MARRIAGE FORMS IN VIETNAMESE FAIRY STORIES VIEWED FROM ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

Human society has passed through three ages, from wildness to barbarism, then from barbarism to civilization. In each of those ages, there were different forms of marriage such as intermarriage, group marriage, dual marriage, and finally, monogamy. From the important meaning and richness and complexity of this issue in life, the oral writings were soon concerned and reflected it and therefore. Marriage became one of the themes that frequently appeared in most genres of Vietnamese folklore, in which it is fully and most clearly concentrated in the genre of fairy tales of many ethnic groups in Vietnam. Fairy tales have recreated not only the movement, transformation and progress in human marriage, but also the burning desire of workers for love, a free marriage, for justice, for good human qualities. By surveying a collection of Vietnamese fairy tales, including those of ethnic minorities reflecting the theme of marriage, analyzing, explaining, and comparing from an ethnographic perspective, the article pointed out the imprints and characteristics of marriage forms reflected in the fairy tale genre.

KEYWORDS: marriage theme, fairy tales, Vietnam, marriage form, ethnography

INTRODUCTION

Fairy tales are always directed to the people in the ancient society with a lofty humanistic view; at the same time possessing a unique world of art. These things have created the attraction of fairy tales to mankind. Surveying fairy tales, we will understand the customs, practices, and traditions of good behavior - the soul of each nation and the miraculous creativity of the common people, in which it is impossible not to mention marriage theme.

Evolutionists have shown that the history of human society has passed through three eras associated with specific forms of marriage. In the wild society, there was a system of interbreeding, group marriage with the form of blood family in which father and son, mother and child, siblings can mate with each other. A form of dual marriage with polygamy and polyandry appeared in the barbaric age. And the civilized age is marked by the form of monogamous marriage. Surveying the collection of Vietnamese fairy tales, we can see the imprints of these marriage forms in a very bold way.

CONTENT

Surveying the treasure of Vietnamese fairy tales, we made a statistic of 374 stories related to the marriage forms of 31 ethnic groups living in Vietnam. Specifically: Kinh people have the most stories with 54 stories (14.5%). The following ethnic groups have the number and proportion of stories respectively: Mong ethnic group: 42 stories (11.3%), Dao ethnic group: 37 stories (9.9%), Tay ethnic group: 31 stories (8.3%), Cham ethnic group: 26 stories (7.0%), Thai ethnic group: 26 stories (7.0%), the Co Tu ethnic group: 17 stories (4.6%), Muong ethnic group: 15 stories (4.0%), Ta Oi ethnic group: 13 stories (3.5%), Co Ho and Xo Dang ethnic groups have 12 stories (3.2%). Chu Ru and Hre ethnic groups have 10 stories each, Khmer and Van Kieu ethnic groups have 09 stories (2.4%), Ede ethnic group: 08 stories (2.1%), Gia Rai ethnic group: 07 stories (1.9 %), Giay ethnic group: 06 stories (1.6%), Phu La ethnic group: 05 stories (1.3%), Ma ethnic group: 04 stories (1.1%). Ba Na, Cao Lan, and Mang ethnic groups have 03 stories (0.8%). Ca Dong, Pu Peo, and Ra Glai ethnic groups each have 02 stories (0.5%). Gie Trieng, Khang, Lao, Lo Lo, Mnong and Xtieng ethnic groups each have only one story (0.3%).

These numbers may not be complete, but they are enough to see the appearance of the picture of multi-colored and diversified marriage forms of the ethnic groups living on "S" shape strip of land of Vietnam. If we count the number of the ethnic groups with 10 stories or more, we will see that the most common fairy tales about marriage are among the Kinh people with 54 stories; Next, there are 11 ethnic groups with 10 stories or more, including: Mong ethnic group: 42 stories; Dao ethnic group: 37 stories; Tay ethnic group: 31 stories; Cham ethnic groups: 26 stories each; Muong ethnic group: 15 stories; Ta Oi ethnic group: 13 stories; Co Ho and Xo Dang ethnic groups with 12 stories each; Cao Lan and Hre ethnic groups with 10 stories each. It is worth noting that, although the number of stories by the Kinh people is the most, followed by the Mong people, but compared to the population, it is Ta Oi ethnic group with the highest rate of stories of 13 stories/ 52.356 people; followed by the Co Tu people with 17 stories/74,173 people[1]. Both of these ethnic groups live mainly in the narrow mountainous areas of the provinces from Quang Tri to Quang Nam, concentrated in Thua Thien - Hue. This phenomenon is very interesting to explain, but in this research the authors have not had the conditions to go into depth.

