

The Study of Folklore in Southeast Asia

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Abstract: The Definition of folklore are vast and varied. There are twenty-one different definitions of folklore given by various scholars. While anthropologists considered folklore as literature, literary scholars define it as culture and folklorist choose enumerative definition, intuitive and operational. The purpose of this article is to discuss about folklore in South East Asia. Of data and examples shown discovered that the characteristics of folklore in South East Asia is very diverse. Each country has its own understanding of folklore. However, it seems, verbal folklore, both non-narrative, such as proverbs, riddles, parables or the narrative, such as myths, legends, epics, folklore, is still a dominant feature in these countries. With the growing diversity of the folklore characteristic in South East Asia, the approaches, techniques and theories that are used can be adapted to the shape.

Keywords: Folklore, Southeast Asia, anthropology, literature, culture

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I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of folklore seems to have emerged in the 16th century in Europe as a result of the growing appeal of antique something. Collection of fairy tales of the earliest Europeans, namely *Le Piacevoli Notti* (Straparola, 1550-1553) have recently appeared in Venice. The collection contains several well-known fairy tales in Europe, such as *Puss in Boots* and *Beauty and the Beast*. After that, appears *Reliques of English Poetry* (Percy, 1765), then Von Arnim and Brentano published a collection of poems and a song called *December Knaben Wunderhorn* (1806-1808). After that, in 1812, Grimm published a collection of children's stories entitled *Kinder und Hausmarchen*. (Abbot:2000:4)

In 1846, appeared the term of folklore in the English language, created by William Thoms, to put a mark on the meaning of "antiquity popular goods" or "popular literature". However, since the words of folklore was introduced, appeared a controversy that was very sharp and lasted long that questioned this definition. There are twenty-one different definitions of folklore given by various scholars in the *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*, M. Leach (ed), Vol.1, 1949, New York, p 398-408. (Mazharul, 1985:2). The word *folk* proposed by Thomas interpreted as a social group together in a single language, religion, occupation, activities and other general factors, while the word *lore* seen as information orally transmitted by a group based on the tradition. (Abbot, 2000:4).

The Definition of folklore are vast and varied. *Völkerkunde* in German, *folkminne* in Swedish, and *Loksahitya* in Indian languages, different from the term of folklore is in English. While, anthropologists considered folklore as literature, literary scholars define it as culture. The Folklorist choose enumerative definition, intuitive and operational. (Amas, 1971:3-15)

Folkloristic is a field that tends to overlap with some other subject, especially cultural anthropology and literature. Folklore often defined broadly. The papers presented at seminars on folklore lately, are very diverse of human behavior and beliefs, like gambling, baseball, flea markets and others. (Jordan, 1986:500-518)

In Europe, the word of folklore which lately often called the word folklife, referring to the three cases, the groups are formed based on ethnicity, occupation, religion, various types of affinity, the practice of communications conveyed unofficially that contains instructions on way of doing things and the artistic practices that do not need to be too beautiful or sublime, but more emphasis on how to create or decorate something that is not common in everyday life. In general, the word of folklore is used for marking on an old but charming, eccentric, or odd. (Cormick, 2011, 224).

Literally, the word of folklore means "study of human". Folklore is a psychological expression of those ancient times, both in the field of philosophy, religion, science, and medicine in the organization of social and ceremonial, or more precisely in the areas of intellectual history, poetry and other literature. (Burne, 2003:1)

II. FOLKLORE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

In Southeast Asia, there are several books about folklore, of which is written by Jan Knappert, entitled *Mythology and Folklore in South-East Asia* (1999) This book is the first anthology in English that discusses the myths in Southeast Asia. In addition to containing about traditions of storytelling, which is written in the form of short story translation, short paraphrases of epic, also contains poetry, drama, proverbs, and prose from various regions and culture. The readers will find stories of romance, tragedy, drama and adventures in Southeast Asian kings, princes, princesses, heroes and commoners. (Knappert,1999)

