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**SCENARIO AND SOLUTIONS FOR PRESERVING KHMER FAIRY TALES  
(SITE: SOC TRANG AND AN GIANG PROVINCE)**

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**ABSTRACT**

The more the society develops, the more the spiritual life of people is improved and diversified. Many modern forms of entertainment have emerged and have replaced the traditional forms of culture and art. Therefore, many conventional cultural values are gradually lost. Conducting a survey and looking for solutions to preserve Folklore genres, especially fairy tales is one of the most necessary and urgent tasks in the Mekong Delta, especially Areas where Khmer people are living.

**KEYWORDS** :Reality, solution, conservation, Khmer fairy tales.



## INTRODUCTION

In the Mekong Delta, folk literature, including the legendary Khmer tales, is at risk of being forgotten [1],[4],[8]. The survey shows that less of Khmers know and care about folk tales especially their fairy tales. Therefore, researching the situation and finding solutions to preserve the Khmer fairy tales in the Mekong Delta is a contribution to the preservation and development of folk literature, which is fairy tales in Khmer folk literature.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

To complete our research, we use the following research methods and approaches:

### \*Practical method

This method is used when we go to Khmer-inhabited areas in the Mekong Delta to participate in scenarios where miraculous fairytales are performed for recording, filming and documenting. In addition, we designed questionnaires and notes for the in-depth interview with native Khmer people to find suitable stories to propose conservation solutions.

### \*Methods of analysis, statistics, classification

Methods are used in this research to count available texts and practical texts, based on that method and categorize the stories, as the basis for identifying and classifying the fairy tales.

## RESULTS

### 1. Survey

Total number of survey questionnaires: 222

#### Age of respondents:

- Under 25 years old: 144 questionnaire forms, occupied 64,9%
- 25 to 50 years old: 52 questionnaire forms, occupied 23,4%
- Over 50 years old: 26 questionnaire forms, occupied 11,7%

#### Ethnic group of respondents:

- Khmer: 207 questionnaire forms, occupied 93,2%
- Kinh: 14 questionnaire forms, occupied 6,3%
- Hoa: 1 questionnaire forms, occupied 0,5%

#### Survey content: (Questionnaire, interview, survey)

- Form of existence and preservation
- Main content
- Time of the performance
- Object of interest
- Other values

#### Form of survey:

Order number	Questions	Responses
1	What kind of folk tales of the Khmer usually exist? (oral/ written records)	-oral records: 118 sheets (53,2%) -written records: 16 sheets (7,2%) -both oral and written records: 88 sheets (39,6%)
2	Where are the written-form folk tales of the Khmer preserved? Were they written in Vietnamese or Khmer language?	*place of preserve: -pagodas: 107 sheets (48,2 %) -other places: libraries in An Giang, Tra Vinh, Soc Trang province; museums in Soc Trang, Tra Vinh 115 sheets (51,8%) *They were mainly written in Khmer language (124 sheets, occupied 55,9%). Besides, they were also written in Vietnamese and Bali language 98 sheets (44,1%).
3	When are folk tales of the Khmer told? Where are they told?	-family gathering, festivals at the pagodas and when the monks evangelize Buddhist tenets. 180 sheets (81%)



