

An analysis of the traditional culture of China and Korea in fairy tales

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Abstract: *The cultural exchanges and communication between China and South Korea not only have a long history, but also become closer with the development of information and convenient transportation. Under the background of the increasingly frequent folk cultural exchanges and the increasing number of Korean Chinese learners and Chinese Korean learners, analyzing the similarities and differences between Chinese and Korean cultures through the comparison of traditional fairy tales can be of great help to the close cultural exchanges between the two countries. This paper selects the Chinese fairy tale "The Wolf grandmother" and the Korean fairy tale "The Brother and Sister turning into the Sun and the Moon" to discuss, in order to provide reference for the language learners and cultural lovers of the two countries.*

Keywords: *China, Korea, traditional fairy tales, cultural comparison*

1. Introduction: Traditional fairy tales are an important window into a country's culture

As one of the important carriers of national culture, traditional fairy tales play an important role in the transmission of culture, culture dissemination and language and culture education. Traditional fairy tales are usually short stories written or changed for the purpose of educating children, with a simple and short structure, and an interesting and strong storytelling style, often reflecting the thoughts, beliefs, values, customs and local conditions of the nation, and some of them have some educational significance. Some of them are common to all human beings, while others have strong local characteristics. Traditional fairy tales are a meaningful entry point when trying to understand the culture of a nation or society, or when trying to make cultural comparisons. By using traditional fairy tales as an entry point for learning a country's language, learners can greatly enhance their learning experience and deepen their understanding of the cultural similarities and differences between the two countries, thus effectively overcoming culture shock.

In general, the traditional fairy tales of a country have the following distinctive features:

First, reflecting the universal culture of the country. As scholars such as Venbola (2009) and Zhang Zhenghao (2013) have pointed out, traditional fairy tales are often full of the wisdom of life and the universal truth of life, and can reflect the nationality and values of a country. Through historical accumulation and word of mouth, traditional fairy tales^{[1][2]}.

Second, Traditional fairy tales have a clear admonition effect. In traditional fairy tales, the protagonists are often characters who can overcome hardships and tests and create good value, with the image of protecting justice and goodwill value (Zheng Suying, 2009; Wu Shizheng, 2014)^{[3][4]}. Such a narrative structure is a universal rule of traditional fairy tales, which can play an educational role in guiding children's cognitive and excellent moral character (Liang Zhishan, 2009). According to Zheng Suying (2009), traditional fairy tales add the effect of daily elements, which can arouse the interest of listeners or readers^[3]. Wu Shizheng (2014) pointed out that traditional fairy tales directly reflect the admonition effect of fairy tales through the narration of the protagonist, making children easy to have a sense of substitution, so as to obtain the truth in life^[4].

Third, traditional fairy tales have a unique story structure that can reflect the real world in interesting storylines and easy to understand stories (Kim, Mungi & Lee, Haengsun, 2018)^[5].

In addition, fairy tales can give life to inanimate objects and personalities to non-human things, thus giving them thoughts and feelings. Traditional fairy tales are often rich in fantasy and exaggerated characters to create distinctive images, and as Jin Wenji & Li Charity (2018) point out, although traditional fairy tales have a simple structure and monotonous narrative, it is this feature that makes

them easy to understand and interesting to children^[5].

Due to the geographical proximity and frequent exchanges between China and Korea since ancient times, the fairy tales of the two countries are inevitably very similar, but at the same time there are certain differences that reflect the unique cultural characteristics of the two countries. By comparing the fairy tales of the two countries, we will be able to compare the cultures of the two countries and provide a useful tool for language learners and culture lovers between the two countries.

2. Comparison of traditional fairy tales between China and Korea

2.1 Comparisons should give equal weight to differences and similarities

Comparative culture refers to the analysis of the meaning and main characteristics of culture through a variety of examples, illustrated from a comparative cultural perspective that is the basis of cultural studies (Li Haiying, 2016)^[6]. Initial comparative cultural studies attempted to explain recent social changes by bifurcating cultural types at a macro, historical level, and as the world became globalized and people began to focus more on other cultural circles, the attention to comparative cultural studies increased.