Then, more specifically, Lopez wrote a book about folklore in the Philippines under the title *A Handbook of Philippine Folklore* (2006). According to him, scientific research includes three stages, namely the collection, classification and analysis. The folklorist in the Philippines many are still in the stage of gathering. Based on the type, the folklore of Philippines is divided into four types. First is a verbal folklore which is divided into non-narrative folklore, such as proverbs, riddles, parables and narrative folklore, such as myths, legends, epics, stories rakyat. Second, social or customs folklore, such as festivals, games, medicine. Third, folklore and performing arts, such as drama, singing, dancing. Fourth, material folklore, such as architecture, handicrafts, clothes, and dishes..Meanwhile, the study of Philippines folklore is divided into the study of the origin, function, appearance and its context. In the study of the origin, which is discussed is about where folklore come from? If folklore exists also in other places in the Philippines, which version is the oldest. What is the impact of modern technological developments of the existence of such folklore..In the study of the function, discussed about the function of folklore in each region in the Philippines. Typically, the function is the same, although each has its own shape folklore. (Lopez, 2006:36).

About folklore in the Philippines, Eugenio in his *Philippine Folk Literature* (2007) adds that from a large body of folklore, folk literature occupies a major part and very important, as it covers all types of verbal folklore. Therefore, Eugenio create an anthology of folk literature in the Philippines. According to him, like all literature in general, folk literature is an artistic expression of meaningful human experience through the medium of language. Ancient times, all literatures were in the form of oral, that every time retold, there was a change and modification, so that oral delivery and the absence of fixed shape is the essence of folklore. Meanwhile, today, all materials of tradition is printed. However, with the printing, do not have to make folklore be stopped. (Eugenio, 2007:xxiii)

Besides the Philippines, Singapore also published books about folklore, which is a book edited by Heng entitled *Reframing Singapore* (2009). According to him, the study of folklore in Singapore many who follow the development of the study of folklore in America. One of the theories used in research on folklore is Hybridisation. This theory is used since the late 1990s to examine groups of migrants living in the area who may previously not have social groups or cultures that now dominant. Hybridisation as an approach aims to examine about the population and culture of people entered in the port city (Heng, 2009: 32).

Then, in Vietnam, a writer from California, Gail Graham, wrote a book whose contents recounted in Vietnam folklore of the original French. One story is the story of "The Shadow on the Wall" contained in the book "The Beggar in the Blanket and other Vietnamese Tales". However, apparently, the end of the story have been changed. Whoever change it, he or French writer, is unknown, since no footnotes that explain it. The part that was changed is the story of a wife who ran away from her husband and returned to her husband's house to apologize to him. Changing the end on all of the children's story, so that it fits it has become a trend in Vietnam. (Geisler, 1997:118).

Folklore in Vietnam often dramatize the total loyalty of a wife to her husband. But, conversely, if a wife defected or are not obedient to her husband, then a big disaster will happen to her. In some stories depicted on a implacable woman who must accept the problems of her husband and the other story portrayed also about a smart wife obedience to her stupid husband. Rarely in the stories in Vietnam women are portrayed as incompetent, gullible, or easily manipulated (Jamieson, 1995: 27)

In 2006, Malaysia published a book on folklore, entitled *From the Written Stone: An Anthology of Malaysian Folklore*. This book is a tribute to the rich heritage of Malaysia and is an anthology of folklore legends and epics were rewritten in prose and poetry. This book introduces some of the legends of the famous in the area, such as legendary epics, kingdoms that have been forgotten, astute Malaysia heroes and the story of the hare. In his preface, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Heritage of Malaysia said that the folklore and legends is a legacy of the most beautiful and visible from ancestors centuries ago. These stories provide a unique identity. In the past, the folklore presented as entertainment that contains messages smooth and rich monumental epics that are now used as a guide to look at the past. The book reminds us of the great times and stories about the origins and cultures that often we forget (Ninotaziz, 2006: vii)

