

Evaluating the Authority...

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Evaluating the Authority, Educating Youngsters: Reconstructing ‘Goa Mampu’, an Indonesian Folktale

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Abstract—Folktales are stories deliberately written to educate young generation of a nation to be appropriate individual. Having such an important role, not all folktales are entirely suitable to carry that mission today. Many folktales still contain teachings that promote gender, race or age bias, murder, illogical taboo, unfair punishment, arrogance of authority, belittling subordinates, and even teachings that promote revenge. These are inappropriate materials to be used as education tools for youngsters. A folktale reconstruction is necessary for such kind of folktales.

An Indonesian folktale titled *Goa Mampu*, and its reconstruction version, are discussed in this paper. Both versions of folktales are closely analyzed on the values and teachings they offer to transmit to the young generation of Indonesia, especially on the issue power dominant by the authority. The theme of power dominance, arrogance of authority figure, and how they impact the young generation that is central in both folktales is evaluated. It is proven that the reconstruction version of the tale is a healthier version to educate younger generation on a more humble and serving authority figure.

Index Terms— folktales, education, folktale reconstruction.

I. INTRODUCTION

Children stories are not as neutral as what people think. Stories for children are heavily loaded with agendas. They are not only aimed at entertaining children, but more importantly, children stories are aimed at educating children to be expected human beings. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5].

Stories for children are written with the main intention to instruct children rather than to please them. Therefore, Citraningtyas, Tangkilisan, and Pramono [4] re-defined Horace’s long-standing definition of literature ‘dulce et utile’. Citraningtyas *et al.* [4] stated that children stories are more appropriately defined as ‘utile et dulce’, for children stories are purposely written to teach children first, and only then to amuse them.

Folktales are known as a genre of children literature that contain the strongest edifying component. Zipes [1] indicated that folktales are purposely formulated to educate children. It is therefore unsurprising that folktales are used to hand down values, to nurture them, and to ‘shape’ nations [6] [2]. Folktales act as cultural transmitters [7], they pass down the so-called cultural heritage. Through its firm structure, folktales have

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become a convenient vehicle to pass on desired teachings to young generations.

Having such an important role in the education of a nation’s young generation, has positioned folktales as important texts in education. Being an important text, folktales need to evolve with civilisation. Folktales need to be transformed, adjusted and adapted in order to be relevant to society. Values that used to be regarded as important in the past, may not be important anymore and even irrelevant in today’s society. It is in fact critical to always assess the values embedded in folktales to assure that they are attuned with the present development. In some cultures including Indonesia, unfortunately, there is a strong tendency to keep folktales preserved and unchanged.

This paper discusses the inappropriate teachings that might be transmitted to Indonesian child readers through a long-standing Indonesian folktale, ‘Goa Mampu’. It will then show how a reconstructed version of the tale titled ‘Raja Mampu yang Bijaksana’ (‘The Wise King of Mampu’) will provide more positive teachings to young readers, the nation’s future generation.

II. INDONESIAN FOLKTALES

As a country that is so diverse in culture, race and language, Indonesia is rich of folktales. There are hundreds of folktales found from Sabang-the west tip of Indonesia, to Merauke-the east tip of Indonesia. Despite the importance of folktales in handing down and nurturing values from generations, and in shaping the character of a nation’s young generation, Indonesian children have grown up with many disturbing folktales [8].

Indonesia has many folktales that end in disturbing fashion. Many of them end in catastrophe, calamity, curses, and other negative endings. Citraningtyas [5] [9] listed at least 15 Indonesian folktales that end in cursing, where a protagonist is cursed into a lifeless object. The majority of these tales are about punishment from an authority figure: a father, a mother, a king, a leader to their subordinate – the powerful to the powerless. The powerless are punished, cursed, and transformed to be a stone, a mountain, an island, a dragon, and other lifeless or meaningless objects.

Scholars affirm that in comparison to other forms of literature, folktales are implanted so deeply in our hearts, remain there until our adulthood. Without many of us

realising, they have become energy that guides us to be desired member of society.