Due to their geographical proximity and long-standing influence on each other, the cultures of China and Korea have great similarities, while there are many differences between the two cultures due to their independent development, which is not exactly in the same direction. These similarities and differences are reflected in the traditional fairy tales of both countries. Generally speaking, comparative studies focus on differences. However, in the era of globalization, the commonalities should not be ignored when making comparisons, considering the issues of cultural contact and the need for cross-cultural communication. Therefore, this paper argues that if we want to conduct a better comparative study of traditional fairy tales in China and Korea, we should pay equal attention to both commonalities and individualities, and on this basis, we should explore the cultures of both countries, which can positively contribute to the cultural exchange between the two countries and help language learners in both countries to understand each other's cultures.

In order to compare traditional fairy tales, it is not only a good strategy to select a large number of works at the ephemeral or common time level to summarize their commonalities and then compare and discuss them, but also a good strategy to select representative typical works for a more in-depth discussion. In this paper, we adopt the latter approach and select the Korean fairy tale "The Brother and Sister who became the Sun and the Moon" and the Chinese fairy tale "Granny Wolf".

2.2 Comparison of the traditional fairy tales of the two countries represented by "The Brother and Sister Who Became the Sun and the Moon" and "Grandma Wolf"

2.2.1 Selection of materials

Elementary school language textbooks usually include a selection of traditional fairy tales that are known to the public and have a broad social base, with characters, expressions, and even proverbs that are familiar to people on a daily basis. As suggested by Kim Shu-hyung (2013)^[7], Korean elementary school textbooks contain a wide range of traditional fairy tales that are designed to enhance the learning process.

The Korean language education-related contents are selected to help improve the basic language skills of learners. A traditional fairy tale, "The Brother and Sister Who Became the Sun and the Moon," appears in Korean language textbooks for elementary schools, and it also appears frequently in Korean language textbooks developed and published by many prestigious institutions of higher learning, including Seoul National University. The story of "The Brother and Sister Who Became the Sun and the Moon" has a more complex and stable narrative pattern, and the story has fewer variations than other legends. In addition, its theme and story structure have many similarities with traditional Chinese fairy tales. These characteristics are the reasons why it is widely included as a text in various textbooks and why this paper proposes to use it as a research object.

Similar to "The Brother and Sister Who Became the Sun and the Moon," there are many traditional Chinese fairy tales in which a beast disguises itself as a man and tries to trick and eat the child. In such stories, the animal usually appears in the form of a personified animal that, although fierce, is ultimately unable to defeat the brave and clever boy.

2.2.2 Extraction of pedigree

After selecting the representative fairy tales, we can extract the fairy tale synopsis. The narrative sequence of the two fairy tales is the same. The narrative sequence can be summarized as follows: lack of guardians, invasion of evil people, children wake up, children escape, children encounter crisis, escape from crisis, expel evil people, and happy ending. In fact, this narrative sequence is the most common in stories with similar themes, not only in China and Korea, but also in fairy tales from many countries and regions in Europe.

2.2.3 Comparative analysis of important elements

In "The Brother and Sister who became the Sun and the Moon," the villain is portrayed as a "tiger mother," while in "Wolf Grandmother," the wolf is disguised as a grandmother. As mentioned above, in the traditional fairy tales of China and Korea and their various variants, tigers and wolves are very common in the role of villains, and another distinctive feature is that the guardians are often the elders of women. It is not difficult to see that under the influence of Confucianism, the task of raising children in traditional families in China and Korea is mainly performed by the women in the family, and therefore children often live with female elders such as mothers and grandmothers, and are closest to and most dependent on them. In contrast, in China, young couples often live with their own parents or send their children directly to their grandmother's or grandma's house for childcare and financial help.

