

SIMILARITIES IN “HERO KILLS MONSTER” TYPE OF VIETNAMESE AND KHMER PEOPLE IN SOUTHERN VIETNAM

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Abstract. Research on fairy tales in general and miracle fairy tales in particular in terms of type and motif has been effectively applied by Folklore researchers in the world. In Vietnam, in recent years, this research trend has been becoming popular and achieves high practical values. By comparison the miracle fairy tales of Vietnamese people and Khmer people, this method is important in finding similarities and differences in miracle fairy tales systems of people in the same territory in term of literature and culture. In this article, by statistics, analysis and synthesis, some typical miracle fairy tales with the theme of “Hero kills Monster” type of Vietnamese people and Khmer people were chosen for comparison to figure out the similarities.

Keywords: Miracle fairy tale, motif, Khmer people, type, Vietnamese.

1. Introduction

Comparative research method is a very effective method in term of approaching culture trend and science research. In *Studying folk literature from a type and motif perspective - possibilities and inadequacies*, Tran Thi An has had a systematical point of view and indicated the readers possible trends of research in terms of type and motif [1]. By comparison Hero kills Monster stories in the miracle fairy tales system of Vietnamese people and Khmer people living in the same territory, Mekong Delta, were chosen to find the similarities and the first foundation bases on characters of history, religion, geographic culture, custom, habit,... in order to explain that this similarity, according to us, is currently a possible and practical trend of research in Vietnam. Finding the similarities creates an overall scientific view on intimate relation in “Hero kills Monster” type of Vietnamese and Khmer people.

2. Content

2.1. Theoretical basis

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In the world, the term Type was first known in the works of Verzeichnis de Marchen typen (List of fairy tales) of Antti Aarne in 1910. This work was then inherited and developed by S. Thompson in *The Type of the Folktale - A Classification and Bibliography*, Antti Aarne's Verzeichnis der Marchentypen (FF communications No.3). Translated and enlarged by Stith Thompson [2].

In *The Folktale* established in 1977, Thompson defined the type of story as follows: “Type is a plot which can exist independently in the oral story treasures. It can be considered as a complete story, its meaning is not the same as any other story. Of course, it can also be combined with other stories randomly, but appearing separately can also prove its independence. It can consist of one or more motifs” [2].

In this definition, Stith Thompson has initially distinguished two very basic concepts as type and motif. Accordingly, there may be one type of story that may have one or more stories; There can be many motifs or only one motif. Type is a relatively fixed set of motifs [2]. Thus, on the level, type is bigger than motif, in other words, the motif is a basic unit to create the type.

In Vietnam, Nguyen Tan Duc is the first person who introduces and applies A-T theory into folk tales research. In *Folk story type and motif index*, Nguyen Tan Duc has raised his knowledge on type as follows: “Type is just a collection of stories with the same plot of the same type or unit of story; Motif indicates an element of the story which is separable, able to be assembled, strange and unusual; especially featured elements of folk tales [3].

In *Thach Sanh and the story of the brave in ancient Vietnam and Southeast Asia*, Nguyen Bich Ha has given the definition of story type as follows: “Story type is a collection of stories with the same motifs. There can be many motifs in a story but it is not necessary that each story of this type must be full of the general motifs. Some stories may have just one or several general motifs with other stories. Some have many [4].

In this study, Nguyen Tan Duc’s and Thompson’s type definition were used as the basis for establishing Fairy tales of Khmer and Viet people.