Folktales also have more impact on the moral and psychological development of readers. Röhrich [10] declares that folktales are one of the first literary forms with which people come into contact in their lives, and remain one of the deepest and most enduring childhood impressions for most. Robbins [11] contrasts folktales with regular children story, and claims that folktales go further by reaching into a child's subconscious. Folktales seem as if they are expressing our desires because we have taken up their standards since childhood. Thus their legitimacy may continue to be unquestioned (p. 101). Citraningtyas [3] also found that students remember folktales more than any other children stories. At the end of a 16 week Children Literature course, students were asked to quickly mention two children stories they knew. Fifty out of sixty stories mentioned were folktales. This result reaffirmed other scholars' findings that folktales stay longer in people's mind than any other genres of children stories.

Though rich in folktales, Indonesia's many negative folktales have become alarming, especially when the tales are aimed at forming a national identity for future generation. Such folktales that end with curses, insults, harshness, calamitous punishment, and other negative aura may restraint Indonesian young people and hinder them from advancing. Cursing a subordinate to be a lifeless object may prevent children from developing. Rather than being productive, children who receive such teachings may be constrained from being valuable and productive – such a great loss for a nation.

These kinds of folktales need to be rewritten, to be reconstructed.

III. FOLKTALE RECONSTRUCTION

If folktales are believed to educate children, to nurture noble values, to form a national identity, a serious question should be posed. Are folktales that feature destructive punishment still relevant to today's readers? Are folktales that feature arrogant leaders still appropriate? Are these the values that we wish to transmit to the young generation? Such folktales must be rewritten and reconstructed for the betterment of human capital. The changes made should be more in line with the demands of positive modern values.

What is and how story reconstruction works? The base word for the English word reconstruction is 'reconstruct'. According to Merriam-Webster dictionary [12] to reconstruct means to establish, to form, to assemble again, or to reassemble.

Something is reconstructed because there is a need to make it better or stronger. A building, for example, is reconstructed to revamp its looks and strengthen its structure. To correct certain defect in the body, a physical reconstruction is needed. If applied to a folktale, reconstruction will mean to assemble again an available folktale with the purpose of making it better. The parts that are outdated and not usable anymore are changed with a new, better and stronger part [13].

If applied to folktales, reconstruction means to rewrite an

existing folktale with the aim to correct errors and fix parts that are not constructive, or change values that are not anymore suitable to today's readers. This is in line with what Bradkūnas [14] promotes that folktales are not dead and stagnant "Tales, just as plants, adapt to a certain environment through natural selection and thus differ somewhat from other members of the same species".

Folktale reconstruction is common in many cultures. Citraningtyas [12] noted how folk and fairy tales have gone through changes, rewriting and reconstruction throughout centuries. The well-known Cinderella tale, for example, has gone through a long history of changes. The 1867 Brothers Grimm version featured the violent scenes, and end with the stepsisters being blinded for the rest of their lives. This is very different from the later version where the Cinderella invites the stepsisters to live with her, and matched them with great lords of the court. In the 2015 Disney version, Cinderella even goes further to utter forgiveness to the stepmother who was wicked to her. The Little Mermaid and the Little Red Riding Hood tales also went through a number of changes from time to time.

As civilisation advances, as values changes, the tales adapt with the changes. The new adaptation is somehow more positive as it features less violence, promote forgiveness, and end happily. Citraningtyas [8] who conducted a research on the effect of folktales on child readers' self-efficacy also confirmed how a tale reconstructed to be more positive will result in positive effects.

IV. 'GOA MAMPU', THE TRADITIONAL TALE

'Goa Mampu' is a traditional folktale, originally from Bone in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. It is a story around the formation of a large cave in the area, called as 'Goa Mampu', or the Cave of Mampu. The Indonesian word of 'mampu' itself literally means being able to, or it can also mean being economically well-off or being wealthy.

The folktale is well known among Indonesians, especially the South Sulawesi people. It is often used as a companion story or story attached to tourism to 'Goa Mampu'. Goa Mampu is a 2000 meter square cave located around 210km away from the capital of South Sulawesi, Makassar. Being the largest cave, Goa Mampu is one important tourist destination in the area [15].

According to the local village head, M. Yasin, the cave was formed due to a king's curse. Long ago, there was a well-known king from the Kingdom of Mampu, a very prosperous kingdom. The King had one daughter who was very skillful in weaving. One day, as the princess weaved, she accidentally dropped her weaving tool under the house. So the King announced that whoever could retrieve the weaving tool could marry the princess. Suddenly a dog appeared with the weaving loom in his mouth. The King was very angry. He did not want his daughter to marry a dog. Everyone was so afraid seeing the cross King. So angry was the King that he pronounced a curse. He cursed that the whole kingdom became stone. People screamed in fear, but everything was too late. When a king had pronounced a curse, no one could say otherwise. So the whole kingdom of Mampu turned into stone [16].

