

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MALAY AND CHINESE TRICKSTER TALES: SANG KANCIL, THE RABBIT AND THE RAT¹

See Hoon Peow

SEGi University, Petaling Jaya, Selangor, MALAYSIA
Email: hpsee@segi.edu.my/hoonpeow@gmail.com

To cite this article: See Hoon Peow. 2016. A comparative study of Malay and Chinese trickster tales: Sang Kancil, the rabbit and the rat. *Kajian Malaysia* 34(2): 59–73. <http://dx.doi.org/10.21315/km2016.34.2.3>

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21315/km2016.34.2.3>

ABSTRACT

Trickster tales are told not only for amusement but also to convey lessons or morals via their humorous characters and sequence of plots. The characters, the stories and the morals of the stories can be a reflection of the culture and the values of the people in the culture from which the tales originate. Every culture is believed to have its own trickster tales. In Malaysia, unlike the popular Malay trickster tale Sang Kancil, not much is said about Chinese trickster tales, such as The Rabbit and The Rat. This paper juxtaposes the characters and motifs of these trickster tales to negotiate the similarities and linkages between the Chinese and Malay cultures amid striking differences in cultural values and societal norms. The findings not only provide evidence of the heuristic value of the current study but also suggest several directions for future investigations in the study area.

Keywords: *Sang Kancil*, rabbit, rat, trickster, Chinese, Malay

INTRODUCTION

Folklores are anonymously created, orally passed down between generations, and preserved by the people within a specific culture. Also known as the stories of a community, folklores survive through time because they are constantly being created and recreated to suit new situations, even within contemporary urban communities (Dundes, 1965: 1–26). It is rather impossible to determine the original version of folklores because they are created in anonymity. Other than verbal and written forms, including stories, legends, riddles, and songs, folklores are transmitted in various physical forms, such as artwork, artefacts and performances.

One of the salient characteristics of a folklore is the varied versions of one tale, which many believe to be the result of the transmission process. Despite such variation, the main structure of the folklore remains stable². This characteristic explains a fair sum of folklore or tale phenomena. Often, it is interesting to see how these tales evolve within the same culture or subtly change over time and how the motifs of a folklore change when transmitted to a different culture due to changes in contexts (Duan Bao Lin, 2005: 10–12). A motif, the smallest narrative unit of a story, can be a character or even the specific background (Liu Shou Hua, 2002: 91). A motif can include the main character of a folklore, such as *Sang Kancil* himself, or other characters, such as a greedy or ungrateful person/animal being punished.

Perhaps the belief that each culture has its own folklores is the reason most of the studies on folklores in this country have not focused much on similarities among the folklores of different cultures. A trickster tale for instance, is a reflection of the culture and reveals how the Malay and Chinese folks in cultures perceive and react to challenges in life. However, an investigation of how folklores can reveal common philosophies and worldviews between these two ethnic groups is lacking.

The Malays and the Chinese are the two major ethnic groups in Malaysia, alongside the Indians, the *Orang Asli* (the natives), and other ethnic groups. Unlike Malay folklores such as the trickster tales of *Sang Kancil*, not much is said about the folklores of the Chinese and the other groups. Examples of more recent works are found in See (2010), who explores how the Chinese language textbooks used in Malaysia make use of folk literature, and See (2015), who explains how the Chinese Malaysians acquired their work values from the Chinese folklores³.

Studies on folklores in this country have paid much attention to how folklores can be used to educate children in schools. In their studies on Malay and *Orang Asli* (natives) folklores, Yusoff, Mutalib and Ali (2003) point out that oral traditions can be used as educational materials and function as a form of social control for children. Irmadura (2004) explore how pre-school children interpret the immoral conduct of fairy tale characters, e.g., telling lies, and how their interpretations change when the purposes of such immoral actions are known to them. A more recent work is found in Nasr and See (2014), who review the Malaysian Ministry of Education's special programme incorporating *Orang Asli* folklores and legends into teaching and learning aids. A comprehensive review of the studies on Malaysian folklores are available in See (2010: 11–23).

In practice, folklorists use tale-type indexes and motif indexes to determine the type and motif of a tale. A tale, as a Chinese writer (Liu Shou Hua, 2002: 91) puts it, "...is a complete story that is made up of a relatively stable motif chain..." Thus, one tale may consist of a single or several motifs. The most popular indexes include the Anne-Thomson System (AT System), the Ting Nai

Tung tale-type index (Ting Nai Tung, 2008), and the Kristina Lindell's Motif-Index for Southeast Asian Folk-Literature (Lindell, 2006).

In the present study, the Ting's index was used because it is by far the most comprehensive index for Chinese tales (Ting Nai Tung, 2008). For motif comparison, Lindell's Motif-Index was used. Little is known about the specific index for Malay tales.

