

ANIMAL TALES IN CHEROKEE AND SUMBAWA TRADITION: A STUDY ON CHEROKEE AND SUMBAWANESE VALUES REFLECTED IN THREE PAIRS OF STORIES

Vivin Nila Rakhmatullah
Alumni of American Studies Graduate Program
Universitas Gadjah Mada

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to observe a comparative study of animal tales of Cherokee, one of Native American tribes and Sumbawa, an Indonesia tribe, especially to describe the similarities and the differences in delivering moral values between the three pairs of tales, to explore the cultural values in Cherokee and Sumbawa animal folktales, and to elucidate the representation of the characters in those animal folktales. The animal tales of Cherokee are *How the Terrapin Beat the Rabbit*, *The Rabbit and The Possum Seek a Wife*, and *How the Deer Got His Horns*. While, the animal tales of Sumbawa are: *The Tales of The Monkey*, *The Turtle and The Snail*, *The Tales of The Monkey And The Flamingo* and *The Cocky Monkey (Sruduk Team)*. The animal characters in these tales are to represent human being, their characteristics, moral and cultural values. Their main characters in most of animal tales are different; Cherokee is represented by the character of Rabbit, whereas Sumbawa is represented by the character of Monkey. The animal tales of Cherokee and Sumbawa is very much alive and imbued with power to create identity and community.

Key words: Comparative study, Folklore, Folktales, Animal tales, Moral values, Cultural values.

INTRODUCTION

United States is a nation that consists of many peoples and various ethnic groups whose origin came from many different parts of the world. They migrated from their homeland to America bringing their traditional cultures, ideas, ways of life and thinking, habits, myth and legends. Their folklore enriches and contributes the American experience.

In terms of its culture, United States of America is extremely diverse. The people who came from many different parts of the world lived in the dream land, intermingling with the indigenous people of the land, usually called Native Americans. The latter has long been living in their own local wisdoms, even before the ‘new comers’ had not yet arrived in the big land. Ever since the Native Americans were forced to accept white European culture, they have been straddled in two worlds. They have

been holding on membership in tribal groups, some of them with the status of separate nations and simultaneously being American citizens. Indonesia is also a nation composed of many peoples and various ethnic groups whose origins are from the islands of what is called *Nusantara* archipelago. Those ethnic groups are united into a nation called Indonesia based on shared historical background. Although living together in one geographical space, each ethnic group has its own way of life without ‘a melting pot’ process taking place. In reference to those two different nations, this article attempts to compare Cherokees of Native Americans and the Sumbawanese of Indonesia by focusing on the oral tradition in folklore, and taking animal tales (fables) as the subject matter of the study. Folklore itself according to Allan Dundes, refers to “Folk” or a group of people who has a same physical characteristic, social, and culture, thus can be divided into social and cultural groups (Danandjaja, 1984, p.1). In the context of animal tales *How the Terrapin Beat the Rabbit*, *The Rabbit and The Possum Seek A Wife*, *How The Deer Got His Horns* and *The Tale of The Monkey*, *The Turtle and The Snail*, *The Tale of The Flamingo and The Monkey*, *The Sruduk Team*, it is proven that at some extent, the Cherokee Native American Folk and Sumbawanese Indonesian Folk have a similarity in their view although they have

different social and cultural background. While, the term “lore” is a part of culture, inherited from generations to generations orally or through an example with sign or mnemonic device (Danandjaja 2-1). The “lore” studied in this research is limited on the form of animal tales.

The types of folklore is based on three modes of existence: verbal, nonverbal and partially-verbal (Brunvand 3-2). Partially-verbal folklore includes popular belief and superstition, folk games, folk drama, folk custom, folk festival, and folk dances. Non Verbal folklore includes both traditional materials of folk architecture, arts, crafts, costumes, and food. Verbal folklore includes folk speech, proverb and proverbial saying, while traditional questions are folk riddles. Next are folk rhymes and other traditional poetry, then folk narrative of all kind, and folk song.

Folktales are the short stories of oral literature and it is a part of verbal folklore. Folktales are traditional prose narratives that are strictly fictional and told primarily for entertainment, although they may also illustrate a truth or point of moral (Brunvand, 1968, p.103). Those are stories of magical events and fantastic wonders that is transmitted orally for

entertainment and illustrate truth or moral values.

