

## An Identification Task toward Engendering a Malaysian Folktale Classification System for Preservation

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### Abstract

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Malaysian folktales are one of the intangible cultural heritages that mirror and carries the lineage of the past generations to the present. It deserves to be preserved systematically but thus far; such effort is scarce if not lacking in this country. Consequently, a study is conducted to create a structural classification of the folktales with an aim to preserve such valuable heritage. Nevertheless, before the classification begins, an important task precedes which are an identification of the Malaysian folktales in a form of literary sources. The identification task is guided by a combination of two qualifying factors: an operational definition established in the study and also an ownership of the folktales. Ultimately, this paper presents the method employed in the identification process and also the number of the accepted and excluded Malaysian folktales along with the titles of the folktales as findings of the process.

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**Keywords:** Malaysian folktales; intangible cultural heritage; folktale classification; identification of folktale; preservation of folktale.

### 1. Introduction

In the past, the cultural heritage of the world purely represented the tangible artefacts of old but at present, the cultural heritage also encompasses the similarly valuable intangible heritage of the forefathers (UNESCO, n.d.). The intangible cultural heritage is composed of many aspects, and one of them is folklore which embodies social and cultural identity of a community (UNESCO, 1989). Several facets of folklore reflect the traditional practice of a society namely music, dances, festival, and also stories, which persist through times in a form notably known as folktale (Mohd Hussein, Mohd Nor, &

Abdul Manap, 2001). Folktale, as well as legend and myth, forms the three basic categories of folklore (Bascom, 1965).

In this digital age, folktales, myths, and legends are treasured inheritances which need to be preserved to avoid total disappearance as a result of globalization and commercial entertainment (Dorji, 2009). Wisely used, folktales offer various benefits toward the society. For instance, it teaches positive morals, behaviour changes, self-endurance, rational decision-making, the distinctiveness of cultures, and communicate the worth of compassion that when combined, induce the growth of a nation with outstanding cultural values (Babalola & Onanuga, 2012; Kirmani & Frieman, 1997). Six stages are underlined as significant in the preservation of folklore: identification, conservation, preservation, dissemination, protection, and international collaboration. The first stage which is identification addresses a couple of recommendations, and one of them is a creation of register that the current study accomplished via classification. Folktale classification system offers systematic and integrated identification of folktale which is in line with UNESCO's recommendation in the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2003). The undertaking of folktale classification had been initiated by many other nations such as Japan, China, and Spain but not yet by Malaysia (Abd. Wahab, 2005). For that reason, this study identified and analyzes the Malaysian folktales to create a systematic classification system apt to preserve the precious literature legacy of Malaysia. Nonetheless, before commencing the classification task, it is essential for the study to obtain a reasonably comprehensive collection of Malaysian folktales because it is the fundamental building blocks of the classification system. Hence, the subsequent section considers the requirements for obtaining the Malaysian folktales.

## 2. Malaysian folktale identification

Classification of folktale begins with sufficient sample of folktales and it is plainly stated a minimum number of texts is crucial to making a valid conclusion in a study conducted (Jason, 2000; Propp, 1998). In a structural study of Burmese folktales, the analysis was performed only on a collection of 27 folktales, but yet significant findings were yielded (Lwin, 2010). Propp (1998) also claims that in classifying folktales, a collection of 100 tales are more than enough for the quality of the folktales weights more than the quantity. Therefore, the current study chose to employ the folktales collected from four diverse literary sources. The literary sources are *366 A Collection of Malaysian Folk Tales, Stories From Sarawak: Orang Ulu Stories, Stories From Sarawak: Orang Melanau Stories, and Malaysian Fables, Folk Tales, and Legends* and the total collected folktales are 426 (Munan, 2006, 2007; Puteh & Said, 2010; Skeat & Gomez, 2012).

After the samples of folktale had been obtained, the identification task began. Two qualifying factors were established as the condition of acceptance. They were the operational definition developed in the study and the ownership of the folktales (Harun & Jamaludin, 2014). The purpose of the qualifying factors is to ensure the folktales identified from the samples are consistent and not contaminated by other forms of folklore. Besides, they also warrant the identified folktales were initially transcribed from the narrators of past generations. It is necessary for all the folktales to be classified to satisfy these two qualifying factors. Table-1 presents five essential formal features of the

operational definition of folktale, for a tale be considered as a folktale and used in the study. Meanwhile, Table-2 exhibits the 14 ownerships of the folktales that assist in determining the cultural value of the folktales and also possessed by Malaysia (state or national).