The tales referred to in this study are mostly well-known stories taken from story books, textbooks and other collections, such as the tale-type indexes mentioned. These stories may not be in their most "native" forms because they may have already been subjected to editing. However, by the nature of folktales, there is no such thing as the original version of a folktale, as mentioned above. The present writer does clearly cite the sources of the tales mentioned in this study, either as a citation from a book or as a tale type taken from a tale-type index.

This study is comparative in nature. The writer attempts to compare Malay tales and Chinese tales mainly in terms of the tale types (by referring to the tale-type indexes), story lines, characters, motifs, etc. From the comparisons, it is hoped that similarities and differences between the tales and the cultures in general can be revealed.

TRICKSTER TALES

There are basically two broad categories of tricksters: human tricksters and the animal tricksters. Trickster tales are stories about how the main character, i.e., the trickster, tricks his enemies. Lock (2002: 1) points out that a trickster is neither difficult to identify nor difficult to explain. Trickster tales are essentially a type of folktales; on some occasions, they are also a type of fable. The term "folktale" is normally used to refer to folk stories in the broadest sense, whereas fables are short stories that carry a clear moral message. The most famous of all fables is probably the Aesop Fables. So, if a trickster tale is short and carries a moral message, it can also be a fable. In contrast, if the trickster is an animal, its stories also fall into the broader category of animal tales. According to Thomson (1946: 10) "...the moral purpose is the essential quality which distinguishes the fable from the other animal tales."

Malay culture is known for its trickster tales of *Sang Kancil*. *Sang Kancil* is portrayed as clever and benevolent in Malay folklores, despite being one of the smallest creatures in the Southeast Asian jungle. *Sang Kancil* is told to have personally defeated or helped other animals defeat stronger and wicked opponents, including the tiger and the crocodile.

In contrast, the Chinese community is known for human tricksters, such as *Ah Fan Ti* (阿凡提), which is Turkish in origin and transmitted to China,

becoming a folklore among Chinese Muslims) and *Xu Wenchang* (徐文长) (Qi Lian Xiu and Feng Zhi Hua, 1993: 1–2). Han Chinese are better known for long contract worker trickster tales, in which workers trick their exploitative master (Liu Shou Hua, 2003: 667–680). It is worth noting that Han Chinese have their own animal tricksters in folklores, such as the rabbit and the rat, which are given less attention.

As mentioned earlier, one of the salient characteristics of folklores is that there are various versions of one tale, which is believed to be the result of the transmission process, but the structure remains stable⁴. It is interesting to see how these tales evolve within the same culture, subtly changing over time, or how they change when transmitted to a different culture due to changes in the context (Duan Bao Lin, 2005: 10–12). The understanding of such characteristics helps demystify certain phenomena of folklores.

A structural analysis (McKean, 1971) of Malay and Chinese trickster tales allows us to compare and contrast how the Malay and Chinese react to power. The comparative method employed in this paper is based mainly on tale types and content analysis and to a lesser extent on motif analysis (Liu Shou Hua, 2002: 88–98). A tale is a complete story. A tale is made up of a relatively stable motif chain (Liu Shou Hua, 2002: 91). Some tales have only one motif, whereas others consist of several motifs. In practice, as alluded earlier, there are standard tools called tale-type indexes and motif indexes that folklorists use to determine motif and tale types. The most well-known indexes are the Anne-Thomson system (AT system). This study relies heavily on the Ting Nai Tung tale-type index for Chinese tales (Ting Nai Tung, 2008), which was compiled and indexed according to the AT system. Ting's index is by far the most comprehensive index for the Chinese tale. There is no index of Malay tale-types. This study also makes use of Kristina Lindell's motif index for Southeast Asian folk literature to compare motifs (Lindell, 2006).

The following quote from a website introducing the *Sang Kancil* storybook defines the trickster tale as follows:

You know about Brer Rabbit from the southern United States. You may also know about Anansi the Spider from West Africa. These animals are called "tricksters," because they trick other animals in the stories. There are many trickster animals around the world, and stories told about one often told about others.

Mouse Deer is the favourite trickster of Indonesia and Malaysia, two countries of Southeast Asia. But what is a mouse deer? It is an animal about the size of a cat, and it lives in the jungles of Africa, Asia, and many Pacific islands. It has the legs and the tail of a deer, and the face and the body of a mouse—but it is not really a mouse or a deer. The mouse deer eats only plants, but

lots of animals eat the mouse deer. To stay alive, it must be quick and smart. That is why the Indonesians and Malaysians have made Mouse Deer their favourite trickster. Any of their boys or girls can tell you tales about him.⁵

The Chinese have the equivalent of *Sang Kancil* in the Rabbit and the Rat (and of course *Ah Fan Ti*). One may immediately realise that these are small and relatively weaker animals. There are stronger tricksters, such as the fox and cultural heroes, in myths (Lock, 2002). However, in animal trickster tales, tricksters are usually small and weak animals, and, if not for their intelligence, they would easily be the prey and meal of other stronger animals. In a sense, the tricksters are models of how a small and weak but intelligent person can defeat strong, powerful and evil persons. This is also true in the case of human or supernatural tricksters because they are often at a weaker position than their enemies.

