

**RESEARCH PAPER****The Multifunctionality in Vietnamese Fairy Tales****Ngoc Lan Nguyen Thi**

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ABSTRACT

Fairy tales are one of the most important narrative genres of folklore. In the process of developing folklore, fairy tales came into existence very early and flourished especially in class-divided societies. By identifying and analysing the multifunctionality in Vietnamese fairy tales, we can see that this genre places emphasis on aesthetic. The fiction is meant to satisfy the artistic needs of the folk authors. Not only are fairy tales literary science, but they also entail cultural and educational knowledge. These features have demonstrated the role and position of fairy tales in reflecting and interpreting real life. They are also the factors contributing to the vitality of the genre in the flow of folklore.

Key words: Multifunctionality, Vietnamese, fairy tales, folklore

INTRODUCTION

Multifunctionality is one of the essential attributes of folklore. In fact, every literary work, regardless of its genre, has a certain role to play in reflecting and re-enacting various aspects of social life, which means it will have many different functions. This has labeled folklore as 'the art of natural synthesis', containing the knowledge of an 'encyclopedia' produced and accumulated by folk wisdom over thousands of years. Multifunctionality is recognizable in every genre of Vietnamese folk literature and its distinctive signs are also visible in fairy tales, a type of narrative primarily considered the largest and most important genre of folk literature.

LITERARY FUNCTION

Fairy tales first and foremost emphasize on the literary-aesthetic function. Though they are derived from myths and inherit mythical motifs, the essence of fairy tales is far different. Myth was created mainly for the purpose of perception; hence, the creator was completely unaware of his artistic creation and the mythical value of his work. With fairy tales, the author has a clear sense of fiction and fabrication. The creative product is considered true art. In fairy tales, the unfortunate are fictionalized to achieve ideality, becoming a paragon of beauty and good according to the people's perspectives. For the first time, the 'little man' has become the central figure in fairy tales, and for the first time ever, trivialities have evolved into the primary concern of folk authors. This is proof that the aesthetic sense as well as the social perception of human beings have truly shifted. Especially, with its happy endings, fairy tales have expressed the positive views on human life of the people.

As a conscious and creative product of folklores, fairy tales contain stories about family, society, life lessons, moral concepts, aesthetics. The real society with many issues that need to be reflected and explained has created for the genre contents which are both authentic and illusory.

The nature of fairy tales is fiction and imagination. Yet, no matter how fictional, these tales still have to stem from reality. Reality can be easily spotted but is also able to be preserved through faded remnants which are considered fairy tales' ancient 'core'. 'Betel and Areca' tells the story of two brothers named Tan and Lang. Before the brother got married, they lived in harmony with each other, but from the date of his wedding, he became distant and cold with the younger sibling. Especially after the sister-in-law accidentally hugged her husband's brother, the conflict between them became irretrievable and their deaths at the end of the story, in this case, were a sort of resolution to the conflict. The story reflects the remnants of polyandry (a woman married to many

husbands) in the matrilineal period. This form of marriage is losing its dominance in the face of monogamy (a woman can only have one husband). The detail of Ms. Luu cooking porridge and inviting the two brothers to eat (observe who eats the porridge bowl first, the brother did) reflects the victory of monogamy and the girl's husband selection was dictated by the patriarchal ideology. Likewise, in the 'Tale of the Warrior's Wife', two siblings were in an accidental incestuous relationship, and when they discovered the truth, the husband left and never returned. This makes compelling evidence for the transfer from consanguineous marriages to contemporary marriages. Previously, in a matrilineal family, marriage to blood relatives was viewed as normal. With the advancement in perception, this form of marriage is considered backwards and was replaced by marriages to those outside the family. This transfer is extremely progressive, showing that people are gradually advancing towards civilization. However, in order to achieve that result, people sometimes have to pay the price which is the loss of kinship. Fairy tales about the fate of the misfortune such as the youngest sibling, the stepchild in 'The Star fruit Tree', 'Tam Cam'... bring us another perspective on society. At this point, social conflict has become extremely drastic and difficult to reconcile. The patriarchal economic empowerment with the establishment of the role and position of the man has become steady, creating the basis for the emergence of conflicts between brothers, stepmother and step daughter... The fight between family members is in essence the battle between the rich and the poor, the oppressors and the oppressed... in a class-divided society. Or the characters 'Coconut Skull', 'The Turtle', 'The Toad'- they are actually a reflection of the unfortunate people who are deemed ugly and deformed. Imagination along with sympathy help folk authors build art icons, outstanding details; convey moral concepts and human philosophy. Hence, it is clear that the specific features of real society have directly influenced the creative spirit of folk authors and fairy tales are considered the result of such reality. In every story, we see humans and their lives. Those lives are reflected and interpreted with literary materials and the ingenious creativity of folk authors. They come alive and are well-suited to the psychology of the audience.