Fables and animal tales are vast body of folktales, both in America and around the world. Generally speaking, fables are animal stories of a very particular sort: They are narratives pointing a moral for audience members (Watts, 2007, p.133). Those are stories in which animals serve as the characters, representing human being, symbolizing certain meanings, and conveying certain set of moral and cultural messages.

Comparative study of folklore is the study in comparing two, or more, objects of folklore. This thesis is going to examine—compare and contrast— three pairs of animal tales of different cultural, historical and geographical back-grounds. The sampled tales are the Cherokees' animal tales *How the Terrapin Beat the Rabbit*, *The Rabbit and The Possum Seek A Wife*, and *How The Deer Got His Horns* and the Sumbawanese's *The Tale of The Mouse-deer and The Snail*, *The Tale of The Monkey and The Terrapin*, and *The Sruduk Team*. Those three pairs of animal tales are chosen as the representation of Western and Eastern tales to demonstrate the variety of world folklore.

The Sumbawanese animal tales, *The Tale of the Mouse-deer and The Snail*, *The Tale of The Monkey and The Terrapin*, and *The Sruduk Team* taught a very basic lesson of life. Indonesian fables usually teaches moral values for children and those moral values derives from the initial cultural background of Indonesia as a nation once consist of kingdoms. In the case of oral tradition, Indonesians, especially the Sumbawanese, have a powerful oral tradition, just as powerful as is the Native Americans'.

Sumbawanese oral tradition goes back to perhaps hundreds of years ago. The storytelling activity in folk life is called "batutir", and the oral tradition of the Sumbawanese is called *Tutir Samawa* (Sumbawanese folktale). In such a storytelling activity, stories or tales are used to deliver moral values, educate and entertain other people, but particularly to educate the next generation. The stories are packed with implicit moral and cultural values and presented in funny and enjoyable ways, so that the people's younger generation can easily enjoy the activity and understand the implied values. The words of oral stories are not to be taken for granted; they must be taken seriously, and they must be remembered. N. Scott Momaday stated that:

Words are rare and therefore dear. They are jealously preserved in the ear and in the mind. Words are spoken with great care, and they are heard. They matter, and they must not be taken for granted; they must be taken seriously, and they must be remembered (Elliott, 1988, p.7)

Words are spoken in the oral storytelling are varied that caused varied versions of a story. Linda J. Meyers said that:

“The oral storytelling differs greatly from written literature because stories are slightly varied with each telling and this is reasonable. Each storyteller tells story to the audience in their own style and words. The transmitting process may be similar; transmit orally but the way of they tells the story, the expression or mimicking their face, the words they choose and use is different.” (Barrett & Markowitz, 2004, p.512)

Moreover, Dundes stated that folklore is “something alive and dynamic” rather than “dead and static”. It is not something relegated to primitive others—historically and socially—but rather a behavioral pattern that everyone exhibits (Bronner, 2007, p.1). Apart from the differences in cultural and geographical backgrounds of the tales, this article attempts

to look in American and Indonesian animal folktales for answering to the following questions: what is beyond those folktales; what is the function of fables in its society; and are those animal tales still exist in the daily life of both tribal groups?

As afore-mentioned, the Cherokees of Native Americans and the Sumbawanese of Indonesian are presumed to have some similarities in their views of life, albeit the differences in their social, historical and cultural backgrounds. From this point of view, it explores the sampled

Cherokees’ and Sumbawanese animal tales, looking for similarities and differences, by means of a comparative analysis. Hence, the problems come out as follows: How the Cherokee and Sumbawanese convey their cultural values in their folktales? What are the characters represented in those different animal tales? How is it represented? What are the differences and similarities of the animal tales in delivering moral values?

To answer those problems, it employs library research method in order to collect the appropriate data needed in analyzing the topic. The data are collected from various sources, written materials, on-line articles, and websites. The primary sources are the three

pairs of Sumbawanese and Cherokee animal tales which are selected based on the available written version. These written tales are collected from the storytellers then printed in books form. Second, the data is analyzed individually by using the theories of American Studies and folklore to understand the significance of the animal tales that represent its cultures.

DISCUSSION

In working on the comparative analysis, a micro-to-macro approach is adopted. This approach was proposed by Leo Marx, who convinced that to understand a culture one can start “from a small object or artefact to grasp the big picture (Marx 31). The ‘micro’, the cultural product(s) or work(s) is the representation of the ‘macro’, the universe. In this perspective, this study sees cultural products (microcosm) –folktales, in this case—as a reflection of the empirical life (realities) of the society that gives birth to it (macrocosm). The reflection is represented by the animal characters in delivering moral values in the folk’s life. The micro-to-macro approach, thus, necessitates that the samples of the study are studied first as objects or artefacts to grasp the bigger picture, the

meaning of the reality of folk life, which constitutes the macro.

