

Aqua Pixie Kakasha

Written by Tang Tang

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SYNOPSIS

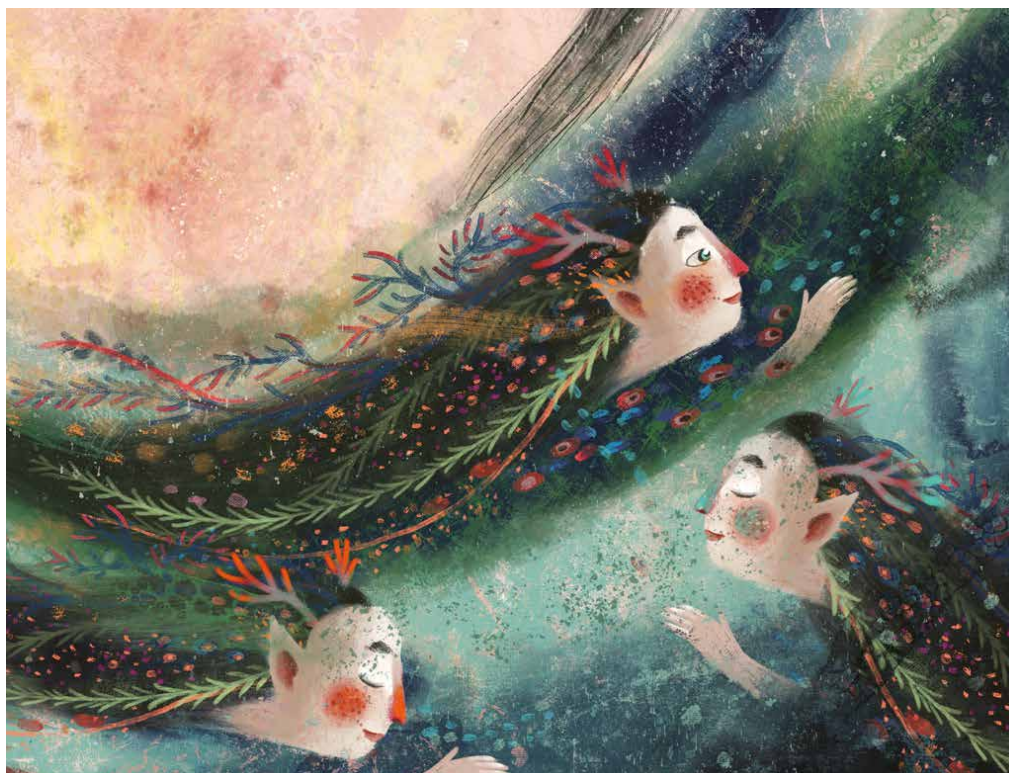
When Tilly befriends an ugly and feared old woman in her village, she is surprised to discover that she is really an aqua pixie! Faithfully waiting for rain to come and restore her lake, aqua pixie Kakasha has been in hiding for many years. Can Tilly help her find her way back home or will Kakasha give up on Lake Pululu and become a real human?

AUTHOUR BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Tang Tang is a bestselling children's author in China. Her book, *Aqua Pixie Kakasha*, won the 10th National Children's Literature Award.

EDUCATIONAL APPLICABILITY

Aqua Pixie Kakasha weaves together traditional Chinese culture and magical folk tales with modern fairy-tale conventions. This book is a great way to ignite an interest in Chinese culture and mythology as well as encourage children to explore mythologies from around the world in general. The story also features strong female characters and celebrates themes of bravery, loyalty and friendship.



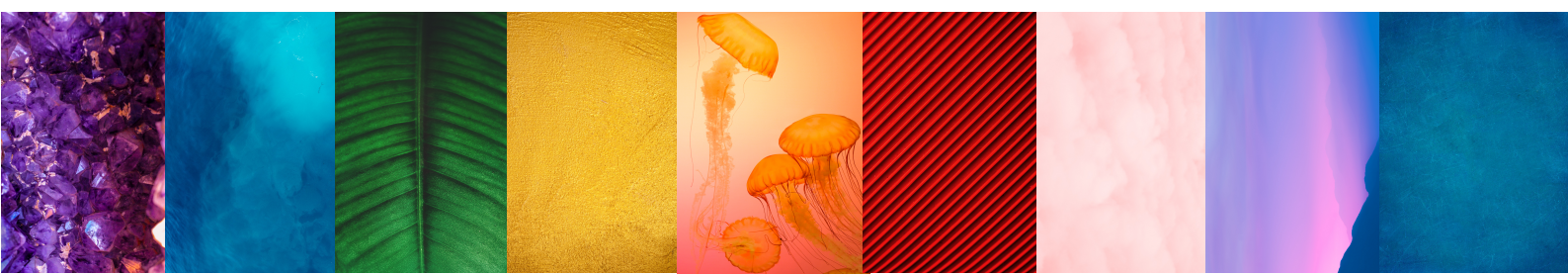
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CHINESE COLOUR SYMBOLISM

