Jameson examined Ye Xian is *Three Lecture on Chinese Folklore* in 1932.

Artur Waley provided an extensive cultural translation in 1947, when he published *The Chinese Cinderella Story* in Folk-Lore.

Victor Mair published his translation in 2005 in *The First Recorded Cinderella Story.*

Fay Beauchamp published *Asian Origins of Cinderella: The Zhuang Storyteller of Guangxi* in 2010. Wang Qing wrote an essay in 2006, 灰姑娘"故事的转输地 *'Huiguniang' gushi de zhuanshudi* in which a new, intriguing explanation of Ye Xian was given, based on Cinderella's areas of diffusion.

Those are not the only scholars to have tackled the study of this tale, but the ones whose work has proven fundamental for our analysis.

A third group of scholars, whose work is apparently not directly connected to Ye Xian but it has proven functional for the connection of this tale to ancient narratives: Graham Anderson and William Hansen.
Anderson wrote in 2000 *Fairytale in the Ancient World* followed by the essay "Finding the First Fairy Tales." in *A Companion to the Fairy Tale* in 2003. Hansen published in 2003 *Ariadne's thread*; both works are proven fundamental for the concepts of genre variance and to provide precious information about Cinderella in the ancient world.

Among other scholars, worth mentioning for their contribution for the Cinderella type in Asia are Timothy Tangherlini, for his studies on the Korean variants, and Chieko Irie Mulhern on the Japanese ones, extremely useful for the examination of the cultural connotations of the story.
Moreover, it would be impossible to examine any tale without using the work of two of the most important scholars in this field: Stith Thompson and Vladimir Propp. Neither of them concentrated on Ye Xian or even Cinderella stories, but their studies are an indispensable tool to any scholar who would tackle the analysis of a folk tale.
Thompson, along with Antti Aarne, was the creator of the Aarne-Thompson classificatory system which is know as Index of Motifs, while Propp published in 1928 the *Morphology of the Folktale*, which he studied according to functions and dramatis personae. Motif on one hand, and functions on the other, are considered the minimum elements of tales the basis of every folklore study.

Cinderella stories started to be collected and compared very early in the story of folklore discipline.

"Perhaps the most famous fairy tale ever is Cinderella" [Liu,1995:29]. A Chinese folklorist, quoting Stith Thompson, one of the most famous Western folklorists and author of the Motif-Index, states what it is apparent to the eyes of both scholars and of the non-specialists: not only is this tale universally known, at least in one of its versions, but it is also present in the folklore of so many diverse tradition, to have generated, quite early in the study of this discipline, a comparative phenomenon and numerous tale monographs, "a complete life history of a particular tale"[Thompson, 1946:430]. The history of the research on this tale, therefore, is inseparable from the evolution of the folklore research itself. When at the end of the 19th century fairy tales were still considered relics of myths —identifying them, therefore, as a minor genre, composed of residual traces of a grand, more important one — Friedrich Max Müller affirmed that all fairy tales descend from the Indian *Rigveda*.

His disciple, Angelo De Gubernatis, was one of the first scholars of Cinderella, poetically describing it as a veiled version of the myth of Dawn [De Gubernatis, 1887:75-96]. Very soon afterwards, comparative monographs on fairy tales started flourishing, with many scholars studying comparing different version of similar stories that they identified as belonging to a unique type.

These monographs, very different from each other and influenced by the progress in the study of folklore, still offer an inestimable tool to the researcher; not only, as it was in the past, in order to find the Ur form, the primeval nucleus of the tale, but especially to trace the journey and the consequent mutations of the story across time and space

 The first important comparative work on the Cinderella story, *Three Hundred and Forty-Five Variants of Cinderella, Catskin and, Cap O' Rushes, Abstracted and Tabulated with a Discussion of Medieval Analogues and Notes*, by Marian Roalfe Cox, was had been commissioned by the Folklore Society of Britain, and was published in 1893.

This work, despite not being the first of its genre (William Ralston had written a comparative essay on Cinderella in The Nineteenth Century in 1879) is crucial in the study of the tale because it was first observed, following a scientific method, that there were

several versions of the "same" fairy tale, which were susceptible of comparative analysis: some elements were identified, which were presents in some of the variants, and absent in others, sometimes according to the geographical distribution of the tale, and the concept of "motif" as a recurring constitutive element of the story was applied. This work, however, is clearly embryonic and still rudimentary in its methodology: Lang, who introduces the compilation, insists on the hypotheses on the origin of the myths and on the fairy tale, but there is no author's intention to explain how the fairy tale were collected and chosen: Cox did an excellent job discovering and comparing an impressive number of variants, going as far as including a Japanese version: "The variety and expanse of the stories which Cox and her colleagues discovered is amazing, when one considers the lack of modern technology" [Shaefer, 2003:144]. Nonetheless, a commonly used folk tale classification system was still to be created, and the result of the research was ineluctably affected by this problem.

 Cox's work did not belong exactly to what was few years later classified as Cinderella: even though we know that "the concept of type is merely an ideal construction" [Honti, 1975:35], we use the concept of type in order to identify and compare different tales, which sometimes share the same motifs. In Cox's book, actually, five main different types are present: Cinderella, Catskin, Cap O'Rushes, Undetermined and Male hero.

What emerged, therefore, was that the folk tales as we know them are as a matter of fact the result of a long process of transformation in which the motifs of the story appear, change and disappear: most of these stories share some elements such as an orphan mistreated girl who receives gifts from a magical being, gifts by which she is recognised by her future husband: but then the plot varies considerably.

In some versions she has to hide herself as her father starts feeling unnatural attraction to her after the death of her mother; in other cases, she is mistreated by a stepsister or her servant who pretends to be her, but she is recognised by mean of the magical gift; in some others the father, who is usually a king, asks her daughters to tell him how they love him; the two sisters of the protagonist usually flatter him, and the third is outcast until her father discovers that she is good and sincere (this is called *King Lear's judgement*).

All these stories, therefore, are intertwined in a complex and sometimes inextricable way: what we know as Cinderella was not yet born as a precise type when Cox did her research, although Perrault's and Grimm's versions had been already written and made famous, but the comparative method was already being successfully used in order to find correlations between the story and its changes in time and space. Cox's work did not mention Ye Xian or any other Eastern story, despite her effort to collect variants of Cinderella all over the world. At the beginning of the 20th century the new, ambitious idea was born to categorise all the folk tales known in a single index with the aim of helping scholars to have a system of reference for their research. This marked an enormous step in the study of folk tales in general, and also in the study of Cinderella: the two main collections of Cinderella stories, Cox's and Rooth's, show in their differences the impact this classification system had on later folklore research.

Kaarle Krohn first conceived the idea of reuniting in a single scheme, easy accessible by all scholars, all the folk tales of his native Finland, and commissioned the execution of the task to his student, Antti Aarne. In 1910 *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography,* was published: an index of types, that is tales that can exist independently or with another tale, a combination of plot synopsis with precise details. Only *Märchen* are collected in this index, that is fairy tales, excluding legends, sages, religious stories, miracles, toponymic or aetiological stories, or other typologies of texts that were not defined as proper fairy tales; every type is defined by a code or a number. The system was translated and developed first by the Norwegian scholar Christiansen, and in 1927 by the American Folklorist Stith Thompson who wrote the final *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature,* revisited by himself in 1961, and expanded in 2004 by Hans-Jörg Uther who published *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography.*

The classification system is therefore also known as Aarne-Thompson, AaTh, AT, or Aarne-Thompson-Uther.

Thompson and Uther's classification is based on motifs, rather than types, but the definition itself of motif is not very clear. Thompson defines it as the minimal unit a tale is composed of, but many detractors of this classification find it too ambiguous a term, as it can signify at the same time a twist in the plot, a function, a character or even an object. Cinderella falls under the category of "Supernatural Helpers", which contains numbers from 500 to 559. Number 510 reports "Persecuted Heroine", and the A typology is Cinderella, while 510B is defined "Unnatural love", and 511 is "One-eye, Two-Eye. Tree-eye"; number 480 is "The Kind and Unkind girls", and all these tales are related to ours and will therefore mentioned in this work.

When the acronym AT510A is reported, therefore, it is to be intended by the reader as the technical definition of proper Cinderella tales according to the Aarne-Thompson classification system.

Here I report a scheme of AT510A slightly simplified, which I borrow from Graham Anderson's *Fairy Tales in the Ancient World* [:24]:

   I The persecuted heroine

1) The heroine is abused by her stepmother and stepsisters: she stays on the hearth and ashes; and

2) is dressed in coarse clothing – cap of rushes, wooden cloak etc.

3) She flees in disguise from her father who wants to marry her; or

4) is to be killed by a servant

II Magic help

While she is acting as servant (at home or among strangers) she is advised, provided for, and fed

1)by her dead mother; or

2) by a tree on the mother's grave; or

3)by a supernatural being, or

4) by birds, or

5) by a goat, a sheep, or a cow

6)When the goat (or other helpful animal) is killed, there springs up from her remains a magic tree

III Meeting the prince

1) She dances in beautiful clothing several times with a prince who seeks in vain to stop her, or she is seen by him in church;

2)she gives hints of the abuse she has endures as a servant girl; or

3) she is seen in beautiful clothing in her room or in the church

IV Proof Of identity

1) She is discovered through the slipper test; or

2) Through a ring which she slips into the prince's drink or bakes in his bread

3) She alone is able to pluck the apple desired by the prince

V Marriage with the prince

The Aarne-Thompson classification system is still widely used as a text of reference by scholars of different disciplines, although he has received much criticism by scholars who see its shortcomings. For example, the famous folklorist Alan Dundes, the inventor of concepts of motifeme and allomotif, whose contribution has been important in the redaction of this thesis, affirms that the AT is "the most valuable tools in the professional folklorist's arsenal of aids for analysis" and it is so important that "the identification of folk narratives through motif and/or tale type numbers has become an international sine qua

non among bona fide folklorists" [Dundes, 1997:101]. At the same time, though, he criticised the system as too vague and too indefinite, and tried to improve it by combining the idea of motif whit Propp's functions.

One of the critics of Aarne-Thompson classification was the Russian formalist Vladimir Propp, who in 1928 published the *Morphology of the Folktale.* Propp was primarily a linguist, and his approach to the narrative was strongly influenced by the groundbreaking studies on Structuralism. He collected more than a hundred Russian folk tales, and analysed them comparatively, distinguishing some recurrent elements. His work focused on the interaction of elements in a tale which was conceived as a system; Propp identified thirty-one of such interactions which are constantly present in tales, and called them functions. Propp criticised Thompson for failing to see that motifs were basically elements of the plot which made the classification confused and unreliable: since the majority of tales share one or more motifs, the classification into one or another category was arbitrary and unsystematic, and very different tales would fall into the same group because Thompson had decided that they had the same salient motif, and vice versa.

Propp was criticised for the same reason he was praised for: his work followed formalist criteria and therefore was even criticised by the Structuralist Levi-Strauss —even though Structuralist and Formalist now are now often considered under the same heading— who accused him of focusing on the syntactic aspect of the narrative, neglecting the semantic, therefore lacking the vocabulary while concentrating on the grammar. Propp's thesis, nonetheless, remains an incredibly innovative study, as it presented a pragmatic, scientific approach to a field which still showed the traces of the 19th century's poetic theories.

Ye Xian was not particularly considered by the scholars until 1911, when the famous and multi-talented Japanese intellectual Kumagusu Minakata, in an article in the number XXVI of the magazine *Jinrui Gaku Zasshi*, brought attention to a Chinese tale which reminded him of Cinderella; it was the beginning of the 20th century, the Far East looked at the West as a bearer of modernity and some fields of study, such as Folklore studies and Comparative Literature were in their infancy; cultural and literary links between the two

worlds were continuously sought and found to show how deep the connection between East and West was. In 1932, R. D. Jameson, then professor at Tsinghua, University, astonished by the similarity between this ancient tale and the European Cinderella, carried out comparative research of this Cinderella story, analysing the differences between this and some others collected by Cox and some others by Bolte and Polivka in *Grimms Märchen Anmerkungen*, and made the story known to the world.

His work is deeply influenced by the folklore theories mentioned above and which are nowadays completely abandoned; nonetheless it proves extremely important for its contribution to the story of the tale, as it provides a very precious scheme of the basic Cinderella tale; he identified five motifs:

A-A mistreated girl

B- A period of menial job during which she is assisted by magical helpers

C- A direct or indirect contact with a prince or an important man

D-The identification through a lost object belonging to the protagonist

E- The marriage with the prince

which change and are added or eliminated according to the narrator and the auditor emotion and identification with the heroin and to the place of diffusion of the tale [Jameson, 1982:82].

Jameson then elaborated the scheme into more detailed typologies:

A. A young girl is ill-treated

A1 by her stepmother and stepsisters or

A2 by her fathers who wishes to marry her or

A3 by her father whom she tells she loves him as she loves salt, and is driven from home or

A4 by her entire family who wis to kill her

B. During a time of menial service, at home or abroad

B1 She is advised, supported (fed) and given clothes by her dead mother, a tree on her mother's grave or a super-natural creature

B2 She is helped by birds

B3 Goat, sheep or cow

B4 When the animal has been killed, a gift-bearing tree grows from its entrails, a box with clothes is found inside it or its bones are otherwise useful providing clothes.

C. She meets the prince

C1 Disguised in her pretty clothes she goes to a ball and dances several times with the prince, who tries in vain to find out who she is, or he sees her as she goes to the church.

C2 Sometimes she hints to him about sufferings and thus both mystifies and interests him.

C3 Sometimes the prince peeps through a keyhole and sees her dressed in her finery.

D. She is identified by

D1 The shoe test.

D2 The ring she leaves in his soup or bakes in his bread.

D3 Her ability to perform some difficult tasks such as picking the golden apples.

E. She marries the prince.

A further point is usually present in types such as "Judgement of King Lear" and Cap-o'-Rushes:

F. If her suffering is due to the fact that she told her father she loves him as she loves salt, she now serves him unsalted food to prove how necessary salt is to human happiness.

According to his analysis, then, there are two main typologies to be considered: the first is the more successful in western Europe, while its presence is attested from Bohemia to Iceland: circulated in England and made famous by Perrault, it is the Cinderella we all know and which can be summarised it is consist of the some of the parts mentioned above:

(A.1) a young mistreated girl is forced to do menial work by her stemother and stepsisters

(B.1) she is advised, helped, fed and given beautiful clothes by her mother, or an animal, or a tree grown on her tomb, or by a supernatural creature,

(C.1) disguised in her pretty clothes she goes to the ball and dances with the price, who tries in vain to find out who she is

(D.1) when she flees the place he gets old of the shoe and tries to identify her through it

(E.1) he succeeds and they get married.

The second version, which circulates more in the Slavonic area, is the following:

(A.1) A young girl is ill-treated by her stepmother and stepsisters

(B.3) She is helped, advised fed and given gifts by a helpful animal

(B.4) from whose viscera she acquires her pretty clothes

(D3) the identification is through her ability to perform a difficult task.

Not only did Jameson (unlike Cox) know Ye Xian, but he even thought that this second version might have been born in China, due to the diffusion of the task-test in the Confucian world, as it will be later seen.

Jameson, with his work, opened a debate between the traditional western world and the new areas whose folklore was still virtually unknown in Europe.

His work is, nonetheless, clearly the logical production of an author influenced by the two main lines of research in the folkloric field in his time: in it a coexistence is present of two different perspectives, wide apart in time and in purpose. On the one hand, "all embracing" theories on the origin of the Cinderella tale as derived from a myth celebrating Spring, or the struggle between light and darkness [Jameson, 1982:86]; on the other hand, the historical-geographic method.

In 1947 Arthur Waley, one of the most famous sinologists of his times, renowned for his *Monkey*, an abridged translation of the 西游记 *Xiyouji* into English which made this book

popular in the West, wrote an article on Ye Xian, not comparing it with other versions but giving a translation of the tale in which he specified which elements could be considered Han, and the ones probably belonging to other Chinese ethnological groups. Despite the fact that Waley´s article was written only a decade after Jameson's, nevertheless it is very modern in that it gives a translation of the text giving reasons about his choices based on his knowledge of the cultural environment in which it had been produced: his work, therefore, is at the same time a translation as a cultural interpretation of the text, and a historical-geographic study of the themes, or motifs, of the tale. In his article the idea of Lang of polygenesis had already been abandoned, and, although he clearly states that "it is not, however, the purpose of this paper to discuss either the distribution or the origin of the story" [Waley, 1947:236], he affirms that the Chinese version is the earliest version of Cinderella "anywhere in the world" [:226].

The origin and the diffusion of the tale seems to be, however, the first concern of the paramount work of Anna Birgitta Rooth, which is so significant that the historical-geographic research on the Cinderella type is named after it: *The Cinderella Cycle*, published in 1951.

This work was published nearly sixty years after Cox's compilation of fairy tales.

Her doctoral thesis identifies an Ur-form or primeval version of the story, present from the Middle East to the Celebes islands, in which an orphan receives gift from the tomb of his or her mother; this basic theme travels West and East, North and South, Europe and Asia, acquiring other elements in the different societies and cultural conditions it gets in contact with; the author, analysing the motifs, traces routes and maps of diffusion of the tale. She resumes Cox's work, expanding it to collecting more than seven hundred variants. The focus of her work is influenced by the comparative theories which had thrived during the first decades of the 20th century: unlike Cox, who had collected and categorised the stories according to the motifs present in them, Rooth strives to identify the journey of the this tale type, recording its diffusion and its changes along the centuries. She identifies the A1 type, the most ancient, and "primitive in all that concerns its content, style and

composition",circulating from the Middle East to Celebes Islands, in which an orphan is mistreated by his or her new stepmother, and receives food and gifts from the mother's tomb, or from an animal who is her reincarnation; the stepmother then kills the animal or desecrates the tomb, from which a tree grows which keeps contributing to the orphan sustenance. This primeval tale becomes, travelling towards East and Eastern Europe following two opposites routes, the A2 type, in which only the orphan can collect the tree's fruit, which are usually magical: they are made of gold or silver, or they have wondrous powers. This exclusivity of the orphan becomes her (or less commonly, his) nuptial test. In Germany and France this tale becomes *One-Eye, Two-Eyes, and Three-Eyes*.

The plot of the story is the following: a girl is tormented by her stepmother and stepsisters because she only has two eyes, while her sisters possess respectively one and three. A woman tells theTwo-eyed girl that the goat she is guarding can make a wonderful banquet appear when requested. The girl uses this magic talent many times, until her florid appearance, contrasting with the diet of leftovers she is enduring, arouses suspicions in the family. Her sisters then lie in ambush, discover the magic, and kill the goat. When the protagonist is despairing, the good old lady reappears and tells her to bury the goat's heart. So she does, and the day after a splendid tree, bearing gold (or silver) fruits which only Two-Eyes can pick, has grown on the spot. A knight (or prince) sees the marvellous fruits and he wants them. Despite the sisters' efforts, only Two-Eyes can pick the fruit and ends up marrying him. This tale, similar to Jameson's "Slavic model" merged with a previous one on a lost and found object (presumably a theme from the ancient Mediterranean world) creating the model AB, circulated from Ireland to Indochina, in which the helper —tree, animal or, in more recent version, a fairy godmother— provides gifts and clothes functional to the protagonist's marriage. According to Rooth, who identifies some versions that show this transition of two models in the Balkans, the AB model encounters the tale known as AT480, "The Kind and Unkind girls", creating the Cinderella we are familiar with and summed up in five points by Jameson, as shown above, while Donkey-Skin and Cap-o'-Rushes are considered by her as a derivation from the B model without a common

origin, and are defined as B1, while the C model is the one named by Cox as "Hero Tales". Rooth therefore disregards the theory that Cinderella is a completely Indo-European heritage, tracing complicated routes and inserting in her work two Chinese versions, both taken from Jameson's work, adding more Eastern versions when her work was republished in 1977, in which she said that her research purpose was to "contribute to the knowledge of the relationships between different cultures" and to "progress in anthropological science". Rooth's work has been criticised by some scholars because the work displays that the versions of some areas have not been examined as thoroughly as others: the study of diffusion of tales in the Far East and in southern Europe is not as complete as other zones'. This, however, is a problem which the broadness of this kind of work entailed, and it is related to the purpose of my thesis: a scholar's scope of knowledge is inevitably restrained to his or her area of interest; therefore, without the joined effort of more scholars, it is quite difficult to carry out such extensive research deepening the knowledge of the various areas evenly. Despite the criticism received, especially on the study of the Eastern versions [Liljeblad, 1952:325-326, and Taylor,1952: 68-69], which in fact she tried to improve in her later edition in 1977, Rooth's work is still the most complete book on Cinderella, and it can be considered the most extensive monograph on it, with more than 700 versions collected, and the last work with this ambition: in time, the monographs have become less and less common, condemned by their own" gigantism" [Goldsberg,1986:165].

Pieces of research focusing only on a tale-type considering all its versions, in fact, risk scrapping only on the surface without delving deeper into the single versions and on their cultural frame.

It is not probably a coincidence, therefore, that the following works on Cinderella tended to focus on fewer versions and on more specific areas: on the Eastern versions of Cinderella we have the works of Ikeda Hiroko e Chieko Irie Mulhern on Japanese versions, and of Timothy R.Tangherlini on the Korean Cinderella. As regards the Chinese Cinderella, in 1974 Ding Naidong, the author of *A type index of Chinese folktales (in the oral tradition and major works of non-religious classical literature)*, wrote *The Cinderella Cycle in*

China and Indo-china, which follows the tradition of the comparative method, but reduces the area of investigation to tales collected in a specific area, identifying two main traditions: the Ancient, to which our story belongs, and the Modern, which is more related to the Han culture and which has survived much longer [Ding, 1974:32]. His conclusions are very interesting in tracing the diffusion of the tale, but he unifies under the same category texts extremely distant and very different from one another, furthermore using European concepts like "fairy tale" or "folk tale" to define both stories collected orally and their literary versions.

The Cinderella Cycle in China and Indo-China analyses twenty-one versions collected in the area which is now China, and nine in Indochina, Vietnam and Cambodia.

The author states that finding Han elements in these stories is not a proof or indication of origin, as "the division of nationalities in China is arbitrary, as many of the non-Han and Han tribes are derived from a common origin". It is inevitable that the Han ethnic group, which had reunited Chinese tribes under a unique banner and started a centralised form of power in the North, had a greater influence on the other ethnic groups, especially when Confucianism became one of the most important teachings.

According to Ding, Han elements in Ye Xian are the following:

1. the heroine is the first daughter, a typical Confucian trait;

2. the fish helper is connected to the red carp which becomes a dragon in Han folklore (I will try to explain why this is hardly a Han Chinese element);

3. a mistreating stepmother is a common element in the 二十四孝 *Ershisixiao,* a very important text in the ancient Chinese family teachings;

4. the dishevelled person from the sky can be a 山神 *shan shen*, a mountain spirit;

5. the shoe was a typical nuptial gift a bride gave to the groom.

Ding realises, however, that these elements, regardless of their origin, would later clash with the evolution of Han culture. The fish would become a bird of a water buffalo or a cow; the shoe would lose its importance and tests would appear to show the protagonist's skills suitable to a good Confucian bride-to-be; the tribal festival would disappear and the meeting between the girl and her future husband, when present, would be a religious celebration or a wedding, the only special occasions a well-bred girl could meet people in public; and the king would be substituted by a 秀才 *xiucai*, a candidate for imperial exams, or a wealthy man, figures much more credible as future husbands and good matches in the Han society, where the royal family was remote and inaccessible. The Ancient Tradition identified by Ding is represented, in its first instance, by Ye Xian, originated in Yue territory and then circulating from Guizhou to Yunnan and Sichuan. This Ancient Tradition contains many elements ascribable to AT510A: a mistreated girl helped by a special animal attends a festival to meet her future husband and loses the shoe; she is later recognised through by the prince, and marries him.

The Modern Tradition presents instead the juxtaposition of the protagonist with an ugly and unkind stepsister, and it is similar to "One-eye, Two-eyes, Three Eyes" explained above. The magical helper, which is usually a tree, provides gift to the protagonist only; and this exclusive ability is what permits the marriage to the husband. The bad stepsister usually meets a horrible fate, in the attempt to become beautiful and substitute the protagonist: torn to pieces, boiled alive, scalded to death, and even cooked as a meal for her mother.

This Modern Tradition, according to Ding, is not more than six-hundred year old, and it is more congruous with Han culture "lowering in the level of excitement to agree with Chinese way of life"[Ding, 1974:13]: the meeting, the husband and the chores are a more realistic reflection of a peasant girl's existence. The author seems to ignore that the Modern Tradition is very similar to Tangherlini's Korean Cinderella which, according to the scholars, perfectly reflects Confucian moral and especially filial piety, a pillar of

Confucian teachings. Tangherlini does not entirely ascribe filial piety to Confucianism, but rather to Korean family structure which was present before the process of sinification, and which provided fertile soil to Confucianism; his findings, nonetheless, express specific conclusions valid also for the Chinese Han culture; both the Korean Cinderella and the Modern Tradition share also Buddhist elements, when the protagonist, killed by her stepsister, comes back as a lily or a bamboo stalk, Buddhist simbols of purity, flexibility and ability to adapt.

Ding's opinion is that Ye Xian is a complete and structured version, and therefore the first one to reach other areas of the world travelling along the maritime trade routes. According to him, a fragmentary version, such as Strabo's Rhodopis or Rooth's A1 cannot be the origin of a finished story such as Ye Xian: he therefore disregards the hypothesis that this story was connected to the ancient Middle- Eastern narratives on the basis that the bird stealing the shoe was already present in the area when Yunnan's Miao live with Cham and Khmer, sharing some cultural elements. He does not focus on the little variations which can be attributed to foreign influence, and seems to fail to see what Jameson, in 1932, had already perceived: that the fragmented structure of Ye Xian shows clearly signs of interpolation with previous narratives. Moreover, he thinks that Ye Xian was connected to a real fact happened in Vietnam in the 4th century B.C. and believed as true until the beginning of the 20th century, using as an argument that folk tales, at least in China, often originated from local legends. I think this is the main shortcoming of Ding's study, and it depends on the fact that he is a folklorist, and ignores or neglects the fact Ye Xian is not a fairy tale, and that *zhiguai* were connected to true facts and to spatial and temporal real elements in order to achieve the credibility expected from this genre, due to the cultural connotations of Chinese literature. Ding's corpus is made of tales collected over a span of 10 centuries, being Ye Xian the only recorded before the 20th century: this is the time-flattening aspect of the old comparative studies, which did not take into account genres and precious cultural context. One of the main innovative character of this thesis is that a genre

a-specific study — unlike Ding's, who thought he was dealing only with fairy tales— is not sufficient to provide information about an ancient text.

The heterogeneous and inconsistent character of Ye Xian's structure seems to be clear to Liu Xiaochun. Starting from Ding's research combined with di Zhong Jinwen's, Liu published two essays in which he comparatively analysed seventy-two versions collected among twenty-one ethnic groups. He still used the historic-geographic method, but he combined it with cultural anthropology in order to find connections and correspondences with the different cultural systems where they were collected.

Starting from Ye Xian "the paradigmatic model of this type of story" and the most ancient versions, he categorised the stories as follows:

1. Tibetan Model

2. Southern Model
- Basic Southern Model
- Developed Southern Model

3. North-Eastern Model
- Variation of the Southern Model
- Juxtaposition of good and bad
- Handless girl

4. North-Western Model
- Supernatural reciprocal help Model

- Easy-to-marry-off Sister

- Magical Transformation Model

Without examining the details of all the models, it is worth mentioning here that Ye Xian is inserted by him in the Basic Southern Model, which roughly corresponds to Ding's Ancient Tradition. Ye Xian is the most representative tale of this model and other variants see the supernatural power of the dead mother increasing the more the story travels to the North. The twenty-first versions categorised in the Developed Southern Model, instead, show some similarities with AT433D, "The Snake Husband": as in Ding's Modern Tradition, the protagonist is killed by the stepsister and comes back to life as a bird, a plant or an object; the villain is atrociously murdered; the story ends with a marriage. This story presents then internal variations, as it circulated as far as to Guangdong, Guangxi, Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan and Tibet; in some versions the two sisters are biological sisters, especially in Miao versions. In the North, which was traditionally more influenced by Han Confucian culture, we find the marital tests and the helpers are a cow and some birds, making it very similar to *Kongjiwi and Patjiwi*, the Korean Cinderella story. The second model of the North, moreover, contains the contrast between "The Kind and Unkind Girls", and it is similar to AT480: in 金粉和玉粉 *Jinfen he Yufen, Gold Powder and Jade Powder* the bad sister is killed when she tries to emulate the good sister who has helped a tiger in trouble. All the other versions analysed share some element with our story, but present more influences from the areas they were in contact with: Xinjang, Tibet, Japan, Korea, and so on.

The authors concludes that Northern stories tend to simplification and insist on the moral of the tale and are more authentically Han Chinese, while the others are more diverse and show contamination with neighbouring areas.

Liu considers Qinghai the place where the exchange between Tibetan culture —where Buddhism had arrived very early in history and had mingled with animistic local beliefs,

and where stories of siblings rivalry and abusive stepmothers had precise cultural connotations — with the South inhabited by the Yue, who grew rice and raised fish, and where the shoe had a precise cultural relevance. These Yue populations, according to He Guanyue, occupied an enormous area: the Yang-Ze estuary, the central plains of Hubei, in Zhu Jiang valley, and in the south in Taiwan, Okinawa, Hainan Island, down to the Indian continent.

The diffusion of the Ye Xian type was moreover corroborated by Rooth's findings, which reduced the presence of a fish— or a turtle— as helper to the place where Yue people lived. From the fusion of Ye Xian with Tibetan motifs a new tale was born which, according to the Rooth's maps of diffusion, went back to Europe through the Balkan peninsula.

Liu Xiaochun's work focuses on the relations between Eastern-Asian variants of the tale, and he does not provide suppositions on the origin, nor does he relate this story to Middle-Eastern narratives. His work is a cultural analysis of the variation within a defined area, and he proves how this culture-oriented examination provides unique information about the diffusion of the story and his study, instead of offering an amplification of the range of study based on the fairy tales, traces in fact an opposite trajectory, going from a macroscopic to a microscopic approach to identify specific cultural connotations.

The investigation on single elements is very useful indeed, as a proof of origin and diffusion: fish as helpers are only present in Yue areas; the reincarnation of the protagonist is usually present in Buddhist countries; a she-demon who suggests killing the mother is a Tibetan feature, and so on.

The scope of Xiaochun's work, however, while extremely detailed and functional to the recognition of similarities among Eastern version, is not so functional when the aim is the connection between Ye Xian and previous narratives.

In 2005 Mair published the article "The First Recorded Cinderella Story" in *Hawaii's Reader in Traditional Chinese Culture.* This work is short but remarkably useful for the cultural study of this tale. Mair states that the area where Ye Xian is said to come from was a profoundly "non-Sinitic"[Mair, 2005: 363] and therefore presents a translation of the

story focusing on foreign terms and odd components of the text. He attributes them to Duan Chenghi's life and works, and to Tang dynasty's cultural openness towards all the countries it traded with. He explains that Duan Chengshi, son of the great minister Duan Wenchang, he was a bibliophile, a collector of foreign stories "had a particular penchant for all things arcane, strange, and alien" [ibidem] and that he collected stories from foreigners, including Romans (according to Mair, probably Anatolians or Syrians) and Indians. According to Mair, the book where Ye Xian is contained, *Youyang Zazu*. the Miscellaneous Morsel of Youyang, is to be intended as "miscellaneous morsels of lost lore", and everything contained in it as the collection of a peculiar intellectual.

Mair, moreover, notices the stoning as a strange element, and the phonetic transcription of elements absent in Han culture, ascribing them now to Indian and now to Middle-Eastern influences.

While his work exposes so many important elements, Mair is first and foremost a linguist and a sinologist, and does not even mention the long tradition of the *zhiguai* genre, with its standard structural regulations and content guidelines. He does not stop to analyse the structure of the text, casually adding the imagined missing parts, and does not compare it to other Cinderella stories, as he is not a folklorist.

He does, however, see the exigence of a development of this topic. "Unfortunately, the "Chinese" story is poorly known outside of a small circle of Sinologists" [Mair, 2005:364]. Wang Qing, in 2006, published her article in which she explains how the fairy tale might have actually arrived in China from Europe, demolishing the idea that its origin was Chinese. The writer starts by saying that Duang indicates Li Shiyuan as teller of the story, adding that writers of *zhiguai* and 傳奇 *chuanqi* (transmission of the unusual) used to indicate the source of their story which could be fictitious; moreover, Li's birthplace is not a guarantee that the story came from the same place; furthermore, even if the story is said to have originated in a precise place, the process of indigenisation (本土化 *bentuhua*), might have shown instead an accumulation of motifs from the cultures it had contacts with: the lack of success of AT510A in China seems to support

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this theory. It is explained that 陀洹国 Tuohanguo, mentioned in the *Xintangshu* —written circa three centuries before Ye Xian— and about which we know that its inhabitants did not know the silkworm, and sent embassies with parrots and precious ointments to China, was actually the transcription of Dalmian, Damia or Talmian, according to Tang phonetics. This name would indicate an island, and 洞 *dong*, instead of cave, is to be intended as an insular administrative unit, as reported in the *Suishu*. Also, according to the auther, 善淘金 *santaojin* is to be translated as "good as sifting gold", when Arab and Indian sources define Java and Sumatra the "gold islands". Finally, the scholar relates Ye Xian to a close Indonesian story similar to Rooth's A2, with a tree grown on the orphan's grave which provides fruit only the protagonist can pick, while the loss of and identification through a magic object are not present: being this story, according to the writer, more ancient than Ye Xian, it indicates a movement of the narrative from West to East. Ye Xian's name would also be the transcription of *Asan,* Ash in Sanskrit, and therefore related to Grimm's *Aschenbrödel.*

The theory is that Arab, European and Chinese merchants would meet in Malaysia and Sumatra exchanging story and cultural motifs along with merchandises, especially in the long stays due to the monsoon season. Not only Ye Xian, but also AT300, *The dragon slayer,* and *The Helping Horse*, present in *One Thousand and One Nights*, would have come to China from Europe, through Sunda Islands and Cambodia. Cinderella, thus, must have come in embryonic form to Sumatra, and then elaborated in Vietnam, where was told to the intellectual Duang Chenshi in the 9th century. Wang Qing, therefore, changes completely the direction of the presumable diffusion of the tale: while scholars are still convinced that Cinderella, as we know it, comes from China, the truth could be the opposite, and the author locates in the Mediterranean basin, rather than in India like the ancient folklorists, the origin of the majority of modern folk tales.

In 2010 Fay Beauchamp wrote an article in which she tried to prove, instead, the Asian origins of this tale type. She supports the idea of the Yue origin of Ye Xian (as expressed by Ding) and explains why she thinks that the Chinese version is probably related to the

Zhuang people. *Asian Origins of Cinderella: The Zhuang Storyteller of Guangxi*, ascribing the origin of the story to this area due to the presence of the fish helper, the shoe as identification object, and the festival with marital purposes. With the help of two Zhuang scholars, versed in their minority's anthropology and cultural traditions, she unfolds this theory on the provenance of this story, connecting the motifs to Zhuang customs.

She carries out a punctual linguistic analysis, where different translations are compared in order to explain some obscure points, and then relates the constituents first to Zhuang culture and then, broadening the horizons of her research, to Chinese literature and ancient Indian folklore. The examination is precise and meticulous, but some of her conclusions sometimes appear too influenced by the contribution of her collaborators.

The elements she analyses are the same that Liu Xiaochun had identified as Yue, being the Zhuang, along with the Dong, their descendants.

First of all the fish, due to its importance in Zhuang economy and because the reference to the fish bone in the text can be related to their use as fertiliser (and she also connects it to Zhuang burial customs); then, the special embroidered shoes, traditionally tailored by Zhuang women for themselves as a display of ability and still related to courting rituals in Guangxi. Lastly, the festival with matching purpose: according to the author, the marriage with the greedy king of Tuohan is a veiled disapproval of marriage for money, without the previous meeting of the partners at the festival.

She then adds a few more elements, which nonetheless seem less exclusively connected to Zhuang culture: 翠 *cui,* instead of kingfisher, would indicate the special blue whose production is a prerogative of this ethnic group; the praises to the beauty of the nature and the women's resourcefulness are also ascribed to Zhuang culture. Whereas it is probable that peasant women enjoyed more freedom among the tribal minorities than in the rigid Han society, the initiative of Ye Xian and the description of nature hardly seem Zhuang specific prerogatives.

Furthermore, she adds a new, fascinating interpretation: Ye Xian story would be the metaphor of the political history of the Yue (according to her, the Zhuang).

In a mythical era, before the Qin and the Han, a girl, daughter of the chief of the tribe, was abused by a greedy stepmother, which killed her only source of affection, the fish. The resourceful girl, however, acquired riches from the fish bone and, thanks to her feminine skills, ended up marrying a prince. The protagonist would represent the Zhuang, while the evil stepmother and the greedy king should be read as a metaphor of the Han invaders. The continuation of the story would be a proof of this theory, especially the mention of a rebellion. This exegesis of the story seems to me a little too far-fetched, formany reason: the international presence of this story type, the voluntary marriage with the king, and especially because usually national narratives have a happy ending, while here the only satisfaction would be that the king ends up losing all the riches provided by Ye Xian.

Beauchamp, then, provides other explanations of motifs which, however, appear less rigorous than the connections with the Zhuang culture. Like Liu Xiaochun and Lu Yilu before her, she relates this story with Hindu literature, which most probably had come in contact with southern China. The first reference is to *Ramayana*, because some of its countless motifs are similar to Ye Xian's: the *Ramayana* is the largest ancient epic, it contains myriad of stories intertwined and connected to one another, and therefore many of its elements can be found in other stories all over the world.

The motifs Beauchamp cites are the rivalry between stepbrothers, the abuses of the stepmother, the loss of status of the stepson, the recognition through a talisman, and a happy marriage at the end of the story. Now, where it is probable that Indian literature influenced the one of neighbouring countries, this story seems to have almost nothing in common with Ye Xian, or al least no more than biblical narrative such as Cain and Abel or Esau and Jacob: what is described in this story is the rivalry that happened in polygamist societies where each wife tried to favour her own children. The other Indian story mentioned by the author is *Manu and the Fish*, and here also the small animal that repays a debt of gratitude and a deluge are universal motif, and hardly relatable to Ye Xian, whose fish is not a mythological creature.

Other elements which we will see more in detail with the examination of the single motifs in the second part, are mentioned by the writer. One is Guanyin's iconography, represented in southern China with a basket of fish and honoured with the liberation of red fish in ponds.

Beauchamp also mentions Yang Guifei, protagonist of Bai Juyi's 长恨歌 *Changhen ge, Song of everlasting sorrow,* because she is described wearing 翠翘金雀玉搔頭 *cuiqiao jinque yusaotou,* hair garments made of gold, jade, sparrow and kingfisher feathers; the second is Wukong, protagonist of the famous classic 西游记 *Xiyuji ,* because he is asked to guard the garden. Also, in the *Xiyuji* there is a reference to a fish which becomes a dragon.

All these references, however, seem quite dubious, and cited only because Ye Xian is said to wear kingfisher feathers, to guard the fruit in the garden and because there is red fish in the story. Goldfish that become dragons are present in many folk tales and books in China, for instance 封神演义 *Fengshen yanyi, The creation of the Gods,* and the fact that the stepmother kills and eats the fish should be enough to show that this is hardly a Chinese motif.

To sum up, Beauchamp's work is interesting and expands its horizons to Chinese and Indian literature and culture; but the author seems to ignore the Chinese language and all the literature about Ye Xian written in Chinese; the references to Chinese and Indian literature are somehow unconvincing, as they mention small particulars rather than real narrative motifs. Beauchamp is not a folklorist nor a Sinologist, and that what makes her work remarkable, because she is not prejudiced by any previous methodology; all the same, she does not identify the genre, the structure, the motifs of the narrative; moreover, her Zhuang contributors appear quite influenced by their idea on the origin of this tale: "I should note, however, that the Zhuang scholars I interviewed quickly cut off a discussion of such a Buddhist interpretation" [Beauchamp, 2010:476]; they seem to exclude any Buddhist influence because the Zhuang are proudly animist and consider Buddhism a religion imported by the Han conquerors, which might have hindered

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objective and unbiased research. Also, she imagines the Walt Disney must have known Ye Xian very well because his rendition of the story contains anthropomorphic mice. At the end of her essay, she indicates southern China as the birthplace of Cinderella, which would have therefore moved to Europe: "I further suggest that much later in the sixteenth century a Westerner on board a ship learned this story at a time when Chinese were talking about a new, printed edition of the ninth-century written Yexian story. After that boatload of European sailors, Jesuits, or merchants reached home, the story quickly embarked to new destinations, spreading from Italy throughout Europe and the world" [Beauchamp, 2010:449]

Those are all, or most of the scholars who have tackled the study of Ye Xian, or of Cinderella, or have provided fundamental tools for its analysis.

Every single scholar has passed through the process of translation: from ancient to modern Chinese, or to English: the process of exegesis carried out have implied the passage from a linguistic and cultural system to another.

While translation seem to have been the common tool for all the scholars, we can tell the difference from a study to another: some are Sinological and some are Folkloric, and some are both. Nonetheless, none of them seem to organically unify the methodology of both branches, nor do they seem to use them to relate the story to ancient narratives present in the Middle East; not only the orphan helped by a tree indicated by Rooth, but also classical stories containing elements of Cinderella which will be exposed in the chapter on the history of the tale type.

1.3   Research hypothesis

Research hypothesis

With my research I aim at demonstrating that Ye Xian, Tang tale recorded by the intellectual Duan Chenghsi in his book *Youyang Zazu*, *The Miscellaneous Morsels of Youyang*, is not the origin of the Cinderella story, but the link between three proto-Cinderellas stories — motifs presents in ancient narratives in classical literature— and the modern Cinderella tale as told by the Grimm brothers.

To illustrate this hypothesis, I will will outline the data in a scheme.

I will call the proto-Cinderellas **PC**, Ye Xian **YX**, and the modern tale **MC.**

PC is the union of three different narratives:

(PC1), or Rhodopis and **(PC2)**, or Rooth's first Cinderella core, and **(PC3),** or Joseph and Asenath

(PC1) is mentioned in Herodotus, but her story with Cinderella motifs is narrated by Strabo (1st century B.C,) and Aelian (2nd century C.E.).

(PC2) has no precise time indication but Rooth says that it can be up to 4000 years old and, for the reason discussed in the history of this tale, is probably not more recent than the 7th century C.E.. Rooth maintains that it was originated in the Middle East [Rooth, 1951:49]

(PC3) is a Hellenistic narrative published in an anthology in 550 C.E

These three narratives are treated in the chapter Tripartite History of the Cinderella tale type.

YX, or Ye Xian, is a Chinese tale of the Tang dynasty (10th century)

MC is Cinderella, also known as AT510A, according to the Aarne-Thompson index of fairy tales: we use the Grimm version of 1812 in *Kinder und Hausmärchen*

There are both structural and content-related reasons that prove that **(YX)** is the combination of **(PC1), (PC2),** and **(PC3)** and which is connected to **(MC).**The evidence is that**(YX)** contains all the elements present in **(PC)** and in **(MC).**The connections are not been extensively investigated because the elements emerge only through close reading of material belonging to different genres and therefore analysed so far by specialists of different fields: Classicists, Sinologists, and Folklorists.

Structural features

The structure of **(PC1)** is a tale told in the work of a Greek historian and a Roman one. The story is therefore presented as a true fact, with reference to a real Pharaoh and a pyramid.

(PC2), on the other hand, is an embryonic folk tale, a narrative transmitted orally in primitive societies.

(PC3) is presented by his author as a piece of wisdom literature; it is a religious story with romance, contained in "*Volume of Records of Events which have Shaped the World*."

(MC) is a fairy tale, that is a written folk tale, collected and rewritten by cultured scholars.

(YX) is a *zhiguai*, a genre which is a hybrid form of folk tale and historical account. Native to China, this form was a Record of the Strange, the transcription of an odd event, particularly one happened in the peripheral parts of the empire. The authors of *zhiguai* considered themselves reporters rather than writers, as their role was to narrate occurrences, instead of inventing stories.

This genre, therefore, can be considered an intermediate passage between the historiography and the fairy tale.

Content

(PC1) is the narration of an Egyptian female slave, Rhodopis, whose sandal is stolen, and dropped into the lap of the Pharaoh who looks for and marries her. She builds a pyramid, or, in other versions, the Pharaoh builds a pyramid for her. This can be summed up as follows:

(shoe+animal helper + marriage with the prince+ monumental tomb)

(PC2) presents a child, or children in other variants, whose mother is dead, who are mistreated by their stepmother and who receive gifts from a tomb, or a tree grown from the tomb

(mistreated orphan + stepmother + helping tree)

(PC3) is an orphan girl whose stepmother is her rival in love. She lies in the ashes. A man from the sky helps her. She is recognised by a ring, and she marries the prince.

(orphan+ stepmother+ man from the sky+ ashes+ recognition object+ marriage with the prince)

(MC) presents an orphan mistreated by the stepmother and her stepsisters, a tree grown from a torn twig given to her by her father and grown on her mother?s tomb. The stepsisters give her tasks to accomplish if she wants to go to the ball, and some animals help her with these otherwise impossible tasks. A bird singing from the tree grown on the tomb gives her the dresses and the shoes to go to the ball, where she loses her show. The prince looks for her, makes her try on the shoe, and marries her)

(mistreated orphan + stepmother+ stepsisters + helping tree+ helping animal+ the ball+shoe+ the marriage with a prince)

(YX) is the story of an orphan mistreated by the stepmother. She has a stepsister but she does not play an important role in the tale. She is helped by a fish and, when the fish dies,

she receives helps first from a person from the sky, and then she is found by her stepmother hugging a tree. She goes to a ball where she is supposed to meet her future husband, but she loses her shoe, which is retrieved by a man of her tribe and brought to the prince. The prince finds her and marries her. The stepmother and stepsister are killed by flying stones and buried in a monumental tomb.

The comparison of the three different narratives can be illustrated by the following table:

	PC1	PC2	PC3	YX	MC
Mistreated Orphan		x	x	x	x
Stepmother		x	x	x	x
Stepsister/s				x	x
Helping Tree		x		x	x
Helping Animal/s	x		x	x	x
Man from Heaven			x	x	x*
Dung/Ashes			x	x	x
Ball				x	x
Shoe	x		x**	x	x
Marriage with the Prince	x		x	x	x
Monumental Tomb	x			x	

*Grimm's Cinderella does not have a man from the sky, but other version, like Perrault's, present a fairy godmother, which can be related to this magical/ religious figure

** Asenath does not present a shoe, but it does have a recognition object, more frequent in narratives, which is a ring. Moreover, there is an odd long description of the protagonist washing her future husband's feet, as though the element of the man kneeling before the

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woman and touching her feet had to be changed in order to match Jewish traditional culture.

Therefore, **(YX)** maintains all the elements of **(PC1)**, **(PC2)** and **(PC3)**, but it adds to the narrative two new motifs: the stepsister and the ball which will be maintained in the **(MC)** tale.

Moreover, **(YX)** possesses elements that not only will be present in **(MC),** but presents one, the monumental tomb, which disappears in **MC**, but was present in **PC1**.

If Ye Xian is analysed as a *zhiguai,* and then stripped of the historical elements added to give credibility to the genre, its elements can be investigated:

1. through a careful cultural analysis of the elements in the context of Yue society (the place of origin of the teller)
2. through a careful examination of previous Chinese literature and Tang society (the cultural system of the writer)
3. tracing comparisons with the earlier Middle- Eastern versions, and highlighting the presence of the motifs in them

As a result it can be be proven that those elements are not originally Chinese, and they are related to the older Middle-Eastern narratives aforementioned.

Theoretical framework

In order to extrapolate and compare the three different phases of the Cinderella evolution, an interdisciplinary combination of three different perspectives is needed.

1. The approach of Classicists who study folk tales, as they have hypothesised the genre variance, which allow us to use texts belonging to different genres by isolating the motifs present in them. It is functional for the genre non-specific study of **(PC),(YX)** and **(MC)**

2. The sinological approach, which permits us to deepen the study of **(YX)**: contextualise the author, his conception of literature, his work, and the genre of the tale. Chinese national literature, however, is not sufficient to the study of a tale which has travelled across the world, so international focuses on literature are considered too.

3. The Folklorist approach is used for its methods of comparison and for its study of the unit of measurement in comparison: motif and function, functional for the study of **(PC),(YX)** and **(MC).** It also provides useful information on oral transmission, and on the validity of the study **(YX)** as a text with oral connotations, despite its written form.

Analysis of the elements.

(YX) therefore, can be considered a Cinderella because the main elements are present; they are not strictly Chinese and they show contact with the Middle East.

Those elements are:

The mistreated orphan;

The stepmother;

The stepsister;

The helping tree;

The helping animal;

The shoe;

The ball;

The marriage with the prince.

Availing myself of folklore theories, I have grouped some of the elements according to Propp's dramatis personae, as in the system simplified by Peter Gilet:

1) The Heroine and Her Double (The protagonist and the stepsister)

2) The Adversary (The stepmother)

3) The Helpers (the fish, the person from the sky, the tree)

4) The Magic Object (the shoe): is not one of Gilet's dramatis personae but I have inserted its examination for its crucial role both in Cinderella stories and in Chinese culture

5) The Marriage with the prince (The ball): explains while the ball has been inserted in the narrative, and the reason why the marriage is not treated is because both the marriage and the figure of the prince are only briefly mentioned.

All these five elements, but 5), appear in the both **(PC)** and **(MC)**.

5) was added because it was a traditional custom among the Yue, and it represented a marital festival where young people go to meet their future husbands and wives.
The incorporation of this element is so obvious and misconducted that the protagonist goes to the ball, but the shoe is stolen from a man who takes it to another country, where the king lives.
In 4) there are traces of another Middle- Eastern narrative, a Jewish story called *Joseph and Asenath*, to which one of the helper is related and whose protagonist is recognised by a magic object.

Furthermore, I have analysed in *controversial elements* two structural and two content-related components which prove my hypothesis.

1) In *Spatial and temporal contextualisation* analyse the need of the author to insert time and space elements in order to make the story credible; one of these elements is the monumental tomb, which appears in **(PC1)**and **(YX)** — the two history-related genres— but is not present in **(PC2), (PC3)** and **(MC)**.

2) In *Broken Narrative* I have pointed out how the structure of the texts shows in many parts the combination of two different narratives: one with a fish helper, a shoe and a ball, and the other one with a lost shoe and a prince. Moreover, the incidental presence of the person from the sky and the tree support this suppositions.

3) In *Stoning* I try to explain the puzzling death, burial and subsequent worship of Ye Xian's stepmother and stepdaughter, reconnecting the punishment to stoning, virtually unknown in China and traditionally practised in the Middle-East.

4) In *Lack of success* I provide more evidence that Ye Xian did not originated in China because this tale type did not have meet the audience's needs

Conclusion

Since all the elements in **(PC)** appear in **(YX)**, and then in **(MC)**, it is quite clear that **(YX)** is the connection of **(PC)** and **(MC)**. **(YX)** adds to **(PC)** the presence of a stepsister and a ball, which will then be present in **(MC)**.

- The ball was a normal occurrence among the Yue as a matching occasion which, however, would have seemed tribal and primitive to an educated Chinese man, as in Han society girls would not go looking for a husband, as arranged marriages where the norm.

- The stepsister is probably an attempt to adapt this story to Han culture, where sibling rivalry was a very common topic in folk tales, and was present in works as old as 孝經 *Xiaojing*, and 二十四孝 *Ershisixiao*, two very important texts on Filial Piety. In later Chinese versions, the ball will disappear, and the rivalry between two sisters will become the most important element of the Cinderella stories.

Moreover, **(YX)** presents the monumental tomb, a component of **(PC1)** which will not appear in **MC.**

Furthermore, the elements which are traditionally considered the proof of the Chinese origin of Cinderella (the shoe and the stepmother) do not really fit into the cultural system of **(YX)**, and in later versions of the same cultural system they will either change or disappear, proving a foreign origin of these motifs.

Lastly, concerning the genre, **YX** belongs to the *zhiguai,* which is a supernatural story with historical elements, which places it in an intermediate position between **(PC1)** (historiography) and **(MC)** (folk tale).

1.4   Assumption: The Tripartite History of the Cinderella tale type

The assumption which underlies this research is that the Cinderella cycle did not start, as assumed by Rooth, with the first narrative core of abused orphans receiving gifts from their mother's tomb, or by a tree grown from the tomb; instead, I am proving that this motif

fused with older stories retold in classical works by Greek historiographers into a more complex narrative, whose our tale, Ye Xian, is the most ancient recorded example.

Ye Xian, therefore, represents the first combined story known by us as Cinderella is a crucial point of the Cinderella cycle as it is the link between the old, separate motifs and the complete modern fairy tale.

The universality of Cinderella's motifs, which make this story so fascinating and complex, is also the reason why it is quite complicated to reconstruct its history and diffusion. Other narratives are more simply ascribable to precise cultural system.

For example, the presence of dwarfs and knights set *Snow White* in Europe (although the magic mirror also appears in the Indian epic poem *Padmavat*),while dragons are always clear evidence of Far- Eastern origin of a tale.

Since the change of status of the protagonist is determined by the shoe test, scholars took it as incontrovertible proof that the story had originated in China. Along with others cited in this thesis, Yang Xianyi, the famous translator into English of the classic 红楼梦 *Hongloumeng, The Dream* of *the Red Chamber,* affirmed that the first version of this story generated before the Qin and Han and was transcribed by Duan Chengshi in the *Youyang zazu*.

Its story, however, began long before it, and its tripartite history of this tale can be summed up as follows.

1-Cinderella in the ancient world
Rhodopis

Strabo tells the story of Rhodopis ,and this tale can be considered the first, embryonic trace of Cinderella. But it is Aelian, in his Various History, in the 2nd century C.E. that tells us the story of Rhodopis. She is a Greek girl who is enslaved and who therefore loses her status; while she is bathing in Naucratis, her sandal is stolen by an eagle and dropped into the lap of the Pharaoh Psammetichus (Psamtik), who was administering justice in

Memphis. miles away; the Pharaoh becomes obsessed with the sandal and starts looking for its owner, until Rhodopis is found, she marries the Pharaoh and she becomes remembered forever. In fact, in Greece people believed that Rhodopis had built the third pyramid. While Herodotus says that the credence was absurd, it was repeated as a true fact by Pliny the Elder in *Naturalis Historia*. Diodorus Siculus and Strabo say that the pyramid was built by Rhodopis's lovers, while she was a courtesan. Aelian and Pliny, however, report that she had become the queen of Egypt, and she had built the third pyramid.

We have, in this story, a destitute girl, a helpful animal, a lost shoe which is the tool for the identification of the protagonist, and the marriage with the king. There is no mistreated orphan, no stepmother or ball, but the four present elements qualify Rhodopis as the most ancient Cinderella story known.

Asenath

From a comparative point of view, the story of Joseph and Asenath is certainly the most intriguing. The origin of the story is in the Genesis, and it appears in the famous tale *Joseph sold by his brothers.* Not before the 6th century, however, did the story develop into a formed narrative known as *Joseph and Asenath,* which is part of a Hellenistic anthology in Greek circulating around 550 C.E. , and it is an Egyptian story, just like Rhodopis.

The story goes as follows.

Asenath is the daughter of the Jewish Dinah. Her mother is raped and for this reason she and Asenath are abandoned in the desert. An eagle takes the little Asenath, who wears a special ring, and she is brought to the house of the priest of a pagan divinity. She lives there, and she grows in beauty, despising men.

She meets Joseph, who belongs now to the Egyptian aristocracy, but comes from an important Jewish family; he was beloved by his father, sold by his brothers to a slaver when he was young.