In this structural mode of analysis, the animal tales of the two groups of people, the Cherokees and the Sumbawanese, are brought first under study as the objects or artifacts to understand the reality of their life in their separated and different settings. This mode of analysis is modelled after what Alan Dundes has worked on in analyzing lore, by which he unified Vladimir Propp’s “syntagmatic” method and Claude Levi-Strauss’s “paradigmatic” one. In using Vladimir Propp’s syntagm, Dundes seeks the relations of a sequential pattern of plot functions; and by Claude Levi-Strauss’ paradigm he seeks a thematic set of contrasting relations, looking for similarities and differences, to reveal the mental processes underlying the structural patterns of fantastical expressions. These analytical steps are thus applied in this study of folklore, by which the plot functions and the structural patterns of the sampled animal tales are explored and identified and then interpreted before coming to the macrocosm, the underlying values of those tales, which are the significance to both cultures.

Native Americans believe in the Great Spirit who has power over all including animals, trees, stones, and clouds. This Great Spirit

controls animals and other elements of the universe. Animals are also important in the life and beliefs of Native Americans. They generally do not consider themselves superior to animals, but believe in animals' role in the world as a resource for people— meat, skins, or bone for tools. In fact, in Native Americans' 'religion, animals play an important part in the creation of people, and usually have human traits such as speech, or virtues such as bravery or generosity (Garrett and Garrett, 2003, p.14). Whatever the belief system the individual tribe may have, it is deeply rooted in the natural world. Animals, plants, rivers, lakes, mountains, and springs are all incorporated into a system of belief that can be called Sacred Geography.

Next, characters may be represented as human. Carole A. Barret states that:

“Human creation myths seek to answer mysteries about the human condition. Human are generally created from supernatural beings, from natural elements, or from animals. In most tales, animals and plants precede the creation of humans.”

(Markowitz & Barrett, 2004, p.516)

As afore-mentioned, in most tales, animals and plants are considered even more important than human. In the Cherokees' animal tales, the characters are represented as animals. Human generally created from animals as Barret said. The animal characters are used to personify human being in a story. The characters that represent human being are usually the important animals in the Cherokees' belief system.

On the other hand, the Sumbawaneses also use animal characters to personify human being in a story and it is quite similar to the Cherokees. The difference is that the Cherokees believes that human are generally created from supernatural beings, from natural elements, or from animals, whereas the Sumbawaneses convince that human is God's creature, created from natural elements of soil, not from animals.

The use of animal characters in storytelling is to make it simpler and easier for people in transmitting and understanding the stories. A certain animal represents a certain symbol; different symbols represent different purposes in the stories. Ernest Jones via Dundes states that: “.....symbol always represents a concrete idea, never a general or abstract one.” (Dundes, 1965, , p.96)

Character, is one of the important elements in the story. The use of different characters in these tales is related to the cultural values in each society where the tales came from. The characters has a special meaning in cultural and moral values of its society. In those animal tales, all of characters are animals representing human beings and the underlying moral and cultural values. An animal character may have similar or different representations in various area or tribes, depending on the values of its society it represents or symbolizes.

Finally, animals function as symbols throughout American culture, from the patriotic image of the bald eagle to the animals employed as mascots for sport teams. Whether used as symbols of human characters or for their own attributes, animals also appear throughout American folk narratives (Watts, 2007, p.17). In representing human beings, animals are needed as the media in spite of human. Animals have many characteristics and qualities that are similar to those in human beings, make them fit for use as media of representing humans.

Every story—every myth—has ‘a pragmatic characters’. Every myth serves some purpose or end” (Weaver, 2001, p.17). For the Cherokees, the pragmatic character or the

main characters in their animal tales is Rabbit, whereas for the Sumbawanese, the pragmatic character in their animal tales is Monkey. The supporting characters in the Cherokee and Sumbawanese animal tales are Turtle (Terrapin), Snail, Pig, Fly, Flamingo, Mouse-deer (and Deer of the Cherokees), Crocodile, and Fox.

One of the functions of folklore is to convey values. The Cherokees and the Sumbawanese convey their cultural values in their animal tales that are easily learned, remembered and understood. As a part of folklore, animal tales’ functions are as follows: animal tales as a matter for education and animal tales as a matter for entertainment.

