Different Family Roles, Different Interpretations of Thai Folktales

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While many other kinds of Thai folklore have all but disappeared in the face of cultural and social change, it is unclear why *chakchak wongwong* tales continue to attract Thai people. *Chakchak wongwong* is a genre of Thai folktales, the stories of which are about adventurous and polygynous life of princely heroes. In most, the hero goes out to find a spouse and almost always sneaks into a princess's castle and sleeps with her. He is usually caught by the princess's father, and eventually there is a fight between them. The hero usually acquires additional wives later on in the story, often leading to jealousy between the co-wives. This kind of story has been told by storytellers and performed in folk drama for more than three hundred years. For thirty years these stories have appeared as a popular television serial broadcast by Channel 7—the channel with the widest availability in Thailand. Interestingly, recently, two other television channels have started to also produce this kind of folktale movie. Despite the popularity and the persistence of *chakchak wongwong* stories, they have been neglected by both Thai and Western scholars, and analysis of them from a socio-cultural or anthropological perspective is almost unknown.

In this paper, I attempt to find out, firstly, what in these folktales appeals to people such that they have persisted and remained popular and, secondly, in what way people can " make use " of these tales. To understand the persistence and longevity of *chakchak wongwong* tales in Thai society, it is necessary to see how the stories are associated with important aspects of Thai life. I then examine the relationship between role conflict among characters in folktales and role conflict in Thai families. And, to understand how *chakchak wongwong* stories hold

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meaning for Thai people, I particularly focus on the investigation of folk's interpretation of the tales. More precisely, I investigate how differently occupants of different family roles interpret the behavior of folktale characters. Correlation between family role and kind of tale interpretation will clarify why *chakchak wongwong* tales are so popular, how these folktales correspond with Thai social order and, very importantly, how the *folk* use the *lore.*

Role Conflict among Characters in Chakchak Wongwong Stories and Role Conflict in Thai Families

The relationship between folklore and the social order has been addressed by many folklorists and anthropologists. Malinowski (1954, 96) clearly states that, " . . . an intimate connection exists between the word, the mythos, the sacred tales of a tribe, on the one hand, and their ritual acts, their moral deeds, their social organization, and even their practical activities, on the other." Fischer, giving more content to the relationship, points out that, "Any theme which is prominent in the folktales of a group is the subject of considerable conflict in real life " (1963, 262). He goes so far as to say that, " Folktales generally will make the most sense and will tell the most plausible role within the nuclear family " (1963, 263).

A Southeast Asian case in keeping with Fischer's point is Leach's argument that family conflict in Kachin society is reflected in their folktales (Leach 1964, 167). He points out that the inconsistency arising from the association of a rule of patrilocal residence and a rule of succession by ultimogeniture causes jealousy between older and youngest brothers. The youngest son is the residual heir. If the older brothers stay at home according to the post-marital residence rule, however, there is likely to be conflict. This kind of family role conflict, namely, sibling conflict, is prominently presented in Kachin folktales.

Whereas Leach (1964) found Kachin tales to revolve around sibling conflict over succession and inheritance, my analysis (Thitathan 1987) of Anantasan's (1972) collection of twenty *chakchak wongwong* tales shows sibling conflict to be overshadowed by marital conflict. In most tales, the plot involves a hero acquiring spouses, his conflict with his wife's father, and his solutions for his co-wives' jealousy. In sum, the conflict between characters in *chakchak wongwong* tales involves two pairs of conflicting family roles, i.e., the conflict between co-wives and the conflict father-in-law and son-in-law.

Let me illustrate in more detail the occurrence and the pervasiveness of these two prominent pairs of conflicting family roles in these

twenty *chakchak wongwong* stories. I classify plots of the twenty stories into three types. Type A are stories starting with the jealousy between co-wives, then one of the wives together with her child are banished out of the kingdom. When the child (the hero) grows up, he sets out on his adventures. Upon his adventure, either he sneaks in to a princess' castle and sleeps with her and later on fights with the princess' father (by Thai cultural standard, behaviorally, the princess is considered to be the hero's wife and, therefore, the princess' father, the hero's father-in-law). Or, he wins in the trial by contest and marries the princess. In either case, the conflict between the hero and his father-in-law usually develops which leads to some quarrels.