In Indonesia itself, there is a book written by Danandjaja entitled *Folklor Indonesia, Ilmu Gosip dan Dongeng* (2007). The book begins with introductory chapters outlining the understanding and explanation of the word folklore. Then, on the historical development and its application in Indonesian folklore which are divided into two periods, in past and present. After that, about the usefulness of the folklore research in Indonesia, which

according to him, one of which is to perpetuate what is considered important. Furthermore, concerning the classification of folklore quoting Jan Harold Brunvand, a folklore expert from the US, which divides folklore based on their types into three major groups namely verbal folklore, partly verbal folklore, and non-verbal folklore. Moreover, in the book, also shown on story folk prose like *Mado-Mado* (Nias), *Atu Belah* (Sumatera), *Anak-Anak Dalem Solo yang Mengembara Mencari Sumber Bau Harum* (Bali), *Gunung Tangkuban Perahu* (West Java), *Asal Mula Nama Tengger dan Terjadinya Gunung Batok* (East Java), *Joko Tarub* (Tuban Version). (Dananjaya, 2007)

Meanwhile, in Brunei, there is the term of *Kedayan* Folklore, which is a widespread belief among the people of *Kedayan* who came from Java. They came to Brunei during the reign of Sultan Bolkiah dubbed *Nakoda Ragam*, the captain or sailor who is popular among neighboring countries, such as Java, Sumatra and the Philippines. It is believed that when Sultan Bolkiah anchored in Java, he heard about the wealth of Java with oil products. Brunei, although its name is famous, but at that time was more backward in agricultural techniques than Java. When Bolkiah docked in Java, he saw a lot of green land in the form of fruit and rice fields. Realizing the importance of the fields for the people, then he intends to implement it in the country, then sought the Javanese were ready to be taken there to teach you how to grow crops. (Ibrahim, 1985: 314)

In Brunei, who developed literature and folklore is the Center for Language and Literature, namely by publishing text books in Malay and English for using in primary and secondary schools. Poetic form known as the *sajak* is very popular among school children. The most famous traditional works are the epic poem *Syair Awang Simaun*, which tells about the courage of heroes in the area. *Culture of Brunei Darussalam* in <http://www.everyculture.com/>, June, 14, 2013) On 5-7 June 2007 held workshops on folklore. The workshop was opened to the librarians and teachers in the country. In the workshop taught about how storytelling in the classroom.. (Nassar, 2008)

Meanwhile, in Thailand, folklore as a new discipline lasted for 30 years (a book that became a source published in 2000, now means that has lasted for 45 years). One of a kind folklore in Thailand is a folk performance, such as folk dances or folk drama, for example *lakhon*, *likay* and *nang Talung*. The other type of folklore in Thailand is a symbol and monsters found in architecture and design. *Singha*, symbols such as the lion, whose name is used by the largest beer company in Thailand, was very popular. *Nak Puggsee*, mostly shaped like humans, some birds and some snakes. *Panorn Maruek*, whose form partly human, partly monkey or sometimes bird. In addition, there is also *Rajasi*, a flaming lion, *hong*, a graceful bird, *kinnari*, a beautiful female bird and ferocious *yakkhas*, monsters that stand guard temples and palaces. (Kislenko, 2004:98)

In Laos, folklore is also referred to as *khati khong xaoban lao*, which is a term that included a mixture of indigenous, proverbs, songs, poems, puzzles or games. (Kislenko, 2009:65). One of the oldest and most popular stories in Laos is *Xieng Mieng* (or *Xiang Miang*). Print version of *Xieng Mieng* story has been around since the 16th century on a palm leaf manuscripts and may have been there before. The copies of this manuscript was found in Lao National Library. The story in prose and poetry. Since the mid 1990s, the reading contest of *Xieng Mieng* was held every year in Laos, usually every April 1. The name of *Xieng Mieng* generally is connected with the story of a boy named *Kham* who later became a monk (Xieng). He worked in a stone house of *Mieng* that time the palace was abandoned by the king. In the other story, he also played as a comedian or the other. When he died, *Xieng Mieng* leaves a wife, several aides and a dog and a cat beloved king. Largely, publishers in Laos, publish at least a book or a collection of folklore about *Xieng Mieng*. For example, the Vientiane Times Publications, which has a special collection since 1995, which is dedicated solely to *Xieng Mieng* story. Books written in English was retold by Steven Jay Epstein. Epstein is an advisor to the education and language training in Vientiane School of Law. The collection was illustrated by Anoulom Souvandumane. (Lao, 2011)

