An Intertextual Comparison among Three Pieces of ChineseFolktales: Tales of Afanti, Balagencang and Aku Dönba

By

Fang Wen

PhD candidate, Semiotics and Cultural Studies
School of Liberal Arts, Shinawatra University
Email: 673873357@qq.com

Saengchan Hemchua

School of Liberal Arts, Shinawatra University
Email: saengchan.h@siu.ac.th

Abstract:

Folk literature constitutes an important category of Chinese literature. Diversified folk tales of ethnic minority groups play an important role in Chinese folk literature. Tales of Afanti, Balagencang and Aku Dönba are separately popular folk tales in three autonomous regions of Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia and Xizang (Tibet), China. These tales are also called trickster stories. Most existing researches pay more attentions on origins, variants and language features of such folk tales. However, few studies treat them as texts of signs from the semiotic perspective. In order to explore the intertextuality among texts of these three kinds of tales, this paper selects three pieces of tales from three books. Plots of these three pieces of tales are close to each other but they belong to different kinds of tales separately.

This paper compares these three pieces of tales and discusses their similarities and differences. It shows their similar narrating morphology and sign lies. In addition, contradictions between social classes at different levels and their different natural environments in tales are analyzed too. This intertextual comparison among three pieces of representing tales provides a glimpse into similarities and difference among these three kinds of tales. Interactions between the privileged (antagonists) and the tricksters (protagonists) indicate the level of social contradictions in the old days when tales were formed. Folk tales of different ethnic minority groups in China have same functions to entertain folk people and educate them in the process of disseminating.

Key Words: Intertextual Comparison, Chinese Folktales

Introduction

China is a unified multinational country with Han Chinese and other 55 ethnic minority groups (Shaoshuminzu in Chinese). Most ethnic groups have their own trickster tales, such as tales of Aidan of Naxi ethnic group (Naxi zu in Chinese) and tales of Zhaomah of Dai ethnic

group (Dai zu in Chinese). These folktales are disseminated for hundreds of years and widely accepted by members of their own minorities. Some of them become popular all over China.

Mair and Bender (2011) concluded the main collection process of folklore in China in the twentieth century. They thought scholars in China had begun to systematically examine Chinese folklore by the early twentieth century. They said that "some Chinese researchers in folklore collected and analyzed folktales and other types of oral literature not only from Han Chinese areas but also from ethnic minority areas" (p.13).

Tales of Afanti in Xinjiang are most popular in China among all kinds of minority tales and they were inscribed into China's national intangible heritage list under a category of folklore in the year of 2014 with its number 1242-I-148 (https://www.ihchina.cn/Article/Index/detail?id=12400). Tales of Balagencang was inscribed in the second list of Chinese national intangible cultural heritage in 2008 with its number 538-I-51 (https://www.ihchina.cn/Article/Index/detail?id=11664).

Tales of Afanti would occur to one's mind first in Chinese people's discussions on folktales. It just like a standard to be compared with. Tales of Afanti are to Uygur ethnic minority group (Weiwuer zu in Chinese) what tales of Balagencang are to Mongolian ethnic minority group (Menggu zu in Chinese) and what tales of Aku Dönba are to Tibetan ethnic minority group (Zang zu in Chinese). Tales of Afanti, tales of Balagencang and tales of Aku Dönba are mainly spreading in three autonomous regions in China: Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia and Tibet. Geographically speaking, Xinjiang borders Inner Mongolia to its east and Tibet to its south. Tales of Afanti, tales of Balagencang and tales of Aku Dönba interact with each other within the communication among these three minorities. They affect other tales and also are influenced by other tales. All these three kinds of tales share many similarities and have many differences at the same time. What's more, there are some tales exists in different folktales but have similar plots.

Based on Peircean definition of signs, Danesi stated "As something standing for something else, a sign can take any form, any size" (p. 98). Therefore, each piece of tales can be seen as a sign text and each kind of folktales of a a certain minority group in China can be regard as a sign text too.

Bulgarian French semiotician Julia Kristeva coined the semiotic term Intertextuality to bring writing subject, addressee (readers) and exterior texts into interpretations sign texts (Schlosser, 2018). "For Kristeva, intertextuality means that a given text does not exist as an independent or closed unit or system" (Wiggins, 2019) . This study chose three pieces of tales from these three kinds of folktales to be the research objects.