Starting from an ethnographic perspective and on the basis of surveying the characteristics of marriages, we found that Vietnamese fairy tales have reflected four basic forms of marriage, including: consanguineous marriage, polygamy (one wife and many husbands), polyandry (one husband many wives) and monogamous marriage.

1. Consanguineous marriage form in Vietnamese fairy tales

Consanguineous marriage is an ancient form of human marriage. It is the union between two blood-related individuals (also known as interfamilial marriage). This form of marriage appears a lot in the type of sibling marriage story, which is mainly expressed in two genres of myth and fairy tale. In ancient times, after the age of group marriage, marriage between siblings was considered a normal phenomenon, not taboo, condemned, and consanguineous marriage was completely voluntary. This

phenomenon is reflected quite clearly and appeared in the early myths of the peoples. For example, the story *Bok Kơ Dơi - Bok Sogo* (Ba Na) [2] and *Slao Cải và Pú Lương Quân* (Tày)[3]… both tell about the voluntary marriage between two siblings. These marriages were praised and honored by the community and considered as the original source of man. Author Dang Thai Thuyen said that this is the "earliest form that can exist in the period of consanguineous marriage ". At this time, people were not aware of incest.

If in mythology, consanguineous marriage is to explain the origin of the ethnic groups, then in fairy tales, consanguineous marriage has become a taboo, so this marriage form have to go through many challenges to be made, including "magic", "probe", test items, etc., such as consulting the animals, or thanks to the arrangement of the gods. In the story of *Ải Cắp Ý Kèo*, after the great flood, all things in the world were swept away by water, and by hiding in a pumpkin, Ải Cắp Ý Kèo survived. The two people have a sense that "two brothers from the same family cannot share a hut, each must have their own hut"[4]. However, in order to maintain the human race, the supreme being Po Then (God's father) advised (required) them to get married. In this case, Po Then's intention dissolved the taboo.

If in myths, the type of stories about marriage between siblings is quite common, almost every ethnic group has it, then in fairy tales, it appears sporadically in a number of stories of ethnic groups such as: *Sự tích con cá he* (Kinh)[5], *Cụ Vách và Ốc Sên* (Muong)[6], *Sự tích suốt lúa làm nhà* (Gie Trieng)[7], *Tiều Lu - Upên* (Van Kieu)[8], *K'Đòng và Ka Ròng* (Ma)[9], *Sự tích Sấm, Sét* (Chu Ru)[10], *Sự tích đá Vọng Phu* (The Kinh)[11]…

According to author Cao Huy Dinh, "marriage and family are the subject of the first fairy tales". In this period, society had a class division, consanguineous marriage in the mythological period changed to monogamous marriage in fairy tales. Reflecting the disintegration of consanguineous marriage, each fairy tale has a different approach. The tale of *Sự tích đá Vọng Phu* (The Kinh)[13] explains that separation is the reason why the siblings got married; The tale of *Sự tích sao Hôm sao Mai* - (The Kinh)[14] tells that the younger brother misunderstood his brother, so when he went to sleep, he put his hand on his sister-in-law's stomach; The story of *Sự tích trầu cau và vôi* (the Kinh) [15] explains that the wife hugs the brother-in-law by mistake, because the two brothers are alike like two drops of water… Consanguineous marriages in fairy tales are always referred to objective factors such as wandering, dispersal, confusion ... and all direct listeners to the awareness that consanguineous marriage is incest and a taboo.