Today the folktale is still looming among the locals. It is also told and retold by tourist guides and locals to the tourists and

visitors to the cave. This folktale carries a strong edifying agenda to society, especially children. As an education tool for children, however, there are elements in this folktale that need to be evaluated.

The 'Goa Mampu' folktale needs to be rewritten and reconstructed for a number of reasons. This folktale teaches superiors and leaders to be autocratic and undemocratic. As an authority figure, the King of Mampu positions himself in the highest rank. He exercises power as the one and only supreme who is untouchable by any human laws and customs. He also assumes a position that does not need to listen to other people. He believes that he could do anything to his people, including cursing them to be stone even for something that is not their fault. The king punished his whole kingdom because he was angered by what happened that was out of his expectation. Something that the king himself had promised to do, but could not be fulfilled. In other words, the king punished the whole kingdom for his own fault for not being able to fulfill his own promise. This is not an appropriate value to pass on to the young generation. It teaches the young generation that a superior can do and say as the please, even if they are at wrong. Children may grow with a spirit of arrogant and unforgiving authority figure, and exercise the same value once they reach the position as superior. This is an unhealthy cycle for society.

The folktale also teaches the young generation that authority figure does not have to be responsible to what they do and say. The king is enraged by what seems to be his own fault, because he has promised something irrational. In doing so, he does not have to be responsible for what he has irrationally promised. Rather than being responsible, he feels that he has the power to punish his inferior for his fault. He cursed the whole kingdom to be stone, gets away with it, and abandoned the stone kingdom. People (children and parents) may interpret that it is normal and legitimate for an authoritative figure to punish the subordinate, even if the subordinate does not do any mistakes. This is a poor role model for youngsters on how a leader should be.

The whole kingdom ended being stone. A stone is a cold, dead, and unproductive element. The whole kingdom became stone, even the people. They are not able to do any action, nor speak any words. They are dead, they are useless, they are unproductive. Their civilisation ended there. They are extinct under the curse of their own king. And their extinction serves as a constant reminder for others from one generation to the next, as they become stone monument, visited by many sightseers. This ending is destructive for the nation's young generation. It kills them, enchains them and prevents them from being productive.

With all these negative effects that may result from 'Goa Mampu' folktale, it is thus important to reconstruct the tale. Reconstructing the folktale will be more advantageous for the country's future generation.

V. 'RAJA MAMPU' THE RECONSTRUCTED FOLKTALE

'Raja Mampu yang Bijaksana' or 'The Wise King of Mampu' is the reconstructed version of the 'Goa Mampu' folktale. It is a tale about a King of a prosperous Kingdom of Mampu. The

same as in the 'Goa Mampu' tale, the King had a daughter who was skilful in weaving. One day, she happened to drop her weaving loom. The King announced that whoever could retrieve the loom could marry her, and the dog appeared with the weaving loom. So furious was the King that he cursed the whole kingdom to be stone. The whole kingdom – except the royal family and the dog – slowly turned to be stone. As the process took place, the princess begged the King to cancel the curse. She said that she was willing to sacrifice herself so that the villagers were freed from the curse. The King was moved but he was ashamed to retract his words. To him, his words were a decree that cannot be cancelled. But the dog, who turned out to be an incarnation of a god, said that there was still a chance only if the King apologized and weaved fabrics to blanket the villagers. After a long inner battle with himself, the King agreed. In the end he apologized and weaved fabrics, helped by the Princess and the dog. As the sun rose the next morning, the King had rescued the whole kingdom using fabrics he weaved himself. The people were so thankful to the King. Together they rebuilt the kingdom, not far from the stone cave. The king, the princess, the queen, the dog, and the villagers all learned a lot from what happened.

