

CHAPTER 4

The Wise Old Woman

4.1 Introduction

Wise old women are very common characters in stories and myths. Usually, the wise old woman is portrayed as an older woman with knowledge, magic, and spiritual qualities. They serve as guides, advisors, and helpers for change in the story. Such female characters are endowed with the experience of life, spiritual knowledge, and intuitive abilities, and people tend to hold them in high esteem and seek their opinion. For this reason, wise old women are often called wise grandmothers in folktales from all over the world. They are usually depicted as old, wise, and possessing some kind of supernatural or magical strength. They are the mentors and guides of the major characters. They give important advice and help and sometimes magical gifts to support them on their journeys or quests.

4.1.1. Mentor and Guide

A wise old woman often acts as a mentor and guide to the hero. They have a natural sense of how people behave, the ways of the world, and the actions that can do harm. They provide key lessons and advice to the hero on how to live through challenges and make all important choices. One illustration of the role played by the Fairy Godmother in "Cinderella" and, generally speaking, how she guides the plot and the protagonist (Estés, 1992, p. 33).

4.1.2 Bestower of Gifts and Magical Powers

Many folktales see wise old women go on to endow magical gifts, powers, or enchantments upon the hero. The gifts usually help the protagonist on his quest or equip him with a means to overcome obstacles. For instance, in the Arthurian legend "The Lady of the Lake," the heroine gives the sword Excalibur to King Arthur, and this sword symbolizes true kingship (Green, 2016, p. 101). Sometimes, a hero is met with the challenge or the test that comes from the wise old woman. These tests help the hero see their good qualities and understand themselves better, making them show their value. In the epic poem "The Odyssey", the goddess Athena disguises herself in the form of an old wise woman named Mentos to conduct the test for the hero, Odysseus. In the course of the

test, invaluable lessons are gained about loyalty, leadership, and perseverance (Homer, 1998, p. 45).

4.1.3 Catalyst to Transform

Very often, the presence of a wise old woman character in the folktale is a catalyst for transformation and a catalyst for personal growth. They help the hero embark on a journey of self-discovery, face their fears, and be somebody better. In the Brothers Grimm fairytale "Sleeping Beauty," a wise fairy visits the princess's christening and predicts what will happen that leads to the princess waking up from a deep sleep (Grimm & Grimm, 2014, p. 78).

4.1.4 Keeper of Ancient Lore and Traditions

Wise old women are often depicted as the guardians of old stories, traditions, and cultural heritage. They are associated with nature, the spirit world, and the secrets of the universe. The grandmama spider, in Native American folktales, is a wise old woman in many tribal stories, weaving the web of life and sharing wisdom and creation stories with the people (McCullough, 2002, p. 112). Similar concepts can be found in other cultures, too. Also, it includes Baba Yaga from Slavic folklore, who is usually seen as a scary but smart witch. It also mentions Cailleach, the goddess of winter and change from Celtic tradition. Additionally, it talks about Pythia, the Oracle of Delphi from Greek mythology, who is a wise woman that gives advice and guidance to those looking for help (Morford & Lenardon, 2018, p. 203). Research studies and folklore research provide information on the role of the wise old woman in stories. A great reference for this is "Women Who Run with the Wolves" by Clarissa Pinkola Estés. The book tells of the female characters within folktales and strong change that the wise old woman can bring (Estés, 1992, p. 59). Another book that is in a similar category is "The Great Goddesses of Egypt" by Barbara S. Lesko. It is a reference to the position of the wise women and goddesses in ancient Egyptian mythology and folktales (Lesko, 1999, p. 143).

The old woman, therefore, becomes a great symbol for folktales. She embodies the collective wisdom of a community or culture, having knowledge passed on from one generation to the next. The wise old woman in folktales shows how important it is to respect elders and what they bring to the society they help create. This old woman

character goes against gender stereotypes in folktales because she often stands out instead of being seen as insignificant or a character just in the background.

4.2 Role and Social Status of Older Women in Traditional Chinese Society

The position and role of elderly women were also quite diverse in traditional Chinese society, depending on family background, marital status, and regional customs. There were some generalities, though; China is a big country with very different cultural practices. Nevertheless, a general overview may be drawn, based on historical records and cultural observations, concerning the functions and positions of old women.

