



# SSAMIC



THE PROCEEDINGS OF

THE 6<sup>TH</sup> SOCIAL SCIENCES, ARTS  
AND MEDIA INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 2019



13-14 JUNE 2019

SRINAKHARINWIROT UNIVERSITY  
BANGKOK, THAILAND

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THE 6<sup>TH</sup> SOCIAL SCIENCES, ARTS  
AND MEDIA INTERNATIONAL  
CONFERENCE 2019

June 13 – 14, 2019

at Srinakharinwirot University  
Bangkok, Thailand

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The 6th Social Sciences, Arts, and Media International Conference (SSAMIC 2019) scheduled on June 13th – 14th, 2019 at Bangkok (Thailand) is for the scholars, professionals and students from the universities all around the world to present ongoing research activities, and hence to foster research relations between the Universities and the society.

The conference is organized under the patronage of Srinakharinwirot University (Thailand) in collaboration with Ubon Ratchathani University, Illinois State University, University of Missouri – St. Louis, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, San Diego State University, Dalhousie University, University of Essex, Neu-Ulm University of Applied Sciences, IST University of Applied Sciences, Dali University, College of the Holy Spirit Manila, Indonesian Institute of the Arts Yogyakarta are holding on in Bangkok, Thailand. This conference provides a place for academicians and professionals with cross-disciplinary interests related to social sciences, arts and media to exchange new ideas and application experiences face to face, to establish business or research relations and to find global partners for future collaboration. All the submitted conference papers of articles and creative arts will be peer reviewed by the academic committees of the conference. All accepted papers of the conference will be published in the printed conference proceedings with valid international ISBN number that will be registered at Bangkok, Thailand.

I am particularly indebted to the wonderful staff of SSAMIC committee and many colleagues across the institution who have been tireless in supporting this event. This conference is a credit to their many talents, passion for academic and dedication to ensuring all our delegates will have a memorable and enjoyable experience here.



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# Proceedings



**13-14 JUNE 2019**

**SRINAKHARINWIROT UNIVERSITY  
BANGKOK, THAILAND**



## **“Red Onion White Onion”: Reconstructing an Indonesian Folktale, Rewriting Childhood**

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### **Abstract**

Folktales are very important because they are believed to educate society, especially its young generation. Although aimed for children, folktales are not written for the sole purpose of entertainment. Folktales are written to educate. They are used to shape and educate children, and to hand down important values. In doing so, folktales also shape nations and thus play a highly important role in a society.

It is unfortunate, however, despite society's everchanging culture and norms, many folktales still remain unchanged and stagnant. The old-aged teachings planted into the stories based on previous centuries are preserved as valuable 'tradition'. As a result, the old tales may miss their target in educating children especially in the modern world.

This paper discusses a well-known Indonesian folktale titled “Red Onion White Onion” (*Bawang Merah Bawang Putih*). While there are noble values in the folktale, some parts of the tale contain some worrying elements. This paper evaluates the messages embedded in the folktale, and proposes to reconstruct its worrying that are not representing accepted values today. By doing so, the popular folktale is reconstructed, and childhood is rewritten for a better future.

**Key Words:** Folktale, folktale reconstruction, *Bawang Merah Bawang Putih*, *Red Onion white Onion*.

### **Introduction**

As early as 19 BC, a Roman poet Horace was successful in promoting that literature is *Dulce et Utile* - “sweet and useful”. According to Horace, literature is supposed to entertain and to be useful for its readers. It is not always the case for children literature, however. Stories for children are generally less entertaining than useful. They are full of teaching elements that are embedded within the story. It is especially true with folktales. Folktales have the strongest teaching elements among other forms of stories for children. So unlike other stories for children, folktales are not solely aimed at entertaining children. They are used more to teach children with values that are deemed important for children.

Being convenient vehicles to pass on teachings from generation to generation, folktales become popular stories directed for children. Every culture has abundant of folktales to transmit desired teachings to their young generation. As a result, there are many different folktales in the world. All of these folktales worldwide, however, are variations on a limited number of themes. A classification system originally designed by Aarne (1910), then revised first by Thompson (1928) and later by Uther (2004), is intended to bring out the similarities between tales by grouping variants of the same tale under the same category.