The difficulty of analysing trickster tales is pointing out their significance to the surrounding culture and nature. In our case, *Sang Kancil* seems to be mostly depicted as a benevolent person, and his enemies include the crocodile and tiger, who are strong and evil. However, it is less often noted that *Sang Kancil* may not be so lovely in some cases. According to McKean (1971: 82),

We may infer, then, that an examination of the *Kantjil* (sic) tales in total would reveal more ambiguity in his character than is displayed in the stories translated above. He might display that profound combination of intelligence and stupidity, good and evil, creativity and nihilism, eroticism and asceticism, selfishness and altruism which are found in man himself.

Likewise, the rabbit and the rat are equally complex. They are in a sense more amoral and often their tricks are more for strategic purposes for their own gain or simply for survival. However, the gains may not be legitimate. A comparison of their similarities and differences illustrates similarities and differences in the two cultures.

SANG KANCIL

In the *Sang Kancil* trickster tales, *Sang Buaya*, the crocodile, and *Sang Harimau*, the tiger, are usually portrayed as the most common threats to the other animals in the Southeast Asian rainforest. Despite being stronger and mightier than *Sang Kancil*, they often fall victim to *Sang Kancil*'s tricks. There are times when *Sang Kancil* appears to be the victim at the beginning, yet later he is free and unharmed due to his clever trickery.

In one story, *Sang Kancil* is initially careless and caught by the crocodile. However, he stays calm and teases the crocodile for mistaking a stick for his leg. The crocodile is fooled and opens his mouth to check whether it is true, and *Sang Kancil* quickly gets away. *Sang Kancil* is well known for his quick response to danger. American folklorist Ting Nai Tong indexed this type of story in his famous tale-type index as type D5 Biting the Foot (according to the Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson AT system) (Ting Nai Tung, 2008: 2). In Chinese tales, the animals are usually a fox and a turtle. The turtle catches the foot of the fox, but the fox manages to fool the turtle into releasing him.

After being released, *Sang Kancil* still wishes to cross a river full of crocodiles to eat fruits from the tree on the other side of the river. Therefore, he tells the crocodiles that he was ordered by King Solomon to count the number of crocodiles. He tells the crocodiles to line up from his side of the bank to the other side of the bank so that he can hop on them and count them. They do so. *Sang Kancil* crosses the river and then turns back and laughs at the crocodiles for being fooled (Othman and Aripin, 2008: 86)⁶.

The tiger is another usual victim of *Sang Kancil*⁷. One day, *Sang Kancil* runs into a tiger whom he had tricked several times (Othman and Aripin, 2008: 157). The tiger is very angry and wants to eat him. However, *Sang Kancil* tells him that he should not eat him now because he is guarding King Solomon's gong, which will make a sweet sound when beaten. The tiger wishes to hear the sound, but *Sang Kancil* refuses to beat it, claiming that if he were to do so, he would breach King Solomon's trust. However, he agrees that the tiger can beat the gong himself, if he does not see it. Therefore, he gives the tiger a stick and excuses himself. The tiger beats the gong, which is actually a hornet's nest (type D49A).⁸ The tiger ends up jumping into a river to avoid the hornets (Othman and Aripin, 2008: 156). Later, *Sang Kancil* persuades the tiger to put his tail in between bamboos so that he can listen to beautiful violin music when the wind blow. Though the tiger is treated to music, his tail is cut by the bamboos. While trying to get away from the raging tiger, *Sang Kancil* falls into a pit. Again, he fools the tiger into jumping into the pit by telling him that the falling sky is going to crush the tiger⁹. The tiger throws him out to be crushed by the falling sky¹⁰. Interestingly, there is an almost exactly the same Vietnamese version of this tale, but the trickster is a rabbit rather than *Sang Kancil* (Sun, 1974: 60–63). The motif in this tale is also common in Laotian folk literature. This could be an indication of a case of transmission, which will be discussed in more detail later in this article.