Ignoring all this, and for his appearance and countenance, she falls in love with him; her stepmother also falls in love with Joseph, and they become rivals. Asenaths repents for

having disdained men, and fasts in the ashes for days, until a man from the sky tells her to wear her best clothes and the ring, and to meet Joseph. She is recognised by the ring as Joseph's niece, therefore as a Jewish woman. She insists on washing Joseph's feet, and they get married the day after: two people, both raised as Egyptian, therefore heathen, are reunited by the divine providence and they get married, contracting matrimony with a noble Jewish person.

The elements which can be found here are: an orphan; a stepmother; an object the orphan is recognised by; the ashes, which will be the important theme in later Cinderellas; a man from the sky who tells her what to do; and the contact with the feet of her husband, as though the narrative could not depict a man kneeling before a woman, touching her feet. The man from heaven presented in Asenath bears an astonishing resemblance with the *tian ren* who helps Ye Xian: even the syntax of the sentence is the same, and his hair is described in both as wild and dishevelled: in Asenath he is described as having "hair like flames".

This story was written only a few centuries before Ye Xian, and it circulated in the Hellenistic world, for example in Alexandria, where Jewish, Arab and Christian lived together, sharing cultural motifs, and which was an important trading post between Europe, the Middle East and Asia. One can reasonably suppose, therefore, that some elements of the story had trickled and combined with other narratives before they reached the Indonesian islands where the story probably got in contact with the Yue culture.

There are other figures related to Cinderella in the ancient world [Anderson, 2000:42-45]; none of them, however, seems to be so important as Strabo's and Aelian narrative. Aspasia from Focea is a not very common tale which also appears in Aelian's *Storia varia,* a work with a mixed character containing anecdoctes , legends and aphorisms, dating back to the 2nd century A.D. The story is about a virtuous girl who, after dreaming a prophecy that she will marry a perfect man, gets her face spoilt by a malformation. She sees in another dream the goddess Aphrodite who tells her how to cure it and, become extremely attractive, she is brought to Cyrus the Great's court, where she conquests the

king's admiration for her moderation and continence (σωφρόνος καὶ ἐγρατῶς,*sofronos kai enkratos*), different from all the other girls who try to seduce him, She becomes his wife and after his death she will be his brother Artaxerxes's concubine.

Anderson considers this story as a Cinderella story because the girl is described as virtuous and wise; Aphrodite appears to her as a white dove, representing the animal helper; there is a public occasion where the girl stands out for her qualities, and she refuses the advances of the king, as Cinderella will do by fleeing the ball three times, in later versions. This last theme is viewed, from a psychoanalytical perspective, as the ambivalent feeling in Cinderella tales, of becoming a woman getting married but at the same time of remaining a child; Chen Yuping describes this original meaning of the tale, when an older woman used it to introduce new girls to their duties as future wives[Chen, 1998:57-61]. From that point of view, therefore, Aspasia's story seems to fulfil the role that Cinderella will have in all stories universally circulating: the desire for a sentimental involvement is mitigated by both modesty and natural fear of a young girl towards the encounter with a possible match. This tale contains some elements of Cinderella, such as the animal helper — actually a goddess who appears as a dove, which was her sacred animal —and a party where the king chooses Aspasia among the other girls for her virtuous demeanour. Nonetheless, it would be hardly possible to say that this story can be considered a Cinderella tale: the interaction between family members, the destitution of the protagonist, the loss and recognition through a magic object are all absent in this account on a young woman helped by the gods.

Aspasia is depicted as a modest girl, but the later Cinderella figures, including Ye Xian, show patience, rather than chastity, as their main virtue: as a matter of fact, they display their resourcefulness by disobeying the stepmother to sneak to the ball. The other narratives mentioned by Anderson as Cinderella examples in the ancient world do not seem to possess the motif that would qualify them as Cinderella stories. One is the story of Shakuntala, protagonist of a Kalidasa's drama of the 5th century, but already mentioned in

the *Mahabharata* at least two centuries before. The heroine is a young wife forgotten by her husband because of a curse, but recognised by a ring.

Anderson also cites the myth of Io, Zeus's lover transformed into a cow, because of the presence of the cow as helping animals in later Cinderellas; his argument, however, seems rather unconvincing, because there is no other element in the story which may qualify it as a Cinderella story. Furthermore, Anderson seems to use quite nonchalantly etymology in order to trace connections between these stories. Io's mother, for example, is called Melia, (μελιά). The word is used in modern English to define the ash, but in ancient times it only indicated the "*ash tree*", which, however, is not related to the ash; the ash tree comes from a Germanic root present in ancient English as *aesc,* "pike" or "spear", not showing any relation between *aesc* e *Aschenputtel*. Anderson, moreover, tries to connect the name of Aspasia — which comes from the verb ασπαζειν aspazein which means "to welcome"— to Aschenputtel, and to the ash, affirming that "It may be that an original of the latter in some non-Greek language that has been Hellenised into the first Greek name available" [Anderson, 2000:31].It is quite evident, therefore, that Anderson uses etymology quite daringly to create temerarious connections between ancient narratives and the modern Cinderella.

The last narrative he mentions, however, might have some more important relations to Cinderella. Anderson cites Inanna, the Sumerian goddess, nurtured by a tree, and dancing with a shepherd-king Dumuzi before marrying him: we have a nurturing tree, a dance, and even a mention to sisters who carry out nicer tasks than the protagonist. The nurturing date tree, therefore, could be a part of the very ancient tradition hypothesised by Rooth and explained below.

Rooth's A1

Anna Birgitta Rooth carried out in 1951 a very thorough analysis of more than 700 versions of Cinderella. Unfortunately, only two Chinese versions are mentioned, and one is Ye Xian, cited as a fairy tale among others.

According to Rooth, Cinderella tale type originated in the Middle East, but travelled to the Celebes Islands, where a story circulated of a mistreated child, or children, whose dead mother came back to rescue as a tree grown on the tomb to provide nourishment; she defines this model as A1.

In the story there is also an abusive stepmother, who cuts the tree or desecrates the tomb. Rooth says that this model could have been around for as long as 4000 years; and it was probably no more tolerated after the Islamisation of the area in the 7th century,

Islam refuses any belief in ghosts and reincarnation, not even for a good cause, or for favouring people who behaved righteously in life.

In the Qur'an the following dialogue is found: [For such is the state of the disbelievers], until, when death comes to one of them, he says, "My Lord, send me back That I might do righteousness in that which I left behind." No! It is only a word he is saying; and behind them is a barrier until the Day they are resurrected. [Surat Al-Mu'minūn, Ayas 99, 10].

Moreover, in the Sunnah it is narrated: "The Lord, Glorified is He, said: "I have already decreed that they will not return to life."He said: "My Lord, then convey (this news) to those whom I have left behind." Allah said: "Think not of those as dead who are killed in the way of Allah, Nay, they are alive, with their Lord, and they have provision." [Sunnah, Hadith 190 in].

This tale, therefore, was an ancient reminiscence of some animistic tribal cult practised in the area, so strong that even today sacred trees are connected to the tombs of Muslim saints in the Holy Land: both tree and tombs are believed to be the abode of the sacred soul of the saint; this cult, however, shows quite evidently traces of paganism, and therefore it is not officially accepted. [Dafni, 2007].

Now, it is not known whether the nurturing tree is a direct derivation from the date tree found in the story of Inanna. It seems to me that a tree that provides food, especially dates, would be a very immediate and comprehensible helper in an area like the Middle East. The nurturing three is an element of cultural ecology: in a dry, rocky land, dates were a common source of food, and could save the life of people who had stranded too far from

their home, or were travelling across the inhospitable land. Trees were an important source of spontaneous food which did not require any special effort.

It is not a case that in the Grimm's Cinderella the tree is a hazel, for the same reason. Hazelnuts were a source of food, as hazel trees (Corylus avellana) grow very fast and their fruit are a source of protein. Moreover, we know that the element of the mother's tomb where orphans abused by their stepmother cried was a known element among the Tang [Ding, 1974:35].

Ye Xian contains all these typologies of helpers (an animal, a man from the sky, a tree). The model A1 identified by Rooth combined, according to her, with the model A2, where only the orphan can pick the fruits of the tree (which are made of gold or silver, or possess other magical qualities) and this specific skill will be used as a marital test. This exclusivity in later stories, including Ye Xian, was transferred onto the shoe.

It is quite apparent that the fusion of all these narratives with some local elements was the nucleus of formation of Ye Xian.

2-Ye Xian

Since Ye Xian is the main object of this thesis, I will not deepen its description in this section.

I would like, however, to point out some of its aspects, especially important in the Cinderella cycle.

As my hypothesis is that Ye Xian is the link between earlier and later stories, I will highlight the fact that the separate motifs appearing in the ancient narratives aforementioned and in the modern folk tale as written by the Grimm brothers, are for the first time present all together in Ye Xian.

The assembling of such motifs, however, is quite maladroit, and it shows quite clearly: later versions will correct this structural awkwardness, and will display a more organic plot.

Ye Xian possesses a stepmother who is quite abusive, and a stepsister, who instead is only mentioned three times, and whose only fault is to recognise Ye Xian at the ball. She gets killed, then buried and worshipped. Now, this stepsister is probably an attempt at adapting this tale to the Confucian Han society: in later Chinese stories, as it will be explained, the contrast between the stepsisters will be the main motif, and the Modern Tradition, as Ding defines it, presents many such stories.

Ye Xian also has three helpers, one obvious and two just mentioned: an animal, a man, and a tree. The one described in detail is the fish, as it was probably the southern Chinese Yue contribution to this story. The other two are only briefly mentioned, and they show too great a similarity with the man from the sky of Asenath and the tree of Rooth's A1 to be considered merely casual additions.

There is a shoe, like in Strabo's Rhodopis, which Ding affirms was known in Tang China [Ding, 1974:35] and which most probably was the main contact between the proto-Cinderellas and the southern Chinese culture, as shoes possessed a unique value and exclusivity in Yue society.

However, the route of the shoe is quite complicated in Ye Xian, as she loses it at the ball, it is picked up by a man of the tribe, shipped abroad, brought to the king of another country, then returned to the cave-settlement.

And this introduces the next odd element: the ball and the king, in this story, have no contact whatsoever.

This is my explanation: the ball was a Yue marital festival, thus a precise aspect of their society; but according to the pre-existent, foreign narrative, the girl had to marry a king. Since the animal helper for the Yue was the fish — so important for their sustenance — instead than an eagle, and it was important that it had died in the story, to show that even its bones were precious. The two motifs, the ball and the marriage with the king, were badly stitched together, revealing the double narrative underneath.

Along with all the elements present in the former narratives, including the ashes/ rubbish, Ye Xian contains also temporal and spatial contextualisation, especially at the beginning

and the end: this was the typical structure of the Tang *zhiguai*, or *chuanqi,* as it was also called after the Six Dynasties. These stories, in fact, were usually divided in three parts: introduction, main body and epilogue, and the first two contained information about the time and place where the story was set, its collection, its source, its teller, and so on. One of the elements shown here, which again do not seem to organically fit into the narrative of Ye Xian, is the tomb of the stepsister and stepmother. The two women are killed by flying stones (whose interpretation will be later discussed), pitied for and then buried under an enormous mound which the people admired and to which they would bring offers when hoping to find a partner. This is another quite bewildering association of elements. First of all, the stepsister is killed, despite not being a villain, along with the stepmother. They are murdered by flying stones, probably a reference to lapidation, unknown in China and among the southern tribes. And, after that punishment, they are buried with the greatest honour and then worshipped. While the element of the monumental tomb may be related to Rhodopis's pyramid, stoning is not known as a punishment in fairy tales, but was the usual public execution in the Semitic Middle East. The worship of the villain, though, is such a strange element that probably the tellers of the story tried to adapt the pyramid to the nearest concept in their culture, a colossal burial mound where two women were worshipped as goddesses.

This element will disappear in later narratives, as fairy tales did not need any historical-geographic connotations as, unless historiography and *zhiguai*, they were set in a magic world.

The interval: changing in the social gathering and the shoe

The third version compared here is the Grimm story, which was published at the beginning at the 19th century. There are indeed other versions of Cinderella recorded in the Middle Ages and in the 17th and 18th century. Rashen Coatie, or Rushen Coatie is mentioned in 1540 in the *Complaint of Scotland.* Andrew Lang and Joseph Jacobs in 1894 *More English Fairy Tales.* This story presents a stepmother, stepsisters, a shoe and marriage with the

prince. The place where they meet, though, is not the ball, but the church, which was the social occasion a girl could participate in. As we see, in time the mother becomes a stepmother.

The presence of some of the elements before the Jesuits had intense contacts with China shows incontrovertibly that Ye Xian is not the first Cinderella narrative, as stated by some scholars. It proves that the ancient narratives that travelled to China from the Middle East had also travelled to Europe and built up in a solid tradition all throughout the continent. It is very possible, though, that the ball, which was a typical Yue custom, and connected with the shoe, was the addition to this narrative, and substituted the church in later story. Basile's Cinderella is the first written European Cinderella written, which puts together the elements of stepmother, helping tree, helping animals, shoes and marriage with the prince. It does not present a proper ball, though, but a similar social gathering, and it is still influenced by medieval gruesomeness. Along with Ye Xian's probable influence, Basile shows the effect of the medieval oral culture upon his work. Just as Rushen Coatie, his Zezzolla is a cold-blooded murderer, something quite unexpected if compared to Cinderella as we all know it.

In fact, she kills her first stepmother, instigated by the woman who will be her second, and more abusive, stepmother.

The way she gets rid of the first stepmother is actually a motif per se in the Aarne-Thompson Index of Folk Tales: it is an entry of Unnatural Cruelty, and it is come S121" *Murder by slamming down chest-lid. Done while victim is looking into the chest* ". This motif was present in Gregory of Tours's *Historia Francorum,* when the queen Fredegund, described as a ruthless termagant, tries to kill her daughter in this way; so it dates back as early as 6th century CE, and it appears again in Masuccio Salernitano's *Novellino,* in the 15th century.

It is interesting to notice that in another tale collected by the Grimm which will be mentioned elsewhere in this thesis, *The Juniper Tree,* the tree and the murder by slamming the lid appear together, along with the stepmother cooking the son and serving it to the

unwitting father: a motif from the Greek myth of Tantalus and Pelops, but also in some Chinese and Korean versions of Cinderella where the protagonist cooks her stepsister and serves her to her stepmother.

Cinderella protagonists happen to be murders: in a rough, wild world, they can kill to restore the status they have lost and to conquer their freedom to move on and get married. The rest of the story presents other variations. For the first time the protagonist is the daughter of a rich noble man.

While the psychological approach would explain that the morale of the story is that the protagonists, after recklessly murdering the first stepmother, learns the lesson and becomes a patient, modest and humble girl. From a historical comparative point of view, though, my opinion is that it is quite evident that two narratives fused together, just like in Ye Xian. The violent European Cinderella of the Middle Ages gets in contact with the meek, virtuous protagonist of the Far Eastern version, probably through the cultural exchange of Italian and Spanish Jesuits with Chinese culture.

The shoe, which was an element already present in both, unified the two versions. The mother becomes definitely a stepmother, and a ball with a shoe-test in included, as it was the way to harmonise the Yue festival with the shoe test.

Basile's Cinderella may reflect its time and the character of its author, who was an ex-mercenary courtier of the King of Naples: the protagonist does not refrain from murder in order to achieve a better status, and the Neapolitan intellectual would retell this tale keeping the disturbing episode in order to represent the contradictions of the crude 16th century in the Italian peninsula, plagued by division, wars and occupations.

Perrault's version can be considered the apex of the process of literalisation of folk tales, and because of its fundamental role in the public's acknowledgement of this story: his sweetened version, presenting a Manichean juxtaposition of characters and a passive, over-obedient protagonist, is the inspiration of Disney's Cinderella, fundamentally contributing to its worldwide diffusion. Also, it is the first one to present a ball, organised by the king in order to find a wife.

The ball or the match-making festival, was an element which was present in the Yue culture, but it was so strange to the Han culture to disappear altogether in later Chinese versions. In Europe there were not marital festivals, especially after the Counter-Reformation, while before a reminiscence of such festivals could be observed in the rural celebrations of St. John's eve and Beltane [Ellis, 1938:140].

The element of the ball and the marriage with the prince, which appear so disconnected in Ye Xian, could be adapted to European fairy tales because of their usual setting in an unreal feudal society, where, unlike the Chinese emperors, kings and princes reigned over small portions of territory, and their contacts with their subjects were more frequent. The ball, therefore, instead of being a popular celebration like in Ye Xian, became a party thrown by the landlord to find his princess, combining harmoniously the Yue festival with Strabo's Rhodopis.

Similarly, Perrault's *Cendrillon* reflects the new absolutist regime established by Louis XIV. The new political system has completely deprived of authority the nobility, centralising the power into the hand of the King and his ministers.

Perrault is the first author to introduce the famous glass slipper, or shoe, which will be the object of many debates, involving intellectuals as important as Balzac, who gave a rational explanation of this element. According to the famous writer, Perrault mistook the word *vaire,* which was a particular soft kind of fur, for the homophone *verre,* which means glass in French. This idea met a great success, and it is even supported by the Encyclopedia Britannica. In fact, despite the apparently logical deduction, this hypothesis has been called into question. The change from folk tale to fairy tale entailed this kind of changes too: from the collective, oral product of a civilisation, fairy tales in their literary form contained many extravagant elements in which the magic aspect was the most important. Fairy tale kept the pedagogical purpose of folk tales, but they developed an increasing distance from the "folk" which had transmitted the tradition: Cinderella was no longer a poor girl; she was the daughter of a rich merchant, or a baron, or a prince, demoted to a role which

patiently endures. The audience of these fairy tales, in fact, are the nobles of the important courts of Europe, whose leisure was occupied, among other activities, by storytelling. Paul Delarue thinks it is not necessary, thus, to imagine such misunderstanding between vaire and verre, as glass shoes are an element perfectly in line with the pumpkin turning into a carriage, lizards becoming servants, etc. Fairy tales present strange and unusual materials like invisible clothes, shirts spun from spiderwebs, dresses the colour of the sky, golden gowns, and so on.

Bruno Bettelheim, moreover, states that the introduction of the glass slipper would dissociate this tale from the feature, contained in the Grimm's version and which had probably been circulating for centuries before, of the stepsister amputating their heels and toes in order to be able to wear the magic shoe: a glass shoe would make this aspect nonsensical, de facto separating this gentle tale from the grisly endeavour.

3-The modern Cinderella

The third and last modern version examined here is the Grimm *Aschenputtel* as published in their *Kinder und Hausmärchen* at the beginning of the 19th century.

It must be said that the Grimm variant has not a great value, folklorically speaking, because, despite presenting themselves as collector of existing folk tales, they rather combined the elements of different folk tales, selecting the ones they considered the most salient for their research purpose. While in theory their approach was radically different from the previous writers', as they claimed to provide a rigorous, impartial selection of tales, and are de facto regarded as the inventors of the comparative, or historical-geographic method, their proceeding was quite unorthodox, at least from the point of view of modern folklorists. While it is true that they did not make any effort to sooth and sweeten the harsh character of many folk tales, as Perrault had done, adapting the raw material for his sophisticated audience, the fact that they created composite texts instead of collecting existing stories, orally transmitted, makes their work an artistic creation rather than a faithful compilation. In fact, their Aschenputtel was changed in three successive

editions in 1812, 1819, and 1856, and it does not correspond to any actually circulating version "Contemporary folklorists rightfully deplore the literary improving of authentic filed-collected texts, but one must not judge too harshly in retrospect. Rewriting folktales was certainly the accepted practice in the nineteenth century and before. … In sum, the published versions of Cinderella reported by Perrault and the Grimm may well be the most popular and well known, but they are not necessarily the most authentic in terms of orally circulating versions of the tale".

Their work is, however, incredibly innovative as folklore, as a concept, was not yet an object of scholarly attention when they published it, being the word *folklore* itself being probably used for the first time in 1846.

The beginning of the 19th century had witnessed the birth of the concept of nationalism, and the Grimm brothers strove to present their work as a faithful compilation of German stories as paradigm of oral folklore shared by the lower classes throughout Germany despite the fact that the country was not yet reunited under the same flag.

Anthropology, ethnology, and folklore tradition were born in this process of creating a cultural identity stronger than the actual boundaries dividing different territories. The recognition of a Germanic spirit was fundamental in the creation of the state operated by Bismark in 1871, and the Grimm largely contributed to it by spreading their folk tales in a literary form which, according to them, was a mere representation of existing accounts narrated by the German peasants "we have endeavoured to present these fairy tales as purely as possible...No circumstance has been added, embellished or changed" (Preface to 1812 edition; Michealis-Jena, 1970, p.53).

Grimm's work is, therefore, an incredible effort to collect fairy tales and their work is chronologically the last in which the role of the author, writer and collected is not yet perfectly defined. Only a few decades later, as explained in the chapter on Folklore, the comparative method will be recognised as *the* method of studying folk tales (see for example Lang in the introduction to Roalfe Cox's *Cinderella: Three Hundred and Forty-Five Variants of Cinderella, Catskin and, Cap O' Rushes, Abstracted and Tabulated with a*

Discussion of Medieval Analogues and Notes, in which folk tales as *One-Eye, Two-eyes and Three-Eyes*, *Catskin* and other stories narrated by the Grimm are de facto presented as variants of Cinderella. According to Thompson, Wilhelm Grimm can be regarded as the first folklore researcher as he collected, compared and then combined different versions of the same stories: his brother Jakob was a theorist of Indo- European and the study of such language was based on comparison. Both versed in many different fields of study, they aspired to identifying a common substratum in the Europe and particularly in Germany, the cultural roots lost to the cultured intellectual classes but still alive and kicking among the peasant classes. For that purpose, they collect, at least theoretically, popular narratives which would demonstrate that the territories of the then divided Germany shared a common primitive tradition and therefore were united by strong cultural bonds, to be spread and recognised by the elite and glorified by the lower classes.

The difference between Perrault's French and Grimm's German versions, therefore, is not to be sought in cultural dissimilarities, but rather in the different role of the authors and in their different purposes in publishing stories.

While Perrault, secure of the French monarchy's centralising power, had written an aristocratic entertaining tale, while the Grimm mirrored the Romantic spirit that swept across Europe in the 19th century.

"The romantics did not intend their fairy tales to amuse audiences in the traditional sense of divertissement. "Instead, they sought to engage the reader in a serious discourse about art, philosophy, education, and love. The focus was on the creative individual or artist, who envisioned a life without inhibitions and social constraints. It was a theme that became popular in the romantic fairy tales throughout Europe and in North America. In contrast to most folk tales or fairy tales that have strong roots in folklore and propose the possibility of the integration of the hero into society, the fairy tales of the 19th and 20th centuries tend to pit the individual against society or to use the protagonist in a way to mirror the foibles and contradictions of society."

To find correlation between the authentic, spontaneous *naturpoesie* and the cultured, intellectual *kunstpoesie* was a major point in Grimm's research, oriented to make people aware of the strength of cultural identity.

Paradoxically enough, though, the origins of their fairy tales, epitome of national folklore tradition, were often aristocratic and even foreign, and *Aschenputtel* represents no exceptions. It seems that at least one of their informer was a Huguenot fled from France and living in Kassel, in Northern Hesse, among whom was Wilhelm's future wife Dorothea [Walser Smith, 2015:263]. In order to Germanise and popularise those tales, it was acceptable to transform foreign and international narratives to prove German common substratum and creativity.

The story of Aschenputtel goes as follow.

The wife of a wealthy man is in her deathbed, and she calls her daughter to make her promise to be always pious and good, and to tell her she will be always with the girl after her death, looking after her from heaven. The girl often goes to cry at her mother's grave, and her father marries a woman with two daughter who are beautiful but black-hearted. They force the protagonist to the kitchen and give her menial work to do, like to sort lentils and peas from the ashes: they call her Aschenputtel, which is not a German name, but means "untidy girl of the ashes" in Franconian dialect. The father goes on a trip and asks her daughter and step-daughter swhat kind of present they would like him to bring them. While the wicked stepdaughters demand precious garments, while the protagonist asks for the first thing that will strike against his hat on the way home, which happens to be a hazel twig. The three girls receive what they have asked for, and Aschenputtel plants the twig on her mother's tomb. She walks to the place three times a day and she weeps so profusely that soon the branch becomes a fine tree. A white bird always rises from the tree and realises all her wishes. The king throws a ball in which the all the fair maidens have to participate, as he intends to find a wife for his son the prince. Aschenputtel desperately wants to go and her stepmother allows her on the condition that pick up all the lentils she has purposely poured into the ashes. Thanks to the help of some turtle-doves, she

accomplishes this task, but the stepmother makes the task even more difficult, by demanding two full plates of lentils to be sorted out of the ashes. When the protagonist again succeeds, the stepmother plainly refuses to take the girl with the rest of the family claiming she would make them ashamed as she possesses no appropriate clothing nor manners. The girl goes to the tree where the tomb is, and starts crying: a marvellous dress with beautifully embroidered slippers are given to her by the magical bird. She goes to the ball, unrecognised by her stepmother and sisters, and the king's son refuses to dance with anyone but her. When dusk comes, she flees the place, and hasten back home. The prince follows her, and ask her father to look for the beautiful girl she has seen hiding into the house. The father, not believing it is his daughter the prince is talking about, helps him in vain. The same occurs the day after when she leaves the ball where she has been dancing all day with the prince, and again she leaves in a hurry. The third day the prince has the stairs to his palace spread with pitch, to impede the girl from her hasty departure. She manages to escape but her beautiful golden slipper gets stuck to the floor. The prince rides to her house and demand the young maidens of the house to try on the shoe. The first sister's foot is too big, but, on her mother's advice, she cuts off her toe in order to be able to wear the shoe. The prince believes she is the girl he has danced with, and rides away with her but, as they pass by Aschenputtel's mother's tomb, two pigeons denounce the fact that drops of blood are falling from the shoe. The prince examines the girl's feet, and rides back to her house with her. The second stepdaughter is asked to try on the shoe and, when her foot does not fit, she cuts off her heel. The same birds denounce the fact as they ride past. The prince rides back and demands to see the other daughter, although her father affirms that it is impossible that she could be bride. The shoe fits perfectly, as confirmed by the birds when they ride past them.

Conclusions

As explained above, Perrault's work is to be intended as a divértissement in a moment when folk tales were being transformed in fairy tales, undergoing a process of

literalisation, abridged of their most gruesome, unsettling features to become patrimony of the new bourgeois class "As more and more wonder tales were written down in the 14th, 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries—often in Latin—they constituted the genre of the literary fairy tale that began establishing its own conventions, motifs, topoi, characters, and plots, based to a large extent on those developed in the oral tradition but altered to address a reading public formed by the aristocracy, clergy, and middle classes. Though the peasants were marginalized and excluded in the formation of this literary tradition, their material, voices, style, and beliefs were incorporated into the new genre during this period" [Zipes, 2015:XVI].

The differences between Perrault's and Grimm's versions are quite evident, and are mostly related to the fact that, despite being a composite text, the Grimm version is much more faithful ton the original folk tale. In fact, Perrault's story present smany more literary characteristics than the Grimm's one, where the popular element is still very strong.

First of all, in Perrault's Cinderella there are no animal helpers, or tree grown on the tomb of the mother. The helper is a fairy godmother, not presented in the text before her actual appearance as a gift-provider: nothing is known about her, and she is like a deus-ex-machina whose presence is justified only by plot exigences. Cendrillon is extremely submissive, too nice for her own good, and not very resourceful: the godmother pushes her to go to the ball. All in all, she is an obedient girl, whose fortune depends on the will of her godmother, to whom she gives herself completely. *In Perrault's version, Cinderella's actions are determined more by the fairy godmother than by Cinderella herself*" .She does not even ask why she has to leave before midnight. The era in which Perrault lived saw the nobles more and more stripped of their authority, and living at court at every beck and call of the king. Somehow, this is reflected in the story: a girl whose nobility has been lost ascend to the greatest social position by the guidance of a superior, and by the marriage with the prince, who is so distant not to be even present at the shoe test, substituted by an envoy. The man would not even recognise the girl as the prince's true love, if it was not for the fairy godmother, who intervenes to transform, for the last time, the protagonist's rags

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into precious clothes. The clock that strikes the midnight and the detailed description of the apparatus the protagonist is bestowed by the godmother are other indications of Perrault's times, which emphasise his adherence to the moral of the story; the magic of the animals transformed into people and the glass slipper, so thin and delicate that only a very aristocratic foot could wear it, add an ironic tone to its entertaining purpose. Perrault's text does not present the rhymes contained in the Grimm's version, as they are usually an unequivocal feature of orally transmitted narratives; nor does it show the threefold repetition, also a characteristic of folk tale, which in important in Aschenputtel: three times she goes to the ball, and the third she loses the shoe; three times do the birds sing while the prince is leaving her house, and the third time they celebrate the reunion between the prince and his love[Liabenow, 2014]. Also, stepsisters who amputate their feet and who are later blinded during the wedding by the two enraged doves would be hardly in line with an aristocratic account. The protagonists of the two tales are also very different: Aschenputtel is not a self deprecating, overly kind girl, but rather a demoted young woman striving for achieving what she thinks she is entitled too. She is forced, rather than chooses, to live in the ashes, to help her sisters —and she cries, while doing so— and to accomplish the impossible tasks.

Grimm's version presents an overall popular and more ancient character. As in true folk tales, there are not elements which help to contextualise the narrative either spatially or temporally. There is no clock, and the ball is held during the day; the prince himself rides to Aschenputtel's house and rides away three times with each of the three sisters; Aschenputtel hides twice, first in the pigeon-house, then she climbs up a pear tree, which are all elements belonging to the country world, and so is the pitch spread on the stairs of the king's palace in order to prevent her from fleeing the place: these elements do not appear in Cendrillon, as the world depicted by Perrault is aristocratic: even the sisters are not punished but magnanimously forgiven by the newly married princess.

Despite the much later publication of the Grimm's text, it is quite obvious that it is much more similar to the ancient versions circulating in Europe for centuries before being taken down in writing by the German brothers.

As regards the motifs, in fact, all the elements of the ancient narratives are present here: the tomb of the mother, as in Rooth's A1; the animal helpers, which in this case are birds; the tasks, which are completely absent in Cendrillon, but which represent one of the most important feature of Cinderella stories across the world.

As explained in the following chapters, Cinderella type was interpreted by psychoanalytical folklorists as a description of the dismal feeling of a girl going through puberty, feeling rejected by her mother for whom she ceases to be a child and becomes a woman and, as such, she must be trained to help in the house and become a good wife. That is why in some European ancient stories, as the aforementioned Rashin Coatie or Pernette, an ancient French version, the protagonist's mother is her biological mother: "*la mère, qui se repentoit de l'avoir jamais portée en son ventre*". We know, thanks to Ye Xian, that ancient versions circulating in the Middle East and in Asia, where situations of polygamy were more frequent, that evil stepmothers were a common topic in such stories, in accordance with the Confucian traditional teaching (although, it will be seen, stepmothers usually tormented stepsons in ancient Eastern narratives). Most likely, a stepmother was a more fitting villain in a narrative on familiar conflicts, as it is somehow less upsetting that a woman without biological bonds is seen as a tormentor and even a rival for her stepdaughter (as in many traditional stories like the aforementioned Asenath and the more famous Snowhite). Whether this element evolved in European versions, or, more probably, was influenced by the Eastern stories, the stepmother is the result of this growing distance between a young girl undergoing the growing process, and the figure who is in charge of her education: the tasks, in fact, are present also in Ye Xian and in the later Chinese and Korean versions, defined by Ding as "Modern Tradition"; the difference is that, while in the former the girl is forced to do dangerous menial jobs, in the latter these task assume a more magical character: the stepmother gives the protagonist assignments

impossible to execute without the helper assistance, be it a flock of birds, a cow, and so on. The difference between Ye Xian and the Grimm is quite apparent here: in Ye Xian the helpers and the tasks are not related, while in the European folk tale they are strictly connected, as in the Chinese and Indo-Chinese Modern Tradition, which shows an analogue evolution of this motif in both cases. While Ye Xian is sent to collect water and firewood in dangerous places, as she is resourceful and brave, later Cinderella figures will be assigned labours which real house chores a girl is expected to do but magnified through the lens of the dismay a girl must have felt when confronted with them for the first time: heaps of hemp to spin, huge pots of lentils to sort, rooms full of hay to transform into gold, and so on. All these endeavours are ordered by the stepmother out of mere cruelty, and they are accomplished by the animal helpers, a supernatural help in an upside-down human world to the girl who faces her mother's stern behaviour and housework for the first time. Another elements which is presents in both Ye Xian and Aschenputtel is the harsh punishment of the villain at the end of the story. While in Ye Xian the stepmother is the main villain, and she is killed with her daughter by flying stones, in the Grimm version the mother is spared and the stepsisters mutilate themselves and then are blinded by the same doves appearing throughout the text. This popular element of fair retribution, despite having been used as a Buddhist elements by some scholars according to the Buddhist theory 有恶报,善有善报 *You he bao, shan you shan bao*: Evil generates evil, Good generates good, but the facts that it is present in most version across the world indicates, in my opinion, a more general satisfaction felt by the listener at the punishment of the antagonist.

The reader, at this point, will be already aware of the fact that the ball is the element which is present in Ye Xian, is absent in the Medieval version, but it appears again in the modern fairy tale narrated by Perrault and the Grimm. Chronologically speaking, it is more than possible that a special ball, mentioned in versions of the story coming from the Far East and brought to Europe by Italian and Spanish Jesuits, combined with local versions and substituted the meeting of the prince at the church. Perrault's Cendrillon goes to a night

ball, aristocratic event where luxury is one of the most important aspects; she must hastily leave at midnight, according to the godmother's indications; Aschenputtel, on the other hand, goes to the ball during the day and runs home at dusk, as any sensible girl should do. Both participate in this unique event which has no correspondence in real life, and seems to be created ad hoc for this type of story. Moreover, the prince dances all night, enticed by the protagonist's beauty, but then he is unable to recognise her without the shoe test, perpetuating the combination, present in Ye Xian, of a festival with nuptial purposes and the story of a lost shoe through which the protagonist is identified and ends up marrying a prince.

This paradox seems to indicate that the element of the ball is the addition of the Eastern stories to the European narrative where the girl was recognised by a magical object or her marvellous dresses or shoes —the heritage of Rhodopis —, by a prince she has met beforehand. Other tales classified as similar to Cinderella, such as Donkey Skin, show similar features of a ball attended by a girl who is not recognised as the scullion usually wearing ragged clothes, as she participates in the party dressed in marvellous finery donated to her by the helper. In these more ancient stories, also, the girl is a demoted princess who had to flee her country as her father has unnatural feelings towards her. While these stories are different, the ball in which the protagonist actually meets her future husband is similar, and it describes a gathering in which an important match is to occur: the prince must find his princess.

A ball, therefore, substituted the church of the earlier versions, as it presented the details of the story in a more vivid light: by forbidding the protagonist the participation in the ball, the stepmother basically condemns her to a life of slavery in the household, eliminating the only way of social promotion permitted to a girl, namely marriage to a richer man. Also, a ball could justify the rich clothes worn by the protagonist, and their description would magnify the help given by the helpers, stressing their magical powers. In Europe, however, there was not a social occasion such as a nuptial festival where young people were expected to meet their future partners. Photeine De Bourboulis states that there are records

of this kind of parties thrown by king and emperors from the Byzantine empire to ancient China in order to find concubines. While this custom is certainly recorded in ancient times, my opinion is that the scholar wrongly imagines that it is the antecedent of the cave festival reported in Ye Xian[De Bourboulis, 1982:105]; on the contrary, the opposite is true. First of all, in general folk tales start in the lower strata of the population, and they later undergo a `process of literalisation: all the ancient Cinderella figure are poor girls whose life is connected with the chores of the future wife in an agricultural society: "*Neither by birth nor by marriage are Chinese heroines aristocratic*" [Irie Mulhern, 1985:10]. None of the Cinderellas we encounter in the ancient texts comes from an aristocratic background, especially in Asia, and Ye Xian's story in particular is a tale on a girl from a tribe of cave-dwellers in Southern China. It is quite obvious that the cave-festival that she attends, disobeying her stepmother's orders, is one of the many festival celebrated in tribal societies in Southern China, as reported by Liu Xiaochun, and which bear strong analogies with coming-of-age rituals among the tribes in Africa, Australia and America, when for the first time both boys and girls present themselves as adults and suitable partners. This story, which presents this element, probably travelled to Europe during the 17th century, when Jesuits which had been in contact with Chinese civilisations came back to their natal places in Italy and Spain. The cultural translation of this feature became necessary, because, though some of the mating ceremonies still existed in Europe, they were fiercely condemned by the Church, especially during the Counter-Reform, so a ball was imagined where the king wanted to choose his future wife. A common, probably yearly tribal meeting, whose participation was mostly popular, became therefore, in the Christian Europe, a very unique, elitist and aristocratic celebration to which only the nobles were allowed; Cinderella, at this point, had become a demoted aristocratic who, assisted by magical helpers, would restore her former status.

Conclusions

In light of everything said so far, it can be clearly seen that Ye Xian contains all the elements present in the ancient narratives written in Greek but connected with the Middle East, especially Egypt.

- Rhodopis was a Greek slave who became the wife of the Pharaoh thanks to her sandal, stolen by a bird and dropped into the lap of the king, who later builds a huge pyramid to celebrate his beloved wife. Ye Xian becomes a queen due to the special features of her slipper, she is helped by an animal, and her story is connected to a majestic burial mound where people made sacrifices. Rooth's A1, with the helping tree and the mistreated orphan, which is considered to be the earliest core of Cinderella, is represented by Ye Xian who buries the fish bones and is said to be found hugging a tree in the backyard.

- Asenath is a girl from a Jewish tribe who, however, is raised as an Egyptian (Asenath is an Egyptian name), she is helped by a man from the sky, she lies in the ashes for days, and she is recognised by her future husband through a ring. Again, Ye Xian is helped by a man from the sky, whose presence is pretty odd in the structure of the tale, she scrabbles through the ashes in the background to find the precious fish bone, and she is recognised through a magic object.

- There is another element which points decisively to the Middle East, which is a reference to stoning, when her stepmother and stepdaughters are killed by flying stones. This form of capital punishment was absent in the cultural system where Ye Xian was retold and taken down in writing, while it was a common practice among Semitic people in the Middle East.

- In later versions, both in China and in Europe, the reference to the tomb will disappear. In fact, the presence of both the awe-inspiring pyramid in Rhodopis and the impressive tumulus in Ye Xian serve the purpose of spatially and historically contextualising the stories, to give them a certain historical accuracy that later, with the metamorphosis of the *zhiguai* into the modern 童话 *tonghua*, under the influence of Western contacts, was no longer required; similarly, folk tale in their popular expression

stopped being connected to myths and legends in the 12th century in Europe, and authentic setting were replaced by nebulous places with vague spatial and temporal references.

• In China, after Ye Xian, which contained too many foreign motifs to survive as it was, as seen in the chapter on lack of success, Cinderella stories underwent profound changes and became Confucian stories of a filial and an unfilial daughter, according to the Confucian morale. The tasks to be solved became more important, as the main focus were the good will, the skills and the obedience of a good Confucian heroine, while the prince was duly diminished to a more realistic figure in the Eastern world, such as an exam candidate. Punishment, reincarnation and other Buddhist elements are also present in these stories, displaying the syncretic religious feature in the area.

• In Europe the story, present since the ancient narratives, travelled across time combining with other stories and losing some important features.

The helping tree and the helping animals survive in some medieval versions, but are mostly related to other stories collected in Europe, such as *The Juniper Tree*, and only rarely in Cinderella stories, until the Grimm collected German and French versions. The story type became the mistreated heroine helped by a magical animal, forced to do menial jobs either at home or in a place where she has been been forced to flee, and finally revealing herself to the prince. The element that we do not find in versions between Ye Xian and Perrault's *Cendrillon* is the ball, which was a customary habit among the Southern Chinese tribes, especially before the sinification, and must have seemed a very untoward and primitive occurrence in the eyes of the dominant class of the Han. It was therefore substituted in Asia by a spontaneous, unpremeditated meeting between the protagonist and her future husband, as a girl eager to meet a man was an element hardly in line with the women's role in Confucian societies.

In Europe the girl initially serves in the prince's house as a scullion, as the keeper of the geese or the hogs of the family, and so on. Somehow, the prince sees her while, hiding from everyone, she is wearing one of her beautiful dresses, and falls in love with her. Or she slips her ring into a pie she bakes when the prince becomes ill.

- In Perrault and Grimm's version, however, a party is thrown, more likely due to the encounter of the Jesuits with the Chinese narrative — a few decades before their arrival, in fact, the *Youyang zazu* had been reprinted: there was a new printing in the 1580s [Reed 2003:40 and 2001:3-4]; because the *Youyang zazu* contained many fantastic stories of the "strange," the book became quite popular in China and was even printed in Tokyo [Reed 2003:32]. The ball substituted the church as a social place where the main character and the prince meet, as this elements, unlike the Sunday holy mass, indicated that the protagonist was resourceful enough to disobey her stepmother and her stepmother's and stepsister's cruelty (forbidding Cinderella to go to the ball meant to condemn her to a live as a servant), and also that the character of the story was aristocratic and elitist.

- The importance of Ye Xian is therefore capital in the Cinderella cycle, as not only is it a combination of pre-existing narratives of the ancient word, presenting a unique composite feature, but also because the element of the ball, so important in the modern Cinderella, was probably borrowed by this version. For many centuries after Ye Xian's first appearance, in fact, the meeting between the protagonist and the prince was substituted by a wedding in China, and by the Sunday mass in Europe, or disappeared altogether, describing therefore a situation where the protagonist is entirely substituted, and not merely represented, by the shoe or another magic object.

The thorough analysis of the most important elements of the story — the protagonist, the antagonist, the helpers, the magic object, the social gathering— will corroborate Ye Xian's crucial role as a link between the ancient narratives and the modern story we know.

1.5   Methodological framework

Methodology is the ensemble of processes that illustrate how the thesis was called into question and developed.

Among all the approaches to literary theories, one feels at loss which one is to be used to be functional to the study of a text in order to avoid biased analysis.

What I do in this piece of research is to investigate this story giving a new identity to the Cinderella cycle; unlike the paramount work of Rooth, who collected and compared fairy tales, I have tried to connect Ye Xian to previous and later narratives which not always can be defined as fairy tales. Ye Xian itself is not a fairy tale, but it is a *zhiguai*; not acknowledging this fact means de-contextualising this text completely, missing important elements of both its structure and its content. Cinderella, as a fairy tale, has been studied quite extensively. The challenge, this time, is to study stories which can be related to Cinderella, but are not necessarily fairy tales therefore assuming that folklorists are not the only scholar who can examine this narrative, as they tend to compare different versions of the same type and to trace their geographic movements in order to understand their origin. Sinologists, on the other hand, tend to study a narrative only through the lens of the Chinese language and culture and, while the linguistic and cultural contributions are fundamental, they tend to examine the material from a local point of view, and this would prove extremely reductive in a tale like this which can be considered a migratory legend, or a travelling narrative. If we assume that the content of Ye Xian is an international migratory tale [Hansen,2002:8] and that it underwent genre variance several time, while its form is a *zhiguai,* then different points of view are needed to study its connotations.

The approach of Classicists is needed for the identification of the ancient stories and their study according to genre variance. The Folklorists' is needed for the study of the motifs and the comparative method, and the Sinologists' perspective for the contextualisation of the story in the new cultural system where it was retold.

Multi-disciplinarity and inter-disciplinarity

The methodology I present here is at the same time multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary.

I define as multidisciplinary the approach to previous studies on both Cinderella and Ye Xian, since the recollection of data came from different pieces of research carried out by scholar of different fields.

According to Stember [1991], multidisciplinarity combines efforts of different people working on the same object from different points of view. In fact, I have availed myself of the previous studies of classicists, sinologists, and folklorists, using their final ideas on the study of a single text. For example, Rooth is a folklorist and Mair a sinologist, and both reached the conclusion that the origin of the Cinderella story was probably the Middle East, for different reasons: the latter for his analysis of Ye Xian, and the former for the comparative study of seven-hundred variants of Cinderella across the world.

However, when it comes to using tools to my own analysis of the story, interdisciplinarity would be the choice of the term, as my attempt is to integrate knowledge and methods from different disciplines, using a real synthesis of approaches. These disciplines sometimes overlap, and some of the authors whose conclusions I have utilised combined knowledge of two fields of study: Hansen and Anderson, for example, are both classicists and folklorists, and Jameson was a sinologist and a folklorists.

In fact, their work has been the most precious because they unified at least two of the three main perspective I wanted to combine in this work.

The three points of view, despite occasionally overlapping, do not normally coincide.

Classicists have single stories, sometimes an author, but fragments of a narrative, and therefore not a recognisable genre, as usually tales are inserted in myths (like Heracles and Atlas, the Dumb Giant, or in historical narratives, or like the Dragon Slayer in the myth of Perseus), and their story is always written, and it does not evolve; it's a trace in the past. They apply modern literary theory, and the concept of a-specific genre.

Sinologists usually have both a genre, a precise text, a spatial and temporal context, and an author: nonetheless, when it comes to analysing international tales, or tales from another cultural system, they can be hindered by the national focus they give to their studies.

Folklorists do not usually deal with authors, and their material is oral, or orally transmitted and then collected; they do deal with a precise genre, which is the fairy tales, but they tend to consider all fantasy narratives fairy tales, and tend not to deepen the contextualisation of the stories they treat: they tend to ignore the cultural connotations of the stories, and the

research usually pivots on tales collected from antiquity to modern times. My methodology, therefore, is oriented to establish the tools to investigate all the literary connotations of this text.

The idea conceived a functional choice for proving my hypothesis of Ye Xian being the most ancient datable Cinderella which for the first time collected the elements of ancient traditions of the classical stories contained in the historiographical accounts and set in Egypt and other zones of the Mediterranean, and fused which Anne B. Rooth in her work considers the first nucleus of this typology of tale—mistreated orphan whose dead mother comes back as an animal or a tree that provides gifts. The travelling story mixed and mingled with elements belonging to cultures of Southern China and was retold, again as a true fact, by a Chinese intellectual interested in strange facts reported at the periphery of the empire, whose alleged civilising impetus was restrained by the ancient customs of the uncivilised, primitive populations recently conquered.

Hence the need of an interdisciplinary approach which combines three different perspectives functional for the analysis of the elements of the tale.

1. The Classicists' contribution is to offer both content of the early traces of Cinderella stories and the concept of genre variance which permits to connect them to Ye Xian. Classicist who are also folklorist, such as Hansen and Anderson, investigate myth, sacred books, historiography and legend in order to single out the motifs contained in international migratory tales and, at the same time, the justification to utilise Modern Literary Theory applied to an ancient text written in China, but whose composition was probably already centuries old before the retelling, and whose origins dated back to the fusion of some Middle Eastern narratives.

2. Sinologists, on the other hand, contextualise Ye Xian the religious and cultural environment in force when it was written, and, at the same time, they insert it in a precise genre and in the ample context of Chinese literature.

The problem is that scholars of Chinese literature are usually divided in two main groups: theorists and philologists. Philologist are more versed in linguistic and cultural knowledge of ancient China, while theorists assume that literary theory, most of which originated in the last two centuries in the West, is universally valid and should be accepted as such, due to the comprehensive character of theory which, for its definition, is applicable to objects of study regardless their national context. A partial solution to this dilemma is the promotion of international, or comparative or world literature, which would combine the efforts of both groups of theorists. The use of comparative literature is most captivating for the study of Ye Xian, both because its content escape the Chinese national boundaries, being a travelling tale, and because the concept of national literature is for the most part outdated. The challenge, therefore, is to avoid using western theory and its universality without first considering briefly the evolution of literary concepts in China, how they would influence the study of the text, and how theories have only in the last few decades mingled into the concept of one international of comparative and world literature, and how scholars conceive those concepts nowadays. This part is intended to illustrate ancient and contemporary Chinese literary theory, to clarify the validity of using Western theory for the study of a Chinese text.

3. The Folklorists provide a real theory of oral transmission of tales, and the changes it undergoes, and the tools for comparisons. The comparative method, also referred to as Finnish method or historic-geographic method, has become quite obsolete in the last two decades, especially because the gigantic monographs on a singular story type did not take into account the difference of genre and did not delve into the cultural context of the single variants. While analysing its shortcomings, however, one cannot deny its utility in the compilation of so many fundamental works on fairy tales in general, and Cinderella in particular. We have seen that scholars of folklore avail themselves of Aarne- Thompson Index of Motifs and its

classification when comparing tale types, without having to specify them every time they use them. Apart from furnishing this precious material, Folklorists have greatly contributed to the methodological aspect of the study, especially in later years, when Dundes and Gilet questioned the old comparative method and attempted to provide new instruments for the research modifying Propp's functions and employing them as minimal units of comparison.

1.6   Structure of the dissertation

This thesis is divided in four main parts.

1. Ye Xian

   A Prolegomenal part, in which the assumptions and the tenets of this thesis are explained:

- The aim and the reasoning which underlies it
- The state of the field
- The theoretical assumptions
- The research hypothesis and
- The theoretical framework used to prove it

2. Perspectives

   A chapter dedicated to the Three Main Perspectives I have combined in order to study this tale, and a brief introduction to Translations Studies.
   This chapter illustrates the contribution of the different fields of study to my research.

- The Classicists' Perspective explains how Classicists validate the study of ancient texts using Modern Literary Theory, and how motifs of fairy and folk tales in the Ancient World can be studied

- The Sinologists' Perspective illustrate how Ye Xian can be studied according to ancient Chinese culture, and according to contemporary Chinese Literary Theory, Genre and Religious Background
- The Folklorist explains how comparison of folk tales are carried out using motifs and functions

3. The Analysis of the Motifs
- a brief introduction on the theoretical reasoning for the choice of these motifs
- the analysis of the five main motifs of Ye Xian and Cinderella narrative to disprove their Chinese origin and to connect them with the Middle- East
- the analysis of controversial elements related to the structure and the content of Ye Xian which also suggest foreign, Middle-Eastern origin

4. The Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research

2 Perspectives

2.1 The Classicist's perspective

The point of view we are going to examine here is not the one of the scholars of classical Greek and Latin literature in general as, while what associates all the classics, is that they are virtually exclusively written in either of these two languages. Within the field, nonetheless, there are many different branches usually related to the genres to which

different texts belong: poetry, theatre, epic and so on; the discipline's objects of study are numerous and diverse, and so is number of approaches they utilise.

There is a part of classical study that serves to our purpose of interpreting this ancient Chinese tale according to different perspectives, and to understand its role in the evolution of this narrative.

What is discussed here, therefore, is more specific, and it covers two main areas.

The first is the methodological premises that classicists have discussed in order to apply modern literary theory to ancient text: whether and how contemporary ideas can be used for the study of texts which were composed and written several centuries before those theoretical system were created.

The other one is more specific and concerns the study of folk tales by classicist. Classicists do analyse fantasy tales, but usually they consist in myths or, more rarely, legends. Hence, the discussion on the actual existence of fairy tales in the ancient world and the methods some classicists have proposed to study them.

2.1.1 Modern literary theory applied to ancient texts

When I tackled for the first time the story I am dealing with in this piece of research, I was quite astonished to find so few scholars who had discussed the legitimacy and the validity of applying modern and contemporary literary theory on texts created and written many centuries ago. In this chapter, therefore, I will investigate the legitimacy of the employment of modern literary theories for a text produced centuries ago, and which one we can use. This hesitation had been brought to me by the usage of Ye Xian by folklorists who had not stopped to consider that, in the author's and his readers' mind, it was not a folk tale, but a *zhiguai* with precise formal characteristics and audience's expectations.

One of the aims of my research is to extrapolate information about a text by contextualising its elements in the cultural system of the author by whom they were retold.

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In order to do that, one must try to imagine how a person of that particular time lived and thought, and how the narrative would combine with his or her cultural heritage.

On the other hand, though, if one wants to compare this story to more ancient and recent ones, one has to avail myself of instruments of analysis conceived centuries later in a complete different historical and cultural background.

By applying modern theories, however, the object of the study risks being categorised and inserted in a theoretical system it did not belong to when it was produced.

Some scholars have actually debated the validity of using modern theory on ancient texts, as its use, according to them, would distort their meaning and misrepresent their cultural connotations. According to the ones who deem modern theories as inappropriate to the analysis of ancient text justify their position, by saying that literature produced centuries, if not millennia before the current age cannot be studied with tools whose utility cannot obliterate the distance in time.

For instance, Gregor Maurach, in his book on the *Methodology of Latin Studies*, states incontrovertibly that on no account should any form of modern approach, such as "contemporary sociology", be used in the study of an old text [Maurach,1998].

Other opponents of modern theory argue that it can be easily proven that in the ancient world the intellectuals had their own instruments for the study of their literary production, and that ancient works such as Aristotle's *Poetics* or Liu Xie's *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* held already the basics of the idea that were later passed on as innovative and revolutionary; one of the scholars who defended the position that true most concepts and problems in modern literary theory have antecedents in ancient rhetoric and philosophy is George A. Kennedy [Kennedy1989:492–8]**.** Ancient rhetoricians and intellectuals have always tried to scrutinise the literary production of their ancestors; Chinese literature and culture are defined by a strong, incessant reference to texts considered the very base of the cultural identity, the Classics, proving therefore what was later named Intertextuality by Julia Kristeva; and in the library of Alexandria commentators tried to interpret the works of Homer and Hesiod, aiming not only to

paraphrase the texts and thus exploring the meaning of their symbols, but also to categorise them into genres and styles; Callimachus was very aware that the epic saga, which was in fashion at that time, was unable to convey the spirit for the times they were living in, and that made him affirm μέγα βιβλίον μέγα κακόν mega biblíon, mega kakón,(big book, big evil); Kennedy, moreover, noticed in his books that ancient writers had already used semiotics, hermeneutics, deconstruction, psychoanalysis and reader-response criticism.

But, apart from the effort of some sages to decipher and classify ancient literature, it is certainly unjustified to affirm that modern literary theory is but the repetition of ancient notions: some concepts such as structuralism and formalism are certainly unprecedented. Nonetheless, the use of some of those methods to study ancient texts have been proven valid and functional to the exegetic process of literary criticism; and Classicists are used to availing themselves of modern tools. Thomas Schmitz says with regard to the study of Greek and Latin classics: "a number of classicists have become aware of the chances and opportunities that literary theory offers and have developed fascinating new vistas on our ancient texts"[Schitmz, 2007: 6].

Classicists, therefore, offer the key to the study of ancient texts using Modern Literary Theory; in our specific case, stories which are in the liminal state between history and folklore.

Ye Xian is a text only known by a few scholars and, therefore, it would be impossible to find the application of modern theories to it as we may find, for example, towards the study of the Classics or of some sacred books such as the Bible, the Quran, the Torah. Even so, spurning modern theories would equate to pointlessly ignore precious tools for analysis. "This would amount to the same thing as if we ordered archeologists to eschew the methods developed by modern engineering for analyzing ancient material"[Schitmz, 2007:7]. As literary theory aspires to speak for literature for all periods and cultures, every specialist should examine the different cases in which a piece can be study according to different theories and tools, without drawing dangerous generalisations and avoiding

theoretical stretches. Scholars who deal with ancient texts should therefore exclude as unsuitable particular theories, and select carefully the various options.

 The most decisive point, however, is that if we accept that ancient literature could not be explained in and understood in modern terms, this would nullify the meaning itself of the study of ancient literature; if modern methodologies could not be applied on ancient texts, that would mean that they would be only dead text, incomprehensible and therefore defunct to the modern reader, which we know is not the case.

It would be quite impossible to conceive classical Literature in the West without the study of scholars in the last century who indeed used the various new tools that the conception of Humanities as a discipline with a more scientific approach was offering.

The Homeric question would still be in its infancy without the oral studies: anthropologists have put forward the most crucial hypothesis on myths and their explanation and Claude Lévi-Strauss applied Structuralism on mythology only after a few years after Saussure's elaborated the theory.