Order number	Questions	Responses
4	Do many local people remember folk tales of the Khmer? Who can remember the most?	-at Khmer learning class by teachers 42 sheets (19%) -much: 96 sheets (43,2%) -a little: 126 sheets (56,8%) -people remembering the most are the monks, the management board of the pagodas, youngsters learning at pagodas and the elderly 180 sheets (81%) -teachers teaching Khmer language 42 sheets (19%)
5	Can the content of folk tales be changed into scripts for other forms of art? What are the forms of art? When are they performed?	-answer "No": 58 sheets (25,5%) -some form of arts being changed into scripts are Lam Thon, Du Ke, Ch'Bay, Ro bam and they are primarily performed in festivals of the Khmer 164 sheets (74,5 %)
6	-Currently, what is the age of Khmer people having understanding about fairy tales?	-before 15 years old: 67 sheets (30,2%) -from 15 to 59 years old: 118 sheets (53,1%) -after 60 years old: 37 sheets (16,7%)
7	Do Khmer children love the fairy tales of your ethnic group?	-answer "yes": 82 sheets (81,9%) -answer "no": 40 sheets (18,1%)
8	Do Khmer children ask other older people in the family tell the fairy tales of the Khmer?	-answer "yes": 161 sheets (72,5 %) -answer "no": 61 sheets (27,5%)
9	What are some difficulties affecting the existence and preserve of fairy tales of the Khmer?	-the traditional feature is not maintained because of the shortage of preserve in books 40 sheets (18%) -because of the busy life, the elderly couldn't remember much about the fairy tales and children do not care much about them 100 sheets (45%) -technological development and the advancement of mass media makes the need to expose to fairy tales decrease, because of the influence from other ethnics and wars 82 sheets (37%)
10	How does your community preserve these fairy tales?	-answer "do nothing": 62 sheets -oral stories, "dien tuong" are the main way of preverve 160 sheets (72%)
11	How do you and your family preserve fairy tales of the Khmer?	-answer "do nothing" : 47 sheets (21,2%) -tell fairy tales in festivals and in family meetings. -find fairy tales books to read 175 sheets (78,8%)
12	Can you tell me the names of some fairy tales of the Khmer you know?	-can not tell : 77 sheets (34,7 %) -can tell some fairy tales: 145 sheets (65,3%)
13	In your opinion, the study about the scenario of the existence of preserve of the Khmer's story including fairy tales is:	a. 134 sheets (60,4%) b. 78 sheets (35,1 %)



Order number	Questions	Responses
a.	Very necessary	c. 7 sheets (3,2%)
b.	Necessary	d. 2 sheets (0,9%)
c.	Not really necessary	
d.	Completely unnecessary	

Assess the situation:

**\* Older people are less interested in fairy tales**

- During the survey, the majority of Khmer people responded enthusiastically, with 207/222 questionnaire forms (occupied 93.2%). This proves that the Khmer are proud and conscious, responsible for preserving their folk tales, including fairy tales. However, the number of respondents is still young, under the age of 25, 144 questionnaire forms (64.9%). The age from 50 years old and over, 26 questionnaire forms (11.7%). This shows that older people have more accurate information that we need but they are less interested in fairy tales.

**\* Form of existence and preservation**

- From the survey, we found that the main form of existence and preservation of the Khmer folktales is in oral and written records. Specifically when asking: What kind of folk tales of the Khmer usually exist?, the result shows that there are 118 questionnaire forms indicating that it exists in oral records (53.2%), 16 questionnaire forms answered by the form of documents (occupied 7.2%) and 88 questionnaire forms answered in both forms (39.6%). The questionnaire forms answered that they exist by the Khmer documents which accounts for 55.9% and the total 107 questionnaire forms show they are preserved in temples are 107 (occupied 48.2%). The documents in Vietnamese are written and compiled by folklore collectors, such as *Khmer-bilingual story* (Son Phuoc Hoan-Son Ngoc Sang) [6], *Khmer narratives* (Son Wang and Lam Es), *Folk literature of the Mekong Delta* was collected and compiled by the teachers and students of Can Tho University, *Khmer folk tales* (Huynh Ngoc Trang) [12], *Folk literature of Soc Trang*, *Folk literature of Bac Lieu* and *Folk literature of Soc Trang* of Chu Xuan Dien, collected and compiled by teachers and students of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities of Ho Chi Minh City.

**\* The amount and content of fairy tales gradually narrowed**

The survey also shows that nowadays, most of the monks only know the folk tales of Shakyamuni Buddha. (When talking about the Buddha, the monks talk very confidently and proudly) but the folk tales of the Khmer are rarely remembered. This is also understandable because of the process of learning and the need to evangelize. The monks only focus on the Buddha, but gradually forget the folk story. Even if they remember, they cannot remember the whole story, so they often refused to tell the stories. According to the monk Lam Tu Linh (Hamatup Temple - Soc Trang City), there are some historical books preserved at the temple but due to the time and the lack of preservation, some are damaged, and some are lost. This is a big loss for the researchers interesting in this field. Besides the monks in the temple, the elders also know the Khmer folk tales but most of them do not clearly remember clearly the content of the stories and also get many difficulties when telling the stories. The main problem is old age and they do not tell the stories for a long time. If you want to hear the stories, you have to give the elders time to reflect. Although they have time to remember, they cannot remember all the stories. Sometimes they are confused and mix up one genre to another genre. Story telling is sometimes too difficult and that makes the life of the folk stories including the legendary Khmer miracles are decreasing and being on the verge of a gradual decline.

