

**FEMALE HEROES IN CHINESE AND KHASI  
FOLKTALES: EXPLORING GENDER DYNAMICS  
AND CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS**

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## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Conclusion**

At the end of this thesis, it is necessary to assess the observations on the representation of women in the aforementioned Chinese and Khasi folktales. The intricate narratives and cultural frameworks that shape the portrayal of women as sisters and daughters have been examined in these two different but sometimes intersecting cultural contexts. Through the comparison of these tales, significant insights into the societal values, gender dynamics, and cultural meanings embedded in these stories have been discovered.

In the previous chapters, a wide range of folktales was carefully examined, and some of the repeatedly occurring themes and motifs of the presentation of female characters were found.

The purpose of this final chapter is to synthesize the findings from this comparative study and outline connections between patterns identified and broader cultural implications. Its contributions to folklore studies, gender studies, and cultural studies will be noted with specific emphasis on the importance of interdisciplinary approaches toward an understanding of the complexity of folklore.

This attempt to outline key insights as well as to reflect more broadly on the significance of this research will explore implications from the results for contemporary gender and culture and suggest some ways that further research might be fruitful. Underlining again and again how folktales continue to shape and reflect societal norms and values, this concluding section offers a coherent, meaningful close.

From the chapter "The Mother and The Wife", it goes without saying that there stands a polarized situation against the patriarchal Chinese society while the Khasi Society is totally matrilineal: evidence towards their contrary aspects regarding women, their statuses in families as well as societies. The value of women is often equated with physical beauty and submissiveness, as is evident in foot binding and the desire for male heirs, even after the end of feudalism. Confucian values further support this patriarchal order, casting women as loyal but inferior members of the hierarchical family system. More marriages

under these principles cemented women's submission to the husbands' families, as rights and autonomy were also being stripped from them.

On the other hand, folktales of the Khasi society portray a relatively equal society where women play a more important role and influence. The matrilineal system gives women the right to ancestral property, thus providing them with economic independence and strength. This means that women can handle family affairs and sustain their families, thus proving their power and determination. In this culture, women's roles are not limited by oppressive structures but are instead portrayed as powerful contributors to the family and community.

Cultural influences shape the characterization of women in both Chinese and Khasi folklores. Chinese tales are typically filled with elements of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism, weaving spiritual themes into patriarchal values. Even though Confucianism attempts to make female significance inconsequential, Chinese folklore has strong female heroes and goddesses that go against such limiting dogmas. Khasi folklores, however, focus on the resiliency of women and their economic power, as they are crucial components of their matrilineal society. These stories demonstrate the role that women have in keeping a family together and maintaining society's stability.

The economic independence and social roles of women in these cultures further highlight their different paths. In traditional Chinese society, women were relegated to household roles with negligible recognition for their roles as housewives and child parents. Confucianist values institutionalized them at the lower rung in society, ensuring the predominance of men. By contrast, Khasi women play an active role in the economy and serve both the short-term and extended family interests. The matrilineal system ensures their independence, even in cases of divorce, where women have the responsibility to continue to raise the children in a system of support.

The chapter "The Sister and The Daughter" is a comparative study between gender dynamics in Chinese and Khasi societies. Chinese folktales most of the time present female characters as brave and insurgent, breaking free from the societal norms and struggle for equality with the female gender. The metaphor "half the sky" embodies this quest for women power. On the other hand, Khasi folktales present women with intelligence, caring, and self-respect qualities very important in their matrilineal society. These are

manifestations of the cultural norms and expectations placed upon women in each community.

Social expectations between these societies also widely differ. In Chinese cultures, chastity and truthful value are highly valued on a woman, and some perceived deviation is stigmatized in society. Society's expectations of women here have to manage household and care for extended family. It is a matrilineal society, putting an emphasis on the place of women in maintaining their families' cohesion. Khasi folktales mainly portray women as salvation draws from mythology and other legendary stories. In contrast, Khasi folktales do not emphasize such roles, focusing instead on domestic responsibilities and community well-being.