Many texts belonging to the ancient past have been studied using modern theory, as those works' content was partly connected with them; for instance, narratology has been applied to Homer's work since Irene Jong's narratological interpretation of the epics; Aristotle's cathartic explanation of the tragedy has been seen as psychological interpretation; Menippean Satire is interpreted by Schmitz through the Bacthinian theory of the Carnivalisation of literature; Plato's faith in the ideal world and his Republic has been examined by Marxist scholars; and even what could appear as the very basis of Post-Modernism, i.e. Deconstruction, has its antecedents in sophists such as Protagoras, Antiphon and Gorgias. While the first two are mostly known for their relativism, especially the last affirmed that nothing exists; if it exists, it is not knowable; and if it is knowable, it is not communicable, rejecting thus any epistemological foundations for discourse as nonsensical and imaginary, mirroring contemporary Deconstructionists in their idea that language or any literary interpretation have any stability at all.

After all, as Zhang Longxi points out, there is an intrinsic, ontological feature of theory: "this transcending quality—shall we say the theoreticality of theory?—that makes theory singularly transferable" [Zhang, 1999:31]. That is, if theory is, by definition, independent of its particular object of study, then why would it be less applicable not only to texts proceeding from a far away place, but also to text that were produced far away in time, ancient and classical writings?

This research attempts to deal with approaches which are focused on drawing out meaning of the text in accordance with its historical and cultural context, rather than offering contemporary views of the text. That means providing information on the context of production instead of finding meaning that are currently valid. How to carry out this process coherently? That is, how to extrapolate information on an ancient text, and coherent with its context, using theories conceived centuries later?

Theories are tools that we use to analyse texts and, due to their universal character, all of them could hypothetically be applied to a text. It is quite obvious, nevertheless, that some of them would be more suitable for the study of contemporary texts, or texts closer to us in time; for example, it would be quite difficult to apply psychoanalytical criticism to Confucius' *Chunqiu*, as it was conceived as a historiographical work or New Historicism on Homer's Iliad, because we hardly know the identity of the author; nonetheless, some scholars have tackled the task of considering the validity of these theories on ancient texts, and produced some interesting results.

One such approach is Intertextuality. The term was coined by Julia Kristeva who affirms that a writer is, first and foremost, a reader. That entails that a text is not a closed system, as structuralist would have it, but it contains quotes, citations, and references to other work which also are a product of earlier and contemporaneous literature, and therefore communicate to one another in form and content. It is apparent that Intertextuality, conceived as a textual approach, can transform itself in a contextual approach when instead of proper text and literature, the sources of a text can be found in the sociological, historical, ideological and cultural scenario in which it was created. Intertextuality is very

important in ancient and pre-modern China because, as we have seen above, Chinese writers in general have always had the tendency of being extremely devoted and reverent toward earlier literature, therefore quoting it and creating a system of innuendos and allusions which showed the profound knowledge of the writer and beckoning, at the same time, to other intellectuals acknowledging their erudition, and our author makes no exception: Duan Chengshi's oeuvre is filled with recognition of the past literature and awareness of the taste of his epoch; despite all this, still there is an impromptu, unexpected touch in his literary production which can be attributed either to his genius and his desire to expand his personal experience, and that is why the context we found in our story in particular, but also in many others of his authorship, is exotic and stranger to the dominant culture of his era, as it will be clear when we pass to examine the themes of the tale.
The world of the author, the production, all the context, are all taken into consideration and even more so, considered the importance international panorama of the Cinderella cycle. One important part is also the recognition of the audience and the context, and it has been playing an important role since the reader-response criticism, theorised by Hans Jauss in 1967, and which puts the audience in a dominant position; as we see, these conjectures are not independent, and they can be all used in interaction and synergy with one other: the reader response, in fact, can be described as a form of both intertextuality, author's biography and genre theory, as the writer chooses to communicate his desired content shaping it according to the recipients of the text. Reconstructing the audience can be a hard challenge for scholars, especially when the text was produced in a distant time, as it is not simple to find categories of readers (implied reader, ideal reader, postulated super-reader, like-minded readers) and to identify the relation between reader and writer. Jauss formulated the idea of "horizon for expectation", according to which the reader, the audience, approach a text endowed with the experience and knowledge of text read previously, filled with expectations about genre, models and cultural tradition. This would mean that we, as readers, will have our own assumptions and ideas on a text; and the text, therefore, somehow changes in that it provides different information to the new audience.

This idea is actually not new, and was shared by Ezra Pound who thought that ancient text were dead unless they were translated, that is transformed in order to be understood by modern readers.

The points of view of Duan Chengshi, of the servant Li who told him the story, the Yue people who had passed it on to Li, and the Han readers who accessed this text cannot be fully comprehended, due to the temporal distance between them and a modern reader. Nonetheless, treating this narrative as a *zhiguai*, contextualising it in its cultural system, is a first step to its interpretation.

However, by applying a modern theory, such as intertextuality, conclusions seems to be drawn that a text is only perfectly understandable when read and interpreted within the boundaries of its cultural system.

The response to the dilemma is, again, the combined study of this text using multiple points of view, and regarding it as belonging to a precise genre and at the same time as a travelling text, and therefore genre non-specific.

That means that at the same time, utilising modern theories, this analysis delves deeply into the cultural connotations, aware that through this theoretical grid more information is susceptible to be extracted, but what the Classicists who study folk tales show us is also that a text can have motifs in common with another which belongs to a completely different genre and cultural system.

Classicists who study folk tales in the ancient world are more interested in the content rather than the form; they are accustomed to dealing with specific authors and specific cultural systems. Although Ye Xian challenges categorisations, nevertheless this genre a-specific approach borrowed by the Classicists enables us to gather precious details about Cinderella stories in the antiquity and to compare works belonging to different genres and different cultures

While Classicists tell us that we can and we must use modern concept to the investigation of a text, the sinological approach has been used to put this story into its specific cultural context.

As we have seen, therefore, the employment of Modern Literary theory, of universal conceptions which transcend the time of creation and diffusion of a particular text are, despite some radical approaches, widely recognised and used nowadays, as discarding them would mean rejecting the possibility of extrapolating information from text, but also to situate it at an unreachable distance which would nullify *in toto* the validity of literary studies.

2.1.2   Fairy tales in the ancient world

I have chosen this title for this part because it is indeed the title of a book published a few years ago. Upon reading the title, one would wonder how it is possible to collect fairy tales before then 12th century, as fairy tales, for their definition, are a literary phenomenon of the European Middle Ages. Before the 20th century, though, classical myths and fairy tales were considered the same phenomenon and scholars studied them together.

One of the common explanation of tales, especially in the 19th century, was that they were actually relics of ancient myths; a movement was imagined from the oral tales believed to have a higher literary value, myths, down to folk tales, which were the myths' broken versions circulating among the lower classes. The Grimm brothers were probably the first who hypothesised that fairy tales were the detritus of Ancient Aryan myths, and their theory was expanded by many scholars, among them Von Hahn. Cinderella, in particular, was related to the myth of Dawn [see De Gubernatis, 1887].

What really created a divide between the two fields of study was the fact that folklore assumed more scientific traits with the publications of Aarne-Thompson index and then with Propp's formalist analysis.

Mythology, however, has never become a discipline by itself, most probably for the absence of such tools, or for their inadequacy [Hansen,1997:275–280] and it is still studied as a branch of Classical Languages, or disciplines such as Anthropology or Literature.

Nowadays, the theory of folk tales derived from myths is quite outdated; in his essay in 1932 Jameson still lends it some credibility, but Waley, in 1947, affirms that the mythological origin of fairy tales is just a "fad" [Waley, 1947: 227].

There are, however, connections between myths and other narrative in classical literature and fairy tales.

The scholars who have carried out this specific research are at the same time classicist and folklorist, and they use interdisciplinarity in order to prove the existence of folk tale motifs before 12th century, which would demonstrate how fairy tales are strictly connected to classical literature.

The reasons they suggest, however, are very different, and they are mainly based on the concept of genre.

According to Anderson, folk tales existed in the ancient world, and we have clear evidence of this fact. In Aristophanes's *Lysistrata* the chorus says that the story that Melanion was a women hater is a γραῶν μύθος *graon mythos*, an old women's tale. Plutarch, in *Parallel Lives* points out that women mention bogeymen like Akko and Alphito (sort of witches) to scare the children from doing mischief; and he also explains how mothers would tell stories to cheer their children who were to be sacrificed to the Minotaur. Fairy tales are mentioned also in Aristophanes's *Wasp,* and in Pliny *Espistulae,* and in Ovid, in *Ex Ponto*, presents one of the Getae narrating Orestes and Pylades friendship as a fabula vulgaris narrata,a popular tale.

Probably the best testimony of their existence and their role in education is highlighted by a Father of the Church, John Chrystostom. In one of his homily on education, he strongly suggests that children be told stories from the bible instead of fairy tales, so to give them a Christian education avoiding transmitting them false and misleading mythological teachings. Fairy tales indeed existed in both Greek and Roman culture, and they were part of their quotidian life. The reason why so few traces have been passed on to us is because they were considered trifling and frivolous narratives: the names for folk tales were "γραῶν μύθοι graon mythoi", in latin "fabulae aniles", and "fabula vulgaris", all

derogatory terms that indicated disdain for these stories, told by nurses and mothers to children, and among women while they were occupied in feminine chores such as weaving and therefore only worth derision and contempt. Men in Ancient Greece would not employ such trivial stories in their assemblies—although, of course, Aristophanes is said in Plato's *Symposium* to tell the story of the humankind who was was made of round people, then split, as an allegory of the search for true love.

The idea of virility was not to be challenged with such foolishness, and in *Historia Augusta* the alleged love of Augustus and Clodius Albinus for popular tale is disregarded as an insulting slander. Anderson explains how prejudice influenced the circulation of literary forms of tales of the folk, narratives of the lower classes which were not considered worth recording.

Hansen is even more precise when he talks about what it is considered a typical fairy tale in classical literature: the famous *Story of Cupid and Psyche*, Love and Soul. In the text of his allegoric account *The Golden Ass*, Apuleius inserts this tale, which deals with Love and Soul, but he does not take responsibility for it: actually, the narrator is an old slave woman who is drunken and a little crazy.

"The magic tale was a non-historical genre, and no fictional genre of traditional story is well represented in ancient literature for its own sake, since ancient authors as a rule did not regard purely fictional narratives as worth literary treatment, whether traditional or original. That is presumably why we find so little evidence for the magic tale in ancient author. As a genre, moreover, the magic tale may have been especially popular among the the poor and uncultured" [Hansen, 2002:17].

This assertion is a focal point for our thesis: as in ancient Chinese literature, in classical times folk tales were the prerogative of women, nurse, slaves and other people perceived as belonging to a lower class, and for this reason when tales were recorded they were invested of credibility by narrating them as true stories or legends. While Anderson provides great evidence that fairy and folk tales were a reality in classical times, Hansen insists on the

presence of motifs later belonging to folklore, many of them actually accessible in Aarne-Thompson Index, in many different texts belonging to difference genres.

This position is extremely important for our study because it elucidates the fact that motifs of Cinderella can be find in literary texts which are not fairy tales, namely, historiography and *zhiguai,* several centuries before scholars started to collect fairy tales narrated among the peasant classes. Although Hansen, like Anderson, provides proofs of the existence of fairy tales in the ancient world, his approach to the topic is fairly different, as he analyses the reasons why connections between ancient narratives and folk tales have hardly ever been carefully examined. He ascribes this to a few different causes.

First of all, due to the ancient folklorist's idea, which was widespread in the 19th century, that ancient Greek and Roman "spirit" was a stranger to childishness and triviality, as folk tales were considered. This prejudice was profoundly rooted and reflected works, like Gibbons's *The history of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* in which the virtuous, thoroughbred Romans succumb to barbarian invasion losing their civic sense and therefore meet their fate.

Hansen adds to his explanation that when the Grimm started to seriously collect and analyse folk tales, still there were methodological problems. The Grimm did believe that folk tales descended genetically by myths, but their effort were focused on finding the Ur-form of each type of folk tale, which of course presented a challenge, because not necessarily classical myths and legend could represent the original, primeval version of tale type. Moreover, there was a problem of nomenclature which impeded any structured story of narratives: an important folklorist such as Sidney Hartland used myth, legend and folk tale as synonyms as late as at the end of the 19th century in his *The legend of Perseus.* So, according to Hansen, when Christiansen published his *The Migratory Legend* in 1958, folklore and classical studies were already two separated disciplines, with different requirements and background; and, up to today, the situations remains the same. Classicists, in fact, are usually philologists focus on the language of transmission, and they do not usually apply the comparative method on their research, as the versions of a same

story are usually very few; moreover, they deal with works whose authorship is certain or at least object of discussion. Folklorists, on the other hand, deal with many versions with no author, collected in different epochs.

And, of course, there is the question of the genre which divides the two fields. While folklorists tend to ascribe all the narratives they deal with to the fairy tale or the folk tale genre, classicists' objects of study are texts which belong to the most diverse genres, but the folk tale is none of them, since, as explained above, it was not considered worth of literary treatment in classical world. That is why the study of narrative containing elements which can be related to later popular tales is hindered by methodological questions and epistemological assumptions. It is logical that a cultural system which does not recognise tales for children or for leisure as a literary genre, as was the case of both Europe and China for millennia, does not possess a long tradition of folk tales traditionally taken down in writing. Folk tales started being recorded in the 19th century in Europe, and by the beginning of the 20th century the direct record was already a nearly impossible accomplishment, because the rural society where which tales were told was rapidly disappearing, so scholars had to base their study on variants previously collected; in China the process was similar, and folklore in China as a discipline is even more recent, indebted to Hu Shi who kindled a new interest towards folklore in the second decade of the 20th century.

For all these reason, it appears quite obvious that the only method to the analysis of similarities between texts of classical, ancient literature and folklore is to evade the boundaries of the genre, concentrating on the motifs rather than the structure of the texts. As in Ye Xian, the study of the genre is necessary for its literary contextualisation of narrative, to the study of their structures as a scheme followed by the author and expected by the audience: the content, however, can be derived from other sources, and adapted to these new frames. Similarly, different texts categorised as belonging to the most diverse genres can present the same motifs, when genre variance is taken into account.

"Although individual oral stories tend to be genre-specific, it can happen that a story is encountered at one place and time in one genre, and at another place and time in a different genre, indicating that in the course of its transmission a shift of genre has taken place in one line of the tradition, This phenomenon, in which a story is told by one narrator as folk tale and by another as a legend or myth, can be termed genre variance" [Hansen, 2002:8]. Genre variance permits us, therefore, to identify constituents of tales in many dissimilar forms that, thanks to the comparative method through the individuation of motifs and functions, can be juxtaposed and contrasted. While some authors examined in this thesis, such as Ding and Beauchamp, think that folk tales usually derive from legends, inspired to factual occurrences, and Ye Xian's story might be therefore connected to a real event, the opposite seems true. "A folktale, owing little allegiance to history, geography or genealogy, is generally freer than a legend to be its own story, whereas an ostensibly historical tradition is more likely to have undergone creative distortion in the course of its adaptation to a real locality, a particular slot in traditional history, and a cast of supposedly historical characters. In short, legends are more dedicated than folktales are. The likeliest explanation for the striking parallelism of many ancient legends and modern folktales is that the legends are special adaptations of international tales, branches off the main stalk of the tradition"[Hansen, 2002:16].

It is quite clear, therefore, that the extraordinary similarities between Rhodopis, Ye Xian, and Aschenputtel (Grimm's version)are to be connected to this phenomenon of migratory tale and genre variance. Tales, or parts of them, travelled, encountered new cultural systems and strove to adapt to them; this adaptation entailed the modification of the form, or genre, in which it was retold, which at the same time represented the medium of communication of the author, the structure which he or she was most familiar with, and the expectations of his or her audience.

To sum up, the main contribution of the classicists' point of view is mainly of two kinds. Firstly, that there is a solid study on which the application of modern literary theory in

ancient texts is based, and which basically consists in accepting the universal character of the theory, for its definition.

Secondly, that elements of folk tales in the ancient world are indeed present in the ancient world, both as folk tales for children, and as motif in narratives of various genres.

Fairy tales were indeed a reality in the classical world, as probably all over the world where oral culture is present, but there is little literary evidence, as these stories were considered too trivial to be recorded in writing. What is most relevant for our study, however, is that motifs of tales are present in the classical world regardless the genre. Genre variance is extensively proven a common form of transmission between lower strata of society to higher ones, and from a cultural system to another.

The tools that Classicists possess for their textual comparative analysis is less material to work on, an author, and no specific genre; also, they usually move within one or two cultural systems, the ancient Greek and Latin worlds.

Folklorists, on the other hand, usually have a lot of material to compare, no authors, and a very precise genre, to which they tend to insert narratives which would not properly fit in the definition of fairy tales, as it is our case,Ye Xian, which belongs to a different cultural system, and it should apparently harder to classify as a fairy or folk tale. Sinologists usually deal with single works whose not only the author is known but, due to the high level of internal intertextuality, even the origin, inspiration and references to previous works; they usually move within a single cultural system, and among rigidly determined genres.

This is the content of the next chapter.

2.2 The Sinologist's perspective

2.2.1 Literature in China

The purpose of the study of this text is not only to shed new light on the role of this story in the Cinderella cycle, but also to call into question the traditional approaches to a literary text challenging the traditional idea of national literature. We have previously seen that Classicists usually claim that theory, for its definition, is universal; it does not matter, therefore, that centuries separate the text and the scholar who study it; modern literary theory is perfectly applicable to ancient texts due to the universally true literary theory.

Since a text is conveyed in a cultural and linguistic system however, national boundaries seem to have always played a crucial role in the study of narrative.

In this specific case, Ye Xian is a text produced in China, and therefore to be studied as a Chinese literary creation, but it must also be considered an adaptation of travelling elements to the new context they got in contact with. Moreover, from a broader perspective, literary theorist spurn the idea of a national literature as outdated, and claim that theory is universal, regardless the place where a piece of literature was composed.

The following parts will explain how Chinese literature is conceived and in what it differs from the Western one, and how this influenced the composition of Ye Xian, since its author belonged to this precise literary and cultural system.

a) *Traditional concepts of literature in China and in the West*

The contact of the Western Literary theory with China generated different reactions particularly at the end of the 19th century, because Chinese scholars started to question the role of Chinese Literature in the international system. Before the contact, however, China had already developed a literary tradition of considerable length, which presented some

interesting analogies with the European one, but that at the same time was profoundly different from it.

Chinese traditional literature is characterised by some unique features which reflect in its literary production and, of course, should be taken into account upon analysing a text written in Chinese.

Some of these characteristics were still well present during the Tang dynasty, when Ye Xian was composed, and its author was, aware or not, responding to them in his literary work. The most important can be summarised as such:

1. The importance of the Confucian classics[1]

2. The official disdain for fiction, and appreciation of historiography

3. The marked intertextuality, and the consequent adhesion of an author to literary rules, patterns in a constant dialogue with other *literati* , and thus the strong presence of the authors in their work, and the fusion of aesthetics and ethics

The Chinese term for *literature, wenxue,* has a complicated etymology: apparently, it is a neologism, a return graphic from the transcription in characters of the Japanese word Bungaku, which is the translation of the English word literature; being a "direct neologistic translation of the English word", it is a "far cry frorm the original concept of *wenxue*", which is a compound of the two self standing words "*wen",* and "*xue*" appearing in the Confucian Analecta.

"We should recall that autonomous or pure literature is a modern construct. In China as in the West, "literature' in ancient theory refers to works that served a material purpose and belongs to the category of 杂文学 *zawenxue.* «miscellaneous literature» Passing through a series of inclusions and exclusions, literature eventually identifies itself as distinct from its

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1The Classics are canonical books written before the unification of the Chinese empire by the Qin dynasty, and which have been regarded for centuries as the foundations of Chinese culture. They consist in works of different character, mainly historical and philosophical treatises.

other: non-literature"[Zhang, 2015:286]. If the term is new, the concept of the Wen, writing, in China, is however part of the ancient Chinese artistic conception; Wen has been theorised in ancient Chinese aesthetic. The origins of the word "literature" and of 文學 *wenxue,* the Chinese word that translates *literature* are parallel.

Literature, or better, "les belles lettres", as we have seen, used to define all the knowledge available, comprehensive of different disciplines that have later fields completely different, such as poetry and astronomy. The etymology of the word is quite obviously connected to the word for "letter", and it comes actually from the Latin word that is related to the "written word". Therefore, before it assumed the modern meaning of writing creative process, it referred to the transmissible knowledge usually by mean of writing.

The similarity with the Chinese concept resides in the notion of *wen* 文 ,writing, that we can equate to the pre-modern idea of literature in Europe.

In modern Chinese we encounter the character wen in combination like 汉文 hanwen, when it means "Chinese language", but it actually describes more the written language of the Han, the greatest majority in China since the ancient dynasties, while 汉语 Hanyu expresses more the spoken language.语 Yu in fact expresses the oral linguistic production, while wen, which appears in words like 文學 wenxue, literature, that literally means the study of writing, 文化 wenhua, which means culture, where it carries the meaning of "civilisation". Not until the Han Dynasty would *wen* become "literature", expressing the concept, at that time, of the combination of the written patrimony of the knowledge, namely the classics, historiographical production, and poetry.

One of the first and most complete work on different aspects of the concept of *wen* in the pre-modern Chinese literature is the beginning of 劉勰 Liu Xie's (465-522 AD) monumental *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (文心雕龍 Wenxin diaolong), "*On the Origin: the Dao*" (原道 *Yuan Dao*). This work deals with many concepts that can be considered Literary criticism, although it cannot be considered a treatise on the discipline in form of an essay, as Aristotle's Poetics, but rather an artistic work written in parallel prose; Liu Xie affirms that

wen, as human expression of universal harmony, was transmitted to the wise and the sages, among all Confucius, who all manifested the Dao through they writing. Wen, therefore, becomes structuring principle of the harmony between cosmos, the orderly world, and men, thanks to the transmission of the Confucian classics, which therefore assume a sacred, mystical character. The Dao which is revealed and passed on by the Classics will become, across the centuries, the Confucian moral; the wen, Writing/literature, will become the sole didactic principle capable of carrying the teaching of the harmonising power between heaven and earth.

1. The classics were a canon of heterogeneous works which together were the base on which the Chinese intellectuals recognised their civilisation, their traditions, their customs and their beliefs and their religious and moral system. The canon comprehended many history works, whose tradition dated back to the mythological dynasties of the origins, and among them were the 书经 Shujing, 春秋 Chunqiu, both attributed to Confucius, the 左傳 Zuo Zhuan, and other books that initiated the long story of the historiographical genre, which will see Sima Qian and Sima Tan as the models of most of the successive production; it comprehended, also a poetry book, the 诗经 Shi Jing, which shows how the shi-poem 詩 was already a very appreciated genre many century before the first Chinese Emperor, in the 3rd century BC. This admiration for the Classics as source of knowledge and style, this orientation to the past of the Confucian thinking,to be admired and emulated more that recent authors, is one of the characteristics of Chinese criticism. Mencius echoed the general thought, affirming that a scholar should "befriend" the ancient writers, read their writing so intensely that they should appear to him as intimate companions[Legge, 1895:392]. This great esteem for the past authors, especially Du Fu, Li Bai, Han Yu and Su Shi, was a constant characteristic of the Chinese literary approach, so much that during the Qing dynasty, many centuries later, it was still an accepted and defended position [Pohl, n.p.:5]

2. Another important feature which marks a very obvious difference between the Chinese and Western traditions, which is essential in the analysis of the history of the literary approach, is the importance of categories and genres. Genres in the European area are extremely diverse, due to its history of division, war, migration and influences. It is possible, nonetheless, to see that, as a general rule, fiction and, in general, narrative-related genres had a crucial role in the areas that are generally defined as "Western": "a modern concept of literature, prevalent in Europe/America, regards Homer's epics and Greek tragedies as the beginning of literature which culminates in the modern novel and drama; hence, it emphasises fictionality as the quintessence of literature" [Pohl,.np.:1].Since one of the main purposes of this work is to analyse the tale written in China, it will prove crucial to trace this difference: fiction, which was always quite appreciated in Europe, whose "classics" range from epic poetry to the modern novel, was instead not held in great consideration in the pre-modern China In fact, both theatre and novel in China had a stronger bond with historiography, while the Classical Literature based its repertoire on myths, on "authoritative words" that were supposed to describe the acts of legendary heroes in an era when metamorphoses, enchantments, and relations between gods and humans were considered plausible; Greek heroes and god, though, were not described as distant figures, but instead they were depicted with human characteristic, and came to illustrate human typologies in which the audience, the public, could recognise themselves. In China, fiction was called from the beginning 小说 *xiaoshuo*, small speech: the discourse which was trivial and seen only as an entertainment compared to the importance of the two most important genres: 诗 shi, poetry, and 历史 lishi, history. The classics are so important that literature and popular imaginary is based on it; historiographical works (春秋 *Chunqiu, Springs and Autumn Annals)*were used as books that gave information about the future, with mystical occulted meanings; books of omens, seasons, aphorisms and philosophical discussions were considered with reverential

respect and regarded as indispensable patrimony of both intellectuals and lower classes. It this therefore apparent that even the fiction had to relate and be connected to historiographical accounts, because it gave it a more real character, and so more consideration among the public. In our specific case, *zhiguai,* record of the strange, record and no invention, as we will see in the chapter dedicated to genres.

3. The third important feature of Chinese traditional literature is Intertextuality. Julia Kristeva, one of the earliest poststructuralist critics, created the term "intertextuality" to define the relation between books, when they refer to one another. According to this theory, the author is a node of previous knowledge, repeating, borrowing and alluding to literature produced beforehand, but also expressiong his own intentions and individuality. Intertextuality is indeed one of the most important features of Chinese literature. In ancient Chinese culture writers already conceived themselves and the other authors as readers, heirs of the ancient tradition of written culture and, even without having all the theoretical structure and therefore justification and legitimisation, they practised intertextuality in that they they were always attempting to return to the origins, namely the classics, of their culture, and expected that they readers would do the same with their work, and text and author were so intertwined with each other that a separation was virtually impossible. Borrowing by rewording was such a fundamental characteristic of ancient Chinese writers, and intertextual mention so common that it has always been very difficult to attribute concepts and metaphors to specific writers [see Fischer, 2009:1-34]. As literature was regarded as the reflection of the person, it is subsequent that the author wanted to communicate his personal, specific touch in the text, and it wanted it to be remarkable: texts were read as intersubjective encounters with authors, and intertextual allusion was therefore, at the same time, a form of intersubjectivity. In Chinese literary history it implies a dialogue between books, allusion to traditional oeuvres, and in ancient China also the transformation

of the original form so that only the learnt reader could appreciate the reference that was reworded in order to be not immediately recognised. Literary pieces were regarded as a reflection of the moral qualities of their writers. The popular proverb 文如其人 *wen ru qi ren*, literature is like the person, describes quite effectively this conception, which lasted for many centuries through many dynasties, therefore constituting a main characteristic of traditional literary criticism. This particular author- centred evaluation was one of the tenets of early Chinese Criticism, and continued for centuries, until during the Ming dynasty it turned from an open evaluation of a writer's personality and deeds to a new concept, called 性靈 xingling, individual sensibility: the traditional Confucian strict morality was therefore partially abandoned, but the focus on the person's instead of on the text was not.

b)   *Ye Xian and its author in the context of ancient Chinese literature*

Text

According to Mair, Youyang Zazu is to be intended as "Miscellaneous morsels of the lost lore". Youyang, in fact, indicated the mount Xiao Yu, near the modern Yuanling, in Hubei, where some books were believed to have been hidden during the first emperor Qin Shi Huang Di's persecution of books and intellectuals as a threat to his absolute power. The *Youyang zazu* consists of two collections, the first (前集 *Qianji*) including 30 chapters in 20 *juan*"scrolls", the supplement (續集 *Xuji*) 6 chapters in 10 *juan*. It records fantastic stories of immortals, Buddha, ghosts, as well as such of strange animals, plants, food, monasteries and temples, and so on. On the one hand the stories are characterized as such of the very popular style of strange personalities and phenomena (志怪 *zhiguai*, 傳奇

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chuanqi), and on the other hand there are a lot of tales of curious places and things, which rather belong into the category of descriptive geography, similar to 張華 Zhang Hua's 博物志 *Bowuzhi* Part of the stories has been collected by Duan Chengshi, but he is also the author of some of the tales. Some of the titles are quite cryptic and do not directly expose the content like the story of the jar (壺史 *Hushi*) about Daoist magic, the chapter of the shell (貝編 *Beibian*), which has Buddhist content, the body/corpse's grave (貝編 *Shixi*), which speaks of funeral rites, or a fantastic story with the title of 諾皋記 *Nuogaoji*.

The *Youyang zazu* is included in different later collectanea, among them the 四庫全書 *Siku quanshu* [see Li, Lü, 1996]. The extension of the *Nuogao Ji* is a part in three scrolls and seventy-eight tales known as 支諾皋 *Zhi Nuogao* (*Nuogao's Extension*). While many of these stories have only recently been translated in Western languages, the entry Xu 3, better known as Ye Xian, has been study in the West for approximately one century. Here is its text:

南人相传，秦汉前有洞主吴氏，土人呼为吴洞。娶两妻，一妻卒。有女名叶限，少惠，善陶金，父爱之。末岁父卒，为后母所苦，常令樵险汲深。时尝得一鳞，二寸余，赪鳍金目，遂潜养于盆水。日日长，易数器，大不能受，乃投于后池中。女所得余食，辄沉以食之。女至池，鱼必露首枕岸，他人至不复出。其母知之，每伺之，鱼未尝见也。因诈女曰："尔无劳乎，吾为尔新其襦。"乃易其弊衣。后令汲于他泉，计里数百也。母徐衣其女衣，袖利刃行向池。呼鱼，鱼即出首，因斤杀之，鱼已长丈余。膳其肉，味倍常鱼，藏其骨于郁栖之下。逾日，女至向池，不复见鱼矣，乃哭于野。忽有人被发粗衣，自天而降，慰女

曰："尔无哭，尔母杀尔鱼矣，骨在粪下。尔归，可取鱼骨藏于室，所须第祈之，当随尔也。"女用其言，金玑衣食随欲而具。及洞节，母往，令女守庭果。女伺母行远，亦往，衣翠纺上衣，蹑金履。母所生女认之，谓母曰："此甚似姊也。"母亦疑之。女觉，遽反，遂遗一只履，为洞人所得。母归，但见女抱庭树眠，亦不之虑。其洞邻海岛，岛中有国名陀汗，兵强，王数十岛，水界数千里。洞人遂货其履于陀汗国，国主得之，命其左右履之，足小者履减一寸。乃令一国妇人履之，竟无一称者。其轻如毛，履石无声。陀汗王意其洞人以非道得之，遂禁锢而拷掠之，竟不知所从来。乃以是履弃之于道旁，即遍历人家捕之，若有女履者，捕之以告。陀汗王怪之，乃搜其室，得叶限，令履之而信。叶限因衣翠纺衣，蹑履而进，色若天人也。始具事于王，载鱼骨与叶限俱还国。其母及女即为飞石击死，洞人哀之，埋于石坑，命曰懊女冢。洞人以为禖祀，求女必应。陀汗王至国，以叶限为上妇。一年，王贪求，祈于鱼骨，宝玉无限。逾年，不复应。王乃葬鱼骨于海岸，用珠百斛藏之，以金为际。至征卒叛时，将发以赡军。一夕，为海潮所沦。成式旧家人李士元听说。士元本邕州洞中人，多记得南中怪事

The text is written in a concise and simple prose which Hu Mei defines as 白话文言 *baihua wenyan* "vernacular classical language". In fact, this text is written in 古文 *guwen*, the classical style, with some elements of the popular language. While guwen was

traditionally utilised in works inspired in the Confucian classics, in the Youyang Zazu is used to retell the most diverse stories. 古文 *Guwen* was used also for the composition of different kinds of prose, some of which had Buddhist or Daoist character. Moreover, the style was used also for the *zhiguai* and the related genre *chuanqi,* records of the strange and transmission of the odd, genres which had had their origins during the Six Dynasties, and flourished during the Tang. In the first centuries of the empire, the prose underwent a process of codification which made it progressively more rigid and unnatural. This form of prose,骈体文 *piantiwen,* parallel prose, was highly regarded during the Han and the Six Dynasties for its sophisticated character, which used to take years to be reached. The ability to create semantic, phonetic and grammatical parallels required a long training and was highly prized among the intellectuals. This form of expression, however, had become by the Tang so separated from the way people usually communicated that a person could hardly understand any of the works written in this style. During the Tang dynasty, and especially after An Lushan's rebellion, (755 C.E.) the intellectuals reacted claiming a greater compositional freedom and the liberation from this artificial character of their work in order to a greater focus on content and to give a didactic value to literature. One of the greater supporters of this movement, which is known as 古文运动 *guwenyundong*, Movement for the Classical Prose, was the famous 韓愈 Han Yu who, despite being an extremely refined poet, believed in the 古文 guwen, the classical prose, inspired to the Han author's sobriety, especially the historians Sima Tan and Sima Qian, as a tool to make people closer to the Confucian classics. Han Yu, in fact, quite unlike Duan Chenghsi, despised Buddhism as a foreign religion, and Daoism as a belief alienating people from the State's public welfare, indicating Mengzi's teachings as the best example of combining moral integrity and social stability. Although the success of these genre is hardly ascribable to the Movement of the Classical Style, it is plausible to identify a direct connection with the Tang dynasty and the diffusion of the *chuanqi.* Tang's political stability had created a perfect situation for the prosperity of this genre. Urbanisation had created cities like Chang'an, modern Xi'an, Yangzhou and Chengdu, with an urban class willing to be

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entertained; the favour Buddhism enjoyed at court allowed the circulation of travelling monks with their baggage of stories from far away which they used to attract new people to their doctrine; and, last but not least, the policy of trade opening which entailed cultural contact: Tang dynasty was quite tolerant and promoted expansion. The stability of the political situation allowed the exploration of new trading routes with a direct and indirect cultural contact with faraway lands such as Middle East and Europe.

The analysis of the terms is interesting, as the language used shows at the same time local, colloquial words, and foreign contamination.

Some of the terms which indicate this colloquial language are for example: 哭 *ku*, which means to weep, to howl, to explain Ye Xian's distress for the death of her fish. The stepmother is defined 弊 *bi*, wicked; the men of the tribe are said to 哀 *ai* have pity for her and the stepsister. Ye Xian's husband, the king, is called 贪求 *tanqiu,* greedy; along with these expressions of emotions, we have references to everyday life: pottery 器 *qi,* manure 粪 *fen,* sleeves in which object can be hidden 袖子 *xiuzi*, religious sacrifices 禖 祀 *meisi* , which suggest a vital, realistic tone.

The name of the protagonist, the kingdom of her future husband, the heap of dung in the backyard and the references to flying stones display both phonetic transcriptions of foreign terms and the adaptation of strange concept to a new cultural system, which is the first evidence of a foreign origin of this tale.

Author

Duan Chenshi, the author of Ye Xian, is perfectly immersed in his culture. He uses his literary production to express his remarkable passion for everything which is strange, irrational, foreign, exotics.

Duan Chenshi was a Chinese writer influenced by Tang culture and his work displays several elements which connect it with his cultural works.

The intentions of the authors who put down in writing folk tales (according to Zipes transforming them into fairy tales, in the process) disclose a lot about the text, stylistic and

content choices, and see how motifs and characters are depicted in order to create connections between the piece of literature and its culture of reference.

The theory according to which a great amount of literary information can be deduced from the life of its author is called Biographical criticism in Literature, which represents the collection of information on the author as precious source of enlightenment about a piece of literature. This seems to be the opposite of what happens in folklore, where traditions are transmitted orally from one generation to the next, and in the process they change, they usually become more sophisticated and, first and foremost, they adapt to different cultural systems in order to maintain their value by acquiring the language and the features of the culture of destination. In the work of Jack Zipes, for example, fairy tales and folk tales are depicted as fluid text which undergo cultural adaptation according to the socio-historical context [see Zipes, 2015]. It is true that sporadically some folkloric oeuvres have been traditionally attributed to an author or another; the Greek epic poems, for example, were attributed until the modern era to Homer, whose mythical characteristic, though, served more as an antonomasia of the bard than the depiction of a real person; and that Virgil and Apollonius of Rhodes are known creator of epic poems, and to know who they were and who they wrote with are essential for a better understanding of their works; but fairy and folk tales, for they definition, are usually seen as the product of a civilisation, and not the talented creation of a single author.

Biographical criticism dates as back as literature itself, and in the Hellenistic period the biography of the authors were indispensable to the complete understanding of a work, as the writers composed their oeuvres as a reflection of their lives; as we have seen in the previous chapters, the life of the author was even more important in ancient Chinese literature, especially in poetry whose production was seen as the reflection of the virtue of its creators. Biographical Criticism was used extensively during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and then it was harshly criticised in the 1920ies by the New Critics who theorised the biographical fallacy, recognising the artificial and constructed character of literature which was not to be interpreted, according to them, as the expression of an

individual conscience, but rather as a codified production intelligible by other members of the same cultural system. Since the 1980ies the biographical criticism is considered as an important element of the New Historicism, which is a very complex literary phenomenon but on which one can safely affirm that it saw contextual information as an essential part of the literary interpretation.

What biographical criticism tells us, among other important aspects, such as the social position and the cultural context of the author, can also be described as a "'recognition of 'otherness'" · "The exploration of otherness is what literary biography and biographical criticism can do best, discovering an author as a unique individual, a discovery that puts a burden on us to reach out to recognize that uniqueness before we can fully comprehend an author's writings"[Benson, 1989: 108]

In our case, due to the distance in time of Duan Chengshi, we cannot draw such accurate conclusions about his life as we can with authors who are closer and about whom we possess diverse sources and therefore cannot extrapolate so much information about the relationship between his life and his version of the tale; but fortunately we have some indications of his life recorded and they are precious tool in having at least a hint of the personality of this intellectual of the Tang dynasty. As a matter of fact, Duan Chengshi is one of those figures whose role was probably more important that what traditional literary study may suggest. He was a real intellectual representative of his era, as at the same time he drew inspiration from the ancient literature, as Chinese intellectual were supposed to do, but at the same time he would go personally collecting material for his literary work [Contrary to most intellectuals of his time, therefore, his work is characterised by an unusual influence of foreign, and therefore barbaric customs and style, describing strange lands and the habits of the neighbouring peoples and subjects of the emperor[Shi, 2002:65-79]. Son of Duan Wenchang, an officer of high rank under Tang Xuanzong praised for the skilful administration of the often troublesome minorities in the South of the Empire he was also a descendant of Duan Zhixuan, who had received the outstanding privilege of applying for public offices without sitting the exams for all the male members of his

family. Duan Chengshi is known also as a poet, as along with Li Shangyin and Wen Tingyun he was the author of *Sanshiliu ti zhangzhou (Memoirs in thirty.-ix styles).* His peculiar personality, however, was less inclined to follow the beaten track, and prone to exploring and discovering new material for his adventurous character. Story as it that once, rebuked by his father for neglecting his studies in favour of hunting and travelling, he sent to the man, some days later, various animals and birds as hunting quarry, accompanying every animal with a short story or a poem related to each of them. Our writer worked for the emperor occupying numerous offices such as counsellor at court [Wang, 1986:1178], librarian [Nienhauser, 1998:940] and that his conduct was scandalous as his natural curiosity made him have as informants people from the most diverse range: tramps, servants (one of whom was most probably the teller of Ye Xian) and various people from different nationalities who were regarded as barbarous and despicable at the court of the Tang emperor: Indians and even "Romans", most probably people for Syria and Anatolia [ibidem]*.* while even the *Xin Tangshu* praises him as fine erudite and researcher [Han, 2010:58].

What we can deduce from the description of this complex character is that in his oeuvre he pursued the stranger, the magic, the fantastic and that in his retelling he narrated the stories of foreign populations retold him by people of the most varied social entourage: popular literature, therefore, and mostly belonging to other cultures. Retelling, however , was not transcribing; while popular culture was less despised by our author than by his contemporaries, he nevertheless did not feel any commitment to the story as it was told to him, and most probably it felt free to change it according to his readers."when attempts to put oral materials into written form involved a scribe who would most likely have been exposed to the basic text of Confucianism. These scribes may have ranged from barely literate peasants to religious, ritual, medical, military specialists, and from professional entertainers to literati who had passed the lower-level civil service examinations. To identify this heterogeneous group to "the people", or to assume that all shared the same anti-elite or peasant worldview, would be oversimplifying. Furthermore, there is no reason

to believe that these people would have limited themselves to transcribing oral material. Among them were also creative who, accustomed to composing their own work, would have added something of their own voice into the stories they adapted"[Idema, 2010:344]. Duan Chengshi was a respected intellectual who has a solid reputation as a poet, and he could experiment prose and new genres which were frowned upon as less prestigious. For this production, he chose a language and a style which were inspired by the classics, by the Chinese cultural tradition. By doing so, he displayed at the same time a great knowledge of the past literature, and the desire of simplifying and making the message more authentic, spurning the parallel prose and choosing instead the simple prose of the old canonical books.

The author, whose life we have discussed so far, modelled the material he had into a form he was familiar with and was accepted and recognised by his readers who belonged to the higher classes of the society. A transformation from popular to literary then, but also an adaptation of the content into a frame shared by his contemporaries and fellow scholars, and organised in a shape familiar to his audience: in other words, in a what is usually known as literary genre, discussed in the following chapters.

c)   *International aspects in contemporary Chinese Literary Theory and overcoming national literature*

While so far the specific Chinese characteristics of this story have been exposed, this part explicates the validity of using Western theory applied to a Chinese ancient story. That enables use to use international theories, and to use their tools to the study of a tale retold in a specific cultural system.

The validity of the study of Ye Xian out of the boundaries of Chinese literature is supported by three main reasons:

1. the outdated concept of national literature;

2. the universal character of theory;

3. the intrinsic characteristics of this tale.

1. It will not come as a surprise that "Usually, studies on literature are qualified by an adjective that indicates language and nationality: for instance, we talk about Urdu literature, French literature, Chinese literature, German literature, or Italian literature… Studying the literature of a nation is usually a political act searching for common cultural models of/for a large group of people one wants to distinguish from others on the grounds of linguistic or, generally speaking, cultural grounds." [Nemesio, 1999:3] Defining literature according to the language and place of creation, therefore, can be considered the most obvious choice, due to the undeniable bond between language and literature, and also since it only requires the knowledge of a sole cultural system, while "If we cross the border, we need well-organized teamwork, because we have to deal with large selections of texts in a project that, in turn, requires skilled competence in different languages and cultures" [Ibidem]. Already at the beginning of the study of Literary theory, however, it was apparent that theory as itself should have been able of describing Literature regardless of the national system it came from; a new movement started, then, to inquire the possibility of setting up a universal paradigm for the study of the discipline; or if this idea should be completely abandoned and no paradigm can be used which can be generally applied all around the world. The study of literature in general, in its early stages, saw the effort of some scholars of broaden the horizons which were imposed by the primordial idea, whose tenets are still widely accepted that Literature is usually defined by the place in which it was conceived, created and sometimes disseminated.

2. At the beginning of the 20th century, after the "dramatic cultural clash" [Cao, 2008:5] with the West, European and American Literary Theories started to be adopted in China by scholars of literature, who adapted them. Although Literature

continues being studied as a national phenomenon in most universities, what has happened in the last decades is that scholars tend to seek an idea of general literature capable of analysing text coming from different parts of the world and belonging to different cultural systems. Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren continued with the idea of a worldwide literature, in which China should have an important role to play in order to achieve the modernisation to which the intellectual elite aspired. Nowadays, there is still a hot debate between Sinologists who believe that Chinese Literature can be studied and comprehended only when analysed through the framework of the specific characteristics of Chinese cultural system, and other, Theorists, Palumbo-Liu describes as "Sinologists", "who endorse what they see as purely neutral (i.e. non-culture based, non-ideological) "philological" project" which leads to discover "some final truth embedded in the language of the text" [Palumbo Liu, 19988:36] and "Theorists", who believe that theory is universal and, therefore, applicable by definition to the various cases. It is quite apparent that the "sinocentric" approach, which claims to be free of any ideological bias and regards Chinese literary texts as untarnished objects to be protected from forceful foreign intrusion, is actually a statement of disdainfulness in that it describes Chinese literature as the secluded kingdom of a (very limited) number of specialists versed in the study and the analysis of the Chinese unique history and culture. Such an assumption, though, can be easily deemed to be hazardous, as on the one hand it shows a certain post-colonial resentment towards the West, excluding any possibility of connection between different cultural realities; and, on the other hand, as it nullifies the definition itself of theory : "if theory is, by definition, independent of its particular object of study, then why would it be less applicable to ancient and classical writings? Or, as Zhang Longxi puts it in his contribution to this volume, isn't it "this transcending quality—shall we say the theoreticality of theory?—that makes theory singularly transferable" [Zhang, 1999:31]?

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3. Moreover, the study of Ye Xian, placed in a moment in time, space and content of profound hybridisation, can but recall the relativity of definitions based on a true ontological dichotomy: as we have seen so far, and we will see more in the following chapters, this work's aim is to carry out a deep study of this short story in order to present its international role in the Cinderella cycle, being it the link between ancient Middle-Eastern narratives and later European versions. Ye Xian is at the same time Chinese and global, Han and non-Han, fairy tale and historical text, oral and written literature, in an alternate analysis of the concepts that compose the study of a piece of literature: the boundaries of national literature are not sufficient to the study of this story for its intrisic character. Totosi specifies in his work that both methodologically and ideologically Comparative Literature should work on inclusion, including "all Other, all marginal, minority and peripheral". To use Tötösi's expansion of polysistemic theory of literature for our work will be apparent in the second chapter dedicated to the analysis of the story, as Ye Xian, apart from being studied as translation, and having been translated, includes in its narrative some elements that reveal that in the retelling of this story there is a dialogue between a "lesser" culture and a main one, with hints of the Han power and the cultural submission of other ethnicities, and a vertical, hierarchical exchange of information along with a horizontal, or geographical one, and the *guai* it describes was the peripheral, exotical and strange character of the "barbarous" provinces."Not that peripherality has not always been evident in political, geographical, economical, cultural, etc. Situations; it has always been the case between the powerful and less powerful, between the colonizer and the colonized… the context is comparative, the method developed from the Systemic and Empirical approach, and the application is with reference to the "Other", the peripheral, or the marginal" [Tötösi, 1998:129].

Ye Xian is important since it contains different peripheralities as in Chinese boxes, one inside another,: a Chinese story studied with the aid of Western theories, whose teller was a

servant, whose topic is a far away space of people dwelling in caves, and whose protagonist is a woman who, as we will see in the chapter on the analysis of the motifs, somehow is a "Culture Bearer", a mythological figure believed to have introduced "tecniques and arts of culture and civilisation"[Birrel, 1993:41],

Both perspectives, Sinological and International, can be positively used in literary research as a source of cultural debate, and Sinological linguistic and cultural analysis, and at the same time Literary Theory, whether it proceeds from the West or not, can be used as precious devices to elicit as many notions as possible.

Ye Xian can be considered a piece of world literature, as, despite being virtually unknown to the general public, it has been studied by numerous scholars around the world since the 19th century and it is probably one of the most ancient forms of a worldwide famous fairy tale. "A work enters into world literature by a double process: first, by being read *as* literature; second, by circulating out into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin [Damrosch,2003: 6].

2.2.2 The Genre

In this part I will discuss the important question of the genre. Far from being a simple theoretical construction *a posteriori*, in fact, genre is also a model of inspiration for the author according to his or her audience and cultural system. In our specific case, Ye Xian has been studied by most scholars well versed in the comparative method (Rooth, Ding, Waley) as a folk tale while we know that the genre it belongs, *zhiguai,* had an important historical character, which, as we have seen, was a typical feature of ancient Chinese literature, according to which fiction was a minor, trivial genre. Even some Sinologists have neglected this hybrid character of the *zhiguai*, treating those narratives as fiction (for example Zhao Xiaohuan). In this thesis the strcutural method, inspired to Propp functions and dramatis personae, is used; however, the double aspect (fictional and historical) of this

genre is taken into account, as being a record (志 *zhi*) of the strange or peripheral (怪 *guai*), the *zhiguai* presents a specific structure, as discussed in this section.

The structural analysis shows that there are parts which do not belong to the folk tale type, but are specific of the *zhiguai*, especially the beginning and the end of the narrative.

What makes this analysis even more interesting is that some of the ancient narratives containing elements of Cinderella were works of historian of the ancient Greek culture.

This does not demonstrate that this story was the report of a relevant, but rather that a narrative of a girl who goes from "rags to riches" was so successful to be included in the works of writers of different genres, even upon narrating history.

Ye Xian's dual character, historical and fictional, reflects the double analysis carried out in this thesis.

It is crucial to take into consideration Ye Xian's genre, the *zhiguai*, for some important reasons:

- To study this text according to its literary context, avoiding which provides better comprehension and avoids biased analysis;
- To separate out, through structural analysis, the elements belonging to the international Cinderella type (fictional) and the ones proper of the *zhiguai* tradition, used by the author to provide his work with a more historical character.

At the same time, the genre a-specific analysis, considering Ye Xian as a folk tale, a travelling legend is fundamental because:

- This tale belongs to the international system of folklore, as it presents previous and later versions;
- it belongs to folklore because it describes the "lore" of people dwelling in caves, raising fish, and their traditions and place of worship.

The treatment of this tale as a folk tale is therefore not completely fallacious, but simply inaccurate, as accepting the category of folk tale without questioning its validity in spatial

and temporal coordinates which are not the usual setting of folk tales may lead to wrong, or at least partial, assumptions.

In my opinion, an acceptable solution to bridge the gap between genre specific and a-specific examination is to carry out research using structural analysis using textual grids for universal narratives, and to analyse its elements according tot the culture of the retelling, in order tostudy a piece of literature through a global approach without neglecting its context.

GENRE

In order to shed new light on the study of Ye Xian, there is an important aspect we have to take into account, and that is its genre.

So far, most scholar have regarded Ye Xian as a fairy or folk tale, and have studied it as such, in the ample perspective of the Cinderella cycle; this tale, therefore, was only one more piece of the mosaic composed in order to juxtapose the different versions of the story tracing its origin.

The question arises then, whether or not it is valid to study a tale as belonging to a genre which not only did not exist when the text was written, but was unknown in the territory of its author for centuries afterwards; characteristic of the text, such as language and structure, the structure and the purpose of a text are all considerably influenced by the genre to which it belongs to. The purpose of this chapter, however, is not to demonstrate that this tale cannot be regarded as a folk tale, but quite the opposite; that, even though this text came to us in a particular form, called genre, which tracers the boundaries of its shape, adds more information about the context and can be therefore used to identify the text's original parts transmitted, and the elements that the author utilised to please both his audience and his fellow writers.

Genre in literature is a convention; rhetorical criticism may actually assert that "there are not genres in literature" [Northrop, 1971:95]; the definition itself is quite ambiguous "is there a finite taxonomy of genres or are they in principle infinite? Are genres timeless Platonic essences or ephemeral, time-bound entities? Are genres culture-bound or

transcultural?" [Stam, 2000:14]. Genres are usually categories created a posteriori by scholars in order to study the material they are dealing with, a "critic's attempt to classify and reorder his material" [McKeon, 2000:43]; but it is also true that creators of literary works across the centuries have followed rules and guidelines expressing both the expectations of the public and some general cultural conventions, some "shared set of communicative purposes" [Swales,1990:46]; the creation of a text accordingly to a specific model, then, is a manner for the writer to establish a stronger bond with their readers or, in case of some folkloric text, their listeners "To varying extents, the formal features of genres establish the relationship between producers and interpreters" [Chandler, 1997:5]. Our tale was written by a Chinese intellectual who was famous for his relationships with foreigners and for his attention to everything that was strange, unnatural, committed to spread newly acquired anecdotes and stories: "Tuan, in fact, values the strange stories he tells not as literature nor as exotic samples of human fantasy, but as contributions to our knowledge of the hidden powers and influences that are all the time at work behind the stolid facade of everyday existence" [Waley, 1947:227]; at the same time, however, he was very aware of his role of writer who followed set rules in both form and content; he carried out what we would call today "field research", but he was at the same time a scholar who followed the tradition [see Ni, 2009:19-21]. It does not come as a surprise, then, that his Miscellanea, in which *Ye Xian* appears, contains stories on the relatively new religion, Buddhism, along with tales dating back to the mythical origins of China, and accounts of contacts with other countries "There are also many foreign stories-Korean, Persian, Turkic, Indian and Central Asiatic" [Waley, 1947: 227].

ZHIGUAI

This model, according to which Duan Chengshi, as most writers of his time, adapted his prose was therefore the 志怪 *zhiguai* and 傳奇 *chuanqi* which literally mean "record of

the strange" and "transmission of the unusual" The two terms are used for stories written respectively during the Six Dynasties, and during the Tang and the Song , and they are commonly used interchangeably because their structure and contents overlap most of the time: what is really noticeable is the later tales present some more different motives more connected with Buddhist reward and punishment, and in general a more ironic and playful character. Karl Kao does recognise a more mature formal organisation of this genre which "is distinguished by the self-consciousness of its representation, as opposed to the earlier CK (zhiguai) which simply report or transcribe something given"[Kao, 1985:39], but he does not regard *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* as two separate genres, and so do most of the scholars. Hu Yuling, however, considered *chuanqi* a fictional invention, as opposed to *zhiguai* which, even in the case they did not correspond to the truth, did not intend to be creative; however, even Hu says that the boundaries between the two forms are really blurred [see Hu, 1993: 37], and Leo Tak-Hong Chan observed that Hu's characterisation of the two genres was a projection, back in time, of the Ming perception of fictionality [Chan, 1998:45-50]; Dudbridge, who is the doyen of the study of Chinese fiction in the est, affirms that the category of *chuanqi* is an invention of the May Fourth critics, and that it should be avoided in favour of the generic term of Tang fiction [Dudbridge, 1995:17]. Since the stories maintain analogous characteristics and the *chuanqi* originated from the *zhiguai*, the term *zhiguai* is used to describe both typologies, and it will be analysed in order to investigate the linguistics and cultural cultural connotations of the term: let us delve deeper into the meaning of the two characters which compose this word, as they represent a peculiar case in which they come to unify two different worlds: the one of the history, and the realm of the supernatural.

志 Zhi assumed its meaning as early as the Han dynasty; we find it used as a verb "to record" in the 春秋谷梁傳 *Guliang Commentary to the Chunqiu* (宣公十五年 The 15thYear of Duke Xuan), and the 春秋左傳 *Zuo Commentary to Chunqiu* (昭公四年 The 4th Year to Duke Zhao). It was, hence forward, used to indicate orthodox historical

genres, especially the bibliographical treatises of dynastic histories. "Thus, the prefix *zhi* indicates conformity to established form as an essential criterion to membership of this genre reflecting its early affiliation with history writing"[Liu, 2015:13]. It would be therefore reductive to consider this genre as belonging to fictional narrative.

FICTION VS HISTORY

As previously mentioned, the fiction, xiaoshuo, was considered a non-canonical genre, much less reverenced than historiography or poetry; it has been said that xiaoshuo was everything that could not be defined as one of the those categories; in the *Han Shu*, *xiaoshuo* were text of heterogeneous content; during the Six Dynasties they were classified under the 诸子 *zhuzi*, "miscellaneous philosophers". "The field is delineated neither by the term *xiaoshuo* nor through any exclusive interest in purely fictional materials; it generally addresses writings in the broad arena suggested by the modern term "fiction" within the wider world of xiaoshuo [Hegel, 1994:395].Therefore the element of recording, zhi, rather than creating fiction, and therefore to offer the documentation of a fact rather than a literary invention dignified this kind of tales and made them held in higher regard than mere fiction.