THE CULTURAL FUNCTION

Fairy tales also preserve ancient cultural values whose characteristics are overshadowed by new layers of meanings viewed as cultural 'codes'. It is imperative that we crack these 'codes' to find the appropriate resolutions. The cultural traces and customs in each social period are explained through fairy tales, for instance, 'The Tale of The Kitchen God', 'The Story of The Maypole'... The main contents of these tales revolve around the human life while the reflection and interpretation of culture are of secondary roles, yet their appearances not only highlight the story's theme but also allow us to determine and explain the older layers... Elements of primitive culture, indigenous customs, cultural exchanges... are also reflected in many stories, most notably, 'Tam Cam'. In the story, there are two unique motifs, the 'shoe' motif and the 'betel piece' motif. Conveying the signal of affection, the 'shoe' motif not only appears in Vietnamese stories but it is also popular in fairy tales about the stepchild around the world, such as 'Cinderella' from France, 'Aschenputtel' from Germany or 'The Golden Shoe' from Italy... This similarity in the topic and motifs is related to the process of cultural exchange. Researcher Dinh Gia Khanh, in 'Sơ bộ tìm hiểu những vấn đề của truyện cổ tích qua truyện Tấm Cám', after analyzing the details related to the 'orphan girl find happiness' stories around the world, he placed special stress on the detail of the 'shoe'. The shoe enables the boy to find the beautiful girl, setting the tone for a wonderful relationship. Shoes, according to the customs of many, are related to predestined marital union. The transition from predestined affinity object in myriad customs to the treasure containing happiness in fairy tales is very logical and well-suited to the theme 'the shoes bring happiness'. However, according to the researcher, in some societies, the shoe does not have a special cultural meaning. Vietnam's 'Tam Cam' is one example, 'in an archaic humid country, our people do not wear shoes. Moreover, pertaining to the laws of the feudal government, commoners are not allowed to wear shoes. Footwear was not a necessity for the majority and there was no particular custom in relation to footwear' (Dinh Gia Khanh, 1999). Hence, we can consider this detail as something 'borrowed' from foreign countries. Nevertheless, in 'Tam Cam', the ethnicity and indigenous culture is also expressed clearly. The 'betel piece' motif- a piece of betel with leaves shaped like flamboyant flower is an artistic creation, embodying the Vietnamese culture.