The cultural values and dynamics of gender that Chinese and Khasi folktales embody with reference to elderly women are explored in chapter "The Wise Old Woman". Stories in Chinese Confucianism portray older women as wise old women or secluded hermits often possessing mystic powers used to lead protagonists through different moral dilemmas. More so, these characters relate to personal growth and character development in a hierarchical mode of society. Khasi folktales, on the other hand, portray elderly wise women as integral to the community, preserving their cultural traditions and promoting ecological balance. Their wisdom interweaves with communal values and justice, reflecting an even more inclusive gender dynamic.

The chapter "The Angel and The Temptress and Beyond" is a study of the contrasting roles played by women in Chinese and Khasi folktales. In Chinese, women are depicted as bold and independent angels and temptresses who break all conventions within society. Such characters tend to symbolize powers that transform and transcend human norms, hence representing Daoist principles. Interconnectedness is another significant point here, because it reflects a cultural necessity for balance in society. Khasi folktales include mystical elements in their plot, with a focus on emotional connections to traditions as well as the strength of character. Women in stories are assertive and protective, which adds to legacies and altruism as themes.

This comparative study on female heroes in Chinese and Khasi folklores shows that the pictures are rich and complex representations of women who are considerably drenched in the societal culture and norms of both communities. The significance of

studying folklores therefore emerges as more than an entertainer, but more profoundly as cultural artifacts expressing the collective unconscious of the society, giving insights on gender dynamics, values, and the social structures. By examining the different roles and representations of women in these folktales, it is possible to gain insights into how societal gender roles are constructed and reinforced while, at some times, subverted across cultures.

The Chinese folktales portray women in the context of a patriarchal society. The Confucian influence, which is based on loyalty, submission, and the preservation of hierarchical family structures, can be seen in the narrative arcs and characterizations of female figures. In traditional Chinese society, women are often depicted in roles that emphasize domesticity, chastity, and the need to uphold family honour. Folktales are frequently embedded with the theme of how a woman's worth is linked to her beauty, virtue, and her ability to conform to social standards of modesty and properness. Foot binding as a practice, depiction of women as subordinate members of the family, and portrayal of their dependency economically also tend to be kept and perpetuated within these texts for a patriarchal setting.

Yet, however, amidst these constraints is a subtle but powerful subversion of these roles: the female protagonists in many Chinese folktales may break free from the straitjacket of restraint and show strength, acuteness, and even moral fortitude. There is, therefore, juxtaposition of societal expectations and personal agency that allows us to understand the complexity of gender roles in Chinese folklore. Women, especially those who go against or transcend the imposed restrictions, become strong emblems of strength and autonomy while still being in their historical cultural context.

Khasi society, on the other hand, is a matrilineal society and would thus offer a different prism through which to analyse women's roles in folktales. Women in Khasi society have great economic and social power. Matrilineal, a system in which the line of descent and inheritance follows the mother, means women have a level of power and authority that one finds nowhere in patriarchal systems like China. This is a unique kind of social structure that was reflected in folktales about women's participation in economics, ownership of property, and their ability to play a significant role in vital decisions affecting the welfare of their families and communities.

Khasi folktales have managed to celebrate the strength, resiliency, and tenacity of women and given them a prime role as the custodians who ensure the upkeep and continuance of the family system. Women are not docile recipients of societal mandates but rather dynamic individuals operating with intelligence and determination, navigating challenges with both astuteness and resilience in these tales. In Khasi society, a model of female empowerment stands out, challenged to this day by the portrayal of women as resilient, capable, and powerful, therefore challenging traditional gender roles in society.

In contrast, the Khasi folklores assert that the place of women is important for the conduct of the affairs of family households both within the house and within their economic sectors as contributors as well as in control over ancestral wealth. A wider scope, the matrilocal system affords the depiction of the feminine figure both within social as well as economic worlds. This emphasis on women's economic agency and participation in decision-making goes well with the cultural values of Khasi society, where women are the very heart of both family and community life.

The cultural contexts in both the Chinese and Khasi societies significantly influence how women feature in their folklores. Chinese folklores frequently highlight the issues of chastity and virtues in them, wherein the females often face tests based on moral grounds and values given to such elements within their society. In fact, women who act out of these ideals have faced punishment or ostracism; therefore, remaining chaste is a virtue highly considered as part and parcel of female identity. It often limits the realm of female agency in a given Chinese folktale to mainly defining women by means of relationships toward men and her position within her family.