4.2.1 Filial Piety and Family Duties

The concept of filial piety was strongly upheld by Chinese Confucian thinking. Old women assumed the statuses of mothers and grandmothers in a household; thus, their place provided a central point of maintaining harmony in the family and culturally transferring values to newer members (Freedman, 1961, p. 325). They preserved the house, raised children, and dispensed wisdom (Hu & Scott, 2014, p. 12).

4.2.2 Elders

Chinese society has always dealt with old people, but especially older women, respectfully. They were regarded as knowledgeable and experienced sources in the society, and thus families and communities respected and paid homage to them (Lee, 1953, p. 273). It was not uncommon for a lot of people to solicit elders for their opinions and decision-making concerning family matters or important choices (Fang, 2014, p. 76).

4.2.3 Ancestor Worship and Rituals

Ancestor worshiping played an important role in the old Chinese culture. Most of the older women who were widows were responsible for continuing the old traditions and doing ancestor worship rituals. They would take care of altars, pray and offer sacrifices, and continue with the family rituals (Han, 2012, p. 42).

4.2.4 Matchmaker and Advisor

Most elderly women in a community would facilitate the identification of a marital partner for the youth. The older women ensured cohesion of families by providing them with a marital union to engage in marriages. The elderly women would advise young females on marriage, childcare, and household responsibilities (Chang, 2020, p. 28).

4.2.5 Cultural Activities and Storytelling

The old women played a crucial role in the Chinese society; they were essential in ensuring that the culture continued as well as the tradition was passed down. They transferred folktales, myths, and histories to the younger generations (Yuan, 2006, p. 15). Storytelling was so important because they taught them morals, lessons, and cultural knowledge as they passed on much cultural heritage (Eberhard, 1965, p. 30).

Societal roles and expectations changed a lot over the centuries in China. With modernization and urbanization, some traditions were lost. The examples above show what old women's roles were in traditional Chinese society. However, their role and status were not always the same and could vary based on the region and cultural setting.

4.3 Selected Chinese Folktales

Wise old women are some of the mythical and legendary figures in Chinese folktales. Wise old women are revered characters known for their wisdom, knowledge, and supernatural abilities. Possessing immense wisdom and knowledge about the world, she often gives guidance, solves problems, and imparts moral lessons to the protagonists of the tales. The archetypal wise old women are sages, hermits, or spirits, and age denotes wisdom and experience. This chapter explores the importance of the wise old women of Chinese folklore, how archetypal representations have influenced the cultural heritage of China and the depth of the stories that Chinese folklore tells of wise old women carrying profound wisdom and playing significant roles in their communities.

4.3.1 The Old Woman and the Tiger

Narration

"The Old Woman and the Tiger" is a Chinese folktale that tells us of an old wise woman who lives in a village situated at the edge of a huge forest. She had lived in this village almost for all her life, and people were often visiting her to ask for advice on problems and dilemmas. A young hunter from another village arrived at the old woman's village to seek her advice. He claimed he had seen a tiger in the forest. He was in a dilemma because he had to decide whether to hunt the tiger to protect his village or save it because it's a big mammal. The old woman listened to him and waited for a while. After a long moment, the old woman began her tale. She remembered how a tiger had once walked towards her when she was a little girl. She remembered how it had placed itself between her and an old tree ready to strike. The girl's fate, she had explained, had been hanging on a string. Eventually, the tiger had spared her, and so she had lived. Feeling renewed by this tale, she advised the young hunter to think out a peaceful means. She explained to him that the hunter should try to win the friendship of the tiger in place of trying to kill it. The hunter was a little bit dubious, but he decided to follow the advice of the old woman. After all, she was wise. He entered the forest without any weapon but with an open heart. For many days, he had to be sitting by the trees offering food and water to the tiger for it to calm down. Gradually, the tiger came to trust the man and began to accept him. Such was the friendship between the hunter and the tiger that in time, they could not live without each other. In turn, the village learnt about this amazing bond and was inspired by the hunter's kindness. People are inspired by his example and thus become more peaceful toward the wild animals in the forest. News about the hunter's tale travelled outside the village, and more and more people came to listen to the old woman's tale. Her tale became a symbol of empathy and understanding. The village and its environment flourished, all thanks to the teachings of the old woman and the courage and compassion of the young hunter.