**Table 1.** The formal features of the operational definition (Bascom, 1965; Thompson, 1951).

Formal Features	Explanation
Belief	The tale is a fiction which means it is uncertain whether it occurred or otherwise in the past.
Time	The tale does not indicate an exact timeline of occurrences.
Place	The tale does not indicate any specific location of occurrences or if it does, the location is fictional.
Attitude	The tale is a story without any religious, or ritual motivation. It ultimately delivers amusement and worth of moral.
Principal Character	The tale tells a story of adventure and voyage of human or non-human characters both of which able to assume diverse forms of appearances.

The succeeding section provides the number of acceptance and exclusion of the Malaysian folktales based on the two qualifying factors established.

### 3. Acceptance and exclusion of Malaysian folktale

Based on the two qualifying factors, the narrative body of the 426 Malaysian folktales were analyzed to separate from the ones that were accepted and excluded to create the folktale classification system. The result of the analysis exposed a total of 269 folktales fulfilled the two qualifying factors hence accepted although 157 folktales failed to do so thus excluded. Table-2 presents the frequency of the accepted folktales distributed based on the ownerships and Table-3, on the other hand, shows the frequency of the excluded ones together with the causes of the exclusion. Based on the frequency of the accepted folktales in Table-2, the titles for each of the folktales are shown in Table-4 arranged evidently by the ownerships. The next section deliberates on the allocation of the number of folktales accepted for the ownerships and also the prominent causes of exclusion of the folktales.

**Table 2.** The accepted Malaysian folktales.

Ownership	Number of Folktale	Ownership	Number of Folktale	
1 National	71	8 Negeri Sembilan	16	
2 Kedah	26	9 Selangor	12	
3 Perlis	19	10 Terengganu	12	Total
4 Pahang	19	11 Johor	12	
5 Sarawak	18	12 Kelantan	11	
6 Penang	18	13 Perak	11	
7 Sabah	17	14 Melaka	7	
Total	188	Total	81	269

**Table 3.** The excluded Malaysian folktales.

Ownership	Number of Folktale	Cause of Exclusion	Ownership	Number of Folktale	Cause of Exclusion	
1 Sarawak	28	Place, Attitude, Belief	9 Terengganu	9	Place	
2 Kelantan	20	Place, Attitude	10 Penang	7	Place, Attitude	
3 Negeri Sembilan	13	Place	11 Perlis	6	Place, Attitude	Total
4 Pahang	11	Place, Attitude	12 Kedah	6	Place, Attitude	
5 Johor	11	Place, Attitude	13 Selangor	6	Place, Attitude	
6 Perak	10	Place, Attitude	14 Non-Malaysian	5	Folktales of Patani, Thailand	
7 Melaka	10	Place	15 National	3	Place	
8 Sabah	10	Place, Attitude	16 Undefined Origin	2	Ownership is not stated	
Total	113		Total	44		157

**Table 4.** The Malaysian folktales collected.

Ownership: National			
Folktale			
1	<i>King Solomon and the birds</i>	12	<i>The glass that turned to gold</i>
2	<i>Mat Jenin</i>	13	<i>The kidnapper and the clever lad</i>
3	<i>Why the panther has a long tail</i>	14	<i>The man-ape</i>
4	<i>A bridge of rainbow</i>	15	<i>The merchant's adopted son</i>
5	<i>Awang siMalim</i>	16	<i>Why the spider has a narrow waist</i>
Ownership: Pahang		Folktale	
6	<i>BawangPutih and BawangMerah</i>	1	<i>Pride goes before a fall</i>
7	<i>Captain Tanggang</i>	2	<i>The pelican's punishment</i>
8	<i>Hantugalah the ghost of the jungle</i>	3	<i>The swan maiden</i>
9	<i>How sang kancil saved the buffalo</i>	4	<i>A pouch of rice grains</i>
10	<i>How sang kancil tricked the tiger</i>	5	<i>A vegetarian dispute</i>
11	<i>How the mosquito was born</i>	6	<i>Mat So'od's fantasy</i>
12	<i>How the python lost its venom</i>	7	<i>The carpenter and the ironmonger</i>
13	<i>Kang the carpenter bird</i>	8	<i>The clever student</i>
14	<i>Melur and the snake</i>	9	<i>The crock of gold</i>
15	<i>Pak Belalang, the fortune-teller</i>	10	<i>The gold chain</i>
16	<i>Pak Pandir and his child</i>	11	<i>The king and three thieves</i>
17	<i>Pak Pandir goes into business</i>	12	<i>The king crow and the Water-snail</i>
18	<i>Pak Pandir repairs his house</i>	13	<i>The magic flute</i>
19	<i>Princess BungaTanjung</i>	14	<i>The magic pot</i>
20	<i>Princess Cenderawasih, the bird of paradise</i>	15	<i>The man who became a turtle</i>
21	<i>Sang kancil the judge</i>	16	<i>The princess's husband</i>
22	<i>Si Luncai and his gourds</i>	17	<i>The story of Princess MelurSekuntum</i>
23	<i>The Angsana princess</i>	18	<i>The two cockerels</i>
24	<i>The ant and the cricket</i>	19	<i>The will</i>
Ownership: Kelantan		Folktale	
25	<i>The ants and the elephants</i>	1	<i>Father Lime-stick and the flowerpecker</i>
26	<i>The baby in the tree</i>	2	<i>The cleversBalau</i>
27	<i>The blind men and the elephant</i>	3	<i>Who killed the otter's babies?</i>
28	<i>The boy who saved a country</i>	4	<i>Awang with big stomach</i>
29	<i>The chicken and the fox</i>	5	<i>The clever parrot</i>
30	<i>The clever deer</i>	6	<i>The clever wife</i>
31	<i>The clever mousedeer</i>	7	<i>The elephant has a bet with the tiger</i>
32	<i>The crow and the stork</i>	8	<i>The king of tigers is sick</i>
33	<i>The durian and the horse mango fruit</i>		
34	<i>The fox and the hen</i>		