Antti Aarne was the first to develop the indexing system for folktales, published as *Verzeichnis der Märchentypen*. The indexing system was based on identifying motifs, repeated narrative ideas that made up European traditional narrative. Stith Thompson, an



American folklorist, revised Aarne's classification system. Thompson also enlarged its scope to include folktales from outside Europe. In doing so, he translated Aarne's theory into English, and created the "AT number system" (Aarne-Thompson number system), a catalogue system to classify the tales. In 1961, Thompson further revised his catalogue system to include some 2500 basic plots from which, for countless generations, storytellers have built their tales. Hans-Jörg Uther, in *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography*, updated and expanded the AT-number system in 2004. He developed the Aarne-Thompson-Uther classification (ATU) system and included more international folktales, removing examples whose attestation was limited to one ethnic group. This ATU classification is still widely used up to now.

The tale indexing system developed by Aarne - Thompson - Uther groups folktales into clusters that are each given a certain number. The names used for the grouping are typical, but usage can vary depending on the region and culture where the tale comes from. The tale type of the same group can also include closely related folktales. Tale types 400 - 459, for example, all feature supernatural or enchanted wife (husband) or other relatives (including brothers or sisters) as the primary protagonist; while tale types 500 - 559 all feature supernatural helpers. If variants are present within a certain tale type, subtypes are usually added. The famous Cinderella type, for example, has two subtypes i.e. 510 A and 510 B. The 510A is about the Persecuted Heroine: "The two stepsisters. The stepdaughter at the grave of her own mother, who helps her (milks the cow, shakes the apple-tree, helps the old man; (cf. Type 480). Three fold visit to church (dance), and slipper test. The 510B is about Unnatural Love: "Present of the father who wants to marry his own daughter. The maiden as servant of the prince, who throws various objects at her. The three-fold visit to the church and the forgotten shoe. Marriage."

### **The rich variants of cinderella around the world**

Cinderella is a folktale that is popular worldwide. It is a tale grouped as type 510 in the ATU index. As an old folktale, Cinderella is still popular to 21st Century readers and viewers. So popular is the tale that it has become strong reference for many women around the globe on what an ideal life for girls should be like. It is also famously used as a term to describe a condition of women's fear to be independent. The term "Cinderella Complex" was first used by Colette Dowling in her book *The Cinderella Complex: Women's Hidden Fear of Independence* (1981) to illustrate the unconscious desire of women to be taken care of by others, especially by men. This condition is just like Cinderella in the folktale, who is unable to free herself from her condition, and / or to live independently. Thus, Cinderella is dependent on someone else to take her out of her misery. That someone else is a man, a prince. This creates a wishful thinking among girls to wait for her 'prince', and also creates a belief that only a 'prince' could save girls. The Cinderella complex is based on the femininity celebrated in the tale, that a woman is beautiful, submissive, serving, dependent, and being envied by other females in society in trying to win the Prince.

Another reason for its popularity is the tale's common theme worldwide. Zipes (2001) noted that thousands of Cinderella's variants are known around the world. Folklorists generally agree to consider the story of Rhodopis (around 7 BC and 23 AD) about a slave girl from Greece who was taken as a wife by king of Egypt as the earliest known variant of the Cinderella type. Around 860, a version of the story appeared in China, titled *Ye Xian* (Beauchamp, 2010). Meanwhile, the oldest written version of the tale was found in Italy in 1634 with the title *Pentamerone*. It was then made famous by Charles Perrault in 1697 and the Brothers Grimm in 1812. Since then, thousands of different versions have been found.

Although many variants of Cinderella feature the wicked stepmother, the defining trait of type 510 is in fact a prosecutor who does not have to be the stepmother. Some rare versions even inverted the sex roles where the daughter is oppressed by the stepfather (Warner, 1995). In some versions, the biological father plays an active role in the humiliation of his daughter;





in other versions the father is secondary to the new wife; and, still, in some other versions, the father has died.

The identifying item is not always a glass slipper. In fact, the glass slipper is distinctive of and made popular by Charles Perrault's version and its variants. Other materials are recorded in other versions. The earliest version recorded a pair of ancient leather sandals; the Chinese version recorded beautiful petite embroidery shoes for bound feet; in the French version it is slippers made of velour. In other versions, it is not slippers or shoes at all. It can be an anklet, a bracelet, a ring, or some other object that identifies the right girl. Still in other versions, the identifying element can be the traits within, that the girl has.

### **Red onion, white onion (bawang merah bawang putih), the Indonesian variant of cinderella**

The Cinderella variant in the Indonesian archipelago is titled *Bawang Merah Bawang Putih* (Indonesian for shallot and garlic). The tale is very popular in Indonesia, with many Indonesian provinces claim as the origin of the folktale. There are slight differences of the story in various versions around Indonesia, but the corpus of the story remains the same. It is a folktale about a hard-working, kind and humble girl, who lives with her greedy stepsister and stepmother.

