

Women Archetype Characters and Motifs in Three Indonesian Folk Tales

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ABSTRACT

This study entitled *Woman Archetype Characters and Motifs in Three Indonesian Folk Tales* has three aims: 1) to identify the description of woman archetypes in Indonesian folk tales in term of the characters and motifs employed in the tales; 2) to investigate the representation of woman archetype of Indonesian folk tales with references to European folk tales; and 3) to make meaning from the comparison between Indonesian folk tales and their European counterpart. The study employs qualitative study with the content analysis approach. The analysis of the study is framed within the theory of archetype characters in literature proposed by Jung (1961), and the theory of archetype motifs in folk literature by Thompson (1955-1958). The fact that Indonesian women are presented to be more assertive and independent than their European counterpart rejects the stereotyped view of Indonesian women as submissive and dependent women.

Keywords: *woman, archetype, character, motif, folk tale*

A. BACKGROUND

It is assumed that oral tradition is the reason that makes typical tale which narrates a story of an orphan girl who is mistreated by her stepmother and stepsister and helped by a prince charming or a fairy godmother is found across culture. Many studies conclude that stories like *Cinderella* are found worldwide not only with the same general framework from beginning to ending, but also varied at the same (Cox's (1893), Propp (1958), Thompson (1958), Aarne and Thompson (1961), and Sierra (1992)). This study focuses on woman archetypal character and motif in Indonesian folktales and the comparison of them with the European counterparts. The purposes of the study are to find the archetypal characters and motifs of woman in Indonesian folk tales and to identify the similarities and differences of motifs and characters of woman archetypes between Indonesian and European folk tales in order to draw

the meaning constructed from the comparison.

B. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The theory of the archetype was introduced by a Swiss psychologist named Carl Gustav Jung in his work entitled *Archetypes and Collective Unconsciousness* (1961). Jung proposes a term called as 'collective unconscious' or "inherited in the structure of brain" (Jung 1962, as cited in Huck *et al* 2004, p. 236). Simply put, collective unconscious can be understood as the universal images of certain thing that people have as their basic consideration to take action. It is believed that these universal images bring similar universal values which are once manifested in the recurrent characters in mythology, folklore, or literature in the form of archetype. For instance a well-known Greek myth of *Oedipus* which highlights the story of mother-son incest is found across cultures with quite a similar viewpoint, that mother-son romantic relationship is banned and completely

unacceptable. Jung's concept in archetype and collective unconscious theories is not only applied in psychological field, but also literary studies such as characters and motifs.

The research on archetype characters and motifs have been conducted by many researchers such as in the work of Cox's (1893), Propp (1958), Thompson (1958), Aarne and Thompson (1961), and Sierra (1992). Those studies are produce one general premise that all tales have similar 'blueprint' with some modifications which makes them varied, but remain the same.

Jung identifies five archetype characters in mythology, folklore, and literature namely the mother and her counterpart the maiden, the child (including the child hero), the hero, and the wise old man or woman (Jung 1969, cited in Garry and El-Shamy 2005, p. xvi). The archetype of mother in fiction seems to be related to the natural characteristics of a mother which are nurturing, soothing, and nurturing. Therefore, the archetype

character of mother is often associated to the role of mother as the child bearer and care taker for her children. The second woman archetype is the maiden. According to Jung, the archetype of the maiden in a story is often described as desirable and pure young woman. The maidens are often depicted as the beautiful, pure, and desirable by man. Eisendrath (1999) argues that most of the heroines of children's stories like *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Beauty and Beast* are maidens. The third archetype is called the wise old in which Jung describes as a spiritual archetype in disguise who is protective and representing wisdom. The wise old man or woman also gives the aids to the hero or heroine to complete the quest or test. Jung describes the archetype character of the child in fiction as the naïve and inexperienced who often be fooled by his or her naïveté. They go through the process of individuation, just like the hero. The last archetype, but not the least, is the heroine which is exposed for her role as the rescuer for their own life or

other's life. The character of the hero often goes through the quest or leaving the home to gain maturity. Jung (as cited in Garry and El-Shamy 2005) uses the term of individuation to describe the stages when the hero (mostly the child or the young adult) goes through the quest to be more distinct and independent.

One prominent study of archetype motifs in folklore is the work of Stith

Thompson's *Motif-Index in Folk Literature* (1932-1936) which is enlarged by The American Folklore Society (1955-1958). The works are in the form of classification and codification of narrative elements in folklore including folk tales, ballads, myths, fables, and so on.