There were times when *Sang Kancil* helps others to defeat strong and evil animals. In one story, a wolf is trapped in a hunter's cage.¹¹ A goat comes by and helps to release the wolf. The wolf, in return, wants to eat the goat. After a heated argument, both of them agree to look for three friends to make judgements. First, they meet the fox. The fox says the goat has helped the wolf once, and he should do it again as the wolf was trapped for a few days without food, and it would

defeat the purpose for releasing him if the goat does not agree to be eaten. Then, they meet a snake. The snake simply says that because the goat is so fat, he is meant to be eaten. Finally, they meet *Sang Kancil*. *Sang Kancil* pretends to be confused by what they tell him and asks them to reenact what really happened. As soon as the wolf goes back into the cage, *Sang Kancil* quickly locks the cage¹². In a similar story, the victim is a human instead of a goat, the villain is a tiger, and the other judges are the road and the tree. The judges' replies are essentially complaints that they have been good to the human and yet the human has been bad to them; thus, it is fair for the tiger to do the same to the human. However, *Sang Kancil* tricks the tiger back into the cage, as in the above story (Skeat, 1901: 20–21).

In another version of the *Sang Kancil* tales, *Sang Kerbau*, the buffalo, lifts a tree trunk to release *Sang Buaya*, the crocodile, from it. The crocodile is ungrateful and wants to eat the buffalo. Luckily, *Sang Kancil* is nearby and witnesses the incident. He manages to fool the crocodile to go back under the tree trunk by showing disbelief that the buffalo is strong enough to lift the trunk (Othman and Aripin, 2008: 95).

The Chinese have a similar story, which Ting Nai Tung indexed as type D155. Usually, the story begins with a person or an animal releasing a predator from a trap. As soon as the wolf, snake or other predator is released from the trap, he tries to eat his benefactor. The parties agree to get other people or animals to be the judges in helping them settle their argument. They finally meet an old man, a hunter or a rabbit, and this person manages to lock the predator back in the trap. This type of story not only emphasises the wisdom of the last judge but also shows the consequences of the ungrateful person/animal. In one example of these tales, the judge is a rabbit (Shanghai Wenyi, 1978: 73–74).

In a Tibetan story, a wolf wants to eat a donkey, but agrees to wait until the donkey is fatter. When the time comes, on his way to eat the juicy fat donkey, the wolf sees a fox and a rabbit and agrees to share his feast with them. Upon arriving at the poor donkey, the wolf agrees with the rabbit that it would be too bloody and wasteful of the donkey's blood to seize the throat of the donkey as usual. The wolf and the fox agree with the rabbit that they should strangle the donkey instead. The rabbit persuades the wolf and the fox to put their head through the movable loops he made and pull. They are strangled of course. The donkey is spared because the loop on his neck is an unmovable one (Sun, 1974: 82–86).

In addition to *Sang Kancil* acting as judge¹³ in the animal kingdom, he also acts as a judge for human conflict. In a story, Long Hasan borrows some paddy and corn seeds from his friend Ngah Ali and promises to pay him back in two months/'moons' time (*dua bulan*).¹⁴ However, he later refuses to pay him back, claiming that he promised to pay him back only when he can see two moons. Ngah Ali asks *Sang Kancil* for help. *Sang Kancil* brings them to a pond and shows them two moons (Othman and Aripin, 2008: 230). This type of story

is indexed as type D926 clever judge (and sub-type A to Q) in Ting's index. However, there is no Chinese story that involves two moons. Interestingly, two moons and two moons are the same words in both the Chinese and the Malay languages.

As alluded earlier, *Sang Kancil* is not always nice. At times, he bullies other small animals and does not appear to be clever. For example, in a story, he crosses a river by rolling a rice crust with his friend the stork (Othman and Aripin, 2008: 170–171; Skeat, 1901: 5–8). In the middle of the river he begins to eat the rice scraps in the rice crust. The stork protests and seeing that the rice crust is going to sink he spreads his wing and flies off. *Sang Kancil* almost drowns, and he realised his stupidity. In an *Orang Asli* (Temuan) *Sang Kancil* tale¹⁵, he tricks the tortoise and makes him walk for miles in search for mushrooms in vain (Ministry of Education, 2010: 32–39). However, the tortoise gets his revenge and tricks *Sang Kancil* back. *Sang Kancil* is found on a rock and refuses to come down to face the tortoise. The tortoise claims that he can move the rock, and if *Sang Kancil* were to look up to the sky he would realise that the rock is moving¹⁶. *Sang Kancil* falls from the rock due to dizziness from looking at the sky for too long. These are not all the mischievous things that *Sang Kancil* has committed. Previous writers such as McKean (1971) and Carpenter (1992) have conducted very fine research on the negative dimensions of *Sang Kancil*, which this paper need not repeat.

Another interesting point to note here about the *Sang Kancil* tales, which may be important for explaining the existences of similar Chinese and other South Asian tales, is that other than the presence of *Sulaiman* or Solomon, there seems to be no other Islamic element in these *Sang Kancil* tales. In McKean's (1971: 73) view, it is clear that Solomon was a later addition to the tradition to the tales. On further analysis, he is also of the opinion that these tales were in fact transmitted from India during the Hindu Kingdoms' day in the region. This helps to explain the presence of similar Chinese tales because the Chinese have long acknowledged the influence of *Jatakas*¹⁷ tales in Chinese folklore.

