

THE ART OF CONSTRUCTING THE STRUCTURE AND PLOT OF CLEVER CHARACTER STORY TYPES IN VIETNAMESE DAILY LIFE FOLK TALES

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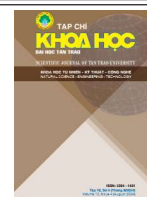
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Abstract:

The childhood of each person is intertwined with the magical world of fairy tales—a spiritual nourishment that has nurtured souls across generations. Each fairy tale is a crystallization of compassion, resilience, and the harmonious blend of reality and dreams. This article draws on theories of structure and plot in literary works, focusing on everyday-life fairy tales and the archetype of the intelligent character to analyze the artistry in constructing narrative structure and plot from two perspectives: (1) The structure of the plot follows four main directions**, each possessing distinctive characteristics and meanings, contributing to highlighting the central character; (2) The art of building conflict** is expressed through techniques such as exaggeration, amplification, and the use of typical motifs, creating an intrinsic appeal and distinct aesthetic value. The symbolic value of the intelligent character archetype in these everyday-life fairy tales goes beyond mere entertainment. It instills optimism and faith in human intellect and resilience. Despite facing adversities, people in the past demonstrated intelligence, love, and respect for human dignity through these stories. This is the core element that shapes the profound cultural and spiritual values of everyday-life fairy tales.



NGHỆ THUẬT XÂY DỰNG KẾT CẤU, CỐT TRUYỆN KIỂU TRUYỆN NHÂN VẬT THÔNG MINH TRONG CỔ TÍCH SINH HOẠT NGƯỜI VIỆT

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Thông tin bài viết	Tóm tắt
<p>Ngày nhận bài: 16/9/2024</p> <p>Ngày sửa bài: 25/10/2024</p> <p>Ngày duyệt đăng: 28/10/2024</p> <p>Từ khóa:</p> <p><i>nghệ thuật, kết cấu, cốt truyện, nhân vật thông minh, cổ tích sinh hoạt</i></p>	<p>Tuổi thơ của mỗi người đều gắn liền với thế giới kỳ diệu của truyện cổ tích - nguồn sữa tinh thần nuôi dưỡng tâm hồn qua nhiều thế hệ. Mỗi câu chuyện cổ tích là sự kết tinh của lòng nhân ái, bản lĩnh kiên cường và sự hòa quyện giữa hiện thực cùng ước mơ. Bài viết dựa trên lí luận về kết cấu, cốt truyện trong tác phẩm văn học, truyện cổ tích sinh hoạt và kiểu nhân vật thông minh để phân tích nghệ thuật xây dựng kết cấu, cốt truyện trên 2 phương diện: (1) Kết cấu cốt truyện có bốn hướng chính, mỗi hướng mang những đặc điểm và ý nghĩa riêng, góp phần làm nổi bật nhân vật trung tâm; (2) Nghệ thuật xây dựng xung đột được thể hiện qua các biện pháp như cường điệu, phóng đại, và sử dụng các mô típ điển hình, tạo nên sức hút và giá trị thẩm mỹ đặc trưng. Giá trị hình tượng của kiểu nhân vật thông minh trong truyện cổ tích sinh hoạt này không chỉ mang tính giải trí mà còn đem lại niềm tin, lạc quan vào trí tuệ và bản lĩnh của con người. Dấu đối mặt với nghịch cảnh, người xưa vẫn thể hiện trí tuệ, lòng yêu thương và sự trân trọng giá trị con người qua các câu chuyện. Đây chính là yếu tố làm nên giá trị văn hóa và tinh thần sâu sắc của truyện cổ tích sinh hoạt.</p>

1. Introduction

Every childhood is intertwined with the magical world of fairy tales—a spiritual source of nourishment for the souls of countless generations. Each story is a crystallization of kindness, resilience, reality, and dreams. Reading fairy tales allows us to reconnect with the spirit of our ancestors and better understand the thoughts and feelings of past generations of laborers (Le Ba Han, 2006).