Type B stories start with a young prince seeking a wife. He usually comes across a kingdom, gets the princess to be his wife and, again, fights with his father-in-law. While he is bringing his wife back to his kingdom, he is usually separated with his wife in the forest. Upon searching for his wife, he acquires another wife by the same method as previously mentioned in type A.

Type C stories are similar to type B stories except for the story starting with the hero already having a wife, or in some stories, seven wives. The hero takes his wife (or his wives) on a trip to see flowers in the forest and gets separated with her (or with them). The hero, again, acquires another wife. The stories end up with jealousy between co-wives.

If we combine the three types of the plots together, we will get a life cycle of a hero. The hero is seen as born in the midst of the jealousy among his father's co-wives. In his manhood, he usually has to fight with his father-in-law, more than one in some stories. In the end, he may confront the situation of jealousy and quarrels between his own wives. The conflict between co-wives and that between father-in-law and son-in-law are thus repeatedly emphasized in the Thai's *chakchak wongwong* stories.

What then is the cultural basis for such family conflict? Turning to look at the Thai family system, the Thai rule for post-marital residence tends to be matrilocality in which the groom moves to live in the bride's household (ANUMANRAJADHON 1968; KEMP 1960; POTTER 1976). However, in practice, the groom initially resides as a dependent member of his wife's natal household, and then moves out to establish an independent household when his wife's younger sister marries and brings her husband in. The displacement process repeats itself until the youngest daughter brings her husband in to stay permanently and finally inherits the parents' house (POTTER 1976, 283; KAUFMAN 1960, 29; TAMBIAH 1970, 12–13; FOSTER 1975, 45).

The fact that each daughter takes her turn bringing her husband in, no matter how long it will be for each case, indicates that so long as the father (-in-law) is still alive, he has to confront his son-in-law one after another. The considerable length of co-residence between father-in-law and son-in-law has the potential to create an explosive relationship. The son-in-law has to help his father-in-law work in the rice field and has to submit to his father-in-law's authority (POTTER 1976, 125). This can put a young son-in-law in a very dependent and uncomfortable position. The fact that the youngest son-in-law will finally inherit the house and succeed to authority in the household makes the father-in-law feel that he is being pushed to release his power. This can create great tension between a father-in-law and son-in-law.

Accordingly, we can now see the correspondence between conflicting roles in real life Thai matrilocal families and the folktale theme of the fight between a princely hero and the princess' father. While in real life both son-in-law and father-in-law have to continue living in the same household under certain constraints, in the folktales one or the other has to be killed. Such dramatic outcomes subtly suggest the ideal desire that there be only one male authority in the household.

Regarding the matter of co-wives, polygyny had long been practiced in Thai societies. Nowadays, though legally a man can have a marriage license with only one woman, in practice polygyny is possible and plausible. It is popularly known that high ranked officers or government officials tend to have " minor wives " (SAMAKKARN 1976, 160, 181). At the village level, there is, however, a lower frequency of polygynous cases and polygyny takes on a different form. Ethnographies on Thailand report that a man tends to have another wife when he works outside the village (See KAUFMAN 1960, 28; THITATHAN 1987, 75–76).

Considering sex roles in Thai households, women not only work in the rice fields but also do all the cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing (HANKS 1963, 13; KAUFMAN 1960, 21–22). This helps explain why men tend to have another wife when they go to work elsewhere. Since men rely on women to take care of them and the household, they are helpless when they are away from home. As a result, a number of them find another woman to do the same kind of activities as their wives do. Thus, the establishment of a new household is often the outcome. Nowadays, village men tend to be more and more mobile; they go to work in the cities during times other than the rice-farming seasons, or they quit rice-farming and become wage laborers. This situation, when combined with Thai sex roles in the household, potentially gives rise to polygynous practices, thus potentially creating conflict between

co-wives. Going back to the folktales, we have already seen that *chakchak wongwong* stories particularly reflect the jealousy between co-wives in Thai families.

Research Questions and Method of Fieldwork

1. Given the fact that the rule of post-marital residence and the practice of matrilocal extended family can potentially generate conflict and tension between father-in-law and son-in-law, and given the fact that the hero and the villain in the folktales are in fact son-in-law and father-in-law respectively, would real-life fathers-in-law and sons-in-law interpret the behavior of the hero and the villain in the folktales differently? And what structures the variability in their interpretations?