THE RABBIT

Interestingly, these *Sang Kancil* tales have Chinese equivalents. The plots of the stories are very similar, but the characters are different. This demonstrates similarities and common concerns in both cultures. However, there are other Chinese animal trickster tales that may not be exactly the same as the Malay tales. They are shown as having different characteristics as the Chinese tricksters.

As a Chinese saying goes, "the cunning rabbit has three holes (狡兔三窟)." This saying originates from a story of a clever protégé to the prime minister of the State of Qi during the Warring State periods who creates a number of

alternatives for his Master to escape when he is in trouble. There is another saying in Chinese that the cunning rabbit will not eat the grass near his holes (狡兔不吃窝边草). These expressions indicate that for centuries, the Chinese people have believed that rabbits are cunning.

There are many other stories in Chinese culture regarding the rabbit. These stories often tell the different aspects of the rabbit. The rabbit can be seen as tame, cute, handsome and innocent, which is completely the opposite of being cunning (Qi Fu, 2011). According to a Chinese author, there are two types of rabbits in Chinese culture, the secular and sacred rabbits (Chen Lian Shan, 2011; see also Sun, 1974: 72–76). The sacred rabbit is the nice one, and the secular rabbit is usually the cunning one. As Sun (1974) puts it,

One of the most beloved Buddhist legends comes from among the Buddha birth tales that originated in India...The Chinese apparently inherited the Indian traditions, for even before the Han Dynasty, records claimed that the hare derives his origin from the moon's vital essence, was always subjected to the moon's influence, and indeed inhabits the moon. Later, the Taoists claimed that a large white hare serves Ch'ang-O, the queen of the moon, and compounds the elixir of life for her. The Chinese always considered the appearance of a white hare as an auspicious omen as it foretold the reign of a benevolent and just ruler (p. 74).

In the Chinese tales, the rabbit can also defeat large and strong animals, just like *Sang Kancil*. In one story, there is one strong but lazy lion in the mountain. He does not go hunting every day; instead he orders the rabbit to bring him small animals every day. One day, the rabbit stops bringing him food. He is very angry and summons the rabbit before him. The rabbit explains that he stopped bringing food to the lion because there is a larger and stronger lion in the mountain now and he ordered the rabbit to bring him food instead. The poor lion is very angry and asks the rabbit to bring him to the other lion. The rabbit brings the lion to a pond. Upon seeing his own reflection the lion charges into the water and drowns (Qi Lian Xiu, 2007: 638–645). This story is obviously foreign in origin because a lion is not native to China. This story, according to a Chinese folklorist, originated from Buddhism from India (Qi Lian Xiu, 2007: 638–645). There are other versions that talk about a tiger rather than a lion. However, the tiger version of the story is illogical because, unlike lions, tigers swim very well. Interestingly, there are similar *Sang Kancil* tales, in which *Sang Kancil* is about to be eaten by a tiger but manages to fool the tiger into jumping into a pond to fight his own reflection (Othman and Aripin, 2008: 268).

The first animal story indexed in Ting Nai Tung's index D1 is a story about a rabbit or other animals (most often a rabbit; in Western stories, a fox) pretending to be dead or singing to attract the attention of a passerby, merchant or other people. When a person stops to pick him up, or becomes distracted, he steals the person's goods or foods. This is similar to one *Sang Kancil* tale in which he falls into a hunter's trap and when the hunter comes to collect his catch, Sang Kancil plays dead (Ting Nai Tung, 2008: 1).

In D8, the rabbit persuades the leopard to put thatch on himself and later lights it, which is how the leopard got his spots (Ting Nai Tung, 2008: 2). The rabbit also cheats the wolf into a trap (D30 and D44) and cons the leopard into wearing a bell while hunting for antelopes (D40) (Ting Nai Tung, 2008: 4–5).

At times, the rabbit can also be silly in trying to fool others. In one story, the rabbit goes hunting with other animals, and later cheats by giving them the undesirable parts of the food, causing trouble. When they come after him, he cuts open his own mouth to frighten them and claims that this is the consequence of eating the food. That is how the rabbit got his cleft lip (D70A) (Shanghai Wenyi, 1978: 81–83; Ting Nai Tung, 2008: 8)¹⁸. Worse still, he is killed for his cunningness. In another story, the rabbit teases the eagle, "You do not seem so capable, and all that you can do better than me is you can fly." However, he said that if you race with me on the ground you will probably lose. When the eagle ignores him and flies away, he shouts at the eagle: "You are so stupid that you can only build one nest, while I have three holes." The eagle is angry and swoops down on the rabbit. The rabbit tries running into his hole but is not fast enough and falls victim to a swift attack. The moral of the story is that one good skill is often better than many (Ai Guo Xian Sheng, 2008). This may not always be the case because the rabbit can kick the swooping eagle. Often a large and strong hare can kill an eagle (Qi Fu, 2011).

