

Chapter 5

Conclusion and Suggestions

Fairy tales are imaginary stories with enchantment and marvelous beings. Most fairy tales of each regional part of the world not only deal with the fanciful stories of the hero's adventure but also relationships within a family such as those between children and their parents or rivalry or jealousy among siblings. Such tales in particular remind us either of satisfactory or unpleasant memories, especially unjust situations in childhood. In most tales of sibling rivalry, the elder children are often villains whereas the youngest children are almost always the protagonists. The matter of sibling relationships has been displayed in such western classic fairy tales as "The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids" and "Cinderella", or in famous Thai tales as "Pla Boo Thong" and "Nang Sib Song". This comparative work explored and compared seven Thai tales and forty-eight of the brothers Grimm's fairy tales all with the protagonists with at least one sibling. The main focus of the analysis is on the sibling relationships and relevant matters. To arrive at the clearest possible picture of the topic, attention was given to the origins and the evolution of the tales, factors that influence the siblings' relationships and roles in the stories, as well as socio-psychological determinants of these narratives.

Sources and Transmission of the Tales

This research finds that the tales of both cultures were originally local tales of the oral tradition and were later recorded and modified. Two theories of tale transmission—monogenesis and polygenesis—have been proposed for decades. Scholars who support the monogenesis theory believe that India is the great and the only source of all tales, which were later spread to other parts of the world because of wars, trades and migration. In the opposite theory, the polygenesis, tales are believed to have their own origin in various places independently, as

people in every region have their own wisdom and experience. The two principles have some flaws and there is no conclusive answer yet.

The Thai tales under this study come from *Jataka tales* (stories of *Bodhisatvas*'s lives) and Thai local tales. The most important *Jataka tales* are *Pannasa Jataka*, composed by a monk in Northern Thailand around the thirteenth century. Some of these tales such as "Sang Thong" were later modified by royal patrons and became Thai classic plays. Of the seven Thai tales under this study, four come from *Pannasa Jataka* ("Sang Thong", "Holwichai and Khawee", "Manohra" and "Nang Sib Song") and three from local tales of the central and north-eastern parts of Thailand ("Pla Boo Thong", "Jampa Si Ton, and "Sang Silp Chai").

Most of the Grimms' fairy tales are from France and other parts of Europe, especially Prussia (Germany at present). The brothers Grimm--Jacob and Wilhelm -- recorded the tales from tale informants of three prominent groups: French and German sources as well as travelers.

Character Roles and Sibling Relationships

Three major types of characters were found in fairy tales: the youngest child who is mostly the protagonist, the elder children, who may be antagonists or the protagonist's supporters or have negligible role, and the stepmother who is always the antagonist. Sibling relationships in both Thai and the Grimm' s fairy tales are equally negative and positive.

Three main types of protagonists were found: the provider, the victimized and the seeker. Of the fifty-five selected fairy tales, there are twenty-nine victimized protagonists, nineteen the fortune seekers and a few of the other kind of hero. Most of the victims are female characters (twenty out of twenty-nine tales) whose lives are made miserable by their stepmother and their elder sisters. While all of the selected Thai tales display female protagonists as passive victims, some of the Grimms' counterparts are more active heroines who carry hopes and consolations to the sufferers, and are the heroic protagonists who rescue their

brothers' lives. The exceptional role of these female characters in the brothers Grimm's fairy tales seems to suggest remnants of matrilineal society of the pre-Christian times. The portrayal of most women in the tales, however, seem passive and submissive, if not downright wicked as in the stepmother's case. This depiction seems to suggest a bias against women as either "terrible" or "weak" in traditional societies.

Of the male characters, the seeker heroes prevail. Their common objective of their journeys is searching for fortune and the best thing for a better life. In Thai tales, the seeker protagonists wander through a foreign land in order to find their love ones while that of the brothers Grimm's fairy tales set out to prove themselves. A woman and a kingdom are usually these fortune seekers' rewards.