35	<i>The goatherd</i>	9	<i>The mouse-deer's shipwreck</i>
36	<i>The hunchbacked lobster</i>	10	<i>The trees that changed places</i>
37	<i>The red ant's small waist</i>	11	<i>Wit wins the day</i>
38	<i>The monkey and the turtle</i>		
39	<i>The mousedeer and the crocodiles</i>		Ownership: Terengganu
40	<i>The nectar bees</i>	1	Folktale
41	<i>The owl and the moon</i>	2	<i>Awang, the ant fighter</i>
42	<i>The pheasant and the buffalo</i>	3	<i>The king who lost his appetite</i>
43	<i>The price of greed</i>	4	<i>The seven princesses</i>
44	<i>The prince and the peacock</i>	5	<i>Awang Merah's stepmother</i>
45	<i>The pumpkin princess</i>	6	<i>Carried away with playing chess</i>
46	<i>The rice crust boat</i>	7	<i>How seven brothers saved the villaged</i>
47	<i>The sixth fisherman</i>	8	<i>Looking for a cure</i>
48	<i>The snake and the bamboo</i>	9	<i>Princess Bakawali</i>
49	<i>The stork and the crab</i>	10	<i>Raja Bongsu of Pinang Beribut</i>
50	<i>The stork and the mousedeer</i>	11	<i>The clever storyteller</i>
51	<i>The story of Badang</i>	12	<i>The magic flute</i>
52	<i>The story of sang kancil and the bear</i>		<i>The bodyguard</i>
53	<i>The tiger and his reflection</i>		Ownership: Johor
54	<i>The tiger and the cat</i>	1	Folktale
55	<i>The unfortunate Pak Kadok</i>	2	<i>Si Jambul</i>
56	<i>The wise judge</i>	3	<i>The cenderawasih bird</i>
57	<i>The wrong catch</i>	4	<i>The prince and princess of Gunung Selbu</i>
58	<i>The squirrel princess</i>	5	<i>Awang and Dayang</i>
59	<i>What a plate of rice is worth</i>	6	<i>Driving out the djinn</i>
60	<i>Why bats fly at night</i>	7	<i>Princess Gaharu</i>
61	<i>Why caterpillars are poisonous</i>	8	<i>The bear prince</i>
62	<i>Why chickens scratch</i>	9	<i>The clove</i>
63	<i>Why the cockerel crows in the morning</i>	10	<i>Princess siHelangBakau</i>
64	<i>Why the crow has black feathers</i>	11	<i>The lady and the gold tray</i>
65	<i>Why the goose has a long neck</i>	12	<i>The leader of birds</i>
66	<i>Why the monkey has no home</i>		<i>The story of the turtle-dove</i>
67	<i>Why the rabbit's tail is short</i>		Ownership: Perak
68	<i>Why snakes have no legs</i>	1	Folktale
69	<i>Why the stork is thin</i>	2	<i>Kintan's sorrow</i>
70	<i>Why the tortoise's shell appears cracked</i>	3	<i>The bunian princess</i>
71	<i>Why the woodpecker flies high and low</i>	4	<i>The prince and the snake</i>
	Ownership: Perlis	5	<i>How to fight the giants</i>
	Folktale	6	<i>How the cat became a judge</i>
1	<i>Princess KelapaGading</i>	7	<i>The cawi bird and the snail</i>
2	<i>The nipahpalm's tears</i>	8	<i>The giants that fled</i>
3	<i>Tuk Naga, the sea serpent</i>	9	<i>The intelligent one</i>
4	<i>A drop of milk</i>	10	<i>The sparrow and the king</i>
5	<i>Awang with the big hands</i>	11	<i>The thieves who were outwitted</i>
6	<i>Cut but not really cut</i>		<i>War in fairyland</i>
7	<i>Honest Awang</i>		Ownership: Malacca
8	<i>KetukungTogel, the bald and tailless one</i>	1	Folktale
9	<i>King Suton's adventure</i>	2	<i>Kindness pays</i>
10	<i>Prince InderaPahlawan</i>	3	<i>The faithful eagle</i>
11	<i>The birds and the princess</i>	4	<i>The two sisters</i>
12	<i>The magic stones</i>	5	<i>Golden rice</i>
13	<i>The monitor lizard and the princess</i>	6	<i>The goldsmith and the blacksmith</i>
14	<i>The rice flowers</i>	7	<i>The obedient son</i>
15	<i>The song of the sandpiper</i>		<i>The red buffaloes</i>
16	<i>The story of PenghuluAlangGagah</i>		Ownership: Sarawak
17	<i>The two merchants and the jungle spirits</i>	1	Folktale
18	<i>The wise young fellow</i>	2	<i>Teloh's magic stone</i>
19	<i>Why the nipah palm tree is low</i>	3	<i>The story of the mouse-deer and other animals who went out fishing</i>
			<i>The tree of life</i>