The moral values in the three pairs of animal tales of both cultures are varied; some are similar to one another, and some are different from each other. Each pair of animal tales delivers special moral and cultural values implied in the tales. Those are competition, the oppressed defeats the oppressor, the smart defeat the arrogant, every action determines the future and dualistic character of human beings.

values. An animal character may have similar or different representations in various area or

tribes, depending on the values of its society it represents or symbolizes.

Finally, animals function as symbols throughout American culture, from the patriotic image of the bald eagle to the animals employed as mascots for sport teams. Whether used as symbols of human characters or for their own attributes, animals also appear throughout American folk narratives (Watts, 2007, p.17). In representing human beings, animals are needed as the media in spite of human. Animals have many characteristics and qualities that are similar to those in human beings, make them fit for use as media of representing humans.

Every story—every myth—has ‘a pragmatic characters’. Every myth serves some purpose or end” (Weaver, 2001, p.17). For the Cherokees, the pragmatic character or the main characters in their animal tales is Rabbit, whereas for the Sumbawanese, the pragmatic character in their animal tales is Monkey. The supporting characters in the Cherokee and Sumbawanese animal tales are Turtle (Terrapin), Snail, Pig, Fly, Flamingo, Mouse-deer (and Deer of the Cherokees), Crocodile, and Fox.

One of the functions of folklore is to convey values. The Cherokees and the Sumbawaneses

convey their cultural values in their animal tales that are easily learned, remembered and understood. As a part of folklore, animal tales’ functions are as follows: animal tales as a matter for education and animal tales as a matter for entertainment.

The moral values in the three pairs of animal tales of both cultures are varied; some are similar to one another, and some are different from each other. Each pair of animal tales delivers special moral and cultural values implied in the tales. Those are competition, the oppressed defeats the oppressor, the smart defeat the arrogant, every action determines the future and dualistic character of human beings.

In conclusion, referring to the previous discussion, both the Cherokees’ and the Sumbawanese animal tales are laden with moral and cultural values. These values are implied in the dialogues and the deeds of the animal characters, thus the representations serve a didactic purpose as well, not only that of entertainment. By means of these animal tales, moral and cultural messages are delivered in a very subtle yet enjoyable way, from one generation to the next, thus preserving the traditions, cultures, histories, and all other relevant values from by generations.

CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis in this research leads to some conclusion, which includes some similarities, it can be concluded that folktales in either tribe's traditions employ animal characters to represent humans and in delivering the relevant moral and cultural messages. Animals are represented as having human attributes and qualities, and they function as symbols, serving certain purpose(s) in the tales and representing a certain meaning, especially human nature.

Both the Cherokees and the Sumbawanese convey their moral and cultural values by means of their animal tales. The tales are enjoyable as a kind of entertainment, and their messages are easily learned, remembered and understood. When their people see the animals, or hear about them in the tales, they will easily recall the underlying moral and cultural values of the stories. Moreover, they will be more closely connected to the nature, not only to the animals but also to the settings of the stories.

In terms of moral and cultural values, both the Cherokees and the Sumbawanese believe that, in real life, competition and dualism in human

character do exists everywhere whether they like it or not. How they react to such competitions and how they manage the inherent dualism of human character will determine their fate in the future. People need to be honest, humble, patient, as well as smart in dealing with their life, and they must not do any harm to their natural, cultural, and social environments, but, on the other hand, there is no such things as 'pure character'; e.i. no people is totally good and no people is totally evil; both are present simultaneously in every human being. These two themes are shared cultural and moral values of both tribes discussed.

In dealing with the theme of animal/human natures, there is yet a difference between the Cherokees and the Sumbawanese in representing and defining certain characters. For an example, the Cherokees use rabbit in symbolizing smartness, brilliancy, agileness, and also cunningness. On the other hand, the Sumbawanese use monkey to symbolize the same psychological traits, even if it is also as cunning as the rabbit of the Cherokees. In the Cherokees animal tales, the bad characters receive punishment for his mistakes, even if the good characters never punish them or take revenge on them. On the other side of the issue, in the Sumbawanese animal tales, bad characters always receive a fair, or even

worse, punishment for what they have done to others. They get their punishment from their victims, the friend(s) of the victim(s) or by other character.