V.Ia.Propp (2003) stated that 'fairytales have preserved traces of the lost forms of social life'. The earliest forms of material life and social organization have left traces in each story, which are concrete proof of the multifunctionality of the genre. Rituals, customs, and beliefs that have existed in a certain period of human history have been transferred into fairy tales and become motifs with social themes, meaning it has been overlaid with a new layer of meaning which may be very different from the prior one. Thus, to investigate this function of fairy tales, one can see the reflection of the customs and rituals and beliefs that existed in ancient cultures, such as totem, fetishism, sacrificial rituals, magic-granting rituals, coming of age ceremonies... In stories like 'Coconut Skull', 'The Human and The Frog', 'The Serpent'... the motifs all contain cultural content, such as miracle birth motif and skin shedding motif... The character disguised as the object is mainly derived from a 'mythical relationship'. This 'fabled' fiction is subjected to the influence of the mythological world and also entails imprints of a certain social stage. It was the primitive communal era that the polyandry and primitive promiscuity of the matriarchal rule were reigning formally. Undeniably, there are traces of the totem here. In fairy tales, sacred animals in animal worshipping (frogs, toads, tortoises, snakes...) are the disguise for the ugly and lower-classed characters. Or in the case of the skin shedding and reincarnation motifs..., they do not only encompass the meaning of changing the appearance or the conception of life and death, but they are also a rite of passage, because after temporary death, people are reborn in new skin with new meaning. In addition, with regards to reincarnation motif, we could see the imprints of religious forms, especially the Buddhist concept of reincarnation. Buddhism perceives human life as a constantly turning wheel, taking people from one life to another. What man has received in this life is due to the karma and relationships of his previous life. This is why in fairy tales, characters can be killed numerous times but are eventually reborn in human form. This is compensation for the unfortunate people who are victims of injustices like in the stories 'Tam Cam', 'Y Uoi Y Noong', 'Tua Gia Tua Nhi'.... Such reincarnation has a positive meaning, giving people a strong belief in good, with a cause-and-effect philosophy: 'one good turn deserves another'. In contrast, villainous characters would receive appropriate punishments, for instance, the vicious sister would turn into a snake in 'The Serpent', the evil stepbrother into a beetle in 'Thach Sanh', proof of 'Curses (like chickens) come home to roost'.

It seems that the contents of fairy tales have a historical, cultural- social foundation and basis for its existence and movement. The manifestations of material and spiritual culture, such as primitive beliefs, customs, and rituals... have become the older layers of meaning in fairy tales that, over time, turned into sedimentary layers difficult to detect.

EDUCATIONAL FUNCTION

Telling and listening to fairy tales are not just for the purpose of relaxation or entertainment but behind each story is a moral and human education.

Day after day, night after night, stories of an orphan with many misfortunes, the less privileged youngest siblings, the abused stepchild, those who are hurt over and over... have become an integral part of the people's daily life. People listen and dream. The character's change of fate in fairy tales has captured the burning aspiration of human beings towards an ideal and fair society in which the good is rewarded and the bad receive punishment. The once ragged Tam became a queen, the orphaned Thach Sanh a prince and the poor brother whose wealth was appropriated would become rich... This outcome for the character is not a complete far cry from reality. It is the spirit of optimism and the desire to live despite immeasurable challenges. Fairy tales are not only 'reflections' of the real world, but they also open the doors to an ideal world in which people always achieve their dreams of 'changing position'. In this regard, M.Gorki stated: '... The older I got, the more distinct the differences between fairy tales and the tedious and poor life filled with greedy people whining and fueled by jealousy. In fairy tales, people fly in the air, sit on a flying carpet, travel seven miles, resurrect the dead just by sprinkling water on them, build a castle in one night, generally, fairy tales have taken me to another life where there is a fearless and free force dreaming of a better life' according to (Dinh Gia Khanh, 1999)

'A better life' is the goal of the people and to achieve this goal, people propagate the notion to live well, just and with kindness... Therefore, the philosophy of kindness is always promoted in fairy

tales. Tam in the shape of a fruit 'chose' to stay with a poor but good-hearted elderly woman (Tam Cam); the younger brother cared about the ragged beggar lying on the sidewalk so he took him in and treated him like his own relative (Binh and Dinh); the orphaned girl was willing to share the already little rice with the old man (The Tale of The Monkey)... Love of people is shared with sincerity. Hence, the good always receive the fate-changing gift... The education function of the fairy tales lies here. It is no surprise that a kindergarten teacher tells children the story of Thach Sanh and has them act it out. During the casting process, the children only want to play Thach Sanh and not Ly Thong- the antagonist. Such a choice has shown the good nature and the reaction of the child to what's evil.