To this day, many scholars continue to study this enchanting world, with particular emphasis on analyzing the system of characters, such as the “intelligent character” archetype—representing wisdom in everyday life fairy tales. These studies not only deepen our understanding of the thematic value of folk literature but also broaden perspectives on the subgenre of everyday life fairy tales within folklore. Alongside magical fairy tales and animal fairy tales, everyday life fairy tales enrich the treasure trove of Vietnamese and global folk culture and literature. While magical fairy tales captivate with their mystical elements, everyday life fairy tales are relatable and imbued with the realism of daily life.

This article is based on theories of fairy tales, Vietnamese everyday life fairy tales, and the intelligent character archetype. It aims to highlight the unique artistic features in the structure and plot development of the intelligent character archetype, while also contributing a modest voice to affirm the enduring vitality of these “precious gems” in the spiritual heritage of our ancestors.

2. Literature Review

Fairy tales are one of the most distinctive genres of folk literature in the literary traditions of most nations around the world. As such, fairy tales have become a significant topic of interest, attracting the attention and dedication of many researchers.

The study of Vietnamese fairy tales has undergone various stages and produced numerous important works. Among these, the most notable

is “A Preliminary Exploration of Fairy Tale Issues Through the Story of Tam Cam” (1968) by Dinh Gia Khanh, which presented multiple variations of the Tam Cam tale and established that fairy tales possess both international and national characteristics. In 1972, Dinh Gia Khanh and Chu Xuan Dien expanded on this research in the “Textbook on the History of Vietnamese Literature” (Volumes 1 and 2 (Dinh Gia Khanh, 1972)).

In 1974, Nguyen Dong Chi (Chi, 1974), in his monumental work “The Treasury of Vietnamese Fairy Tales”, remarked on the diverse and difficult-to-define nature of the concept of fairy tales. This work collected a wide array of fairy tales and introduced new theoretical issues. Similarly, the “Textbook on Vietnamese Folk Literature” (1978) by authors from the University of Education opened new directions for research on the characteristics and social significance of fairy tales.

In 1989, Chu Xuan Dien, in “Fairy Tales Through the Eyes of Scholars”, summarized various research trends. Do Binh Tri, in “The Poetic Characteristics of Folk Literature Genres” (1999), made significant contributions to the study of poetics, structure, characters, and conflicts in fairy tales.

From the 1990s to the present, research on the subgenre of everyday life fairy tales has flourished. This subgenre features minimal fantastical elements and is closely connected to real-life experiences. Nguyen Dong Chi observed that this subgenre often reflects social conflicts. Hoang Tien Tuu (Tuu, 1998), in “Vietnamese Folk Literature” (1990), clarified the boundary between magical and everyday life fairy tales, asserting that the latter reflects life’s conflicts through realistic logic.

The studies of Nguyen Thi Huong and Nguyen Thi Thu Oanh have further illuminated this subgenre. Nguyễn Thi Huong analyzed types of endings in everyday life fairy tales, identifying two categories: happy and unhappy endings.

Nguyen Thi Thu Oanh categorized character types into virtuous, intelligent, cunning, and naïve archetypes.

The works of scholars such as Dinh Gia Khanh, Chu Xuan Dien, Nguyen Dong Chi, and subsequent researchers have enriched the understanding of fairy tales, particularly the everyday life subgenre (1975), (Thu, 1979), (Literature, 1999), (Pham Thu Yen (Editor), 2002),... The integration of new theories and folkloric research methods has clarified many issues and opened new directions for study, contributing to the preservation and promotion of national cultural values.

From this overview, it is evident that while these scholarly works are valuable, most remain at a general level, with few studies delving into detailed and specific analyses.

3. Methods

To conduct this research, we employed the following methods:

- Theoretical Research Method: This method was used to study theories on fairy tales, the subgenre of everyday life fairy tales, and the intelligent character archetype, forming the theoretical foundation for the study.

- Statistical and Classification Method: This approach involved categorizing and analyzing the structure and composition of the intelligent character archetype in 35 Vietnamese everyday life fairy tales.

- Analytical Method: Based on the classification results, we analyzed the distinctive artistic features in the construction of structure and plot within the intelligent character archetype in everyday life fairy tales.