2. Similarly, given the fact that, even nowadays, there is a possibility that a man may have more than one wife, resulting in co-wives situations, how differently do major wives and minor wives in real-life interpret the behavior of the minor wife and the major wife characters in the folktales?

3. More generally, how do people make use of the folktales and how do folktales hold meaning for people, and how do variation in interpretation of the folktales help explain the relationship between folktale and social organization and, finally, the popularity and longevity of *chakchak wongwong* stories?

My field research in a village in central Thailand directly focused on how occupants of different family roles interpret the folktale characters. Two main kinds of data were collected. One concerns family background of the villagers, including composition of their households, their relations with other family members, and gossip about people who are in conflict in the families. The other set of data is the intensive interviews of family members' interpretations of the behavior of characters in the " Sangthong " story, the *chakchak wongwong* story chosen to use in this investigation in tale interpretation.

Ethnography of the Village

I carried out my field research in a rice-farming village in Singburi province, central Thailand. It is an old and traditional village with its own history and people have strong ties to their village. It is a functional village in the sense that it has its own Buddhist temple and its own school and local stores where one can find things one needs daily. And if one needs to go to the city, the local mini-bus is very convenient.

Rapid social and technological changes in the village actually started not long ago. In 1972, Asia Road, the highway running across the central part up to the northern part of Thailand, was built. To-

gether with Asia Road came electricity which dramatically changed village life style. For instance, family members all watch television instead of talking or storytelling at night.

Today the village contains sixty households, made up of 247 people. The average size is four members per household. This village used to be mainly an agricultural village. Within the past ten to twenty years, many people have left rice-farming, and changed to other occupations. In 1985–1986, out of sixty households, only twenty-three households still do rice-farming. Children of farmers have become teachers, soldiers, nurses, and many have taken up construction work or become wage laborers.

Although modernization has dramatically changed the pattern of village subsistence economy, family practices do not seem to have changed so radically. Today, the matrilocal extended-family can generally still be found. However, in several matrilocal households, the father-in-law has already died, leaving the mother-in-law and the family of the youngest daughter in the household. Or, there are cases of fathers-in-law of 50–65 years old whose sons-in-law tend to live elsewhere, not in the village.

The fact that fathers-in-law do not live in the same household as sons-in-law does not mean that they are not in conflict. Data from the field suggests that conflict can also develop if one of the parties does not behave as the other expects. Both have cultural role expectations toward one another. When fathers-in-law are asked what kind of son-in-law a father-in-law likes, they respond that a son-in-law should be obedient, hard-working, moral, should not be aggressive and should neither gamble nor drink to excess. When sons-in-law are asked what kind of father-in-law a son-in-law likes, they respond that they expect fathers-in-law to be fair, generous, not biased, not picky, not strict, and more importantly, not to interfere with their lives. Conflict can arise if the behavior of one does not meet such role expectations of the other. For example, there are several cases in the village where fathers-in-law do not get along with their sons-in-law who gamble and are always drunk.

Given the fact that the village has been changing in many respects, nevertheless, many cultural and oral traditions are on-going. Quite a few people can still tell old stories. Female storytellers like to tell *chakchak wongwong* stories, whereas male storytellers can also tell jokes. Most villagers of all ages will not miss the folk drama whenever any drama troupes pass by. Most villagers regularly watch the series of folktale movies shown on the television.

" SANGTHONG ": THE *CHAKCHAK WONGWONG* TALE CHOSEN AS A CASE STUDY

" Sangthong " is one of the most popular folktales in Thailand, perhaps the best-known among Thai people. It has been transmitted in many forms: ***chakchak wongwong*** tale, ***jataka*** tale (stories about the Buddha's previous lives), local legend, literature, folk drama, court drama, and television. Let me briefly summarize the Sangthong story.

> There is a king who has two wives. The major wife gives birth to a son who is born in a conchshell. The minor wife influences the king to banish the major wife and her conchshell son out of the kingdom. They live with an old couple. Everyday Prince Sang, the conchshell son, will come out of the conchshell to help his mother do the housework. The mother finds out and breaks the shell. The minor wife finds out and again tries to get rid of Prince Sang. Later on, a lady giant takes care of Prince Sang. One day, Prince Sang jumps into a golden well that the lady giant forbids him to jump into, and he also puts on an ugly mask and flies away. He comes across the Samon kingdom. King Samon has seven daughters. He announces to all the kings to send their sons for his daughters to choose. The six daughters choose their husbands, but Rodjana, the youngest daughter, does not. She finally chooses Prince Sang (when putting on the ugly mask, he is usually called Chao Ngo), since she could see his golden body while other people see him as an ugly person. King Samon is very furious and chases away his youngest son-in-law and his youngest daughter to live in the rice field. Then he orders all of his sons-in-law to bring him a hundred fish and a hundred deer with an intention to kill Chao Ngo. Chao Ngo has a magic spell so he can bring a hundred deer and fish but the other six sons-in-law cannot. In the end, Chao Ngo helps King Samon save the kingdom and reveals his golden body and his royal origin.