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	Ownership: Kedah	4	<i>A different scent and colour</i>
	Folktale	5	<i>ApaiSaloi</i>
1	<i>The friendship of the squirrel and the creeping fish</i>	6	<i>How the python got his beautiful skin</i>
2	<i>The green horse</i>	7	<i>Jelenggai</i>
3	<i>The three princesses</i>	8	<i>Revenge</i>
4	<i>Who is wiser</i>	9	<i>The deer horn</i>
5	<i>For a stick of sugar-cane</i>	10	<i>The honest traveller</i>
6	<i>Gedembai</i>	11	<i>The lazy boy</i>
7	<i>Gold and scorpions</i>	12	<i>The lemayung fruit</i>
8	<i>How the woodpecker got its crest</i>	13	<i>The story of Palog Raya, the dim-wit</i>
9	<i>Princess Sadong of the caves, who refused her suitors</i>	14	<i>The story of the mouse-deer, the deer and the pig</i>
10	<i>Princess Sanggul</i>	15	<i>The wind and the sun</i>
11	<i>Sultan Bahadur Syah</i>	16	<i>Transgression of taboo</i>
12	<i>Swallowed by a whale</i>	17	<i>The wicked mousedeer</i>
13	<i>Sweet lime</i>	18	<i>The mousedeer and the tortoise</i>
14	<i>The baby fish</i>	<hr/>	
15	<i>The bird catcher</i>	Ownership: Sabah	
16	<i>The crocodile daughter</i>	Folktale	
17	<i>The curse of the Gedembai</i>	1	<i>Dang Pingai</i>
18	<i>The fish head</i>	2	<i>The bewitched snake</i>
19	<i>The geroda bird</i>	3	<i>The story of Princess RambangRambunut</i>
20	<i>The gold axe</i>	4	<i>Bobolian, the healer</i>
21	<i>The magic swing</i>	5	<i>How the durian got its smell</i>
22	<i>The price of greed</i>	6	<i>Junah and the king of the mosquitoes</i>
23	<i>The shy princess</i>	7	<i>Kinambura</i>
24	<i>The storytelling contest</i>	8	<i>Sampapas</i>
25	<i>The tiger and the shadow</i>	9	<i>The blind and the limp</i>
26	<i>The tiger gets his desserts</i>	10	<i>Si Pugut</i>
<hr/>		11	<i>The bleeding tree</i>
	Ownership: Selangor	12	<i>The cursed crab</i>
	Folktale	13	<i>The elephant trumpet</i>
1	<i>Pickled tiger's eyeballs</i>	14	<i>The story of Awang Semaun</i>
2	<i>The gold fishing rod</i>	15	<i>The story of siKaluni</i>
3	<i>The proud eagle</i>	16	<i>The tale of the two suns</i>
4	<i>A mother and her child</i>	17	<i>The tortoise and the princess</i>
5	<i>Broken promises</i>	<hr/>	
6	<i>Ear-rings</i>	Ownership: Penang	
7	<i>How Pak Tani outwitted the tiger</i>	Folktale	
8	<i>Shamed by his own deed</i>	1	<i>Seasick and landsick</i>
9	<i>The ape's magic pot</i>	2	<i>The kemuni tree</i>
10	<i>The clever son-in-law</i>	3	<i>The mother hen and the eagle</i>
11	<i>The kingsfavourite girl</i>	4	<i>Nuts and eggs</i>
12	<i>The missing gold</i>	5	<i>Pearls from the seven seas</i>
<hr/>		6	<i>The bayanhave escaped</i>
	Ownership: Negeri Sembilan	7	<i>The bull and the buffalo</i>
	Folktale	8	<i>The durian tree and the banana tree</i>
1	<i>Busu, the midget</i>	9	<i>The field of gold</i>
2	<i>The loyal tiger</i>	10	<i>The fierce geroda</i>
3	<i>Why elephants have small eyes</i>	11	<i>The flute player</i>
4	<i>An egg in the morning, a leaf in the evening</i>	12	<i>The foolish flying-ant</i>
5	<i>Breaking a promise</i>	13	<i>The old man and his crippled daughter</i>
6	<i>Bujangterboyoi</i>	14	<i>The rich miser</i>
7	<i>Honesty</i>	15	<i>The tale of Princess JarumEmas</i>
8	<i>Si Kecil, the little one</i>	16	<i>The tarap tree and the pedada fruit</i>
9	<i>Sulung, the naughty boy</i>	17	<i>The water snake and the land snake</i>
10	<i>The faithful sister</i>	18	<i>Waiting for freedom</i>
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#### 4. Discussion