Objective of this study is to explore the intertextual relations among tales of Afanti, tales of Balagencang and tales of Aku Dönba. The research question is: What are the similarities and differences among sign texts of these three pieces of tales?

1.   List of Three Pieces of Tales

These three pieces of tales are selected from three published books. They are: (1) THE EFFENDI AND THE PREGNANT POT - Uygur Folktales from China (English version, 1982, New World Press. Beijing, China), (2) Tales of Balagencang (Chinese version, 2013, Yuanfang Press, Inner Mongolia Publishing House, Hohhot, China), and (3) Tales of Aku Dönba (Chinese version, Tibet People's Press & Hebei Province Children Press, 2003). Only the piece of tale of Afanti is written in English, while the other two pieces of tales are translated into English by author of this paper. These pieces of tales are listed as follows:

Tale 1: The Bag of Tricks (Tales of Afanti) :

2.   The Bag of Tricks

(Translated by Primerose Gigliesi and Robert C. Friend. Authors of The Effendi and the Pregnant Pot-Uygur Folktales from China).

The fame of the Effendi Nasreddin had gone beyond the borders of the nation. The padishah of a neighboring state, who had the habit of doubting everything, said to his ministers, "I have been told that not very far from here lives a man named Nasreddin who is able to trick even the padishah. Can such a thing be true?"

"Yes," his ministers replied. "We have heard that Nasreddin is very intelligent and as far as cunning is concerned no one is a match for him, not even you, your majesty."

"Humph!" said his majesty. "I can't believe that! Think it over carefully: can a villain be craftier than a padishah?"

"Ah no," the ministers agreed with a convinced air. "It is not possible."

The sovereign decided to go into the neighboring state to become acquainted with this Nasreddin and play a trick on him which would prove that the brain of a padishah is always better than the brain of the brain of a man of the people.

He walked several days and finally arrived at the effendi's village. The effendi was working in the fields. The padishah, who was dressed as a pilgrim, asked him, "It is said that in this village there is a very astute man called Nasreddin. Can you tell him to come here? I would like to know just how justified his fame is."

The effendi, who had guessed the motive of this strange pilgrim's visit, said, "Nasreddin? I am he. How can I serve you?"

"Ah, so you are Nasreddin!" said the sovereign with a scornful smile. "I have heard that you are very cunning and that you have fun at the expense of everyone. I tell you that with me you will not win that game. No one has ever succeeded in fooling me."

"I want to try then," said the effendi. "But first you must wait for me a moment. I have to go home and get my trick bag. If you are not afraid of my bag, lend me your horse so I can return at once."

"Even if you had ten trick bags, I wouldn't be afraid," said the padishah, handing the reins to the effendi. "Come back at once so I can test your talent."

The effendi climbed into the saddle and galloped off like the wind. The padishah waited until

the sun was going down behind the mountain but no one came back. When he realized that he had been tricked he hid until it was dark and then began his journey back home.

Tale 2: The Bag of Tricks (ToB)

3. *The Bag of Tricks*
(Translated by author of this paper from the book Tales of Balagencang)

Balagencang was well known for his wit. At the mere mention of him, people would say "Lord has the most cattle and sheep while Balagencng the most wisdom." An arrogant Nuoyan was not happy hearing this and said angrily, "Darned! Can slaves be cleverer than our Taiji (a Mongolian title for nobility), and has more wisdom? I should like to see how clever this Balagencang is." Then he was looking for Balagencang everywhere, intending to compete with him in wit.