The type of stories about consanguineous marriage appears not only in the fairy tales of the Vietnamese peoples, but also in the fairy tales of many countries such as China, Greece, Armenia, Russia... and in each plot, the circumstances may be slightly different. Researching this issue, when referring to the Vietnamese type of story *Đá Vọng Phu*, Cosquin traced the origin of a series of stories with the theme of "*predestined marriage*" with the motif of "*identifying scar*", which he considered very close together and he cited an Indian story as an example. The story goes like this: a king asked the wise men to predict the prince's marriage. After considering them, they refused to tell the truth, but at the king's

urging, they had to say: the prince will marry a despicable woman, a "pali" in a street in the city of Basan. To break that predestination, the prince rode to the house and cut open the girl's belly. But that girl was lucky not to die and shortly after, was put on the elephant's back and brought to the king's palace. The prince saw that she was extremely beautiful, so he married her without knowing that it was the one he had been trying to avoid. When he discovered and traced the scar on his wife's belly, the prince understood that the predestined relationship was inevitable... Cosquin also mentioned a series of other stories with the theme of "predestined marriage" such as the son accidentally killing the father and then getting married to the mother, including the Greek story named *Ơ đíp*. In the fairy tales of the ethnic groups of Vietnam, this theme of marriage can also be found in the stories of the Khmer; however, not as common as sibling marriage.

It is worth noting that when consanguineous marriage was forbidden, the folk author skillfully handled the situation in the fairy tale by creating a confusion that only the brother could detect through the scar signal. The scar is the obsession tormenting his soul, reminding him of his previous mistakes. And in order for the sin not to continue, it was the brother/husband who had to leave forever so that the wife/woman incarnated as an eternal symbol of faithfulness – a moral action highly respected by the Vietnamese. The incarnation is also a reminder of the sin of incest, even though it has been explained and vindicated by "accidental", "mistake".

2. The form of polyandry marriage (a wife with many husbands) in Vietnamese fairy tales

In addition to the imprint of consanguineous marriage, we can also find in the fairy tales the signs of the matriarchal period in the form of polyandry marriage. Polyandry allowed a woman to have multiple husbands, and this form of marriage appeared in the primitive communal period. There are not many fairy tales that accept polyandry marriage. Typical for this type of fairy is the story of *Nàng Vỏ Trứng* (Tay)[16]. In this case, the folk author skillfully put them in a majeure but extremely beautiful situation. The story goes that, since the day there was Nàng Vỏ Trứng in the house, the two men did a good job every day. The younger brother discussed with the older brother that the older one and Nàng Vỏ Trứng should get married and "all three live together peacefully in a house". Their relationship is the one between a wife and two husbands. This marriage is a remnant of the phenomenon of heterogamy in primitive society, when matriarchal marriage was prevalent.

As can be seen, most of the fairy tales about polyandry marriage appear in the form of ruins, in marital tragedies. The theme of marriage is also cleverly inserted by the folk author into the explanation of the origin of things, phenomena, etc. in society. Although polyandry marriage is no longer accepted, a complicated life still happens with contradictory love affairs in which a woman is still related to two men who love her dearly and all are pure. It is worth mentioning here that the people involved behaved in a very humane and beautiful way. The incarnations of the characters both explain their innocence and remind people to give up polyandry marriage, but the most valuable are the immortal moral symbols.

The story of *Sự tích Trầu Cau và Vôi*, traces of polyandry marriage are hidden behind the action of the sister-in-law hugging her brother-in-law by mistake because the two brothers are very similar. This confusion led to family tragedy and ended with the deaths of three characters. The story reflects the disintegration of the extended family. The story leaves traces of the ancient time when two brothers married a wife. The last vestige of which is the Chue nue custom of the Ede ethnic group in the Central Highlands. It can be understood that it is the withdrawal of the outdated marriage regime which gives the way to a new family form being formed. The "event" of the brother getting married has created a rift in the feelings of the extended family. The folk author has chosen a difficult situation in which two orphaned brothers grew up, loving each other very much, but when the older brother got married and had his own family, that intense affection also broken. This contradiction develops further in the story *Sự tích sao Hôm sao Mai*. In the story *Sự tích sao Hôm sao Mai*, the traces of the monogamous marriage form lie in the details that the younger brother misunderstood the recommendation of the older brother and since the older brother was away, every night when the younger brother went slept, he put his hands over the wall and placed on the sister-in-law's belly. As a result, the sister-in-law became pregnant (hand pregnancy). The pregnancy of the sister-in-law was a proof that accused the younger brother of an incestuous marriage and led to the brother's misunderstanding.