The question arises, thus, whether we should consider this genre as a real record of the unusual, that is, an account intended a more or less faithful to a real occurrence at least in theory, or rather a piece of fiction, whose authorship is fundamental but whose inspiration can come from the most diverse sources."Literary criticism on *zhiguai* has been a tenuous construction. It was not recognized as a genre until the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), and even today there has never been scholarly consensus on its definition. Western scholars have attempted to impose such labels as myth, fantasy, and folklore on them, but the problems of these categories are obvious. *Zhiguai*, therefore, is strange in its content, compilation and criticism"[Liu, 2015:8]. Is would be extremely difficult, therefore, to draw an absolute line between the historical character of the *zhiguai*, where the facts are

presented as unusual but true, and the creative aspect, inspired not by the authors desire of retelling a fact, but by the effort of the author to compose an imaginary tale sometimes with moral or ironical purposes: and, in fact, scholars of different fields have regarded these stories as belonging to these two different categories, fiction and history.

Lu Xun implied in his *A brief history of Chinese fiction* that the Six Dynasties *zhiguai* and Tang *chuanqi* were the origin of Chinese fiction, later developed into vernacular short stories of the later dynasties [see Lu, 1973]. Among the other scholars to consider *zhiguai* a fictional genre the most relevant for this research is Zhao Xiaohuan, who affirms that the *zhiguai* works during the Tang started to be read as fiction more than a fact [Zhao,2005:85]; by applying Propp's functions, connecting therefore this genre to the Western folk tale and fairy tale; as regards our specific text, it has been studied as a folk tale by many scholars which considered it merely yet another variant of Cinderella.

 Li Jian Guo,. 1984, affirms that Zhiguai extracted material from historical events and figures blending them together [Li, 1984:10].

"The zhiguai was actually regarded as a form of history, (at least until the Tang period in the form that some authors consider the chuanqi): in the three hundred years which separate the Wei-Jin and the Northern and Southern Dynasties from the Tang, a gradual awareness of the authors of these text arose and the once historical narrative assumed a more fictional character; the process, however, lasted several centuries and, at least officially, the authors kept considering themselves as "recorders rather than creators of those unheard-of things, They believed that those strange things actually happened at that time and were not figment of their imagination" [Chung, 2013:56].

We have therefore, two opposite concepts which apparently cannot coexist in the same form: on the one hand, the historiographical narrative with its attempt at objective information; on the other, the fantastic creation of an imaginative writer. This incurable dichotomy, however, is such only from our contemporary point of view.

Far from being a phenomenon only present in Chinese literature, the accounts of unusual events was part and parcel of historiography also in the classical world, where Greek and

Romans authors reported strange occurrences and omens (which the Romans referred to as "monstrua"), which were believed as true and retold as such, and the phenomenon became even more apparent in the following centuries of the Middle Ages, when the historiography became even more legendary and assumed a strong moral connotation.

It is true, however, as we have been saying so far, that fiction was especially disregarded in China, and history particularly favoured; the limits of the two categories, therefore, of retelling and imagination were particularly blurred: the fantastic element was not present in Chinese literature *per se* due to the pragmatic character of the Chinese culture, advocated by Lu Xun.

"In exploring fantasy writing in the story of the Chinese culture, the usage of the framework of Chinese literary history is inevitable. Unlike the debates of conceptualization of fantasy in the West, fantasy is barely recognized in the Chinese context. (…) Owing to the authoritative and central state power of Chinese regimes and their political influence on Chinese intellectuals and academia, and the relatively "homogeneous" feature of Chinese culture that Lefevere identifies, the institution of literary categories has less controversial and more prevalent basis and practice than in culturally heterogeneous country. Browsing through the prevalently recognized categories, in Chinese literary history only Zhiguai can be recognized as some kind of Chinese fantasy or imaginary writing"[Chung, 2013:52].

The two elements, therefore, of absence of a totally fictional genre in China, and the belief of ancient people in events that lay outside of the everyday common experience as true facts, created this grey zone of fictional history or historical fiction which is particularly evident in China and assumed a specific character for a few centuries which differentiated itself from the proper historiographical genre, and which did not encounter too much success in Europe; it is, therefore, an apparently specific trait of traditional Chinese culture.

"There is no clear line between history and fiction does not suggest that people in premodern China were incapable of or indifferent to what is true or what is false. The modern notions of fiction and history are only two idealized polarities on a continuum of narrative possibilities in which Chinese literature or literature in general is situated.

Zhiguai is a type of literature that problematizes the clash of extremes, questions binary thinking, and introduces a crisis that generates a new epistemological framework"[Liu, 2015:4].

YE XIAN AS A ZHIGUAI: Different typologies

It is however quite illuminating to notice that there is a parallel between a certain category of Zhiguai, to which Ye Xian belongs, at least in part, and some forms of semi- fantastic literature in the West: the geographical retelling and some travel literature which indulge in the description of monsters and mythological creatures, such as *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* which dates back to the 14th century.

Geographical narratives are not one of the categories used by Karl Kao to classify the production of *zhiguai*, which he puts forward in order to simplify the "unsatisfactory, not to say unwieldy" [Kao, 1985:6] traditional system found in 太平广记 *Taiping Guangji,* the largest compilation written during the early Song in order to collect and to organise the previous fictional works in ninety-one categories, two thirds of whom are related to the supernatural. Kao uses six categories of the supernatural, which are

1. Natural portents
2. Necromantic communion
3. Animistic phenomena
4. Manifestation of fairies and deities
5. Thaumaturgic phenomena
6. Retributive phenomena

These categories very often overlap, and more than one concept of supernatural is very frequently present in one single narrative, and *Ye Xian* is a typical example.

In our story we find: an animal which grows to abnormal size, which becomes affectionate and whose bones bestow precious gifts, and which is connected, as we will see in the chapter dedicated to the "helpers", to animistic beliefs and reincarnation theories; there is a

wild person coming from the sky, and later versions of Chinese Cinderella will contain a more highlighted character of retribution, but in Ye Xian we witness how the stepmother and the stepsister are killed by mysterious flying stones. Ye Xian was therefore a story whose elements were perfectly suitable and adaptable to Tang culture, and to the narratives which were the main subject of the zhiguai.

There is a very important aspect mentioned by Kao when he discussed the necromantic communion: the concept of 鬼 *gui*, which is normally translated as "ghost", as the departed souls of the dead who either help or damage people according to moralistic schemes. There is, however, a complete different meaning, related to the animistic world, emanations of nature which lurk in the wilderness; sometimes these creatures belong to "land peripheral to China and unfamiliar with its culture" [Kao,1985:8] in the tradition of the 山海经 *Shan Hai Jing*, Classic of Mountains and Seas. These creatures are referred to, among other names such as 妖 yao and 精 jing, as 怪 guai, which is the second character which composes the genre we are analysing in this chapter.

GUAI AS EXOTIC: Ye Xian as a geographical narrative

Therefore, just like the character 志 zhi indicated the "historical" character of the texts, whose authors were recorders rather than writers, the analysis of 怪 guai can offer some interesting insight in the analysis of this genre. "Guai", in fact is not the "fantastic" as conceived in modern literary theory, which originates mainly in the Western tradition; Todorov, in his famous work, analyses the fantastic literary production identifying three main categories the uncanny, the marvellous, the fantastic; the first one describe events that can still be explained according to the laws of the reality as perceived in the Post-Enlightenment world; the second contradicts these laws; and the fantastic happens when the author hesitates between the two first alternatives.: it is quite apparent, therefore, that the fantastic and the other categories have to be understood as different perspectives of the authors' perception[see Todorov,1975]. In China, however, the concept is quite different and it hinges on the facts themselves, presented as either unnatural or supernatural, but are

always presented as factual as opposed to fictional. These texts, therefore, are the records of occurrences which are deemed as 怪 guai. Scholars have observed that there are two main meaning of guai: exoteric and exotic; (cosmologically supernatural or a geographically peripheral world). Such is the idea, for example, of Robert Campany, whose groundbreaking study of the *zhiguai* determines how, in his opinion, it was regarded as minor branch of history, therefore non-fictional, which described events that did not belong to the quotidian experience of the Han Chinese people living in the traditional territories of the Empire: they represented, therefore, historical accounts of exotic traditions and occurrences in the remotest parts of an expanding empire. In his *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China*, describes guai as unusual, as not commonly seen; ; Guai is not 异 "yi", which indicates what is different from the normality, what, with a Western perspective, we would regard as paranormal. In the Wei Zhao commentary on the dragon, for example, the beast is defined as – the *guai* of waterways, "非常見，故曰怪" it is not commonly seen, and therefore *guai*.". That does not mean that the dragon was considered a supernatural or fantastic animal; it was simply unfamiliar and out of the ordinary, and as such it related to the accounts of travellers and civil servants that reported their personal, subjective experiences of the places they had visited and people they had come in contact with. Some scholars, therefore, have highlighted how zhiguai were private literary expressions which could not enter the official literary genres which listed the official, the public aspect of such accounts [see e.g. Davis, 2001]. Guai therefore comes to represent unusual tales and customs, especially at the periphery of the "civilized" pre- Han world, and therefore it also attains a specific political and sociological agenda: to convey the idea that the Han conquerors are the carrier of civilisation in a periphery of the Empire where monsters live and the border between the world of the living and the dead is somehow blurry. It is not a fantasy world that they depicts, a world which is metaphor of the physical, phenomenic universe, or is dreamy perception of the individual and collective unconscious, or a satyric description of the society, aspect which would see the light and develop as "the fantastic" in Western

literature; the universe as described in the *zhiguai* may be far in time and sometimes in place, but it is conceived as real and actually existent: it does not possess, therefore, the ethereal, dreamlike character of the fairy tales, their indistinct temporal and spatial settings, or their paradigmatic purpose towards the children; most *zhiguai* do express a morale, but it is a general teaching of reward or lack thereof of character who live according to the harmonious laws of the universe, be they Daoist, Confucian or Buddhist.

YE XIAN: A PERFECT ZHIGUAI

Ye Xian, as it was heard and retold by Duan Chenghi, was a perfect zhiguai narrative, as it fulfilled different aspects of those stories at the same time: it was a geographic retelling of customs of a peripheral part of the empire, which was "less civilised" and belonged to a different culture; it narrated of a strange animal, which could relate to the reincarnation of the dead mother of the protagonist and at the same time to the water cult; it explained some customs, and the origins of a cult place; moreover, it contained a vague moral lesson of reward and punishment. The reader can easily identify more than one of the five categories of zhiguai mentioned above, as determined by Kao: it is easily comprehensible, therefore, that Duan Chengshi who was a reporter of unusual facts happening at the periphery of the Empire and even further — described by his contemporaries as a man interested in everything that came from beyond the borders of the provinces— seized his chance and committed to paper a story which was perfect for his purposes of writer. However, something quite unexpected happened. While Kao says that "popular culture is often only the refraction of certain convictions and outlooks of high culture, as the two realms inevitably influence each other." and that many *zhiguai* could "be traced back to the cultural themes in the sanctioned belief systems of the state" [Kao, 1985: 4].
This did not happen with Ye Xian, as it remained the refined exercise of a Chinese intellectual, but did not become a successful folk tale. This tale disappeared, or was so easily transformed that it was altogether forgotten, only to reappear centuries later in other countries and in other parts of the world; nowadays, it is virtually unknown to the Chinese

and Western public and only few scholars are aware of its importance. What happened is that, as it will become clear in the analysis of the tale, it most probably did not resonate with Chinese people as it did not describe a society that was familiar to them, and examples of life they could relate to. It is quite paradoxical, in fact, that some people indicate Ye Xian as the first Cinderella written for the wrong reasons, such as the size of the shoe and the evil figure of the stepmother. As a matter of fact, it did not satisfy many of the expectation that a popular tale would, and so some of its elements were adapted to fit with the society as conceived by the Chinese public. The Ancient Tradition described by Ding Nai Dong only offers two examples, one of which is Ye Xian; Cinderella stories had to undergo severe modification in order to survive and be apt to diffusion in the Chinese cultural system, and these stories are defined by Ding as Modern Tradition. Cinderella as narrated in Ye Xian, a girl who marries a prince because of the unique features of her shoe, came back to China centuries later, probably also thanks to the Jesuits who re-imported in from Europe; this will be more apparent in the description of the constitutive elements.

IMPLICATIONS OF YE XIAN AS A ZHIGUAI

As we have stated before, one of the purposes of this work is to investigate this tale from a more global and, if possible, less Eurocentric point of view, unifying Western-based theories with perspectives related to the place of production of the single versions of the tales.

The considerations we extrapolate from our analysis of Ye Xian as a *zhiguai* are numerous and extremely important in the study of the Cinderella cycle. "By unpacking a *zhiguai* text, we can not only understand the epistemology of the strangeness, but also uncover the hidden philosophies and unconscious ideologies that circumscribe a category of strange things. What is made especially strange tends to be differences in terms of culture, politics, race, and gender" [Liu, 2015: 67].

Next question would be whether it is functional to the comparative study of our tale, and what does the acknowledgement of the genre add to analysis of the text.,and indeed there are some crucial aspects to take into consideration: there are three main points that can be extrapolated through the study of the tale as a *zhiguai*: the contextualisation, the structure of the story belonging to a particular genre, and the question of the possibility of a study through a genre non-specific perspective.

1. First of all, by taking into account the genre of the story, we delve deeply into its context, the cultural, social, historical and biographical aspects which were spurned by the theorists of structural, or textual theories, but which permit us, by analysing the context, not only to discover more on the text itself in the process of exegesis, but also on the culture in which it is told, and retold; every text, especially in the ancient societies, represent the vision of the world according to its authors and to its public. Studying Ye Xian as a zhiguai, therefore, while providing precious insights on this special version of an embryonic Cinderella, sheds light to literary rules and conventions in Ancient China, such as the lower consideration of the fiction compared to history and poetry, and the ideas of the cultural civilisation of the empire's periphery: from here, the necessity of creating a historical frame in which more fictional elements could be contained; the term *zhiguai*, as we have seen, denotes the record of an uncommon aspect of the cultural life, and study it as fairy tale without further enquiry would be reductive, to say the least: Märchen, the term used by folklorists to talk about fairy tales, is an ancient German diminutive of the word "tale", which, in turn, is related to a Germanic root related to the act of narrating: folk tale is an account transmitted among the people of a certain tradition, while a fairy tale is a story which contains magic elements. While these extraordinary elements appear in different tales from around the world, they are, in these precise version, arranged in a specific order.

2. Secondly, in fact, the genre gives us a pattern, a scheme that the author will tend to follow, as familiar to himself or herself, and to his or her public. The analysis of the

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structure, therefore, can be used as a sieve in order to single out, isolate, and identify contents while weeding out the parts which are more related to the form. In our case, it is the structure itself of the zhiguai, according to Kao, which tells us that the addition of place and time, which are so unusual in folk tales, were inserted because it responded to literary conventions of genre; it had been done before by writers, because so was expected by the audience. The material was reused, remodelled. The structure, in fact, is usually tripartite: introduction which is contains spatial and temporal settings and the presentation of the main character; the main body of the narration (which in our case, despite the new literary awareness of the writers in the Tang period, in Ye Xian appears broken and inconsistent, as though retold in a fragmentary and confused fashion); and the epilogue, which is "a meta-textual appraise of the story recounted, an explanation of the source of the story, and sometimes a brief mentioning of the descendants of the main character" [Kao, 1985:40].

It is for the purpose of justifying this record of the uncommon occurrences that the *zhiguai* contains in its structure a more varied and elaborated statement than "once upon a time": the introduction is a formulaic temporal and spatial setting which indicates when and where the facts had happened. This second point is, therefore, that no matter whether the story was true or not, it was conceived and narrated, structured as true; if one therefore, analyses one would easy identify some parts which differ from the parts of a fairy tale, especially the beginning and the end. Those are parts which would be more appropriate to historiography and, while it is justified by the genre, it is important for the third element of importance. It would be interesting to note that also the first Cinderella versions in the ancient world belonged to the history genre; should that make us believe that it was a real story? The negative answer is obvious, but it is singular how a tale from rags to riches was so successful that narrators all over the world included it in their works, even upon narrating history.

3. The third question arisen by the analysis of Ye Xian as a *zhiguai* is very important because it relates to one of the main purposes of this thesis: to demonstrate that Ye Xian represents the bridge between the ancient classical stories which contain some elements of Cinderella stories and the medieval Cinderella as an organic folk tale which possesses most of the elements which characterise this story: an orphan mistreated by a step mother, animals that help, a shoe and a marriage to a person in a higher social position. The fact that the first elements of this type of tale, in fact, can be found, as we see in the chapter dedicated to the Cinderella cycle, in the works of two historiographers of the Ancient Greek world: Herodotus and Strabo, centuries before Ye Xian, encourage one to consider that, long before the formation of the tale itself, important themes were present in narratives in zones of the world far apart, and were retold according to the cultural system of their production.

How should these shreds of tradition, appearing incidentally in various literary phenomena, be studied? They are not formal fairy tales, nor are they folk tales in a strict sense, as sometimes they do not seem to reflect a tradition, but they are presented as hearsays and retelling of real occurrences. Classicists and folklorists have very different points of view towards these recurrent motifs, which probably depends on the fact that "unlike folk narrative scholars, mythologists did not undergo a typological phase in the development of their discipline" [Hansen, 1997:278]: that means that, except for the 1928 *Handbook of Greek Mythology* by H.J. Rose, they have not had a tool of classification like the Aarne-Thompson which, while flawed and outdated, still provides an indispensable instrument to the study of tale types. The union of classicists and mythologists on the one hand, and of folklorists on the other, never occurred because, as we have seen in the chapter dedicated to folklore, folklore became in the 19th century a discipline by itself, while mythology remained part of the curriculum of the linguists expert in Old Greek and Latin, therefore inextricably intertwined with the study of the old languages: "their problem sprang in part from a conceptual vagueness and in part from the lack of a standard system of reference for the international tale" [Hansen, 1997:276].

No wonder, then, that usually the approach of the classicists in general much less rigid and less explanatory than the classicists' one: for example an important book that undergoes the task of collecting elements of the fairy tales in the ancient world is Graham Anderson's *Fairy tales in the ancient world,* and the confusion between terms familiar to folklorists is quite evident "most of Anderson's material should be considered components (motifs and themes) rather than full folktale variants" [Goldberg, . An especially interesting but at the same time quite vague, is a diachronical approach, for example the concept of "migratory story" used by Hansen in his work, in *Classical Mythology: A Guide to the Mythical World of the Greeks and Romans* but also in *Ariadne's thread*, in which he analyses myths, folk tales and fairy tales whose traces can be found in different cultural environments all around the world., Hansen provides a definition in the introduction of his book, where he explains how "ancient parallels to modern international folk tale sometimes agree and sometimes disagree with regard to the genre in which they are expressed" [Hansen, 2002:15]: myth, *novelle*, animal tale, lying tale and legends all share same elements, same motifs and usually same purpose, which is basically the entertainment of people of all age. A great difference, nonetheless, is plain to see: "Modern tales take place in anonymous localities, are set in an indefinite past...and features generic characters who are nameless or bear conventional folk names,… whereas ancient Greek stories typically are situated in real places…, are located in a definite point in the flow of time, and are peopled by allegedly historical characters. Simply put, the difference is between narratives treated like fictional and narratives treated like historical… The generic frame affects the structure and contents of narratives" [Hansen, 2002:9].

It appears evident, then, that this type of information must be taken into account when texts belonging to the ancient world are studied; in fact, although fiction was a minor genre in China and in classical Greece, (with the exception of the epic poetry, which, however, was considered "authentic", an informative synthesis of the heroic past) [see Elmer, 2013].This factor, then, influenced the structure of the text, the pieces of information contained in it, and connects it to historiographical expectations of the public, instead of dealing with

children's tales and with a fantastic world. All this elements present in different cultural systems were adapted to the new ones they got in contact with, in a conventional genre, according to some guidelines, through the process of "the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads the work"[Hermans, 2004:127].

GENRE NON-SPECIFIC STUDY

The fact that the genre in which Ye Xian was written , according to which we classify this story and which was the inspiration for this author, though, does not mean that this history can and should be studied only within the boundaries of Chinese culture. We have shown how, while the considerations of the genres provide precious information, at the same time they should be considered as container of elements present in different cultural systems; even more so for genres like the *zhiguai*, in which factuality and fictionality mix inextricably, the authorship is often called into question and many structural elements are accessories as the would retell according to the canonical rules of composition, so one aspect did not exclude the other: "*zhiguai* challenges categorical dichotomies –history vs. fiction, natural vs. supernatural, and belief vs. disbelief – and occupies a liminal status in between"[Liu,2015:V]

There are many a reason why one must take into account folklore theories in the study of this story; the first is that this story belongs to a global tradition of similar tales across the world, and this form, written as a *zhiguai,* is only a version of the universal, world-wide known Cinderella: we have the proof of this, and we can insert this story into the Cinderella cycle due to the presence, in the story, of various elements, or motifs, that were present in former narratives and are present in very similar form in the subsequent stories: and the classification of this story as a Cinderella enables us to use folklore theories in order to study it.

The other reason, also exposed in the chapter on folklore, is that, although written in a formal style by an intellectual, the story describe beliefs and traditions of the folk, more specifically, as expressed by Robert Campagny, the extraordinary story, worth mentioning, set in a remote area of the kingdom, a *guai* occurrence in the peripheral world of the Chinese empire. In the southern provinces a slave, Li Shiyuan, describes people living in caves or rural settlements, participating in rural gatherings, breeding fish, and weaving shoes. Moreover, according to Karl Kao, *zhiguai* was a hearsay of the folk, so it was the transcription, considered as factual, of hearsays belonging to the lore of a community, mostly illiterate; the extremely notable character is, however, that the people described by the story were not Han Chinese, as they belonged to the periphery and therefore were a minority, a tribe whose customs were unusual, and that is probably one reason why it did not succeed in spreading and becoming a popular story among the Chinese.

The question, then, is whether it is possible to establish a framework to study and analyse tales coming from different traditions, different cultural systems and belonging to genres which greatly diverge from one another. This question, which in the writer's opinion is crucial, as it questions the validity of previous collections of tale which were classified without discussing their origin and cultural background, inquires whether it is possible to find a general theoretical framework to the study of the tales, and, if so, which one it could be. So far, Alan Dundes probably tried to answer the question of the comparison as exposed in the chapter of folklore, by saying that there is not real comparison without a unit of measurement; this unit, according to him, is the motif, but not as vaguely conceived by Aarne and Thompson, but rather as structural, and therefore "textual" parts of the narrative; as the most famous formalist who worked on the structure of the tale was Vladimir Propp, it seems logical that the choice should fall on his theories.

Another scholar who faced the problem and came out with a similar response is Peter Gilet, who uses a term to be used for all these stories: "wonder tales", instead of folk tale or fairy tale, or even legend or myth; this term is particularly appropriate as it susceptible to unify stories whose common element is the presence of the supernatural, rather than the

didactic purpose, or the explanation of some local tradition or some cosmogonic exegesis. Gilet discusses distinct folklore theories, starting from Socrates, passing through all the systems mentioned above, from the ones who tried to explain myths and legend as relics of old rites, dreams, the cult of the ancestors worship, etc., to the ones who focused on the study of the structure of the text, on the characters and on the motifs. He calls the former "textual theories" and the latter "contextual theories"; he also identifies some miscellaneous positions, and he tries to provide his own paradigm, modifying, and simplifying, Propp's system of functions. He analyses different tales trying to apply both textual and contextual methods, that is, focusing on the structure of the text, and imagining explanations based on the cultural background. In the conclusions, he affirms clearly that he thinks that the problem in the study of the folklore is that all the previous theories were either textual or contextual, and that a model to study the stories from both points of view was missing. He suggests that there might be "an initiatory archetype inherent in the human condition" [Gilet, 1998:147], relating therefore the origin of the Wonder Tale to a process of initiation to the adulthood, in which the young person passes through stages of experience in what he defines The Other World, before reaching their place in the tribal society.

Gilet is not the first to create a connection between initiation and folk tale: among others Bruno Bettleheim, for example, describes Cinderella itself as a girl's passage from the life of a child to the life of a sexually mature woman, dealing with the drudgery of her new status, in conflict with her mother- stepmother and her sister, and in need of some magic help in order to conquer the marital status: but, unlike Bettelheim and other folklorists of the psychoanalytical school, he attempts to provide a methodology and a paradigm of analysis to these stories.

The definition of wonder tale is very good and Gilet's attempt is valuable, providing a contextual explanation for the functions of the tale; nevertheless, he chooses to use a new and adapted scheme of Propp's, whose validity has been called into discussion, even by his user[see Dundes, 1964]; Xiaohuan Zhao also analyses zhiguai stories using the Propp's

functions, modifying it partially (as Propp never claimed universality to his model, and therefore the choice of its model seems the most obvious due to its diffusion among scholars of folklore and literature in general.

Supporting Gilet's thesis, however, I do regard Propp's model as overcomplicated and susceptible of simplification: therefore my analysis will pivot on the agents or *dramatis personae* of the story, namely the protagonist, the antagonist and the helpers, with the addition of the magic object and the social gathering that marks the development of the story and the future of the protagonist.

The structure in general is then tackled, with its peculiarities as zhiguai, its formal irregularities and its obscure points, in order to investigate it, as much as possible, from within the cultural boundaries and from a folkloristic, comparative perspective.

The discourse of the genre is, in the writer's opinion, one of the most interesting and useful tools to the comparative studies of stories such as Ye Xian, whose elements are found in different traditions according to which they are modelled, but at the same time are universal, or at least present in numerous and diverse cultures across the globe; I am referring to tales of the Good and Bad Sister, the tale known as "Turandot" in which a prince must accomplish some tasks in order to gain the hand of the princess, or stories related to a deluge from which only few people and animals survive, and they have to repopulate the earth.

The paradigm I try to offer here is similar to the one put forward by a scholar of comparative literature, Franco Moretti [see Moretti, 2000] that is to unify the close reading of several specialists in the different national literatures, who at the same time have enough notions of Comparative and World literature in order to interact with other scholars for the construction of a comparative analysis

If either of these elements, the general and the specific, is not taken into account, it is extremely difficult that a comparative analysis be carried out, as a strive of opposite forces will be present between the specialists of a national literature, with their competence in the

language and the tradition, and the comparatists whose abilities consist in discover connections and similarities between different cultural systems.

Basing a literary study on a genre, intended more as a cultural model to which the writers tend to adapts their work as familiar both to them and to their audience rather than a theoretical categorisation by later scholars, is not only useful, but essential as by ignoring the genre, we would ignore the context and therefore the cultural connotations of a literary text. On the other hand, though, one must be aware that a genre is most frequently little more than a container in which the content is poured, and it is extremely important to consider it in order to separate the content from the form; both, in fact, change accordingly to each different cultural system, as they both respond to its specific exigences and expectations, and distinguishing form and content enable us to compare the specific aspects related to one field of the other. One example might be the invocation of the Muse at the beginning of the epic poetry; far from being a confession of faith in a divinity, it represents an almost obligated ouverture to the recital of the poem; and we would not be able of analysing the Odyssey if we did not know that the *nostoi,* the homeward journeys narrating the adventures of illustrious mythological figures were a common literary topos in the pre-classic Greek literature and Homer's work was only one of the many produced in that period.

In our case, as seen above, the structural analysis of the genre permits us to identify and isolate the elements which can be characterised as "historical" as dictated by the literary conventions which saw the narration as almost inextricably intertwined with factual record in order to be held in higher regard by the audience. Not only does this kind of analysis sort out the formal characteristics of the text in order to weed out the elements which do not belong to the content, and therefore leave the substance of the story to be juxtaposed to other texts; at the same time it sheds light on the culture by which it was adapted and transformed providing precious information about the cultural system of reference. The study of these stories, carriers of themes which travelled across the world assuming different shapes, must not be restrained to the genre, as its motifs are often universal; but

the genre should be taken into account in order to contextualise correctly avoiding a biased (usually Western-trained) approach to the story; one should therefore attempt to investigate the different versions of a story contextualising it in its literary environment, but simultaneously being able of identifying the universal, travelling themes in order to make a real comparison which singles out the motifs without overlooking the cultural ambience of the text, its redactor and its audience.

2.2.3   The Religious Discourse

Religion is not univocally related to the Sinological approach; on the contrary, religions and their cultural aspect are very often studied as folkloric or anthropological aspects of a society. My choice of providing a brief glance to the religious aspects traceable in Ye Xian is connected to the three major systems of belief traditionally present in the Chinese area of cultural influence: Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism.

As seen in the chapter on folklore, folk tales adapt to the different cultural system they are retold in order to be understandable and to bear significance among their listeners. This process of adaptation is what has been used by scholars in order to recreate the pattern of diffusion and sometimes even the origin of some tales circulated By identifying resemblances between the components of a tale, and their specific occurrences (what Alan Dundes calls "motifemes") and a particular cultural system, some correlations can be traced between them which can indicate the adaptation, and therefore the circulation, of a tale. One example, in Cinderella stories, is the different identity of the Helper which can suggest different settings and retelling more in accordance with different cultural systems: different species of trees are present in most of the earliest versions, cows and water

buffaloes are normal in regions where these animals are a crucial part of everyday life, and they are substituted by fish and turtles in other territories such as Southern China and Vietnam, birds in Europe, and so on.

One of the aims of this work, however, is to disprove some of the hurried association made on Ye Xian and other stories of the Cinderella cycle by scholars who were not too familiar with either Chinese Ancient culture or Classical Literature. One of the concepts I have invalidated is, for example, that the shoe as a token necessarily signify an Eastern, or even Chinese origin; while shoes were important in rural China, it is important to remember that foot-binding and the obsession for the female foot size became later in China, and that stories whose protagonist loses a shoe and is then married by a prince thanks to it date back to many centuries before Chinese versions.

With the religious question, the same has happened: motifs of Ye Xian has been attributed to different religious systems, either present in China or in neighbouring countries. Many elements of Ye Xian, therefore, have been interpreted according to different traditions, mainly Buddhism and Hinduism, in order to relate this story to those lores and therefore prove the origin of this story, or at least its foreign influences.

This seems to be the main idea, for example, of Fay Beauchamp, whose study identify religious elements belonging to Hindu and Buddhist tradition.

While the work is remarkable for range and depth, some of the conclusions sound a little far-fetched, especially when the author relates Ye Xian's story almost exclusively to Zhuang minority. Basing her research also on the contacts between Zhuang and ancient Indian cultural systems, she asserts that many of the motifs of this story derive from the Indian epic poem Ramayana. relating the element of multiple wives and the helping fish in Ye Xian to elements of narratives in the stories of Sita and Rama. The fact that the juxtaposition is a little daring, as wives are not rival in Ye Xian, and the fish in Ramayana is Vishnu in disguise, while in our tale is a normal fish which shows unusual affection for its owner and exceptional size.

Moreover, Ramayana is an epic poem, and the idea that folk tales come from myths is outdated. The first folklorists would relate folk tales to myths: it is the case of Saint Ives with Cinderella as the relic of a myth on Dawn. Myths are a religious explanation of the cosmology, the way people explain their origin and create a set of rules. Connecting folk tales to myths was an elitist view as it imagined that folk tales were relics of myths, therefore theorising a movement from what was considered solemn and grand to what was regarded as a minor, popular, childish genre [Boas,1916:335–343]. This conception was related to the idea that myths, especially in the classical world, were the expression of a superior race who had reached the acme of the civilisation and set the foundation of the Western culture. The key to understanding a tale like Ye Xian, however, is to regard it as the expression of popular culture. Most of the elements of Ye Xian, in fact, are the adaptation of an orally transmitted story which started circulating in southern China, and was later written down by a Tang intellectual. Folk tales originated from society's popular strata, and are therefore important carriers of information about the unofficial culture. There exist many studies, especially in China, which describe Ye Xian as a Buddhist heroine; this would be supported by the general character of Duan Chengshi's work, imbued with the then relatively new religion, especially in the karmic cause-and-effect aspect of the Buddhist teaching [Shi,2002:65-79], combined with traditional Han culture; *zhiguai* were records of unusual, peripheral and exotic aspect the authors came across, and Duan Chengshi was extremely versed in researching and retelling foreign and unusual customs, so much so that he is considered one of the main contributors to the adaptation of Buddhist tradition to Buddhist culture [Xia, 2002:11-17].

Nevertheless, some of the studies on the religious aspects of Ye Xian can be misleading; one such work, for example, tends to regard the protagonist as a perfect Buddhist heroine, while Cinderella, according to its author, is a typically Christian tale, as it depicts a tree helper, associated to the Christian symbol of the Christmas Tree, the punishing doves in Cinderella as connected to Noah's dove bringing an olive twig back to the arch, and the mutilation of the sisters to Mosaic law[Zhang, 2012]. It is well known, though, that

Christmas trees are not a Christian symbol, but a heritage from pagan cults from northern Europe, and there is no apparent connection between the magic doves and the Old Testament, and the mention of Mosaic law in connection with the sisters' self-mutilation is simply preposterous.

Ye Xian is not strictly a Buddhist story, because we see that in later tales, the ones called "Modern Tradition" by Ding Naidong, also present in Korea, the Buddhist element will become so strong that the stress will be put on the bad sister's punishment, on reincarnation and other elements more related to that tradition; in Ye Xian the listener does not understand while stepmother and especially stepsister die, how they die and why they are worshipped afterwards.

At the same time, in later stories the difference between a filial and an unfilial girls will become the most important character of the story, so much so that Tangherlini [1995] borrows Holbeck's system of polarities in folklore and add a forth polarity in Korean tales, filial versus unfilial characters, providing these stories with a much more accentuated Confucian spirit.

Ye Xian is not yet a Buddhist story, nor is it a Confucian story, as those traits will become much more apparent in later times, when the process of sinification of the peripheral parts of the empire has considerably advanced, and the story has undergone a considerable process of adaptation to the new culture.

Even reincarnation, used by some authors [De Bourboulis,1982] as a clear Buddhist feature, does not resist a more thorough examination: reincarnating into an ox, a cow or a water buffalo, apart from being degrading, is usually related to come back into an animal form to repay a debt, and a Buddhist protagonist would have been quite upset to see her mother come back as a cow, as in many south-eastern versions, or as a fish, as in Ye Xian. Reincarnation does not exist in monotheistic religions, and in Buddhism and Daoism it has its own specific features; the correlation between the dead mother and the tree or the animal helper, on the other hand, is a typically animist element which originated in popular folklore, not within official religion, and was common to most ancient populations. Sacred

tree which provided fruit or had particular characteristics, helping animals which some extraordinary features are present in the cultural substratum of all ancient cultures, as they describe a moment of civilisation when metamorphosis was still accepted and the boundaries between human, animal and vegetable kingdom were still blurred.

Every effort to ascribe Ye Xian's components to one or another religious system is therefore bound to prove inadequate, as they originated in a time, and in a place, when these religion had not yet come into existence, or they were not considered by creators and tellers of folk tales.

For example, the figure of Ye Xian as a fish breeder is juxtaposed by Beauchamps to the southern Chinese iconography of Guanyin, Buddha's Merciful Bodhisattva. While a genetic connection between the two figures is hardly conceivable, it is nonetheless observable as both figures are ecologically integrated in the system where they were present. In a zone where aquaculture was so crucial for survival, a heroine assisted by a magic animal would probably have a fish as a helper, and the incarnation of Buddha which represented generosity and provided succour and support in dire moments would have most probably been related to fish and water. Rather than a genetic interaction between these two elements, one should imagine a convergent evolution according to which figures with similar nature are conceived and depicted with similar appearance and characteristics. Elements of Ye Xian indicate that a foreign story about a poor girl who, thanks to her sandal being brought to a prince, ends up marrying him, would have deeply resonated with southern Chinese culture, where home-spun shoes were highly prized as a match-mating gift. The story therefore assumed a form which made more sense for its listeners, starting a process of adaptation which would last centuries. Ye Xian, therefore, is the first example, at least up to today, which can provide precious information about this passage. The broken narrative, the reference to three different helpers and to unknown place, along with some cultural translation issues, prove that this was one of the most ancient retelling of this story which, for its dissimilarity with the culture it came in contact with, had a relatively limited

success, and became quite different in later versions which responded more to the cultural needs of its listeners, transforming into a Buddhist and Confucian story.

Ye Xian virtually disappeared for centuries, only to come back as a splendid example of adaptation several centuries afterwards.

2.3 The Folklorist's perspective
2.3.1. Why folklore Theories

According to the most common definitions of folklore, our tale should not, apparently, be studied as belonging to this area of studies: in fact, the term folklore was apparently created in 1846 by the writer William Thoms, who intentionally substituted the more more common terms, at that time, of "popular antiquities" and "popular lore". By doing this, he attempted to formalise a tendency that had commenced at the beginning of the 19th century, with the birth of the concept of nationalism all throughout Europe; at that time, the collection of what was considered the cultural expression of the illiterate rural masses was regarded as vital for the survival of the national identity of the single countries. Our text, however, is inserted in an utterly different set of circumstances, in a remote time in the past, so that the connotations of the recording are ascribable to distinct reasons and purposes. First of all, Duan Chengshi's work is not what would be strictly defined as "popular" literature, as he does not declare that his work is to give voice to the masses, or to save their culture threatened to fall into oblivion; it is true, on the other hand, that he stated that his accounts, for the most part, were redactions of story he had previously heard personally, and therefore they were faithful transcriptions of events transmitted orally by people; not all the oral literature is folklore,"by itself [oral transmission] is not sufficient to distinguish folklore from non-folklore" [Dundes,1965], but oral transmission was the only

possible for people with virtually no access to writing, the lower classes of the society; also, he adds that this particular story had been told to him by his servant Li, whose origins were in the South of the Tang Empire. This provide us with two precious elements: the narrator was a person from a lower class, a servant, and he came from another region with cultural characteristics distinctively different from the dominant Han culture which were, however, slowly being swallowed by the conquerors. One might wonder, then, whether Duan was trying, by transcribing his faithful servant's tale, to save part of the disappearing culture of his subordinate, whose account was described as a legend about a specific past, and specific places. Some elements, however, seem to point to a different interpretation. First of all, the concepts that were valid in the 19th century's Europe were virtually unknown centuries before, as literature was seen as the written articulation of the elite, and the popular art was not usually respected as a patrimony to save, but rather disregarded as an uneducated, inferior expression of the lowest classes.

As for the record, by the hand of the conqueror, of the remains of the conquered, Ding Nai Dong seems to suggest that the culture of Chinese minorities in the ancient times was not so distant from the Han culture: there was a common language, and most of the members of different ethnic groups could communicate and share cultural patrimony [Ding, 1974:7], and therefore what drove Duan was not an intention to represent a piece of a disappearing world, but most probably the desire of a curious traveller and writer to record events happened, or believed to have happened, among other communities of people with different backgrounds. We must also add that collectors of fairy tales have always presented themselves as faithful scribes of the popular tales, with no literary intent — although it is well known that even the Grimm brothers, among the first to gather popular fairy tales in their beloved Germany, while officially putting into writing popular tales, were in fact mixing different version in order to create a different one which they considered to be the most suitable for their purpose). Duan Chengshi, on the other hand, had in mind that his reader were to be aristocrats and other members of the elite and, although his style in this books differs greatly from the one used in his more official

literary production, such as 诗 *shi* poetry, it is nonetheless to be considered a literary creation, as he was under no social, moral of cultural obligation of depicting events as he had heard them, as the main purpose of his work was to entertain his readers.

So, the question remains why we claim our right to apply folklore theory to a text that does not admittedly belong to a compilation of strictly popular tales, nor is it an attempt to put into writing the tale of some tribe that lived in small dwellings in Southern China.

The application of the folklore system and method is justified by two main reasons: first of all, regardless of the purpose, the tale can be considered, for its content, a reproduction of some customs and traditions of a society, of part of it: by telling us the story of a mistreated girl who rose from rags to riches, Duan Chengshi contributes to providing information not only on those people's habits and tradition, but also on their social organisation and ethics, as we will see in the chapter on the specific constitutive elements. Secondly, this story is present in different versions in international folklore and is one of the many variants, influenced by the cultural system it was retold, of a story whose features had circulated for centuries, and will circulated for century afterwards, until it was put into writing in the 17th and 19th centuries in Europe by Perrault and the Grimm brothers.

As for the first reason, folklore, especially at the beginning of the study of discipline, was considered different from other fields of human studies, as, unlike anthropology, it pivoted on phenomena that could be depicted as parts of a tradition: and Ye Xian can indeed be considered as such under many points of view. First of all, the story depicts some habits of a lost world, which had already vanished by the time the story was written: a time in which mistreated girls could meet a king and end up marrying him, and people dwelt in caves; secondly, it contains some magic elements belonging to a culture still bound to animistic expressions of the divine, such as goldfish which grow to an enormous size and bestow magic gifts and people descending from the sky; lastly, it includes a legend, when it tries to explain why a burial mound has its name. All this characteristics make this text susceptible to be studied as part of folklore tradition, as it carries information of the old customs and beliefs of an ancient society.

The other motive that legitimises the application of folklore theory to Ye Xian is the presence of so many elements that indicate a foreign origin of the tale or, at least, that make it susceptible of being compared to other stories studied as folk tales according to the comparative method, which we will discuss further in this chapter. According to this method, we can set a framework based on the juxtaposition of tales from all over the world from a global and international point of view. Accounts which are very different from each other and belong to radically different cultural systems have been studied and analysed comparatively since the early stage of folkloristcs, and it is actually one the cornerstone of the whole discipline: what made these stories susceptible of comparison were the profound similarities they showed regardless of their origin, and making scholars wonder whether the tales belonging to different ethnic groups were actually proceeding from the same source or rather, whether societies went through the same stages in evolution and therefore produced similar cultural and literary phenomena. The traditional comparative method has its shortcomings in its first forms, but it is purpose of this thesis to show how this method, modified according some epistemological lines, is still valid in the study of literature and, more specifically, folklore.

2.3.2 Folklore: theories on the origins

Folklore has a long history and has undergone profound changes. In its development, different forms of this discipline were used in order to respond different conceptions of civilisation and purposes.

"Folkloristics is the scientific study of folklore just as linguistics is the scientific study of language. [. . .] It implies a rigorous intellectual discipline with some attempt to apply theory and method to the materials of folklore" [Dundes, 1978:VII].

The definition we have is the one of the most known and controversial folklorists of the 20th century, Alan Dundes; long before, though, had the question "What is the study of

folklore?" arisen. Not long after Thoms, as we have seen, had used for the first time the word "folklore", the word folkloristics was used as the study of this heterogeneous material: again, according to Alan Dundes, this term was first introduced in an address by Charles Leland in 1889 in a speech during the Hungarian Folklore Society and compared as "Die Folkloristik" [See Dundes, 2004:386].

Since then, the study of the discipline has faced many a variation especially concerning the epistemological foundations of the field, rather the methodology: in fact, as we will show in the next chapter, what is known as comparative method has been and remains, despite some changes, the preferred and probably the most functional tool in folklore research, while the reasons why folklore is studied, and the concepts of folk and lore themselves have radically changed from the beginning of the theory to the modern days.

Before becoming a discipline based on textual studies, in fact, folklore went through different stages during the 19th and the first decades of the 20th century, when folklore, mythology, anthropology and other fields were still inextricably intertwined. The most important processes in its history were characterised first, especially in the Victorian era in the United Kingdom, by a mystical approach to folk material as an inventory of curiosities and relics of ancient myths, and then, mainly in Scandinavian countries, as a tool for the creation of territorial identities: the authors campaigned for distinctiveness and analogy between tradition of different areas spurred by ardent nationalism.

While some authors who have studied Ye Xian were still influenced by these theories, the analysis of this thesis avails itself mainly of the textual approaches emerged in the 20th century.

Textual approaches

The idea of folklore is nowadays very different from the antiquarian concept of preserving traces of disappearing cultures: instead, it is now considered by some scholars to be a dynamic, alive field which widely interests contemporary society. "It is not something

relegated to primitivized others—historically or socially—but rather a behavioral pattern that everyone exhibits." [Bronner, 2007:1]. This shift of orientation was mostly due to what Peter Gilet defines as "The pragmatic reaction" [Gilet,1998:23] in the study of folklore: after decades of studies oriented to find an almost mythological explanation of folklore material, and after its instrumental usage of folklore for nationalistic purposes, this field, along with other disciplines related to literature, underwent a profound change. The focus of the subject shifted from context to text, and the starting point of the analytical process became therefore the latter. Instead of looking for hidden information and subtext, scholar concentrated on the internal structure of the text, which was a more concrete object of studies. Structuralism, Formalism and Narratology are some of the names used for different aspects of this conceptual revolution, which provided a completely new, more scientific character to the study of literature.

As a matter of fact, the previous character of predominant interest in folklore context rather than the study of its texts is one of the motives of the crisis of folklore in later times: anthropology and social sciences were already focused on the critical approach in their methodology, and therefore folklorists thought that their discipline should be based on texts and their interpretation, as otherwise it would have undergone a serious challenge, mostly for "its critical contribution to the politics of interpretation" [Gencarella, 2009:172], In fact, the more the discipline drifted away from its initial object of study, the more it appeared quite evident that its definition and boundaries started overlapping other contiguous fields of studies (as it still does). It is true that "While the discipline of folklore has long sought to accurately document traditional elements of culture, many folklorists have shied away from the critical assessment of folkloric expression"`[Howard, 2013:74]. The two most important textual theories, the historic-geographical method and structuralism, will be explained in the following chapter.

Other contemporary folklore theories: anthropological and psychoanalytical

While the comparative method on the one hand, Structuralism on the other remain the most used method for the study of traditional folklore, with the risk of focusing solely on the text neglecting contextual elements important for the interpretation of folklore, psychological interpretation has dominated the last decades of the 20th century, when many scholars, from the psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim to the folklorist Alan Dundes, have shown us the multiple implications of fairy tales and other folklore expression as imagery of the different stages of the evolution of a child and also as the most natural and basic needs of a restricted group of people, generally suffocated by civilisation through the analysis of folklore's destabilising and irreverent vein [see Bascom, 1954].

There exist more theories that have been used so far, some of which will be considered during the analysis of the motifs, but not in a detailed manner, as they are not regarded, for this specific case, as a method of interpretation, but rather as a source of enlightenment in the discussion of the particular figures present in fairy tales, legends and myths. Two particular theories are especially illuminating when it comes to identifying the background in the composition of a narrative: the anthropological one, and the psychoanalytical one.

Anthropological theory

The anthropological theory of folklore would be quite complex to explain, as folklore and anthropology were not even two separate fields of study until recent times, and the objects of their respective area are not clearly identified: since the beginning of the disciplines, the two of them were strictly intertwined in both methods and domains, and still there are grey zones. As a general rule, anthropology studies social and cultural phenomena of a human group, and tales are therefore a fundamental part of the field; there are some specific cases, though, in which anthropology and folklore can conflict, and this is usually when it comes to studying fairy tales (or similar, equivalent cultural expressions) as representative expressions of a society, when we find recurrent elements in the tales of a tribe or a group, such as anthropophagy or abandonment of children, without these being descriptive

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features of a community, but rather representative its anxieties and primal fears "an oral literature does not mirror the external life, but projects the stresses and anxieties of the culture" [Dorson, 1963:103]. Anthropology, moreover, aims to explain patterns of social behaviour, and a tale is also somehow a personal creation of an author who, on the other hand, respects his or her cultural system in order to be understood and appreciated, which can be relate to Duan Chenshi's expressive choices in response to his cultural system, and it is called individual style as opposed to tribal style [see Benedict,1935] Anthropology, on the whole, has contributed to the comparative method by trying to explain why the characteristics are similar, instead of comparing analytically elements and motifs, and such has been the criticism that the anthropological school has moved against the comparative one, without any pretension of substituting it, or offering a different method, but rather with the idea of integrating, which is exactly how it is going to be used: in order to see the motifs in context, a cultural analysis is crucial.

The other important theory which has attempted to heal the rift between analytical comparative method in its quest for the Ur form and the human experience of folklore has been the psychological one.

Psychoanalytical theory

This theory substituted the old idea of folklore as an expression of heavenly phenomena, or the transposition of rites of passage, with sexual symbolism which relates to Freudian and, later, Jungian theories of dreams and suppressed libido. The psychoanalytical school of folklore, despite being "the most abhorrent to orthodox folklorists" [Dorson, 1963:105] has been widely used, especially after the contributes of Erich Fromm and Bruno Bettelheim, who embraced the Freudian conception in myths (Fromm) and fairy tales (Bettelheim) as substitution of sexual fear of castration, adjustment to new roles in the family and other stressful moments in the social and familiar contexts. Bettelheim, as a matter of fact, borrowed also the Jungian worldwide accepted theory of a collective subconscious to which we relate through archetypes that manifest themselves in myths, legends and fairy tales.

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Apart from Freud and Jung, whose analysis was based on symbolism, Campbell, with his *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, is considered one of the greatest exponents of the psychological school, and indeed he provides fundamental insights in the study of myths, and the trials and tribulations of the hero such as separation, labours and return as archetypal phenomena in the evolution of a collective group as representative of a society. This research deals with folklore in the original sense of the term, as its purpose is the study of a text created in the 10th century, and its role in the international scenario of the study of Cinderella, taking into account the specific implications of the genres in different cultural systems. While the invention of the textual methods has provided folklore studies with a more scientific character, the phenomena are usually so complex that, as in this case, interdisciplinarity is needed to delve deeper into the study of a tale. Textual theories, included the one utilised in this research, namely Historical-Geographic method and Structuralism, tend to overlook the cultural ecology of different civilisations, and therefore only superficially deal with the social, historical and cultural context of every single version: it is in fact virtually impossible to master the knowledge of several cultural context when innumerable versions are compared, as it happened in the classical comparative method. Structuralism too, while it offers a more handful tool to comparison by identifying functions and *dramatis personae*, more effective than motifs and tale types, does not take into account the living phenomenon of folklore as a retelling and an adaptation of material to diverse environments.

Therefore, the anthropological context and the consideration of the variations of the archetypes are important to analyse the elements from a more complex point of view. The choices of Ye Xian's author, his rendition and the later success, or lack of, of this story respond to precise anthropological conditions; the recognition of archetypes such as rivalry between siblings, mistreatment by a stepmother, redemption from rags to riches are important premises of the comparative analysis, as they explain how these universal concepts have been differently adapted to the various environments: for instance, the king

that the protagonist marries becomes a candidate of the imperial exams, for the specific aloofness of the Chinese royal family.

Anthropological and psychoanalytical methods, therefore, are used in this thesis as supplementary tools of investigation to accompany the two textual theories examined in the next chapter, the historical-geographic method, which provide us with the premises of comparison, and Structuralism, which furnishes epistemological categories for the study of the text.

a)   Historical Geographic Method

The idea of comparing folklore is as old as the discipline itself. The necessity of comparison in folklore is, therefore, one the most important characteristics of the discipline. That made Andrew Lang, one of the fathers of folklore who wrote a precious introduction to the first known monographs on Cinderella in 1893, once state that comparison *is* the way to study folklore. That is, comparison is able not only to create a cross-cultural interpretation of an item of folklore, but it also creates the basis for the discussion on what elements are to be compared and, thanks to the juxtaposition with similar elements, it helps identifying a singular typology and therefore its study.

This purpose, which is nowadays the banner under which the supporters of the method express their appreciation, was, especially at the beginning of the discipline, conflated with other specific aims.

The idea of comparing folklore is as old as the discipline itself. Some scholars ascribe the paternity of the method to the Grimm Brothers, especially Jacob, for his philological endeavour in the study of the German language and folklore "Comparative folktale scholarship owes its existence to the Grimms" [Goldberg, 2010:21]. Others, nonetheless, seem to consider Finland the birthplace of the method, while all agree on the fact that it originated in the 19th century as an adaptation of perspective to study philology (that is, the discipline

that combines history and linguistics) to folklore, following the discovery of the Indo-European common origin of modern languages.

Scholars of Folklore borrowed the concept and, quite early in the discipline, it gave birth to what is known under different names: "comparative method", "historic(al)-geographic", or simply "Finnish method". Those terms are very often use as equivalent to each other, but they differ slightly in conception and usage. Profoundly indebted to Romanticism but also Positivism, the historical-geographic method mirrors this apparent contradiction borrowing the concept of scientific analysis grounded on evidence from the latter, but inextricably bound to the affirmation of European national identities. The first scholar to conceive the method, Kaarle Krohn, had his own aims when he published in 1926 *Die folkloristische Arbeitsmethode Begründet von Julius Krohn und weitergeführt von nordischen Forschern , 'The Working Method for Folklore Studies: Founded by Julius Krohn and Further Developed by Nordic Researchers';* he wanted to create a universal methodology for the study of folklore, but his and his father's studies on *Kalevala* initially wanted to explain how the different poems and fragments which composed the *Kalevala* were distributed in more than a regional area, but they could be classified hierarchically, therefore composing map of diffusion which ultimately proved or at least suggested the origins of the poems.

In it, Krohn affirmed that folklore is governed by rules whose validity is nearly scientific, similarly to the laws of linguistics, but distinct from the ones of every other discipline. His merit, therefore, was not only to set the basis for the comparative method, but also the acknowledgement of folklore as a subject *per se,* with its own specific features and methods, and not just a branch of anthropology or ethnography. Soon Krohn's method would be defined as Finnish method or, as we have seen, as Classic Historic-Geographic method; despite the emphasis he placed on the Northern researches as main actors of the creation of this methodology, Krohn actually aspired to an international, cross-national structure susceptible of approaching the study of this new subject on a global scale. Comparison is par excellence the way a fairly tale is studied either to find its origin, its early variants, or to carry out a cross-cultural study; even psychological and

anthropological study entails comparison, as the tale is study in its earliest forms that are usually cruder and are more directly linked to archetypes, and the anthropological perspective attempts to explain the relations between societies and their folklore. It is quite evident, therefore, that in its origins folklore served two purposes, which apparently contrast each other: one was to prove a common origin, while the other was to highlight differences among the different traditions in the same areas. It is not a mere coincidence that folklore as a discipline was born in Finland, which at that time was fighting for its independence from Russia and later, Sweden; and Swedish scholars, on the other hand, highlighted traits of the folkloric tradition shared by both Finland and Sweden to to endorse a common origin.

The Historical-Geographic method is originally identified with the original methodological process aiming, through the diachronic study of a folk tale, to (re)construct the *Ur form*s of individual traditions; the method itself is a crucial part of the study, rather that being just used as a tool, and its main feature is the search for the Ur form, named after the city of Ur, believed to be one of the most ancient urban centres in the world, and which was considered, at the beginning of the study of folklore, the text or the tale that originated all the others.

The definition of the methodology of comparative method has never been very simple, because its premises have always been quite confused: just one single type of story or tradition was taken into account (therefore already creating the problem of defining and identifying single types); different versions were therefore collected where possible, and a geographical analysis was carried out; at the same time, the versions were studied diachronically. Thompson affirmed quite early in the study of the fairy tale that Krohn's conclusion, and his own, were that "Only by special studies on each story, based always on as large a number of versions as possible, could one hope to reach real knowledge of the facts" [Goldberg,1984:2].

The process of gathering the material, classifying it and reconstructing its history and diffusion were what the classic method consisted in.

"Modelled as it was on philological reconstruction and biological classification, the comparative approach to folklore was intended to reveal groups and hierarchies that were empirically valid" [Goldberg, 2010:22-23]. Comparison, as a form of classification, offered a revolutionary view, as it transported folklore from the realm of imaginary and open interpretation to the scientific approach.

The Index of Folktales was an ambitious plan in the folklore research, as it had been born by the desire of Kaarle Krohn to reunite and compare all the folk tales of its native Finland in a scheme which was at the same time complete but also readily accessible to the scholars interested in the field; the delicate work was commissioned to Antti Aarne and came out n 1910 as the first edition of what will become a tool still widely used in folklore: *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography,* a list of types of fairy tales, or better, *Marchen,* classified according the motifs which appear in them; motifs that are usually occurrences, or characters, and their identification can be termed "controversial". This index, along other merits, provided for the first time an account which intended to be exhaustive on fairy tales only, so that it did not include Sagen (legends), religious stories of conversion and miracles and story connected with toponymy and aetiology, therefore identifying fairy tales for what they represented in folklore (curiously enough, Ye Xian contains a toponym, and this is another prove of the fluidity of elements geographically, and their adaptation to different genres). The system created by Anti Aarne was universally recognised for its utility, and underwent many minor changes which were intended to enhance the scope of the work and integrate it with new discoveries, but which did not criticised its core, first by the Norwegian scholar Reidar Christiansen, and later on, in 1928, by the american folklorist Stith Thompson, author of *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* and *The Folktale) and revisited and corrected by the same Thompson in* 1961 and known, nowadays, as the Aarne-Thompson classification system, Aarne-Thompson, AT, orAaTh .