One day, Nuoyan happened to meet Balagencang when crossing a grassy marshland on horseback, who was smoking leaning against a crooked-neck tree.
Without getting off the horse, Nuoyan asked, "Are you Balagencang?"
Rolling his eyes at Nuoyan, Balagencang stayed still and said, "Yes, it's me."
"I have heard that you are good at fooling people, is that so?" Nuoyan said.
"You flatter me, Master. But people do say I have wit."
Nuoyan said, "Ok. Today I should like to compete with you in wit. If you can fool me once in front of me, then I lose. If you can't, I will cut your head off with my sabre."
"Today won't do," said Balagencang, pretending to be in panic, "My bag of tricks is left home. If it is with me, I can fool the emperor in the face, let alone you."
Hearing this, Nuoyan flew into a rage, saying "Go get your bag of tricks, I will wait for you here."
"It will take long for me to go and return if I walk. Forget it. Let's find another day in case you think I am a coward and dare not compete with you. Besides, I don't have time today.
"No," said Master Nuoyan petulantly, "We have to compete today. Ride my horse if you think walking is too slow."
 "No, no. I really have no time today."
"Why don't you have time?"
"Can't you see, Master, that this crooked tree is going to fall. I have to support it with my body. How can I leave?"
"Let me do this for you." Master Nuoyan gave his horse to Balagencang, came to the tree and upheld it with his body.
"Well," Balagencang said, "It seems that you won't be happy if I don't fool you."
"Don't brag, Balagencang. If you lose, mind your head." laughed Nuoyan grimly.
"Well, then I will show you how I fool you, Master. Uphold the tree and be careful not to be eaten by wolves. Wait for me to get my bag of tricks." Jumping onto Nuoyan's horse, Balagencang kicked the horse's belly and the horse shot off like an arrow. However,

Balagencang never returned.

Tale 3: B-y-e (Tales of Aku Dönba)

B-y-e
(Translated by author of this paper from the book Tales of Aku Dönba)
There lived a disciplinarian in Drepung Monastery, who had always been pretentious and arrogant.
One day he was riding a tall yellow horse to go home from a big manor, wearing a pair of high leg boots and carrying a rifle on the back. People all couldn't help but gasped in admiration at his majestic manner......
On the way he suddenly came across Aku Dönba.
"Hey, Aku Dönba, where are you going?"
"I am going to my child's uncle's."
"What for?"
"They want me to tell them stories."
"Oh, yes. I heard that you are good at telling jokes and you are quite good at fooling people, is that so?"
"You are flattering me!"
"Don't be courteous! It's a great opportunity we met here today. Try fool me!"
"How could I dare! How could I dare!"
"Don't play dumb! I let you fool me. You have to fool me! I will see how proficient you are at fooling!"
Seeing his insolent manner, Aku Dönba simply pretended to be timid, saying in obedience with one hand cupped in the other:
"Your honor, please spare me. From ancient times on owls only hoot at night. How dare little devil play tricks in front of God……"
 "Save your words. To live or to die, it's up to whether you fool me or not. Don't you know my temper?"
"Such being the case, I dare not defy you. But today doesn't work since I don't carry my trick kit with me. Could you please have mercy on me and change a date?"
"Where do you leave your trick kit?"
"At home."
"I will wait for you here. Go get it."
"My home is quite a long way from here. I feel bad making you wait here."
"If so, ride my horse and go now!"
Aku Dönba mounted the horse reluctantly and a few steps later, he deliberately reined the horse to a stop. Aku Dönba dismounted then ran to disciplinarian and said, "Your horse is a noble one and it would not carry me since my dress is so miserable and shabby."
Hearing this, disciplinarian took off his magnificent cassock and shining boots unreservedly and handed them to Aku Dönba.

"Put them on. Now you look gorgeous."

With the magnificent clothes on, Aku Dönba rode the "noble horse". After a while, he reined the horse again, dismounted, and ran to disciplinarian. He said: "Oh, it won't walk again. Your horse is not just a 'noble' horse. Only generals can ride it. It must have seen that there is no rifle on my back and won't go. Your honour, simply lend your rifle to me!"

The disciplinarian thought: It must be that Aku Dönba dare not fool me and tries to find excuses. It doesn't hurt if I give my rifle to him. Thus, he has no excuses. Then I will see what he has to say. So, he gave his rifle to Aku Dönba resolutely.

Now Aku Dönba was already armed to the teeth. He spurred the horse and the horse galloped. When he crossed the wide Nyang Qu River, he turned back and shouted at disciplinarian, his hands cupping around his mouth: "Hey! Bye bye! Bye---bye."

With things as such, the stupid disciplinarian realized he had been fooled. But what can he do? Running after them on bare foot will only make him look more awkward!