THE RAT

The rat is equally complex. It has the same dual personality like the rabbit. On the one hand, Chinese sayings, such as "rat head and brain (鼠头鼠脑)", "timid as a mouse (胆小如鼠)", and "rat crossing the street, everyone try to kill (过街老鼠, 人人喊打)", are mostly derogatory in meaning (Yang Zhen, 2008). When the Chinese say someone looks like a rat, it is often very insulting. Rats are often trouble makers, such as in story indexed as D111B, in which cats were brought in to kill all of them (Ting Nai Tung, 2008: 13; Leong, 2006: 96–98) or the house has to be burned down to kill them (Leong, 2006: 37–39). However, in another story they were so clever that they could persuade the cat to wear a bell (type D110; Ting Nai Tung, 2008: 12). According to Sun (1974: 28–32), the rat is an auspicious animal in the orient¹⁹. It is one of many symbols of prosperity. It all

depends on the angle from which one looks at them. "People born in the year of Rat therefore exhibit these same qualities. They are active, hardworking, and their lives are marked by constant effort and steady accumulation, little at a time, rather than by large strokes of fortune. They are patient, alert, persevering, and marked by deep humility" (Sun, 1974: 32).

There are also quite a large number of stories about the rat in which the rat is not necessarily a trickster. The most well-known story is about the rat looking for the strongest rat to be son-in-law (老鼠嫁女) and ending up realising that rats are actually the strongest creatures (Liu Shou Hua, 2006: 66–75). Other stories about the rat also often depict them as clever, e.g., in a story about rats stealing oil (type D112A). To reach the oil in the container, they hold on to each others' tails. However, there are other versions (normal for folktales) that have different endings. In some versions, they toppled the container and had a good treat, and in another, they dropped into the jar and drowned (Ting Nai Tung, 2008: 13; Leong, 2006: 194).

The stories involving the rat as tricksters are often associated with their first place ranking in the Chinese zodiac (Sun, 1974: 38–40). There are a few versions of the story about how the rat received its ranking. In one version, the rat told the Emperor God (玉皇大帝) that he was the largest among the animals selected. Of course, God did not believe him. He implored that the God seek the people for judgement. His request was granted. The Emperor God had wanted the ox to be ranked first. However, there was no reaction from the people. Then the rat jumped onto the head of the ox and the people all shouted in unison, "Look! The rat is so huge!" Therefore, God ranked the rat first and the ox second (D111C; Ting Nai Tung, 2008: 13).

In other versions of the story, it was the pig who volunteered to do the ranking, and God for some reason allowed him. The pig was punished and ranked last for the messy ranking. In another version, there was a race. When the animals reached the last stage of the race, they had to cross a river. The rat was not a good swimmer, and the ox was. The rat persuaded the ox to carry it because it was so small, and the ox agreed. When they neared the bank, the rat jumped forward and won the race (Yang Zhen, 2008).

In yet another Buddhist version of this story, the animals were summoned to bid farewell to Lord Buddha before his passing away. The rat persuaded the good-natured ox, who had a head start, to give him a ride. When they were near, the rat leaped forward and became the first animal to meet Lord Buddha (Sun, 1974: 28). In some versions, along the way, the rat sang to the ox. For the ox to hear better, the rat rode on the ox and sang into his ear.

In the same story, the rat and the cat were actually good friends. The cat was invited for the selection but he missed the selection time because he overslept. In order not to miss the selection, the cat in fact requested the rat to wake him up in the morning. In some versions of the stories, the rat deliberately

See Hoon Peow

did not wake the cat up to reduce competition at the selection, and in other versions he forgot to wake the cat up. This is also why cats are so angry with rats and have hunted them for thousands of years. This was why the cat was not in the zodiac.

CONCLUDING ANALYSIS

It is interesting to note that there are very similar trickster tales in the Malay and Chinese cultures, as alluded. The characters or motifs in folkloristic studies may be different while the plots are similar. What can we conclude from such similarities and differences?

Firstly, we can safely conclude that there might be some cultural links between these two cultures. On the one hand, the similarities show the universality of the structure and content of folktales or, in this case, trickster tales (Liu Shou Hua, 2003: 99). They also show common concerns in the two cultures. Beneath the cultural differences, our basic needs and concerns could be similar. The fascinating thing about folktales is that they are often diverse and yet stable in structure (Liu Shou Hua, 2003: 45).