Daughters who are married are often closer to their grandparents, even if they do not live with them, so the scene in "Grandma Wolf" in which the mother leaves home to visit her grandmother (and thus suffers an accident) is very familiar and easy for readers to understand. In Korea, it is common for couples to raise their children on their own, even if they both have to work, and grandparents, although they may help their children in times of difficulty, are less likely to raise their children on their behalf.

In addition, there are more than one child in both stories, and there is a mix of male and female children. In China and Korea, which are traditionally agrarian cultures, the concept of "many children, many blessings" is very common, even when families may not be wealthy. Not only in these two stories, but also in these stories, multiple protagonists are common, and there is a mutual help of siblings in the crisis and out of the crisis. It is clear that such depictions in fairy tales are intended to teach children not only to be brave, but also to develop the character of friendship and mutual help.

In the part about escaping from danger, the siblings in "The Brother and Sister Who Became the Sun and the Moon" make use of the supernatural power of "heaven", which is quite romantic and mythical.

In "Becoming the Sun and the Moon", the siblings use the supernatural power of "heaven", which is quite romantic and mythical. In "Wolf Granny", they rely on the power of passersby to escape from danger. In other Chinese fairy tales of the "Granny Wolf" type, there are also episodes in which the children themselves rely on their own resourcefulness and bravery to overcome the villains without the help of outsiders. When telling the story to children, parents and elders can combine the story with the plot to teach children to ask for help when they encounter difficulties and dangers, or to encourage them to be brave.

In both fairy tales, the story takes "home" as the common starting point. "Home is the environment that children are most familiar with and rely on, and it is often an important support for traditional culture. In fairy tales, "home" has a strong meaning of "a place to return" or "a space for the family to be together". It is also a space for family to be together. "Home" means the safest place. If you leave home, you may encounter danger, and it is safe to block the danger outside your home. In "Grandma Wolf," the mother tells her children to stay at home and not to open the door to strangers when she goes out. Although the "home" (house) at this time is inanimate, it can also be a reliable umbrella of protection for children. Such a scenario is very familiar to Chinese children. In daily life, especially at an early age, we often have the experience of parents going out and leaving their children alone at home with instructions not to open the door to strangers. All these are reflected in "Grandma Wolf".

The fairy tale reflects not only the culture of food, clothing, housing and transportation. In addition to family relationships, external help and the shelter of home, many ethnic elements are also reflected. For example, in "The Brother and Sister Who Became the Sun and the Moon," there are special foods such as rice cakes. Although rice cakes are also eaten in China, they are obviously less common than in Korea. Not only in festivals and important ceremonies, but also in everyday meals, rice cake is a very common ingredient in Korea. In "Grandma Wolf," there is wutong oil, a natural vegetable oil made from fried wutong seeds produced in southern China, which is a natural paint commonly used in furniture making.

The exhortation effect is one of the important functions of traditional fairy tales. Traditional fairy tales often carry some basic and universal values, such as "the authority of elders", "helping each other", "not being afraid of hardship", "punishing evil and promoting good", etc. Punish evil and promote good" and so on. Take the "authority of elders" in "Grandma Wolf" as an example.

In the story, the mother instructs the child not to open the door to the stranger before she leaves, but the child disobeys the mother's words, that is, the "authority of elders", and opens the door to the stranger, which directly leads to the danger. In both fairy tales, the evil man is punished by losing the threat to the children in the form of death, and the children are finally safe from the crisis. Obviously, one cannot always get out of danger safely, but such a happy ending provides comfort to the reader on the one hand, and conveys the value of "no evil is too good to be true" on the other, which can teach children a positive lesson.

3. Conclusion

From the above analysis, we can see that the fairy tales of China and Korea are both characterized by elements of their own countries and nationalities, and many of these elements are very similar, closely related to the similar natural and human environments of the two countries. There is also a great deal of similarity in the values conveyed and the lessons offered. Language learners and culture enthusiasts in both countries can be more comfortable in understanding each other's cultures and learning each other's languages if they pay attention to these characteristics.

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