The examples of Thompson's *Motif-Index* classification and codification system are as follows:

H. Test

H0 --- H199. Identity Test: Recognition

H0. Identity Test

H10. Recognition to common knowledge

H20. Recognition by resemblance

H30. Recognition through personal peculiarities

H50. Recognition by bodily marks or physical attributes

H51. Recognition by scar

H51.1. Recognition by birthmark

H200. --- H299. Test of truth

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H1570. --- H1599. Miscellaneous test

In this study, the Thompson's codification is used to identify the structure or plot of the data from each Indonesian folk tales and its European counterpart to be compared as the basic archetype analysis.

C. METHODOLOGY

The study employs qualitative study with the content analysis approach. The data are analyzed through several steps. First, the woman characters are classified into major woman archetypes in folk literature proposed by Jung. Second, the classified women characters are identified and with reference to the established pattern of archetypal characters and motifs by Thompson as the codification basis to see the structure or plot of each Indonesian tales and European tales. These codification units are also used to identify the cross-culture comparison between Indonesian and European folk tales which finally concluded to find

and establish woman archetypes and motifs of Indonesian folk tales.

D. DISCUSSION

The study shows that the archetype characters in Indonesian folk tales are presented by the archetypes of *the mother, the wife, the maiden, the child heroine, and the wise old woman*. The data show that the archetype characters of the mother, the wife, and the child heroine are against the characteristics of women archetype of the European counterpart as proposed by Jung. For example, the archetype character of the mother in Indonesian folktale are presented in a more indifferent and non-nurturing manner.

“You wretched, ungrateful son!’ said Dayang Sumbi as she hit Sangkuriang in the forehead with her spoon. Sangkuriang was wounded and bleeding”.
(Samsuni, 2011:113)

What seems to be put forward by this event is the idea of educating the children how to respect their parents, particularly how a son should be respect his father. In fact, this scene is memorable and important because it triggers the story to develop. It indicates Dayang Sumbi's role as a mother who passes the moral and social value to her son, that a son must not kill his father. Besides, this event is one of factors which made Dayang Sumbi character is not clearly perceived as a nurturing mother.

The data also show that Nawang Wulan as the second archetype mother of the data gives up her son and leaves him with his father in the earth without much regret described in the text. This event indicates that Nawang Wulan is a selfish mother because she chooses to abandon her son when she has the choice to stay and live with her son in the earth.

“I am going back,’
she (Nawang Wulan) said
to her husband. But I
can't bring our child,

because he was born here
on earth”. (Sugiura and
Honda, 2001: 9)

Another archetype character in this study is presented through the characters of the wife. Like the archetype of the mother, the qualities of the wife are also different from Jung's archetype theories. In Indonesian folktales, the wife is not characterized as inferior to her husband. It is shown for example:

‘You opened the lid.
You did the one thing I
asked you not to do’. ‘If
my powers are seen by a
mortal being like you’,
she explained sadly,
‘then they disappear’”.
(Sugiura and Honda,
2001:8-9)

In spite of showing
submissiveness in front of her
husband, Nawang Wulan shows her
autonomous attitudes when she
decides to leave as she discovers
that her husband is untrustworthy.

The similar tendency also appears in the archetype character of child heroine of Bawang Putih in the tale of *Bawang Merah Bawang Putih*. Bawang Putih's characterizations change as the tale reaches its complication. Bawang Putih becomes strong, courageous, and active. She goes through the quest for Bawang Merah's clothes which leads her to the adventure. Although the text informs that the changes on Bawang Putih's traits is driven by her fear to her stepmother and stepsister. Nevertheless, the text indicates that she is fighting for her life, freeing herself from fear, facing the eerie old woman, and changing her own life, unlike Cinderella who is passively waiting for the prince to find her and change her fate. The changes of Bawang Putih's character traits are constructed through text, for example:

“It felt very strange and eerie inside. But Bawang Putih somehow found the courage to clean the rooms and help to prepare a meal

for the two of them”.
(Sugiura and Honda, 2001: 26)

Compared to her companion, Cinderella, Bawang Putih goes through the process of individuation described by Jung (Jung, cited in Garry & El-Shamy, 2005). Bawang Putih leaves the home and goes through the quest in search of Bawang Merah's clothes. She faces some obstacles like she has to ask the cattle farmer and horse rancher for the direction. She also has to face the strange old woman and do the favors from her. Bawang Putih can conquer her fear and uncertainty. Her good nature helps her to pass the test. She gains the pumpkin with full of treasure inside as the reward for her generosity.

E. CONCLUSION

The study showed that through their archetype character, Indonesian women are presented as more active and assertive compared to their European counterparts who

are submissive and passive. These facts reject the stereotyped views of Indonesian women as passive, submissive, and unattractive women. The data showed that Indonesian folk tales are more feminist than their European counterparts in a way they construct women characters to be more independent apart from the men partnership.

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