

**TYPICAL MOTIFS IN “HUMAN IN ANIMAL SHAPES”
TYPE OF THE SOUTHERN KHMER
(IN COMPARISON WITH “HUMAN IN ANIMAL SHAPES” TYPE OF VIET)**

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Abstract. Up to now, a number of works of collection, study, introduction on folk stories of the Southern Khmer have been implemented with certain achievements. However, in order to recognize the uniqueness of the Southern Khmer's fairy tales, we need to compare them with fairy tales of another ethnic group in large population and cultural differences (Viet). Therefore, the feasible study direction for the above objective is to compare Southern Khmer's fairy tales with Viet people's fairy tales from the perspective of type and motif. Especially, finding the typical motifs of the type of the “Human in animal shapes” type of the Southern Khmer will contribute to identifying the specific characteristics of their cultural identity. This article presents the typical motifs of the “Human in animal shape” story type of the Southern Khmer in the view of comparing with the Viet people's similar story type, which is a practical work to meet the needs of preserving and developing the Khmer folk literature resource in general and this type in particular.

Keywords: Typical motif, the Southern Khmer's story type.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the study direction towards collection of folk literature of ethnic minorities has been given special attention by researchers and initial impressive achievements have been achieved. As an ethnic group with a relatively large population in the community of 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam, the Khmer mainly reside in the South and play a subject role in this cultural region - the root land of the “Oc Eo culture”. In the abundant treasure of folk literature of the Khmer, the magical fairy tales, including the “Human in animal shapes” story type, emerge as a unique phenomenon of word art. In addition to the common characteristics of the content and art of the genre, the “Human in animal shapes” story type has its own characteristics, specifically, it clearly reflects the cultural identity of the Khmer ethnic group and the South. One of the outstanding characteristics that make up the distinctive characteristics of the Southern Khmer's “Human in animal shapes” is the system of typical motifs mentioned in this study.

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2. Content

2.1. Theoretical viewpoints

2.1.1. Motif concept

The followings are typical viewpoints on motifs in the world:

- *Motif is an primary formula, a simplest narrative unit that cannot be separated* (A.N.Veselovski) [8; p.66]

- *Motif is the nucleus of action and plot is formed by a combination of ancient motifs and social activity motifs* (E.M.Meletinski) [8; p.73].

- *Motif is the smallest element that may continuously exist in tradition* (S.Thompson) [1; p.3].

In terms of the implications of the concepts, we realize that in all the above-mentioned viewpoints on motif, there is an agreement that “motif is the basic unit to form story types”. Each type of story includes many different motifs.

According to the Glossary of Literary Terms co-edited by the authors Le Ba Han, Tran Dinh Su and Nguyen Khac Phi, *Motif is called “mau de” based on the Sino-Vietnamese language (The Chinese transcribed “motif” in French)*, which may be converted into the words “mold”, “form” or “type” in Vietnamese, in order to refer to the elements, big or small parts that have been formed in a firm and stable manner and used in literary and artistic composition for many times, especially in folklore literature” [9; p.136].

In this study, we have a concept that: Motif is the smallest element that constitutes the story type.

2.1.2. Introduction on the “Human in animal shapes” story type

The “Human in animal shapes” story type is a sub-category of magical fairy tales, in which the protagonist can be male or female. They were born with very strange origins, specifically, they are always in animal shapes. However, they are people with a lot of special talents. Thanks to the support of miraculous forces, they overcome all challenges, marry beautiful girl, remove their disguised shapes to get handsome and happily live for a lifetime. For examples, *Magic snake, The horse-faced girl, A piece of coconut shell able to talk, Gold-box girl, Toad King’s son in law, Fairy toad, Mr. Frog* (Southern Khmer); *Marry Goat Husband 1, Marry Goat Husband 2, Toad Fairy, Snail fairy, Coconut shell* (Viet).