There have been at least two different major versions listed by Wikipedia (2019). The plot of the first version tells about a widow who lives with her two beautiful daughters, "Bawang Merah" (Red Onion or Red Shallot) and "Bawang Putih" (White Onion or White Garlic). Bawang Putih's biological father who was also the widows's husband had died long ago. Bawang Merah and Bawang Putih had opposite characters and personalities. Bawang Putih was diligent, kind, honest and humble. Meanwhile, Bawang Merah was lazy, glamorous, proud and envious. Bawang Merah's bad personality was worsened because her mother spoiled her. One day, Bawang Putih was doing her stepmother and sister's laundry at the river and did not realize it when a piece of cloth belonging to her mother was washed away. She was afraid as she could be punished and expelled from home.

So Bawang Putih walked along the river looking for the cloth. Every time she saw someone by the river, she asked them about the cloth, but no one had seen it. Eventually Bawang Putih came to a place where the river flowed into a cave. Surprisingly, there was a very old woman in the cave. Bawang Putih asked the old woman if she knew of the cloth whereabouts. The woman knew where the cloth was, but she made a condition before she handed it to Bawang Putih. The condition was that she had to work assisting the old woman. Bawang Putih was used to working hard so that her work pleased the old woman. The day got darker and Bawang Putih was saying goodbye to the old woman. The old woman handed the cloth to her. Because of her kindness, the old woman offered her a gift of pumpkins. There were two of them, one was larger than the other. Bawang Putih was asked to choose the gift she wanted. She was not greedy, therefore she chose the smaller one.

Returning home, the stepmother and Bawang Merah were furious because Bawang Putih had been away for so long. She told them what happened from the time her mother's cloth was washed away until her encounter with the old woman in the cave. Her stepmother was still furious because she was already late and only brought one small pumpkin, so the mother smashed the pumpkin to the ground. Inside the smashed pumpkin there were beautiful golden jewelry and diamonds. The Stepmother and Bawang Merah were very shocked. They could get very rich with that much jewelry. But greedy they were, they yelled at Bawang Putih asking why she did not take the large pumpkin instead. In their minds, the larger pumpkin was, the more jewelry and diamonds it should contain.

Fulfilling their greed, Bawang Merah followed the steps told by Bawang Putih. She deliberately drifted her mother's cloth, walked along the river, asked people and eventually came to the cave where the old woman lived. Unlike Bawang Putih, however, Bawang Merah refused the old woman's order to work and she even arrogantly ordered the old woman to give her the larger pumpkin. And so the old woman gave the larger pumpkin to Bawang Merah.





Bawang Merah happily brought the pumpkin that the old woman gave, imagining how much jewelry she would get. Returning home, the stepmother welcomed her beloved daughter. Hurriedly they smashed the pumpkin. Instead of jewelry, out came various terrifying poisonous snakes from the large pumpkin and attacked the stepmother and Bawang Merah.

In the second version, the father has two wives, each has their own daughter. The older is Bawang Putih, and the younger is Bawang Merah. Bawang Merah and her mother are jealous of Bawang Putih and her mother. When the father dies, Bawang Merah and her mother take charge of the household and bully both Bawang Putih and her mother. Bawang Putih's mother stands up for her daughter but she soon dies prematurely.

Without her biological mother and father, Bawang Putih is left alone to be tortured by her cruel stepmother and half-sister. Though Bawang Putih suffers, she is patient. One day, when she is out in the woods, she sees a talking fish in the pond. The fish tells her that it is actually her deceased mother. Bawang Putih is overjoyed to be able to communicate with her mother again, and she secretly visits the pond whenever she can.

Eventually Bawang Merah finds out. Bawang Merah lures the fish to the surface of the pond and catches it, cooks it and feeds it to Bawang Putih. When Bawang Putih finishes eating, her stepmother and stepsister reveal the identity of the fish she just ate. Bawang Putih is so shocked and sad. She gathers the fish bones and bury them under a tree. When she visits the grave the next day, she is surprised to see that a beautiful swing has appeared from one of the tree's branches. When Bawang Putih sits in the swing and sings an old lullaby, it magically swings back and forth.