A particularly interesting parallel is the way older women figure in both cultures. In Chinese and in Khasi folk narratives, older women embody or represent wisdom and authority—a difference in form, but similarities in function. In most Chinese folktales, wise old women are figured as hermit mentors—spiritual guides and vehicles of moral lessons. These were catalysts for personal transformations and growth, guiding youth through their trials. Thus, the role of the older woman is aligned with Confucian ideals of wisdom and moral development, with these figures often embodying the pinnacle of virtuous conduct.

Conversely, in Khasi folktales, older women appear as tribal elders, custodians of ancestral wisdom, and custodians of communal justice. These figures assume pivotal roles in mediating disputes, preserving traditions, and ensuring the welfare of the community. The older woman in Khasi narratives is a bridge between past and present, pointing to human beings' interconnectedness with nature and the collective memory of the tribe.

Comparing female heroes in Chinese and Khasi folktales presents similarities as well as vast differences, reflecting the fundamental values and gender dynamics that each of these societies was embedded in. While the folktales of Chinese reflect a patriarchal, Confucian-influenced society where women's role is restricted to certain roles, Khasi folktales portray an altogether more egalitarian vision of women in their economic independence, tenacity, and their very active role in the life of family and society.

The research further emphasizes how there are certain themes and character types common to all cultures. Here again, despite the great difference in cultural practices, women in Chinese and Khasi folktales seem to be powerful women, capable of challenging these restrictions imposed by their societal structure. Such an initial study based mostly on secondary sources provides the background for studies that would subsequently be allowed to dive into these questions in a bit more detail, in view of fresher input and developments pertaining to female imagery in Chinese and Khasi folklores.

The universality that these stories have to all its cultures shows the timelessness of folktales because they are not only one of the vehicles of cultural expression but also mirror changing gender norms in society. The cultural boundary that this shared humanity crosses is useful in viewing how gender roles are fashioned, contested, and become different over time. Therefore, when societies evolve, their expressions on women in folklore continue to evolve, giving an easy way to understand an evolving landscape of gender, culture, and identity.

Objectives	Hypotheses	Findings	Support / Refine / Challenge
<b>1. To examine how women are represented in Chinese and</b>	H1: Chinese folk tales predominantly feature women as being in patriarchal, Confucian contexts, whereas Khasi	Chinese tales often confine women to beauty, chastity, and domesticity in Confucian contexts, even if some heroines subvert expectations. Khasi	<b>Supported</b> (overall distinction is clear), <b>Refined</b> (Chinese tales also contain counter-

Objectives	Hypotheses	Findings	Support / Refine / Challenge
<b>Khasi folktales.</b>	folk tales feature women as being in enabled matrilineal contexts.	folk tales feature female control over property, lineages, and community.	narratives of strong heroines).
<b>2. To analyse cultural frameworks shaping female characters as mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters.</b>	H2: Patriarchal ideology limits female agency in Chinese tales, while Khasi matriliney maximizes women's economic and social agency.	Chinese folk stories suggest patriarchal marriage systems and filial obedience, which restrict autonomy. Khasi tales highlight inheritance rights, maternal descent, and decision-making powers.	<b>Supported</b> (frameworks directly shape roles).
<b>3. To explore recurring archetypes of women (mother, wife, sister, daughter, wise woman, angel, temptress) across both cultures.</b>	H3: Archetypes within both cultures are the same (e.g., wise older women, nurturing mothers) but serve and have different cultural meanings.	Chinese wives and mothers in stories embody sacrifice and devotion, while in Khasi stories they embody resilience and authority. Chinese wise women appear as hermit-mentors; in Khasi stories, communal elders. Chinese angels/temptresses embody Daoist balance; in Khasi, combative guardians of tradition.	<b>Supported and Refined</b> (archetypes exist in both but acquire distinct meanings).
<b>4. To compare how folktales reinforce or contest gender norms.</b>	H4: Folktales not only reproduce but also subvert softly dominant gender norms.	Chinese tales confirm Confucian gender hierarchies but also feature heroines crossing social boundaries. Khasi tales confirm women's centrality but also acknowledge burdens of responsibility and communal expectations.	<b>Supported and Refined</b> (folktales both reproduce and contest norms).
<b>5. To contribute to cross-cultural understanding of gendered folklore.</b>	H5: Comparative analysis will elicit divergences (patriarchy and matriliney) and convergences (valorisation of wisdom, resilience, and feminine strength).	Clear divergences: patriarchy and matriliney. Convergences: feminine wisdom, resilience, capacity to keep family/community together. Both traditions teach women as cultural stabilizers.	<b>Supported</b> (cross-cultural parallels and contrasts evident).