2.2. Survey results

Nearly 70 Vietnamese stories and more than 100 Khmer stories were chosen to survey. After statistic and classification, 19 stories with the theme of Hero-and-Monster were identified as follows: 3 Vietnamese narratives, *Thach Sanh*, *Three skilled men* or *Kill the python*, were chosen to survey. Based on the naming of motifs, the structure of this type was defined with the following basic type:

Table 1. The systemize structure of “Hero kills Monster” stories of Vietnamese people

NO.	Story	Beginning	Content	Ending
1	<i>Thach Sanh</i>	1.1	II.8 – II.9 – II.10 – II.11 – II.12 – II.13 – II.14 – II.15	III.35 – III.36
2	<i>Killing the Python</i>	1.2	II.8 – II.9 – II.10 – II.11 – II.12 – II.13 – II.14 – II.15	III.36 – III.37
3	<i>Three skillful men</i>	1.3	II.18 – II.19 – II.20 – II.21 – II.28	III.36

For fairy tales of Khmer, an examination of the 16 following stories was conducted: *Chau Sanh Chau Thong*; *Say V’oan*; *Rich Thi Sel and Kon Ray lady*; *The last child of*

17 girls and the Ogress; (Xangxa Rachi, Sangsen Lochay, San sal La chi); Seventeen children; Chao T'bat T'bu; Hero Maha Tho te; Areca flower; Three-color flower; Chau Pram Thngay; Nieng Soc Ko-ro-op, Fragrant hair lady, Fragrant hair princess; Bo-Piel kills giant crocodile.

Based on the above analysis, the structure of “Hero kills Monster” stories of Khmer people was systemized as following:

Table 2. The systemize structure of type “Hero kills Monster” stories of Khmer people

NO.	Story	Beginning	Content	Ending
1	<i>Chau Sanh Chau Thong</i>	I.4 – I.5 – I.6	II.11 – II.31 – II.8 – II.9 – II.10 – II.9 – II.14	III.38 – III.37
2	<i>Say V'oan</i>	No motif	II.16 – II.23 – III.37 – II.24 – II.8	III.39
3	<i>Rich Thi Sel and Kon Ray lady; The last child of 17 girls and the Ogress</i>	Type	II.26 – II.25 – II.27 – III.37 – II.30	III.38 – III.39
4	<i>Xangxa Rachi; Sangsen Lochay; San sal La chi</i>	Type	II.20 – II.27 – II.28 – II.16 – II.31 – II.9 – II.16 – II.13	III.38 – III.39 – III.37
5	<i>Seventeen children</i>	Type	II.16 – II.8	III.36
6	<i>Chao T'bat T'bu</i>	None	II.31 – II.14 – II.15 – I.3	III.37
7	<i>Areca flower</i>	I.22	II.25 – II.10 – II.29	III.37
8	<i>Hero Maha Tho te</i>	I.4 – I.5 – I.6	II.26 – I.8	III.36
9	<i>Three-color flower</i>	I.7	I.8 – II.30 – II.23 – II.16	III.36
10	<i>Chau Pram Thngay</i>	I.1	II.20 – II.21 – I.31 – II.8	III.36 – III.37 – III.39
11	<i>Nieng Soc Ko-ro-op, Fragrant hair lady, Fragrant hair princess</i>	None	I.2 – II.16 – II.8 – II.9 – II.13 – III.37 – II.10	III.37 – II.20 – II.34

Note: *Miracle birth (I.1); offering sacrifice (I.2); Son-in-law selecting (I.3); Eating so much (I.4); Leaving child in the forest (I.5); Strong man (I.6); Reward (I.7); Killing a python (II.8); Victory depriving (II.9); Killing Magpie (I.10); Killing a crocodile (II.11); Going to underwater palace (II.12); Being mute (II.13); Miracle sounds (sound of musical instrument); Fighting against the invasion war (II.14); Fighting against the invasion war (II.15); Magical things (rice pots, sword, hammer, shoes, drug, flower, bottle of water, talisman) (III.6); Considering ogress as disciple (III.7); The left thing (III.8); Competing (III.9); Competing (II.20); Agreement to snake (II.21);*

Calumniation (II22); Learning cabala and talisman (II23); Jostling victory (II24); Fighting over each other to have the father (II25); Prediction of deviner (II26); Work (wage earner) to support relatives (II27); Fraudulent exchange (II28); Passing the ocean (II29); Adjudging (II30); Transforming (II31); Vying in wits and a challenge with a snake (II32); Violating the taboos (II33); Traitorous maiden (II34); Invasion (III35); Jostling and adjudging victory (III.36); Victory rewarding (III.37); Marrying and throne demise (III.38); Punishing the guilty (III.39).