In contrast, we could be looking at a case of transmission or influence of Indian culture, as suggested by McKean (1971: 78–79). It was suggested that the *Sang Kancil* tales originated from the *Jatakas* tales. Likewise, the Chinese have long recognised Indian influences in their culture through Buddhism (Liu Shou Hua, 2003: 173–202). As alluded, a version of the zodiac rat story was clearly influenced by Buddhism. If these are all true, it is not difficult to explain the similarities in the stories, as they could be from the same source or subject to the same influence. The *Sang Kancil* tales, whether they are considered Malay or *Orang Asli*, may originate from the same source. It is not difficult to explain the differences too because they later changed within their own contexts.

Secondly, if we take folktales and, in this case, trickster tales to be a reflection of the culture, we can draw a few comparisons between Malay and Chinese cultures.

Sang Kancil appears to be more carefree and full of life. His trickeries are often for the fun of it and without any advantages. Of course, being a small animal, the issue of survival is always present. Small animals need to trick their larger adversaries to survive. This is common in both cultures. However, the image of *Sang Kancil* is more like a benevolent mischievous boy in the jungle. One would raise an objection here regarding the benevolent nature of *Sang Kancil* by referring to earlier recorded versions of *Sang Kancil* tales that show more negative characteristics and undesirable traits of the *Sang Kancil*. That is fair. However, the nature of a folklore is such that changes occur in the process of transmission. The changes in a way reflect cultural changes or cultural sentiments. As suggested by McKean (1971: 83), *Sang Kancil* can be seen as an "ideal type"

that "characterises and reinforces a value system which I suspect to be part of both the believed-in and the lived-in world."

In contrast, the rabbit and the rat are more calculating and conniving in their trickery. They can be benevolent and help others, as in some of the tales. However, they are more purposive in their trickeries, e.g., the rat in becoming the first ranked animal in the zodiac, preserving its status or stealing things. Some of these stories were told in association with political power struggles within and between states, as alluded. Chinese culture, being a long-standing civilisation, has long left jungle life and become more occupied with inter-human problems than with struggles with nature. Thus, the trickster tales that are preserved may more reflect how to take advantage of each other.

Interestingly, in Chinese culture, animal tricksters are not given high regard. They are often guarded against, instead of celebrated, like in Malay culture. Trickery and cunningness are seen as necessary for survival or for winning competitions but not culturally approved as honourable. There are of course other Chinese human trickster tales that are viewed more favourably, such as *Ah Fan Ti* and long-term contract workers (长工) who trick their exploitative master or landlord. They are often seen as exemplifying liberation from exploitation in Chinese culture, but animal tricksters are seen as cunning, rather than clever as in Malay culture.

NOTES

1. A draft version of this article was presented at the Conference on "Malaysian Chinese in Historical Context: Interpretation and Assessment" organised by the Institute of Malaysian and Regional Studies of New Era College, on 8–9 November 2014 at New Era College. The author thanks Mr. Faisal Ibrahim of SEGi University for his comments and proof reading of the final draft.
2. This study does not attempt to be exhaustive in presenting the different versions of the tales mentioned here, save for reason of explanation when necessary.
3. Folklorists have a way of comparing these stories that a layman may not be able to understand or agree with.
4. This study does not attempt to be exhaustive in presenting the different versions of the tales mention here, save for reason of explanation when necessary.
5. <http://www.aaronshp.com/stories/R01.html>.
6. Interestingly, there is a Japanese version of a similar story, but the character is a hare. Motif-Index K579.2.1. A hare crosses the sea on sea monsters' backs pretending to count them (Lindell, 2006: 106). In another version of the story, *Sang Kancil* simply claims that the mouse deer outnumbers the crocodiles to persuade the crocodiles to line up to be counted.
7. The tiger motif is very common in Southeast Asia (Lindell, 2006).
8. Motif-Index J1772.21. Bee-hive thought to be kettle gong: beaten. Laos (Lindell, 2006: 95).

See Hoon Peow

9. Motif-Index K711.5. Laos (Lindell, 2006: 106).
10. Motif-Index K616. A tiger in the same pit as the boy is cheated into throwing the boy out of the pit. Stories were found in Laos (Lindell, 2006: 106).
11. Motif-Index R41.7. Captivity in cages. Laos (Lindell, 2006: 131).
12. Motif-Index J1172.3. Ungrateful animal returned to captivity. Philippines (Lindell, 2006: 93). The story is taken from Chapter 4 of Standard 3 (second half of the year) of the Chinese Language Textbook for Chinese Primary school published by Malaya Press in 1964.
13. Thomson motif index B274. Animal as judge.
14. In the Malay language, two months and two moons (*dua bulan*) are the same words.
15. It appears that *Sang Kancil* tales have an origin in *Orang Asli* culture. This may be an important point to explain some of the issues later.
16. Thomson motif index x1520 lies about a mountain and hill.
17. Stories from India concerning the previous lives of Buddha.
18. In another story, the rabbit got his cleft lip from laughing excessively at other's fate (D 47A).
19. Motif Index cB811 sacred animals.