The system was revised even further in 2004 by Hans-Jorg Uther with the publication of *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography, which criticises the shortcomings of the previous authors, without changing the foundations of the work.*

The Aarne-Thompson classification attempts to be systematic and contains hundreds of important data which have proven crucial for the study of the folklore.

Just to show how the system works, if we were to classify Ye Xian, we would have to look for the category "Supernatural helper", number 500 to 559; tales of Supernatural, however, usually contain supernatural helpers but the authors, quite arbitrarily, choose to focus on the helpers in this case; Ye Xian, furthermore, is not strictly speaking an Indo-European tale, although its characteristics show beyond a shadow of a doubt that our story belong to a tradition which evades the frontiers imposed by traditional studies of the discipline. As a matter of fact, 510A is known as "Persecuted Heroine" and it describes perfectly the story of our Chinese girl; in Europe, however, the tale is related to two other tales: "Unnatural love" 510B ", which we will later see in the story of our tale as "Catskin", and 511,"One-Eye, Two-Eyes, Three-Eyes" which will also mentioned along the development of this piece of research.

Honko's Tripartite System of Comparative Method

The folklorist Lauri Honko proposed, in 1986, a radical discussion of the theoretical approaches of the method: first and foremost, the different possibilities offered by the comparison of different versions of the tale.

The basis itself of comparison is complex and, the more complex, the richer and more exhaustive will be the results. The complexity of methodology implies a plural approach: "there is more theoretical flexibility and more level or dimensions of research that may be utilised not only separately but also in various combinations." [Honko, 1986:110]

He then passes to indicating three aspects of the comparative process that should be taken into account upon analysing with this method any piece of folklore: the tradition-phenomenological, the tradition-ecological, and the tradition-historical dimensions.

Despite being quite unknown, this three-dimensional methodology is very useful when applied to the study of types of folk tales, as it enables the scholars to find the subtlest implications of a given tradition. Phenomenological analysis creates a system before researching and collecting; historical does not conceive a system; ecological tradition is the

study of a tradition within a system which is real and existent, such as a linguistic or cultural system.

Phenomenological

What he called "phenomenological dimension" is the study based on what he defines as phenomena only, and therefore do not need to possess genetic affinity: these phenomena can be defined more etic than emic, that is, as explained below, they are more of a theoretical construction based on scholarly agreement than real occurrences, because phenomena in culture, while based on concrete manifestations of incidents in history. can be defined only by phenomenologists, which tend to organise them in abstract structures. Phenomenological categories are lasting, independent even from cultural change and universal, as they are found globally: "they can be called moulds of frames for the basic similarity of human culture"[Honko, 1986:112] and they prove that human culture can be at the same time comparable and unique in that they express such universal elements in different fashions, and that permits and enhances the cross-cultural comparison; examples of phenomenological categories can be rituals for the bride to be, grief for the dead, and so on: they are found universally in every culture, but their expression is different based on the different culture. The danger of this kind of classification based on phenomena, according to the author, is that, even accepting that those are based on factual manifestations, they are nonetheless studied and interpreted by scholar, which may lead to oversimplification and reification as scholars may forget that transmission of culture operates on many levels, i.e. structural social, cultural, individual, and therefore are carriers of meaning in many a way which could be overlooked because of the restricted focus of a study.

Nonetheless, this dimension of comparison is extremely effective not only in getting results which are cultural bounded and therefore "individual", but also in asking questions on over-cultural and of they retain permanent and ontological elements of meaning.

The fault in the phenomenological comparison is that it studies the phenomena as occurrences without systematising the connections among them. In the study of our tale, we assume contacts and an, at least partial, genetic relationship among different versions of Cinderella, a living, factual exchange between a variant and another. By doing so, as a genetic dimension is hypothesised and therefore the ecological dimension, which focuses on the variants that occur within a system, rather that the phenomenological, is the tool for the study: a global system of communication is hypothesised, whose variants are the expression of different cultures which established contacts throughout space and time. Our comparative study of Ye Xian is not the mere juxtaposition of phenomena collected by scholars, but the study of the variants and the reasons why they are present in comparison to other variants.

Ecological

While phenomena are studied according to a system imagined by scholars, the transmission of a tradition as experienced by a community, society and individuals are known as "ecological": the system here is less a theoretical construction than a real set of interaction within which the variants occur and affect one another: if we assume a genetic connection between those variants as connected across continents and seas, we are already considering a macro-ecological system, as we imagine navigation routes and intercontinental exchange: the study, therefore, does not consist in a mere juxtaposition of similar occurrences, but a study of their interdependence. Phenomena are never part of a system until they are placed side by side by a scholar: basically, they do not exist within structures as they do not replicate a natural system: that's why Honko would say that the word "allomotif" is somehow misleading in folklore, when used to indicate the interdependence between motifs and variants; allomotif is a term coined by Alan Dundes, whose theories we will see in the following part, inspired by the term "allomorph", in a linguistic metaphor; allomorph is a variant of a sound, a phoneme which changes without mutating its meaning, a variant form of a morpheme: but morphemes exist within the same

linguistic system for their own definition, when cultural phenomena are not necessarily present in the same system. The ecological dimension of tradition observes different forms of adaptation, when "a tradition originating in alien circumstances adapts to the milieu according to the principles of familiarization and localisation"[Honko, 1986:116], according to the concept of ecotypification: similar variants are expressed differently in separate communities where some aspects are preferred and recognised by the audience and the members of the society which will emphasise the characters they relate more to, neglecting or transforming the others. This process is somehow what really defines, or should define, the comparative method, and it is the one that is used in this work through the analysis of Ye Xian, enquiring why some aspects are made clearer and more comprehensible for its audience, and why, even after the adaptation, the story fails to satisfy the needs of the community.

All these different types of adaptations are crucial to the analysis of folklore, especially because they define the scope, the purposes and the meaning of the comparative method, which so often, as we have seen, is subject to theoretical spurn but at the same time is used often uncritically.

The ecological comparison has been utilised by other scholars. Tales are shaped through a phenomenon of adaptation to the new environments in which they are retold: "migration is a selective and creative process"[Goldberg, 1984:8]. An example of ecological tradition is the concept of oikotypes by Von Sydow, which borrowed the term by botany, basically "differences in narratives owing to the cultural and geographical environment in which they are told" [Bronner, 2007:107], regional subtypes that are influenced by local cultural boundaries.

Historical

While phenomenological and ecological dimensions of tradition have opened new horizons to the research of folklore, the classic Finnish method used the historical dimension: the

variants are studied in the terms of cultural loan, of identification of movement from a culture to another, according to the hierarchical method, and which are much more complex that it could be seen at a first glance: the borrowing of cultural elements in folklore seems to indicate a direction, but when culture have been sharing territories, communicating to each other and maintaining relations with one another, it is very hard to identify the elements and which culture influenced the other first: in linguistics, the cultures in analysis are called substrates and superstrates, and often they generate syncretic cultural situation. In our case, the cultures in analysis can be the Han and the Yue, from which Ye Xian seems to have borrowed many an element; we are not necessarily talking about a clash of cultures toppling and overdoing each other in different aspects of life, such as we see in the Far East, when different ceremonies are celebrated following different cultural patterns: births, weddings and funeral are expressed according to the different culture present in an area for centuries, and people have accepted some elements of every winning culture in their life; but, in our case, which embodies an early case of cultural contamination, we can clearly witness the presence of the elements which do not belong to the Han culture and which are most likely the expression of the Southern fish culture, and of more remote cultural systems from which the story probably has come.

Comparison therefore is a necessity when it comes to carrying out a cross-cultural study, according to the concepts of variation; at the same time, one analyses different oikotypes finding out more about the fairy tale in object and one unearths different layers of knowledge of a singular culture it which the fairy tale expresses itself, its traits and its features, and even its evolution. If universal are really such, according to Honti's study, then they are expressed differently according to diverse circumstances, showing us similarities in differences, that is what makes people humans as pattern in every society, and differences in similarities, that is what makes a culture unique and distinct.

The premises of the analysis of Ye Xian carried out in this thesis are eminently based on what Honko defines as "ecological comparison". Due to the presence of so many variants of similar stories, we rightly suppose an exchange between cultures, and a process of

adaptation to the different cultural systems the story came in contact with. Phenomenological and historical comparison are not the main tool in this thesis, for two different reasons.

The phenomenological comparison does not focus on the relationship among the different versions, and it is therefore ineffectual when it comes to comparing versions which show a genetic relations. The historical, on the other hand, is impractical because it pivots on the historical changes and cultural exchanges between different systems, which is not the priority of this work. While we do witness a progressive process of sinification in the history of the tale, and we note that Ye Xian is the first adaptation of a foreign story first to the Yue culture, and then to the predominant Han culture, the centre of attention in this research is the unofficial exchange between distant cultures occurred mainly in "neutral" areas such as the commercial posts in the ports of islands such as Java and Sumatra. Comparison therefore is a necessity when it comes to carrying out a cross-cultural study, according to the concepts of variation; at the same time, one analyses different oikotypes finding out more about the fairy tale in object and one unearths different layers of knowledge of a singular culture it which the fairy tale expresses itself, its traits and its features, and even its evolution. If universal are really such, according to Honti's study, then they are declined differently according to the diverse circumstances, showing us similarities in differences, that is what makes people humans as pattern in every society, and differences in similarities, that is what makes a culture unique and distinct. The comparative method, therefore, offers the premises of the comparison itself. Any comparison, however, needs a minimal components which can be considered the minimal unit of measurement and which can be juxtaposed in the process of identifying differences and similarities. Unfortunately, this is not provided by the comparative method because the smallest components, tale types and motifs, are not univocally defined.

Problems of the Comparative Method

"The method's assumption of a single source caused the problem of what an archetype can represent, a confusion which plagued the historic-geographic method from its early days" [Goldberg,1984:3].

The very first premise of this method, therefore, was a fallacy, as it supposed an Ur form, normal form of archetype which was not retrievable and was, therefore, more of a theoretical heuristic construction than a real folkloric phenomenon. The problem of the Ur form the scholar were seeking was that it was never established whether it was a real, once-existing version now lost, or rather a Platonic idea that Dundes calls "super-organic"? After all, no ancient cultural manifestation was, most probably, produced for the scholars to study; imagining a form of a fairy tale only by logical deduction can be misleading.

Propp, whose contribution we will analyse in the second part of this chapter, affirmed that not all imaginable tales that could be hypothesised by using the functions he had identified actually existed or had ever been recorded. That meant, among others elements, that the Ur form was in the majority of cases just a theoretical construction built on analogies and deductions but too often not very close to the real phenomena.

In the 50ies, Walter Anderson called the Ur form "normal form", not necessarily the original, and admitted it was more of a theoretical construct that a real, existent tale.

In order to go back to the origins, some scholars [see e.g.. Jan Ovljd Swahn, *The tale of Cupid and Psyche*] had the intuition of calling this hypothetical older form "archetype", which in old Greek means "principal" or "primeval type", including therefore both concepts, of hierarchical superiority in time and in importance, in one word. Needless to say, this led to confusion due to the large use of the word in psychoanalysis; there is no proof whatsoever that the original tales were archetypes: as folklore research should work on material which has been actually recorded in written or oral forms, there would be an obvious problem demonstrating that folk and fairy tales in their primeval forms were archetypes, just the same as demonstrating that fairy tales, some folklorists assumed in the 19th century, came from dreams (Van der Leyden), from solar myths (Saint Yves) or

totemic rituals (Van Gennep), which are now theories totally disregarded by the scholars of the field.

Another issue was that the method according to which the variants were identified, collected, classified and then hierarchically ordered, though, did not have a univocal basis and was therefore arbitrary. This lack of theoretical inquiry would unfortunately persist during the following decades of the 20th century and will influence The Aarne- Thompson Index of Fairy Tales. The historical-geographic in particular based its research on the compilation of a variety of tales belonging to the same type: the concept of type, however, is also a theoretical concept with very few example in reality, and folk tales share motifs, characters, functions are actually very hard to classify univocally. Some story types are rigid, and some vary considerably: the definition of type is itself contradictory and vague, and usually a type shares motifs with other stories, so the classification is very complicated: as the boundaries between the stories are blurred. even identify what we can consider a Cinderella story, and why would be arduous, as the absolute majority of tales transmitted orally for generations present analogies with other tale types, to the point that a classification is nearly impossible. Moreover, the classification of motifs is also extremely arbitrary and confused.

First of all, according to Thompson, motifs were defined as "the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition"[Thompson,1946:415; 1950:1137].

He basically gave a diachronic definition, by saying that motifs resist through time and retelling. This aspect was something that structuralist approach, and later Dundes, did not care of, as they looked for a kind of analysis which would synchronic in its comparison. Moreover, Thompson affirmed that motifs were free to combine, so that types, which are composed of motifs, are not defined as fixed models, as they can appear in infinite different combinations. However, he also affirmed that a type was "a traditional tale that has an independent existence." Once again, it may be seen that the tale type is not defined in terms of morphological characteristics. Instead, just as in the case of the motif, the criterion of existence through time is employed. Thompson notes that a complete tale or

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type is "made up of a number of motifs in a relatively fixed order and combination",
therefore contradicting that they "combine freely everywhere" [Bronner, 2007: 92].
Also, despite stating that tale types are units made up of smaller units called motifs, he
wrote that "by far the largest number of traditional types consist of these single motifs.
Narrative motifs thus, the so-called incidents may occur just as "true tale-types," and,
if so, then the distinction between motif and tale type appears blurred and confused.
It is apparent, therefore, how the Aarne-Thompson typology is based much more on
subjective evaluation of the classifier, compared to the structural one, as its units are
variable and their definition is not univocal. "it variously refers to theme, plot (tale type),
actor, item (object) or descriptive element.
There have been at least two major criticisms of the concepts of motif and tale type to date;
the first, articulated most effectively by Scandinavian folklorists, calls into question the
"independence" of the units. Anna Birgitta Rooth, probably the most relevant scholar on
the Cinderella cycle, in a "Digression" entitled "The Tale as Composition,"
[Rooth,1951:237–40], suggested that individual motifs were more often than not found to
be interdependent upon other motifs in a given tale, and she proposed the notion of "motif-
complex" to describe such collocations of motifs. Similarly, Bengt Holbek, who can be
reasonably considered a structuralist as he conceived the cubical structure of tension in
folklore that we will see further on, affirmed that standard Aarne-Thompson tale typology
"does violence" to the actual material collected in the field as so-called types were often
combined [Holbek,1964:160]. But, as we have seen before, probably the harshest critics of
the Finnish method were the Russian formalists, and especially Vladimir Propp himself
who stated that the motif is based on plot features which Propp asserted were "vague and
diffuse" when he proposed his famous structural analysis based on functions and *dramatis
personae*. As we have repeated many times, the focus on the structure of the text rather
than on its content was revolutionary and its important was crucial. According to Dundes,
as content changes but structure tend to remain the same, a real comparison is possible

only when a structural analysis is carried out, in which the minimal units are structural parts of the text.

b)   *Structuralism*

Literaturnost, or Literariness, was the concept coined by Jakobson in 1921, in the attempt at finding a new, universal approach to the text, changing forever the well-established custom of recognise the literary function of a text by its subject.

Formalism and structuralism both pivot on the study of the text, the structure, the language and the functions, somehow ignoring the subject of the single works; the birth of contemporary literary theory is usually identified with these two first theoretical movements.

"Formalism was essentially the application of linguistics to the study of literature; and because the linguistics in question were of a formal kind, concerned with the structures of language rather than with what one might actually say, the Formalists passed over the analysis of literary 'content' (where one might always be tempted into psychology or sociology) for the study of literary form"[Eagleton,1996: 3]

Structuralism and Formalism were produced under the same pressure of creating a method of focusing on the text rather than the context, and the terms are usually changed interchangeably; Structuralism is used co-extensively with Formalism or as one of its branches, and their separation of the two schools results quite problematic [Gilet, 1998:25].The two concepts have in fact been studied under the same aegis by numerous scholar, for example Ulf Drobin..

Propp

The most important figure of these movement, that consist in Structuralism, Functionalism and Narratology, was undoubtedly, as regards folklore, Vladimir Propp. While Jakobson is

believed to be the father of Functionalism, and Saussure is considered the founder of Structuralism, Propp is considered the inventor of Structural and Functional analysis in comparative studies of folklore. Saussure was a great admirer of Jakobson's, and his linguistic theory was influenced by the Russian intellectual; just as Jakobson wanted to decontextualise literary texts to identify a literariness within the language itself as a system, Saussure set about ignoring the diachronic aspects of the language, which up to then had been the main interest in linguistic studies, limiting its scopes to internal relationships between a single utterance and the system of rules according to which it has been produced, denominating the two terms respectively *parole* and *langue.*Levi-Strauss utilised the idea of structuralism applied in anthropology in order to explain myths as the expression of a conflict, or tension, between two forces interacting to prevail one another. What Propp did was to theorise Formal narratology, that is to apply the structural study of a narrative text, conceived as a closed system, reducing the plot to a very schematic conceptualisation, going as far as to say "All the fairy tale are of one type with regard to their structure". Propp's work was astonishing as it it the bases for later studies of narratology, but first and foremost for the focus on structure independently on context; when he analysed Russian fairy tales, he reduced the possible action into 27 incidents and a reduced number of actors who, instead of being concrete figures, were dramatis personae who could, and actually did, play more than one role in a tale. Although extremely innovative, Functional Narratology came up against a great deal of criticism, especially because it reduced literary creation to a finite set of units that could be put together, therefore limiting the creative act of literature to the endless repetition of the same models. Despite being, as we will see, essential in identifying minimal units of comparison in a more objective fashion, Propp's analysis would be harshly criticised by the new schools of thought which believed in literature as a carrier of human messages, and not as a structure void of context and meaning. In fact, the structural approach has been opposed to another, important perspective which hinges on the intentions of the creator of the text, on his or her intentions and basically on what it is called the "pragmatics" This approach is more

complex, and pivots on the idea of the "context", more than on its internal syntax, and on the relations a text creates and maintains with the elements of the world around it.

In light of this distinction, "literariness" can be an object of study, a quality which is bestowed upon a text according to its characteristic or a sort of an aesthetic awareness according to which authors are somehow conscious of the character of their production., which is created for a precise "skopos", and which is also related to the intention of the author who is affected by the finality of his or her piece of work. As we will see, this point is essential to understand the author mindset and to identify some determining elements of the text we analyse. It becomes apparent that this two perspectives, therefore, are not be considered as two separate theories, but only as two different focuses on the same subject. The Formalists like Jakobson had already realised that the language and the structure itself could not, alone, determine the literariness of a piece of work, because without the "context", it would be impossible for us to gauge the degree of separation between the "ordinary" language and the literary one."They recognized that norms and deviation shifted around from one social or historical context to another -that 'poetry' in this sense depends on where you happen to be standing at the time" [Eagleton, 1996:5]

Although the importance of these first modern literary theories cannot be denied for its attempt at a shift of perspective on the subject, from mystical to rational, from subjective to scientific, it was quite apparent after some decades that this innovative characteristic was at the same time their limit, as they resented too much of the positivist ideas of the background in which they had been conceived; they therefore received harsh criticism; Levi-Strauss, one, the fathers of the structuralism, was accused to have reduced semiology to a natural science [Pettit,1975:117] and the reaction was so widespread and heterogeneous, especially in the USA and in France, that many thinkers were defined Post-Structuralist, in that they, in the most diverse fashion, called into question the validity of the Structuralist methodology.

Sructuralism, with its focus on text, is the key for a real comparison in that it provides us with the necessary units to carry out a juxtaposition of elements to be compared.

According to Alan Dundes, all comparison must be structural, or else it fails its purpose for theoretical fallacy: if content instead of structure is used, then the comparison lacks objectivity and it is subject to the scholar discretion.

The study of the structure of Ye Xian, moreover, is fundamental because the focus can shift on the internal harmony of the narrative, its flow and coherence; our story presents indeed narrative ruptures, which, upon analysis, denote possible interpolation of text, the fusion of different folk traditions, and adaptation of the teller to its audience.

This lead us to the third point of utility of Structuralism in our research: the Structure, when compared to other similar stories that deal with an orphan who is mistreated by her o his stepmother and helped by a magical creature can reveal crucial information on the genre of the text; as the narrative is accompanied by parts which make reference to places, dynasties, tribes; as it attempts to explain the legend related to a real worshipping place; as it contains an adjunct in which it destroys the happy ending in order to give it a more realistic view of the human nature, in order to provide real spatial and temporal context, it becomes apparent that the story is not a fairy tale, nor it should be studied as such by unawares scholars.

Vladimir Propp had actually criticised the historic- geographic method by saying that it was based on the premise that fairy tales were actually fluid phenomena and that the existence of clear cut types was fiction, they probably never existed; he suggested going on finding the functions instead of the motifs, that is subjects, actors dramatis personae and their roles, or functions.

Propp's and Thompson`s method diverged in so many an aspect that they were considered two opposed perspectives until recent times, when they were finally recognised as two complementary tools which can be used together in order to reach a more exhaustive study of a tale. When the two system, Proppian Functionalism and Thompson historic- geographic, clashed, many interesting insights appeared:,for example, the functions identified by Propp, who claimed a more objective approach to fairy tales, which were

analysed within their own structure, without examining their origins, not always combined to create an existent story: some combination, therefore, were artificial and therefore not representative of the folklore phenomena, constructing different but still theoretical , Platonic concept that did not have a correspondence in reality; moreover, tales monographs assumed monogenesis, while the structural analysis of Propp did not exclude polygenesis, which nonetheless had been already discarded by serious scholars a hundred years before. "a historic-geographic study sets the limits for a tale type, not by statistics or by definition but by the examination of where discontinuities naturally occur." (Ibidem) and when monogenesis is challenged, the factual evidence is more important than the theory; some similar stories are actually not related "genetically" (we are talking about single monographs, no tales in general, for which monogenesis is taken for granted, along with diffusionist theory). Propp can be considered as a chemist, who analysed the single components of the narrative, why the comparatists can be considered biologist, in that they have always tried to go to the origins of a fairy tale (although the monographic approach failed to describe the general phenomena regarding fairy tales as genre).

c)   *Unifying Comparative and Structuralism*

Propp identified a number of functions, which were " meant to represent the deep structure of the narrative, not the concrete steps which the action involves. Every single tale will provide an individual version of how these functions are realized. Nevertheless, on the level of structural analysis, we can speak of identical elements. Not every element will occur in every folk tale, but the folk tales never change the fixed order in which these actions take place. This unchanging order explains why Propp's method of analysis can be called structuralist: the single elements define each other by virtue of their position in this order; they provide relations and correspondences with each other" [Schmitz,2007:p.45]. Those functions aimed to describe narrative using a more general method than the historic-geographic method, as it reduced most of the narratives to only few patterns whose structure was fixed; therefore, in contrast with Thompson index of tales, it had the

ambition of telling more about the folk tale as general phenomenon, and it was therefore paradigmatic in that it showed models applicable to any form of narratives, and on the single parts which interacted to each other.

Very soon after the publications of the book, it became quite clear that Propp and the other scholars of Functionalism, who were mainly based in Russia, considered themselves as antagonists of the Finnish method, providers of an alternative to the study of the field. So important was the criticism operated by them on the historic-geographic method and on Thompson's index of tale types that Heda Jason gathered the different commentaries in his article "The Russian criticims of the Finnish school", which was a collection of the main remarks on the method by Propp himself and some Russian scholars such as A.I. Andrejev, A.T. Nikiforov and V. Petrov. However, as Christine Goldberg pointed out, "although a few of their charges constitute potentially serious disagreements, none seriously undermines the value of the historic-geographic method. The objections are less to the method as a whole than to its tecniques"[Goldberg, 1984:7].

Goldberg then responds to the main points of criticism dismantling most of them and showing that, ultimately, the two methods can actually complement each other, rather than being used antithetically, as the material gathered in the historic-geographic process can provide crucial information on the basic structure of the tale.

As a matter of fact, Jakobson had already tried to bridge the gap between diachronic and synchronic approaches, between the comparative method and the Proppian structural analysis of the narrative. In 1966, in his *Selected Writing IV (Slavic Epic studies)*, he affirms that comparison is at the same time a diachronic and synchronic process, in that the structural approach, in linguistics as in folk lore, operates on material collected by the comparatists who, in the case of linguistics, are philologists, and in the case of folklore are the supporters of the Finnish method, in order to find the basic structures of the folk tale. Roman Jakobson, as a matter of fact, mostly known for his contribution to structural linguistics, had studied the *blyny*, a form of Slavic epic, and during this analysis he had shown how comparison by itself is necessary but not sufficient; what he reproaches the

historical approach for is its mechanical application, which does not take into account that an epic song, as any other form of folklore, is a poetic creation which contains in itself elements of myths, of other songs, of different forms of tradition that can be identified and studied through the structural method.

Dundes

In my opinion, however, the scholar who has contributed the most to the cause of unifying different methods in the study of folklore in general is Alan Dundes, who went even further, discussing not only the diachronic and synchronic methods, but distinguishing also between syntagmatic and paradigmatic approaches, and integrating the psychoanalytical approach to these different perspective in order to create a new tool for the folklorist.

In one of his essays, he affirms that "Students of the folktale have become accustomed to distinguishing the various different theoretical approaches to folktale, e.g., the Finnish (comparative) historic-geographic method, structural analysis, psychoanalysis, etc. One could easily get the mistaken notion that these approaches or methods are totally separate and distinct, and that they cannot be used together to attack a common problem" [Bronner. 2007:320]

However, Dundes challenges this; he explains: "I would like to propose a method for the analysis of folktale symbolism which depends upon a combination of the comparative method and structuralist theory with implications for psychoanalytic theory. I believe the methodology, if valid, can be employed anywhere in the world – though my particular examples shall be drawn from the European folktale tradition. And I further suggest that the method can be applied to any genre of folklore, not just folktales" [Bronner. 2007:190].

Dundes, before proposing his own theory on folklore, analyses in detail advantages and shortcoming of the other methods widely used by the scholars in the field: that his effort was directed to a unitary folklore theory capable of explaining different phenomena, and whose theoretical aspects of the study did not exclude the experience itself of folklore as creative activity. This is why he criticises at the same time the three great theorists who had

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deeply influenced the research by then: Thompson, Propp and Levi-Strauss, whose fault was not having created a univocal minimal unit functional to the comparison, and at the same time elaborating a method which is mainly heuristic and directed to the study neglecting the actual process of creating and interpreting folklore.

In one essay, *Structuralism and Folklore*, he operates explaining his goals in the analysis of the structural method: he argues that a real comparison cannot be effective without identifying the unit to be used for the comparison of tales. Both Thompson and Propp, the initiators of the two main approaches to folklore, the Finnish method and the functional-structural were not precise in the definition of the minimal unit they used, respectively the motif and the function, and Dundes proposed his own minimal unit based mostly on linguistics and phonetics. The concept he proposes is based on the linguistic distinction between etic and emic, borrowed from linguistics: phonemic versus phonetic. While phonetic studies the sounds that can be pronounced, but not necessarily exist in a given language, and therefore are more a theoretical categorisation than a classification of actual entities, phonemics deal with real sounds pronounced in different linguistic systems. The minimal unit is essential because there is not comparing organisational patterns without a minimal unit; and this should be susceptible of being used regardless of the genre of folklore "The problems of structural analysis are approximately the same no matter what the genre.... Perhaps the most difficult task is the discovery of a minimal structural unit. Without a minimal unit, it is almost impossible to undertake structural analysis. It is true that structural analysis is more concerned with the relationships or organizational patterns of the units than with the units *per se.* But how can one discuss relationships intelligently without specific reference to the terms or units which are presumed to be related?" [Dundes, 2007:127]

The second important step in Dundes's analysis is the investigation of the relationships between different minimal units in combination that can be therefore defined structural since structuralism, as in Jakobson and Saussure, identifies and study the relationships of single elements within a system. According to him, the structural analysis is crucial in the

study of folklore because the Finnish method, in his historic-geographic quest, which we have seen before was defined by Honti is not based on assuming any specific system within the single unit occurs, risks becoming "superorganic," a term coined by the idea of A.L. Kroeber in anthropology, and which implies that culture is a concept *per se* which is above the level of human social and individual organism. Without a system, a living organism in which the motifs, or units, occur, the comparative study is reduced to the conception of narratives represented as schemes without human agency, and whose units are therefore ontological since they suggested that tales diffuse without human agency, and, as invented units, existed as ontological entities.

The partial refusal of the Finnish method is motivated by a structuralist concern for the context, which the diachronic, historical method neglects, as it tends to ignore the non-comparable uniqueness of each performance, the so called "context"; although the analysis is a literary one, and therefore based mainly on the text, Dundes quotes Malinowski "the text, of course, is extremely important, but without the context it remains lifeless." [Malinowski, 1954:104]. The minimal units of the Finnish method, moreover, according to Dundes, should be based on empirically verifiable occurrences, rather than theoretical constructions, and describe narrative performances. The structure should be composed of units that are known and knowable by the tellers who use and combine them, and not a superorganic pattern they ignore, if the study is to be carried out within the same cultural perspective of the tellers, rather than from an ivory throne above the system in object, in an attitude which Dundes defines as "patronising abstraction". Structuralism as a tool of folklore analysis is, therefore, at the same time more testable in its description of the phenomena, and therefore more concrete, and more immersed in the culture as it is more descriptive than inductive in its conclusions.

The third part of his analysis is the cross-cultural comparison of these different units and systems to determine the diffusion or particularity of the identified structures.

This last part include a psychoanalytical interpretation of the symbols which are present in a given culture, in order to investigate the correlation between the structure and the cultural

system which identifies a general "worldview," that is, outlooks, values, and beliefs that drive human action and inform ethical and moral judgement,

The structuralism conceived by Dundes is, in fact, a "structural analysis, a form of rigorous descriptive ethnography" because it is vital, in his opinion, that folk should not be separated from the lore, which is a metaphor to describe superorganic approaches, which create schemes instead of discovering real structures.

His main concern, therefore, was to relegate folklore to academic construction without its creative, individual character of invention.

What he suggest is a union of the three methods, in an extremely ingenious modus operandi: "First of all, what is needed is a large number of versions of a tale type…. Secondly, we need to take (Proppian) structural analysis into account. We understand from Propp that folktales consist of sequential sets of functions (which I have re-labelled motifemes). Although Propp was not concerned to name the various motifs which could fulfil a given function (motifeme) slot, I have suggested that such motifs be termed allomotifs. Thus for any given motifemic slot in a folktale, there would presumably be two or more alternative motifs, that is, allomotifs, which might occur. If we have a full-fledged comparative study of a tale available, we probably have a good idea of what the range of allomotifs are for any one motifeme. Please note again that the concept of allomotif cannot be applied if one has just a single version of a tale type. One would need at least two versions to demonstrate the variation within a motifeme and probably a great many more than two versions to ascertain the full gamut of allomotific variation" [Dundes, 2007;190-191].

d)   Conclusions

This thesis studies the single elements of the story utilising Dundes's idea of unifying comparative method and Structuralism, adding the contextual interpretation that Dundes defines as symbolic.

It becomes apparent that comparative, Finnish method and Structuralism are not only complementary but even synergistic when it comes to analysing oikotipes: that is, single local variations and expressions of a tale in a particular area due to cultural influences. Both Strauss and Propp claim universality in their work: Strauss because the tension between the two elements he recognises in myths are widespread as myths themselves, and Propp because his analysis, despite being focused on Russian tales only, contains functions applicable to international tale types. This universality by definition, should be cross-cultural, and therefore should survive comparison of different cultural systems. Structural patterns and therefore, structural oikotypes, are extremely helpful for the folklorists in order to identify local contents within a common, general structural frame: in other words, the structural analysis enables the comparison of different contents. The comparative method should therefore highlight the differences between the different forms, whereas structuralism has found a similar, and therefore comparable, textual and contextual structure. Both methods should thus be used as precious tools in synergy, because if through a traditional comparative study, of a single tale type, a subtype, or form of the tale peculiar to a given area is unearthed, in order to claim the discovery of an oikotype the researcher should be sure that it is different from other tale types without having to study all the tale types that share similar forms, as not all the tales are included in the Aarne-Thompson index, nor are they all clear cut like, for example, *Little Red Riding Hood*. Here is where structural analysis could be of considerable assistance. An oikotypical pattern can in fact be isolated by a structural analysis of even a single form of a given culture without the need for the thousands or at least hundreds of versions of a single tale type so essential for a historic-geographic study. A structural pattern discerned that way would then be compared to other patterns to be found in other tale types without going through the labour of compiling an extremely large list of tales as the Finnish method would entail and therefore the culture in question would unveil special information through the analysis of the specific traits of its oykotype. Comparative studies and structural studies are thus hardly mutually exclusive; these methods so often opposed are highly compatible

and they may be mutually supportive, as they work on two different aspects of tales, namely content and structure; structure tends to be cross-cultural, while content is culturally specific.

Dundes's conclusions, therefore, seem to be the same as Goldberg's: the different methods are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they can successfully be used as a valid integration and implementation of each other, as a real comparison is possible when structural patterns are identified, otherwise, if it is the content to be juxtaposed and analysed, the similarities will be chosen on an arbitrary basis: what we compare when we compare, in fact, is an important question for avoiding arbitrariness and it will be discussed in the next part: both Thompson and Propp, according to Dundes, were too vague upon explaining in what the units they used to compare really consisted in. Also, independently from the method in use, the main shortcoming of both, historic-geographic and structuralist, is that the former, when the quest for the Ur form went slowly losing importance, studied diffusion, without delving deeply into the symbolic origins of the story, and the latter was more descriptive, failing to shed lights on the cultures in which the single versions were recorded.

Structural analysis "is not at end in itself. It is only a means to an end, that end being a better understanding of the nature of human beings, or at least of a particular society of humans [Bronner, 2007:136]. Its crucial advantage, as we have seen, is to be universal, and therefore cross-cultural, and thus able to depict aspects of the culture through the sieve of the tales' structural analysis.

The Finnish method was often defined as perniciously Eurocentric, although Christine Goldberg dismantles this idea that the Finnish method was Eurocentric per definition, as she clearly states that historic- geographic studies can, and actually have, been carried out in different contexts, such as Turkey or China [see Goldberg, 1984:7]. The structural method, however, as modified and integrated by Alan Dundes, was used by him to analyse comparatively Native Indians tales, in order to find a common structure and to delineate some important traits of the culture of reference [see Dundes, 1964]

In our case, the comparative and structural analysis is directed not only to disclose hidden aspect of out tale, of its text, but first and foremost to unveil the symbolic and cultural importance of some key topics and characters in the narrative, which teach us about the con its deeper meaning, but also to discuss the structure of production of the version as juxtaposed to other versions."In isolating and describing a structural pattern present in an item or genre of folk lore,we may have provided a useful aid to understanding the nature of the culture at large as well as the cognitive categories, ideological commitments, and concrete behavior of the people sharing that culture. For surely one of the goals of structural analysis of folklore or any other variety of cultural materials (language, written literature, etc.) is to afford insight into worldview" [Bronner, 2007:32].

By using these tools, therefore, this thesis attempts to reveal as many aspects of Ye Xian as possible, in order to shed light on the tale itself and me aspects of the Tang culture which could escape the knowledge of folklorists specialised in the comparative method but not particularly aware of the complex cultural history of China. The text, therefore, disclose context, the culture it somehow represents and, by comparison, the others where this tale type is present.

Structural analysis, however, must be united to Historic-Geographic method in the assumption that tales travel and change in the process, and they assume different shapes according to the cultural system in which they are retold; Goldberg, in her essays, defends the idea that migration is a selective process and comparative studies, far from being mere registration of the tales' displacement, show us "how the tale behaves during its migration. They can describe the choices made and the creativity employed, and even the rejection a tale can find from a neighbouring culture" [Goldberg,1984:8]. In our case, the lack of success of Ye Xian and similar tales in China, the so-called "Ancient Tradition" by Ding Nai Dong, fits perfectly, as we will see, with the rejection encountered by the cultural system in which the tale most likely migrated and was not accepted as it clashed with people's customs and traditions.

That is why, even when we use the structural method to identify how and what to compare, we must be aware of the importance of the Finnish method and use its comparative assumptions in order to carry out an effective study of a fairy tale.

This work avail itself of these two methods, the Comparative, or Historical-geographic method, and simplified versions of Propp's functionalist theory, for two different purposes. The Historical comparative, as discussed above, furnishes the premises of comparison, especially in Honkos' observation of the comparative phenomenon as ecological adaptation to different cultural systems. That is what enables us to analyse different versions and investigate changes, adaptation and meaning in different cultural contexts.

Structuralism, on the other hand, gives us a crucial tool for analysis as it provided, accordig to Dundes, the minimal unit of measurement.

In this research, the analysis of single elements is based on Gilet's simplified structuralist approach: the functions or better, dramatis personae, are used to discuss the variation of the various component of the story and whether they were meaningful and originated in an area, or were clearly an adaptation of foreign elements, their transformation, and so on. Although the method of comparison based on the structure of the text is unquestionably more effective, as content is what varies and compares in different variants (the allomotifs) while the structure is less prone to changing, nevertheless a cross cultural study of a folk tale must be diachronic, in order to avoid the flattening of temporal dimension. That means that, while we use the structural analysis of the story as a tool to identify motifemes and specific narrative expressions related to a culture, but we do study the historical and social context in order to get information about both the tale and the culture of reference. The difference between a traditional comparative study and a cross-cultural one, is that the context is fundamental; not only the different stories to trace their spatial journey, but the choice of the allomotif in a specific oikotype. This work avails itself of comparative and structural analysis: by comparison with more ancient and more modern versions, and with the help of Propp's function, we will attempt to find out culturally-specific elements in order to identify their meaning both within the same system, and cross-culturally. As

Dundes is at the same time innovative and unifying and his theories are not famous as the Finnish method or Proppian method, most likely because the two previous method boast a longer tradition. Aarne-Thompson-Uther Motif-Index is still one of the most important instruments for the study of folklore, and Proppian analysis, though obsolete, is still nowadays one of the pillars of tales analysis. It not a case that scholars who have tried to study folk tales from an international, global perspective, have tried to do so using Propp's functions and structural analysis as a way to evade the genre barriers. These scholars, namely Peter Gilet and Carl Kao have carried out textual analysis and to identify structural patterns in stories that are not strictly folktales, and in order to do so they have employed the functionalist formula.

Peter Gilet has traced a new theory in the attempt of conciliate textual and contextual approaches using Propp's system but distinguishing fewer functions and dramatis personae, while Kao has utilised it to analyse traditional Chinese stories such as *zhiguai* and *chuanqi*.

In this thesis the material has been studied considering the premises of the comparative method and ecological adaptation, while the elements has been identified using Gilet's simplified Functionalist method.

3 The analysis of the constitutive elements

3.1 Terms: motifs and functions

The analysis chosen for this piece of work, based on my previous works on both the Chinese and Korean Cinderella, is based on some constitutive elements that represent, in the cultural study of the tale, the key points.

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The first distinction to be done is whether the components to be analysed are to be chosen according to their structural importance, or on their contents. As we have seen before, folk tales have been analysed so far according two main different approaches: the historic-geographic method, also called Finnish method or comparative method, and the Structural method, studying fairy tales dividing them in motifs in the first case, and functions in the second. Motifs are units related to content, and therefore diachronic, as they are identified as units of the plot, while functions are essentially related to the internal interactions, and they can therefore be diachronic (proper functions) or synchronic (dramatis personae). We have already seen that motifs are not clear-cut elements, as they are not perfectly distinguishable from tale types. The concept of motif, therefore, is vague and ambiguous as "it variously refers to theme, plot (tale type), actor, item (object), or descriptive element. A precise application of the term requires that it refers to only one kind of unit" [Apo, 1997:563-564].

The structuralist analysis utilises Propp's thirty-one functions and seven dramatis personae which appear successively in a tale as essential parts of the structure. If certain functions are missing from the sequence, this does not affect the order of the rest. According to Propp, functions are an apter tool to classification than themes, which can be questionable and verbose: folktales that possess equal functions can be assembled under a same type. While a motif is usually based on content, a function "plainly ignores the contents and focus on the action of dramatis personae in order to classify. Yet, it has been noted and made known that function is actually dependent on dramatis personae because the performance and role of dramatis personae dictates the essence and semantic of a folktale". [Harun, H., & Jamaludin, Z. 2013:355]

It is quite apparent, however, that form (function) and content (type and motif) cannot be separated in the analysis of the tale, as the for content is built on structure and structure is the frames that embrace the content [Levi-Strauss, 1997].

This semantic importance of the functions, of motifemes, was what motivated Dundes to seek a theory that could embrace both a formal unit of measurement which reflected the

symbolic value in real examples in folklore. He understood that any comparison, in order to be scientific, needs a minimal unit, therefore borrowing the concept of function but inserting it in a less theoretical context, and based on actual tales. called *motifemes* or *emic motifs*, used as the primary structural unit in narrative classification.

Therefore, upon selecting the constitutive parts which symbolise the most important point of text, different options are offered.

The first natural choice is The Index of Folktale; Cinderella type is listed sub voce: Persecuted Heroine, AT510, which reads *The two stepsisters. The stepdaughter at the grave of her own mother, who helps her (milks the cow, shakes the apple-tree, helps the old man; cf. Type 480). Three fold visit to church (dance). Slipper test.* Now, the division of elements according to this definition could not be satisfactory: not all Ye Xian's components are present, nor are all these present in Ye Xian. One of the criticism to Thompson's analysis, we have seen, is that is Western-oriented and, actually, it is mostly based on fairy tales collected in Europe. Jameson, in 1932, tried to offer a new comparative scheme based on version collected by Roalfe-Cox, the ones in Bolte Polivka' *Grimms Märchen Anmerkungen,* and Asian versions collected by himself.

Jameson 's basic structure is:

    A. A young girl is ill-treated;

    B. She is forced to provide menial service ;

    C. She meets the prince;

    D. She is identified by a magic object or an exclusive skill;

    E. She marries the prince.

There is another motif, which is

    F. If her suffering is due to the fact that she told her father she loves him how she loves salt, she now serves him unsalted food to prove how salt is necessary to human happiness.

There are many specifications of the first four motifs, and Jameson's scheme ends up by quite complicated and, and he notices this by affirming that "Unfortunately these episodes are too highly generalised to enable us to form any adequate conclusions as to geographical variations"[Jameson, 1932:82].

Having searched for a satisfactory scheme that could include the constitutive motifs present in Ye Xian and having found none, I deem it necessary to personally elaborate a new scheme which sums up which sums up the principal narrative and functional elements in both Ye Xian and the modern, European tale as we know it in the Grimm's rendition.

The elements to be treated are, therefore, the orphan girl, the mistreating stepmother, the helpers, the magic object and the ball where she meets, or is supposed to meet, her prince.

The fact that Ye Xian does not meet the prince at the Cave Festival has been analysed as a clear interpolation of the narrative in the attempt at adapting a previous tale to its cultural system, and thus it deserved appropriate attention,

Propp's system of functions and dramatis personae has to be also taken into for two main reasons.

The first is because Dundes pointed out that there is no comparative analysis without a unit of measurement, and that is provided only by a structural analysis.

The second is because, even though Propp did not claim universality for his system, it had already been used by scholars who study *zhiguai*, namely by Xiaohuan Zhao and by Karl Kao. Furthermore, Peter Gilet's attempt to adapting Propp's complex and elaborated system to the study of international tales, simplifying it and broaden its conclusion to the study of folk tales all over the world, really drew my attention.

While Gilet's work is oriented to the combination of textual and contextual folklore theories, which would enable scholars to analyse stories taking into account their structure along with the theories on their origin, I availed myself of his simplification of Propp's structural method in order to apply it to the material of my research.

The result is that my own elements roughly corresponded to Gilet's simplified list of dramatis personae. While Propp identifies seven roles, or spheres of action, Gilet narrows

them to six: The adversary, the Helper, the Prince, the Hero, the False Hero and the Double.

The first element analysed here is the Protagonist and her missing False Hero or Double, which will be present in most later versions, but not here, and this factor is extremely important in the analysis of this tale.

The second is the stepmother, the Adversary.

The third is the Helper, or helpers, as more indicated in this case. To use Dundes's definition, the motifeme of "helper" an emic category, is here filled by three different allomotifs.

The forth is the shoe, and it does not have any apparent connection with Gilet's roles, becaise it is a magic object. In other tales, however, the shoes or the other magic object are the crucial element that leads to the separation of the protagonist from the Usurper, or False Hero. The shoe test is in this tale type (in modern version, rather that in Ye Xian) one of the most important element of development of the plot and interaction among roles.

The fifth is the Prince, and here I have analysed the Festival as the place where the heroine usually (but not here, and the reader will later find out the reason of this) meets the prince and gets married. The figure of the Prince is also the one that goes in search of the protagonist as the owner of the shoe, and it has therefore been analysed as such; nevertheless, more space has been given to the explanation of the Festival as a main narrative component with crucial cultural connotations.

I have not analysed the continuation of the story, and the figure of the king because, as it will be explained, it is most probably just an added element to make the tale more similar to the record of a factual occurrence, a *zhiguai*, and therefore alien to the structure of the tale.

My analysis of five elements could be then explained as the utilisation of four of Gilet's dramatis personae (unifying Hero, the Double and the False Hero) and adding the role of

the magic object. Those constituent, which are here referred to as "elements", are as matter of fact dramatis personae, or agents of the drama.

Without any of those parts, in fact, the story loses its identity and ceases to be a Cinderella story. That is why, when dealing with ancient narratives, we cannot talk of Cinderella tales, but only of proto-Cinderellas.

Rooth's A1 contains the protagonist, a mistreating stepmother, a helping animal (elements 1, 2, 3).

Rhodopis presents a protagonist who is enslaved, a helping animal, and a magic object she is recognised by (elements 1, 3, 4).

Asenath consists of a protagonist, a helper, a stepmother, a magic object (1,3,2,4).

Nonetheless, the five-parted analysis had an analogy of Todorov's basic narrative functions as expressed in his "Structural Analysis of Narrative".

The basic stages of narrative expresses by Todorov are:

Equilibrium, Disequilibrium, Acknoledgement, Solving, New Equilibrium.

1. Equilibrium

   The equilibrium is the first stage of Todorov's theory. This stage is found at the beginning of the narrative, where everything is as it should be and the characters lives are normal. In our case, Ye Xian is said to be the elder daughter of a tribe chief.

2. Disequilibrium

   The second stage is the disruption stage. This is when the state of equilibrium is disturbed by an event occurring. Ye Xian loses both parents, and her stepmother, treats her badly, breaking the Confucian harmony

3. Acknowledgement

   Next, Todorov identifies in the narrative an acknowledgement stage, where there is recognition of the event that disturbed the equilibrium. Helpers try to restore this lack, although partially, by providing her with affection first, and then precious gifts.

4. Solving

   The solving stage is the part of the film where there is an attempt to repair the damage of the disruption that has been made. Ye Xian goes to the ball, she loses her slipper, and she is sought after by the prince. This helps to go back to the restoration of the equilibrium. In this part I have analysed the shoe as element of plot resolution.

5. New Equilibrium

   The final stage, is the equilibrium stage again. This is the part where there is a return or restoration of a new equilibrium. The part should be focused on the king and the marriage, but, since his figure is hardly described and the narrative is broken, I have concentrated my analysis on the festival as a marital ritual.

To sum up, the elements which are being investigated, according to Todorov's five stages, are:

Equilibrium: Ye Xian, daughter of the Chief, heroine

Disruption: Ye Xian becomes orphan: the mistreating stepmother

Resolution : The helpers

Restored Order: The shoe test

New Equilibrium: The festival and the prince

To sum up, the elements I have identified here, therefore, are a combination of Gilet's dramatis personae, reduced to four and adding the magic object as a fundamental element, and Todorov's narration stages, adapted to this particular text. These elements could be defined as narrative motifemes, as at the same time they represent both the fundamental units of the narrative, the roles of the agents in the structure of the tale, and their oikotypical value in a comparative analysis.

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These motifemes are not strictly functions, as they are the agents of the narration, but also the five stages of Todorov's narrative, and take into account the symbolic meaning of these elements in folklore.

1. The Protagonist, the Equilibrium, the Mistreated Girl
2. The Antagonist, the Disruption, the Evil Stepmother
3. The Helpers, the Resolution, the magical animals whose aid is fundamental for Protagonist can solve the Disruption
4. The Magic Object, The Restored Order, the token through which the Protagonist reach a new Equilibrium
5. The Social Gathering and Marriage with the prince, The New Equilibrium, the attainment of a new status by the Protagonist

While it is through that in Cinderella stories the shoe text usually follows the ball with the prince, the shoe and the magic clothes are donated to the Protagonist before, and they are the only tools for the protagonist to reach the next narrative stage,

The division I propose is advantageous for the study of tales because:

• it is based on structural units, and it is therefore quite directly accessible
• it focuses on the agents of the narrative, rather than the events, and therefore it is more deftly applicable to different genres
• it avoids eurocentric bias by concentrating on the functions and their oikotypical values rather than on motifs of the AT Index.

The five components I have singled out are going to be examined below.

3.2 The five elements

a)   The protagonist and her (missing) double

The first of the five elements treated here is our protagonist, Ye Xian. The analysis of this character shows how her description does not fit entirely with the Han culture and, instead, there are some aspects which could be related to Middle-Eastern ancient societies.

Ye Xian, our protagonist, is presented in the text after her father, who is defined as 主吴 *zhuwu*: *zhu* usually signifies "lord", and *wu* is a term with many meanings, but it was generally used to describe a territory or a state in ancient southern China. It is then specified that people called him 吴洞 *wu dong* "the lord of the caves"; Jameson "*chief of a mountain cave*" [Jameson 1932:75], Waley "cave-master" [Waley,1947:227],and Carrie Reed "*cave-dweller*" [Reed, 2001:113]. It might seem, at first, that this is a fantastic element, related to fairy tales, to a mythical time when people lived in caves, before the Qin and the Han, before civilisation appeared. This conception is supported by Fay Beauchamp, who informs us that in the area of Guilin there are caves that were used, during the Tang, as places of cult for ritual purposes [Beauchamp, 2010: 456]: this would identify our protagonist as a girl of a lower class; unlike some later Western versions, where Cinderella is the daughter of a rich man relegated to menial work by the evil stepmother. The older variants depict a poor girl, especially in the Far East. Chieko Irie Mulhern affirms that "Neither by birth nor by marriage are Chinese heroines aristocratic" [Irie Mulhern, 1985: 10]; and Tangherlini, a scholar who investigated Korean versions, legitimately hypothesises that the tale is nothing but the description of the reward of a skilled, hard-working woman who marries thanks to her qualities of a perfect wife of humble extraction according to the Confucian moral [Tangherlini, 1994 :282-304]. Waley, however, proposes that the name of Ye Xian's father indicates something different: "In our story, Cinderella's father is referred to as a "cave-owner", and the aborigines of this district are described by another T'ang writer in 821 as "living in precipitous places on the mountain side" and "calling themselves cave-owners". It is possible that in the 9th century they still lived chiefly in caves. But in Sung times (10th to 13th centuries) "cave" had come simply to mean "native settlement". The Sung History enumerates eleven "caves" ("native settlements") near Nan-ning. It is evident from the story that Cinderella lived in a house,

not a cave, and that the term "cave-owner" is applied to her father in an ethnic, not a literal, sense" [Waley, 1947: 230].

Moreover, in his article, Lu Yilu reports the result of the research carried out by a historiographer of the Guanxi area, according to which 洞 *Dong,* during the Tang dynasty indicated an administrative division, and that 洞主 is therefore to be understood as an administrative title among the Zhuang minority [Lu, 2003: 8-11]. Mair translates it as "tribal leader" [Mair, 2005: 364] identifying therefore our heroine as belonging to a higher class; that would make Ye Xian a person with a more prestigious social position than the other protagonists of the Asian tradition, and more associable to the ones of the Western and Middle-Eastern variants. There are many factors, though, suggesting that Ye Xian was a girl from a rural settlement who did not disdain working actively for the family; all the same, she probably enjoyed a higher status of which she had been deprived by her evil stepmother.

There is another fascinating hypothesis on the term *wu* which, according to Wang Qing, indicates, in the 隋书 *Sui shu* (*The book of Sui,* the official story of the Sui dynasty written during the Tang dynasty)*,* an insular administrative unit, therefore setting the story on Sumatra or one of the neighbouring islands [Wang, 2006:15], completely transforming the geographical connotations of the story and, therefore, its origins.

Duan Chenghi's concise prose informs the reader that: "娶两妻，一妻卒*" qu liang qi, yi qi zu* he married two women, and one died. Some scholars have ascribed this to an evident example of polygamy, making this story hardly coherent with Chinese culture. Chinese men in ancient times could have many concubines, but only one legitimate wife; populations in the South, though, who were considered peripheral, barbaric, in a word, *guai,* might have practised polygamy, and therefore the story would appear as non-Han. Waley, who recognises that the tale most likely contains a case of polygamy, considers this element strange to Han culture, and therefore excludes that this might be a Han narrative, while stating that it was indeed quite a common practice among the Southern minorities [Arthur Waley: 58].

In the section on the figure of the mother it will be explained how some scholars, whose theory I strongly support, relate this element to Middle-Eastern culture. Even though we cannot know whether the story is about a widower who remarries, a man with a concubine, or a polygamous individual belonging to a tribe where it was a commonly accepted custom, Ye Xian is later described as a 上妇 *shangfu,* after her marriage, "principal wife", which might represent an attempt at sinification of a detail hardly in line with Confucian society.

Next we encounter the name of the protagonist, 叶限 Ye Xian. All the scholars who have studied this tale agree on the fact that this was not a commonly used girl's name in ancient China, and it was most probably a phonetic transcription of a foreign term, as the characters composing the word respectively mean "leaf" and "limit". It would be extremely useful to know whether the name comes from a region of China where Han Chinese was not the first language, or from another country altogether; such information, however, can only be the object of mere speculation as there are no certain traces of this name in Chinese literature. Ye Xian has never been related to the name *Asenath* despite the fact that this Egyptian name might have had a similar pronunciation in ancient Semitic languages. Asenath is the protagonist of a story in which a girl whose stepmother is her rival in love repents in ashes and is guided to the recognition through a magic ring, and subsequent marriage, by a man from the sky, which oddly bear outstanding similarity with Ye Xian's 天人 *tianren,* person from the sky. The narrative appears in a Syrian text dating back to the 6th century in the Middle East, and it is considered an apocryphal interpretation of the Old Testament. As in many apocryphal stories of the Bible, this tale contains folklore elements circulating in the area for centuries before being reinterpreted and adapted to the holy book. Many a narrative on the childhood of Christ, the Virgin, and many other characters of the Bible display successive elaboration of motifs belonging to the folk tradition of Middle East [Schwarzbaum, 1968]. A combination of elements of this tale with Rhodopis and Rooth's A1 is not only possible, but even plausible for the presence in

Ye Xian of the ashes in the dung heap in the backyard, and the inexplicable presence of the man from the sky as a helper.

Another very fascinating hypothesis, though, is Wang Qing's theory that the name might be the phonetic transcription of *Asan,* which is the term for "*ash*" in Sanskrit. This idea, which unfortunately cannot be proven, would revolutionise the current conjectures on the origin of the tale; instead of a Middle-Eastern provenance, in fact, we could imagine that the tale originated in Indo-European culture. The word "ash" itself is connected to *Asan*, and most European versions — Cinderella, Cenicienta, Cendrillon, Aschenputtel, Aschenbrodel, Pepeljuga and so on — are related to the ashes of the hearth [Wang, 2006:17]; even in the modern Chinese name of Cinderella, 灰姑娘 *Huiguniang,* the first term means *ash.* However, this explanation, though captivating, does not take into account that in medieval Chinese the two character composing Ye Xian would have sound i̯ɛpɣăn, therefore showing a little connection with *Asan.*

As the tale goes, we are presented with more information on the protagonist. 少,惠善陶金,父爱之 *shao tao jin, fu ai zhi.* She was young and intelligent — or, if we do regard 少惠 as a syntagma, bright since she was a child —and good at working gold, and her father loved her. These two sentences are put together, to demonstrate that her father loved her dearly for her good nature, but also for her skills: this theme of Ye Xian as a skilled worker will appear again in this thesis, as it is an important key to interpreting this text according to the cultural system within which it was being retold. As we will see in the following chapter, Ye Xian is a talented girl, well-versed in domestic duties.