Bawang Putih continues to visit the magic swing whenever she can. One day, while she is on the magic swing, a Prince who is hunting nearby hears her song. He follows the sound of her voice, but before he approaches her, Bawang Putih realizes that she is not alone, and quickly runs back home.

The Prince and his people find the home of Bawang Putih. In some versions this happens immediately after the Prince's first sighting of Bawang Putih, but in other versions it happens after a long search made by the Prince's people. Bawang Merah's mother, seeing the opportunity, orders Bawang Putih to stay hidden. The Prince asks about the swing and the girl who sat in it. Bawang Merah's mother says that the girl he heard is her beautiful and talented daughter Bawang Merah. Though the Prince agrees that Bawang Merah is beautiful, he requests that she show him how she sang in the magical swing.

Bawang Merah and her mother reluctantly follow the Prince. Bawang Merah sits in the swing and attempts to sing so that it will move, but she cannot. The Prince, angrily ordered the mother to tell the truth. Bawang Merah's mother is forced to confess that she has another daughter hidden. The Prince brings Bawang Putih back to the swing, and as she had done many times before, the magic swing starts moving as soon as she begins singing. The Prince is overjoyed and asks Bawang Putih to marry him. She agrees and they live happily ever after.

The theme of Bawang Merah Bawang Putih has inspired the making of some modern version films and soap operas in Indonesia and even in Malaysia. Some well known films inspired by the folktale:

- *Bawang Putih Bawang Merah*, a 1959 Malaysian live-action musical, starring Latifah Omar as Bawang Merah, Umi Kalthom as Bawang Putih, and Mustapha Maarof as the Prince. This film adaptation does a twist in the characterizations where Bawang Putih is the bad stepsister whilst Bawang Merah is the good sister.

- *Bawang Putih Bawang Merah*, a 1986 made-for-television Malaysian remake of the 1959 version.

- *Putih*, a 2001 Malaysian animated film starring the voices of Erra Fazira as Putih, Raja Azura as Merah.

- *Bawang Merah Bawang Putih* is a 2004 Indonesian soap opera (or sinetron ) starring Revalina S. Temat as the good Bawang Putih and Nia Ramadhani as the bad Bawang Merah. The series was also widely popular in Malaysia, which led to a rerun not long after it ended months later.



- *Pohon Ajaib Berdaun Emas*, a 2006 Indonesian film starring Penty Nur Afiani, Chaterine Pamela, Afdhal Yusman, Sally Marcellina and Al-Indra.
- *Bawang Merah Bawang Putih: The Movie*, 2006 Indonesian film starring Laudya Cynthia Bella, Eva Anindita, Nana Khairina and Ferry Irawan.
- *Bawang Merah, Bawang Putih dan Dua Raksasa*, 2007 Indonesian film starring Naima, Vina Kimberly, Lesty, dan Lysewati.

### **The need to reconstruct red onion white onion (bawang merah bawang putih)**

Being a highly popular folktale around Indonesia and its neighboring countries, *Red Onion White Onion* does carry positive values to be passed on to children. The folktale teaches that the good wins and the bad loses. This is an important teaching for children. Children need to be encouraged to do good deeds by giving examples of the rewards gained by those who are being good. In contrast, the bad and the wicked are punished and have to pay for their wickedness. *Red Onion and White Onion* also teaches that someone is worthy due to the person's internal quality. Bawang Putih does not need to own a glass shoe, or a bracelet, or an anklet to be identified as a good person. This is an important teaching for children. Children do not need worldly things for them to be good and to be of high quality. These positive teachings should be preserved.

Although the *Red Onion White Onion* contains positive teachings, there are unfortunately the not so positive teachings embedded in the tale too. Some of the negative values in *Red Onion White Onion* are as follows, mainly on gender portrayal.

a. Physical beauty reflects internal beauty.

Bawang Putih, who is pictured as more beautiful than Bawang Merah, is also kind hearted. On the other hand, Bawang Merah who is not as beautiful, has a wicked heart. The stereotype that beauty reflect godness is not educational for children. With this kind of message repeated in this folktale, and echoed by so many other folktales, children will get the message that people who are physically beautiful, will have a beautiful heart as well. While people who are physically not beautiful, are wicked. This thinking is unhealthy and can even be dangerous for children.

b. Whiteness reflects goodness / colored (red) reflects badness.