4. Results

4.1. Concept of Structure and Plot

To date, many researchers have provided definitions of structure and plot. However, within the scope of this thesis, we have chosen to use the definition provided by the authors Le

Ba Han, Tran Dinh Su, and Nguyen Khac Phi in the book *Literary Terminology Dictionary* (Vietnam Education Publishing House, 2006) as the theoretical basis to develop the thesis content:

- **Structure:** It is “the entire complex and dynamic organization of a work.”

The authors also emphasize that structure differs from composition. “The term composition refers to the arrangement and distribution of chapters and parts of the work in a certain order”.

The term structure “represents a broader and more complex content. The organization of the work is not limited to the surface continuity or the external relationships between parts and chapters, but also encompasses the internal connections, the artistic architecture of the work’s specific content. Composition is one aspect of structure. In addition to composition, structure also includes: the organization of character systems, the organization of time and space in the work; the art of organizing specific connections between plot elements, the art of presenting, arranging elements outside the plot... so that the entire work truly becomes a unified artistic whole.” (Le Ba Han, 2006),p. 156 - 157].

Every literary work possesses a specific structure. Structure serves as an essential and fundamental tool for artistic generalization. It fulfills a wide range of functions: effectively conveying the themes and ideas of a work, presenting and developing the plot in an engaging manner, organizing characters into a coherent system, structuring the narrative perspective of the author, and creating the unity of the work as an aesthetic phenomenon.

While technical elements and artistic techniques are finite, structure is infinite, as each literary work is a “living entity”, a “living organism”. Therefore, the structure of a work is an architecture and an organization tailored to the specific content of that work. Structure reflects the author’s perception, talent, and unique style.

- **Plot:** Defined as “a system of concrete events organized according to specific ideological and artistic requirements, forming the most fundamental and crucial component of the dynamic form of a narrative or dramatic literary work” [(Le Ba Han, 2006); p. 99].

A plot can reveal two organically interconnected aspects: on one hand, the plot is a means of exposing the characters. Through the plot, the writer demonstrates the interaction between the various character traits. On the other hand, “the plot is also a tool for the writer to recreate social conflicts. The plot not only helps to effectively reveal the distinctive features of each character and organizes the character system well, but also presents a system of events that accurately reflects social conflicts, with the power to attract and engage the reader” [(Le Ba Han, 2006); 100].

4.2. Structure, plot, and other artistic aspects

4.2.1. Structure and Plot of the Intelligent Character Archetype in the Subgenre of Everyday Life Fairy Tales in Vietnamese Folklore

a. Concept of Structure and Plot

According to Le Ba Han, Tran Dinh Su, and Nguyen Khac Phi (Le Ba Han, 2006)), structure is defined as “the entirety of the complex and dynamic organization of a literary work”. It is distinct from the term *composition*, which refers to the arrangement and distribution of chapters and sections in a specific sequence. Structure encompasses broader elements, including the organization of character systems, artistic time and space, and extra-plot elements, forming the artistic unity of a work. It extends beyond external relationships to include internal connections and the artistic architecture of the work’s content. This makes structure an essential aspect of creating a cohesive and meaningful artistic whole.

The structure of each literary work is unique, reflecting the author’s style, talent, and perception, while also serving as a tool to generalize themes and ideas. The plot, as a fundamental part of the structure, is defined as “a system of concrete

events organized according to specific ideological and artistic requirements”. The plot illustrates the interaction between characters and portrays social conflicts. Through the plot, the writer not only reveals character traits but also reflects societal conflicts and events, thereby engaging and captivating readers.

b. The Structural Model of the Intelligent Character Story Type

The structure of the intelligent character story type in the subgenre of everyday life fairy tales is formed by the structural patterns of groups of stories featuring intelligent characters. Based on an overview of the structural model of each story within these groups, we have identified representative structural models, which collectively form the general structural framework of the intelligent character story type in this subgenre.