An important piece of evidence is the locution 善陶金 *shan tao jin,* whose translation might be quite controversial, and the undefined use of punctuation in ancient Chinese makes it even more so.

Now, 陶 *tao* usually means pottery, and so the sentence would read "good at pottery and gold", which sounds a bit odd, since there is no verb in the phrase. Waley gives a completely different meaning to the word 金, supposing it sounded similar to 轮 *lun,* wheel, when the tale was recorded and therefore it should be considered an error Duan

committed upon writing down Li's tale. According to his translation, however, that would clearly denote a foreign origin of the tale "Yeh-hsien's skill in pottery" is another non-Chinese trait. Pottery is usually regarded in China as man's work" [Waley, 1947:226]. Although Waley's opinion is interesting, gold seems to be an element quite important in this tale. Gold is normally cited in fairy tales for its magical character: in folk stories, magic objects are usually rare and precious, such as gold, silver, crystals, diamonds, spiderwebs, leaves, and the skin of magical animals. Nevertheless, there are records that gold was an important part of the life of the Chinese minorities in classical times. Beauchamp, citing Barlow [Barlow, 2001:223] indicates that: "the Guangxi prefecture was wealthy, with one gold mine being a 'truly significant producer,' and he refers to a Song Dynasty source that indicates that alluvial gold, found in stream beds, was sifted under the control of Zhuang headmen" [Beauchamp, 2010:460].

There is no reason, therefore, to imagine a magical element, even more so as gold appears at various times related to Ye Xian's clothes, the fish colour and the precious gifts she receives from the fish bone. For this reason, accepting that the character 金 *jin* actually means gold, then we have the option of Jameson "sifting gold". This is supported by Beauchamp, whose idea is introduced by the proven abundance of gold in rivers of southern China although, she points out, "These facts would support Jameson's word choice. But a woman's skill lies in embroidery, not in the work of sluicing for gold that was done by 'labor gangs'" [Beauchamp, 2010:460]. Not even the freedom that women enjoyed among the minorities, according to Beauchamp, allowed them to do a hard task traditionally reserved to men. Gold, thus, can be a clear element connected to the economy of the country of origin [Wang, 2006:15], but many a factor induce us to suppose that Ye Xian's ability was not related to its collection, but to feminine skills. Mair, in fact, considering 陶 *tao* a verb, translates "good at working gold", adding that the verb is uncertain and putting forward a key suggestion saying that Ye Xian "may have been proficient at spinning gold thread, a technique perfected by the Persian and other Middle Eastern peoples" [Mair 2005:366]. Since spinning gold was probably a foreign practice,

there would have been problems transmitting the concept from one cultural system to the other. Nonetheless, this seems to be the cleverest translation: the shoe, as explained below, is precious, unique but also silent and discreet, reflecting its owner's qualities: embroidering with gold thread seems to be the safest option. Ye Xian is therefore most probably described as possessing extremely impressive skills at spinning and embroidering, and she is later described as brave, as she does not refrain from collecting wood and water in dangerous places.

A great part of this story, therefore, would be the fantastical transposition of abilities and tasks a good housewife would have to endure in a rural society [Tangherlini, 1994:290], just like most of the Far-Eastern Cinderellas circulating in later times. Ye Xian would thus be a Confucian story about a girl who is preparing to meet her destiny and become the perfect, obedient wife, according to Han Chinese codes of behaviour, in force for centuries in the empire.

One more element of southern Chinese origin could be the description of her attire when she is ready to go to the Cave Ball: 衣翠纺上衣, *yichuifang shang yi, nie jinlü,* wearing a jacket woven with kingfisher feathers — along with the precious gold, golden or gold-embroidered slippers. 翠鸟 *cuiniao* is the kingfisher's current name. This bird preys on fish and is always found near water. According to Jameson*,* 翠 *cui* is to be intended as the colour of the feathers, hence his translation "dressed herself in bluish finery" [Jameson, 1982: 76], where this bluish indicates emerald green and iridescent blue.

Zhuang expert prof. Nong informed Beauchamp that this bluish colour was a recurrent traditional element in Zhuang female clothing "The professors felt that the beauty of the cloth was a strong marker of identification between the Zhuang and the story" [Beauchamp, 2010:457]. Waley's translation is "a cloak of stuff spun from kingfisher feathers"; 纺 *fang*, in fact can be either translated as a noun "light tunic" or a verb "to weave".

Whatever the translation, and whether the clothes were made of kingfisher feathers, or they were the colour of the kingfisher itself, the reference to this animal is certain: kingfishers

are abundant in south-eastern Asia, a region extremely rich in water, and in Cambodia they were hunted to provide the Chinese market with their feathers to make clothes and hats [Beauchamp, 2010: 457]. Moreover, headgear made of this bird's feathers had a clear literary Chinese connotation, as in the famous example of Yang Guifei, the unfortunate protagonist of Bay Juyi's *Song of everlasting sorrow,* who wore headgear of this kind 翠翹金雀玉掻頭 *cuiqiao jin que yusaotou,* her kingfisher hair ornament, her gold sparrow hairpin and her jade hair clasp [白居易 Bai Juyi, 長 恨 歌 *Zhanghenge*, line 40].

Even though these elements might all point to a Chinese origin, my thesis, however, is that Ye Xian is the link between the later Cinderella stories and the ancient narrative of Rhodopis, a girl who married a prince when her sandal was stolen and dropped into his lap. Since Ye Xian is most probably the first of these Confucian narratives — that would become so widespread in China, Korea and Vietnam — however, it is not yet perfectly Confucian, and therefore not completely Han. Most of the elements that would indicate this hypothesis will be discussed below, when the single motifs are tackled. These elements are: the strange relationship between a stepmother and a stepdaughter; the presence of many, incongruent figures of the Helper; the disturbing element of reincarnation into animal form; the absence of foot binding; the fact that Ye Xian disobeys her stepmother to participate in the Cave Festival; and, first and foremost, the fact that she ends up marrying a prince instead of a young candidate to the imperial exams, as in most later stories.

There is, nonetheless, another factor that should be analysed in this part, which is the virtual absence, — in this story — of an evil counterpart, a stepsister who incarnates all the traits a good, Confucian girl should not possess: greediness, laziness, and lack of respect towards the family hierarchy.

Cinderella stories in general, and Ye Xian in particular, do not move too much sympathy towards the heroine. As a matter of fact, in our times the passivity shown by the mistreated little girl is associated with resigned acceptance of one's fate, with dull indifference towards the possible outcomes of life. It is extremely interesting to note, however, that some of the Cinderellas we have seen in our analysis are absolutely divergent from the

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image of the girl obedient to her own disadvantage. Throughout the tradition, our mistreated protagonist has been a thief, a liar and even a murderer; in some versions she goes as far as killing her own sister and stepmother.

Ye Xian, on the contrary, suffers and endures all the abuse because she knows that she represents, in a Confucian and Buddhist society, what is good and just for a girl.

In the Eastern versions, Cinderella is the eldest daughter in a family, as this element makes the story more violent and impressive for a person whose traditions are rooted in Confucianism: filial piety, 孝 *xiao*, is one of the Confucian virtues a child (or child-in-law) has to observe in order to keep the cosmic order wanted by Tian, Heaven, and maintained by the joint efforts of the Emperor and all his subjects.

It comes as no surprise, then, that in many versions that would be successful in China, Korea and Vietnam, the heroine is juxtaposed to an evil sister who incarnates all the traits contrary to the Confucian spirit and, in general, is both physically and morally negative. This motif, the comparison between a positive and a negative character, is extremely common in folk tales across the world, and is usually identified as a specific type, which in the Aarne- Thompson index is indicated as AT480. "The Kind and Unkind Girl" resembles what Ding identifies as the "Modern Chinese Tradition", and in which two sisters or stepsisters are compared to highlight the virtues of the first. This is the case of Chinese and Korean versions popularised later and imbibed with Confucian moral. The examples are countless: in China we have *A story of the two sisters, Yang Pa and Yang Lan, Two- Eyes* and so on [see Ding, 1974]. Examining the story *Pari Princess,* whose figure has been of example for Korean girls across the centuries, Kun Jong Lee states that "The moral of the narrative is filial piety, the cardinal virtue in Confucianism" [Lee, 2004:435].

Timothy Tangherlini offers an important key to the interpretation of far-eastern narratives culturally connected to Confucianism: he modifies Bengt Holbek's *Interpretation of Fairy Tales: Danish Folklore in a European perspective*. Holbeck identifies three fundamental social oppositions on which folk tales are based and with which the audience can identify: these pairs are young/ adult, lower status/ higher status and male/female, forming a cube

along whose lines all the interactions in a tale move [Holbek,1987: 410]. Tangherlini inserts a fourth juxtaposition in his analysis of Korean folk tales: the filial/non filial opposition, according to which devotion to family and respect of the hierarchy is prized as the greatest virtue, and its lack regarded as the worst ignominy.

Ye Xian disobeys her stepmother's order and participates in the Cave Festival adorned with her most beautiful pieces of clothing; her stepsister notices a resemblance between this girl and Ye Xian, and informs the stepmother of her presence. This is all the sister has to do to become one of the villains of the story: in no other part is she described as abusive or even mentioned, if not to inform the reader of her existence and, finally, her punishment. To be killed, probably stoned to death, seems quite an extremely hard punishment for a stepsister, but maybe less so to the audience of the Tang dynasty: the stepsister says to the mother "此甚似姊也" *ci shen shi zi ye* "this really looks like my sister", using the term 姊 *zi*, elder sister, demonstrating therefore that Ye Xian, whose presence she is denouncing, is the sister to whom she should have shown respect throughout the story. Ye Xian, in fact, as biological daughter of the father, and elder sister, was entitled to greater respect and reverence in Confucian society: the order being menaced, only the punishment of the stepsister, who is the younger one, can re-establish justice and harmony. This human or divine vengeance is very common: she is killed by her husband whom she had stolen from her older sister, in *A tale of the two sisters* [Yuan, 1929:55-56] Vietnamese variant, *Kajong And Haloek*, in which the evil foster mother, Kajong, is tricked into eating the flesh of her own dead daughter (who boiled herself alive trying to be as beautiful as Kajong) — punishment for both of them.

In some versions of the Korean Cinderella □□ □□ Konjiwi and Patjiwi, the stepmother and stepsister kill the protagonist, and the husband ends up with the evil sister, thinking that she is the other one. Thanks to some form of magic, she comes back to life and with her husband plots to punish Patjiwi, the bad sister, whom they cook and offer to the stepmother. The latter dies in horror when she discovers she has been feasting on her own daughter's flesh. Kongjiwi and her husband live happily ever after. The atrocity of the

story is that, unwillingly, stepmother and stepsister perform the greatest ritual of filial piety, not unknown in Chinese and Korean society "Real examples of children who feed their parents with their own flesh seem to have occurred until the end of the Yi dynasty" [Janelli,1992: 51]. This hardly seems to depict a Cinderella-like heroine: in Western culture, slaughtering and serving human flesh is the greatest crime. In Greek tradition, Tantalus received the worst punishment in Greek Hell for challenging the gods. By killing his own son and serving it at a feast where the immortals had been invited, Tantalus breaks the moral order which the new Greek, patriarchal society, was imposing; his punishment must be an example as he represents the chaotic, animal and metamorphic world of the tribal society they have come to replace. These Eastern Cinderellas, through their crime, attempt to re-impose order to the world by punishing those who wanted to destroy this order that begins with respecting family hierarchy. Their acts are abominable, but breaking social rules represents too big a threat to the society.

Ye Xian represents a good image of filial piety, but is only partially a Confucian heroine, as we have seen; only in later versions do Chinese Cinderella possess an anti-filial alter ego, usually her younger sister, who breaks celestial harmony by usurping the benefits conceived for the elder, the real father's daughter. The step-daughter, whose only luck is to have her mother re-married and who, in some later versions, tries to pass as her elder daughter to marry her fiancé, mimics her uninterested sister's good deeds, moved by her desire of benefits and riches, and usually ends up punished for her lack of compassion, politeness and, in general, a generous heart.

This kind of tale is different from our Cinderella, the AT510A, yet they have been intertwined since the origins of the tale: the psychoanalytical explanation given by Bettelheim may be the need of the child to reaffirm her goodness and her positive role in the family when, with puberty, she is made to work hard by her mother. Not only does the protagonist fail to recognise the new behaviour of her mother, therefore perceiving her as a stepmother; she also develops a rivalry with her younger sister who, not having yet reached

maturity, is still treated tenderly by the mother for her status of child as opposed to "bride-to-be".

My opinion is that, in a Confucian society, for the reasons we have seen thus far, the presence of an unfilial sister, exalting the virtue of the obedient girl, was more successful as it was more related to the customs and traditions of China and its neighbouring countries in the same cultural sphere of influence. What Ding calls "Modern Chinese Tradition", presenting the antagonism between two girls, produced more variants and was more widespread in China; while in Europe it gradually separated into two different stories. Before the oldest versions we know were created — Rushin Coatie, where the protagonist kills the sister; Basile, where the protagonists kills the mother; and Perrault, where there is no mention of the chores done by the sisters — Cinderella and The Kind and Unkind Girls were two different tales.

The moral conduct exemplified in the story of the two sisters, or the good girl and bad girl, was so crucial for Confucian society to become more important than other elements, such as a dead mother who reincarnates into animal form, a girl recognised for her shoe or who gets to marry a king (unheard of in the rigid Chinese social system). This partial lack of success is another indication for folklorists that the oikotype of AT510a, in ancient China, tried to adapt because, as it had come by sea to land in southern China, it did not meet the needs and the moral of the people it was told to, and therefore had to undergo profound changes in order to become an important part of the national folklore. As Ding states, the Ancient tradition was not successful, and did not take off in Chinese ancient culture, as will be explained in the next chapters. One reasonable motive might be that, as it was recorded by Duan Chengshi, it had come from a foreign land and therefore, was a strange tale or, better, Tale of the Strange. It was interesting for its anecdotal value but did not represent the culture and sensibility of the people it had come to be told.

Ye Xian, as a protagonist, is not therefore to be regarded as a Chinese element of the story, since her characteristics, despite the effort to modify this figure according to Chinese cultural expectation, are still too atypical; her skills and resourcefulness, and in the virtual

absence of her bad sister, whose role will be crucial in later Chinese narratives of this type, clearly demonstrate a foreigner origin of this element.

b)   The antagonist: the evil stepmother

The presence of the stepmother, also, despite being an element in many Chinese stories, is not a proof of Han origin of this story. On the contrary, her connotation in this text is not only not exclusively Chinese, but can be related to the ancient Rooth A1 narrative.

The stepmother is a recurrent element in many a fairy tale, personifying the evil member of the family who overcomes a weak father figure pushing him to abandon his children like in *Hansel and Gretel*, or plotting to kill her beautiful stepdaughter as in *Snow White*. According to the psychoanalytical school of folklore, the figure of the stepmother probably symbolised the feeling of alienation which overwhelmed young girls when they came of age and were no longer regarded as children, and were asked to participate in the house management, being at the same time at the orders of the older women of the family, especially their mothers; contemporaneously, sexual development would probably change the manner they were perceived by the members of the community, and their mothers would admonish them (as *Little Red Riding Hood* seems to signify), adding to this grudge between the female members of the household; these growing tensions and rivalry would create antagonisms which induced your girls to perceive their mothers as actually abusive stepmothers. Cinderella tales, and Ye Xian is no exception, are stories of rivalry between the protagonist and her sister(s), and also between her and her mother. In fact, in the medieval versions the antagonist is the biological mother, who only in later versions becomes a stepmother, determined by an Oedipal complex: "Cinderella's wish to eliminate Mother is completely repressed in the modern versions and replaced by a displacement and a projection: it is not Mother who overtly plays a crucial role in the girl's life, but a stepmother; Mother is displaced by a substitute and it's not the girl who wants to debase mother so that she will be able to play a much bigger role in her father's life, but, in a projection, it is the stepmother who wants to see the girl replaced. One more displacement

further assures that the true desires remain hidden: it is her siblings who want to take the heroine's rightful place away from her."[Bettelheim, 2010:249] It is psychologically necessary to get rid of the mother in order to gain adulthood. It is quite obvious that the psychoanalytical approach, though very fascinating, is at times not genuinely connected with the real literary and folkloric phenomena. The first nucleus of Cinderella, according to Rooth, is an orphan whose mothers comes back in an animistic form to bestow gifts, and this is radically different from the psychological explanation according to which the child symbolically transforms the mother into a stepmother, or kills her like in the medieval versions, only to make her come back as a fairy godmother (since Christianity did not tolerate the idea of a good mother coming back as an animal or a ghost). The two stories, which eventually merged into one, seem to describe two different situations in a child's life: in the first, the comfort of the return of a deceased loved one; in the second, female rivalry in a girl's maturation process.

The latter can be explained anthropologically as the training girls had to undergo in order to become perfectly suitable brides; in tribal societies, girls who reached their sexual maturity were gathered and isolated in a hut where they were energetically taught domestic tasks by an elderly woman. Chen Yuping states that the tale symbolises this rite of passage (supporting the thesis of the first folklorists according to whom fairy tales are shreds of narrative of tribal rituals): the helpers thus represent a girl's female companions and the whole tale symbolises this stressful situation, the old matriarch is the horrible stepmother and the protagonist finally reaches sexual and social maturity[Chen 1998:59]. The connection between this kind of tale and the tasks of adulthood is obvious, and that is probably what made some scholars of the psychoanalytical school state that every girl in a traditional, family-centred world would relate to it while growing up and assuming her new role in the family and in society. It is indeed very visible in later Western and Eastern versions, such as the most famous Korean variation, *Kongjiwi and Patjiwi,* whose reference to marital tasks is explicit: "As such, the difficult tasks presented in this section can be taken as a representation of a domestic output of a wife, within the span of lifetime"

[Tangherlini, 1994:290]. Our version, however, differs in this aspect, as the reader is only told that Ye Xian was sent like a servant to gather wood and collect water in dangerous places, but there is no allusion to typical chores. Moreover, she possesses the ability to make pottery and spin gold, which are quite unusual for a girl trained to be a perfect wife, especially in rural China. But, whether or not the single versions insist on these chores, the central figure of the Cinderella tales is always an evil stepmother whose features have been adapted to different cultural systems.

Our study now proceeds to the analysis of this figure in order to investigate its conformity with ancient Chinese culture.

First of all, let us have a look at the text, which reads 娶两妻，一妻卒 *qu liang qi, yi qi zu*

"(he) married two wives, one died". In this short sentence the reader is informed that there are two wives, 妻 *qi*. Zhang Zichen [Zhang, 1986:51-57] describes this tale as an explicit allusion to feudal Chinese family customs, which saw concubines mistreat non-biological children in the household in the attempt to gain advantages for their own offspring (and in fact China was not the only country where this was a reality, as we can read in the ancient Indian epic poem *Ramayana*). Fay Beauchamp, along with Liu Xiaochun [1997:102] and Lu Yilu [2003:10] see a clear association between Ye Xian and this epic poem, affirming that it is certain that Indian and Chinese cultures had strong contacts, especially after the spread of Buddhism. The *Ramayana* presents a rivalry between stepbrothers; a stepmother who clearly favours her own son and mistreats the other, driven away covered in rags thus losing his status; his later recognition through an amulet; and a happy ending through marriage. There is also a reference to a helping fish, as we will see in the chapter on helpers. However, these similarities are mostly superficial. In fact, Ye Xian is a girl; there is no rivalry between the sisters; and while the final identification is between two people who already know each other in the *Ramayana*, in Ye Xian concerns the protagonist meeting her future husband. In the *Ramayana*, moreover, there is a rivalry between concubines.

As aforementioned, the Chinese language is rich in words to identify a concubine, 妾 *qie* being by far the most commonly used; 妻 and 妾 are not synonyms, and the word 妻妾 *qiqie* indicates both the legal wives and concubines of a man. It is therefore a wild assumption to imagine, as in the late European versions, a widower who remarries, because the text says that Ye Xian's father had two wives. Was Ye Xian's stepmother a concubine? Or was what the narrator of the story describing actually polygamy, as practised in many parts of the ancient world, but not in China since the Han Dynasty, and outlawed during the Tang. The Tang code reports that a man who would take a second legal wife, would be sentenced to a year of penal labour, as would his second wife unless she could prove she had been deceived. In any case, the marriage would be annulled：“諸有妻更娶妻者，徒一年；女家減一等。若欺妄而娶者，徒一年半；女家不坐。各離之。” *"zhu you qi geng qu qi zhe, tu yi ninan; un jia jian yi deng. Ruo qi wang er qu zhe, tu yi nina ban; un jia bu zuo. Ge li zhi."* [see Tang code].

Some scholars seem to ignore this fact, and they actually see this element as perfectly fitting with Han society.

Hu Mei, for example, believes that the tale is about a feudal polygamist society pointing out that, unlike in the European version when the father is weak or absent, Ye Xian disgrace consists in the death of her father, the only masculine figure able to protect her, according to the strongly patriarchal Confucian society [Hu, 2003:74]; Liu Xiaochun also mentions a polygamist society where mothers try to favour their biological children, making the stepmother an evil character while, in a strictly patriarchal society, the acquisition of the rights to her own children was everything a mother could do in the harsh competition with the other women of the family[Liu, 1995:35]; similarly Chen Yuping, whose approach to the tale is more psychoanalytical and describe the story as a rite of passage to adulthood, justifies the hatred of the stepmother towards her daughter with the fact that she is probably a concubine [Chen, 1998:57].

If we are really dealing with a case of polygamy, as the text seems to suggest, we have another hint of the "strange", the 怪 *guai* character of the story, and its exotic and foreign origin: while it is possible that polygamy was practised in Southern China before the conquest of the Han, it is universally known that it was commonly practised in the pre-Islamic and Islamic Middle-East, where we are hypothesising this tale originated. Whether she was the only official wife, or she was one of the legal wives, Ye Xian's mother dies: Liu Xiaochun [1995:35], in his accurate study, explains the universal success of the element of the mistreated orphan with the fact that giving birth was always an extremely dangerous occurrence, as it exposed a woman to infections such as the terrible puerperal sepsis. Our protagonist is now at the mercy of this evil stepmother — and Chinese stepmothers in Chinese literature are numerous and fierce.

In the legends regarding the life of Shun the Great,—one of the mythical Chinese emperors —, collected in the Yuan compilation 二十四孝 *ershisi xiao*, *Twenty-four examples of filial virtue* only a few centuries after the publication of the Youyang zazu and rooted in the collective imagination, the orphan Shun is said to have been mistreated and nearly killed several times by his stepmother and stepbrother Xiang, whom he always forgave until their repentance and redemption. This attitude of passive resistance to wrongdoers, even when they occupy a subaltern position in the family, is perfectly in line with the Confucian virtue of 孝 *xiao*, filial piety. As the wife chosen by the father, the head of the family, the stepmother is in fact related to his authority, which must at all cost be maintained in order to guarantee the earthly harmony which reflects the heavenly one. In addition to Shun's, the same work presents other stories, for instance Min Ziqian's and Wang Xian's, respectively number four and twelve, which narrate examples of filial piety connected to stepmothers and their filial stepsons. The stories are set in the time of Confucius and the protagonists will become two famous disciples. The first, Min Ziqian, is harshly abused by his stepmother, who in front of her husband, Min's father, pretends to behave lovingly towards her stepson. Not only does he docilely put up with all her vexations, but in the end he even convinces his father, who has discovered the true nature

of his wife, not to abandon her and her biological son. The second, Wang Xiang, has to deal with a stepmother who does not care for him, and who is dangerously inappetent due to a mysterious illness. To make her eat, he lies on the surface of a frozen lake in order to melt it and fish a carp whose broth is the stepmother's favourite food (in this story, we curiously have another stepmother who eats a fish, although in a completely different context). All these proverbial examples could make us think that Ye Xian could have originated in China, because the stepsister is a figure with very famous representatives in classical Chinese literature[Lu, 2003: 10].

There is a fact, nonetheless, that disproves the idea of the Chinese origin, which is that in Chinese literature, the most famous examples of despicable stepmothers tolerated by stepsons, *id est* sons of one of the other wives of the family. Concubines always tried to favour their own children, especially sons, since male children were seen as the continuity of the family name and, on a more practical side, they could help do hard work in the fields. A secondary wife could reach a higher status by bearing sons, heir of the lineage; on the other hand, as discussed by Tangherlini and Ding Naidong, in pre-modern China it was not difficult to get rid of an unwanted orphan stepdaughter by sending her to serve in some family or to her future husband's household as a 童养媳 *tongyangxi*, a bride-to-be, custom which was practised especially by poor families in Northern China who could not afford to maintain one more female family member; a boy was, however, a whole different story. "He usually stayed to work on his father's farm. If he was the oldest boy in the family, he could be entitled to the largest share of the patrimony. The stepmother was supposed to hate him or even plot against him. Hence folk imagination invented many tales of atrocities inflicted on stepsons"[Ding, 1974:36].

Along with mistreated stepsons, we have another model that see a patient daughter-in-law abused by her husband's mother. Stories depicting a vicious mother in law tormenting her son's wife are abundant in Chinese ancient literature. Tangherlini goes as far as to hypothesise that the Korean version he analyses, *Kongjiwi and Patjiwi* (which is a topic examined by the writer in another work), depicts the practice of *minmyomuri*, which is the

equivalent of *tongyangxi* in Korea. A Korean traditional proverb recites "a female offspring is a thief"; it was thus normal to send a girl to her fiancé's house to work for years before marriage. The figure of the stepsister and stepmother in the story would therefore be intended as the future husband's family members [Tangherlini. 1995:279]. Due to the motives expressed above, we have two models of Cinderella: one in which the protagonist is a male, and the other, presenting a young woman mistreated by her mother-in-law, since a stepson was basically the heir of the family and it was virtually impossible to get rid of him. Therefore, there is a gap of centuries between Ye Xian and the majority of later versions in which the protagonist is a female; the figure of the stepmother is quite common, but she is related to the mistreatment of a stepson, rather than a stepdaughter. The lack of success of this model — a young woman mistreated by her stepmother — is another hint of the difficulty of this tale's adaptation to Chinese culture.

Some writers, [see Zhang, 2012; Li and Li, 2009] explain the element of punishment of the bad characters and the rewards which awaits Ye Xian as a typical Karmic and Buddhist feature, and therefore as evidence of its Chinese origin. Nevertheless, the satisfaction produced through the reward of the good character and punishment of the villain in narratives is hardly an exclusively Buddhist aspect, as it is universally connected to the idea of divine justice, which is also present in most traditions and religions: in the Grimm version, just to make an example, the stepsisters, driven by greed and encouraged by their mother, try to shorten their feet by self-mutilation in order to fit into the magic shoes and achieve a better economic and social status through marriage with the prince. Ye Xian, thus, cannot really be defined as a Buddhist tale, especially basing this judgement on this reward-punishment element. First of all, while the stepmother is quite mean, the stepsister is not described as a particularly tormenting character. All the same, she meets her fate with her mother; and what is even odder, is that they both are first pitied by the people of the Caves, and then buried and worshipped as goddesses. Secondly, poor Ye Xian, although quite well-married, is constantly nagged by her greedy husband whose insatiable desire for riches is frustrated when, after a year, the fish bone interrupts its magical aid. There is a

mention of a military rebellion, and one day both riches and fish bone are washed away with the tide.

It is quite clear, therefore, that not only do the elements connected with the stepmother fail to provide any evidence of a Buddhist or Confucian, and therefore Far-Eastern origin, since the figure is usually connected to a stepson rather than a stepdaughter in Chinese tradition, but also good and bad are not clear cut, as we would expect from a tale of reward and punishment, and therefore this tale is not Buddhist. The features which add confusion — the death and consequent worshipping of stepmother and stepsister and the continuation of the story with the greediness of the King — demonstrate at least two factors: firstly, the intent of "historicising" the facts as expected in a *zhiguai* story; and secondly, a long process of successive retelling, editing, adaptations and interpolations, breaking the linearity of the narrative and at the same time making it so interestingly unique and offering so much material for cultural analysis.

c) *The helpers*

According to Propp, helpers are crucial figures in the development of a fairy tale. In his categorisation of *dramatis personae*, the Helper comes second, and its figure is sometimes assimilated to that of the Donor. I have personally chosen to use the term "helper" since providing gifts is not the only function carried out by the figures playing this role in the tale.

These figures represent the key role in analysing this tale as there are three different helpers, one obvious and the other two present as relics of previous versions.

The text reads:

时尝得一鳞，二寸余，赪鳍金目，遂潜养于盆水。日日长，易数器，大不能受，乃投于后池中。女所得余食，辄沉以食之。女至池，鱼必露首枕岸，他人至不复出。

其母知之，每伺之，鱼未尝见也。因诈女曰：“尔无劳乎，吾为尔新其襦。”乃易其弊衣。后令汲于他泉，计里数百也。母徐衣其女衣，袖利刃行向池。呼鱼，鱼即出首，因斤杀之，鱼已长丈余。膳其肉，味倍常鱼，藏其骨于郁栖之下。逾日，女至向池，不复见鱼矣，乃哭于野。

Shi chang de yi lin, er cun yu, cheng qi jinmu, sui qian yang yu pen shui. Ri ri zhang, yi shu qi, da buneng shou, nai tou yu hou chi zhong. Nu suode yu shi, zhe chen yi shi zhi. Nu zhi chi, yu bi lu shou zhen an, ta ren zhi bu fuchu. Qi mu zhizhi, mei ci zhi, yu weichang jian ye. Yin zha nu yue: " Er wu lao hu, wu wei er xin qi ru." Nai yi qi bi yi. Hou ling ji yu ta quan, li shu bai ye. Mu xu yi qi nu yi, xiu liren xing xian chi. Hu yu, li chu shou, yin jin sha zhi, yu yi zhang zhang yu. Shan qi rou, wei bei chang yu, cang qi gu yu yuqqizhi xia. Yu ri, nu zhi xiang chi,bu fu jian yu yi, nai ku yu yue.

"Once she found a fish, a little over two inches long, with red fins and golden eyes and she put it in her bucket, then she kept it in a pot and raised it. Day by day it grew, so she repeatedly changed the pot; it grew so large it could not be held in a basin, so she threw it into the pond in the backyard. When she acquired a surplus of food, she at once submerged it to feed it. When the girl went to the pond, the fish would unfailingly stick its head out and pillow in onto the shore, but the fish would not come out if anyone else approached. The stepmother came to know about the fish, waited for it but it never appeared" So she deceived the daughter saying, "Haven't you been working too hard? I've made a new jacket for you." Whereupon she exchanged (the jacket) with (Ye Xian's) shabby clothes. After that she ordered her to collect water from a spring several miles away. The stepmother calmly dressed in her stepdaughter's clothes, tucking a sharp knife inside her sleeve, walked toward the pond and called the fish. At once the fish stuck out its head, then the stepmother killed it with the knife. The fish was already over ten feet long. She made a meal out of the its meat, twice as tasty as the common fish, and she hid the bones under the

dung heap. The next day, the girl went to the pond, she did not see the fish, and cried in the wilderness."

(My translation)

Before even starting the cultural analysis of the fish element, I would like to point out how, in so few lines, the author expresses the deep desperation and utter loneliness of this girl and, at the same time, depicts the evil personality of the stepmother.

At this moment of the story, in fact, the fish's only remarkable feature is its size; it is not described as a magical animal, and its role in the protagonist's life is to show her the little affection she is not receiving from the surviving members of her family. Out of sheer wickedness, the stepmother plots to kill the fish in order to deprive her stepdaughter of her only companion, to whom she gives all the extra food she can get hold of. This animal is thus a figure which offers love to Ye Xian, who is an orphan seeking affection where she can find it. Likewise, Cinderella's helpers, across the centuries, always incarnate an attempt to fulfil the lack of love she experiences. Apart from representing the company that animals can provide to children in need, when it comes to orphans, the animal, in animistic cultures, represented the returning soul of a dear departed. The fish, as a helper, is present in very few versions of Cinderella, which usually prefer other animals, as will be explained below. Its presence in this story, and the fact that it is killed even though it is not bestowing gifts, is complex and puzzling.

Some scholars have related the fish to the Hindu myth of deluge, as found in the *Satapatha Bhramana*, probably composed between the 8th and 6th centuries BC, and allegedly known among the Tangs, thanks to travelling Buddhist monks who had already spread Hindu folklore throughout China when Ye Xian was composed [Zhang, 2012:30]. The analogy is that Manu, the protagonist, ancestor of all humans, spares a little fish which, outgrowing every pot it is put into, warns him of the imminent inundations and suggests constructing an enormous boat to save himself and his beloved. This story, whose pivotal concepts are debt of gratitude and rewarded acts of kindness, shares in fact only a superficial similarity with ours, as it is more a moral tale containing a Buddhist message, present in many

traditions: an apparently insignificant animal is spared out of kindness, later offering an unexpected form of help to the protagonist. The same can be said about the deluge, a feature present virtually across the whole world, which symbolises a punishing divinity who spares the life of the just: the little fish in the Indian legend, in fact, is an avatar of Vishnu, growing to titanic dimensions once released into the ocean.

The goldfish is indeed a Chinese (Han) element; in modern China fish are carved as lucky charms, especially due to the homophony of the words 鱼 *yu* fish, and 余 *yu* surplus, abundance. Also, since ancient times, goldfish have been associated with dragons, and have a magical character. An old Chinese myth strictly connects dragons to carps and, in fact, a proverb derives from this myth: 鲤鱼跳龙门 *Liyu Tiao Long Men,* "the carp has leapt through the Dragon's Gate". This expresses courage, perseverance and accomplishment, as it was believed that the first carp to jump up a waterfall (located in different places according to the different myths — in Hunan, Shanxi or Gansu) would be transformed, for this achievement, into a dragon, the most powerful and magical creature of Chinese mythology.

The fish of our tale, on the other hand, is not magical — up to this point in the story — it is just an unusual pet, fond of its keeper, growing to very large dimensions, but in no way supernatural. On the contrary, it is described, quite meticulously:

二寸余，赪鳍金目, *er cun yu, cheng qi jin mu* (slightly over two inches, with red eyes and gold fins)*;* this is the description of a Koi carp or a goldfish, which was already common in South-Eastern Asia since the Jin dynasty, and during the Tang was commonly bred in decorative gardens [Roots, 2007:20–21]. At the same time, however, the gold 金 *jin*, appears some lines above to describe Ye Xian's abilities: the fish is golden, just like the gold she spins (or she works). It is therefore, a common animal with some supernatural characteristics worth mentioning: somehow it embodies the concept of 怪 *guai,* in its being exotic. The story goes to great lengths to describe the process of breeding fish; how to transfer it into different containers, then into a pond; and how to feed it with left overs. It also explains how the fish recognises its keeper, and how its meat tastes much better than

the average fish. This oddly long illustration, beginning with affection and ending with the consumption of the fish by a human, provides precious insight about the cultural identification of this tale.

Most scholars have related this version of the tale to the Yue or Bai Yue ethnic group, as the Han called the various populations of southern China, in the regions which roughly correspond to today's Yunnan, Guangdong, Guizhou, Hunan and northern Vietnam. These all had traditional tribal organisations with which the central government had troubles until the 10th century, when Vietnam became independent and all of southern China fell under the Chinese dynasties, undergoing a slow but steady process of sinification. Duan Chengshi's *zhiguai* told the story of this peripheral region with its strange customs: people living in caves, probably still practising polygamy, celebrating festivals in order to form new marriages, and whose girls embroidered precious slippers for this purpose. Their staple food was rice, grown in paddy fields and on rice terraces, where they also bred an important element of their diet, the carp. In his study of this tale, Liu Xiaochun connects the fish to the aquaculture typical of these areas, where fish, turtles and shrimp were an important source of food [Liu, 1995:33]; Hu Mei hypothesises a divinisation of fish as they were the main source of protein in the region [Hu, 2003:75], and Li Qizheng and Li Zhehong [Li, 2009:114] support this theory; while Ding Naidong [Ding, 1974:11] alludes to the familiarity of these people with fish. While it is indubitable that the fish appears in this story, as different cultural systems tend to adapt folklore figures to their own, familiar world, one has to wonder about the importance of this element in this tale. Fay Beauchamp, whose study reads the entire story as strictly associated to the large Zhuag minority — cultural heirs of the Yue group in China —, defines Ye Xian as a *culture bearer* [Beauchamp, 2010:463] who, apart from being a skilled craftswoman, multi-talented and good at heart, plays a crucial role in discovering and spreading the notion of domestic fish breeding. This latter practice provided her people with a significant source of food, which during the Tang Dynasty spread from southern China to India and then onto Java and Indonesia [Beauchamp, 2010:463]. Guanxi, with Guilin, is a territory in which

the abundance of water permitted the cultivation of rice and, as a side activity, aquaculture which provided a steadier source all year round. Another feature, mentioned by Beauchamp, is the association of fish to Buddha's bodhisattva Guanyin, the Buddha of Mercy, to whom "Mercy Ponds" are dedicated in the south of China, into which goldfish are poured as an offering for gaining her compassion. Guanyin is sometimes associated in her iconography with water and fish: she is at time represented standing on the head of a big fish; walking on water; and, in Fujian — also inhabited by the Yue group in ancient times — she is represented as a woman with a basket full of fish: one of her epithets is 鱼篮 观音, *Yulan Guanyin* (Guanyin with the fish basket). Although the canonical explanation is that the bodhisattva once appeared in a village as a fish seller, teaching the Sutras to people initially seduced by her beauty, in China the figure of the fish was often associated with the dragon, lord of all waters [see Werner, 1922]; in the south, the dragon became a large fish, like in the iconography of Guanyin, as fish were so important for survival.

One obvious paradox of the story, though, is that the figure of the fish, which later became an important source of nourishment, in this story is a pet, eaten by the stepmother; that seems to clash with the concept of Ye Xian being a culture bearer, as it is the villain who, in disguise, kills and eats the protagonist's faithful companion. Only Beauchamp seems to notice this paradox, as she explains that the fish is described as unusual, a special creature; Ye Xian illustrates how to raise carp, but hers is a Koi, the Japanese breed which, according to recent DNA studies, descends from the Chinese carp, becoming a pet when breeders selected the most beautifully coloured specimens [Beauchamp, 2010: 463]. Apart from its beauty, there was another important factor: raising fish in paddy fields was advantageous because they ate mosquitoes and their eggs and larvae, as well as other insects including parasites that feed on rice plants. By sparing fish, the human community received precious help in preserving their staple food, availing themselves of this natural pesticide. In some cultures, edible animals are not killed when they play a more important role in the ecological system, just like the cow in India, the horse in the United States, and

the dog in Europe. The services these animals provided greatly outnumbered the nourishment people could obtain from their meat, so they were spared and a religious or cultural taboo forbade their slaughter until this became so unnatural as to raise repulsion and indignation within the community [see Harris, 1966: 51–66]. Hence, while plain-coloured carps were normally eaten, also to control the abnormal growth of the number of fish in the fields, goldfish were exempt because they were considered special, just like the Heikegani crabs in Japan, whose particular shell pattern, vaguely resembling the face of a warrior, determined an involuntary artificial selection. Throughout the world, animals became sacred for some unusual characteristics, "Sacred fish are anomalous in appearance and/or behaviour." [Anderson, 1969: 445]

Only the comparative study of Cinderella stories, however, brings up another important element of analysis. As stated before, the intent of this work is to use the knowledge provided by different fields of study to investigate any aspect that might escape sinologists' attention which, however, becomes apparent when a more folklore-oriented examination is carried out.

The element of the evil stepmother who eats the helper is a common topic in the archaic forms of this story: the reader is reminded here that, according to Rooth's *The Cinderella Cycle,* the most ancient nucleus of the story is an orphan whose mother comes back in order to provide sustenance: her tomb produces gifts, or so does a tree or an animal — her reincarnation — until the evil stepmother desecrates the tomb, cuts down the tree, or kills and eats the animal. Only a few centuries after Ye Xian, Rashin Coatie's stepmother (or mother, in some versions) pretends to be sick and that she can be cured only with a broth made from the meat of the red calf that had hitherto helped the protagonist. In many later Chinese and Korean versions, the helping animal, normally a cow, is killed and cooked by the evil stepmother and stepsisters [Ding, 1974:13] —the latter are virtually absent in Ye Xian because, as pointed out before, the juxtaposition of a kind and an unkind girl had not yet been developed. Of course, a cow would seem a much more natural choice to represent the defunct mother, as it is the nourishing animal *par excellence* in that it provides milk

and is usually of a very docile nature. The reincarnation of the mother into an animal over time became an implicit suggestion, rather than a clear statement, due to its animistic nature, which contrasted the new official religions. The scholars who studied the Korean and the Tibetan versions, Timothy Tangherlini and Carla Gianotti, all say that a cow would be the most normal choice[Tangherlini, 1994:291].

Here, in southern China, a special fish which became an important ally in growing the staple food, and may in hard times become a source of food itself, took the place of whatever helper might have been present when the cultures came into contact.

有学者认为鱼类献宝故事具有深厚的文 化内涵, 反映着神话因素积淀和史前文化的 孑遗, 此类故事植根于原始思维的沃土, 鱼表 繁殖, 鱼兆丰称物阜, 鱼通灵有性及长生 善化的特性, 使它领有人类恩主的地位; 华夏先民 对鱼神的信仰与崇拜伴随着鱼文化 的发展而 积蓄与流传, 甚至在物质形态变更以后, 作为 精神意象还出现于风俗活动 和口承文艺 中。. 着眼于中国鱼文化的大系统, 这段论述 无疑具有相当的说服力。

我们在具体分析《叶限》故事中的神鱼相助(鱼类献宝) 母题时, 还应注意此类型母 题产生的具体文化环境。

"According to some scholars, the model of the fish as a helper presents profound cultural connotations which reflect the accumulation of mythological and prehistoric cultural relics; these stories are rooted in the fertile soil of the traditional mindset.

The fish which is raised, associated with physical and sexual strength and to longevity, and the cult of the fish was connected to that of the ancestors, providing help even after the transformation of its physical form. It appears in collective imagination and in oral culture; focusing on aquaculture, the argument is indeed quite convincing and, according to the author, this is a decisive element in the identification of Ye Xian as cultural product of a specific area"[2][Liu, 1995: 33].

Ye Xian's fish, just like the vulture in Rhodopis, is not a supernatural animal. While it is alive, it provides affection to the protagonist and grows to huge, but not titanic,

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2   My translation

proportions; when killed, it is particularly tasty. Thus it differs from talking and shape-shifting animals of proper fairy tales, and the fact that its magical powers begin only after its death seems to support the idea of the didactic value of the first part of the tale. Unlike other versions where the animals can work magic, the metamorphosis from helper to donor is guaranteed here by an external figure, obviously necessary since the helper is dead and only a third presence could ensure the realisation of the narrative.

This figure, who is to be considered the second of the three helpers/donors, is depicted quite clearly, but his or her role is so incongruous that many a hypothesis has been put forward in order to explain it. Ye Xian is said to be crying in the wilderness, when 忽有人被发粗衣，自天而降 "all of a sudden there was a person with dishevelled hair and course clothes, come down from the sky." This person consoles Ye Xian by telling her where to find the fish bone and what to do with it. This reference to the sky has been noticed, as Ye Xian is later defined as 天人 *tian ren*, heavenly creature. Yet, this character makes this appearance and then is not mentioned anywhere else in the text, functioning as a sort of *deus ex machina* who contributes to the narrative process which otherwise would be hindered. In other stories, there is a speaking animal giving instructions: but this would make the story less believable and weaken the illustration of fish-breeding. From a structural analysis, it looks like the teller had to introduce the description of the fish, and its death; at that moment, however, there was no manner to make the story continue without the help of a new figure, which was therefore introduced and then disappeared again.

Jameson, Waley and Giurastante translate 人 *ren* as man, while Victor Mair specifies that the term does not necessarily indicate a male person, as does Amy Lay, who describes how gender bias has affected the translation of this story in the last century. She associates this person from the sky to a Buddhist angel [Lai , 2007:53].

Beauchamp, who interviewed local experts of Zhuang traditional culture, affirms that the creature might represent a Buddhist angel [Beauchamp, 2010:479], although the features of the figure do not really seem to indicate an angel; or the spirit of either the father or the mother, which in other stories are presented more explicitly and connected to ancestor

worship, present throughout the entire Chinese territory [Beauchamp, 2010:456]. A different interpretation is that we are dealing with a witch, due to her dishevelled appearance: the witch and shaman are two similar figures that were intertwined and not always distinguishable from one another, especially in animistic religions such as Daoism in its origin. While the presence of the mother's spirit is the foundation itself of the tale type, there is not real evidence here that this is the case. On the contrary, the figure is not completely comforting, with his or her sudden and unusual appearance. On the other hand, a witch or a shaman would probably not be described as flying from the sky, which is prerogative of fully supernatural figures.

Now, Chinese stories are full of gods and goddesses, saints and reincarnations of the Buddha who present themselves as beggars in rags, tattered vagrant monks and shabby pilgrims, turning out to be divine in order to teach that appearances can be deceiving, as in the *Hong Luo Meng*, *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. The role of this character, however, is so short any disguise to hide his or her true identity would be useless, and so this option can also be eliminated. This figure, which breaks the homogeneity of the story, might be a 山神 *shan shen*, a mountain spirit in ancient Chinese tradition [Giurastante, 2010: 113]: a personification of natural elements. It is the writers' idea that it may even be related to the Jinns — flying creatures of the Middle-Eastern world, whose appearance was somewhat grotesque and who played a key role in the narrative. Jinns were also relics of the pre-Islamic period, and were similar to the *daimones* of the Greek world, holding an intermediate position between gods and humans, and related to natural elements. Just like nature, they possessed ambivalent qualities: "Jinn can take many shapes, especially a serpent, scorpion, lion, wolf, or jackal, but they may also assume the guise of a particularly lovely or especially ugly man or woman" [Allen Peterson, 2007: 96]. Jinns, or Genies, traditionally grant wishes, but they have to be tricked in order to make the wishes come true. With Islam, the concept of ambivalent Genies acquired a bad connotation and they mostly became malevolent spirits who assumed different forms. Sometimes, however, they expressed good feelings: "stories are told of good jinn rewarding virtuous humans who are

suffering unfairly" [Allen Peterson, 2007:93]. Ye Xian shows many positive characteristics throughout the story: she is beautiful, kind, skilful, humble. A Genie is told to help such people "they are guardians of treasure; vengeful spirits; agents of justice or punishment", as does this character, who merely provides explanations on what the protagonist is supposed to do before disappearing. There is another similar figure which caught my attention, in another tale from Jewish tradition: Joseph and Asenath, whose origins are in the Bible, but whose complete edition as a tale dates back to the 6th century C.E. While Asenath is repenting in the ashes for having refused Joseph, "and there came to her a man from heaven and stood at her head; and he called to her, "Aseneth"… his face was like lightning, and his eyes were like the light of the sun, and the hairs of his head like flames" [Sparks, 1984:473-503]. The similarity between these two characters is quite impressive, and even the semantic structure is similar: a man from heaven comes out of nowhere, and his appearance is bewildering; in both cases his wild hair is cited, and in the Jewish tale it is said that to look like fire. As Asenath is a character which bears resemblance with Cinderella, this might be another piece of evidence that the origin of this story is the Middle- East. As in Ye Xian, moreover, this character is only present to provide indication as to what the protagonist is supposed to do next in order to reach her marital status.

In Ye Xian the indications are quite clear: to receive anything she wants, Ye Xian must dig into the pile of rubbish and find the fish bone.

Victor Mair notices that the words used to describe this filthy place 郁栖 *yuqi*, are unusual terms that make no sense as a collocation and, in his opinion, represent an attempt to transfer into Chinese characters a non-sinitic expression [Mair, 2005:366]. The very humble element, the heap of swill and manure in the backyard, provides us with much information.

First of all, we are, once again, witnessing a translation between two people who did not completely understand each other — the author, a refined and adventurous scholar, and his servant from a remote, exotic place, attempting to relate some account famous among his people.

Secondly, the next part of the story starts: the real animal has disappeared, and the magic begins, forming a double narrative representing the difference between the desire to illustrate fish breeding and the magical, exotic part. Up to this point, the fish is not supernatural and, unlike Rashin Coaties's talking calf, the punishing doves in the Grimm version, and the magical cow which spins hemp from her anus in the Korean variant, it cannot provide useful information on the plot, so another figure is to be called into action. Now, its bone will begin to bestow magnificent gifts, as in the previous stories which demanded a marvellous factor.

The third element is that, in order to obtain the precious fish bone, Ye Xian must rummage through a pile of rubbish which was probably used as fertiliser; burnt fish bones were historically used to fertilise by Zhuang and Dong, considered the descendants of the Yue [Liu, 1995: 33]. Furthermore, Zhuang funerary rites prescribe the recollection and second burial of the bones after three years of death. Both aspects could be hinted at by the magical fish bone: riches provided by fish bones mixed with the ashes of the family hearth kept in the rubbish and spread in the fields with the manure, and rituals of bone burials, which would associate the fish even more with the deceased maternal figure. Moreover, in order to get the precious gifts, not only must Ye Xian renounce the affection of her companion, but she has to rummage through the ashes, like Cinderella who will be named after those ashes (object of controversial interpretation among scholars). This element reconnects Ye Xian to the narrative of *Joseph and Asenath*, in which the female protagonist is said to lie in the ashes for repentance, waiting for a message from God [Joseph and Asenath, 10.2 to 10.18 in Sparks, 1984]. This Jewish-Egyptian narrative, the first to mention the ashes which will become such an important element of the narrative, again seems to point at the Middle- East as a proof of origin.

The heap of rubbish in which the fish bone is hidden might be also symbolically connected to the scatological element present in so many stories of this kind. In some Korean versions, for example, clothes and jewels are expelled from the anus of the helping animal; in others, the protagonist must spin enormous quantities of hemp as a labour to achieve a

precious object or to avoid death and, in this case, the animal, usually a cow, chews the hemp and defecates it already spun[Tangherlini, 1994: 291]. Other times, some parts of the animal's body become marvellous objects, and all those references to bowels, anus and mouth are connected to the phases of a growing child, and at the same time, to the general concept of fertility [Dundes,1980: 40]: let us not forget that cow dung was extremely precious in ancient times in agricultural society [Tangherlini,1994:291], not only as a fertiliser, but also as building material and as a combustible for heating houses. Cinderella is mistreated, and she sits by the fireplace, where the ash is collected, like the servants used to do in ancient times to receive some heat; but formerly, ash was also used as a fertiliser and as a bleaching agent for clothes; the message seems to be that the humble would be exalted, a comforting thought for a young girl who depicts herself as persecuted.

Ye Xian, similarly, fumbles in the dung heap in order to reach the precious bone of the fish which will dispense riches; however, the bone is also the element of the body which resists dissolution, and it might be a reference to immortality. Let us remember that Rooth's conceptualisation of the Cinderella story was that its original core, which she defines A1, had an orphan whose mother comes back to sustain her; at times it is her tomb that provides nutrition, and at others, there is a tree or an animal helping him or her survive. It is quite obvious, however, that the reincarnation of the mother slowly disappeared, while official institutionalised religions substituted the common animistic substratum. Abrahamic religions do not conceive the return of the dead, who are either in heaven or are waiting for God to come to earth and save their souls, bringing their bodies back to life; Buddhism, on the other hand, does have a doctrine of reincarnation and this element has been used either to prove or disprove that the story is in accordance with Chinese traditional culture: "This idea[...] is again quite compatible with Chinese beliefs, where reincarnation is a religious doctrine"[De Bourboulis, 1982:106]; in another article, however, it is affirmed that "the motif of mother-as-cow could not have thrived in ancient China because it runs counter to the Chinese Buddhist concept of Karma [Ding, 1974: 36]." This second opinion makes more sense, as Buddhism envisages reincarnation either as a form of divine punishment for

sins or a hindrance to reaching Nirvana. In either case, to admit that the mother of the heroine had reincarnated meant that she had not been the flawless person that her daughter had imagined her to be; something inconceivable in a tale concerning the affection of a child for her dead mother. "In other tales of this type, where the heroine's mother and the helpful animal are identified, the mother has originally had human form and has suffered a magical transformation. In many cases […] the identity has been completely forgotten"[Hartland, 1982:68].

The key to understanding the helpers, however, is only briefly mentioned, and it escaped the attention of most scholars. Nonetheless, Jameson noticed this element and regarded it as a convincing proof that the story was an actual successive adaptation of a previous foreign narrative [Jameson, 1982:79]. In the text, the stepmother comes back from the social gathering, suspecting that Ye Xian was present wearing beautiful clothes 但见女抱庭树眠，亦不之虑 "but she sees her asleep hugging a tree in the yard." Jameson points out that sleeping hugging a tree is not a normal action, and it must be the relic of an older story. The tree has been associated to works like the epic *Ramayana,* for the presence of a garden with flowers and fruits, and to the paramount classic 西游记 *Xiyuji*, in which the protagonist, the monkey Wukong, is ordered to guard a precious tree bearing magical fruit. On the other hand, according to Photeine P. De Bourboulis, the tree should not even been considered an external element because it could simply mean that the girl was merely meticulously carrying out the stepmother's orders, because she had been ordered to stay home and guard the fruit in the yard [De Bourboulis, 1982:103].

There are so many elements, however, which makes Jameson's thesis so interesting. Not only is the tree, as we have seen, the principal donor in Rooth's A1, but it is also present in many European versions: the Italian *Gatta Cenerentola* by Basile, in which a palm tree is given to her by her father, who in turn received it directly from the fairies; in Grimm's *Aschenputtel,* the father gives her a branch of hazelnut which she plants on her mother's grave and becomes a large, leafy tree (still connected to Rooth's A1) where a little bird comes to grant her wishes. There is a form of magical exclusivity in these helpers;

they can be tamed or untamed animals, or even a tree, but they always have a special and unique relationship with the protagonist; even when she (or he) disappoints them, they never abandon them, like the helpers in the *Golden Bird*.

Even the tree is selective: according to Rooth, in the following variation of the tale, which she defines as A2, the tree that grows on the mother's grave bears fruit which only the protagonist can pick, and they are usually special in shape, smell or even material: they are sometimes made of gold or silver. In Ye Xian, this exclusivity is attributed to the fish, which is the main helper: "他人至不复出" *ta ren zhi bu fuchu,* "if anyone else approached, the fish would not appear", while the tree is only mentioned; but, despite its virtual disappearance from Cinderella tales, it is a fundamental element in tales such as *The Juniper Tree* and *The Rose Tree,* in which the tree represents the mystery of birth, the guardianship carried out by a dear defunct, and the resurrection, as it is the element that permits the protagonist to come back to life, when his or her bones are buried under it. In fairy tales centuries after the composition, or better, the retelling of Ye Xian, there are children hated, slain and eaten by stepmothers, whose bones, interred in the yard, are connected to magic trees.

It is therefore evident that, when they disappeared in AT510A — which was particularly successful because it probably favoured the listener's identification with the protagonist — those elements survived in other stories which were more gruesome and related to the oral phase, and to children's fantastical interpretation of childbirth and to the connection between food, death and resurrection from underground.

To sum up, the analysis of the helpers disclose some important pieces of information about Ye Xian.

First of all, the presence of three helpers shows the reader that the story is indeed a patchwork of different stories, as is also obvious from the structure of the tale in other parts.