There are four significant reasons why the Sangthong story is the best to be used in examining variation in tale interpretation. First, like other ***chakchak wongwong*** stories, the Sangthong story contains two prominent pairs of conflicting roles, i.e., co-wives and father-in-law / son-in-law. Unlike other stories which makes the Sangthong story more special, it includes two more pairs of conflicting family roles, i.e., older / younger sisters and older / younger brothers-in-law. Viewed in this light, the Sangthong story can attract wider audiences, since more occupants of different family roles can get deeply involved when listen-

ing to the story.

Second, the transactions between father-in-law and son-in-law are much more lengthy and more complex in the Sangthong story than in other stories. In other *chakchak wongwong* stories, the hero typically confronts his wife's father and either one or the other is killed. In the Sangthong story, however, there are five episodes dealing particularly with father-in-law and son-in-law transactions. All of the episodes contain considerable interactions between father-in-law and son-in-law, providing many topics and detail to be discussed when it comes to the audiences' interpretations of the tale.

Third, the characters in the story possess good and bad parts in their personalistics. As a result, the tale allows richer discussion and criticism of characters' behaviors. The fact that it is ambiguous and ambivalent to judge, for example, whether King Samon is a cruel father-in-law or a father-in-law who should receive sympathy, opens the field of discussion, since the audience can view it either way.

Fourth, the characters of both parties to conflict experience both "pain" and "gain." For example, King Samon, in the beginning, gains in the control over his youngest son-in-law, but in the end he loses and Sangthong wins. This gives a chance for both parties to real life role conflict to identify themselves with the characters who occupy the same family roles as they themselves occupy in real life. When their counterpart gains, they identify with him, and they become satisfied when the characters who occupy the opposite roles lose.

Since, possessing all of the above characteristics, "Sangthong" can attract more occupants of family roles than other stories, and the characters are ambivalent enough to be interpretable, it is possible to argue for the "rightness" of both parties to conflict. It is, then, interesting to see which occupants of family roles in real life will argue for or against which characters in the story.

Variation in Tale Interpretation by Occupants of Different Family Roles in the Village in Singburi

Most of the interpretation data were gathered in a series of relatively open-ended interviews, each of which lasted about 30–45 minutes. The interviews contained questions on audience's opinions toward feelings and behaviors of the characters who were in conflict, opinions toward who the villain is, and what are their favorite episode and their favorite character.

I interviewed sixty informants: twelve fathers-in-law; ten sons-in-law; eight co-wives, eighteen non co-wives, and twelve unmarried people. Fathers-in-law are older men, ranging from 50–87 years of

age (though mostly in the sixties). They all have sons-in-law, and their fathers-in-law had already died. Sons-in-law are younger men, ranging from 30–47 years of age (mostly in the thirties). Out of the eight co-wives, four are major wives, three are minor wives. One is at one time the major wife and at another the minor wife, since her husband has another " wife " and she and her husband are separated, while now she lives with another man who does not live with his wife.

Since father-in-law / son-in-law and co-wives are the major role relations between characters in the Sangthong story and in *chakchak wongwong* tales in general, I will particularly compare fathers-in-law's as opposed to sons-in-law's interpretations of King Samon's behavior and Chao Ngo's behavior. Then I will examine fathers-in-law's, sons-in-law's, and co-wives' identification of villainy. Then I compare major wives and minor wives' interpretation of the behavior of the hero's father's minor wife, Chandewi. Family roles and family background of informants will be analytically discussed along with their tale interpretations.