**\* The legendary fairy tales are often Vietnamized**

Naming stories is also varied more according to trend naming the stories by the Kinh and is often Vietnamized. As the story Chau Thong Chau Sanh is called Thach Sanh - Ly Thong, Nieng-mo-ro-nac-mo-da or Nieng-kon-tuoc Nieng - Chong-Ang-Kam is called Tam Cam... What we are concerned most is the number of people who know about this genre is becoming less and less. Many of older people who know greatly about this type of story of the Khmer people have died of age, and the young Khmers today approach the Vietnamese culture quite early (because most of them study at the schools using National language) then they have little interest in the folk tales of their people. And today's reality also shows that: On festival occasions, the Khmer people do not often tell folk tales to each other. They only tell the stories of the Buddha for the purpose of preaching and teaching Buddhists to direct their hearts toward the Buddha.



## 2. Some conservation solutions

Based on the survey situation, we propose some solutions to preserve and bring into play the Khmer folk tales as follows:

### **\*Enhance the role of Khmer students in preserving and promoting the Khmer folk tales**

According to the statistics we have, currently the proportion of Khmer students studying at Can Tho University and professional schools in the country is quite high (about 30%), they are young intellectuals of the Khmer future. More than anyone else, Khmer students need to be aware of the importance of the Khmer folk story system in traditional folk preservation. So, for preserving the Khmer folk tales, we chose to enhance the role and our awareness of Khmer students which is the most important solution. Through the organization of the "Khmer Folk Storytelling Contest," firstly it will be launched mainly in the School of Pre-University, to encourage Khmer students to participate and learn about folk tales of Khmer in general and the Khmer legendary in particular. Then, we will organize the contest at the school on the occasion of the new year celebration of the Khmer, Chol - Chnam - Thmay. In addition, we also organize the collecting and practicing programs so that Khmer students can join. We believe that the activities mentioned above are likely to be able to preserve and promote the Khmer ethnic culture.

### **\*Based on the temple, the administrators of the temple and the monks, teachers teach Khmer language to improve Khmer people's sense of story Khmer folk**

In the cultural life of Khmer people, pagodas and monks play a very important role. The Khmer people consider temples as their second home. In particular, the Khmer people worship Buddhism and fully trust in the monks as well as the temple administrators. The monks and the administrators of the Khmer temple are intellectuals who understand many aspects of their spiritual and cultural life. They are the most well-informed about the role and value that the Khmer story brings. In particular, temples are places storing many cultural values of the Khmer. Khmer temples are places occurring spiritual, religious activities as well as teaching words and convey the knowledge of traditional culture. Especially, according to traditional custom, the Khmer boys getting the adulthood usually have to go to the temple for 3-5 years before leaving the monkhood to get married. The ordination is an act of showing gratitude toward parents and to learn the wisdom to improve knowledge. When studying Khmer language at the temple, if these boys are told the folk tales, they will be the force to spread the Khmer stories after their marriage to the society.

The schools that teach Khmer language, ethnic boarding schools are the places to spread Khmer folk stories to the young Khmers. Moreover, during the stressful learning time, teachers can tell the Khmer folk tales to the students. First of all, it helps the students to be entertained. Then, it makes the class more interesting and the most important benefit is to raise the awareness of the student about the importance of Khmer folk tales when they are still sitting on the school bench.