2.3. The similarities in Hero kills Monster type of Vietnamese and Southern Khmer people in Vietnam

By comparing the Hero kills Monster stories of Vietnamese and Khmer people, it is found that there are many similarities among them. The basic points are specified as follows:

2.3.1. Similarity in content

Giving a general view based on the statistics table above, it is identified that: The story content of Viet people’s Hero kills Monster stories and the Southern Khmer’s one is basically similar, including 3 parts: beginning, content, and ending.

+ The beginning

The introduction of the Hero-and-Monster stories of Vietnamese and Khmer people often includes some motifs telling about the background and birth of the heroes. In the stories of Viet people, the motif of these stories is usually *the motif of miraculous births*. The expression of this motif showed clearly as in *Thach Sanh, Ba chang thien nghe (Three Skillful Men)*, or *Tieu diet mang xa (Killing the python)*. The heroes in these stories may have clear miraculous backgrounds as Thach Sanh (*motif of miraculous births*). He was a son of the Jade Emperor, and then he was reincarnated as a son of a farmer. After his parents had passed away, he became an orphan. In addition, a hero might be an orphan and adopted by a monk, as the young man who had magical powers in *Killing the Python*. Also, some heroes might not have a clear background, like the three men who had natural endowments in *Three Skillful Men*.

In Khmer’s stories, the beginning of Chau Sanh – Chau Long story is also a motif about the background of Chau Sanh’s birth. In the country of Pa-ria-na-xay, capital city of the king Po-rum Mo-tot, there was a couple who were old but had no children. One day the old man went to the forest and saw a boy on a lotus in the middle of a swamp. Then, he took the child home.

In Prince Sang-Sen-Lo-Chay story, the beginning was also the appearance of the prince Sang-Sen-Lo-Chay. When he was born, he had a preternatural strength. Right after he was born, he rode a sacred snail with a sword in his right hand, showing the ascendancy of the heroic descent, and a crossbow made of a precious wood as white as elephant’s tusk in the left hand, with a tube of arrows on his shoulder. He looked so stately. The prince Rec-cho-say had a shape like a lion with invincible strength. He could fly above the clouds like the wind.

Therefore, it can be seen that although the men in the stories mentioned above had different backgrounds when they appeared and grew up, they were burly and had miraculous talents.

+ **The content**

The middle part of the Vietnamese's Hero-and-Monster stories often has basic motifs such as: killing malicious snakes, being cheated, choosing a son-in-law, killing malicious bird, going down to the palace under the sea, becoming mute, miraculous mellow tones, miraculous sword, things that were forgotten, fighting against the aggressive wars, miraculous rice pot, marriage and becoming Kings. This part focuses on the challenges that these heroes need to overcome. Every challenge often comes along with one or some certain motif(s). Thanks to the magical force, magical things, or their power, these heroes could overcome the challenges and complete their missions.

In *Thach Sanh*, the brave and good-hearted woodcutter experienced the following basic challenges. *The first challenge is killing the monster (Motif of killing malicious snakes)* thanks to the magic taught by the josses and a magical hammer. After that, Ly Thong deceived Thach Sanh for the first time and deprived his achievement (being deceived); *the second challenge was killing an eagle (Motif of killing malicious birds)* to save the princess and then he was deceived for the second time by Ly Thong. Thanks to the musical instrument given by the son of the King of water, Thach Sanh could cure the princess from being mute (*motif of magic mellow tones*) and get married to the princess (*motif of getting married*). *His last challenge was defeating the invaders from 18 countries (motif of fighting against the aggressive wars, miraculous musical instruments and earthenware pot)* to bring peaceful life to everyone.

Although the orphan man in *Killing the Python* did not experience as many challenges as Thach Sanh, he overcame a dangerous challenge *which was directly fighting with python, killing it and saving a princess and people (motif of killing malicious snakes, motif of miraculous swords)*. After that, his achievement was deprived by a duke. However, *thanks to a remaining piece of a sword (motif of the things that were left behind)*, he could retake his achievement.