Interpretation of King Samon's (Father-in-Law's) Feeling

Referring to the episode when Rodjana chooses Prince Sang, who is usually called " Chao Ngo " when he wears the ugly mask, and the episode when King Samon banishes his youngest daughter and son-in-law, I asked, " What do you think about King Samon's chasing Chao Ngo to live in the rice field and ordering his sons-in-law to bring him a hundred deer and a hundred fish? " All sons-in-law's answers tend to be stereotyped and relatively short, indicating that they do not show much sympathy toward King Samon nor do they show any kind of emotion. Sons-in-law's interpretations do not vary much from the following, characteristic responses:

> King Samon must feel ashamed to have such an ugly son-in-law living in the palace.
>
> or
>
> King Samon thinks his son-in-law should not stay in the palace. He is ashamed to have an ugly son-in-law.

Fathers-in-law's answers, on the contrary, are relatively longer. Fathers-in-law have a lot more to say about King Samon, the character who occupies the same family role as themselves. Particularly fathers-in-law who are in great conflict with sons-in-law use very strong words and emotionally give their opinions supporting King Samon's feeling:

> That's because he hates Chao Ngo, he wants to kill him. He

chases Chao Ngo out; he does not want his daughter to go, but she follows him anyway. King Samon thinks that if Chao Ngo dies, his *youngest* daughter can come back to the palace. He loves his daughter but he hates his son-in-law. So he orders his sons-in-law to hunt deer and fish with the belief that he can kill his *youngest* son-in-law that way.

This opinion was given by a father-in-law who hated his youngest son-in-law because his *youngest* daughter ran away with him after they were forbidden to marry. The young couple had a daughter, who later on was left in the care of this father-in-law, since his daughter and his son-in-law could not afford to hire a babysitter to take care of the child. This father-in-law loved his grand-daughter but he still never talked to his youngest son-in-law.

It is interesting that this father-in-law emphatically uses the words *youngest* daughter and *youngest* son-in-law as if he was relating his painful experience with his youngest daughter with Rodjana, the youngest daughter in the story. The fact that he stated that " King Samon does not want his daughter to go, but she follows him anyway " sounded like the story of his youngest daughter who ran away with the young man. Moreover, his opinion that " If Chao Ngo dies, his youngest daughter can come back to the palace " interestingly accords with another father-in-law's opinion that " King Samon tries to find the way to kill his son-in-law so that his daughter will have a chance to remarry." This is the case of a father-in-law whose elder son-in-law deserted his daughter and the youngest son-in-law is always drunk and likes to gamble.

Overall, in fathers-in-law's interpretations, we find evidence of fathers-in-law's identification with the character of the same family role, taking the form of conditional statement: " If I were King Samon, I would . . . ," or by suggesting that, " We should sympathize with King Samon," or by confirming that, " King Samon is right, he is not wrong," all of which are absent in sons-in-law's interpretations for the same matter.

Interpretation of Chao Ngo's (Son-in-Law's) Feeling

When interpreting King Samon's feeling, fathers-in-law tend to be more involved and concerned with King Samon's feeling than are sons-in-law; when interpreting Chao Ngo's feeling, however, the sons-in-law are more involved with the character's feeling than are fathers-in-law. I asked, " How does Chao Ngo feel toward a father-in-law like King Samon? " All fathers-in-law interpret Chao Ngo's feeling the

same way, saying that, " Chao Ngo is not really angry with his father-in-law." Not so from the point of view of the son-in-law audience, all of whom think that Chao Ngo must be angry with King Samon. They all confirm that, " Chao Ngo must be angry with his father-in-law," or " Of course, he must be angry. He wants to get revenge against his father-in-law. If I were he, I would be angry too." Notice that a son-in-law also uses the same kind of conditional statement as a father-in-law does, " If I were he, I would . . . "

An interesting case was a son-in-law who was always drunk and who knew well that his father-in-law did not like him at all, while getting along well with his other sons-in-law. He once quarreled with his father-in-law and had to move out to live in the middle of the rice field, similarly to what happened to Chao Ngo, the son-in-law in the story. This son-in-law sadly interpreted Chao Ngo's feeling toward King Samon that:

> Chao Ngo must feel sorry for himself. He can think that his father-in-law is not fair to him since he chases only him out, simply because of his ugly looks, but he is his son-in-law as well as the other six sons-in-law. They can stay in the city but he can't. He must feel sorry for his destiny.