□ 2.1. Group of Stories Featuring the Intelligent Character Solving Riddles

To facilitate the modeling process using diagrams, the steps in the model are conventionally numbered as follows:

- (1) Introduction: (1a): The intelligent character appears directly; (1b): The intelligent character appears indirectly.
- (2) Development: The process of overcoming challenges: (2a): The riddles posed by the challenger; (2b): The intelligent character poses riddles in return; (2c): The intelligent character solves the riddle.
- (3) Conclusion of the story.

This group of intelligent character stories is featured in five works: The Intelligent Child, The Legend of the Sixty-Week Offering, The Orphan’s Mission, The Hien first doctoral candidate (Trạng Hiền), and The Termite as Witness.

Example: The Story “The Intelligent Child”

The structure of the story *The Intelligent Child* can be summarized as follows:

(1b) → (2a) → (2b) → (2c) → (3)

What stands out in this model is that the intelligent character not only answers the riddles but also poses riddles multiple times. There are four instances where riddles appear, which is a key feature in the process of studying the group of intelligent characters who solve riddles. This demonstrates that the act of the intelligent character posing a riddle in return is an action that proves their proactivity and intellectual strength in the face of challenges.

Example: The Story *The Orphan's Mission*

The structure of *The Orphan's Mission* can be outlined as:

(1a) → (2a) → (2c) → (3)

A distinctive aspect of this story is that while the intelligent character participates in solving riddles, the format does not strictly involve traditional riddles. Instead, it consists of answering challenging questions posed by a neighboring king. We regard these as a special form of riddles, so the character of the Orphan is still categorized under the group of intelligent characters solving riddles. The Orphan answers two of the neighboring king's questions.

Based on the structural models of each individual story, we deduce the common structure for the group of stories featuring intelligent characters solving riddles as follows:

(1) → (2) → (3)

The introduction of the plot involves the appearance of the intelligent character, who may be introduced directly or indirectly. The development of the plot consists of the process through which the intelligent character overcomes challenges posed by the challengers. The conclusion of the plot is the recognition of the character's intellect, followed by a reward.

The primary difference between these specific structural models lies in the way the story begins (either (1a) or (1b)) and the number of riddles answered by the intelligent character. For the five specific structural models, there are:

- Two stories where the intelligent character answers only one riddle (*The Termite as witness and the legend of the sixty-week offering*).
- One story where the intelligent character answers four riddles (*The Intelligent Child*).
- One story where the intelligent character answers three riddles (The Hien first doctoral candidate).
- One story where the intelligent character answers two riddles.

Additionally, there is a unique case in the model of *The Intelligent Child*, where the child is both the one being challenged and the one issuing challenges. This dual role emphasizes the belief in the intellectual capabilities of young people, reflecting the confidence that the common people once had in the intelligence of youth.

Group of stories: Intelligent characters participating in marriage selection

Similar to the previous group, the following model outlines each unit in the structure:

- (1): Introduction; (1a): Announcement of marriage selection; (1b): Appearance of the intelligent character.
- (2): Plot Development: (2a): Challenge participants; (2a1): Future father-in-law; (2a2): The wife; (2a3): The girl; (2b): Content of the challenge; (2c): The intelligent character faces the challenge
- (3): Conclusion of the story.

This group of stories featuring intelligent characters participating in marriage selection includes 7 stories: *You had to marry because of a dead man, while I had to marry because of a pair of ceramic crocodiles* (Dì phải thắng chết trôi, tôi phải đôi sáu sành), *Marriage selection* (Kén rể), *The Son-in-Law is the one with knowledge* (Chàng rể hay chữ), *Angry with You, who will I live with?* (Giận mày tao ở với ai), *Make the Princess speak* (làm cho công chúa nói được), *Hanging pictures to select a husband* (treo tranh kén chồng), *Miss Chin* (Cô Chín).

Example 1: *You had to marry because of a dead man, while I had to marry because of a pair of ceramic crocodiles*

The structure of *You had to marry because of a dead man, while I had to marry because of a pair of ceramic crocodiles* is as follows:

(1b) → (2a1) → (2b) → (2c) → (2a2) → (2b) → (2c) → (3)

In this case:

- (2b): The intelligent character uses tricks to deceive both the future father-in-law and the wife to achieve the goal of marrying the woman.
- (2a1): The challenge is not presented directly but through a trick where the future father-in-law is deceived.
- (2a2): The wife is the main character who presents a challenge to the intelligent character.
- The intelligent character faces the challenge once in this story.