Bawang Putih is white, and she is good. Bawang Merah is colored, and she is bad. This is another message that sends a wrong teaching to children. This message echoes so many other stories and folktales where whiteness is regarded superior and good. If this teaching is repeated, children will think that all white people are better than colored people. This is especially unhealthy for the Indonesian children. Having a history of being colonized by the Dutch for 350 years, they already grow up with the postcolonial syndrome that is still looming accross the archipelago. Many Indonesian children still believe that anything originates from the white culture will naturally be better than anything that originates from the non-white culture. This goes from language to fashion, to physical appearance, to beauty, to language, to intelligence and the list goes on.

c. Step mother is always wicked and does not love step daughter.

The continuous exposure and justification that stepmothers are wicked and do not love their stepdaughters are harmful rather than helpful. Stepmothers have long been unfairly generalized to be wicked. In real live, however, it is untrue that all stepmothers are always wicked. Children need to witness neutral portrayal of stepmothers.

d. Women are never in good relationship with other women.

Folktales and soap operas often present women who are always in direct opposition with other women, especially in trying to win men's attention, to attract men, or to try to find a boyfriend/ husband. This constant representation of women is highly unhealthy for children. Children, especially girls, will grow with the understanding that they must always compete with other women to win a man.

e. Unfortunate circumstances, that are suddenly changed to remarkable fortune.



These are some of the disturbing teachings that are embedded in *Red Onion White Onion*. These kinds of teachings cannot be ignored. Something must be done to stop this handing down of the not so positive teachings. A folktale reconstruction is necessary to better some tales.

What is and how does tale reconstruction work? The English word reconstruction is taken from the word to reconstruct. Reconstruction of folktales are rewriting of folktales by changing the parts of folktale that are deemed unsuitable for children. To reconstruct is generally understood as to build again. Something is reconstructed because there is a need to correct it. Citraningtyas proposed the following diagram for the reconstruction of folktales.

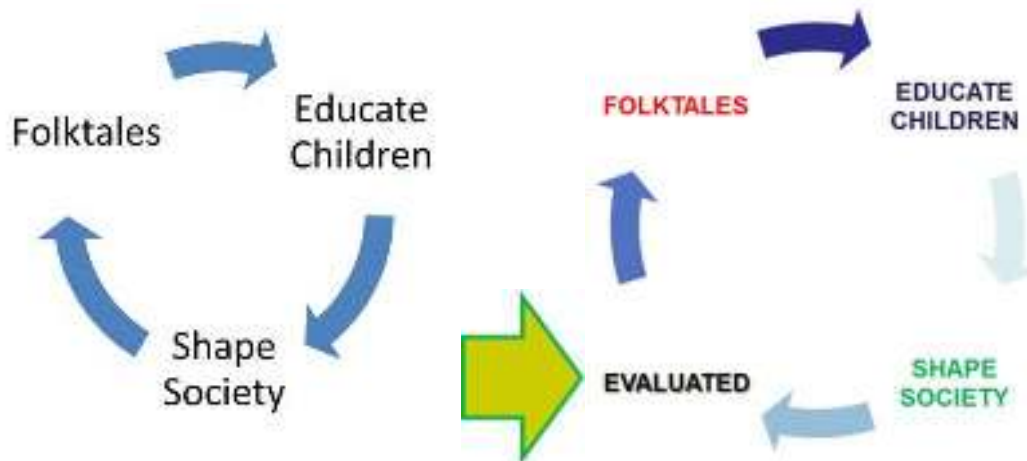


Diagram 1: Folktale Reconstruction

Based on the above diagram, to reconstruct a folktale is to rewrite the tale after an evaluation on its use. Tales are just like plants, according to Bradkūnas (1975). Tales “adapt to a certain environment through natural selection and thus differ somewhat from other members of the same species”. Tale reconstruction, therefore, has to be continually carried out so to adapt with the ever-changing cultural and social shifts.

Many folktales around the world have been reconstructed, including the many versions of Cinderella (Citraningtyas, 2012). It is a pity if *Red Onion White Onion* does not go through the same steps that the other versions of Cinderella go through. Thus, it is a necessity that *Red Onion and White Onion* is reconstructed. The reconstruction of *Red Onion White Onion* should be concentrated on diminishing the negative teachings embedded in the story. By doing so, the folktale will be an ideal means of edutainment for children.

## Conclusion

With the not so positive elements still embedded in *Red Onion White Onion* and other popular folktales in Indonesia and worldwide, it is important that the folktale is reconstructed. The reconstruction version of the tale must eliminate the negative teachings and pass on more positive teachings. By doing so to children, childhood is thus rewritten for the bettermen of future generation.



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