4.   Comparison

These three pieces of tales with similar plots strikingly exists in tales of Afanti, tales of Balagencang and tales of Aku Dönba. Tales (1-3) are all about tricksters' "bag of tricks". Tales (1-2) are named exactly the same "The Bag of Tricks"in tales of Afanti and tales of Balagencang. It is "B-y-e" in tales of Aku Dönba which has pretty similar plots with the other two pieces of tales. The reason why it is treated as one tale similar to "The Bag of Tricks" is because Aku Dönba lied that he had a trick kit instead of a bag of tricks. However, they are just different synonyms which had same function in these tales. This paper compares details of them to find their similarities and differences.

3.1 Similarities

As representing pieces of folk tales of three ethnic minority groups, these three pieces of tales share a similar narrating morphology and all tricksters lies to the privileged.

3.1.1 Similar narrating morphology

The core plots of tales (1-3) are similar: A man of the privileged obstructed a poor person who is famous for his wit from a lower social class. The antagonist is a Nuoyan in the tale of Balagencang, a padishah in the tale of Afanti and a disciplinarian in the tale of Aku Dönba. This man of privileged forced the trickster to fool him in all three pieces of tales. Balagencang and Aku Dönba declined them with the excuse that they forgot their bags of tricks (trick kit in the tale of Aku Dönba) at home and the privileged required them to go fetch it. Instead of declining the padishah, Afanti expressed his problem with a same reason: "I have to go home and get my trick bag" and proposed to borrow the horse of padishah so he could return at once. Only after wise men left, the privileged could realize they were cheated.

The narrating morphology of these three pieces of tales are close to each other. They all can be divided into 5 steps.

Step 1: The privileged met the trickster and forced the latter to fool him;
Step 2: The trickster lied that he forgot his bag of tricks/ tricks kit at home today;
Step 3: The privileged lent his horse to the trickster to fetch the trick bag/kit;
Step 4: The trickster had gone and never returned;
Step 5: The privileged realized he was fooled at last.

From the perspective of story construction, Bag of Tricks in tales of Balagencang and tales of Aku Dönba took a brief background but it in tales of Afanti started a dialogue between a padishah and his ministers first. They presented different ways to start a tale. Then, tales developed with similar procedures and endings. In tales (1-3), the privileged all realized tricksters were lying and never returned but it was them who forced trickster to fool them at first. They had to accept the ending although all were angry and hoped to take another chance to make difficulties for the tricksters.

3.1.2 Sign Lies

Eco (1976) believes that "Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign. A sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else. This something else does not necessarily have to exist or to actually be somewhere at the moment in which a sign stands in for it". He concluded "Semiotics is in principle the discipline studying everything which can be used in order to lie. If something cannot be used to tell a lie, conversely it cannot be used to tell the truth: it cannot in fact be used to 'to tell' at all."(p. 7).

Tales (1-3) are great evidence to explain sign lies. All tricksters chose to lie to the privileged and said they forgot the trick bags home. They don't have bags of tricks or tricks kit at all but a bag of tricks can be used for tricksters to tell lies. So "a bag of tricks " is a sign lie itself. Leaving their bags of tricks at home was lies of them to fool the privileged. It is a sign lie too since its prerequisite doesn't exist at all.

3.2 Differences:

Although these three pieces of tales share similarities, they belong to folktales of different minorities. What defines the classifications of tales with similar plots and contents. Therefore, special features of each kind of tales should be focused more in the following discussion.

3.2.1 Contradictions between Social Classes

"A narrative is a story that is put together to portray reality in a specific way" (Danesi M, 2007). Comparing tales (1-3), they are on the same topic "bag of tricks" and all reflect social conflicts. The privileged oppressed the poor people obviously. To a certain extent, folktales are sign texts of history which can reflect history. Relation between different social classes is the