Example 2: *Hanging pictures to select a husband* (2005)

The structure of *Hanging pictures to select a husband* is as follows:

(1a), (1b) → (2a3) → (2b) → (2c) → (3)

In this case:

- (2b): The intelligent character must deceive the girl.
- The intelligent character faces the challenge once in this story.

Example 3: *Miss Chin*

The structure of *Miss Chin* is as follows:

(1a), (1b) → (2a1) → (2b) → (2c) → (3).

In this case:

- (2b): The intelligent character never mentions the girl's name, "Chin", as part of the challenge.
- The intelligent character faces the challenge once in this story.

From these specific examples, we derive the following common model for the group of stories featuring intelligent characters participating in marriage selection:

(1) → (2a1) → (2b) → (2c) → (3)

The plot begins with the announcement of the marriage selection by the future father-in-law and the appearance of the intelligent character. The plot develops as the intelligent character faces and overcomes various challenges, leading to the final conclusion where the intelligent character successfully marries the woman.

The number of challenges faced by the intelligent character varies across the stories: 4 stories feature 1 challenge; 1 story has 6 challenges; 1 story has 4 challenges; 1 story has 2 challenges.

This variation demonstrates the flexibility and adaptability of the intelligent character as they face different situations and challenges, which reflects the broader theme of human resilience and cleverness in overcoming life's difficulties.

The Group of Stories with Intelligent Characters Handling Legal Cases

Similar to the previous structure, we define the units in the plot structure model as follows:

- (1): Introduction with a problematic situation.
- (2): Development: The intelligent character resolves the problematic situation.
- (3): Conclusion of the story.

The general model is as follows: (1) -> (2) -> (3).

In this group of stories, all 8 stories share the same specific model. The uniqueness of each individual model lies in the problematic situations.

Among these structural models, only one model features the intelligent character solving three problematic situations in a single story, which is the story "The Clever Judgment". All other stories have the intelligent character solving only one problematic situation to overcome the challenge.

The Group of Other Intelligent Character Stories

The group of other intelligent characters is the largest group, consisting of 15 works, and it also includes the most diverse characters. Therefore, it is difficult to create a unified model for all the

stories. However, we still attempt to establish a relatively general model. I define the following:

- (1): Introduction: (1a) Problematic situation; (1b) Direct appearance of the character
- (2): Development: (2a) The challenge; (2b) The intelligent character undertakes the challenge
- (3): Conclusion of the story

“The group of stories includes the following works: *The girl who deceived the monk, the village head, and the district magistrate* (Cô gái lừa thầy sãi, xã trưởng và ông quan huyện); *The clever wife and the foolish husband* (Con vợ khôn lấy thằng chồng dại); *The Rich man and the seller of shoes* (Lão nhà giàu và anh bán giày); *Chicken meat to poison the husband* (Thịt gà thuốc chồng); *Lying like Cuội* (Nói dối như Cuội); *Old swindler trapped or cunning woman* (Bọm già mắc bẫy hay mưu trí đàn bà); *The Blind son-in-law* (Chàng rệu thông manh); *The teacher saves the student* (Thầy cứu học trò); *The Unwilling doctor* (Thầy lang bắt đắc dĩ); *The Thief magistrate* (Quan ăn trộm); *Peacock spring rolls, phoenix meatloaf, and dragon whiskers* (Nem công chả phượng râu rồng); *The Thief teaches his student* (Kẻ trộm dạy học trò); *The Good girl teaching her husband* (Gái ngoan dạy chồng); *The Luong woman* (Con mụ Luông); *The talking dog* (Con chó biết nói); *The servant and the thief* (Người đầy tớ và người ăn trộm).

Example 4: The story *The girl who deceived the monk, the village head, and the district magistrate*:

(1b) -> (2a) -> (2b) -> (3)

Where (2b): is the intelligent character deceiving the challenge, with one challenge attempted.

