Structural Classification as Preservation Means of Malaysian Folktales

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Abstract

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Malaysian folktales as one of the intangible cultural legacies mirror the ancestry of the past generations to the present. It is worthy to be preserved systematically. However, it is discovered such preservation effort is absent in Malaysia. Consequently, a study to develop a structural classification of the Malaysian folktales is conducted to preserve. The structural classification is realized by obtaining embedded narrative structures of the folktales. Furthermore, the 31 functions of folktales' morphology are used and adapted as a method to get the narrative structures. In the end, this article offers the collection of the Malaysian folktales attained as the data and as well the finding of the analysis executed on the data which is the functions' sequences that shape the structural classification.

1. Introduction

Formerly, cultural legacy signified heterogeneous tangible entities. Nevertheless, currently, it too represents the intangible cultural legacy which is just as important as the tangible counterpart (Deacon, Dondolo, Mrubata, & Prosalendis, 2004; UNESCO, n.d.). There are many shapes of intangible legacy, and one of them is folklore. Folklore can be looked as an art that exemplifies a society's social and cultural identity (UNESCO, 1989). As one of the intangible legacies, folklore also has various shapes namely dance, poem, music, and tales being the former is the center of this study in a form of folktale

(Mohd Hussein, Mohd Nor, & Abdul Manap, 2001). Folktale with myth and legend provides the basis for folklore (Bascom, 1965) and folktale is known as a story that is narrated and adapted for many generations by various narrators with unique style priming it for current and imminent generations (Dawkins, 1951; Porter, 2004).

Preservation of folklore including folktale is vital in this modern and technological period to prevent it from disappearing as the result of internalization and entertainments commercialization (Dorji, 2009). Folktale may be unimportant to some, but it is undeniable that it reflects a culture's image and has the potential to communicate positive values such as kindness, high morality, and inner strength which all these are needed to support the fundamental of a population with unique cultural values (Babalola & Onanuga, 2012; Kirmani & Frieman, 1997). There are six phases in the preservation of folklore: identification, conservation, preservation, dissemination, protection, and finally, international collaboration. The second phase which is identification is the aim of this study. Among others, the highlight of the suggestion for identification is the development of identification and recording system (UNESCO, 1989) and it is fitting to achieve the suggestion through folktale classification system. It is because a folktale classification system promotes a centralized and systematic identification and this is parallel with the suggestion of intangible cultural legacy's safeguarding by UNESCO (2003). The undertaking of folktale classification has been initiated by other countries such as Japan and Spain but not Malaysia (Abd. Wahab, 2005). Thus, this study investigates the Malaysian folktales to develop a systematic classification as an effort to preserve the valuable intangible legacy. Regardless, before the classification begins, it is wise to emphasize the Malaysian folktales collection obtained and chose to be analyzed because it is the data that builds the classification system. Therefore, the next section explains on the collection of Malaysian folktales complete with the method established for the collection process.

2. Folktale identification

Two qualifying factors were initiated as the filter for the folktales collected. The qualifying factors are an operational definition built in this study and an ownership of the folktale. Such filter is crucial because it helps to:

1. Confirm the consistency in the folktale collected
2. Protect the collection from contamination of myth and legend
3. Ascertain the cultural element of the folktales

It is hard to define folklore and folktale because such terms are frequently used as required by context (Bascom, 1965; Hunter, 2013; Utley, 1958; Uzun, 2011). To have the operational definition is important in this study because it aids to ensure consistency in the data collected and also protect the data from contamination of myth and legend. Table 1 shows five formal features that must be satisfied by the folktales collected or else excluded from being part of the collection.

Table 1. The formal features of the operational definition (Bascom, 1965; Thompson, 1951)

Formal Feature	Explanation
Belief	The folktale must be a fiction and never occurred in the past.
Time	There is no indication of the specific timeline in the folktale
Place	There is no evidence of the specific location in the folktales or if it is indicated, the location must be a true fiction.
Attitude	The folktale must be devoid of any sacred motifs and serves to impart entertainment and moral value only.
Principal Character	The main characters in the folktale must be in the shape of human or non-human which both can be in various façade.