REFERENCES

- Ai Guo Xian Sheng. 2008. Four animal fables. <http://mall.cnki.net/magazine/Article/ZWXS200811031.htm>.
- Carpenter, K. 1992. Kancil: From mischief to moral education. *Western Folklore* 51(2): 111–127. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1499360>.
- Chen Lian Shan. 2011. Folklore studies. <http://chinese.pku.edu.cn/docs/2014-04/20140404135844116789.doc>.
- Duan Bao Lin. 2005. *Zhongguo min jian wen xue gai yao*. Beijing: Peking University Press.
- Dundes, A. 1965. What is folklore. In *The study of folklore*, ed. A. Dundes. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Irmadura Ramli. 2004. Children's interpretations of moral values in fairy tales. M.Ed. diss., University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur.
- Leong, S. 2006. *Fable of ancient: China*. Kuala Lumpur: Arowana Publication.
- Lindell, K. 2006. Motif-index of Southeast Asian folk-literature: According to the system of Stith Thompson: Motif-index of folk-literature. Lund University: Lund.
- Liu Shou Hua. 2003. *Bi jiao gu shi xue lun kao*. Hei Long Jiang Ren Min Chu Ban She.
- _____. 2002. *Zhongguo min jian gu shi lei xing yan jiu*. Wuchang: Hua zhong shi fan da xue chu ban she.
- Lock, H. 2002. Transformation of the trickster. *Southern Cross Review*. <http://www.southerncrossreview.org/18/trickster.htm>
- McKean, P. F. 1971. The mouse-deer ('Kantjil') in Malaya-Indonesian folklore: Alternative analyses and the significance of a trickster figure in South-East Asia. *Asian Folklore Studies* 30(1): 71–84. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1177765>.

- Ministry of Education (MOE). 2010. *Koleksi cerita rakyat masyarakat Orang Asli*. Vol. 1. Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Education.
- Nasr, Ahmad Abd. Al-Rahim and See, Hoon Peow. 2014. The use of folk literature in Aborigine education: A review of the UNICEF Project in Malaysia. In *Traditionalism and modernity: Issues and perspective in sociology and social anthropology*, ed. A. H. M. Zehadul Karim and Nurazzura Mohamad Diah, 35–56. Singapore: Partridge Publishing.
- Norhayati Mokhtar, Abdul Razak Abu Bakar and Hajah Hasnah Nordin. 2010a. *Koleksi cerita rakyat masyarakat Orang Asli*. Vol. 1. Putrajaya: Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia.
- _____. 2010b. *Koleksi cerita rakyat masyarakat Orang Asli*. Vol. 2. Putrajaya: Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia.
- Othman Puteh and Aripin Said. 2008. 366 a collection of Malaysian folk tales. Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publications and Distributors Sdn. Bhd.
- Qi Fu. 2011. Talking about rabbit in the year of rabbit. <http://www.guoxue.com/?p=2742>.
- Qi Lian Xiu. 2007. *Zhongguo gu dai min jian gu shi lei xing yan jiu*. Shijiazhuang Shi: Hebei jiao yu chu ban she.
- Qi Lian Xiu and Feng Zhi Hua. 1993. *Zhung wai ji zhi ren wu da jian*. Beijing: Zhi Shi Chu Ban She.
- See, Hoon Peow. 2015. Malaysian Chinese stories of hard work: Folklore and Chinese work values. *International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies* 11(2): 1–16.
- _____. 2010. The use of folk literature in modern education: The case of Chinese language textbooks. PhD diss., International Islamic University, Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur.
- Shanghai Wenyi. 1978. *Zhungguo dongwu gushi ji* (Collection of Chinese animal tales). Shanghai: Shanghai Literature & Art Publishing House.
- Skeat, W. 1901. *Fables & folk-tales from an Eastern forest*. Cambridge: The University Press.
- Skeat, W. and E. H. Gomez. 2012. *Malaysian fables, folk tales & legends*. Kuala Lumpur: Silverfish Books.
- Sun, R. 1974. *The Asian animal zodiac*. New Jersey: Castle Books.
- Thomson, S. 1946. *The folktale*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Ting Nai Tung. 2008. *A type index of Chinese folktales in the oral tradition and major works of non-religious classical literature*. Wuhan: Huazhong University Publishing House.
- Yang Zhen. 2008. Talking about rat in the year of rat. http://www.china.com.cn/info/zhuanti/cj/2008-01/22/content_9568878.htm
- Yusoff, N., Mutalib M. A. and Ali, R. M. 2003. Menyemai nilai melentur budi dalam tradisi lisan kanak-kanak (Transmitting values through children's oral tradition). Paper presented at Seminar Za'ba mengenai alam Melayu, Renaissance Hotel, Kuala Lumpur. 12–14 August.