The initial objective of the current research was to explore women's presence in Chinese and Khasi folktales. The corresponding hypothesis assumed that Chinese folktales portray women in patriarchal, Confucian roles, while Khasi folktales portray women in authoritative matrilineal positions. The evidence broadly confirms this verdict: Chinese narratives usually confine women to definitions of beauty, chastity, and domesticity, but some heroines resist these definitions, presenting counter-narratives of power and agency. By contrast, Khasi folklore always emphasizes women's control over property, lineages, and community, consistent with the structural empowerment coming from their matrilineal society. Thus, the hypothesis is validated and qualified, since Chinese fiction introduces not just patriarchal constraint but also occasional undermining of them.

The second objective sought to analyse the cultural paradigms that shape women characters in the fiction as mother, wife, sister, and daughter. The hypothesis assumed that patriarchal ideology would inhibit women's agency in Chinese fiction, while Khasi matriliney would enhance women's social and economic agency. The evidence is in support of this contention: Chinese folk stories mostly describe patriarchal marriage traditions and filial obligations curtailing women's independence, whereas the Khasi stories focus on the right of women to inheritance, mother lineage, and feminine charisma in household and society. These are explicit affirmations of the hypothesis, showing how cultural discourse critically shapes women's representation.

The third purpose was to consider repeat images of women—mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, wise women, angels, and temptresses—in both traditions. It was hypothesized that the archetypes overlap but with differing cultural meanings and uses. The data support this. Mothers and wives in Chinese fiction are paragons of loyalty, chastity, and sacrifice, while in Khasi fiction they are paragons of obstinacy and authority. Wise women exist in both cultures but in differing forms: hermit-mentors and sacred mentors in Chinese cultures and tribal elders and communal custodians in Khasi cultures. Angels and seductresses, when present in Chinese myth, embody Daoist equilibrium and transcendence, while in Khasi myth women emerge as guardian custodians of tradition. This hypothesis is therefore corroborated and developed, as while archetypes overlap, their cultural connotations are distinct.

The fourth objective was to contrast the emergence of how folktales reinforce or disrupt gender expectations. The hypothesis was that, in addition to reproducing

hegemonic gendered roles, folktales provide spaces to subvert them. This is strongly supported by the evidence. Chinese culture is sustained by Confucian hierarchies helped along by images of obedient daughters and filial wives, yet on occasion heroines resist cultural limits, symbolizing strength and resistance. Khasi tales verify women's place at the centre of family and community but also the weight of responsibility the matriline expectations place upon them. In both societies, therefore, folklore simultaneously supports social norms and creates sites for subversion and negotiation of precisely those norms.

The final aim was to contribute to cross-cultural understanding of gendered folklore. The hypothesis here was that comparison would reveal both points of divergence—Chinese patriarchy and Khasi matriliney—and points of convergence, such as idealization of wisdom, endurance, and feminine strength. The results well justify this expectation. Chinese and Khasi narratives differ intrinsically in social contexts but both traditions place women in the foreground as balancing forces in family and society. The duplicity refers to the differences in cultures as well as shared values in societies, marking the universal dimensions of women's symbolic functions.

Taken as a whole, these correspondences between ends, hypotheses, and conclusions highlight the thesis's central contribution to folklore as much as gender studies. The comparative method demonstrates how folktales operate as cultural mirrors, inscribing and negotiating gender norms that simultaneously are context-specific and yet universally legible. By setting Chinese and Khasi narratives side by side, this research refines our perspective on how patriarchy and matriliney shape women's representation as well as how they deceive age-old archetypes and shared values that represent some fundamental human universals. Thus, the thesis provides a fruitful context for the analysis of folklore as a living repository of gendered meaning—recounting the tension between social structures and individual agency, and the feminizing function of women in the cultural imagination.