Giving symbolism to colours is nothing new, but did you know that the significance of certain colours can vary vastly between China and the West? Read the table below to learn more.

Colour	Chinese Symbolism	Western Symbolism
Purple	Purple stands for divinity and immortality, as well as love and romance.	Purple usually has connotations of royalty rather than divinity in the West.
Blue	Blue represents the wood element and symbolises spring, immortality and advancement. Blue is very pure and is often reminiscent of the ocean, the sky, the water and the universe. Blue also represents being calm and rational.	Blue is a popular colour choice in the west as it has many positive associations. It represents trust, security, authority and is considered soothing and peaceful. However, it also implies negative emotions such as depression, loneliness and sadness ('feeling blue').
Green	Green stands for cleanliness, spring, peace, hope and life in China.	Green represents nature, spring, environmental awareness, wealth, inexperience and jealousy ('green with envy' or 'green-eyed monster').
Yellow	Yellow represents the earth; it is an imperial colour associated with power, royalty and prosperity.	Yellow, as the colour of sunlight, is associated with happiness, optimism, warmth and hope. However, it also had connotations of caution and cowardice.
Orange	Orange represents change, spontaneity and adaptability. Orange is a cheerful, lively colour that represents fashion and youth.	Orange is strongly associated with autumn and therefore the harvest in the West. It also has connotations of warmth.
Red	Red represents the fire element and also symbolises good luck, joy, prosperity, celebration and a long life. In China, brides often wear red on their wedding day as it is meant to ward off evil.	Red signifies excitement, energy, passion, action, love and danger.
White	White stands for the metal element and has varied associations as it can represent purity but is also associated with death and it is the colour worn at funerals.	White symbolises purity, elegance, peace and cleanliness. As such, brides often wear white on their wedding day.
Black	Black has largely negative associations as it represents evil, destruction, disasters, cruelty, suffering and sadness.	The colour black has similar negative associations in the West as it connotes death, evil, mourning, illness and bad luck. However, it also symbolises mystery, sophistication and formality.

1. Can you think of any reasons why these colours symbolise what they do, either in China or the West?
2. Now that you know some of the symbolism, can you think of instances in *Aqua Pixie Kakasha* when the author has chosen to emphasise a particular colour? Like the name Granny Blue. Are there any other instances when colours feature prominently in the story?
3. Now consider the illustrations. Which colours are most dominant in the different illustrations and why do think this is?



CHINESE MYTHOLOGY

This section focuses on some key characters and creatures in Chinese mythology.

Dragons

Unlike western stories of dragons which depict them as fire-breathing creatures, Chinese dragons are more closely associated with water. It is believed that all water was controlled by various dragons. Most Chinese dragons are depicted without wings as their ability to fly and their power over water and the weather were mystical rather than physical attributes. There are 'Nine Classical Types' of dragon portrayed in Chinese art and literature. These are:

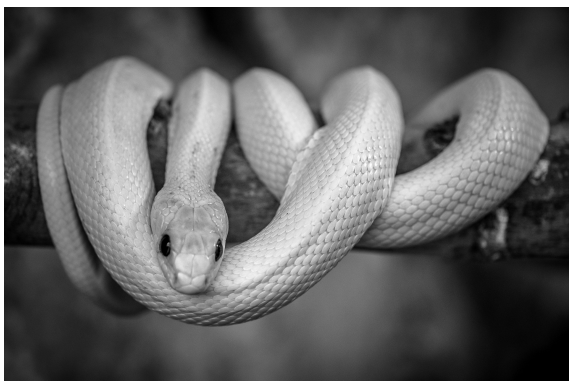
Tianlong, the Celestial Dragon,
Shenlong, the Spiritual Dragon,
Fucanglong, the Dragon of Hidden Treasures,
Dilong, the Underground Dragon,
Yinglong, the Winged Dragon,
Jiaolong, the Horned Dragon,
Panlong, the Coiling Dragon,
Huanglong, Yellow Dragon, which emerged from the River Luo to show Fuxi the elements of writing
And finally, the Dragon King.