Table-2 shows that the average distribution of the folktales accepted is even. However, there are two extreme distributions of folktale based on the ownership which is National and Malacca. The highest distribution belongs to Malaysia in general while Malacca, the lowest. The national folktales are the ones that were transcribed from the narrator in Malaysia but lack information on any particular state ownership hence labeled as a national folktale. Moreover, some literary sources identified and accepted explicitly claimed that the printed folktales are national folktales and belong to Malaysia in general thus regarded as national folktale too. Nevertheless, the lowest distribution in Malacca does not signify the lack of literary folk literature culture in that particular state. What it does represent is either the minimum number of Malacca's verbal folktales that were transcribed in literary form or the restricted number of identified folktales that met the established qualifying factors.

Meanwhile, Table-3 shows a total of 157 folktales that failed to fulfill both the qualifying factors. Concerning the first factor, the majority of the excluded folktales do not meet the formal features of Place, Attitude, and Belief. The formal feature Place explicitly states that a folktale is not to have a particular place of the event in the body of the folktale itself. However, the mention of a fictional place is acceptable for example the nation of *Chempaka Sari* in the national folktale of *The Unfortunate Pak Kadok*. Furthermore, in the case where the place mentioned in the folktale is fictional but similar to a real place in Malaysia, it must still be excluded. The analysis conducted was based on the apparent meaning that offers a clear, direct, and straightforward interpretation of the folktales. Consequently, a fictional place that bears similarity to the real place in Malaysia cannot be accepted.

Likewise, the folktales identified must also void of any religious or sacred element in its content. To cite an instance, the folktale entitled *God Who is Just* tells the story of a boy who challenges God's fairness to his creations hence not accepted as part of the collection to be classified. For the formal feature Belief, the folktales must be a pure fiction and has never occurred in the far or recent past. In the folktale *Danjai and the Were-Tiger's Sister*, it is clearly stated in its body of narrative that the tale actually occurred in the past (Skeat and Gomez, 2012) thus excluded from the collection as well.

Regarding the second factor which is ownership, it is found that a selection of the folktales that were transcribed and collected have a questionable origin and some are not Malaysian. One of the instances is *The Tune that Makes the Tiger Drowsy* that its source is anonymous whereas there are folktales that were mistakenly declared as Malaysian but, in reality, belongs to another country such as *The Elephant Princess and the Prince* that is owned by Thailand. As a consequence, this kind of folktales was also excluded from being classified.

#### 5. Conclusion

This study proposes to create the Malaysian folktale structural classification system to preserve the Malaysian folktales. Before the structural classification system, however, it is essential to identify and collect the Malaysian folktales because the tales are the vital pieces in creating the classification system. The two qualifying factors have been established to guide the identification process: the operational definition and the ownership of folktale. These qualifying factors promote in confirming

consistency to elude contamination of other folklore's forms and also distinguish folktale of cultural value from the modern fictions. The factors above being focal of this paper, decide the acceptance and exclusion of the Malaysian folktales identified to create the Malaysian folktale classification system for preservation.

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