The three men in *Three Skillful Men* overcame a common challenge which was killing the eagle to save the beautiful princess of the Le dynasty based on their talents. *The first man had the talent in shooting arrows with a bow in spite of difficulty and long-distance. The second man could swim underwater for many weeks and dive for tiny things under the ocean. The third man was a skilled doctor, he could cure people of any diseases, including reviving people who just passed away.* The story's situation challenged all of them; however, they could overcome their challenges by using their talents.

Like Vietnamese Hero kills Monster stories, in the Khmer's stories, the heroes must directly fight against the monsters.

In *Chau Sanh - Chau Long*, the old man was too poor to raise his son, Chau Sanh. Then, he took the son to the forest to kill him because he did not want his son to be rotten away. He cut a big apitong tree to lay on his son's body. Thinking that the boy had died, he brushed away his tears and went home. After a while, the son shouldered the apitong tree and went home, which was very surprised and happy. Since then,

people called the son the hero shouldering a pitong tree. After that, he killed a crocodile, a monster, Ko-ruot bird to save the princess and Dragon King’s son.

In *The prince Sang – sen – lo – chay*, the King expelled the two princes to the forest because of being deceived by his wife. When the princes’ aunt was caught by the monster, he killed the monster and saved her. Besides, he also went down to the palace under the sea to save the princess.

+ The ending

When studying the three stories: *Thach Sanh, Killing the Python, Three Skillful Men*, it is found that the endings were the victories of the heroes after formidable fights between them and monsters. The prize for this victory was that they can marry a beautiful girl. Getting married to a princess, they could be crowned king. Perhaps for Viet people, a happy ending with a happy family is always their dream. Therefore, the fairy stories involving “Hero kills Monster” type always go along with beautiful and intelligent princesses.

After having married the princess, Chau Sanh was crowned king.

The prince Sang – sen – lo – chay saved his aunt from the monster and also saved her daughter. He was clear of accusation. Then, he and his mother went back to the palace and he was crowned king.

As Viet people, Khmer people also dream of a happy life and family. The worthiest prize is that the beautiful girl shall become the hero’s wife after his victory.

2.3.2. Similar in motif

After statistically analyzing the motif in Viet people’s “Hero kills Monster” type and that of Khmer people, it is found that both of them have common motifs such as: Extraordinary birth and growth; killing malicious snakes; killing malicious birds; being deceived; becoming mute; miraculous sounds; getting married and becoming Kings. These motifs are almost comprehensively similar in terms of meaning and appearance. The details are as follows:

Tabel 3. Similar motifs

Motif	Viet people	Khmer people
Motif of extraordinary birth and growth	Knowing that there was a couple who were poor but very kind, the Jade Emperor sent the Crown Prince to incarnate as their son. These young men have outstanding talents: swimming, archery, saving people, etc.	The child was born after praying (found on a lotus). The child can walk and talk only 5 days after birth.
Motif of killing malicious snakes	He used a hammer to fight against the monster. It was cut into halves and had to reveal the real figure which	Chau Sanh used a hammer to cut the monster’s head when he was cutting wood in the forest; three sons helped their father in killing the monster; Sayvoan kills the monster