top difference to mention. It is inferred that oppression of the ruling class was the slightest in Afanti's period in history. Compared these tales, only Afanti was not threatened to fool the powerful. The ruling class in Balagencnag's and Aku Dönba's social environment were more tyrannical. Balagencang was told to lose his head if he could not fool Nuoyan, and the disciplinarian asked Aku Dönba to choose to live or to die. Aku Dönba had to fool this disciplinarian to live. Only Afanti proposed to have a try to fool the powerful while the other two had no choices. Compared with the other two tricksters, Afanti expressed himself more directly. His attitude is more positive. He said **"I want to try then,"** when the padishah challenged him. What's more, he proposed to borrow the horse, and said "**If you are not afraid of my bag, lend me your horse so I can return at once.**" Balagencang's interaction with Nuoyan is more complicated than Afanti's with the padishah. He refused Nuoyan many times. Balagencang said he left his bag of tricks at home first and added that it would take very long time to get it back if walking. Actually, he laid the groundwork for his next step to borrow the horse of Nuoyan. His second excuse to refuse Nuoyan that day was that he had to support that crooked tree with his body. He lied to Nuoyan since that tree was not going to fall in fact. This was only his trick to make Nuoyan stay there and left no room for Nuoyan to detect his lies soon or required to go with him together to fetch his bag. Nuoyan walked right to the traps of Balagencang and was fooled at last. Aku Dönba did the same to refuse the disciplinarian many times at the beginning. What's more, after he borrowed the horse successfully, he found many excuses to stop the horse and made the disciplinarian lose not only his horse but also his magnificent cassock, shining boots, and even his rifle.

A straw shows which way the wind blows. The reason why these three tricksters reacted so distinctly when they were challenged is that they were under pressure at different levels. Tales are fictional but they could also expose reality problems of that age. The padishah just came to play a trick on Afanti to prove that "the brain of a padishah is always better than the brain of a man of the people." while the Nuoyan threatened Balagencang and said "If you can fool me once in front of me, then I lose. If you can't, I will cut your head off with my sabre." Balagencang had to be more careful than Afanti, because he would lose his life if he failed this competition. It was the same for Aku Dönba. It may infer that people, who lived in old days when tales of Balagencang and tales of Aku Dönba were formed, lived an extremely hard life under the ruling class' oppression. Even one's personal safety was in risks. Ordinary people were easy to be oppressed by cruel officials. Although Inner Mongolia is adjacent to Xinjiang geographically and Xinjiang is adjacent to Tibet, Inner Mongolia and Tibet culture has more intersections at this point.

3.2.2 Natural Environment

Tales (1-3) presented different natural environments in these three pieces of tales. Padishah walked several days then met Afanti at his village when Afanti was working in the fields. Nuoyan met Balagencang when crossing a grassy marshland on horseback and Balagencang was smoking leaning against a crooked-neck tree. This natural environment is

typically related to lifestyle of Mongolian people. Disciplinarian met Aku Dönba on his way home from a big manor. At the end of this story, after Aku Dönba crossed the wide Nyang Qu River, he turned back and shouted at disciplinarian Bye. Nyang Qu River is one of the five main tributaries of the world-famous Yarlung Zangbo River, and the other four are: Lhasa River, Nyang River, Parlung Zanbo and Dogxung Zangbo. "In the Tibetan language, rivers are called 'zangbo' or 'qu' " (An, 2003).

3.3 Significance construction

Tales of Afanti, Balagencang and Aku Dönba are symbols of wisdom of Uygur, Mongolian and Tibetan ethnic minority groups. These tales entertain and educate folk people at the same time.

3.3.1 Identity Construction

Unknown (2008) stated: "Almost every minority has its own trickster, and some minorities even has two tricksters. They are all elite and masters of humor for their own minorities" (p. 11). Tales of Afanti, tales of Balagencang and tales of Aku Dönba were orally spread in areas where Uygurs, Mongolians and Tibetans live in history for hundreds of years. Scholars and people who have strong interest on folk literature realize their significance and began to collect and publish more and more tales in different languages in modern society. At least every kind of these folktales is published both in its own ethnic language and Chinese. Some of them are translated into foreign languages such as English and Russian. Sign texts of tales of Afanti and tales of Aku Dönba have grown into different forms in multi-modalities. They were transformed from oral texts to written texts, from collection books to picture books, from books to cartoons, even to TV programs.

Within the growing process of each sign text, it interacts with other tales and produces many intertexts. They belong to different kinds of tales because of their differences instead of their similarities.