The ownership which is the second qualifying factor assists in confirming that the folktales collected did contain the cultural elements and recorded from verbal narrators of the past which eventually became literary forms (Munan, 2007; Skeat & Gomez, 2012). The ownership in the context of this study is National, Kedah, Perlis, Pahang, Selangor, Kelantan, Negeri Sembilan, Terengganu, Johor, Melaka, Perak, Sarawak, Sabah, and Penang. To determine the ownership, the folktales obtained in the literary form were examined to find information that offers evidence that the folktales were indeed recorded from Malaysian storytellers and in fact owned by Malaysia (state or national). Plus, when possible, informal interviews were also conducted toward obtaining the folktales to ascertain their cultural value. Since this study works to preserve the folktales of cultural value, it is vital to differentiate such folktales from the ones created by modern authors. As the first factors, the folktales that do not meet the second qualifying factor were excluded from the collection too.

Using the two qualifying factors as the guide, the Malaysian folktales were sought in literary form all around Malaysia and finally four various sources were obtained basing on the Malay's and Malaysian Borneo's folktales as the scope of the study. The sources obtained are *366 A Collection of Malaysian Folk Tales*, *Stories From Sarawak: Orang Ulu Stories*, *Stories From Sarawak: Orang Melanau Stories*, and *Malaysian Fables, Folk Tales, and Legends* (Munan, 2006, 2007; Puteh & Said, 2010; Skeat & Gomez, 2012). Totally, 426 folktales were obtained but considering the qualifying factors; only 269 folktales were accepted to be analyzed for the classification. As soon as the data were attained, the analysis to unearth the embedded narrative structure commenced and the explanation is in the subsequent section.

3. Folktale classification

The morphology of folktales was used as the method to obtain the narrative structures. The morphology represents the account of the tale according to its structure parts and also the association of the parts to each other and the tale in entirety (Propp, 1998). There are 31 functions in the morphology acting as a constant in the folktale, and it is known as the action of the actor in the tale. To develop the structural classification in the study, the 31 functions were exploited. Normally, a tale starts with an Initial Situation that narrates the hero or the family members. The Initial Situation is not regarded as one of the functions, but it is yet considered as essential to be included in the tale. Sometimes there are actions of actors that are undefined by the 31 functions due to the difficulty in understanding the

structure without any external reference or caused by the contamination of myth and legend. If such action of actor is discovered in the folktale, it is labeled as unclear and put under the group of undefined function. The 31 functions with the definitions are provided in Table 2.

Table 2. The 31 functions of folktale's morphology (Propp, 1998)

Definition		Function	Definition		Function
1	Absentation	The hero left home	17	Branding, marking	The hero is marked with symbol
2	Interdiction	A prohibition is given to the hero	18	Victory	The hero won
3	Violation	The hero violated the prohibition	19	Liquidation	The hero obtained the item requested
4	Reconnaissance	The villain investigates about the hero	20	Return	The hero comes home
5	Delivery	The villain obtains the hero's information	21	Pursuit, chase	The hero is hunted
6	Trickery	The villain tries to trick the hero to get something	22	Rescue	The hero is rescued from the hunt
7	Complicity	The villain tricks the hero	23	Unrecognized arrival	The hero is not acknowledged once he or she arrives home.
8	Villainy	The villain hurts the hero	24	Unfounded claims	A false hero claims to be the hero
8a	Lack	The hero needs something	25	Difficult task	The hero is give a difficult task to fulfill.
9	Mediation, the connective incident	The hero or someone else needed something and requested to get it	26	Solution	The hero solved the task
10	Beginning counteraction	The hero reacts to the request	27	Recognition	The hero is acknowledged
11	Departure	The hero searches the requested item and leaves home.	28	Exposure	The hero revealed the false hero or villain.
12	The first function of a donor	The hero is tested before he or she is given a helper or agent	29	Transfiguration	The hero is transformed to a new look.
13	The hero's reaction	The test is face by the hero and pass	30	Punishment	The punishment befalls the villain
14	Provision or receipt of a magical agent	The hero attains the helper or agent.	31	Wedding	The hero is rewarded with married and rules the country.
15	Spatial transference between two kingdoms, guidance	The hero is transported to the location of requested item	32	Undefined function	Unclear element
16	Struggle	The hero battles the villain			

