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COMPARATIVE GENRE TYPOLOGY OF KARAKALPAK, TURKMEN AND ENGLISH FOLK TALES

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Introduction

The classification of folk tales remains one of the important theoretical problems in folklore studies. Folk tales are characterized by considerable diversity: some are organized around magical events, others focus on animals and their symbolic actions, while another group presents everyday life, social relations, irony, and human behavior. At the same time, the boundaries between these categories are not always clear, since a single tale may combine several genre characteristics. Therefore, determining the genre of a particular tale requires attention not to one isolated character or motif, but to the dominant direction of the plot and the artistic mechanism through which the narrative develops.

The present study approaches the genre classification of Karakalpak and Turkmen folk tales from a comparative perspective and examines its relationship with English folk-tale traditions and the international classification of tale types. Such a comparison makes it possible to distinguish between two related but different scholarly tasks: identifying the general genre character of a tale within a national folklore system and determining the international type of its plot. This distinction is especially important for comparative folklore research because national terminology reflects cultural and aesthetic features that cannot always be represented by an international tale-type number alone.

The Karakalpak folklorist Q. Ayimbetov regarded folklore as a form of cultural memory that preserves the accumulated wisdom, life experience, traditions, and artistic thinking of the people. In his work Xalıq danalığı, folklore examples are examined in close connection with social relations, customs, everyday life, and the worldview of the people [1, 169]. Such an approach is valuable for the study of fairy tales because it encourages the researcher to view the tale not simply as an artistic narrative, but as a symbolic representation of historical and cultural experience.

From this perspective, even apparently fantastic episodes may express ideas rooted in everyday life. Through conventional and imaginative plots, folk tales communicate perceptions of labour and livelihood, family relations, justice, happiness, authority, morality, and the opposition between good and evil. Thus, the fairy tale can be understood as an important means of preserving cultural memory and transmitting social experience from one generation to another.

Genre Principles in Karakalpak Folklore

Q. Maksetov proposed a three-part classification of Karakalpak folk tales. According to his system, they may generally be divided into: tales about marvelous events, tales based on animal characters, and household or everyday tales [2, 169]. This classification is significant because it emphasizes the dominant artistic features of a narrative rather than relying solely on the presence of fantasy.

Maksetov also approached the terminology of fairy-tale classification critically. He questioned the usefulness of terms such as “imaginary,” “fantastic,” and “magical” when they are treated as independent genre categories. In his view, imagination is characteristic of fairy tales in general, and therefore the term “imaginary tale” does not necessarily provide a sufficiently precise distinction between genres. Likewise, the word “magical” may have a narrower meaning in the Karakalpak language and could therefore create terminological ambiguity [2, 169–170]. For this reason, the designation “tales about marvelous events” provides a broader and more functional category.

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The strength of this classification lies in the fact that magical narratives are not reduced to stories featuring sorcerers or supernatural heroes. The category includes narratives in which supernatural elements actively determine the development of the plot. Such elements may include giants and fairies, dragons, the legendary bird Semurg, miraculous apples, animated natural objects, flying carpets, inexhaustible tables, transformations of humans into animals, and the revival of the dead.

However, the mere appearance of a supernatural character does not automatically make a tale magical. The decisive criterion is the structural role of the extraordinary event. A supernatural element must have a direct influence on the development of the plot, the hero's trials, and the achievement of the final goal. For example, in the Karakalpak tale Qıran, the fairy girl, giants, a magical strand of hair, and a supernatural helper constitute essential components of the plot. The hero would not be able to overcome the central trials without these miraculous forces. Consequently, the tale belongs to the magical-fantastic category.

A different situation can be observed in the Turkmen tale Temmel ýalta. The narrative contains supernatural features such as giants, fairies, and pomegranates filled with precious stones. Nevertheless, the main part of the story concerns the transformation of a lazy young man under the influence of an intelligent girl. Everyday, humorous, and supernatural elements therefore coexist in the same narrative. The classification of such a text requires the researcher to establish which element dominates the entire plot.

This suggests a broader methodological principle: genre classification should not be based primarily on the question of what kind of character appears in the story. Rather, the central question should be how the plot functions and what artistic mechanism determines its movement.

Animal Tales and the Problem of Symbolic Meaning

Q. Maksetov defines animal tales not as simple narratives about animals and nature, but as works in which animal characters are used to portray human behavior and social relationships [2, 178]. This interpretation gives symbolic significance to the animal characters and shifts attention from their external appearance to their narrative functions.

In traditional tale structures, animals may represent recognizable human characteristics. The fox may be associated with cunning and resourcefulness, the wolf with greed or violence, and the sheep or goat with industriousness. The donkey may symbolize simplicity or foolishness, while the rabbit can represent either cowardice or cleverness. Such associations, however, should not be regarded as fixed meanings that apply to every narrative.