Children are not the only ones to learn from fairy tales, because in many stories, the lessons about human life focus on adults. Fairy tales revere paragons of virtue like the gentle mother, the kind child, the appreciative wife, husband, the honest people... as role models for the public, for instance, the virtuous and smart wife in 'Wise girl teaches her husband'; the faithful wife in 'The Tale of The King-crab'; the good friend in 'Su Tich Chim Cuoc'.... On the contrary, the evil characters are condemned, like the ungrateful child in 'Pity the chicken, bury the mother' or the wicked and greedy wife in 'The Story of The Mosquito'...

With its educational function, fairy tales provide listeners with deep moral lessons. Unlike fables which lean towards rational education, fairy tales are more about emotional education with integrated philosophical lessons.

THE DIRECT APPLICATION FUNCTION

Looking into the direct application function of fairy tales means investigating its relationship with real life. First of all, it is apparent that the emergence of fairy tales is tied to the need to reflect a completely different reality from myth - the genre before these tales. If myths are about exploring and interpreting nature using the imagination of primitive people, fairy tales promote the interpretation of social problems. The specific function and mode of each genre have resulted in myths being recognized as a kind of religion, expressing the belief and worship of the human towards the divine natural world. On the other hand, fairy tales are seen as everyday stories where people are always placed in familial and social relationships.

The direct application function of fairy tales is evident in the very process of existence and preservation of fairy tales throughout the years. According to researcher Nguyen Dong Chi, in the early modern period, in Vietnam as well as in China, folk authors who tell stories to entertain the people are not rare. Often in the countryside, before the Revolution, every village has a few people with good voices and vivid stories. In their spare time, they would tell fairy tales. When they start, everyone in the village would gather round, sip tea and listen (Nguyen Dong Chi, 1972). Closely connected to the word of mouth method, fairy tales are the 'stories by the fire', 'bedtime stories' that grandparents told grandchildren and parents told their children... Interaction between listeners and story tellers is also an important factor delivering true aesthetic emotions.

Fairy tales are governed by the circumstances of the story telling performance and the audience involved in the performance. With fairy tales, there is always a receptive audience, especially children, most of which have 'little life experience, so the narrator's artistic ability is limited, the narrator has to simplify the conflicts of the story' (Novikova, 1983). Simplification is represented by neat and repetitive narrative formulas. The narrative formulas are repeated to replace the description. Using the available formulas will help the narrator build the plot easily. Ofcourse, in the process of storytelling, the narrator also performs the role of the composer, meaning he is able to flexibly reduce or increase the details so that they are suitable for the performing environment.

In fairy tales' performing space, words play the main role of expression. The linguistic element in any story holds a very important position, but the one that has the highest aesthetic effect belongs to the narrative factors (the tone, the intonation). In a number of performing genres such as cheo, tuong..., the aesthetic effect is maximized when there is a harmonious combination between words and music, dance... In the performing space of fairy tales, the combination of words with tone, intonation, gestures and facial expressions creates resonance between the narrator and the listener. Fairy tales appeal to listeners, especially children, through the feelings, narration, lead-in... The story will never captivate the listener if it is told with a monotonous and dull tone no matter

how good it is (similar to how listening to stories is more enjoyable than reading it yourself). The narration leads the listener into a fairy tale space, a 'fairy tale world'. Here, magical elements are used by folk authors as a means of conveying their world views, explaining the phenomena in social life as well as enhancing the story. In particular, the fairy tale with the familiar 'once upon a time' formula at the beginning of the story will attract the attention of the listener and allow them to immerse in the imaginary world where they are able to experience for themselves both joy and sorrow with the characters. The narration also helps the listener escape from this 'illusory' world with meaningful ending words (the story has ended, there is nothing left to tell or the story has come to an end, believe it or not). All of these factors contribute to the ultimate aesthetic effect for fairy tales. To be precise, the aesthetic effect is made up of the permeability of the various elements in the performing space of fairy tales.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis above, it is evident that fairy tales are similar to other folklore genres. They are not just literary science but they also contain important cultural and educational knowledge. Fairy tales reflect the real world, explain the problems that arise and exist in the family and society through conscious fiction, confirming its artistic nature. The tolerance and unification of the different functions within the genre have offered fairy tales the values of a unique and compelling artwork.

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