Based on the 31 function in Table 2, the 269 folktales were analyzed individually to obtain the sequences of functions of the actor in the folktales. Once the analysis was completed and the sequences of functions were identified, the folktales that have similar functions' sequences were grouped together

to develop the classification system. Eventually, they were classified into different structure classes. The result of the structural analysis gave sex distinctive structure classes as exhibits in Table 3.

Table 3. The structure classes of the Malaysian folktales

Structure A	Structure B	Structure C	Structure D	Structure E	Structure F
Initial Situation	Initial Situation	Initial Situation	Initial Situation	Initial Situation	Initial Situation
Lack	Mediation	Mediation	Mediation	Lack	Mediation
Mediation	Struggle	Struggle	Lack	Mediation	Struggle
Struggle	Victory	Victory	Punishment	Liquidation	Punishment
Victory	Liquidation	Liquidation		Punishment	
Liquidation		Punishment			
Wedding					

4. Discussion

The morphology was originally obtained from the structural analysis performed on the Russian folktales. It is asserted that thought there are 31 functions, not all must emerge in a folktale. However, the functions that emerge must be in the order given. Nonetheless, from the analysis of the Malaysian folktales using the morphology, it is found that the functions do not necessarily emerge in te order given. It is not odd considering the Malaysian folktales assume a different cultural influence than the Russian's. Additionally, Lwin (2010) and Gilet (1998) also stress that once applied, the order of the functions' emergence in a folktale in not as stated by the morphology. In the context of this study, the six structure classes obtained clearly demonstrate the sequences of function not in the initial order dictated and also not all functions were employed. Looking at the structure classes attained, it is plain that each class has a different kind of structure that directly affects the folktales classified under them. For example, the folktales classified in Structure A has the air of romance and touches on the rescue of the princess in trouble. The hero as a rescuer, in the end, is rewarded with marriage. As for Structure B, it is unique in the sense that it lacks the function of Punishment. Such lacking speaks volumes about the battle between the hero and the villain since the villain is not punished in the end.

Having said that, from the analysis performed on the folktales, it can be deduced that all the associated functions were relevant in obtaining the sequence of function from the Malaysian folktales. None of the folktales collected could not be analyzed by the folktale's morphology. Additionally, it is not difficult to comprehend the connection between the 31 functions and the embedded structure of the folktales since this study works with the manifest side of the folktale. Converging on such side affirms a clear, simple, and direct interpretation of the folktales' structure. Furthermore, the lucidity of the structure coupled with the qualifying factors established prevented from the use of the undefined function in the analysis of the folktale. Nevertheless, this study does not claim that the six structure classes obtained are set. Further analysis in the future which may involve more folktales as data and this might yield new function's sequences which certainly invites new structure classes or more so undefined functions that are exclusive to the Malaysian's culture.

5. Conclusion

This study is conducted with one principal objective which is to preserve the Malaysian folktales as one of Malaysia's intangible cultural heritage through the structural classification system. To accomplish that, the identification and selection of the Malaysian folktales are first and foremost. The identification task is supported by the two qualifying factors: the operational definition initiated in the study and the ownership of the folktales. The factors help in safeguarding the folktales collected from contamination of other folklore's forms and as well ensuring the cultural value of it. Once identified, the folktales are analyzed thoroughly to extract the narrative structures from the folktales, and the task is guided by the 31 functions of the folktale's morphology. These two methods are fundamental toward the creation of the structural classification which becomes the means to preserve the Malaysian folktales.

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