Fairy tales about polyandry have shown the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy, from group marriage and clan marriage to dual marriage and exogamy. In these stories, the woman is always related or attached to the two men, rarely having harmony among three people. Thus, in this form of marriage, there are two types of stories: the first story has no signs of conflict in the marriage relationship: two orphan brothers live in harmony with a wife; The second type has appeared the signs of conflict in the triangle love relationship. Both types of stories revolve around three characters: two brothers and a woman. Because of the conflict of two men, all three died and incarnated.

Despite the same theme of polyandry marriage, the marital imprint in each story has a different intensity and that also creates the attraction of fairy tales. This is probably a marriage phenomenon that has lasted in human history, including Vietnam.

3. Polygamy (one husband with many wives) in Vietnamese fairy tales

In Vietnam, polygamous marriage exists in a patriarchal society, when the role of the man has replaced the pillar role of the woman in the matriarchal system. In a polygamous marriage, a man has the right to take many wives, but a woman has the right to marry only one husband. This concept originates from the need for human resources, the need of children's support for their parents when they are old. When the society does not guarantee people's life when they are old, they depend on their children, of course, sons. The Vietnamese custom of worshipping ancestors is also one of the causes of polygamy. According to Toan Anh: "In a patriarchal family, it is necessary to have a son to continue the family lineage and worship ancestors. Therefore, after being married for a while, if the wife only gives birth to daughters, a man may have the right to take another wife to have sons."

Perhaps, the beginning of polygamous marriage is the custom of marrying sisters. The custom of marrying sisters appeared early and is a transitional form from exogamy into a dual marriage, that means, a man marries his sister, when his younger brother reaches adulthood, this man also has the right to marry the younger sister. This is often related to economic issues. When the husband is rich, the first wife knows that the husband will marry the second, the third, etc., she will put her sister in that position so that the husband's wealth is not shared with the children of the pagans However, this has gradually extended to exogamous polygamy.

Polygamous marriage appears in many fairy tales, especially in the fairy tales of ethnic minorities in Vietnam - where the phenomenon of men taking multiple wives still exists today even though the law no longer allows it. . In the story *Chàng Húi K'Lut* (Co Ho) [18], K'Lut is a guy with an ugly body, scabies, but has two wives; The story of the *Voi bảy ngà* (Cham) tells the story of a young Ja-mu-tui, who lost his parents at a young age, and married three young ladies, Bila Lak, Hola Muh, and Chareh Batil;... The Tale of *Sự tích chim lửa* (Thai) [19] goes that "Because of the need for people to work, Ai Chang Noi's parents married him immediately two wives. The first wife's name was Nang Kham, and the concubine's name was Nang Ngan." In particular, the story *Chàng Xin Xay* (Gia Rai) [20] talks about a very strange polygamous marriage. Dam Bong Pha, thanks to taking medicine to live longer, became younger and healthier than people. After the old man's first wife died, Dam Bong Pha took 300 wives more. This is, of course, a fiction, but it also reflects the fact that due to various reasons, including the fact that thanks to the hunter/gatherer economy, people are self-sufficient, without having to worry about "supporting their wives and children" like Kinh men, so men of ethnic minorities get married very early and can have many wives and have many children.

Polygamous marriage has left inequality for women. Engels once said that polygamous marriage has had a very special nature since its appearance, making it monogamous only for women. In a polygamous marriage, although a husband has many wives, only one woman is the main wife (first wife), and the other wives are concubines, and often treated as "birth machines" and servants working in the house. This situation inevitably creates many contradictions when concubines lose their equal rights in the family and that is the reason why when society turns to civilization, this form is gradually replaced by monogamous marriage which is more progressive and ensuring more equal rights of women.