** The criteria for story selection to determine the story type*

Type	Criteria
Human in animal shapes	- There is character in animal shapes
	- There is action of animal shape removal
	- Having experienced the challenge
	- Expressing talents to overcome challenges

2.2. Survey on motifs of the “Human in animal shape” story type

In order to conduct this study, we select 7 stories of the Southern Khmer and 5 stories of the Viet belonging to the “Human in animal shapes” story type, based on Aarne - Thompson's motif table, in reference to the Aarne - Thompson's motif and type lookup table, some applied motif tables on folk tales of Southeast Asia, Vietnam, Korea,

Japan, China, etc; inheriting the research results of a number of magical fairy tale researchers from the perspective of type and motif, surveys on all motifs from the basic types to typical types of “Human in animal shapes” story type of the two ethnic groups of Southern Khmer and Viet, then give names according to their respective symbols: Motif code- name.

2.2.1. Motif survey results

After the survey, we select 20 motifs of this story type, specifically as follows:

Table 1. Names of motifs in the “Human in shape” story type

No	Motif	Symbol
I. Motifs that usually appear in the introduction		
1	Miraculous birth	I.1
2	In animal shapes	I.2
3	Receiving animal as child	I.3
4	Meeting the marriage partner	I.4
5	Breach of taboo (snake's curse)	I.5
II. Motifs that often appear in the development		
6	Animal shapes removal	II.6
7	Challenges	II.7
8	Talents	II.8
9	The youngest child was mistreated	II.9
10	The assigned tasks for elimination of the “human in animal shapes”	II.10
11	Supportive objects (Items that bring wealth, magical objects, objects to help people recognize each other)	II.11
12	Assistant (Magic forces)	II.12
13	Trying heart	II.13
14	Recognizing each other by signals	II.14
15	Failing to imitate	II.15
16	Fighting for beautiful girl	II.16
17	Fighting against foreign invaders	II.17
III. The motifs that usually appears at the end		
18	Reunion	III.18
19	Marriage	III.19
20	Descent	III.20

2.2.2. Statistical results of frequencies of motifs

Table 2. Frequency of the motifs in the Southern Khmer and Viet’s “Human in animal shapes” story type

No	Motif	Symbol	Motif frequency in “Human in animal shapes” story type of the Southern	Motif frequency in “Human in animal shapes” story type of the	Group
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			Khmer	Viet	
1	<i>Miraculous birth</i>	I.1	K1, K2, K4, K7 (4/7)	V1,V5 (2/5)	(1) Group of ‘human in animal shapes’ character introduction motifs
2	<i>In animal shapes</i>	I.2	K1,K2,K3,K4,K5,K6,K7 (7/7)	V1,V2,V3,V4, V5 (5/5)	
3	<i>Receiving animal as child</i>	I.3	K3,K4,K5,K6 (4/7)		
4	<i>Meeting the marriage partner</i>	I.4	K1,K2,K3,K4 K5,K6,K7 (7/7)	V1,V2,V3, V4, V5 (5/5)	
5	<i>Breach of taboo (snake's curse)</i>	I.5	K1 (1/7)		
6	<i>Challenges</i>	II.76	K2,K4,K5,K7 (4/7)	V2,V4 (2/5)	(2) Group of challenge motif
7	<i>The youngest child was mistreated</i>	II.9		V1,V2,V5 (3/5)	
8	<i>The assigned tasks for elimination of the “human in animal shapes”</i>	II.10	K2 (1/7)		
9	<i>Fighting for beautiful girl</i>	II.16	K2,K5 (2/7)		
10	<i>Animal shapes removal</i>	II.6	K1,K2,K3,K4 K5,K6,K7 (7/7)	V1,V2,V3,V4, V5 (5/5)	(3) Group of challenges overcoming motifs
11	<i>Talent</i>	II.8	K1,K2,K3,K4 K5,K6,K7 (7/7)	V1,V2,V3,V4, V5 (5/5)	
12	<i>Supportive objects (Items that bring wealth, magical objects, objects to help people recognize each other)</i>	II.11	K5,K7 (2/7)	V1 (1/5)	
13	<i>Assistant</i>	II.12	V3 (1/5)	K2,K7 (2/7)	
14	<i>Trying heart</i>	II.13	K4,K5,K6,K7 (4/7)		
15	<i>Recognizing each other by signals</i>	II.14	K6 (1/7)	V1,V5 (2/5)	
16	<i>Failing to imitate</i>	II.15		V2,V3 (2/5)	
17	<i>Fight against foreign invaders</i>	II.17	K5,K6 (2/7)		
18	<i>Reunion</i>	II.18	K2,K5,K7 (2/7)	V1,V2,V5 (3/5)	(4) Reward motif group
19	<i>Marriage</i>	III.1	K1,K2,K4,K5,K	V1,V2,V3,V4,	