This new version of the folktale gives a number of more positive teachings for children. The folktale teaches young generation that an authority figure is not always perfect and can make mistake. But most importantly, the authority figure is willing to apologize for the mistake. It is an important lesson for young people, especially Indonesian young people. In Indonesia, and in many Asian countries, many children grow with an assumption that an authority figure cannot make mistake. Many authority figure are assumed, or assume themselves as having power parallel to deity power. King of Mampu in this reconstruction version is different. He is a king who acknowledges his mistake. And this is a good role model for youngsters. It is not easy for the king to acknowledge his wrongdoing, because it is not an easy matter for everyone. He has to face some internal challenges before he finally is able to admit his mistake. This is a beneficial value to be passed on to children.

This reconstruction version of the folktale features an authority figure who listens to his inferior. He listens to the dog and to his daughter, and they prove to provide good advice for the king. The willingness of the king to listen to people who are his subordinate is a noble value that is good to be passed on to children. However, it is a value that is not yet common in Indonesia. The traditional stereotype of a leader in the eastern culture, including Indonesia, is a leader who uses more of an autocratic style. If this autocratic style is passed on to the young generation, it will hone Indonesia's score in the power distance index. Power distance, according to Hofstede [17], is the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. This represents inequality (more versus less), but defined from below, not from above. It suggests that a society's level of inequality is endorsed by the followers as much as by the leaders. Indonesia obviously scores high, i.e. 78, in Hofstede's power distance index result [18]. It means that Indonesians are highly dependent on hierarchy; there are

unequal rights between power holders and non power holders; leaders are directive and holds strong controls. Power is centralized and leaders count on the obedience of their subordinates. If this is not reconstructed, Sweetman [19] worries that “Senior-level people get no information, and believe that they have nothing to improve upon, and junior-level people do not bring ideas forward. It’s hard to innovate under these conditions.” This reconstruction version of the tale helps to make a change to this strong hold of social hierarchy so that innovation amongst the nation’s young generation can be boosted. A clearly useful tool for the advancement of human capital.

The king in “Raja Mampu yang Bijaksana” is willing to work hard to save the whole kingdom. All the other members of royal family helps too. This is a powerful example of servant leadership, a type of leadership that is people-oriented. The term servant leadership was first introduced by Robert K. Greenleaf [20], who proposed the necessity for leaders to serve and to be attentive to the needs of their subordinates. Servant leadership is the concept of leadership which believes that a leader who serves will stimulate the increase of performance amongst subordinates. In other words, servant leaders will likely to succeed in empowering their subordinates. These values are important for at least two reasons. First of all, it sets an example for Indonesia’s today’s leaders about servant leadership, a highly popular and effective type of leadership in the world. Covey [21] suggested that organizations are only sustainable when they serve human needs. Secondly, it helps to flip the young generation’s idea about traditional leadership style. Originating from a country with high power distance index, they may have grown up with major exposure of autocratic leaders. As a study [22] indicates that servant leadership fosters subordinate creativity and team innovation, this climate may also lead to the increase of the younger generation’s innovation.

The folktale reconstruction version ends by releasing the whole kingdom from the curse, and they have the chance to rebuild the kingdom. Releasing the whole kingdom from the curse to be stone is an important cultural transformation. It keeps the villagers and their culture alive. Rather than shackling the whole village, including the future’s generation, the new folktale gives the possibility for them to rebuild the kingdom, to take action, and to be productive. It gives the civilisation the opportunity to grow.

With these values offered in the reconstruction version of the folktale, it is apparent that “Raja Mampu yang Bijaksana” transmits more positive teachings to young generation. Thus folktale reconstruction is beneficial for the bettermen of a nation’s future people.

VI. CONCLUSION

It is an unwitting fact that not all folktales are appropriate educative tools. Folktales can function as a double-edged blade. While they transmit values to nurture desired teachings, they simultaneously can portray improper attitudes, inappropriate emotions, adverse notions, stereotypical images, unhealthy power relations, even fear and violence. Stemming from the case of ‘Goa Mampu’ folktale, there is a need to reconstruct

certain Indonesian folktales to develop positive desirable behaviour, attitudes and values within the Indonesian cultural index. Folktale reconstruction must be promoted for these purposes.

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Clara Evi Citraningtyas is a profound scholar from Indonesia whose research spans a diverse range of educational fields, but is broadly unified by her long-standing interests in the ideology and pedagogy of texts, and global shifts on children's literature in education and culture. Her principal impact on international scholarship and research has been in the field of folktale reconstruction. Her research currently focuses on the impact of folktale reconstruction on the

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