Meanwhile, one of the folklore that developed in Burma (now called Myanmar), is the belief in supernatural beings called *Nat*. They worship the creature when in the game, prayer, sacrifice and dance. *Nat* or *Nathami* (female) is believed to be being very smart and has a great power. The creatures live in the human body or in trees, mountain peaks, sea, and everywhere. Burmese people can not imagine what kind of creature it, but they were afraid of him. They asked *Nat* to protect it. *Thagyamin*, *Nat* that is regarded as God, can hear and know everything and usually worshiped in the new year celebration. In addition, the people of Burma also adores dragons, creatures that live at the bottom of rivers, seas and oceans in places where there are precious stones or pearls. They are regarded as the protector of water and soil. Dragons can change form into a human form. He can be a beautiful woman so as to mate with the authorities and can influence it. Likewise, the people of Burma believe in *Bilus*, man eater who live alone in places hidden (*Burman* in <http://www.everyculture.com> June, 14, 2013)

III. STUDY OF FOLKLORE

With the data mentioned above, we can choose several approaches and theories in folklore research in Southeast Asia. Dundes (1962) states that generally, the study of folklore in general and folktale in particular tend diachronic rather than synchronic. The emphasis is focused on the origins and development of the material of folklore than the structure of the material. The folkloris at the end of the 19th century, more focused on the emergence of folklore rather than the existence of folklore. Genetic explanation is deemed necessary to define the nature of the folklore. There are three approaches that can be used in the study of folklore, ie mythological, anthropological and historical geography. All of this approach not only on the diachronic but also on the comparative.. (Dundes, 1962:95-105)

Then, in his other writings, Dundes (1965) also mentions that there are only two basic steps in the study of folklore in literature and culture. The first step is an objective and empirical. This step may be referred to as identification, ie a research that shows how something is the same as the previous one. The second step is subjective and speculative, or so-called interpretation, ie research that shows how something is different with the things before, and the cause of the difference(Dundes, 1965:36-142)Meanwhile, Cormick (2011) found a common approach in the study of folklore is classifying expressive forms into three categories, namely verbal, material and customaryThe folklorist now prefer researching the folklore of the traditions, beliefs, behaviors and stories about the interaction in everyday life.

In Burne (2003) noted that the study of folklore can be divided into several parts. The first part is about belief and practice, in which there is a discussion about earth and sky, vegetable world, animal world, man, everything man-made, life and other life, superhuman, signs and divination, magic art and disease; in the second part, there is a discussion about customs, social and political institutions, the ritual life of the individual, job and industry, festivals, games, sports and entertainment; and the third part of the story, song and words, which are further divided into the story as truth and stories as entertainment, ballads, proverbs and riddles..

Furthermore, Endraswara (2009) offers some perspective, techniques and theories in the study of folklore. His perspective is humanistic and holistic, etnopuitika, naturalistic, pragmatic and phenomenology; The technique is a transcription and translation, documentation and archiving, data collection, data classification and data analysis; and his theory is the structural theory, the theory of functions consisting of functionalism, sociofunction and psycofunction, ethnocentrism and fetishism, the theory of diffusion and migration consisting of genealogy, origin, comparison and oicotipe, the theory of hermeuneutic which consists of interpretation, transformative hermementic, reification, gender; and the theory of postmodernism and deconstruction, which consists of the theory of Baudrillard, Roland Barthes, Ricoeur and the theory of popular folklore. In addition, it also offers a model of research in folklore, such as interdisciplinary research, such as folklore and philology, folklore and politics, history and folklore, philosophy and folklore and the psychoanalysis research of folklore.(Endraswara, 2009:10)

IV. CONCLUSION

Of datas and examples shown above it appears that the characterize of folklore in Southeast Asia is very diverse. Each country has its own understanding of folklore. However, it seems, verbal folklore, both non-narrative, such as proverbs, riddles, parables or the narrative, such as myths, legends, epics, folklore, is still a dominant feature in these countries. This is consistent with what is said by Bascom (1965) that mythology, legends and folklore are the most basic terms in folklore and sometimes hotly debated as the origin of folklore. Similarly, the opinion of Eugenio (2007) which says that from a large body of folklore, folk literature occupies a major part and very important, as it covers all types of verbal folklore. With the growing diversity of the folklore characteristic in Southeast Asia, the approaches, techniques and theories that are used can be adapted to the shape.

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