The fish is the main helper, but it was probably added, later becoming the central figure, when the narrative came in contact with the Yue or Bai Yue populations, who lived in the

south of China and practised aquaculture extensively. This is also supported by the fact that southern Chinese minorities have their own iconography of Guanyin, connected with water and fish, as for centuries, the latter represented not only a source of food, but also a pet, an *ante litteram* pesticide, and a fertiliser. The first part of the short story is dedicated to the description of the breeding of this fish, its appearance and its behaviour. This extensive illustration must represent an important, didactic element that the teller wanted to keep while narrating it to Duan Chengshi, furnishing details that are less defined and precise in other parts of the story.

The fish as a successive addition can be confirmed by the presence of two more helpers: a human figure coming from the sky and a tree, only briefly, but significantly mentioned. The strange figure appears to console and give indications on the magical virtues of the fish bone. It has been discussed whether it could be an ancestor or an angel (but they are not usually represented dishevelled and coarsely dressed), a witch (but it is odd that she should descend from the sky), and I have hypothesised a Jinn, a character from the Middle East for which there was no translation as its figure was absent in Duan's cultural system. Whatever its identity, this personage is necessary for the development of the plot. Once the fish is eaten, it remains buried, and nobody is there to help Ye Xian, thus this man must appear to tell her what to do next.

As for the tree, it is briefly cited when the stepmother returns from the social gathering and finds Ye Xian asleep, hugging a tree (or *the* tree) in the yard. It seems like the affection she had for the fish is transferred to the tree, and it would not make sense unless it was connected to similar stories, especially the A1 model which Rooth believes to be the first nucleus of the Cinderella tale, in which the spirit of a dead mother comes back as a tree to take care of her now orphaned child. It is quite apparent that a story in which a mistreated orphan is cared for by a tree — a reincarnation of the dead mother —encountered the Yue cultural system and the helping figure was adapted to Yue customs becoming a fish, considering the importance of this animal in this aquaculture-based society. The tree, however, survived in the narrative and was passed on through different generations, if only

as a fading trace; the person from the sky was also present in the previous narrative, or was added for plot exigence, and its character was left vague for either reason. Either it was impossible to find an equivalence in the new cultural and linguistic system, or it was just a character with indistinct magical connotations.

In any case, it is evident that the Chinese Cinderella, with regard to the analysis of the helpers, reveals that Chinese Han culture was only partly present, which is what was expected from a *zhiguai*, with its specific character of record of strange and exotic occurrences in the periphery of the empire. In addition, the Yue had been conquered by the Han centuries before during the Han dynasty. What was maybe unknown to Duan was that in the story he was retelling, there were elements that came from far away, both in time and place, and are ascribable to a prior Middle Eastern narrative, as is also suggested by other indications explored in this thesis.

d)   The shoe: a tool for recognition

The loss of and identification through the shoe is probably the factor which has most convinced scholars and laymen that Cinderella stories have a Chinese origin. It is evident that this element was connected with the southern indigenous, as the shoe was an important element of their culture. The cultural analysis, however, shows that it is not a Han element and that, rather than a proof of origin, it could have been the link between Rhodopis and Ye Xian.

According to Bruno Bettleheim "the unrivaled tiny foot size as a mark of extraordinary virtue, distinction and beauty, and the slipper made of precious material are facets which point to an Eastern, if not necessarily Chinese, origin. The modern hearer does not connect sexual attractiveness and beauty with the extreme smallness of the foot, as the ancient Chinese did, in accordance with their practice of binding women's feet." [Bettelheim, 2010: 237].

Other scholars "有人认为灰姑娘故事起源于汉族，因为整个故事的枢纽在鞋" hink that the story originated among the Han ethnic group, because the whole story pivots on the shoe" [Lu 2003: 10], and Andrew Lang, in his foreword to Cox's work on Cinderella, affirms that "One thing is plain, a naked, a shoeless race could not have invented Cinderella" [Lang, 1893: x].

Ding Naidong, however, point out that "The motif of the small shoe, hinted in Ch1 [Ye Xian] and often-regarded as a typically Chinese trait, is not specified in any modern Chinese variant" [Ding, 1974:26].

Many a piece of research deal with the element of the shoe in Chinese popular and literary culture, deducting therefore its connection with Cinderella stories. Ye Xian has been quite recently associated with this element, because of the role of the shoe in Chinese collective imagination, and therefore it has been described as the ancestor of Cinderella for this unparalleled centrality of the foot [See Yan Ma,2009:75–78]. Lu Rong's essay mentions the Jungian theory of collective subconscious, which associates the shoe to female genitalia and interprets, therefore, this tale with the male obsession with the perfect shoe, and hence the perfect foot, as the masculine search for the perfect partner. As a universal element, this theory would support the polygenesis of stories generating in parallel forms all over the world, at a time when this theory has been receiving less and less credibility throughout the decades, as the theory of the spreading of folkloric motifs is now generally accepted.

Nevertheless, the shoe as a symbolic substitute of female genitalia would be reductive since the cultural phenomena connected to the shoe in China are quite complex and multi-faceted. [Lu, 2007:106] In Zhang Zhongzai's study on the value of the feminine shoe in the European and Chinese subconscious, he affirms that it is probable that in ancient times this model of identification of the woman through her footwear was common across the world, as the shoe was a personal object which could represent the woman in a society where genders were physically divided and segregation made their contact occasional and rigidly controlled [Zhang, 2003:100] —much as a lock of hair during the European Middle Ages,

as sung by Provençal poets, or handkerchiefs in the gallant society of the American Victorian era.

During the marriage arrangement in feudal China, the matchmaker requested a shoe from the bride-to-be as a token for the groom; the shoe was indeed related to the female gender, (see the word 破鞋 *poxie,* "worn shoes" which designated a dissolute woman) and also to status. Still according to Zhang's study, the possession of a shoe was universal proof of being part of a higher class: slaves, servants and poor people could not afford shoes, while mandarins, Confucian teachers and noble ladies used preciously decorated footwear.

The connection between the shoe and status was so strong that during the Han dynasty the *curriculum vitae* was called 履历 *lüli* "shoe's experience"; and during the Song, the imperial exam candidates were provided with a recommendation letter in order to skip the official channels; this letter was known as 脚色 *jiaose* "foot's colour" or 脚色状 *jiaosezhuang* "condition of the foot's colour" and symbolised the candidate's social standing and connection, in order to favour his promotion.

The shoe is therefore connected to different elements which must be taken into account, the shoe, a mark of both femininity and status, is also intertwined and entangled with the foot in the Chinese tradition, and they should be separated in order to draw the most accurate conclusions.

As a proof of the Chinese origin of the tale, in fact, scholars like Bettleheim used the obsession of Chinese culture with the smallness of the female foot: after resisting for virtually a millennium, the custom of foot binding was eradicated only with Mao — and not without difficulties — as a barbarous, sexist and retrograde procedure, which degraded women, making them utterly unable to walk and completely dependent on others.

Some scholars affirm that this painful practice dates back to the Warring States, or even to the Springs and Autumns [Lu, 2007:56], while according to a better founded opinion based on historical records, it started in the Tang period and became widespread during the Song. Following a common legend, during the reign of the last of the southern Tang, emperor Li Yu's extremely beautiful concubine would bind her feet with long bands of silk to dance.

The concubine was probably of foreign origin, and most likely the custom came from abroad, becoming more and more common during the Song; during the Ming it was such a standard practice that a woman whose feet had not undergone this procedure would seriously damage her opportunities of contracting an advantageous match, and could be the object of social reprobation.[De Bourboulis, 1982:104] References to this habit in Chinese literature are countless, from the work of Du Mu and Baj Juyi to *Jin Ping Mei's* Pan Jinlian, spanning 700 years. Among the others, it is interesting to mention Wen Tingyun, famous Tang author of *ci*, who belonged to Duan Chengshi's intellectual and poetic circle and cites this practice in his poems.

Foot binding was therefore most likely already known during the Tang, if not universally widespread. What seems to escape most scholars, however, is that it is irrelevant whether it was or not, because in our tale, the first datable Cinderella story, there is no reference to it.

The shoe is said to be 小者履减一寸 *xiaozhe lǚ jian yi cun*, one inch smaller than the feet of all the girls of Tuo Han kingdom, but we must remember, as said before, that Ye Xian does not belong to a higher class, nor do most Chinese Cinderellas in China. Ye Xian is a country girl, probably a farmer, used to collecting water in distant places and gathering firewood, which would be absolutely impossible for a woman with bound feet. This practice started with an aesthetic and sexual purpose: the feet, constrained in tightly knotted fabric bands, made the women's gait unstable thus forcing them to walk with small steps and giving them a vulnerable, fragile and delicate appearance. The bound foot itself, then, was an object of pleasure and men found it very exciting to put women's tiny feet into their mouths, as bound feet became tout court a secondary sex characteristic, whose sight was enough to tease and excite men. It was also thought that in women with bound feet, due to their swaying bearing, the pubic muscles would tighten, offering men more pleasure during coitus [Favazza,2011:117]

The foot binding, however, did not have only a sexual character, but also a social one: it became apparent that women with bound feet could not carry out any task without help, could not walk long distances, and were therefore completely subjected to men's power

and, at the same time, they proved their social status because it showed they possessed servants, without whom their lives would have been impossible. This is not the case of Ye Xian, who is a hard-working and brave girl. Moreover, in the story there is not much emphasis on the foot being so tiny, as expected in a Chinese traditional narrative: "Some Western scholars in the past have ventured wild guesses at the possible origins of the shoe motif, and tried to trace it to the Orient, citing Mideastern luxury in footwear, footbinding in China, etc. The shoe, however, is not always described as elaborately decorated, nor is its small size crucial in Chinese versions" [Irie Mulhern, 1985: 9]: according to Jameson's and Waley's translation, the shoe "was an inch smaller than the other girls' feet" [Arthur Waley, 1947: 228], while Mair imagines a more magical character: "the slipper would shrink when another woman tried it on"[Mair, 2005:365]. The peculiarity of the shoe is, thus, in fitting perfectly only her owner, and the focus is not the size, but the exclusivity of the shoe which only the protagonist can wear.

These are two extremely different concepts which must not be confused, because they denote radically different notions in cultural adaptation. Historically, foot binding is a Han practice, and only rarely observed in the southern part of the empire, where this tale is said to have been collected [Ko, 1998:41]. Furthermore, we should not forget that Ye Xian and other versions in China and in Eastern Asia in general "Neither by birth nor by marriage are Chinese heroines aristocratic. When menial tasks involved physical labor such as farm work and carrying water (nothing so sedentary as tending fire as in Japanese variants) and the future husband by no means belongs to the leisure class, a girl with dainty feet would be no bargain as a bride" [Irie Mulhern, 1985:10]. The encounter with her future husband seems to be due to magic and luck, but, as it is discussed in the chapter on the social gathering, it is probably an interpolation of an older text, because Ye Xian goes, as it was her right, to the festival organised annually to make young people of both sexes meet and start a couple. While the size of the foot was not a crucial aspect of this kind of social gathering, the shoe was, and it is therefore the focus of the analysis. Whatever the sexual connotations of feet in Han culture, it is quite obvious that this was not the case here; the

custom of foot binding was not so common yet during the Tang, and it mostly involved girls from aristocratic families. The shoe, here, was more of a substitute, a token, an object of engagement but also a display of a girl's ability: we shall not forget that, in all the earlier version of this story, Cinderella and her future husband do not meet until before the wedding; the more modern versions of Perrault and the Grimm brothers have a prince inquiring to find the girl who stole his heart, and whose only trace is a slipper. In ancient times, however, there was no such meeting in the flesh, and the shoe was everything a husband could base his choice on (while the female counterpart, of course, had little or nothing to say in the matter). Eye Xian's shoes are called 金履 *jinlu,* golden shoes according to Jameson's translation, and gold shoes according to Waley, or golden slippers according to Mair: as aforementioned, he hypothesises that the girl was good a spinning gold thread, and adds that "The slippers were probably embroidered with gold thread" [Mair, 2005:366]. This last supposition seems to be supported by the description of the shoes 轻如毛，履石无声 *qing ru mao, lu shiwusheng* light as a feather —*according to* Mair and Jameson, while Waley translates "as a hair" — and silent on stone. The shoes reflect their owner: they are precious, unique, and at the same time light, quiet and discreet: *the shoes] are a very visible and unique marking of the future and potential bride*" [Tangherlini, 1994: 282].

Female shoes have a specific, unique value in southern Chinese culture, for both Han and minorities, and it is the one mentioned above: a token in the nuptial rituals. Liu Xiaochun enumerates several traditions connected to courting and marrying in which footwear is a necessary part: during the Jin dynasty, the 同鞋 *tongxie,* "companion shoes" ritual became popular, which saw the future husband and wife exchange slippers made of hemp especially woven for the occasion, a custom followed until recent times in Hefei. In Wuhu, in the past, a pair of shoes to be worn upon entering the new house was an indispensable component of the dowry. Meanwhile, in the Jiangnan area, the wedding is also called 踏夫鞋 *tafuxie,* "walking in the husband's shoes".

All these traditions, as many scholars explain, are due to the peculiar linguistic aspect of the Chinese language: there is a magical, superstitious character of the sound of words, and homophony has caused, across centuries, the creation of associations between words with no apparent connections. Let us consider, for example, the negative connotation of the number four 四 *si* for its homophony with the word 死 *si*, to die, while the number eight is considered lucky because the word 八 *ba* is associated with the word 发 *fa*, wealth, and as seen before, the homophony of the words fish and surplus, 鱼 and 余, both pronounced *yu*. According to this explanation, the positive character of the shoe would be due to the homophony of *xie* 鞋, shoe, and 谐, harmony, and also to the traditional connection between the ancient word for foot, 足 *zu*, which appears in compounds such as 足夠 *zugou,* enough, and 满足 *manzu,* satisfied, which is related to an idea of being content and serene [Lu, 2007:106].

The explanation is valid, but reductive: it would not explain, in fact, that in areas inhabited by non-Han ethnic groups, in which Mandarin Chinese is not the traditional language, we nonetheless find nuptial customs associated with footwear: among them, the Mulao in Guanxi, the Dong in Guizhou and the Yao [Liu, 1997:100], which clearly demonstrate that the usage of the shoe in nuptial rituals does not have a univocal connection with the languag. The meaning of the shoe, therefore, must be more deeply intertwined with symbolic, psychological and social connotations.

Shoe, sexual partnership and marriage must have had a significance that is now lost, but which was well in force and whose implications are fundamental for the comprehension and contextualisation of this tale and, oddly enough, considered only by a few scholars.: the exclusivity of the shoe in traditional Far Eastern culture.

As Ding Naidong points out "In ancient China, girls often made their own shoes. Even high-born maidens did the embroidery themselves. Embroidered shoes were thus regarded as very intimate and dearly treasured, as they wore the personality traits of their owner and maker" [Ding 1974:37]. It is very interesting to note that the author mentioned the element

of the shoe to express how Cinderella tales, especially the Ancient Tradition i.e. Ye Xian, did not have such a great success in Chinese later tradition: the bond of a female shoe and its owner was so strong that a character presented as absolutely positive, such as our protagonist, could hardly get away with losing it without being strongly disapproved of and harshly reproached by the listener for her scarce consideration of social behaviour. According to Tangherlini, the scholar who analysed several versions of the Korean model of Cinderella, the shoe represented not only a personal object, but even a personal ordeal that the protagonist had to undergo in order to prove her suitability for marriage. Later versions of Cinderella in Asia, and in other tale types in Europe, have the protagonist demonstrate her skills and her worth as a future wife in a rural world, a context of extreme poverty and hard work in the fields. In Cinderella stories, the tests are imposed upon the girl by the stepmother. In stories like *Rumpelstilzchen,* the girl must undergo the tests because of her bragging, or her father's bragging about her skills: she would be sentenced to death if she failed and, instead, is helped by animals or supernatural creatures and marries the prince. In many a Korean version, the girl must spin a huge heap of hemp, or separate good lentils from spoilt ones, or pick wood or a particular kind of fruit. One of these tests in Korean versions involves the process of confectioning the special, nuptial shoes, which are known as ☐☐ *kkot' shin*, and are "delicately embroidered silk slippers. Often girls embroidered these themselves over a period of time in preparation for, and more likely, in expectation of their eventual marriage[...] as such, the *kkot' shin* are very visible and unique marking of the future and potential bride" [Tangherlini,1994:292]. Not only are these shoes a proof of status, but also a test to pass in order to show marital suitability, as spinning, weaving and embroidering were an essential part of the housework a woman was supposed to carry out, and making a pair of perfectly bespoken and customised slippers for herself entailed all these abilities at the same time.

Sign of status, proof of ability, but also token to attract a potential partner.

In losing her shoe, the girl would therefore lose her appeal as a suitable wife as she would show her recklessness but also, being the shoe associated with female sexuality, she would

reveal a certain licentious personality, so much so that, in several Korean versions, she is accused by her stepmother of spending the night out with different men. In this version, the Confucian element is so strong that even the villain is somehow forced to play an active role of control on the protagonist, which we can interpret as an attempt at adapting the foreign narrative to the cultural system within which it was retold. It is, in fact, a paradox that the shoe, found by the future husband, provides him with a lot of precious information on the protagonist, such as her ability to weave and create unique embroidered slippers, which makes her a desirable wife [Tangherlini, 1994:292]. For example, if we accept Mair's translation, Ye Xian is presented in the beginning as proficient at spinning gold thread, and whoever would have found the lost shoe would have recognised her skills and her good taste. Waley affirms that very often, in southern China, girls would walk barefoot, only to wear — in particular social and religious occasions —shoes appositely sewn by each girl, finely woven with spun gold, not so rare in an area so rich of gold fields: "We next come to the shoe, which is indeed the turning-point of all true Cinderella stories. One might regard the mention of shoes as a non-primitive trait. It is unlikely that the Hsi-ytian aborigines usually wore shoes, their modern counterparts certainly do not. But the moderns do use straw sandals on ceremonial occasions; such sandals are, for example, described as part of the outfit of the shaman. The fact that shoes were not generally worn would have made the story additionally impressive" [Waley, 1947:58]. On the same page is Beauchamp:"[...] the Guangxi prefecture was wealthy, with one gold mine being a "truly significant producer" [..] alluvial gold, found in stream beds, was sifted under the control of Zhuang headmen. These facts would support Jameson's word choice. But a woman's skill lies in embroidery, not in the work of sluicing for gold that was done by "labor gangs." Many sources about the Zhuang extol women's embroidery, which is displayed on balls created by women to demonstrate their unique skill"[Beauchamp, 2010: 460].

To sum up, the shoe is not only connected with sexuality and status, but it represents a true "marital test", only hinted at in this version when, at the beginning, Ye Xian's ability to spin gold is mentioned, but a key factor in other, later versions. We can explain the absence

in this version of a clear relation between the shoe and the protagonist's ability because, unlike the later tales, she ends up marrying a prince. Normally, in more Confucian forms, she marries a literatus or a wealthy man, which does not exclude the fact that she will actively provide to family needs, including spinning, weaving, sewing and collecting food and water.

"The purpose of the shoe test in Chinese versions is, then, not to find a girl with the smallest foot but rather to identify the girl for whom the shoe has been made, or who made the shoe." [Irie Mulhern, 1985:10] The bond between a shoe and her owner is so strong that "When a couple has been betrothed, if the bride dies before the marriage, the groom asks for the shoes she wore last before death and incense in burnt before them for a space of two years" [Jameson, 1932:88].

It is quite clear, once more, that Ye Xian, as a first adaptation of a foreign narrative, still presents a certain level of incongruence in dealing with the motifs: the shoe was of paramount importance in southern China, and it was indeed connected with rituals of match-making, not for its dimensions, which would become much more important in later times and among the wealthy classes. The other Chinese Cinderellas, however, will show how a girl deprived of her title of legitimate first daughter in a Confucian world, would conquer it again, demonstrating her ability as housewife through marrying a well-off man. She would not marry a prince, though, because that would be shocking in imperial Chinese society. In these stories, the uniqueness of the object serves as recognition of the domestic skills of the protagonist in a rural world.

According to Rooth's scheme, mentioned above, the embryonic narrative of the orphan fed by a tree grown on the tomb of his or her mother — the model we define as A1 — developed into A2, which narrates how these fruit could only be picked by the orphan and become nuptial gifts. The protagonist, usually a girl, offers them to a man of higher class, normally a prince, who marries her for the characteristic of these magic fruit. The A2 model combines later, in a further evolution, with a different one, called AB, where a new

element is introduced, the *agnitio* through a lost object, whose happy finding by the future husband leads to the marriage.

In some versions, the object was a shoe, and there was an ancient narrative in which a beautiful woman ended up being the wife of a Pharaoh when a bird stole her sandal and dropped it into the lap of the man who went looking for the owner and married her. The story of Rhodopis could have migrated to these regions through the trade routes, and through the meeting of Arab and Chinese merchants in Java and Sumatra.

The uniqueness of the shoe, beautiful and almost magical, connected with a virtuous girl, was the element that most probably struck a chord in a society where the shoe had so many connotations. Yet there were some problems: the shoe is lost and the protagonist, like the Egyptian one, marries a prince. This changed in the later versions because it did not fit with the Han world, when the emperor of China was an incredibly remote, divine figure, and the good match for a peasant girl became a literatus, making the story more plausible and thus simplifying the tale's process of cultural assimilation.

Not only is the shoe, therefore, evidence of the Chinese origin of Cinderella, but the shoe test, which entailed its loss, must have been quite a disturbing element in Confucian Han culture. The whole motif had to undergo a process of adaptation in order to being absorbed and integrated in ancient Chinese cultural system.

e)   *The social gathering and the marriage with the prince: a Yue story*

The last important motif of this analysis is the dance, or social gathering, though it is not the last, chronologically speaking, as the identification through the shoe is usually the final element leading to the closure of the tale. In this case, however, the social gathering is not strongly connected to the loss of the shoe; it is true that she loses it while fleeing the place

in fear of being recognised by the stepmother, but the place she is hastily leaving is not the centre of the motif. In fact, the investigation of this element shows quite clearly that the tale is the result of the overlapping of two narratives: the local Yue element where Ye Xian is supposed to meet her husband, and the marriage with a prince through the shoe's test as in Rhodopis.

As Jameson pointed out: "Sheh Hsien's visit to the cave festival is recounted with much less precision than her other adventures[...]. She did not marry a man she met at the cave festival […] but rather another person she had never seen. […]. There seems to be no particular need to introduce the cave festival at all […]. Again the suggestion intrudes itself that the compiler of this variant was not entirely independent of the other versions we also know in which a festival, a flight, and the loss of a shoe are essential episodes" [Jameson, 1982: 79].

When we translate 洞 dong as "cave", then the festival where Ye Xian participates with her new shoes and dress can be defined as a "tribal" or "cave" festival. Some scholars have drawn a strong analogy between Ye Xian and Cinderella, explaining how a ball organised by a prince or a nobleman in order to find his future bride was actually a practised custom in ancient China. Records indeed exist on Li Shimin, also known as Taizong, the second Tang emperor, who announced a ball in order to find a concubine, and issued a decree according to which all the most beautiful maidens in the kingdom had to take part in this event at the imperial palace [Yang, 2011:31]. The same practice is reported by Juan Gonzales de Mendoza, an Augustinian monk sent to China by Felipe II at the end of the 16th century, who narrates that "In old time, when that the kinges would marrie one of his children of kingsfolks, he did make in his pallace a great and solemne banket, to the which he did inuite all the principalles lords of his court, commanding to bring with them their sonnes and daughters, ho did accomplish the same, striuing who should apparel their children most richest and most gallantest […] and there he doth chuse his wife according to this owne will or desire, and where he liketh best"[Mendoza, 1853:65-66].

Photeine De Bourboulis, in her analysis of this element, relates it to a Byzantine custom reported in *Vita Philareti,* according to which the Emperor Constantine VI, in search of a wife, sent commissioners across the whole Empire in order to look for appropriate candidates. Their task was to evaluate not only the height, bearing, fairness and beauty of the girls, but also their feet and footwear[De Bourboulis, 1982:106].

These insights, though extremely interesting, seem to deal with a phenomenon with too sporadic an occurrence to create a precedent in folklore and to influence such an important model such as the Cinderella story. We can argue whether the meeting with the prince has a more socio-historical explanation or a psychological one; in medieval times and during the Renaissance in Europe, it was quite customary for the families who could access the court to present their most beautiful daughters in the hope they would become mistresses of the king, and thus gain more influence: Henry VIII could be cited as the most famous, but certainly not isolated example. Psychologically speaking, however, for a tale to be successful it is important that the audience identify with the characters and situations: and a tale in which only the rich girls were invited is not satisfying for a mistreated maiden who dreams of marrying a prince. It is true that Cinderella is, by definition, just like a servant who lies near the ashes of the hearth; but she has only temporarily lost her status of noblewoman, which her stepmother and stepsisters are stealing from her. For Perrault and Grimm's European Cinderella, it is, therefore, more a psychoanalytical desire of being chosen by the prince despite one's humble origins and inconspicuous appearance than the reference of a real habit that make the story so successful. Whatever the reason, Ye Xian depicts a completely different situation: the social gathering she participates in does not involve any king or prince, and it is a spontaneous convention to which people of the humble classes are seen as normal participants, and there is no class difference among them.

While the prince's ball is an extraordinary occurrence, which presents a unique opportunity for the protagonist to meet her future husband, this festival has completely different anthropological and social values. Rather, it is a seasonal gathering whose cultural traces

still survived in the early 20th century. "It is a ceremony of ancestor-worship and at the same time a mating-festival"[Waley,1947: 231].

叶限故事可能发生在我国西南少数民族地区，在这些地区许多民族都存在节日择配的民俗文化现象，利用节日青年男女有机会结识心仪对象并发展成婚姻关系。洞节就是一种庆祝和择配节日，是属于全体劳动人民的

"The festival Ye Xian participates in is the description of a common custom among the minorities of some south-western areas, where the cultural phenomenon of a celebration with a marital purpose, intended to encourage young women and men to get together with the purpose of getting married. The cave festival is a match-making celebration, and it belongs to the whole working class, therefore there are no social divisions, participation is not reserved to higher classes and it is not created for the exclusive and special use of a man only"[3] [LI, 2009: 114].

There are therefore two worlds, Ye Xian's rural and tribal reality, in which many participants are supposed to find their partners, and that of Cinderella which became, especially through Perrault, a ball organised by a prince with an exclusive, elitist character, and an opportunity for only one lucky girl to climb the social ladder.

According to Hu Mei, this is an unequivocal cultural mark which clearly describes two different realities; the Cave Festival and Cinderella's ball "峒节和舞会反映的是两种不同区域的社会文化形态 。 峒节" 展示了我国古代南方少数民族的又一民俗文化现象 —— 节日择偶)这种习俗在我国西南和中南地区的少数民族中至今还流传着 […]辛德瑞拉被继母及其女儿们拒绝带她参加舞会的原因之一"舞会并不是一个人人都可参加的节日"

"reflect two different socio-cultural models of the areas represented here; the cave festival shows a popular cultural phenomenon of the ancient southern ethnic minorities in China, and the tradition of this festival is still practised among minorities in the south-west and

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3   My translation

south-central regions of our country, […] one of the reasons Cinderella is prevented from going to the ball is that it is not an occasion in which anyone could participate"[4] [Hu, 2003: 75].

These festivals date back to the Neolithic age, when the society of all southern China was organised in tribes, sharing blood bonds and usually in totemic clans, similar to the society of the Pre-Indo-European Mediterranean area. These gatherings were organised among the tribes in order to promote exogamy, thus creating connections with other tribes and, at the same time, avoiding internal contrasts and problems such as incest and endogamy: there were cultural taboos that prevented people of the same totemic group to inter-marry within the same tribe.

According to Lu Xiaochun, these gatherings had an orgiastic element, in that they were a moment when individuals of different groups mated and institutions such as marriage, which was still in its embryonic phase, were temporally suspended

民族学家发现,"在大量处于前阶级社会阶段的民族中,都存在过可以放纵性关系自由的节日和时期。在许多民族那里,这类乱婚的放荡节日直到氏族利族外婚消失之后还保.留着。在这些民族中,两性关系的自由,表现为全部或部分地摘除婚姻以及其他的限制。 "Ethnologists affirm that in every society and social class and in every historical phase, in a society there is a moment, a period or a festival when conditionings fall and there is sexual freedom and boundless unions. In many populations, this kind of incestuous and dissolute festival was observed until the arrival of exogamy" [Liu, 1995: 94] (my translation). He states that this inter-tribal gathering to facilitate the meeting of partners is the origin of many a festival with a marital purpose still celebrated, especially amongst the minorities: the list includes the Zhuang custom of choosing their brides the third of March, the Miao Moon Festival, the Dong King of the Land Festival, the Puyi Dance Fair, the Yi Flower Festival, the Hulao Descent Festival, the Yao Song Contest, and so on.

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4   My translation

Therefore, while many scholars point out that there is a substantial difference between the later versions of Cinderella, especially the European ones, in which the Ball was an elitist event thrown by a prince and therefore a unique, extraordinary occurrence, and Ye Xian's Cave Festival, which was held every year and where every girl was supposed to meet her fiancé, there are a few other considerations that have been neglected.

The first is that, while Cinderella is prevented from ascending in social status, Ye Xian is prevented from keeping hers. The fact that her stepmother denies her permission to attend the festival means that she is being treated as a servant or a slave, and not as the elder daughter who, we must not forget, was entitled to greater respect according to Confucian moral. Participating in the Cave Festival was a way for a girl to find a husband, and therefore to comply with the social task expected from her: getting married and raising her own family. Therefore it was a crime to hinder the realisation of social harmony as conceived by Confucian moral. Ye Xian, unlike Cinderella, was not supposed to meet a prince, but a man of her own class who would enable her to become the devoted and capable wife that she has proven to be through the enumeration of her skills: spinning, embroidering and collecting water and firewood, which are not degrading tasks, but the usual chores a good wife was expected to accomplish. This importantly demonstrates how, while in earlier versions of Cinderella the girls go from rags to riches, the Eastern ones usually strive not to lose the social role and dignity they are entitled to. Ye Xian does not really need the gifts of the fish bone: she wears the splendid iridescent coat, probably made of kingfisher feathers, and gold-embroidered slippers at a festival in which, without the appropriate clothing, she could indeed participate. Without the gifts, though, she would have two problems: first, she would be more easily recognisable to her stepmother and stepsister (the latter actually recognises her), and therefore she would show disobedience, a most unfilial trait; and she would also miss the very purpose of the festival, which is to be noticed and appreciated for her beauty along with her domestic virtues and skills, through the extraordinary appearance of her clothes, accessories and, mostly, her shoes.

The second element to consider is the nonsensical development of the plot with regard to the Cave Festival: the protagonist is told to wear her best, magical clothes, in order to take part in a gathering which is not described and about which nothing is said, if not the fact that, despite her astonishing clothes — so different from the shabby garments she is said to be wearing when the stepmother exchanges them with a new jacket in order to kill her fish. Nothing else is said about the festival; not long after arriving, she has to leave. There is no description, no narration, no meeting anyone in particular. After being recognised, she hastily flees the place, losing her shoe. Ye Xian, therefore, manages to participate in the ball she has been prevented to attend, but she does not meet her future husband there, despite this being the main purpose of the occasion.

Some scholars have explained the fact that there is no meeting between the two, but a successive recognition through the shoe, with the cultural connotation of the shoe as substitute. In ancient China, as previously explained, it was normal that the future husband received a shoe woven by the future bride from the matchmaker. Therefore, this is a direct reference to arranged marriage, a very common custom among societies in ancient and modern times; there is no need to meet a partner in the flesh, as the shoes represent the desired object.

"叶限虽未与陀汗国国王见面但峒节却成就了他们的姻缘" "Although Ye Xian does not meet the king of Tuo Han, the ball helps her nonetheless to fulfil her destiny"[5] [Hu, 2003:75].

The contradiction, nevertheless, is still there; not only do they not meet, but the shoe is found by a man of the tribe ("a man of the caves") who sells it to the king of another kingdom. What happens next is even more confusing: the king buys the shoe from the man (although his kingdom is said to be many leagues away); he makes all the dames of the country try it on; when the owner is not found, he throws away the shoe; and then, somehow, he finds Ye Xian in a house while it is being searched (but we do not know in which country).

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5   My translation

The only scholar who has tried to logically explain this textual incoherence was De Bourboulis who hypothesised a hysteron-proteron in the narrative, therefore assuming that the core of the story is the shoe test — which, as we have seen, she related to the Byzantine occurrence of an extensive quest for a bride by some emperors. This, however, is chronologically placed after the ball, which should be the occasion where this test takes place. It is the writer's strong opinion that De Bourboulis attempts to give coherence to a text that does not have any; as we have seen, she tried to do the same with the presence of the tree Ye Xian is found hugging by the stepmother. Without noticing anything odd in the plot and without supposing textual interpolations, in the same way she tried to explain the fact that the king of Tuohan made his men search all the houses of a different country as a "silly feature" and as "the consequence of a previous confusion of motifs." [De Bourboulis, 1982:103].

I think it is pretty clear, however, that this element reveals an obvious fusion of two different narratives that develop in two different ways. In the first, which we can call "the Yue story" — the one that was coherent with the culture of southern China —, the protagonist, the daughter of a defunct tribal chief whose role has been denied by her stepmother, wears the splendid garments she has previously woven and, breaking the orders of the stepmother, participates in the social gathering where she meets a husband of her same class, hastily leaving when discovered by her stepsister. Fleeing, she loses her slipper which is picked up by her future husband who, by merely inspecting it, ascertains the skills of the girl whom he deems to be undoubtedly industrious, seemly, decorous and good at embroidery. Such, in fact, were the connotations of personally woven slippers. He, therefore, commences his quest by searching every house of the tribe until he identifies the owner of the precious object. This original story was perfectly fitting with the minority's cultural system: the shoe was the key to marriage; the festival was an opportunity for all girls to meet their partners; the meeting was among people of the same social extraction; and a disobeying girl, in a culture not yet so influenced by Confucianism, would not set a bad example for the audience. As we have seen in the chapter dedicated to the

protagonist190, the absence of a juxtaposition between the good and the bad sister, which will be a recurrent motif in later variants of the story, indicates that the Confucian moral is not so present yet; the story, in its origin, was not a Han story and filial piety, 孝 *xiao*, was not as important as it would become in Han and Korean adaptations. Amongst the minorities, in fact, women usually enjoyed more freedom: "Zhuang women of the Tang Dynasty had exceptionally high status and freedom of movement […] Zhuang women had higher status than Han-Chinese women of the same period [...]. Zhuang were not constrained by arranged marriages and dowries as Han Chinese women were; they mingled with men, especially on festival days, where they formed and signaled their preferences in a number of ways." [Beauchamp, 2010: 460] The participation in match-making among the minorities was probably more active, as the hard-working women were an important part of the family economy; their feet were not bound, and they provided for the family needs. When the Han culture, more influenced by Confucianism, came into these territories as the cultural heritage of the conquerors and the leading class, it became one of the pillars of the province's social norms, as part of the greater empire.

If we compare this story to the later versions, what Ding defines as "Modern Tradition", which did survive in China and in other Confucian areas, such as Korea and Vietnam, the differences are obvious. Not only is there an evil, unfilial daughter as a counterpart to the heroine, who is apathetically obedient and reverential to the abuses of the stepmother, at least in the eyes of a modern Western reader, but the shoe element, when it does not disappear altogether, is narrated in a completely different way. In the most famous Korean version, which is some centuries more recent than Ye Xian and is much more influenced by Confucianism, the protagonist is said to lose her slipper while running away from the clamour caused by the arrival into town of an important person, a *Yangban* literatus who, in a twist of plot, becomes her husband. This variant is much more in line with Confucian teachings: the girl is not active in the choice of her husband — she actually avoids the place where he is being cheered by the crowd —, as becoming to a modest, humble girl who should steer clear of any occasion of meeting an unknown man. This meekness,

unassertiveness and search for anonymity were highly valued qualities in a young girl and in a future wife [Tangherlini, 1994:292], so different from the audacious Ye Xian who had disobeyed her stepmother by participating in the tribal festival where a girl, adorned with her best garments, goes in order to be noticed and find a husband. The moral of the Korean story is that a girl who avoids men and obeys her superiors will end up marrying a person of a higher class; Ye Xian`s is that a skilled girl can use her abilities to show her possible partners that she is a suitable wife, be eventually identified for her qualities, and make a good catch.

This story, therefore, is not completely Yue, nor is it Han.

The presence of the ball in Ye Xian is in fact one more misleading element in this narrative: the fact that it occurs does not imply that Cinderella has originally Chinese, or even Yue elements that could prove its origin. On the contrary, since she does not meet the prince at the ball, the narrative is broken and the social gathering has nothing to do with her eventual marriage. The ball, so important in Yue culture, here appears merely incidental. It is only mentioned that, in leaving, she loses her shoe. The second part, then, featuring a king of a country she does not even know and who has never met her, is most likely connected to our ancient Cinderella, Rhodopis, as narrated by Aelian. There is no bird involved, but there is a lost shoe whose owner is frantically sought after in order to fulfil the king's desire.

The two motifs which seem to exclude each other, an active participation in the festival and a passive identification through a shoe, demonstrate an undexterous combination of two different stories in one. The element of the ball survived and thrived in Europe, where it became, however, a one-off, elitist occurrence rather than a seasonal encounter among young people in order to form matches: those social gatherings were not common in Europe and the ones practised on Saint John's eve for example were officially condemned. That is why in the medieval versions, such as Rashin Coatie, the protagonist meets her prince at the church, which was the only social acceptable place where a girl could safely meet a man. It is very likely that the ball, present from the 17th century onwards, was the

result of the contact with the Chinese versions, and especially with Ye Xian, through the retelling of locals to the Jesuits who were established in the most important coastal cities in China. The ball which the protagonist attends and the shoe test, which appear as two different motifs in Ye Xian, had probably already combined into one, but in Europe there were no such parties, so the a special, unique event was created in order to adapt this motifs to European society. That is why, in my opinion, De Bourboulis is wrong when she affirms that this kind of ball were common in China, as reported by the Jesuit Juan Gonzalez De Mendoza in *The history of the Great and Mighty Kingdom of China and the Situation Thereof.* De Bourboulis, however, seems to ignore that the foot binding is more recent than Ye Xian, and that the China described by the Jesuits is not the same as Duan Chengshi's: her interpretation of Chinese story is quite temporally flattened. The custom described by Mendoza is, in fact, a Ming traditional ceremony when the emperor would meet girls from the best families to chose his concubines, and it is hardly connected to Ye Xian's social gathering. De Bourboulis states that the royal ball was the antecedent of the cave festival [De Bourboulis, 1982:105], but this is quite wrong, as we know that folk narratives usually generate in the lower classes, and then are literally interpreted. This is even more evident in a story like Ye Xian where the traditions of people considered primitive and peripheral were narrated by a Han intellectual; Han society was much more structured, in Tang times, than the contemporary tribes living in the South of the country. Yue women, therefore, could participate in social gathering with the purpose of meeting their future husband, but the process of sinification eliminated almost completely this element in later versions circulating in China, where arranged marriages were the norm, and girls hardly got to know their future husbands. After the contact between Jesuits and Chinese folklore, the cave festival most likely travelled to Europe where it became as a special ball thrown by a prince — an elitist, aristocratic occurrence— which substituted the previous meeting in a church.

This once more shows how Ye Xian can be the link between the Cinderella of the Ancient world and the modern story we are all acquainted with.

3.3 Controversial elements

Several elements in this story would be quite unconventional for an analysis which does not avail itself of multiple perspectives borrowed from different fields of study. Comparatively examining Ye Xian as yet another Cinderella story, without investigating, as we have attempted to do in this research, its literary and historical context, would deprive the comprehension of some of these important factors. Two, examined herein, are connected with the structure itself of the text — contextualisation of time and space, and broken narrative — while the other two are linked with the socio-cultural context of the time the story was written.

a) Spatial and temporal contextualisation

Fairy tales do not possess spatial or temporal contextualisations: this is what categorises them as a different genre from legends and myths. Their pedagogical nature usually opts for a fantastical setting with characters whose names are either the most common in an area, or comical names that would not normally be given to children. Examples abound in Europe and in Asia, where the names of characters are related to flowers, food or, in the case of a juxtaposition of personalities, two similar names whose only difference is a syllable. "Their protagonists are either nameless, bear very common names (Hans, Jack, Jean) or have ad hoc names that are unique to particular folktales" [Hansen, 2002:17]. It would be false, then, to affirm that fairy tales do not exist in China, because there is a long tradition of compilation of 童话 *tonghua*, stories for children. This term, however, is a mere translation of fairy tales, as this genre did not exist in classical Chinese literature. Ye Xian, as we have seen, belongs to the traditional genre of *zhiguai,* which can explain many features of this story.

To start with, Ye Xian is not a normal Chinese name and it is not related to Chinese culture in general; that is why it has been agreed upon, by virtually all scholars who have studied this story, that the name of the protagonist is but a phonetic transcription of a foreign term. Due to its peculiarity, Chinese language permits phonetic transcription using characters having sound and meaning; combining two characters with different meanings in order to represent the sound of a word is a common practice, and most probably this was the case. The other characters' names are not mentioned: Ye Xian's father is defined by his epiteth, Lord of the Caves, and the only reference to her husband is that he was the king of 陀汗 *Tuohan*.

We should notice that he is not called "the prince" or "the king", as in Cinderella and other fairy tales, but is defined several times as the "King of Tuohan".

This element is important because of the genre this story belongs to: it can be considered a structural feature added either by the writer or the teller to give it more historical credibility, as a proper *zhiguai*'s intent was to record strange uses of the empire's periphery. Kao identifies a common tripartite structure of the *zhiguai:* introduction with spatial and temporal settings; the main body of the text; and epilogue containing a meta-textual appraisal of the recounted story [Kao, 1985].

This text, therefore, begins and ends with references to the source of the story, crucially contributing to its comprehension.

The area of interest in Ye Xian is the south of China; the first reference is provided at the very beginning of the story "南人相传..." *nanren xiangchuan* the people of the south pass on that….

At the time of the writing, this south "was only nominally and tangentially under Chinese political and military control. Culturally and socially, this part of the empire was almost completely un-Chinese" [Mair, 2005:363]. The south as the setting of the story is extremely important as it is mentioned both at the very beginning and end of the story. Duan cites this geographic specification in these two points, highlighting the fact that the story was indeed about a peripheral part of the empire, and also that is was reliable, due to

his contacts with this world. His father is reported in the *Xin Tangshu* for his skilful administration of the southern provinces, then inhabited by the Yue, the conquering Han term for the various indigenous groups. At the end of the tale, Duan informs us that 成式旧家人李士元听说。士元本邕州洞中人，多记得南中怪事 *cheng shi jiu jiaren Li Shiyuan ting shuo. Shiyuan ben yong zhou dong zhong ren, duo jide nan zhong guai shi,* it was told by Li Shiyuan, a former servant of the Duan household; Shiyuan was originally a member of a tribal community in Yongzhou, and remembered many strange tales from the south. The identity of Li Shiyuan is object of interesting speculations: his figure could even have been an invention, as *zhiguai* authors always presented themselves as recorders, rather than writers, but there is some evidence that would make us think this is not the case. Li Shiyuan is said to come from modern Nanning, in Guangxi, a south-eastern province now inhabited by the Zhuang, whose contribution to this story is extremely important, as Fay Beauchamp points out in her article. Waley connects the servant with a particular event in the story of this region: "A disaster, which may have some bearing on how Li came into Tuan Ch'eng-shih's service, befell the aborigines in 821... in the autumn of 821 the aborigines were heavily defeated. Li Shih-yiian may have been the son of an aborigine captured in this campaign and bought as a slave by Tuan Ch'eng-shih's father. Slaves and servants in general were great disseminators of stories" [Waley, 1947: 234].

Whether Waley's assumptions are true or not, the interesting aspect is that, being from Nanning, Li most probably spoke a Tai language, similar to the language spoken by the modern Zhuang minority, whose difference from Han Chinese could indicate the unclear translation of some terms.

The second reference found in the story is to time: 秦汉前 before the Qin and the Han. According to Waley, we should dismiss this indication which is the equivalent of "once upon a time", "This is merely a way of saying 'in the good old days' before the Chinese conquest of Hsi-yuan, the area with which the story deals" [Waley, 1947:229]. Nonetheless, China's legendary, mystical period is usually placed before the Qin, and most certainly before the Han: usually, it is the 三代 *San Dai,* The Three Dynasties; 春秋

Qiunchu Spring and Autumns; and 國時代 *Zhanguo Shidai* Warring States, when the most influential philosophers, Confucius, Laozi and Mengzi, were believed to have lived and spread their knowledge. The teller, more than the writer, then, seems to refer to the period preceding the unification of the country, rather then a mythical era: a golden age when the minorities where still free from the yoke of forced sinification after the Han conquest."Placing the story before the Qin Dynasty, therefore, makes it appear to be a story of a non-Sinitic people, the Zhuang in a 'pure' state" [Beauchamp, 2010: 453].

In fact, An Lushan's disastrous Rebellion of 756-63, interpreted by the Han Chinese as a catastrophe brought onto the nation by a peasant who had tried to overthrow the power — disrupting the earthly harmony, mimesis of the heavenly one —, "could be perceived as a justified protest against high taxation and enforced labor, including the sharply increased conscription of peasants into the military ... From the Qin of 207 BCE through the later Tang Dynasty, therefore, the history of the Zhuang area—including Guangxi and Vietnam —includes local resistance to dominance from North China." [Beauchamp, 2010:453]. Li Shiyuan seems to suggest that, before the unification of the empire and its consequent sinification, a girl with high moral qualities and precious skills taught her people how to breed fish and ended up marrying a prince. This displayed national pride for Li's tribe, now virtually enslaved by the Han power.

Beauchamp, entering the symbolic and psychological interpretation, goes as far as to explain how Ye Xian, daughter of a lord of the tribal settlement, represents the people of Guangxi, Li's ethnic group who were unnecessarily and unjustly mistreated by the new Han conqueror, as Ye Xian was by her usurping stepmother. While my analysis is mainly focused on socio-historical aspects of the tale rather than its psychological meaning, it is interesting to cite this element which could have contributed to the survival of this story among the Yue in southern China.

The next important element is geographical: 陀汗 *Tuohan,* the country whose king marries Ye Xian. Now, it is quite odd indeed that a spatial element, mentioned in order to give credibility to the story, has never been clearly identified. There are of course theories about

this: Jameson thinks that Tuo Han is a corruption of the name To Huan, a country recorded in the *Xin Tang Shu,* "in the south seas and three months from Indo-China" an island country that sent embassies to Tang China in 645 and 648 [Jameson,1932:77-78]. Waley thinks that Tuohan is "an Indianized kingdom on an island off the northern shore of the gulf of Siam, politically dependent upon the great Mon kingdom of Dvaravati" [Waley, 1947:232], and Mair supports this hypothesis: in Middle Sinitic, in fact, □ □ should have sounded *d'ayan* and "this is almost certainly meant to to be the transcription of Dvaravati-Dvarapati or Tavoy" [Mair, 2005:366] Wang Qing, affirms that Tuo Han is the corrupted phonetic transcription of "Damian" or "Tamian", an island off the shores of Malaysia, setting the story in Java or Sumatra [Wang, 2006:15]. Both Mair and Qing, despite identifying this name with two different places, point out that these were key "transshipment points for the long-distance trade between East and West". Dvaravati should therefore have represented a point of contact between India and southern China, while Java and Sumatra were important meeting points for Asian and Middle-Eastern sailors: in both cases, the scholars endorse the idea of sites with crucial roles in the cultural contact between distant communities. Ding Nai Dong, significantly, states that "place names mentioned in folk-narratives...cannot be used as reliable indicators of their primary home"[DING, 1974: 8]. This sole affirmation might be the justification of my research: in fact, we see here how a text, when de-contextualised and treated as a fairy tale, fails to provide all the information otherwise available through a different disciplinary approach. Ding Naidong is a folklorist and treats Ye Xian as a fairy tale, comparing it to stories recorded and collected centuries later. While his work is precious and full of important insights, it is quite apparent that the folkloric comparative approach is quite reductive and found wanting when used as the sole method of investigation.

The next geographical reference, which is quite shocking, as will be discussed in the next chapter, is 懊女冢 *aonuzhong* the tomb of the mournful women. □ *zhong* is the term that defines burial mounds in China, which in ancient times were used for

important people. Here, the most interesting and satisfying hypothesis seems to belong to Waley, who wonders "whether there has not been a confusion with the Yao word *ao*, which means "two". A "tomb of the two women" was one of the sights of Kweilin, capital of Kwangsi in the 9th century. It was a considerable tumulus, apparently some 500 yards in circumference. It too was associated with a step-child story, for the Two Women were the two wives of the mythical Chinese emperor Shun, who was maltreated by but triumphed over his step-relatives. It seems likely that the tumulus which the aborigines associated with the Cinderella story was connected by the Chinese with their own favourite step-child story" [Waley, 1947:233]. Li Shiyuan, or whoever told him the tale, may have associated the famous mound to the story of a child mistreated by his or her stepmother, perhaps to provide it with the historical credibility needed to be retold to a Han intellectual. There is, in fact, no plausible connection between the villains and their successive worship among the southern tribe.

But, again, expanding our point of view, we can clearly see a connection between this story and the narrative of Rhodopis. Herodotus and Pliny the Elder both mention that the third big pyramid of Egypt had been built by the Pharaoh to celebrate the memory of his beloved wife, Rhodopis.

In both stories, we have a remarkable tomb linked to a humble girl marrying a prince who had looked for her, enticed by the splendid features of her footwear. To a southern Chinese, the term pyramid would have most probably sounded strange, and the closest concept, in his or her cultural system, would have been represented by a burial mound. Only Hansen seems to have thought of this association, which is another factor proving that multi-disciplinary investigation can reveal unexpected connections. It is interesting to notice that the monumental tomb only appears in the narrative of the historians and in the *zhiguai*, that we know had a historical character, while it is not present in the folk tale supposed by Rooth to be Cinderella's first core, nor in the modern fairy tales, which do not avail themselves of real geographical indications.

The last element, which is historically unsubstantiated, is the rebellion of the soldiers of Tuo Han against the king, who is forced to open the hiding place — where all the gifts from the magical fish bone had been stowed —and give them to the soldiers. The mutiny of the conscripted soldier, along with the greediness of the king, seems to have two main functions. The first is to make the story more real, eliminating the happy ending which would assimilate this narrative to a fairy tale — a genre then virtually unknown in that area — and furnishing it with the plausibility a *zhiguai* was supposed to possess.

The second is the product of mere speculation, but it seems that by narrating this last part, the servant Li wished to hint at the experience of his own people. Ye Xian, representing the tribe of the south, taken by an avid king for her possessions and neglected when those finished. And the fate of the greedy king — punished by the mutiny of unfaithful and unwillingly recruited soldiers — deprived of all his riches by natural phenomena, was perhaps what Li's people wished onto their conquerors. I repeat, however, that these are wild suppositions suggested by a study of Robert Graves's Greek myths. The author, in fact, attributes to Homer (intended as the figure of many retellers of Greek epics) an ironic character: while singing the praise of the new, savage Dorian conquerors, in fact, he depicts them as greedy, petty, cruel, crafty and violent; while he describes the ill-fated Trojans as a noble race whose higher culture is destroyed by the stronger, but much coarser invaders. Once more, the classicist point of view may provide some more clues for the analysis of ancient narratives. While, in fact, some elements of each story are strictly related to its cultural system, some respond to more general human characters that can be found across the world.

b)   *Broken narrative*

Even through a very superficial structural analysis, this tale presents many an incongruence which can hardly be explained, considering the value of Duan Chengshi as a writer and

sophisticated poetry composer, not only a collector of *zhiguai*. In his accurate study of the genre, Kao states that Tang *zhiguai* had a more refined and literary character when compared to earlier production of the same genre. "Generally speaking, T'ang fiction in the classical language is an enriched form of Six Dynasties CK[6]. It is distinguished by the self-consciousness of its representation, as opposed to the earlier CK which simply report or transcribe something "given"[Kao, 1985:39],

It is therefore extremely disconcerting to note how a piece of literature written by the fine intellectual Duan Chenghsi is said to have been, might present such a disconnected structure.

We can of course identify the coherence of the first part, when the characters are introduced. There are a few elements whose meaning is indeed worth investigating, as we have attempted to do in the previous chapters: the reference to Qin and Han dynasties, polygamy, Ye Xias ability in working gold, and so on. The text, nonetheless, flows smoothly and depicts a situation of disequilibrium which, the audience already knows, will be tackled and solved in the next part. As a matter of fact, there is a long description of the way the protagonist raises a fish, and there is a climactic moment of drama when the villain's evilness escalates to the point of murdering Ye Xian's sole object of affection. Now, the fish dies and it stops being a real animal (although with some remarkable features) to become a magical helper.

But here we have the first disturbance in the text — the person from the sky. Comparing different tales, it can be observed that when the protagonist remains alone and helpless, the instructions are given by a magical figure: an animal which is either a helper itself or, more commonly, a person transformed into an animal (as in The Golden Bird and the The Blue Bird); a ghost appearing in a dream (as Patroclus' spirit appears to Achilles in the Iliad); or even a magic object (such as the magic mirror in Snow White). A fantastically-connoted person is indeed one of the alternatives (such as Cinderella's fairy godmother), but the interaction between the protagonist and the magic helper is usually more complex and

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6   Zhiguai

structured. Here, as we have said, the figure literally falls from the sky, without being recognised by Ye Xian, and returns to heaven. So, whether the figure was not better identified by Li or Duang because it was absent in their cultural systems, or it had been added for plot exigence — since the description of aquaculture required the fish's death in order to explain how to use fish bones as fertiliser — this figure quite evidently breaks the homogeneity of the narrative.

We have discussed before that Ye Xian is found by the stepmother sleeping with her arms around a tree 抱庭树眠 *bao tingshu mian.* As Jameson pointed out, this is a very strange position indeed, and it is a precise indication of narrative interpolation. Why, otherwise, should it be specified that she was hugging a tree? Had she fallen asleep while guarding the garden, as ordered by her stepmother, supposed by De Bourboulis? But why, therefore, describe her position, when what counts is that the stepmother is reassured that Ye Xian has never left the house? Even if there were no precedent stories with a tree as donor — which we know, do exist —, this element would still sound odd, as there was no reason to specify her posture when the stepmother's only worry was that Ye Xian might have disobeyed her orders, attending the Festival.

The Festival is another confusing element: she wears her best finery，衣翠纺上衣，蹑金履 *yi cui fanf shangyi, nie jin lu* the kingfisher cloak and the golden shoes and she goes to the annual meeting — but she does not meet her husband there.

It is quite apparent that something is wrong with this part: one wonders why Ye Xian would wear clothes that would make her conspicuous, risking recognition by her stepmother, if not to participate in a Festival where she hopes to meet her future husband? We have explained how the purpose of these festivals was to promote the meeting of young people in order to make marital matches. However, Ye Xian only stays there until she is identified by her stepsister (this will be pretty much all the stepsister does in this tale) and then flees home, losing her shoe in the process. Her participation in the festival, despite her beautiful garments, has not been successful — another odd element in the story. In other

similar stories, the future husband is smitten by the protagonist's beauty, and she is admired by all the participants; none of this is mentioned in this story.

Things seem them to go even more astray: "You will remember that at the point where Cinderella is identified as the owner of the shoe, something has gone slightly wrong with the text. It seems, however, that the king must have ordered his servants to put the shoe at the wayside and watch to see if anyone came to take it. Apparently Yeh-hsien came and took the shoe, was followed and seen to go into a certain house, where she was duly discovered and identified"[Waley, 1947:232].