Example: The story “The Thief Teaching His Student”:

(1a) -> (2a) -> (2b) -> (3)

Where (2b): is the intelligent character stealing, with two challenges attempted.

From these specific models, we derive the general model as follows:

(1) -> (2a)(2b) -> (3)

The introduction of the story takes one of two directions: either a problematic situation or the direct appearance of the intelligent character. The development is the process of the intelligent character undertaking the challenge.

In the development of the plot, the number of times the intelligent character overcomes the challenge varies, just like the structure of the story. This is evidenced by: 6 models where the intelligent character faces the challenge once; 5 models where the intelligent character faces the challenge twice; 1 model where the intelligent character faces the challenge five times; and 2 models where the intelligent character faces the challenge three times.

Thus, the structural model of the intelligent character narrative usually follows four basic development directions, as outlined in our model above. For each type of structure, I have analyzed how the story begins.

1. Intelligent Character -> Riddle -> Solve the Riddle -> Enjoy Happiness

The first direction typically begins with a situation where messengers seek out talented individuals through riddles or a family facing difficult circumstances. The intelligent character participates in answering the riddle. As a result, the character is recognized for their talent and either receives recognition or enjoys a comfortable life. Examples of stories include: *Em bé thông minh* (The Clever Child), *Trạng Hiền* (Scholar Hien), *Mồ Côi đi sứ* (The Orphan on a Diplomatic Mission); *Con mối làm chứng* (The Termite as a Witness),...

2. Future Father-in-Law -> Challenge for the Intelligent Character -> Overcome the Challenge -> Marry the Girl

The beginning of this second structural type always involves the event where future fathers-in-law announce their search for a husband for their daughters.

In the past, there was a rich man who prided himself on his patience, unmatched by others. The rich man had a beautiful daughter. When his daughter reached marriageable age, the rich man posted a notice saying that anyone who could make him angry or upset would immediately marry his daughter. But if no one could achieve this within a month, they would be beaten one hundred lashes and sent away (Angry with You, Who Will I Live With?).

This way of opening is not unfamiliar in fairy tales in general. In the marriage announcements made by future fathers-in-law, there are usually three parts: the first introduces a beautiful and virtuous daughter; the second announces the search for a husband; and the third outlines the conditions for the marriage. This is a common opening for stories with a marriage theme in fairy tales. The uniqueness in the “marriage selection” story within the folk tale genre is found in the conditions for the marriage. While the conditions in fairy tales with magical elements often involve challenges requiring magical gifts, such as “nine-tusked elephants, nine-clawed chickens, and nine-maned horses” in everyday folk tales, the conditions for marriage are quite ordinary. The fathers-in-law here do not require sons-in-law who can ‘call the rain and command the wind,’ but rather those who are “well-read”, strong, clever, and persistent... These are all virtues and tasks essential for daily life. Thus, the conditions for marriage stem from practical requirements. This is a specific feature of folk tales involving intelligent characters.

A relatively common direction is the story of an intelligent character who uses clever actions and tricks to participate in the marriage search. Initially, the intelligent character faces challenges set by the future fathers-in-law. Later, the intelligent character actively finds ways to “trick” the future father-in-law. Ultimately, the intelligent character wins the bride. This storyline includes 7 stories (which we have listed above).

In most cases, the intelligent character must undergo two steps of challenge. The first step is when the future fathers-in-law present a challenge to the intelligent character to prove they are worthy of marrying their daughters. The second step comes after the marriage, where the intelligent character continues to face new challenges. After overcoming these two steps, the intelligent character will live happily ever after. Among the stories we have surveyed, 2 out of 7 feature characters who must overcome both challenges set by their future fathers-in-law. For example, in the story *The Literate Son-in-law* (*Chàng Rể Hay Chữ*), the intelligent character must first prove his “literacy” to his future father-in-law. He easily passes this challenge using the trick of soaking the book and playing with words. After marrying the daughter, the son-in-law faces another challenge of writing a funeral eulogy, tricking the ancestors to acknowledge that the wife has violated the ‘moral code’ by surpassing her husband in writing the eulogy. Thanks to this clever trick, the intelligent character never has to deal with books again, meaning the truth about the “Literate son-in-law” remains hidden from the wealthy man and his daughter. In such cases, if the intelligent character did not use trickery, the truth would eventually come to light, and the story would not have a happy ending.