Mazu, The Chinese Sea Goddess

Mazu, also known by several other names such as Mazupo and Tianfei, is the deified form of the semi-historical figure, Lin Mo, a Fujianese shamaness. She is regarded as a guardian deity of sea-farers, including fishermen and sailors. Mazu has featured in a number of myths. In one, the demons Qianliyan and Shunfeng'er both fell in love with her and she conceded that she would marry the one who defeated her in combat. Using her martial arts skills, however, she subdued them both and, after becoming friends, hired them as her guardian generals.

The Legend of the White Snake



There are many versions of the White Snake's legend and in one of the earlier iterations she was the villain of the story. She was an evil spirit who was determined to take Xu Xian's (a mortal man) soul while the monk Fahai tried to save him. However, this moral tale of good and evil eventually evolved into a romance with Bai Suzhen, the white snake, and Xu Xian being in love with each other.

The story begins when the white snake spirit leaves her lake to attend a festival with the green snake spirit. They had been practising Taoist magic and were able to shape shift into women. Bai Suzhen met the scholar Xu Xian at the festival, and they fell in love. Bai Suzhen decided to remain in the form of a woman so that they could be together. They soon got married and had a son.

However, their happiness was cut short when the monk, Fahai, discovered Bai Suzhen's true identity as the white snake spirit and tried to break up the marriage on the grounds that humans and snakes weren't meant to be together. He revealed Bai Suzhen's real identity to Xu Xian, hoping to scare him into leaving his wife but Xu Xian refused, professing to love her despite her snake origins. Seeing his first plan fail, Fahai kidnapped Xu Xian and imprisoned him in the Golden Mountain Monastery.

His second plan was also thwarted by Bai Suzhen and her friend Xiao Qing, the green snake spirit. Determined to rescue her husband, the two snake spirits used their powers to flood the monastery. Fahai learnt from his failures and for his third attempt at breaking up the marriage, he captured Bai Suzhen and imprisoned her in the Lei Feng Pagoda.

Xu Xian was unable to rescue his wife and had to raise their son without her. The son eventually gained top marks in the imperial examinations, proving himself to be a scholar like his father. As an imperial scholar, he went to pay his respects to his mother at the Lei Feng Pagoda. His act of filial piety released his mother from her imprisonment but rather than be reunited with her family, Bai Suzhen ascended to the heavens as an immortal.

The Grand Archer and the Chinese Goddess of the Moon

In Chinese mythology Hou Yi was an archer of unparalleled skill. He is most famous for shooting down nine of the ten suns that were scorching the Earth. The ten suns were each supposed to rise during set intervals, so that the Earth would not overheat, but one day all ten of them leapt up at once and ran wildly through the sky. They were having great fun, but their actions were disastrous for the Earth.

Crops dried up, rocks melted, people could barely breathe, and King Yao begged the heavens for help. Hou Yi, the great archer, was ordered to deal with the suns' misbehaviour. At first Hou Yi tried to intimidate the suns into behaving by feigning shooting at them. However, the suns saw through the ruse and were not the least bit intimidated. This infuriated Hou Yi, who then took aim at the first sun and really let the arrow fly. The sun exploded when struck by his arrow. He repeated the motion eight times, with each shot killing another sun. As he drew back his bow for the final time, King Yao stopped him, thinking that the final sun could continue his service to the people. The final sun, cowed by the deaths of his brothers, promised to dutifully rise and set as ordered, so Hou Yi left him unharmed.

As a reward for his heroism, Hou Yi was given a pill that would make him immortal. Hou Yi decided not to swallow the pill, as he could not bear the thought of eventually being separated from his wife, Chang'e. One day while he was away, his treacherous apprentice Peng Meng broke into the house and demanded that Chang'e give him the pill. Doubting her ability to win a fight against Peng Meng, Chang'e swallowed the pill herself to prevent him from taking it.