	was a huge python.	by an arrow; 17 siblings squeezed the monster's neck, break its teeth and killed it; thanks to 2 treasures of the monster, the younger brother was able to kill the malicious monster and save the princess.
Motif of killing malicious birds	Seeing the eagle carrying a girl as it was flying by, Thach Sanh shot it using a bow and arrow. The eagle was injured but it still carried the princess back to its cave. Then, Thach Sanh led Ly Thong and the troops went down to the cave to save the princess. He waited until the eagle fell asleep and used a rope to tie around the princess then signaled Ly Thong to pull her up. When the eagle woke up, he used magic to fight against it and was able to save King of Water's son.	Chau Sanh shot the Maha kraut then followed the blood trace to the cave of the malicious bird to save the princess; the younger brother was attacked by a covey of malicious birds -> he used the sword to kill it and was unintentionally able to save the princess with fragrant hair who was left behind by the soldiers on the way running away from the covey of malicious birds.
Motif of being deceived	When knowing that Thach Sanh had killed the monster, Ly Thong devised a plan to deceive Thach Sanh that the python was raised by the King and he advised Thach Sanh to run away, otherwise the King will kill him. Thach Sanh believed Ly Thong so he ran and hid.	Chau Thong deceived Chau Sanh that the monster was a precious creature raised by the King and told Chau Sanh that unless he hid, the King would cut his head. Chau Thong took the head of the monster from Chau Sanh and brought to the yard of the King's palace -> reaping the fruit of Chau Sanh's labor for the first time. When he knew that Chau Sanh had come back, Chau Thong stole the King's gold and jewelries and took them to the tree where Chau Sanh was living to slander him
Motif of becoming mute	After being taken back to the palace by Ly Thong, the princess became mute.	The princess became mute after being saved from the monster.
Motif of	Hearing Thach Sanh's	In the prison, because Chau Sanh

miraculous sounds	mellow tone, the princess suddenly stood up and spoke and smiled.	was bored, he took out his musical instrument and played it. When the princess heard the mellow tone, she immediately asked her father to bring the person who played the music to her. Thanks to that, Chau Sanh was exculpated.
Motif of getting married and becoming Kings	The King allowed Thach Sanh to married the princess. The wedding was held very ceremonially. Later then, the King did not have any son so Thach Sanh was crowned as the King.	Chau Sanh married the princess and was crowned as the new King; the courageous warrior married the princess and was crowned as the new King; the younger brother married the princess and was crowned when the King became old.

2.4. Explanations

Firstly, these similarities are originated from the characteristics of the category. The characteristic of folk literature in general, and the fairy tale type in particular, is the acceptance of variants. Fairy tales were created from the time of primitive communism and developed flourishingly in hierarchical society in which the stratification between the upper and the lower classes, the rich and the poor were clearly visible. In this society, people who were not powerful enough were always looked down and trampled; those stories show a desire to have a better and fairer life. The type of hero stories in particular and folk literature in general, is the place where ancient people put their thoughts and desires in. The dream of kindness defeating cruelty and the concept of courageous warriors with extraordinary strength, outstanding talents and support from by miraculous forces have become a characteristic of the fairy tale. This aspect governs the structure and meaning of the stories of both peoples.

Secondly, Southern Vietnam - Mekong Delta is the land on which 4 brother ethnic groups Viet, Khmer, Hoa (Chinese), Cham have been living together. They have lived together, worked together and shared their culture, which is one of the characteristics contributing to the similarities between the story type, including the “Hero kills Monster” type. In ancient times, Mekong Delta was a land of sacred and dangerous forest with crocodiles, tigers, leeches and mosquitoes. Therefore, people living in this area-have to fight against these dangers to survive. As a result, to the ancient people in Southern Vietnam, the animals listed above are the dangers and the gods as well as their friends. From the reality, they became the characters in the folk tales of the ethnic groups. The courageous warriors are strong and brave Viet and Khmer young men who were always take the lead in fighting against the harsh conditions. Ancient people always worshiped and respected these warriors and considered them as heroes. The common living conditions and the impacts and interfere between the two peoples are amongst the important elements that make up the similarities between the “Hero kills Monster” type of the two ethnic groups.

3. Conclusion

It is essential to compare the tale systems in general and “Hero kills Monster” type, in particular, to figure out the similarities and differences between the story types of the two peoples living in the same region and explain these similarities and differences. The study will serve the demand in teaching and studying folk literature in the universities and help in protecting the values of folk tales in Vietnam. The writing, although only mentions and explains a part of the similarities of the “Hero kills Monster” type of the Viet and Khmer peoples, aims at contributing a scientifically valuable study to the field of literature.

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