Maksetov points out that the same animal can perform different ideological and artistic functions in different tales. The rabbit, for example, may appear as a timid character in one narrative but as an intelligent figure that saves the community from a powerful lion in another [2, 181]. Therefore, the symbolic meaning of an animal should be interpreted according to its actions, relations with other characters, and role in the development of the specific plot.

This principle is important beyond animal tales. It demonstrates that folklore images cannot always be interpreted through a universal symbolic dictionary. Their meaning emerges through the structure of the particular narrative in which they function.

Turkmen Folk-Tale Classification

The collection Prodanniy son: Turkmenskie narodnie skazki, published in 1969, divided Turkmen folk tales into three principal categories: animal tales, magical tales, and household tales [3, 5]. Structurally, this classification is close to the system proposed for Karakalpak folklore by Q. Maksetov.

Both traditions distinguish between narratives centered on animals, stories dominated by supernatural events, and tales based on everyday life. This similarity suggests the existence of a

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shared typological foundation, while differences are mainly noticeable in terminology and in the internal organization of individual groups.

The comparative relationship may be summarized as follows:

Karakalpak classification	Turkmen classification	International designation
Tales about marvelous events	Magical tales	Tales of magic
Animal-based tales	Animal tales	Animal tales
Household tales	Everyday tales	Realistic tales

The terminological similarity between the Karakalpak and Turkmen systems does not mean that their internal genre boundaries are always identical. A tale containing heroic actions, for instance, may be categorized as a magical tale in one publication but treated separately as a heroic tale in another. This demonstrates that classification is partly dependent on the principles and objectives adopted by a particular folklorist or scholarly tradition.

The work of Turkmen scholar A. Baymiradov provides another important example. In his study Xayvanlar xakındakı turkmen ertekileri, he identified 155 plot types belonging to Turkmen animal tales. Forty-seven of these were assigned main numerical designations, while the catalogue also incorporated 108 tale texts [4, 49–78; 4, 33].

Baymiradov's approach demonstrates the difference between a genre category and a plot type. "Animal tale" refers to a broader genre group, whereas individual narrative formulas, such as a weaker animal overcoming a stronger opponent through cunning, represent specific plot structures. Consequently, genre and plot type belong to different analytical levels.

National Genre Categories and International Tale Types

The international classification of folk-tale plots provides an additional methodological instrument for comparative folklore research. It allows researchers to identify narratives that share a similar plot structure across different languages and cultures. However, this system cannot fully replace national genre classifications.

Hans-Jörg Uther's revised international catalogue divides folk tales into broad groups including animal tales, tales of magic, religious tales, realistic tales, tales about the stupid ogre, jokes and anecdotes, and formula tales [6, 7–19]. The numerical designation assigned to a tale type helps researchers locate related versions and compare their international distribution.

At the same time, a tale-type number does not provide information about the cultural context in which a particular narrative exists. It cannot, by itself, explain the national language of the text, its traditional characters, customs, worldview, or aesthetic characteristics. A Karakalpak or Turkmen tale therefore loses part of its cultural specificity when it is represented only by an international numerical classification.

The collection English Fairy Tales by Joseph Jacobs demonstrates a related situation in English folklore. His collection includes animal stories, magical narratives, household and humorous tales, as well as cumulative narratives [7, 7–19]. The collection reflects the richness of the English national repertoire, but its organization cannot simply be equated with the boundaries established by modern international tale-type classification.

This comparison shows that national collections and international catalogues serve complementary purposes. A national classification describes the structural and cultural features of a folklore tradition, whereas an international classification helps establish relationships among similar plots across linguistic and geographical boundaries.

For this reason, a two-level procedure is particularly appropriate in comparative folklore studies. First, the researcher should determine the place of the tale within its national genre system. Second,

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the researcher may establish the corresponding international tale type on the basis of its plot structure. Such a method makes it possible to preserve both national specificity and international comparability.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis demonstrates that Karakalpak and Turkmen folk-tale classifications share a number of important structural characteristics. In both traditions, tales based on extraordinary events, narratives involving animals, and stories reflecting everyday life constitute major genre groups. This similarity points to a common typological basis in the organization of folk-tale traditions.

At the same time, genre boundaries are not always rigid. Individual narratives may combine magical, humorous, household, and animal-related elements. Therefore, classification based on a single motif or character may produce misleading results. The more reliable approach is to examine the dominant function of the plot and determine which artistic mechanism organizes the narrative as a whole.

The comparison also confirms that national genre classifications and international tale-type catalogues should not be treated as interchangeable systems. A genre category describes the broader artistic and structural nature of a work, while a tale-type number identifies a recurring narrative pattern that may occur in different cultures. The two systems therefore operate at different analytical levels.

For comparative studies of Karakalpak, Turkmen, and English folk tales, combining both approaches provides a more comprehensive result. National classification preserves the linguistic, cultural, and aesthetic identity of a narrative, while international classification makes it possible to trace similar plot structures across folklore traditions. Such a methodology helps avoid mechanical comparison and allows the researcher to recognize both common typological features and distinctive national characteristics.

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