Saidahemaiti (2021) explained that the meaning of Afanti is a teacher and he said Uygur people in China regard Afanti as a teacher of their minority, representative of their ethnic knowledge and wisdom, and embodiment of their ethnic pleasure and humor (p. 47). Afanti in Uygur language becomes a positive word and people usually praise others like "You are a real Afanti".

Based on Mang (1985) of the word "Balagencang" This dissertation prefers to explain it from a morphological aspect. "Balagencang" is compounded by two morphemes: "balagen-" and "-cang". The root of "balagan" is "balag" that means "richness", and "-en" is a suffix to convert a noun to an adjective word. And "-cang" is common to see at the end of a Mongolian name when its transferred meaning "treasure" or "storage" is used (p.112). So, the morphological structure of the word "Balagencang" in Mongolian is "Balag·en·cang", refers to a wise man, full of wisdom and rich in thoughts. Another derived meaning of "Balagencang"

is the king of liars. He often lied to the privileged.Tales of Balagencang are regarded as the crystallization of Mongolian wisdom (Bai, 1989, p. 15) and Balagencang becomes a hero in Mongolians.

Jampa (2001) introduced tales of Agudunba (Aku Dönba), also called tales of Agudengba, as the most widespread trickster tales in Tibet. He explained that "Agudunba" means "uncle mentor", and "Agudengba" is "uncle humor". this book explained that once Aku Dönba was mentioned, Tibetan people would become active and smile immediately (p. 9).

Both figures of tricksters and their tales are signs for these ethnic minority groups. Minority people feel proud and happy when trickster tales are mentioned. These signs and sign texts absorbs and embodies minority intelligence and psychology.

3.3.2 Function Construction

Pu et al. (2020) concluded three kinds functions of proverbs in Qinghai and Tibetan Plateaus: (1) Warnings and Moralization, (2) Knowledge Dissemination, (3) Culture carries (p.114-116). These functions can be elaborated to be functions of all folk literature, including other parts of folk literature, such as folktales and folk songs. Jørgen and Dines (2022) introduced a Thai folklore expert's classification of functions of Thai folklore: (1) Explanation function on Ceremony Origins, (2) Educational function in a society that folklore was spread orally, (3) Maintenance function on rules of social conduct, (4) Entertaining function to relieve stress (p. 79).

Sign texts of tales of Afanti, tales of Balagencang and tales of Aku Dönba have most functions above. According to Volume of Xizang, there were many ordinary people in Tibet who could not afford school education within a feudal serf system in history. Folk literature was school for them, and figures of folk literature were teachers. There was a saying that Agudunba (Aku Dönba in this dissertation) is an incarnation of Sakyamuni or Avalokitesvara to moralize Tibetan people (p.10). If the Tibetan name of protagonist was translated into Chinese phonetic alphabets, it should be Agudunba. The reason why this dissertation takes Aku Dönba as its transliteration from Tibetan to English is because of a series of Tibetan-English students' books: Language Pathways 1-5, A Tibetan & English Reader, Pema Gyatso & Geofff Bailey (Australian), Tibet Peoples's Press, 2010. These tales are written in Tibetan and translated by an Australian, illustrated in bilingual forms. It is believed that the English word Aku Dönba is most carefully chosen by them and which might be the most accurate in terms of expression of sound and connotation. Thus, this dissertation chose "Aku Dönba" as his name in English.

Analogous to function of tales of Aku Dönba, tales of Balagencang and tales of Afanti are the same to form and protect their minority values. Within the spreading process, their ethnic values pass down to new generations. Children and young people would learn from their heroes in folktales unconsciously. Folktales are a part of their childhood.

Based on existing function classifications of folklore above and the influence of these three kinds of folktales, this paper concludes their functions as follows. (1) Entertaining function. For folktales of ethnic minority groups in China, the top function is sure the to entertain people. All tricksters in these folktales are humorous and people of ethnic minority groups feel instinct happy when they hear or tell these tales. (2) Education function. Aku Dönba is uncle mentor and Afanti means a teacher. Meanings of them indicates the education function of these tales. Pu's three functions (2010): Warnings and Moralization, Knowledge Dissemination and Culture carriers can be subcategories of education function.