Interpretation

The folktale has all sorts of interpretations, but above all, it teaches simply a lesson about the power of the wit, resourcefulness, and intelligence over brutish strength.

The trickery of the old woman in order to escape the tiger just describes the triumph of the force of cunning and wisdom over raw force. Besides, the story teaches that one must think on his feet. In any situation, the old woman is calm, immediately assessing her options. She can lead the tiger, exploiting its desires and instincts, and succeed in escaping unscathed. Another important theme of the folktale is that of strategy and careful planning. The old woman develops a plan to deceive the tiger so that she will be safe in the long run. This is a lesson on being careful and considerate in action so that fortune will be on one's side. The theme of survival is also highlighted in the story that something called the will to live does exist. There is this old woman, who is an example, and she happens to possess the will to survive; she would soon come up with a very cunning strategy to help herself survive. "The Old Woman and the Tiger" reminds all that the times of such intelligence, flexibility, and smartness can also overcome all the problematic circumstances. It reminds everybody to use their brains rather than their muscle alone to get by with the obstacles of life.

4.3.2 The Old Lady Meng

Narration

She is widely recognized in Chinese folklore as Meng Po, also referred to as the Lady of Forgetfulness. The tale about the lady speaks on reincarnation and her place in the world of the dead. The Lady Meng Po lives beside the Bridge of Forgetfulness that links the land of the living to the land of the dead, according to the legend. Every time somebody dies, his soul must go over the bridge in anticipation of the next cycle of birth. The job of the lady is to prepare a bowl of soup for each outgoing soul. A bowl of soup which, in an instant, would be able to let him forget all of his former lives completely and enable him to start his new journey. This story goes about the lady's experience who undertakes her sacred duty. It describes her as an elderly kind-hearted and mild lady very dedicated to her job. She brews the soup of a unique formula of herbs and ingredients and gets ready to heal the soul completely of all its memories. One day, the lady finds a young soul while attending to her sacred duty that pauses to drink the soup. The eyes of the soul reflect a look of longing and sadness showing that they don't wish to forget the memories they have. The scene was interesting, and to say the least, took an interest in the young soul. She now starts talking to the young soul in hopes of getting a history of them. She was told that the young soul had a tragic, painful past life full of love, loss, and unfinished business. They

plead to remember and seek closure. The Lady Meng Po, moved by the plea, is now going to give the soul a special opportunity. She gives the soul a taste of another soup, a mixture of stuff to allow him to remember past experiences for some time. In this process, the memory of the soul floods back, and they can clearly reminiscence about the joys and sorrows of their previous life. In the process, they meet and reconcile with the souls they left behind in their previous life. In the process, all the bloody ends are tidied up. Meng Po, by following up, renders her vow, and the soul walks away, ready to embark on the journey of reincarnation with a lighter heart. The young soul is thankful to Meng Po for her compassion and understanding. She crosses the Bridge of Forgetfulness in Meng Po's memory, ready to embrace a fresh start. Meng Po does this again and again with countless souls, always keeping the memory of that one soul where she granted a temporary recall. She offers solace and resolution to those who cross her way, reminding them that healing, and closure are possible even in the deepest of realms.

Interpretation

This is the legend of Meng Po that carries along symbolic meanings for the start of life, end of life, and rebirth. In this story, the legend explains a belief of Chinese culture to have a new beginning; a new life is a new beginning. It further explains how human beings do not want to forget their past and live on their previous experiences if they are willing to continue their life in the present and future. The role of Meng Po reminding human beings of the fact that this life is so short and transitory, which keeps reminding them of the fact that all material and spiritual experiences and identities formed during this lifetime are, after all, temporary, and it is spiritual growth and enlightenment that come from overcoming the limitations of life. Generally speaking, the legend of Meng Po embodies deep meditation on existence, memory, and reincarnation in Chinese folklore. It keeps reminding the reader to live in the present moment and let go of attachments but to embrace opportunities for growth and change into this new life.