The usual antagonists, the elder children and the stepmother, often contrive a way to get rid of the youngest child. However, the stepmother is more remarkable as an antagonist than the others. In this study, the stepmother figure corresponds to C. G. Jung's female archetype of 'the terrible mother' who causes the protagonist harm, injury and death. Although the good mothers also appear in a few of the Grimms' fairy tales-- "Snow-White and Red-Rose" and "The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids"--or a mother-in-law in "Manohra", but they are exceptions. They bestow good things on, and actively encourage their children to overcome difficulties. However, this is almost completely overshadowed by the image of 'the terrible mother'.

Analysis of the Major Elements of the Tales

Three main literary elements—form, theme and motif as well as characterization--were analyzed to give an in-depth context of the sibling relationships. Through an adapted model of Propp's theory concerning the structure of fairy tales, the plot of these fairy tales were divided into three phases: initial situation, adventure and ending. It is found that the beginning part of Thai tales is longer than that of the Grimms' fairy tales as it elaborates on jealousy among the co-wives of the protagonist's father and the extraordinary birth and

childhood of the main figure, but this does not occur in the Grimms' fairy tales. The adventure and the ending of the tales in both cultures are similar. The protagonists leave home in order to prove themselves, flee from danger or search for fortune and finally triumph over adversaries and either marry a prince/ a princess or get all possible rewards.

Two major motifs: the reversal of fortune (type L) and the transformation (type D) are prominent in the study. These two motifs correspond to three themes—"The youngest child triumphs over the elder siblings", "The selfish and greedy person will finally be punished" and "Appearances are deceptive". Forty-eight of the tales display the youngest child as the protagonists whose lives at first seem miserable or inferior to others and who can struggle and finally achieve better positions, the essence of the motif of the reversal of fortune. The motif of transformation appears in the stories with two types of characters: the "animal-grooms" whose ladies see their true value in spite of their ugly appearances (many times caused by wicked curses); or the antagonists (witch or villainous elder siblings) whose appearances are deceptively charming or kind.

Two minor recurrent motifs are also identified: "number" and "resurrection". The noteworthy numbers of sibling are 2, 3, 4, 7 and 12; "two" is the favorite of both groups of tales while "three" is the Grimms' favorite number and "seven" is the Thai favorite. The resurrection motif is rather common in Thai tales because it relates to the Buddhist belief in *Karma* and reincarnation, but less common in the Grimms' tales.

Characters in the selected fairy tales are flat and typically set in archetypes. The outstanding characters are: the youngest child as the protagonist, the stepmother as the antagonist and the obscure real parents. In some socio-psychological perspectives, the unpromising youngest child in the tales is seen as the representative of the underdog or the lowly in general.

The prevalent existence of the antagonist stepmothers has been interpreted variously. First, conflicts naturally arose in real situations of the former times in which a child could suffer after the common death of his/her mother in a childbirth and the widower father remarried another woman, or in the Thai polygamous

society, a father had many wives at the same time. Even without a real stepmother, children can find their real mother ‘cruel’ and considered her “stepmother” in their imagination. Besides, it has been speculated that unhappy elderly female tale-narrators who were only household dependants might be responsible for painting the real mothers as wicked stepmothers and themselves as magical female helpers. As for the general disappearance or vagueness of the father figures in the tales, the proposed explanation is that in the oral tradition of the tales, narrators were probably female; and therefore, the father figures received either minor roles or sometimes, not very favorable ones, particularly, if the tales involved maltreatment of children. As the later written forms of the tales were done mostly by male writers: monks and the royal patrons, magical helpers commonly appear as hermits or Indra, both representing elderly grandfather figures.

From the findings of this comparative study, it is evident that although there are differences between the tales of the two cultures most of which can be traced to the different social contexts, the parallel patterns are more remarkable while the sibling relationships may mirror certain reality of the past when the tales were first conceived and later developed. The more important thing is that behind these simple patterns of relationships, several layers of psycho-social dynamism of life can be speculated. Although no definite ‘truth’ can be claimed, the eclectic approach to the fairy tales has yielded interesting insights.

Suggestions for Further Study

Related to this study which focuses on sibling relationships and conflicts among children and family members in fairy tales, further analysis can be done on the following topics:

1. A comparative study of cross-gendered sibling relationship between the brothers Grimm’s and Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tales.
2. The roles of female characters in Thai fairy tales.