		9	6,K7 (6/7)	V5 (5/5)	
20	<i>Descent</i>	III.2 0	K4,K5,K6,K3 (4/7)		

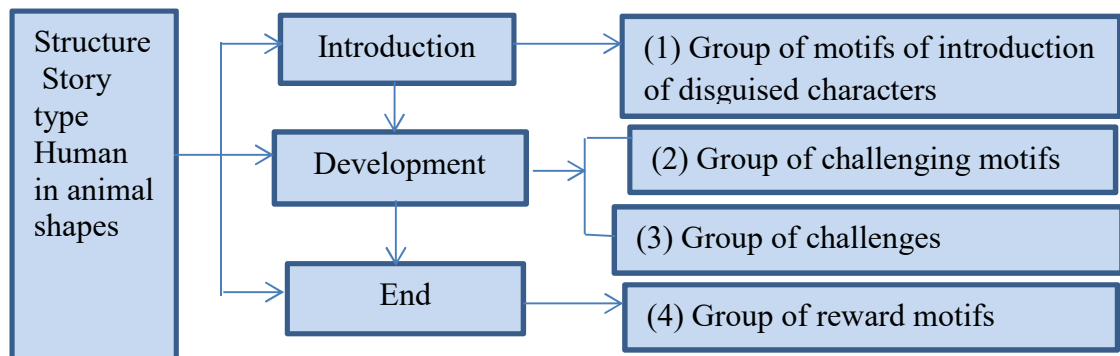
Notes: V: Viet; K: Khmer (Sequence (1,2,3...))

After surveying all the motifs in the stories belonging to “Human in animal shapes” type, we make statistics about the frequency of motifs in this story type in the Southern Khmer and Viet people’s stories of as Table 2.

2.3. Typical motifs in the Southern Khmer’s “Human in animal shapes” story type

2.3.1. Basis for typical motif determination

* *Basic structure of “Human in animal shapes” type story*



Based on the life of the protagonist and the actions the protagonist experiences, we divide the 20 motifs surveyed in Table 1 into 4 above-mentioned narrative groups as a basis for development of narrative structure of the “Human in animal shapes” story type, make statistics on the frequency of the motifs, and base on the criteria in section 2.1, we determine that there are 7 typical motifs of the Southern Khmer’s “Human in animal shapes” story type (on the basis of comparison with the Viet’s story type) as Table 3.

Table 3. Typical motifs in the Southern Khmer’s “Human in animal shapes” story type

No	Motif	Signal	Frequency	Notes
1	<i>Receiving animal as child</i>	I.3	K3,K4,K5,K6	
2	<i>The assigned tasks for elimination of the “human in animal shapes”</i>	II.10	K2	Appearing in a story but repeating for many times, bringing the attraction of the plot
3	<i>Breach of taboo (snake's curse)</i>	I.5	K1	A central motif that makes the plot
4	<i>Trying heart</i>	II.13	K4,K5,K6,K7	

5	<i>Fighting for beautiful girl</i>	II.16	K2,K5	
6	<i>Fighting against foreign invaders</i>	II.23	K5,K6	
7	<i>Descent</i>	III.17	K4,K5,K6, K3	

2.3.2. The structure of some typical motifs in the Southern Khmer's "Human in animal shapes" story type

Looking at Table 3, it can be seen that there are 7/20 typical motifs. According to our survey in this study, these motifs appear only in the Southern Khmer's "Human in animal shapes" story type, not in the stories of the same type of Viet. In particular, these motifs make an important contribution to make up the distinctive characteristics of the Southern Khmer's "Human in animal shapes" story type. In this study, we only present the structure of motifs in repetition of many times in stories as follows:

* *Receiving animal as child* Motif

Receiving animal as child is one of the typical motifs in the Southern Khmer's "Human in animal shapes" story type. This motif has the following structure:

Human in orphan shape -> meeting an old couple -> they receive the human in orphan shape as their child.