In the remaining stories, the intelligent character only needs to overcome one challenge to reach marital happiness. However, whether facing one or two challenges, the intelligent character must still overcome at least one trial to grasp happiness. This reflects the complex difficulties of daily life and also serves to inspire people to dream and cherish the value of happiness.

3. *Problematic Situation -> Intelligent Character Appears -> Solves the Problem -> People's Happiness*

The stories in this type of structure often begin with a problematic situation, creating conflict and arousing the curiosity of the audience. These situations are typically constructed through

conflicts arising from human greed, jealousy, and promiscuity.

For example [5], in *Chicken Meat to Poison the Husband*, the conflict arises from a sudden dead body appearing in Hoa's yard. The story begins with a married couple in conflict: the wife is greedy, unfaithful, and plans to kill her husband. The husband discovers the plot and pretends to be a divine being, causing his wife to believe in him and kill her lover. The body is then moved to Hoa's house, carrying the jealousy and selfishness of humans.

Similarly, in *Old swindler trapped or cunning woman* the problematic situation begins with a conflict over greed and trickery, leading to a confrontation and developing the main story.

These problematic situations in this structure not only appear in stories where the intelligent character uses tricks to resolve them but also in other types of tales. Notably, the intelligent characters in these stories are often female, such as the girl in *Chicken Meat to Poison the Husband* and the wife in "*Old swindler trapped or cunning woman*".

By constructing conflicts and contradictions in such a way, the folk authors have made the stories more captivating, engaging, and stimulating the imagination of listeners. Beginning with a problematic situation not only highlights the essence of the story but also reflects the creativity in the storytelling art of ancient times.

4. Intelligent Character -> Challenge -> Overcoming the Challenge -> Happy Ending

Intelligent characters in Vietnamese folk tales are very diverse: they can be thieves, widows, wives, scholars, etc. However, the common point is that they all use clever tricks to regain happiness, both spiritual and material.

This structural type has various ways of beginning, such as directly introducing the intelligent character or creating a problematic situation. For example, in *The girl who deceived the monk, the village head, and the district*

magistrate, the intelligent character is introduced directly. In *The talking dog* the intelligent character is introduced after describing the greedy old house owner, and in *Chicken meat to poison the husband*, the story begins with a problematic situation involving a dead body in Hoa's yard.

These stories typically start briefly, either directly or indirectly through problematic situations. Moreover, the general nature of these stories is made clear with phrases like "Once upon a time..." or "In a certain village...". Most characters do not have specific names but are referred to by general characteristics, such as "the groom," "The district magistrate," or "The clever boy."

The chain structure is a notable feature of this type of story. However, these are not random anecdotes; the events follow a logical and orderly sequence to highlight the meaning and main story. The endings of these stories are always happy, reflecting the people's desire for intelligence and justice.

The intelligent character not only finds happiness for themselves, such as marrying the girl in the "bride selection" stories, but also brings happiness to the community through actions of fairness and righteousness, such as a judge restoring justice for the people.

4.2.2. The Art of Creating Story Conflicts

a. Exaggeration and Amplification

Through research, it is evident that folk authors have created conflict in stories through the exaggeration and amplification of actions, turning ordinary events into clever and ingenious acts that are captivating. This reflects the hopes and beliefs of the common people in the past regarding intellect and creative abilities in life.

In the folk tales of Vietnam, the stories of intelligent characters focus on social conflict, where these characters face off against the ruling classes such as landlords, officials, and kings. These are not characters with magical powers, but rather individuals who rely on intellect, experience,

and quick thinking. The stories highlight the role of intelligence in life and the ability to adapt to challenges.