Discussion and Conclusion

These three pieces of tales about a bag of tricks share a similar narrating morphology and all tricksters lied to the privileged when they were forced to fool the privileged. Levels of social contradictions and natural environments in these three pieces tales are different.

Similar to these three pieces of tales, all tricksters in these three kinds of folktales are representatives of the lower class in its own ethnic history, poor but very intelligent. It was Afanti when it was in a sign system of culture of Uygur minority, then Afanti usually wore a Turban and rode on a donkey. It became Balagencang when it was encoded with codes of culture of Mongolian minority. So he lived in a Mongolian yurt and drank milk tea frequently. Analogously, trickster of Tibetans was named Aku Dönba and he often suffered from starvation and easily met some cruel serf-owner. The privileged in most tales often snared tricksters so tricksters were forced to meet the difficulties and they dared not say no to them. Instead, tricksters were intelligent enough and they often lied to the privileged. Tricksters usually accepted the burdensome task first and dealt with them through lies. At last, all the privileged who planned to make trouble for tricksters realized tricksters were lying but they had no excuse to defend themselves. That was the intelligence of tricksters.

Folktales are usually short to be memorized and spread orally in history. Comparing these three pieces of tales, Balagencang and Aku Dönba refused the privileged many times but Afanti lied to the padishah directly because Balagencang and Aku Dönba were threatened by the privileged. Contradictions between ruling class and ordinary people in tales of Balagencang and tales of Aku Dönba were severe. This decides the communication between the privileged and the trickster more complicated. Of course, complicated plots indicate a relatively longer tale. In a word, different levels of contradictions between ruling class and oppressed people decided different length of tales. In a society with slight oppression, ordinary people dared to express themselves more directly and folktales are shorter.

As folktales for ethnic minority groups, tales of Afanti, Balagencang and Aku Dönba entertain and educate folk people in their dissemination process. Artificial intelligence can help to analyze the text-based tales. Folklore is an infinite treasure of signs which need scholars to explore. These tales deserve a cooperation in the future among researchers in semiotics, linguistics, literature and translation, anthropology, history, archaeology and so on.

References

An, C. (2003). Tibetan Tourism, Series of Basic Information of Tibet of China. China Intercontinental Press.

Danesi, M. (2007). The Quest for Meaning: A Guide to Semiotic Theory and Practice. Toronto, Buffalo. London: University of Toronto Press.

Eco, U. (1976). A Theory of Semiotics, Bloomington: Indiana Univer. In: sity Press. _.(1981). The Role of the Reader, Bloomington: Indiana ….

Jampa, B. (2001). Collected Chinese Folklore (Volume of Xizang). China ISBN Center Press.

Jørgen, & Dines, J. (2022). Literary Discourse: A Semiotic-Pragmatic Approach to Literature. Toronto Buffalo London: University of Toronto Press.

Mair, V. H., & Bender, M. (2011). The Columbia anthology of Chinese folk and popular literature. Columbia University Press. http://cup.columbia.edu/book/the-columbia-anthology-of-chinese-folk-and-popular-literature/9780231153126

Mang, M. (1985). On Origin and Development of Tales of Balagencang. Ethinc Literature Study, 120. 121-112.

Pu, Y., Werne, J. P., Meyers, P. A., & Zhang, H. (2020). Organic matter geochemical signatures of sediments of Lake Ngoring (Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau): A record of environmental and climatic changes in the source area of the Yellow River for the last 1500 years. Palaeogeography, Palaeoclimatology, Palaeoecology, 551, 109729. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.palaeo.2020.109729

Saidahemaiti, S. (2021). Comparison of the Images of Afanti and Fei Langji. International Journal of Social Science and Education Research, 4(3), 218-221. https://doi.org/10.6918/IJOSSER.202103_4(3).0032

Schlosser, K. (2018). Intertextuality and Psychic Space. Literary Geographies, 4(1), 24-28. https://literarygeographies.net/index.php/LitGeogs/article/view/135

Unknown. (2008). Collected Chinese Folklore. China ISBN Center Press.

Wiggins, E. B. (2019). The Discursive Power of Memes in Digital Culture: Ideology, . Semiotics, and Intertextuality. New York and London: Routledge.