The last conclusion is that the animal tales in both the Cherokees and the Sumbawanese cultures are very much alive and imbued with power to create identity and the culture of the

community. The identity of either the Cherokees or the Sumbawanese is more or less shaped by the elders' thoughts through their oral tradition. The oral tradition of either culture is expected to keep alive and always memorable in the collective mind of its people, so the animal tales will be alive forever in the minds and hearts of the Cherokees and the Sumbawanese.

REFERENCES

- Abrams, M.H. (1981). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston. Print.
- Barret, Carole A. and Harvey J. Markowitz. (2004). *American Indian Culture*. Pasadena: Salem Press, Inc,
- Begawan, Hamid. (2003). *Menyingkap Tabir dan Budaya Tana Samawa*. Sumbawa Besar: Dinas Pariwisata Seni dan Budaya Kabupaten Sumbawa, Print.
- Brunvand. Jan, Harold. (1968). *The Study of American Folklore*. New York: W.W Norton & Company, Inc.
- Brunvand. Jan, Harold. (1996). *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- Botkin, B.A. (1944). *A Treasury of American Folklore: Stories, Ballads, and Traditions of the People*. New York; Crown Publishers, Print.
- Bronner. J, Simon. (2007). *The Meaning of Folklore: The Analytical Essays of Alan Dundes*, Utah; Utah State University Press. Print.
- Crawford, J. S. & Dennis F. K. (2005). *American Indian Religious Traditions*, California: ABC-CLIO, Inc.,
- Damono, D. S. (2005). *Pegangan Penelitian Sastra Bandingan*, Jakarta: Departemen Pendi dikan Nasional Pusat Bahasa. Print.
- Danandjaja, James. (1984). *Folklore Indonesia Ilmu Gosip, Dongeng dan lain lain*, Jakarta: Grafitipers, Print.
- Dinas Diknas Kabupaten Sumbawa. (2006). *Tutir Tau Sumawa. Kumpulan Cerita Rakyat Sumbawa*. Sumbawa: Tiara Perkasa Sumbawa, Print.
- Dundes, Alan. (1965). *The Study of Folklore*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-hall Inc. Print.
- Elliot, Emory. (1988). *Columbia Literary History of the United States*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Emrich, Duncan. (1972). *Folklore on the Amercan Land*, Toronto: Little, Brown & Company.
- Green. A, Thomas. (2006). *The Greenwood Library of American Folktale*, Westpost: Green wood Press.
- Hoxie. E, Frederick. (1996). *Encyclopedia of North American Indians*, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Kramsch, Claire. (1998). *Language and Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press. Print.
- Garrett, M. & J.T. Garrett. (2003) *Native American: Faith in America*. New York: Shoreline Publishing Group LLC.
- Kalimati. Sunan, Wahyu. (2005), *Pilar-Pilar Budaya Sumbawa*, Mataram: CV. Mahani Persada Offset. Print.

- Manca, Lalu. (1984). *Sumbawa Pada Masa Lalu*, Surabaya: Penerbit Rinta. Print.
- Marx, Leo. (1981). *The Machine and the Garden: Technology and the Ideal in America*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press.
- Propp, Vladimir. (1968). *Morphology of the Folk Tale*, Bloomington: The American Folklore Society and Indiana University.
- Rasmussen, Kent, R. (1995). *American Indian Tribes*, Pasadena: Salem Press, Inc.
- Scheer, F, George. (1992). *Cherokee Animal Tales*, Oklahoma: Council Oak Books. Print.
- Selden, Raman. (1985). *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, Sussex: The Harvester Press. Print.
- Varner, R, Gary. (2007). *Creatures in the Mist: Little People, Wild Men and Spirit Beings around the World. A Study in Comparative Mythology*, New York: Algora Publishing.
- Velie, R, Alan. (1991). *American Indian Literature. An Anthology*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Watts, S, Linda. (2007). *Encyclopedia of American Folklore*, New York: Facts on File, Inc.
- Weaver, Jace. (2001). *Other Words: American Indian Literature, Law, and Culture*, Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press.
- Wolfson, Evelyn. (2001) *Mythology: American Indian Mythology*, Berkeley Heights: Enslow Publisher, Inc.
- Zulkarnain, Aries. (2008). *Karakteristik Kepemimpinan dalam Adat dan Rappang Tana Samawa*, Sumbawa Besar: Lembaga Adat Tana Samawa. Print.
- Zulkarnain, Aries. (2011). *Tradisi Dan Adat Istiadat Samawa*, Yogyakarta: Penerbit Ombak. Print.
- Microsoft ® Encarta ® (2009). © 1993-2008 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