Now an immortal, Chang'e floated up towards the heavens. Hou Yi returned to see his wife floating away. He notched an arrow, to shoot her down to prevent her from going any further, but found he could not bring himself to aim the arrow at her. Chang'e floated away and took up residence on the moon, to be as close to her beloved husband as was now possible for her.

Note: There are several other versions of the story of Hou Yi and Chang'e, one in which the archer was punished by the Jade Emperor for killing nine of the suns and Chang'e took the immortality pill out of greed. Hou Yi also shifts between being the god of archery or a very skilled human archer.

1. This is just a brief glimpse into Chinese mythology, are you aware of any other Chinese myths or legends?
2. Now that you know about a couple of Chinese myths, do you think they might have influenced the author of *Aqua Pixie Kakasha*?

WATER MYTHOLOGY AROUND THE WORLD

Myths about water spirits that look like beautiful women are not limited to China, similar stories can be found all over the world. Below are some examples.

Nereids

In Greek mythology, the nereids were the daughters of Nereus, a primordial being that existed before the Greek gods, and his wife Doris the sea nymph. There were fifty nereids and unlike the sirens, who were famous for leading sailors to their deaths, they represented everything that was beautiful and kind about the sea. Nereids could be friendly and helpful to sailors, as they helped the mythological hero Jason and his Argonauts. They are portrayed as beautiful girls in long white dresses decorated with red coral. They had melodious voices and sang often for their father. Thetis, the mother of the famous Greek hero Achilles was a nereid, as was Amphitrite, the wife of the sea god Poseidon.

Morgans

Morgans, also known as morgens or mari-morgans are Welsh water spirits. While morgans are beautiful like nereids and aqua pixies, they are also vicious and malevolent. They use their beauty to lure men to the water and then proceed to drown them. They are also blamed for heavy flooding that destroys crops.

Asrai

In English folklore the ar sai, like the aqua pixies, are a type of aquatic fairy that live in seas and lakes. They are usually described as timid and shy, and they are particularly offended by the coarseness of human men, but their physical description varies. Some sources claim they stand between two and four feet tall while others describe them as much taller than most human women. They turn into puddles if they are taken out of water and exposed to direct sunlight for too long.

Rusalka

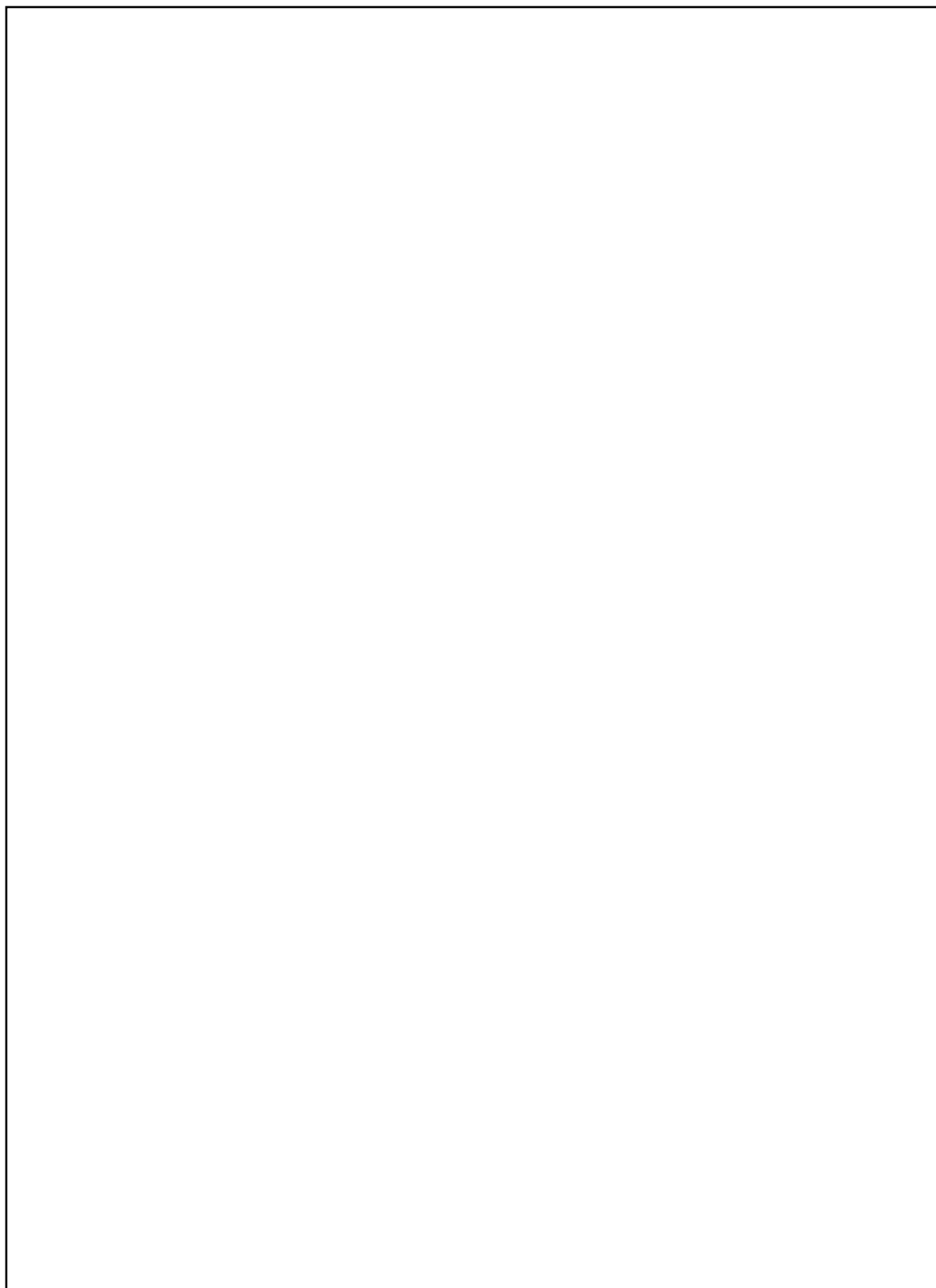
In Slavic folklore, the rusalka is much like the Welsh morgans. They are incredibly beautiful with long red hair, and they use their beauty and melodious voices to lure men into the water. Once a man is in the water, they get tangled in the rusalka's long hair and drown.