Intelligent characters are often depicted as quick-witted, articulate, and logical. They use their intellect and clever words to resolve conflicts, leading to happy endings. For example, the clever boy in *The clever child* is not afraid to enter the dragon's den to save the village and uses his intellect to gain recognition and help the country. Similarly, characters like Hiên in *Scholar Hien* and other clever characters also bring joy and happiness to those around them through their intellect and quick responses.

The conflicts in stories about young intelligent characters solving riddles are often social conflicts between common people and the rulers, such as the king, officials, or the ruling class in general. However, these are not life-or-death struggles. By building young, clever characters who can respond quickly, folk authors demonstrate the importance of intellect, particularly the cleverness required to bring happiness to people's lives.

Intelligent characters in folk tales are often depicted as honest, wise officials who embody the people's aspirations for justice and fairness. Although these stories do not use magical elements, they still captivate readers with their illogical logic. The talents and intellect of the clever characters allow them to find solutions, even when there are no clear clues. For instance, in *Wise Judgment* (Phân xử tài tình), the cases are resolved through the ability to observe, reason, and understand human psychology.

The conflicts in stories about intelligent characters often revolve around social issues like right vs. wrong, rich vs. poor, and oppression vs. the oppressed. In the "bride selection" motif, the clever poor boy often faces conflict with the greedy father-in-law through harsh marriage conditions. For example, in *Miss Chin*, many young men work for free because they fail to meet the father-in-law's stringent marriage conditions. The humor

and intelligence in the trickery of the suitors create the charm of these stories.

Intelligent characters are not passive; they actively reason and take action in the face of challenges. They not only overcome difficulties for themselves but also bring happiness and justice to others. For instance, through their cleverness, they help the poor find joy or restore justice in wrongful circumstances. Intelligent characters are like "fairy godparents" in fairy tales, bringing miracles to life through their intellect and adaptability.

b. Typical Motifs

Motifs and the system of motifs in fairy tales play an important role in reflecting the ideology, character structure, and social conditions of each historical period. Analyzing the motif of intelligence in folk tales shows that they follow a principle of challenges, turning points, and reflect the thinking of different nations. Dinh Gia Khanh commented that the national identity in fairy tales is often expressed through the content of social struggle.

V. Ia. Propp, in his study of the structure of fairy tales through a historical method, determined that fairy tales are made up of character functions and motifs, where the form is stable and the plot changes flexibly. He identified seven types of characters and their corresponding actions.

The motif of challenges in fairy tales is often expressed through difficult situations, exploring the character's personality and fate. Folk tales do not use magical powers but rely on intelligence and clever tricks. For example, in the story *Old swindler trapped or cunning woman*, the clever wife deceives the greedy thief to retrieve the property, demonstrating human ingenuity and flexibility in life.

In animal fairy tales, the intelligent animals, often small, use clever tricks to outwit the stronger ones. The image of the rabbit is a typical representative, demonstrating agility, cleverness,

and calmness in dangerous situations, reflecting intelligence and optimism. These stories not only entertain but also convey life lessons and humane messages through the personification of animals.

Thus, the motif of trickery in the folk tales of Vietnam shares similarities with the motif of trickery in animal fairy tales. In both types of stories, the motif of trickery is central, showcasing the cleverness and agility of intelligent characters. Whether the clever character is human or an animal, life requires wit and resourcefulness. On the other hand, by constructing the motif of trickery in stories about intelligent characters, folk authors wanted to convey their dreams of human adaptability and flexibility in the face of life's difficulties and challenges. The saying *without trickery, one cannot succeed* (không mẹo trèo xuong) is a testament to the importance of intelligence in every person.

5. Conclusion

The genre of stories featuring intelligent characters in Vietnamese folk tales is noteworthy in several aspects. Firstly, the structure of the plot is organized in four main directions, each illustrating distinct features and meanings that highlight the character's traits. Additionally, the art of creating conflict is presented through techniques such as exaggeration, amplification, and typical motifs, which enhance the story's appeal and aesthetic value. This type of story not only entertains but also instills confidence and optimism in readers about the intellectual abilities of people. Despite living in difficult circumstances, the common people in the past demonstrated qualities of intellect, love, and respect for humanity through these stories. This contributes to the deep cultural and spiritual values embedded in folk tales.

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