Among the stories selected for survey by us, this motif appears in 4 stories of the Southern Khmer and excluded in the Viet's "Human in animal shapes" story type. *Receiving animal as child* motif can be considered as a typical motif of the Southern Khmer's "Human in animal shapes" story type. In this motif, human in animal shapes often plays the role of orphans who are adopted by poor and infertile couples as children in their family. In *Fairy toad* story, after being reincarnated to live in a pit in a remote mountain, the frog and was taken care by the elderly couple. In the *Toad King's son in law*, the frog is also adopted by a poor couple. *A piece of coconut shell* was also picked up by the old couple and treated as their grandchild. The golden box was also picked up by the couple in the forest and taken home to be raised. This motif clearly shows the humanity of the fairy tale type. The orphans, the poor, the unfortunate are always loved and protected.

* *Motif of trying heart*

Trying heart is a motif excluded in the challenge series of the group of antagonists for the human in animal shapes, but rather a motif in which the human in animal shapes is designed to try the faith of his wife (or husband). This motif is developed according to the following structure:

After marriage -> Human in animal shape removes his shape -> trying the loyalty of his wife (or husband).

In the system of "Human in animal shapes" story types of two ethnic groups selected for survey, this motif appears in Khmer stories (4/7 stories). The disguised characters often remove their ugly appearance, become beautiful boys and girls to test the faith of partner: Keomina tried the Prince by turning into a beautiful girl (first time, Keomina brings the orge princess to the prince but asks him if he loves her, the prince hesitantly answers and asks her to wait for 3 months, Keomina continued to wait; for the second time, Keomina blesses the gods to temporarily remove the horse disguise to

become a beautiful girl, the prince wants to get married with her, she agrees on the condition that she must be the ruler of the palace and both of them make testimonials); Frog, Frog orince consort and Tree remove their disguise into handsome guys to try their wives’ heart.

*** *Fighting against foreign invaders Motif***

The *Fighting against foreign invaders* Motif appears only in Khmer stories: *Toad King’s son in law*, *Fairy toad*, *Mr. Frog*. This motif is closely related to the *descent* motif with the following structure:

The disguised characters (complete challenges), remove their disguise -> go to defeat foreign invaders -> gain victory and return.

This motif often appears in the Southern Khmer’s “Human in animal shapes” story type (3/7 stories) but does not appear in the Viet’s “Human in animal shapes” story type. *Mr. Toad*, *Fairy toad*, *Mr. Frog*, after removing their disguise, go to fight the enemy and get feat of arms and were crowned the King.

*** *Descent Motif***

Finally, in the group of ending motif, the *descent* motif is found only in the Khmer stories: *Fairy toad*, *Gold-box girl*, *Toad King’s son in law*, *A piece of coconut shell able to talk*. This motif has the following structure:

When disguised characters (complete challenges) -> being (descended) rewarded.

Descent Motif is similar to the Motifs of Reunion and Marriage in terms of function. The reward for the disguised person after having overcome all the challenges given by the antagonist is to be crowned and rewarded. After defeating the enemy, he is crowned king and happily live with the youngest sister *Fairy Toad*, *Toad King’s son in law*; The king, because of his old age, gives the throne to the Crown Prince and the country for Nang hop vang to govern *Gold-box girl*; *A piece of coconut shell* is rewarded a half kingdom by the King *A piece of coconut shell talks*.

2.4. Some interpretations

The evolution of the stories of the type of “Human in animal shapes” often hinges on the actions and social interaction of the characters in animal shapes. Therefore, although on the one hand there are many similarities due to the genre characteristics (expressed in the basic motif), on the other hand, the motifs are different reflecting the differences in ethnic culture and society (expressed shown in typical motifs). The typical motifs of the “Human in animal shapes” stories of Khmer reflect a society rich in Theravada Buddhism and the king's belief.