There are many more stories of mythological water women, some kind and gentle while others are cruel and vicious. And there is also a whole range of male water spirits, like the tangie and the bolotnik, and even several famous water monsters such as the kelpie and bunyip.

1. Do you know about any other mythological water creatures?
2. Why do you think so many mythological creatures that live in the water are fierce and terrifying?

DRAWING ACTIVITY

You've seen the beautiful illustrations in the book, now draw what you think an aqua pixie would look like in the space below.



RIDDLES

Kakasha had a lot of trouble answering Tilly's riddles. Can you solve the riddles below?

1. What can travel around the world while staying in a corner?

2. I'm tall when I'm young and I'm short when I'm old. What am I?

3. What has hands but cannot clap?

4. What has a head and a tail, but no body?

5. What word in the dictionary is spelt incorrectly?

6. What has a spine but no bones?

7. What belongs to you, but other people use it more than you?



ANSWERS

1. A stamp.
2. A candle.
3. A clock.
4. A coin.
5. Incorrectly.
6. A book.
7. Your name.

WRITING ACTIVITIES AND POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In the story, Kakasha endured the pain of her tooth and believed in Lake Pululu until it was restored, despite being the youngest and most fragile aqua pixie. However, Papati, who at first was the leader of the aqua pixies, pulled out her tooth first. What do you think the author wanted to demonstrate through this characterisation?
2. *Aqua Pixie Kakasha* has been translated from Mandarin Chinese into English. It is very important to read stories from different cultures and translated works make this possible. However, it is not always easy to translate a story from one language to another. What do you think the difficulties might be?
3. How do you think the aqua pixies felt about being human? Choose one of the nine aqua pixies who pulled out their tooth and write a short story from their point of view. Or you can choose Galaka's or Gudida's perspective instead, and their struggle to make the water return to Lake Pululu.
4. What do you think about the story's ending? Would you call it a bitter-sweet ending?
5. As you have already seen, a series of strange and exciting myths can be found around the world. Can you think of reasons why it is important to study mythology?
6. Do you think we can learn about different cultures or indeed even our own by studying mythology?
7. Now that you know about some of the other water spirits from around the world, write a short story about one or more of them. It doesn't have to be one from the list provided, there are many others and if you know a little bit about them you can make another water spirit the focus of your story.