### **\*Promote the role of mass media in preserving and bringing into play the Khmer folk tales**

The television stations, radio stations, and mass media have a quite important role in popularizing the Khmer stories. The television station, radio stations at the places where Khmer people live has a specific time frame for the Khmer. Therefore, we can encourage the television stations to promote the folk tales. The programs broadcasting at the places where the majority of Khmer people live need to take apart in introducing or telling the folk tales. And the television stations in Khmer should spend a few minutes to play short films with scenarios of folk stories of the Khmer. TV stations can also follow the format of the program Once Upon a Time to restore folk tales. This is also a viable option. In addition, there is a need to organize a contest about the Khmer folk tales on television to popularise, attract, as well as raise the awareness of people about the Khmer folk tales. The Khmer local newspapers should devote a part to introduce the Khmer folk stories more widely. A YouTube channel is one of the most popular videos sharing channel right now. Therefore, we can create a Khmer folk storytelling program on this site, which can help the Khmer stories not only be widely circulated in the country but also has the opportunity to expand worldwide.

### **\*The preservation and development of storytelling environment of Khmer folk tales**

We can clearly see that the storytelling environment of the Khmer folk tales has created a unique atmosphere for the reception of the work, only in that atmosphere, the novel tells the story of all its aesthetic value and its aesthetic effects are all-round and diverse. During a free time in evening, under the moon light and a nice breeze, grandparents or parents sit down to tell folk stories for the children. Imagine how attractive the story would be compared to reading the stories on pages of the Khmer folk tales exception. When a narrator tells the story, it means the narrator is performing the story through the style, the voices, the gestures, the actions, the emotions expressed during the process of telling the story which makes it more lively and charismatic. In addition, stories that have been changed into scripts, such as Du Ke, also give the audience more options to approach. The Du Ke stage has become a great storytelling environment of folk tales. The storytelling environments of Khmer folk tales



are on the downswing, needing the owners, who are actually possessing them, trying to restore them. Although knowing that raising awareness of the Khmer in this is relatively difficult, it is not impossible. During the topic, the writer asked people about the meaning of the survey of exist and handed situation of Khmer folk tales and receive a very positive answer. Specifically, there are up to 134/222 (occupied 60.4%) of very necessary evaluation forms, 78/222 (occupied 35.1%) necessary evaluation forms. The evaluation shows that the Khmer are still conscious of preserving their folk tales, the issue is that their condition is not allowed.

To keep the Khmer folk stories alive, it is very necessary to preserve and develop the types of scripts that are changed into scripts, because they are the life of the Southern Khmer folk tales, keeping them as keeping the breath of Khmer folk tales. As mentioned above, Du Ke is the most popular stage performance and should be preserved most. Besides Du Ke, Cham – rieng – cha – pay is also another type of art. The art of Cham - rieng - cha - pay is playing Cha - pay and singing (singing as the storytelling) without any orchestra and accompanies. It sounds very monotonous, but not simple. Learning how to play Cha-pay is difficult because it requires a meticulous training of every finger and need to apply a variety of cultural and social knowledge. Khmer people often use Cha-pay to accompany when telling stories. The stories can be folk stories or some sort of life stories. When we listen to a storyteller, we feel as if we are lost in a story full of different emotions, all emotions that depend on and improvise the emotions of the performer. Having the same fate with the Du Ke, Cham - Rieng- Cha - pay is also gradually, the number of artists who know how to play a piano is now very small. The restoration of the two types of arts requires people who are truly dedicated and a long-term, sustainable process. The Khmer culture is in need of cooperation from all, by preserving the culture of the Khmer is preserving the culture of the Vietnamese people.

### CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION (10 pt)

According to the survey results, the author has proposed four major solutions to preserve and promote the folk tales of the Khmer which are: Enhance the role of Khmer students in the conservation and broadcast the stories of the Khmer folk stories; based on temples, the administration board and monks, teachers teach Khmer writing to improve the Khmer people's sense of Khmer folk stories; promote the role of mass media in preserving and promoting the Khmer folk tales; preserve and develop the storytelling environment of Khmer folk tales. These above four solutions are highly practical and the author is convinced that if these four solutions are implemented, we will achieve positive results in the preservation and transmission of the Khmer folk story system including fairy tales.

We have two questions to discuss with the researchers:

- In your country, what methods do people use to preserve Folklore genres including fairy tales?
- Are the solutions we have set out above feasible and usable for preserving folklore genres in your country?

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