Everything is awry: the shoe reaches a faraway kingdom, where the king becomes obsessed with it and starts looking for the owner: this is Rhodopis's tale with the Pharaoh and it will be the leitmotif of all proper Cinderella stories. Something does not add up though: the shoe is a couple of inches smaller than every Tuohan girl's feet. Mair has to imagine the king travelling to her tribe in order to give sense to the plot which is otherwise completely misconstrued. Ye Xian is never said to have left her native settlement. The king, is fact, is said to search all the houses (of his country? Of Ye Xian's settlement?) and to marvel — 怪 *guai,* a word we have become familiar with — and discover Ye Xian in the room. Again, the text seems incoherent with the previous parts: is she hiding? And if so, why, since the desire to meet her husband at the festival surpassed her obedience to her stepmother? Has she been locked in the room, as in Disney's Cinderella? But there is nothing in the text that makes us think so, unless we imagine that part of the text has gone lost: 始具事于王 *shijusheyuwang* only then did she tell the matter to the king. If the matter was some kind of special ill-treatment she has received from her stepmother and sister, then this could explain not only why she is in a secluded room, but also why they meet such a tragic fate.

The king, upon finding Ye Xian, 令履之而信 *linglu zh ier xin* sees the shoes and believes. After that, Ye Xian makes an entrance wearing the same clothes she wore to the festival — but the king was not at the festival, so there is no recognition here as in later versions of Cinderella. With all her best garments, 色若天人 *se ruo tianren* her appearance was like a

creature from the sky. Yet, the creature of the sky we saw before was dishevelled and coarsely dressed; it must therefore be a different kind of image altogether. This in another factor displaying a combination of two different texts.

"We are told, for example, by a 17th century writer that some of the aborigines in Kwangtung and Kwangsi wore robes made of goose-feather and leaves. Again, when the story says that Cinderella looked "beautiful as a heavenly person", we are once more reminded of the swan-maiden motif, for in the Japanese Nō play, The Robe of Feathers (Hagoromo), which deals with a typical "swan-maiden" theme, it is this exact expression "heavenly person", written as here, that is used to describe the heavenly visitant whose robe of feathers is stolen by the fisherman. There is, however, a possibility that the term "heavenly person" in our story refers to a special institution of the Kwangsi natives; for we are told by an I8th century writer that among some of them (the T'ung), the chief's "daughter" is called "the Heavenly Lady" and that it is her business to counter the magic of sorceresses" [Waley, 1947:233]. Ye Xian's grand appearance, therefore, makes her either a wonderful looking character or similar to mythological creatures. Waley's suggestion is intriguing, but if the king came from so far away, how could he possibly know about the title bestowed to the chief's daughter? The plot, here, is really too crooked to make any plausible deduction.

The reader, therefore, is in for another shocking surprise: the stepmother and the stepsister are killed by flying stones (as discussed below). It seems to be quite a harsh punishment, especially since the sister apparently has done nothing evil.

But then the people of the Cave not only have mercy on them, they even build a giant burial mound over their bodies and offer sacrifices to them when they are praying to meet a partner. "The next episode comes as rather a shock, demanding as it does a complete shift in the reader's sympathies. The spirits of the two wicked persecutors become dispensers of love-magic. To us it seems that a fragment of cult-origin myth has been arbitrarily inserted in the story, though in the minds of the aborigines there may well have been connections that are not apparent to us"[Waley, 1947:233].

We have explained the likely meaning of this element in the previous chapter: suffice it to say that, again, the structure appears totally inconsistent, as the story follows the couple's future, which is not rosy as in most fairy tales.

The structural inconsistency is clear, and it is a clear sign of textual interpolation. Drawing some conclusions, there are two main causes: the effort to adapt this story to a stranger cultural system, and the process of combining different narratives. These two factors are not completely separated and could even be considered two faces — linguistic and cultural — of the same process.

It is quite clear that when the story came to Li Shiyuan, it was already a combination of different tales: one with a mistreated girl raising a fish — so important for the southern culture — and recognised by her partner through her beautifully embroidered slipper; and the other about a girl of humble origins who had married a king through a shoe test, and which was related to an enormous tomb. This second narrative had certainly come from far away, and some of the terms where not clear. The aborigines of the south had put them together, but so many aspects neither coincided linguistically nor culturally, hence the result was quite ambiguous. At the moment of the writing, the southern minorities were conquered by another ethnic group, and their traditional stories probably contained some rebellious hints at their invaders, but also some of their new moral teachings.

Confucianism, then, had slowly intruded into the local animistic religious views. Li Shiyuan, being from Nanning, was probably a native speaker of a Tai language, and therefore his retelling might not have been perfect. Duan Chengshi, then, was forced to linguistically and culturally adapt some terms that seem to hardly make sense in Han language and culture.

All these factors generated this extremely important and fascinating narrative, unique in its contamination and in its role in the Cinderella cycle.

c)   *Stoning*

There is a part of the text that has been quite neglected by most scholars, which is the singularity of the demise of both the mother and the stepsister, so described 其母及女即 为飞石击死 *qimu ji nu ji wei fei shi ji si;* literally, they get it by flying stones and die. Some authors have mentioned a phenomenon such as a poltergeist; others talk about stoning (nobody, oddly enough, mentions a possible landslide, perhaps due to the territorial conformation of the place where the story is set); Cristina Giurastante translates the words as "stoning", and so does Mair [2005:366]; if we are really dealing with a description of a lapidation, this would be a crucial clue about the place of origin and the journey of this story.

First of all, let us analyse the death of the stepsister and stepmother. In this story, the stepsister does not play an important role; she is hardly even mentioned and does not mistreat her sister. Most of the versions of Cinderella, whether collected in China or elsewhere, originally contained the death of the stepsister(s), and sometimes also that of the stepmother. Actually, as mentioned in the chapter on the protagonist, the sister seems to be an important counterpart, especially in Eastern versions. Filial piety being a pivotal characteristic of Confucian society. The difference between a filial and non-filial child is a very common topic in the later Chinese Cinderellas, as in a similar tale which is usually defined as "The kind and unkind girls", or AT 480. In Europe, the bad sister is usually guilty of being the biological daughter of the stepmother; the latter being the victim in the earliest European versions, is even killed by the protagonist in the *Gatta Cenerentola*. In the later European versions, the sisters are two and are described as greedy, lazy and only interested in riches. It seems that AT480 merged with AT510a, and the difference between Cinderella and the sisters became stronger. In Ye Xian the sister is not characterised as evil, as in the later versions; she is only mentioned when she recognises her stepsister at the social gathering, yet she meets her fate along with her mother. It seems that there are two main elements: the abusive stepmother meets her fate in the older versions, sometimes by the hand of the protagonist herself; in later versions, it is the sister, or sisters, who meet this

fate for trying to emulate and steal the love, and the newly acquired social position of the protagonist.

The absence of this juxtaposition of bad and good sisters is pre-Confucian, while in Europe, it shows the ancientness of the tale, as it had not yet been affected by the comparison of the sisters present in other story types. It seems that Ye Xian came to China before the two tale types — 510 and 480 — blended into one, which once more proves the hypothesis that Ye Xian is the union of the two different stages of the evolution of the Cinderella story: the older elements coming from the Middle East and the formed, though broken tale of the mistreated orphan we are familiar with.

All the tales categorised by Ding as "Modern Tradition" contain the death of the bad stepsister; at times it follows the murder of the protagonist and her reincarnation. This element, as mentioned, is common to Korean, Vietnamese and Indochinese versions, and is mostly related to the Confucian concept of *xiao*: filial piety deserving of reward and its lack thereof implying harsh punishment. The bad stepsister is alternatively scalded to death by washing her face in boiling water or crushed to a pulp in a mortar — in both cases with the hope of becoming as beautiful as the protagonist —, other times she is transformed into an animal, like a bird [Ding, 1974:13]. As mentioned above, in a Korean version, she is cooked by our heroine and served as a dish to her mother, much like in the Greek myths of Pelops and Tantalus. The stepmother, upon discovering she has eaten her own daughter, dies mortified; in this version, the stepsister's lack of filial piety is somehow horribly restored, as Chinese and Korean Confucian stories present the feature of good children feeding their parents with their own flesh [Tangherlini, 1994: 299].

Ye Xian, however, is the only Cinderella version in which the women are buried, honoured and venerated after being killed. We have already seen that the mention of their tomb is motivated by the historiographical purpose that characterises the zhiguai, as it gives the story a sense of factuality and reality absent in proper fairy tales.

Scholarly speaking, what is more important than the death of either or both the stepsister(s) and the stepmother is the way they encounter it.

In modern Chinese, stoning is called 石刑 *shixing,* capital punishment by stones, and it is the translation of a foreign word. It seems that stoning in China was virtually unknown before modern times, as there is hardly any reference to it throughout Chinese history, in contrast with the long tradition of capital punishment, such as the infamous 五刑 *wuxing, "five punishments*, already enforced during the Han dynasty, which ranged from quartering to skinning, along with other forms of torture with the purpose of deterring crime through extreme suffering and humiliation. The state brutally destroyed whoever challenged its authority, showing its power through atrocious forms of torture.

Of course these intricate and horribly sophisticated forms of administering death are not the exclusive cultural heritage of China; they are, however, a typical characteristic of authoritarian, elaborate and complex forms of state organisation, and the Chinese empire was a very advanced political entity in the ancient world.

Killing by stones, on the other hand, appears to be one of the most ancient forms of death penalty, and it expressed the participation of the whole community in the punishment of a crime considered an offensive threat to society, or a moral abomination. It was extremely common in the Semitic Middle East where organisation was tribal and power was not centralised. Phoenicians, and especially Jews, are known to have extensively practised lapidation for various types of sexual sin, blasphemy, or necromancy, as reported in Exodus, Deuteronomy and Leviticus

China, during the Tang dynasty, had already had centuries of legal practice and treaties on capital punishments, which were regarded as □ *li* [Sanft, 2008:51] specific procedures corresponding to specific crimes — and stoning was not one of them. According to the tradition, Jews were present in the community of Kaifeng, though its existence in ancient China, nonetheless, has been severely called into question [Zhuo,2005:68–80]. But, even without imagining the presence of this community, one can reasonably suppose that elements of this story travelled from West to East and were so unfamiliar to Tang Chinese culture, where spontaneous executions were probably so uncommon that an image of flying stones had to be used to describe them.

There are indeed many scholars who have attributed the quasi-divine punishment of the stepsister and the stepmother to Buddhist karmic law, according to which "恶有恶报,善有善报" *e you e bao, shan you shan bao*, "evil generates evil, while good deeds are always rewarded"[Li, 2009:115].   Nonetheless, it is apparent that the element of divine retribution is not an exclusive aspect of Chinese culture; on the contrary, it is present in virtually all later versions, with the exception of Perrault's Cinderella whose refined audience was to be protected from gruesome facts.

What is most astonishing about this version is that the stepsister, who does not show any evil characteristic, dies just like her mother in a way that so unfamiliar to the writer (and most probably to his servant Li Shiyuan, the teller) that it was translated as something unreal: "flying stones". The people of the caves have mercy on them, burying them under a mound which becomes a popular cult place, where offers are deposed in order for desires to be realised.

The classical tales of Rhodopis in Herodotus and Strabo are connected to the story of a pyramid built by a poor girl married to a Pharaoh through the divine intervention of a vulture who had stolen her sandal and dropped it in the Pharaoh's lap. A pyramid appears in the first versions, and a burial mound in Ye Xian: both stories speak of a girl married to a prince. Moreover, the antagonists are killed by stones thrown at them, something unknown in China, but widely practised in the Middle East. "This would appear to be a confused allusion to death by stoning, a custom common among neither the Chinese, nor their southern neighbours, but well known in the Middle East (e.g. in the Bible: 'He that is without sin, let him first cast a stone'; Islam: the stoning of the devil on the Hajj). In terms of cultural ecology, this would make sense because much of the Middle East is arid, rocky land with lots of good ammunition lying around everywhere" [Mair, 2005:367].

In light of these elements, it is quite plausible to imagine that the teller of the story was reporting a foreign narrative which had been travelling and mixing with local features of the various places it had come into contact with. This shows the success of a tale in which a mistreated orphan is helped by magic animals and marries a prince. This narrative had

such a universal message that it could be adapted to the indigenous people of peripheral southern China, those who dwelt in caves and had a tradition of orally transmitted tales.

d)   Lack of success

The last controversial element to be tackled is again a context-related one, rather than a structural component; its analysis serves the purpose of demonstrating how Ye Xian was the first, or one of the first, adaptations of a foreign tale to a new cultural system, and that its foreign elements were so alienated from this new system that they had to be changed in order to represent the folk who would retell the story.

Detectable through an accurate analysis of Tang culture, these constituents were masterly singled out in Ding Naidong's *The Cinderella Cycle in China and Indo-China.* Throughout my thesis I have criticised this work mainly due to its theoretical premises: that Ye Xian, along with the other stories collected by Ding, was a fairy tale. Ding was a folklorist, therefore his work is conditioned by the historical-comparative approach discussed in the chapter on folklore. The comparison of the motifs and their correlation with different cultural systems is what makes this method so important even today; however, the temporal flattening that tales undergo is unacceptable in light of the new awareness of cultural-specific genres.

In Ding Naidong's work, there is only one ancient tale recorded before the 20th century, and it is our Ye Xian. All the others "read more like märchen, and clearly demonstrate how many changes have crept in during those centuries as the Han-Chinese assimilated the tale" [Ding, 1974:11]. Ding does not present the idea that Ye Xian, being an ancient text, should be treated as a *zhiguai,* with all the distinctions from fairy tales we have pointed out so far: his work was published in 1974, when the historical-comparative method, with the exception of the psychoanalytical, was considered virtually the only feasible method for studying folklore `[see Dorson,1963].

Ding's cultural study, once its assumptions are discussed, is extremely valid and proves to be an indispensable instrument for the evolution of this tale. He notices that all the tales collected in the 20th centuries had been transformed into fairy tales, or märchen, although he does not highlight the fact that Western contamination had been the main cause of this phenomenon. As mentioned in previous chapters, in the 20th century China adopted tout-court Western theory and genres as a way to modernisation. Its folk tales, therefore, contained some traces of the old narratives at different levels, but their genre was already 童话 *tonghua*, children's stories.

What makes his study so fundamental is that he identifies the main elements that underwent a complete change in order to correspond to the Han cultural system: "As is well known, the Han-Chinese have had a long and highly integrated culture and hence a tendency to transform, or at least seriously modify, everything it borrows. Traces of Ch1 [Ye Xian], though, still exist in many Chinese oral tales" [Ding, 1974:11].

Although he categorises these tales as belonging to either "the Ancient Tradition" or "the Modern Tradition", he clearly states that the other versions of the Ancient Tradition all "represent a Han-Chinese effort to assimilate the tale"[Ding, 1974:13].

Several elements analysed by Ding, and another, very important feature that has emerged through this investigation, can be termed as a "lack of Confucian ethics".

The first element Ding mentions is the fish as Helper. "The change of the friendly animal from a carp or a dragon into a cow or a bird is also quite natural, since the fish plays a very important role in Southeastern Asian folklore, whereas water buffaloes and birds are far more common helpmates in Chinese tales than fish. Killing an incipient dragon would, in most Han-Chinese folktales, bring disaster to an entire area and make a subsequent development impossible"[Ding, 1974:11].

He adds, nonetheless, that the transformation of the fish into a cow or a buffalo would not thrive in China, as the helping animal usually represents the mother and, due to the Buddhist concept of Karma, "a person who had led a good life should continue to be human and become happy and prosperous in his next existence. [...]To become a cow or a

buffalo usually meant that the party in question had wronged somebody or failed to repay a debt of gratitude, and consequently had to do hard labor for his creditor in his next life. A Chinese girl would therefore be profoundly disturbed to learn that her mother had assumed such a humble form, even though with the purpose of helping herself" [Ding, 1974:37]. In Chinese, the water buffalo is called 水牛 *shuiniu*, which literally means "water cow"; the word 牛 *niu* is used generally for cows, buffaloes, oxen and bulls.

This first reason for lack of success, therefore, is that this tale is not Buddhist enough. The animist substratum of the southern regions slowly left space for the "new" religions, Buddhism and Confucianism, practised by the Han conquerors, and Ye Xian had to undergo great changes in order to survive as a narrative.

The second element has already been extensively discussed in the chapter on the stepmother: Ye Xian is a girl, and the motif of a stepmother mistreating a stepdaughter was hardly believable in a society where it was so easy to get rid of an unwanted female family member. That is why "in Han-Chinese folktales, the stepson is oftener the victim than the stepdaughter" [Ding, 1974:35].

A third element is that Ye Xian marries a prince, unheard of in Chinese society. An emperor had many concubines, but a peasant girl who worked in the fields was not a likely candidate. "The king of Ch1 [Ye Xian] may have disappeared because kings and emperors do not appear very often in Chinese folktales. When they do, they are not so close to the masses as kings in Western and Indian tale" [Ding, 1974:12] and "the aloofness of Chinese royalty […] appear to be enough to discourage a wide acceptance of AT510A in China" [Ding, 1974:37].. A 秀才 *xiucai,* a young candidate for imperial exams with prospects of success was considered good enough for a girl of humble origins, and that is why, in later variants, he is usually the man who finds the protagonist's shoe or is given a magic object, provided by the helper, and marries her.

The fourth element examined by Ding is the shoe; as said before, a girl's shoe represented her ability, but also her modesty: "in popular literature, a girl who had misplaced her shoes often met a tragic end when her shoe fell into the wrong hands. Losing a beautiful shoe

[…] would most probably be frowned on by older people in ancient China, since a young girl should not be encouraged to commit such an indiscretion" [Ding, 1974:37].

So strong was the bond with the shoe in eastern Asia that Tangherlini, in his study of the Korean Cinderella type, explains how the loss of the shoe was indeed a display of recklessness, and the stepmother accuses the protagonist of having an affair as the only explanation for her beautiful clothes [Tangherlini, 1994:292]. In Korean versions, she loses the shoe avoiding the commotion caused by the arrival of the candidate or the magistrate she will end up marrying. One notices that the sin of losing the shoe is compensated by the modesty she shows in fleeing a situation where she could be noticed, manifesting a meekness and modesty that Ye Xian does not, daring to go to the festival, disobeying her mother, in order to find her future husband.

This introduces us to the next and last element, which is the "lack of Confucian ethics".

Ye Xian is too resourceful and enterprising for a conscientious Confucian girl: she openly disobeys her stepmother, and without hesitation goes to the festival where girls hope to meet their future husbands. Even such festivals must have looked like primitive, barbarous customs to the rigidly organised Han society. The protagonists of later Cinderella stories, in China and other Confucian countries, show a more restrained, delicate and subdued personality, according to what society expected from them.

In order to highlight these qualities, along with other desired traits of a future wife, most later stories present a counterpart, the bad, and usually ugly sister or stepsister, whose role is to show, by comparison, the protagonist's perfect values.

The absence, in Ye Xian, of this counterpart, is one of the most important factors that has been overlooked by the majority scholars. The reason could be that, while this juxtaposition is common in traditional Chinese stories (what Ding calls "Modern Tradition"), it is even more apparent in other geographic areas where Confucianism is the main religious teaching.

As we have seen in the chapter dedicated to Ye Xian's figure, the stepsister in this story is hardly mentioned, and she is not described as the tormentor she will become in later

stories, nor as lazy and abusive towards her older stepsister (entitled to respect according to Confucian family hierarchy). As aforementioned, Tangherlini modified Holbek's three oppositions in fairy tales, adding a fourth, the filial/unfilial contrast in Korean stories, which reflects the Korean Confucian family system. The absence in the story of this contrastive character, so recurrent in later versions, can only mean that this element was not preponderant among the southern tribes, but it became more and more important as the process of sinification unfolded, to become one of the fundamental components in these stories. The comparison of brothers or sisters is important in Europe, and there is a tale type called the Kind and Unkind girl, AT480, often combined with Cinderella. In the Confucian world, however, the element is so important that it basically supplanted AT510A altogether [see Grayson, 2002:51-69].

Ye Xian, as the first written Cinderella story, did not succeed as a tale type because it clashed with the slow but steady reinforcement of Confucianism and Buddhism in the area, which came to substitute the animistic substratum.

Clearly, some relics of this story survived but were not taken down in writing, because that was a prerogative of the intellectuals who would not write folk tales until much later.   The novel, 小说 *xiaoshuo*, became a more tolerated form for intellectuals to entertain their audiences during the Ming dynasty, but folk tales were not usually recorded due to the great intertextuality present in Chinese literature until the 20th — let us not forget that the collection of folk tales did not begin in Europe until the 19th century — and so some shreds of this tradition survived in stories peasants told their children, but the original Ye Xian disappeared almost completely. Not until the 20th century was this fascinating story rediscovered, enabling us to analyse and investigate precious information about its role in the Cinderella cycle.

4 Conclusions

In this chapter I will illustrate the discoveries of my research.

First and foremost, that Ye Xian is the link between the stories with some elements of Cinderella, and the modern European version of the story.

It is impossible to know whether Ye Xian was the only written story which embodies this composition of elements, but so far it is the only one discovered.

The narrative elements that I have identified, unifying both Propp's dramatis personae (especially in Dundes's conception of Propp's functions as motifemes) and Todorov's narrative stages: this methodology allows a comparison between stories from all over the world, not necessarily Europe, and focuses on the structural changes in the narrative, and their agents.

By investigating the identified units in accordance with Ye Xian's cultural system, Tang China, its minorities, and the Middle East world, where some ancient stories presenting elements of the Cinderella type were recorded, I have explained how Ye Xian is the adaptation to the Tang cultural system of a tale narrated by a servant from a tribal settlement, and which consisted of foreign elements.

4.1   Conclusions: foreign elements and indications of origin

At the beginning of this piece of research, I stated that Ye Xian had been called "the Chinese Cinderella" and "the first Cinderella ever written".

I have gone through a complex and interdisciplinary process to demonstrate it is neither, but it could also be both, provided that the concepts of Chinese and Cinderella were challenged and used differently from the their usual connotation.

Ye Xian, though written in Chinese, is not a Han story. The shoe, claimed by many people as evidence of Cinderella's Chinese origin, compares only in this version, and its importance is its exclusivity, not its size. Foot binding would only become widespread later, and it will be an aristocratic habit, while Cinderella stories in China would continue to depict peasant girls; in fact, folk tales in China will be written and recorded only centuries later, due to the poor consideration fiction had in China.

The horrible stepmother too does not resist the examination: in most Chinese folk tales and examples of filial piety the stepson is the protagonist or, when the girl is the main character, then she is vexed by her mother-in-law, due to the facility a family had to get rid of an unwanted female family member. The reincarnation, cited by De Bourboulis :"This idea[...] is again quite compatible with Chinese beliefs, where reincarnation is a religious doctrine"[De Bourboulis, 1982:106], again has been disproved to be a Chinese element, as the reincarnation into an animal would certainly be unsuitable for the protagonist's mother. And, most certainly, there was no king or prince available for marriage for a peasant girl in Han China.

A thorough analysis of these elements, therefore, demolishes completely cultural suppositions based on superficial knowledge of the system in question.

To some extent, though, Ye Xian is a Yue story or, in modern times, a Zhuang story, for the multiple correlation between southern Chinese peoples and the components of this story: China is made up of its minorities, and the Zhuang is the largest one.

The connection with water, fish, tribal nuptial festival is so evident that several scholars (Beauchamp, Nong, Mair) have drawn some obvious conclusions on its origins.

I have demonstrated, though, that many a piece of evidence point to a foreign origin, a place different from southern China. Rooth in The Cinderella Cycle said that the core of all Cinderella was a middle Eastern narrative in which a mistreated orphan was provided with gifts by her mother's reincarnation of a tree grown on her tomb (or an animal). But there was another narrative, more ancient, that was also a Middle-Eastern story reported in historical reports by Greek authors Strabo (1st century B.C.) and Aelian (2nd A.D.) The

story was about a poor girl (a slave, a prostitute) called Rhodopis, whose sandal had been stolen by a vulture, or an eagle, and dropped in the lap of the Pharaoh who had scoured the country to find the girl and marry her; her story was connected to the story of one of the great pyramids of Egypt. Moreover, a story belonging to Jewish folklore but deeply connected to Egypt, *Asenath and Joseph*, portraying a girl whose stepmother is her rival in the attention of the man she will finally marry, presents striking analogies with Ye Xian. First of all, there is the mention of a man from the sky which really resembles, even in the formal structure, Ye Xian's second helper. Secondly, the girl is said to lie in the ashes, which are present in Ye Xian as a heap of dung in which she looks for the fish bones; and finally, she is also recognised by her husband through a ring belonging to her. Moreover, as a little girl she is saved by a vulture which carries her to safety, illustrating therefore a helping bird, like in Rhodopis (another Egyptian tale) and in later Cinderellas, such as Grimm's.

There is no written evidence that these stories got in contact with the narrative of the mistreated orphan in the middle East, but we do know that the first two, Rooth's a1 and Rhodopis, had come in contact with China before the Tang Dinasty. Ding reports that the mistreated orphans who cry on their mother's tomb is the object of a story recorded in the Dunghuang manuscripts, dating from the 9th and 10th centuries, the *bianwen* texts containing Buddhist tales, along with various and diverse material from different area and different religious tradition [Ding, 1974:35]. We also have evidence that Rhodopis was known in southern China before the Tang: "The motifs recorded by Strabo (the shoe-stealing bird and the shoe test) are known in this region. Judging from their appearance in the peripheral version and the replacement of the eagle by a human and therefore more plausible carrier in Ch1, these motifs must have circulated in Southeast Asia long before the 9th century.[...]As has been pointed out before, an earlier tradition possessing details which this peripheral versions share in common — including the competition between sisters and the informative bird asking to be fed first — may have existed before the

appearance of Ch1. Ch1 did not come into being by accident, it was probably preceded by a rich tradition reaching back to antiquity." [Ding, 1974:39]

Both models, the unfortunate orphan with mistreating stepmother and receiving gifts from the mother's reincarnation, and the shoe stolen from a bird and given to the prince who makes all the girls of the kingdom to try it on, might have merged into one, when the shoe became a gift from the helper, and the bird was substituted by a figure or an animal which had more resonance in that cultural system.

There are indeed some resemblances between Ye Xian and Rhodopis: they are both presented as historical facts happened in the remote times, but still as factual occurrences. Rhodopis is present in the work of two historians, and Ye Xian is a *zhiguai*, a story with real elements to make it credible. Both protagonists are poor women who marry a prince because of the splendid features of their footwear; and in both stories the proof of their authenticity is a huge tomb: a pyramid in the Greek-Egyptian version, and the stepmother and stepsister's burial mound in the southern-Chinese one.

Moreover, in Ye Xian there are some elements which were most probably unaccounted of not only by the Han, but most likely inexperienced also by their southern neighbours. Stoning was probably ignored not only by the civilised, organised Han, who did know many more sophisticated forms of capital punishment, but also by the tribal Southerner, for whom accessing stones to carry out the deed was in all likelihood not the easiest way to execute someone, due to the characteristics of their region full of waters and paddy fields [See Mair, 2005:367]. The mention to polygamy in a form unknown in Han Chinese —the Chinese language possesses many words to describe concubine and the excellent literatus Duan Chenghshi says clearly that Ye Xian's father had two wives— represents another indication of a probable Middle-Eastern origin: polygamy was customary both in Jewish and Muslim society, and even before its institutionalisation it had been practised in Egypt and in the Sumerian empire.

This two elements, with the addition of the mention of a tree helper as in the Rooth's first core of the tale, A1, makes it quite plausible to think that the motifs had travelled across

time and space, to reach southern Asia where shoes were fundamental in courtship rituals, and where an adaptation was carried out. The ancientness of Ye Xian is also demonstrated by the fact that the rivalry between sisters and their juxtaposition had not happened yet, and AT510A had not yet merged with AT480, while most successive versions in China show a very clear juxtaposition between the good and the bad sister. AT480 stories was successful in Europe, but nearly as successful as Cinderella stories, and more as a tale type itself than an indispensable element in Cinderella stories. The comparison between the two sisters was fundamental in Confucian stories as it represented the polarity filial/unfilial discussed above, which was central in Confucian ethic and education.

There is only one question left, and it is about the diffusion of the tale. To study it is not the aim of this research, but it would be interesting to see how our story dating back to the 9th century is connected to the European Cinderella, which became so famous after 1650 with Basile's *La Gatta Cenerentola*. Beauchamp explains this with the fact that in 1580 there was "a new woodblock printing of Duan Chengshi's miscellany, *Youyang zazu* ; because the *Youyang zazu* contained many fantastic stories of the "strange," the book was popular in China and many copies are extant from the 1580s onward, including a 1608 copy in Tokyo" [Beauchamp, 2010:480].

Both Beauchamp and Mulhern believe that the diffusion of Cinderella was due to the encounter of European Jesuits with Chinese and Japanese culture. However, the differences between Ye Xian and Basile's version are too great to imagine that Jesuits came back to Europe and imported the folktale, as it was, into Europe.

Beachamp ascribes the diffusion of Cinderella to "many Italian sailors, merchants, and other travelers, including Jesuits" [ibidem] who brought the tale to Venice and Naples ports.

Personally, I find her vision a little biased by her desire of Ye Xian, that she defines as the Zhuang version of Cinderella, to be identified as the tale's most important rendition, making Cinderella a folk tale originated in China."It is time for this heroine's Asian

identity to be recognized and the evocative story motifs understood in their Asian contexts"
[Beauchamp, 2010:447].

From the Chinese Rites Controversy, we know that Jesuits tried to adjust the cultural and
religious background they carried to Chinese culture. For the absence of fairy tales in
classical China, I believe it was actually the opposite of what Beauchamp imagined: Jesuits
told children fairy tales, and not the other way around, so it is logical to imagine they
would teach stories of rewarded virtue, with trees and animals as helpers, and that Chinese
people, in exchange, told them theirs. Forms of Cinderella had been popular in Europe
since ancient times, and shreds of this tradition, traceable in so many tales, had been
circulating long before Basile.

The element Europeans stories lacked was the shoe; so, even though it was not the most
important detail of Chinese stories, nor was it a Han element, it can be possible that Jesuits
merged the two stories in one; or that merchants brought the Chinese narrative to Europe,
where the Cinderella was already alive and kicking, and the result were Basile, Perrault
and Grimm's Cinderellas.

The history of Cinderella seems therefore to acquire more definite traits.

 It is quite apparent that the story originated in the Middle East, which is in line with what
Rooth had discovered.

There was an ancient narrative, of animistic features, depicting orphan children mistreated
by their stepmother, but cared for by their mother's tomb, or a tree grown on it.

Also, there was a tale, reported by Greek historians, about a poor girl who ended up
marrying a Pharaoh when a vulture stole her sandal and dropped into into his lap. This
story was connected to a pyramid built by him in her honour.

These two narratives merged into one in ancient times, and probably got in contact which
more recent narratives of the Middle East, where Jews and Muslims lived, polygamy was
practised, stoning was a form of capital punishment, and a story of a girl repenting in
ashes, mistreated by her stepmother, saved by a vulture and recognised by her future
husband through a magic object had been circulating for centuries.

This new story combining the three of them, of each of them separately joined southern Chinese tribes, who practised aquaculture, probably through the retelling of merchants and sailors at the trading points of Java and Sumatra.

 The shoe test presented in Rhodopis story struck a chord in southern China, where shoes were indeed a unique element of recognition and a nuptial token, and this was the birth of Ye Xian. .

The final narrative is but a combination of elements, most of which came directly from the ancient Middle East: the shoe test and the helping animal in Rhodopis, an Egyptian tale, the abused orphan, the stepmother and the helping tree in the ancient middle-eastern version, along with AT480.

Ye Xian, therefore, is one of the most important pieces of folklore in the Cinderella cycle as, for the first time, it presents all the parts of the ancient narratives in a single text. The version taken down in writing by Duan Chengshi presents a few peculiar traits both in content and structure. These clearly demonstrates that the narrative was patched together by Duan or, much more likely, by story tellers from whom his servant Li Shiyuan had heard the story.

Some strange elements, which had no correspondence and were hardly translatable, had to be adapted: the flying stones as a reference to stoning, and the burial mound to a pyramid. Some others were modified to meet the horizon of expectation of the new audience: the main helper became a fish, and the other two (a man from the sky and a tree) became less important. The story, however, was not successful in Han China, where stepdaughters were easy to get rid of, the juxtaposition of the two sisters was more important, and a girl from a tribe marrying a prince was unheard of.

The tribal festival was an important addition of this version, and most probably survived and reached Europe and it was added to European Cinderella stories. In China, however, folk tales were the expression of the peasants and the lower classes, and intellectuals did not transcribe them; in China, moreover, they did not undergo the process of literarisation that happened in Europe in the 17th century, described by Jack Zipes in his work [see Zipes,

2012], so only from recently recorded tales can we see that AT510A was not really successful in Han China because of the characteristics of its cultural system: stepdaughters easily removed from the family, distance of the royals from the lower classes, and absence of balls with a matchmaking purpose.

In Europe, the ancient narrative had survived in stories of a mistreated orphan, and an animal helper, reincarnation of a mother, like in Rushin Coatie, and stories of a kind and an unkind girls (AT480) had merged into Cinderella tales since ancient times —but before Ye Xian, which carries no trace of it. All the "Western" motifs — orphaned protagonist, mistreating stepmother, animal helpers, shoe as a tool of recognition— had survived in European narrative, and what Jesuits brought into the story was the ball which however had to be transformed, as matchmaking festivals, unofficially practised in Europe as a relic of Celtic calendar, had been wiped out since the Middle Ages, and especially in the Early Modern Period of the Counter-Reform. Therefore, the ball became an exclusive, one-off event promoted by a prince looking for a wife.

The elements which disappeared were the ones functional to spatial and temporal contextualisation, especially the tomb of the stepmother.

All the others, in different forms, constitute the modern Cinderella story.

Unlike traditional comparative studies, however, the aim of this research was less to speculate of this tale's origin and diffusion than to carry out a thorough examination of a story showing how interdisciplinary approach is useful for such narratives where traditional categories are called into question. Drawing knowledge from different discipline while carrying out close reading disclose fundamental information of a text, and using genre specific and a-specific examination is an indication which will hopefully be followed in future studies which deal with text having a decisive international connotation, or are to be examined from the most all-encompassing possible perspective.

4.2   Recommendations for Future Research

In light of the research carried out, it can be said that an interdisciplinary approach which avails itself of different approaches drawing on knowledge from different disciplines, their boundaries, but also using is the most appropriate and constructive when dealing with ancient stories, especially when they contain traces undoubtedly relatable to different cultural systems.

Proposing a multi-disciplinary methodology is the only way to overcome the limits each approach inevitably possess [Zipes, 2012:XI], suggests that interdisciplinary approaches be used in order extract the most information possible on the cultural evolution of fairy tales. Multi-disciplinary, though, is a term which I would use here along with interdiscipinary as the links between the different fields of study is not always clear and univocal.

In fact, as I have pointed out, the three main perspectives that I have used, the Classicist, the Sinologist, and the Folklorist, do not always overlap one another and when they do, they share the object of their studies, rather than methodology itself.

The choice of using the Classicist approach is due to the awareness that the origin of this story lies in ancient narratives which were contained in the work of Greek historians, but where set in Egypt: and a connection was clear when reading Rooth's *The Cinderella cycle*, she pointed at the Middle East as probable birthplace of all Cinderella stories. However, I found it interesting how classicists who are folklorists at the same time would overlook the genre of the stories they are analysing, concentrating therefore on motifs, or components, instead of the genre in question. I have therefore borrowed the foundational concept of Genre variance as in Hansen [2002:8] as a crucial methodological tool enabling us to shift between genres without the restriction of fixed structural models.

The genre of the tale, however, was for me a paramount element to this research, not only for the its formal analysis, but first and foremost for its contextual study: ignoring the genre of a story, while useful for the study of its single components, is risky because it

means extrapolating the text from its cultural context, missing important correlation of the author with his audience and cultural environment. This can lead to two main consequences: the information of the text can be adulterated, because neglecting specific context narrows the access to precious knowledge on the text; and secondly, it can entail a biased, ethnocentric view. To disregard as unimportant the fact that Ye Xian was written as a *zhiguai*, would have hindered the collection of precious data abut the intentions of the author, his structural choices, his difficulties in interpreting foreign elements, his relationship with the teller, and the cultural connotations of the story.

That is why the second approach, the Sinological, was essential. Apart from the obvious need of linguistic interpretation of the text, the Sinological point of view was necessary in order to provide knowledge on the cultural contextualisation of the text. Duan Chengshi was a Tang intellectual, and his work reflects this to a level virtually unknown to the Western ancient writers. The awareness of the relationship of a Chinese author with previous literature and with his own literary production is essential to the comprehension of the latter. It was therefore important in this work to show how Sinologists have so far strived to reach an agreement between two apparently opposite parties: the ones we have defined as "the theorists" and the "philologists". The first insist that theory, in this case Western theory, possesses a universal value and therefore can be used regardless of the cultural context; the others oppose that China's unique linguistic system, history and cultural environment postulate the need of a proper system of analysis. I have attempted to explain how these two approaches are not mutually exclusive, as comparative literature and world literature have tried to combine these points of view. Since, at the beginning of the 20th century, China borrowed the entire Western literary theory in an attempt at modernisation, and that henceforth claiming that literary theory, as it is, belongs exclusively to the Western world is quite inaccurate and outdated. Using Western methodology as a mere tool of analysis, however, does not mean to overlook national cultural context. On the contrary, it means that more and more precise instruments can be

produced all over the world in order to identify the specific connotation of a cultural system.

The way a Han author looked up to the Classics, his exigence of historical credibility, his sense of responsibility towards the other writers due to the higher level of intertetuality are all elements that would have escaped a scholar unaware of the cultural connotations of the ancient Chinese literary context.

This is the limit of the Folklorist point of view, as I have explained while investigating this approach. Folklorists tend to flatten specific cultural context in their comparative works. Despite new approaches to this method, which tried to defend this method by merging it to Propp functionalism and to minimise its shortcomings by justifying its use as a universal tool of categorisation, [Goldberg, 1984] the limits of the comparative method have been quite apparent in the last three decades.

"The main aims of the historic-geographic method – the ascertainment of the origin and distribution routes of tale types, studied in monographs, and also the reconstruction of the original form – still attract interest in narrative research. The reason why these objectives have become secondary is the lack of convincing results so far. In addition to other shortcomings that folklore studies have to tackle, inadequacies are also conditioned by the type of the text corpus –namely, the 19th and 20th century oral texts, which may be based on even earlier oral narratives, and a relatively small number of literary variants from widely different eras that go back to the ancient times" [Shojaei Kawan 2004:33]. The comparative method defines itself as genre specific, but actually its tendency is to collect stories using all of them as fairy tales, sifting them through the Index of Folktales, and then comparing them, therefore getting hold of elements from the most diverse cultural systems without deepen their knowledge of them.

My use of folklore theory in this piece of research is due to many factors that determine the important contribution to analysis: the oral transmission of tales, but first and foremost the reason itself of the comparative method and the attempt to systematisation of comparison The main actors of these two process are especially Thompson with his classification

system and Dundes with his discovery of the necessity of finding a unit of measurement in order to compare. Gilet because of the his adaptation of the Propp's system, making it universal, as Propp had not claimed universality for its method.

Tu sum up: genre specific and a-specific analysis a paradigm of study of similar stories. The paradigm I propose here, therefore, is the combination of the two main focuses of genre specific, or culturally-based approach, and a genre a-specific, or motif-based approach. The latter, in fact, provides the content and the possibility of comparing such constitutive elements. Comparative methods, then, tend to decline the motifemes into motif, the narrative component into a cultural-specific one. We can see, for example, that the helper in the story can be either a tree, a fish, a cow, a fairy godmother, and so on. Without a genre-specific study, capable of connecting every "accident" to the specific cultural system when it was added or transformed, there is not a real cultural study, because the form (the genre) in which the story is retold provide precious information on the condition of the retelling. Genre, in fact, is not just a theoretical construction a posteriori, but also a model of inspiration for the author to adapt his or her work, and a way to respond to his or her audience's need. In a story which aimed to historical credibility, a large fish was plausible, and a figure from the sky too, in those times; a talking fish, on the other hand, would have appeared too supernatural even for a record of the strange, a genre at which Duan Chengshi was proficient and whose rules and limits he knew very well.. My opinion is, therefore, that there is no comparison without a super-national, global theoretical system which permit the acquisition of data independently from the form, linguistic or cultural, they are expressed; but cultural analysis is impossible without a cultural close reading capable of contextualising the information relating it to the cultural background.

The tripartite division in methodology has been dictated by the special place Ye Xian has come to occupy, and the same time the identification of three main periods in the evolution of the story type. The three periods entailed three different linguistic systems, three

different approaches and three different contributions to the study. While this threefold methodology has been specifically tailored to this particular case, the combination of genre or cultural specific and a-specific examination have proven valid tools of investigation. Interdisciplinary studies are an extremely habitual procedure nowadays, and this work is no exception, Nonetheless, the specificity of the discussion over genres as textual grids and cultural relevance will hopefully be instrumental to suggest original methodologies in similar situations.

Although the context in which this comment was uttered was different, as it was in a discussion over the utility of Comparative Literature, I would like to conclude with this remark by Franco Moretti: he stated that "Comparative literature is not an object, it's a problem". In order to gain more knowledge, he recommends abjuring close reading altogether, analysing broad patterns rather than individual works. In order to synthesise years of research of knowledge, he states, "Literary history will become 'second hand': a patchwork of other people's research, *without a single direct textual reading.* As close reading in all its forms depends on a very small canon regarded as fundamental for the study of a literary system, World Literature, which cannot embrace such vast immensity, must be based on distant reading "where distance, let me repeat it, is a condition of knowledge: it allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems "when a culture starts moving towards the modern novel, it's always as a compromise between foreign form and local materials" [see Moretti, 2000:60]. It is quite obvious that I cannot but hold a different opinion from Moretti's, as I do believe close reading is the key to disclosing information; I do understand, nonetheless, his ground-breaking idea that it would be superfluous when the object of the study is ampler, or more specific, and therefore to be inserted in a more broadly encompassing perspective. He concludes: "Now, trees and waves are both metaphors—but except for this, they have absolutely nothing in common. The tree describes the passage from unity to diversity: one tree, with many branches: from Indo-European, to dozens of different languages. The wave is the opposite: it observes

uniformity engulfing an initial diversity..[…] Trees need geographical *discontinuity* (in order to branch off from each other, languages must first be separated in space, just like animal species); waves dislike barriers, and thrive on geographical *continuity* (from the viewpoint of a wave, the ideal world is a pond). Trees and branches are what nation-states cling to; waves are what markets do. And so on. Nothing in common, between the two metaphors. But—*they both work.*Cultural history is made of trees *and* waves—the wave of agricultural advance supporting the tree of Indo-European languages, which is theswept by new waves of linguistic and cultural contact . . . And as world culture oscillates between the two mechanisms, its products are inevitably composite ones. Compromises, as in Jameson's law. That's why the law works: because it intuitively captures the intersection of the two mechanisms. […] This, then, is the basis for the division of labour between national and world literature: national literature, for people who see trees; world literature, for people who see waves. Division of labour . . . and challenge; because both metaphors work, yes, but that doesn't mean that they work equally well. The products of cultural history are always composite ones: but which is the dominant mechanism in their composition? The internal, or the external one? The nation or the world? The tree or the wave?"[Moretti, 2000:67-68]. This division, which is extremely important and has been the premise of this research, entails that "no matter what the object of analysis is, there will always be a point where the study of world literature must yield to the specialist of the national literature, in a sort of cosmic and inevitable division of labour. Inevitable not just for practical reasons, but for theoretical ones" [Moretti, 2000:66].

In order to overcome this dichotomy, or at least to make the most of both forces, the national and the global, I have attempted to carry out the most possible complete research. on a small piece of literature with great cultural implications, the most important of which being that tales travel, evolve, adapt and transform according to diverse cultural systems, yet the desire of fantastic creation is a wave, common to all humans.

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Glossary

Allomotif: every different specific occurrence of a motif in a motifeme (see motifeme)

Aarne-Thompson : classification system of folk and fairy tales according to the motifs present in a narrative; also Aarne-Thompson-Uther ATU, AaTh or AT.
When followed by a number, it indicates a specific entry of the Aarne–Thompson Motif-Index

Ancient Tradition: a tale type identified by Ding Naidong in his *The cinderella cycle in China and Indo-China*. The Ancient Tradition has Ye Xian as its major representative, and roughly corresponds to AT510a.(see Modern Tradition)

AT480: entry of the Aarne-Thompson motif index called *The Kind and Unkind girls*. All the entries under the number 400 are defined as Supernatural Tasks. *The real daughter and the stepdaughter by the spring, or the rolling cake. Cf. Types 403, 510A. I. Kind and Unkind Girls. (a) A real daughter and a stepdaughter or two sisters or (c) other girls, one kind and one unkind*

AT510a: entry of the Aarne-Thompson motif index called *Persecuted Heroine*, which corresponds to Cinderella stories. All the entries under the number 500 are called "Supernatural Helpers"
The two stepsisters. The stepdaughter at the grave of her own mother, who helps her (milks the cow, shakes the apple-tree, helps the old man; cf. Type 480). Three fold visit to church (dance). Slipper test

AT510b: entry of the Aarne-Thompson motif index called Unnatural Love, which in some cases is intertwined with Cinderella stories. All the entries under the number 500 are called "Supernatural Helpers"

Present of the father who wants to marry his own daughter. The maiden as servant of the prince, who throws various objects at her. The three-fold visit to the church and the forgotten shoe. Marriage

A1 (also Rooth's A1): first embryonic component of Cinderella stories according to Anna Birgitta Rooth's *The Cinderella Cycle*. It proceeds from the Middle East and it is the narrative of orphan children mistreated by a stepmother and provided with food and gifts by their mother's tomb, or by a tree grown on her tomb

Asenath (also Aseneth): Jewish and Egyptian narrative about a girl saved by a vulture, challenged by her stepmother in her love of her future husband, and recognised by through a ring

Bai Yue 百越: see Yue

Chinese Rites Controversy: a religious debate over whether Chinese rites of worshipping their ancestors were religious rituals and therefore incompatible with Christianity, as Dominican and Franciscans maintained, or a form of Christian ritual, as Jesuits would have

Comparative method: also known as Finnish Method and Historic(al)- geographic method is the predominant modus operandi in folklore research. It consists in a monographic study of a tale type in order to find as many examples as possible in order to trace its origin and diffusion

Dramatis Persona: according to Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, each of the seven recognisable figures of agents in the development of a narrative

Finnish method: see Comparative Method

Function: according to Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, one of the thirty-one recognisable narrative units in a narrative

Guwen 古文: classical prose, inspired to pre-Han Confucian Classics

Guwen yundong 古文運動 : Classical prose movement during Tang and Song dynasties that promoted the employment of guwen, classical prose, and was followed by some intellectuals who sought clarity and precision against the 駢體文 piantiwen, parallel prose, which had been used since the Han and a rigid structure and was too elaborate

Historic(al) geographic method: see Comparative method

Märchen: the technical name used by folklorists to define fairy tales

Modern Tradition: a tale type identified by Ding Naidong in his *The cinderella cycle in China and Indo-China*. The Modern Tradition is present in many countries of eastern countries such as China, Korea and Vietnam. It roughly corresponds to AT480, *The Kind and Unkind Girls*

Motif: a recognisable and consistently repeated in a story; according to Thompson, the minimal narrative unit of a folk tale

Motifeme: a term introduced by the folklorist Alan Dundes, corresponding to Propp's function.According to Dundes, the motifeme is the general category when a motif is a specific, real occurrence in a story. Example: Motifeme: Hero slays the dragon: Motif: Perseus slays the sea-monster; Saint George kills the dragon; and so on. See Allomotif, function

Oikotype: The local form of a text-type (known as either oikotype or oicotype), borrowed by C. W. von Sydow from biology, where ecotype is a species that thrive in a specific habitat

Piantiwen 駢體文 : parallel prose, a writing style in which the content was exposed in antithetic sentences of four or six characters each and which preferred the employment of literary quotations and sophisticated form. This rigid scheme entailed a lack in clarity and precision of the expression

Rhodopis: famous Greek courtesan whose legend is connected to Cinderella stories. Herodotus says she was taken slave in Egypt, and then freed for a large sum by Charaxus, brother of the lyric poet Sappho.Strabo and Aelian, however, tell the story of Rhodopis as a Greek slave whose sandal was stolen by a vulture and dropped onto the lap of Pharaoh Psamtik who looked for the owner of the sandal, married her and built a large pyramid for her.

Rooth's A1: see A1

Stages of Narrative: Five basic stages of a narration conceived by the structuralist critic Bulgarian-French Tzvetan Todorov in his *Structural Analysis of Narrative*: he identified 1) Equilibrium, 2)Disruption, 3)Acknowledgement, 4)Attempt at a restoration and 5) New Equilibrium.

Tale-type (also type): a recurrent story presenting the same or similar motifs (see motif)

Todorov's five narrative stages: see Stages of Narrative

Ur-form: the first, primeval version of a folk tale according to users of the Comparative method

Xiaoshuo 小说:fiction (literally the small 小 discourse 说), considered a minor genre in traditional Chinese Literature

Yue 百越, also Yue 越: an ancient conglomeration of indigenous non-Han hill tribes who inhabited what is now Southern China and Northern Vietnam between the first millennium BC and the first millennium CE. The process of their sinification began in the Qin dynasty but it lasted for centuries, and remnants of the ancient Yue still live in Zhejiang and Guangdong: the minorities Zhuang, Tai, Lao, etc. are considered their descendants.

Zhiguai 志怪: record 志 zhi of the strange 怪 guai. A Chinese literary genre, with a hybrid character of fiction and historical report.

Annex

Original text of Ye Xian *Ye Xian* [Duan Chenghsi 段成式, *Youyang zazu* 酉陽雜俎(Miscellaneous Morsels from Youyang), Beijing: Zhonghua, 1981]

南人相传，秦汉前有洞主吴氏，土人呼为吴洞。娶两妻，一妻卒。有女名叶限，少惠，善陶金，父爱之。末岁父卒，为后母所苦，常令樵险汲深。时尝得一鳞，二寸余，赪鳍金目，遂潜养于盆水。日日长，易数器，大不能受，乃投于后池中。女所得余食，辄沉以食之。女至池，鱼必露首枕岸，他人至不复出。其母知之，每伺之，鱼未尝见也。因诈女曰："尔无劳乎，吾为尔新其襦。"乃易其弊衣。后令汲于他泉，计里数百也。母徐衣其女衣，袖利刃行向池。呼鱼，鱼即出首，因斤杀之，鱼已长丈余。膳其肉，味倍常鱼，藏其骨于郁栖之下。逾日，女至向池，不复见鱼矣，乃哭于野。忽有人被发粗衣，自天而降，慰女曰："尔无哭，尔母杀尔鱼矣，骨在粪下。尔归，可取鱼骨藏于室，所须第祈之，当随尔也。"女用其言，金玑衣食随欲而具。及洞节，母往，令女守庭果。女伺母行远，亦往，衣翠纺上衣，蹑金履。母所生女认之，谓母曰："此甚似姊也。"母亦疑之。女觉，遽反，遂遗一只履，为洞人所得。母归，但见女抱庭树眠，亦不之虑。其洞邻海岛，岛中有国名陀汗，兵强，王数十岛，水界数千里。洞人遂货其履于陀汗国，国主得之，命其左右履之，足小者履减一寸。乃令一国妇人履之，竟无一称者。其轻如毛，履石无声。陀汗王意其洞人以非道得之，遂禁锢而栲掠之，竟不知所从来。乃以是履弃之于道旁，即遍历人家捕之，若有女履者，捕之以告。陀汗王怪之，乃搜其室，得叶限，令履之而信。叶限因衣翠纺衣，蹑履而进，色若天人也。始具事于王，载鱼骨与叶限俱还国。其母及女即为飞石击死，洞人哀之，埋于石坑，命曰懊女冢。洞人以为禖祀，求女必应。陀汗王至国，

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以叶限为上妇。一年，王贪求，祈于鱼骨，宝玉无限。逾年，不复应。王乃葬鱼骨于海岸，用珠百斛藏之，以金为际。至征卒叛时，将发以赡军。一夕，为海潮所沦。成式旧家人李士元听说。士元本邕州洞中人，多记得南中怪事.

English version of the text. (Translation is mine.)

The Southern people pass down that, before the Qin and the Han, there was a leader of a tribal settlement called Wu. The inhabitants called him Wu Dong, Wu of the tribe. He had two wives, and one died, leaving a daughter called Ye Xian, smart since her childhood and well-versed in spinning gold thread. Her father loved her. Few years later, her father died too. Ye Xian was mistreated by her stepmother that often ordered her to gather firewood in dangerous places and collect water from deep wells. Once she found a fish not longer than two inches, with red fins and golden eyes. She kept it in a bowl. Day by day it grew bigger, but, after changing different bowls, none of them could contain him, so she threw him into the pond in the backyard; she collected the leftovers and submerged them to feed him. When she came to the pond, the fish stuck its head out of the water, and leaned on the shore, so she could pillow on it. But if anyone else approached, it did not appear. The stepmother discovered this, but every time she went to see it, she couldn't. So she deceived the girl. "Haven't you been working too much? I want to give you a new jacket" she told her, before having her take off her tattered clothes, and sent her to gather water from another spring, several miles away. Then she slowly put on the girl's clothes and, after hiding a sharp knife in her sleeve, she went to the pond and called the fish, which stuck out its head, then the stepmother killed it with the knife. The fish had already grown to more than ten feet in length. The stepmother made a meal out of its flesh, which was twice as tasty as the one of an ordinary fish. She hid the bones beneath the dung heap. The next day the girl arrived at the pond, she did not see the fish and cried in the wilderness. All of a sudden a person with dishevelled hair and coarse clothing came from the sky and consoled Ye Xian saying "Don't cry, your stepmother killed the fish. Its bones are beneath the dung. When you go back, you can pick up the bones and hide them in your room. For anything you need, you just have to pray and your wish will come true". The girl followed the instructions and got the gold, pearls, clothing and food she desired. At the time of the

tribe festival the stepmother went but she ordered the girl to guard the fruit in the courtyard. Ye Xian waited until the stepmother was far, then she went herself. She wore a blouse woven with kingfisher feathers and golden slippers on her feet. The daughter to whom her stepmother had given birth recognised her and told her mother "That girl really looks like my elder sister". The stepmother also grew suspicious. Ye Xian became aware of it and went hurriedly back leaving a shoe behind; a man of the tribe picked it up. The stepmother returned home and saw the girl sleeping while hugging a tree in the courtyard; so she no longer thought about it.

The tribal settlement was close to an ocean island and on the island there was a country called Tuohan. It had a strong army and its king reigned over dozen of islands. Its shores were more than a thousand mile long.

The man of the tribal settlement sold the shoe to the kingdom of Tuohan. The ruler of Tuohan got hold of it, he ordered to all the women attending him to try it on, but it was an inch shorter even than the smallest feet. Then he ordered all the women of the kingdom to try it, but it fit none of them. It was as light as feather and did not make any noise, not even on stones. The king of Tuohan suspected that the man of the tribal settlement had obtained it illegally, so the man was imprisoned and tortured, but it was not known where the shoe came from.

So the man was released with the shoe. They searched all the houses; if a woman could wear that shoe, she had to be captured, and the king informed.

The king marvelled at it, so he searched her room and found Ye Xian. He ordered her to put on the slipper and believed.

Then wearing her dress woven with kingfisher feathers and the golden slippers, she made an entrance. Her colours were the ones of a Heavenly being. She started telling the king what had happened. The king returned to his kingdom taking both the fish bones and Ye Xian.

The stepmother and her daughter were soon killed by stones thrown at them. Pitying them, the people of the tribal settlement buried them in a stone pit, called the Tomb of the Regretting women. The men of the tribe offered there sacrifices to find a wife.

When the king of Tuohan arrived at his country, he made Ye Xian his principal wife. The first year, the king was greedy and asked the fish bones for unlimited treasures. A year

later, the bones no longer responded. Then the king buried them at the seashore, with hundred bushels of pearls, hiding them and using gold as a boundary. When the recruited soldiers rebelled, he desired to pay them with it, but one night it was washed away by the tide.

This was told by Li Shiyuan, a former servant in my household. Shiyuan was originally from the tribal settlement of Yongzhou, and could recall many strange facts from the south.