According to many sources of information, 200-300 years ago, the Khmer resided in “phum”, cultivated wet rice and lived according to matriarchal society. The Khmer received Indian culture through the sea, merchant boats and missions. The Indian script, holy books, religion, political institutions and culture thus slowly penetrated deeply and smoothly into Khmer cultural practices.

First is the influence of the monarch's perspective and king’s belief. This form of monarchy is expressed in Khmer stories. The characters in animal shapes, the Golden Box Girl and the Horse-faced Girl, are powerful girls with strong personalities. Both actively approach the marriage partner and fight for happiness.

In traditional Khmer customs, the court used a form of vow to judge and create association to vow motif in the Khmer stories. In addition, the king's belief and royal

social colors also seem to have an influence on the structure of Khmer stories, when the *Fight against invaders* and *Throne* motifs appeared at the end of some stories. Toad prince consort, the fairly Toad guy, after being disguised, got married and fought the invaders. The men all won and came back with the postures of the hero, making these Human in shapes are inspiration of the hero's stories.

One more point shows that the above details express the unique characteristics of the “Human in animal shapes” stories of Khmer in Southern Vietnam because this royal color is not included in Vietnamese stories. Although there is a motif to go far, guide and reunite thanks to conventional signals, *Coconut shell* guy and *Goat* guy of Vietnamese fairytale are not described to go anywhere. In other words, if the going away of Khmer stories is to add the feat of embellishing heroic qualities for characters in animal shapes, for Vietnamese stories, this function is aimed at the marriage partner. They help separate the marriage partner, alone, so that they can bear the scourge of jealousy and overcome challenges themselves.

First of all, the influence of Buddhism, specifically here is Theravada Buddhism. From the 6th century to the 8th century, archaeological data confirmed the Basak region: Tra Vinh and Soc Trang were the two largest Khmer gathering places, and the two largest Buddhist centers of the period before Angkor. However, it was not until the 12th century, when the Khmer society was tired of being engulfed in the war to gain the rights to exclude each other, the peace philosophy of Buddhism with the humanistic Dharma has become popular with the people, spreading strongly and repelling Brahmanism that existed before. Buddhism morality teach Khmer people to do good, follow the law of cause and effect, believe in enlightenment and retribution. Most Khmer men also spent a period of time studying in the temple in their life so that he can fully experience the above lessons and behave properly in life.

Especially Keomina character of the Horse-faced Girl story. She has been in dangerous many times in motif Mission is assigned to remove the human in animal shapes (deep forests, tiger caves, high mountains or go to the kingdom of evil spirit), using magic weapons to overcome challenges like deeds (get tiger milk, seven-color flowers, save the prince, save the princess). Her courage and talent spread in all points of the compass like a man. And even when she realized that prince - her husband really liked the evil spirit princess, she generously allowed the prince to marry the evil spirit princess, while she was removed from the horse guise because her selflessness touched the God. Some Khmer stories also have a motif *Put out feelers*, the character in animal shapes pretends to escape the guises to make the wife think that her husband was dead and to see if she falls in love with another man. This type of *Put out feelers* is in keeping with commandments in Buddhism morality.

The above interpretations initially showed that the stories belonging to “Human in animal shapes” type of the Khmer in Southern Vietnam expressed the interference with the heroic story type.

3. Conclusions

From the above analysis and interpretations, we can affirm that: From the motif perspective, if the similarities make a generalization of the story type, the difference is made from typical motifs. These typical motifs make the unique characteristics of the

story type “Human in animal shapes” of the Khmer in Southern Vietnam and clearly reflect the cultural identity of their ethnic group. Comparing the story type “Human in animal shapes” from the motif perspective to find the differences of the story type of two ethnic groups living in the same territory and initially explaining that the similarities and differences are a practical work to meet the needs of conservation and development of Khmer Folk Literature in general and the story type in particular.

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