Interpretation of " Who is the Villain? "

The question of who the villain is arises from the fact that, in the Sangthong story, it is ambiguous and differently interpretable. Propp (1968, 150) allows many kinds of activities to fall into the sphere of villainy: expulsion, casting into the sea, false substitution, an order to kill, imprisonment, murder. Given Propp's definition of villainy, several characters in the Sangthong story could be perceived as villains. Firstly, Chandewi, the minor wife, influences King Yodsawimon to chase the major wife, Chantha, and Prince Sang out of the kingdom, later on to imprison and to drown Prince Sang. Secondly, King Samon, the father-in-law of Sangthong, chases the couple out to live in the rice fields and orders the sons-in-law to perform difficult tasks with an intention to kill the hero. Thirdly, the six sons-in-law can be seen as influencing King Samon to try to get rid of Sangthong. All of the characters mentioned above can then be argued to be the villains.

Variation in the interpretation of villainy is closely related conceptually with the respondents' interpretation of the characters' feelings. Choices of the villains are closely associated with the interpretation of King Samon's and Chao Ngo's feelings. Fathers-in-law with sympathy for King Samon tend to choose the six sons-in-law as the villain,

possibly because the character occupies the role of son-in-law. In contrast, sons-in-law tend to sympathize with Chao Ngo for having such an unkind father-in-law, and the majority of them choose King Samon as the villain, as shown in Table 1.

Regarding co-wives' identification of the villain, Table 2 indicates that seven out of eight co-wives identify Chandewi, the minor wife, as the villain. This suggests that people who confront co-wife situations in real life really focus their attention on the character who is involved in the same kind of situation. To test this proposition, Table 2 shows that fifteen out of eighteen people who do not have co-wives problems identify other characters as the villain(s).

It is not surprising that major wives in real life identify Chandewi, the minor wife, as the villain: " The villain must be that evil minor wife . . . " or " The villain is definitely that crooked minor wife." It is surprising, however, that minor wives also identify Chandewi as the villain, since I do not expect informants to identify the character of the same family roles as themselves as the villain.

Minor wives in real life have their own reasons to justify how they are " good " minor wives, unlike Chandewi, the minor wife in the story. A minor wife of a high ranking government official who claimed that she was never jealous of the major wife replied that, " The minor wife—I mean the stepmother of Sangthong—is the villain since she is the only one who is jealous." Then she went further, " You know, sometimes it is the major wife who is jealous of the minor wife! " Her discomfort was clear. First, she switched to " stepmother " right after she said " minor wife " as if she did not want to accept that minor wife was the villain. Then she became defensive and explained that the

TABLE 1
Identification of villain by occupants of opposite family roles

Family roles	Villain			
	Six sons-in law	Samon	Minor wife	Yodsawimon
Father-in-law	7	3	1	1
Son-in-law	2	7	1	—

TABLE 2
Co-wives/non co-wives identification of villain

Wives	Character	
	Minor wife	Others
Co-wives	7	1
Non co-wives		15

minor wife was not always as bad as other people thought; sometimes it could be the major wife who is bad. If her criteria for judging who the villain is was " somebody who is jealous," as stated in her interpretation, then she was differentiating between Chandewi, a bad minor wife, since she was jealous of the major wife, and herself, a good minor wife, since she was not jealous of the major wife.

Another case was a minor wife of a man who left his village to work in neighboring village. While staying in that village, he met another woman and settled down with her in that province. The major wife of this man, when learning about this situation, went to yell at the minor wife. This man later on moved to live with his minor wife to help her take care of their little baby. Very interestingly, also defining the villain by the criteria of " being jealous " and defending that she was a " good minor wife," this minor wife made it clear that:

> The minor wife is the villain because she has a jealous mind. However, this is opposite to my case. Even though I am a minor wife, I am not jealous. It is the major wife who is jealous of me and causes me trouble.

Accordingly she suggested that she was not a bad minor wife as the minor wife in the story. In fact, she implied that, with her definition, the major wife in real life could be classified as the villain.

In sum, occupants of different family roles indeed identify different characters as the villain(s): father-in-law, the six sons-in-law; son-in-law, King Samon; and co-wives, Chandewi. Fathers-in-law's interpretations of the villain's behavior are systematically different from those given by sons-in-law. Such strong association suggests that family members in real life not only identify themselves with characters of the same family roles, but also perceive characters of the opposite family roles as representing family members whom they dislike.