4. The form of monogamous marriage in Vietnamese fairy tales

As we have mentioned above, marriage forms reflect the progress of human society. If consanguineous marriage form is the oldest form of marriage of mankind, the true monogamous marriage has reflected a big progress of the society from the primitive to the modern. This form of marriage arises when labor is highly specialized, labor productivity brings excess wealth, etc., there is a situation of seizing private property, the family becomes an independent economic unit,… In a monogamous marriage, the husband holds the position of the owner. This position is formed when the husband is the main labor force in the family, doing heavy jobs, earning enough to support the whole family, while the wife only does the jobs of giving birth (giving birth a lot), raising children and housewives, etc. and gradually

return to a dependent position. Like polygamy, monogamy allowed the identification of the biological father of the children in the family while it had not been identified in previous forms of consanguineous marriage and polyandry. That is the basis for the formation of the family lineage.

The form of monogamous marriage is a common element mentioned in fairy tales of all ethnic groups in Vietnam. This form of marriage has reflected the progress in the family life of ethnic minorities. They want to lead a sustainable and happy family life. Monogamous marriages bring great benefits to society in general by alleviating many of the social problems inherent in previous forms of marriage. Fairy tales of ethnic groups in Vietnam refer to the form of monogamous marriage in many angles and aspects. Mostly, the form of monogamous marriage affirms the role of men in ancient society. The man is the head of the family and they take the initiative to find a wife for themselves (although in a feudal society, marriage only takes place according to the principle "Parents set where children sit"). The role of men is also confirmed when they do meaningful work for the community. In fairy tales of different ethnic groups, we see that there are many motifs of a man who has virtue, talent, merit, and gets married to a beautiful girl. For example, in the story *Suối trong - suối đục* (Tay) [21]: "After killing the demon (tiger) to save the villagers, the elder brother was ordained as Tạo and married a beautiful wife", or "After killing the three-headed snake to save the villagers, the elder brother became a Tạo and married a beautiful wife. The story of *Hai anh em và cây gỗ lạ* (Thai) [22] tells about a younger brother who saved the life of Tao Muong's only daughter, and was given the title of Tạo and married a beautiful daughter … These are typical elements for the motif of rewards for heroes in fairy tales.

The form of monogamous marriage in fairy tales often has less family conflict than polygamous marriage. Most couples have a happy, stable life, working together in harmony. If in the form of polygamous marriage, there are often conflicts between wives and between common children and stepchildren, then in the form of monogamous marriage these conflicts no longer exist. Instead, the couples live a happy, peaceful life. The story of *Ý Nọi nàng Xơ* (Thai) [22], besides reflecting polygamous marriage, also reflects monogamous marriage. The story ends with the details: "From then on, Miss Xo lived happily in Tao Muong until she got old with gray hair. After their death, both of them were bestowed "tu ti" (God of the land) by Then in the village, so that the two of them could continue to protect and help the villagers.

If life is not always smooth, then monogamous marriage in the fairy-tale is not without conflicts. In many fairy tales, especially in daily life, folkloric authors have mentioned the conflicts between husband and wife in daily life, which are mainly caused by the wife's unfaithful behavior. No matter what, monogamous marriage is still the most advanced form of marriage of mankind and the peoples living in Vietnam; it is the last form in the marriage history of society until fairy tales are no longer created.

CONCLUSION

Thus, although fairy tales only reflect parts of certain marriage forms in history, folk authors, with their creative abilities have helped readers identify the imprints of these marriages as well as the progressive development of each period of social history. There are fairy tales that reflect the current state of marriage, but most of them are ancient, reflecting the condemned remnants. The special thing is that, in any form, through each marriage reflected in these imaginary and fictional oral stories, folk authors can also convey immortal moral lessons.

FOOTNOTE

(1). According to 2019 census data.

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