Interpretation of Chandewi's (the Minor Wife's) Behavior

Like fathers-in-law's sympathy with King Samon and like sons-in-law's sympathy with Chao Ngo, major wives' interpretations toward Chandewi's behavior show great sympathy with the major wife character. The conditional statement, " If I were the major wife, I would be angry," shows close relation between oneself and the character. A woman whose husband, a government official who works in a neighboring province, has another " family " in that province, emotionally criticizes Chandewi's behavior:

> She is jealous. She wants to possess the husband all for herself.

She then banishes the major wife so that she can solely have the husband for her own. If I were the major wife, I would feel sorry and very angry.

Interestingly enough, minor wives avoid criticizing Chandewi. One minor wife, instead, blames the major wife's behavior, " That is because the major wife gives birth to an inauspicious son. She gives birth to a shell." Another minor wife uses the question form of sentence and words indicating a reluctance to blame Chandewi, " Is it because she is jealous? She *probably* wants to rule the city. Well, it is normal minor wife-major wife business." Accordingly, we can clearly see different perspectives from the point of view of the major wives and of the minor wives. The major wives really place the blame on Chandewi, whereas the minor wives avoid doing so.

Discussion and Conclusion

Data on audience interpretation suggests that variation in the tale interpretation is structured by family roles and circumstances of the interpreters. The data also confirms that in the process of listening to and interpreting the tales, people identify themselves with characters occupying their own family roles and that occupants of opposite family roles do give opposite interpretations on the behavior of a given character.

Interview responses also suggest that a real-life father-in-law rationalizes the behavior of the folktale character who occupies the role of father-in-law. We can accordingly generalize that the members of the audience actually use their own positions in the family to validate the characters' behaviors by giving the tale an interpretation which subsumes behavior and circumstances. People use the characters to validate their own positions in the family, then, and this is exactly how people can be satisfied from listening to the folktale. My argument parallels Leach's (1964, 265) statement that, " if the status of one individual is validated, that almost always means that the status of someone else is denigrated." The denigration of one's enemy is the reward an audience receives from listening to the folktale.

Two interesting implications emerge from this account. First, if people use folktales to validate their positions in the family, then the folktale helps assure and confirm whatever both parties to real life role conflicts already want to believe about what is right for them to do in the family. Thus, the tale provides a charter for them to continue to behave as they normally do. Second, it then ironically follows that this whole process of listening to and interpreting the folktale stabilizes

real-life conflict situations in the family. If each party feels that his behavior in the family is validated, then this process must be seen as maintaining the status quo of the conflicting roles in the household.

The fact that the conflicts are always there in the family and that people use the folktales to justify their positions in the family clarify why *chakchak wongwong* tales have long persisted in Thai culture. I mentioned earlier that, anywhere in Thailand, a matrilocal-stem family system is widely practiced and that *chakchak wongwong* tales focus on the theme of family conflicts in a stem family setting like the one shared by people in Thai societies. Thai people can, then, relate to and " make use " of *chakchak wongwong* tales. This then explains why *chakchak wongwong* stories are very popular and why they were transmitted persistently. Family is the most fundamental unit in the society, and as long as there are conflicts in the family, people can always " make use " of these stories, I suggest that these *chakchak wongwong* stories will continue to persist.

To answer the questions on how folktales work and what folktales mean to people, we must then analyze them from the perspectives of people who use them. The necessity of pursuing folklore research on audience interpretation has long been recognized: " . . . folklorists must actively seek to elicit the meaning of folklore from the folk " (DUNDES [1966] 1979). Yet, it seems true as DUNDES points out that, so far, it has been the folklorist-collector who suggests that his interpretation is really the natives' own interpretation. In reality, there can be multiple interpretations of the tales and, " the meaning for the tale teller is not necessary the same as the meaning for the audience or rather the different meanings for different numbers of the audience " ([1966] 1979, 411).

Information on people's family life, their family roles, and family positions in the household is necessary; without this, it is difficult to understand the variation in interpretation of the tales. And, in turn, the information on variation in tale interpretation by occupants of different family roles is a prerequisite to the reconstruction and the clarification of how folk use lore. I conducted my research in anthropological ways, by intensively and extensively interviewing the folk in the communities, and by collecting data holistically and comprehensively about the communities where they belong. It is the dynamic, qualitative and comprehensive study of the folk, of their social life, and of their uses of lore that enable us to understand the relationship between *folk* and *lore* and the position of folklore in society.

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