4.3.3 The Old Woman who lost her Dumpling

Narration

"The Old Woman Who Lost Her Dumpling" is one of the popular Chinese fairy tales; it talks about an old woman who is highly admired in a small town. This admiration is for

her delicious dumplings. She decided to prepare a batch of dumplings for her neighbours as a gesture to show goodwill one day. As she was preparing the dumplings, one fell on the floor. It rolled out of her house down the hill and disappeared into a deep, dark forest. Afraid of losing the food, the old woman decided to try to find her lost dumpling. She went in the forest following the trail left by the lost dumpling. The more she entered into the forest, the stranger it became, with trees reaching out and with sounds in the distance. She finally stumbled upon a small cottage hidden among the trees. Out of curiosity, the old woman entered the cottage cautiously. In the inside, she found a magical talking animal—a talking monkey or a talking fox, depending on the versions of the story. The animal told the lady that he had taken the dumpling and was willing to play a game. The game was answering riddles or solving puzzles. The old woman, for her wisdom, accepted it. She answered each of the riddles and completed each of the tasks brilliantly, impressing the talking animal. In return, the talking animal returned her lost dumpling. Overjoyed, the old woman thanked the talking animal and quickly went back home. She shared the rescued dumpling with her neighbours, who were amazed with the delicious taste and had praised her. Ever since that day, the old woman's name as the best dumpling-maker in the village spread far and wide. They respected not only her skill in cooking but also her bravery and wit in retrieving the lost dumpling from the mysterious forest.

Interpretation

Food is highly valued in Chinese culture, and therefore, eating it is never wasteful. The loss of her dumpling for the old woman had meant much—the values and appreciation for the resources. It reminds one not to take things lightly as people should be watchful of what one does. The dumpling that transformed into a living being added something supernatural to the story. This part of the story shows the fact that people believe in magic or supernatural beings in the world. It might remind that one must keep an open mind and embrace the unexpected. Despite her age and physical restraints, the old woman still follows the dumpling and gets it. Her chasing the rolling dumpling shows the firmness and persistence of the old woman, which teaches that barriers should not stop one from achieving one's target. The folktale may also carry a message of passing down wisdom from one age group to another. "The Old Woman Who Lost Her Dumpling" is a reminder to listen to and learn from older generations. Everything the old woman did and experienced had immense, accumulated wisdom that guided her and taught young

generations. The folktale highlights values, mindfulness, perseverance, and intergenerational knowledge imparted by the wise old woman.

4.4 Role and Social Position of the Older Woman in Traditional Khasi Society

Among the Khasis, social status and identity also exist for elderly women. The cultural norms and values of the Khasis constitute the social status. In this community, the wisdom of elderly female members, which is based on experience, is highly valued and highly held in esteem. The women become respected and play an essential role in maintaining the intactness of the social thread and cultural heritage of the community (Banerjee, 2015, p. 920).

4.4.1 Matrilineal System

Khasi society subscribes to the matrilineal system; hence succession and inheritance are tracked along the female line. This, of course, automatically vests considerable authority and influence in the hands of elderly women, mainly the grandmothers and great-grandmothers. For example, it is not uncommon for an old lady, the grandmother, to be the chief of a household and in many cases, she alone decides matters relating to family finances, marital alliances, and property (Beidelman, 1969, p. 190).

4.4.2 Khasi Kinship System

The Khasi follows a unique kinship system referred to as "matriliny." In this kinship system, children carry their mother's name. The youngest daughter of the family is entitled to all the property. In a Khasi family, elderly woman could be responsible for the record-keeping of the family, such as genealogical charts and property documents. Usually, it is her duty to keep the legacy of the ancestors alive through the cultural traditions that are followed from generation to generation (Nongbri, 2000, p. 365).

4.4.3 Economic Contribution

The older women of Khasi society usually are very active in the household economy due to their knowledge and skills. They can be involved in crop cultivation and rearing livestock. In a Khasi family, an older woman may look after the records of household agriculture and the pieces of land registered in the family's name. She often passes on

traditional knowledge regarding farming to younger generations to ensure that farming continues over generations (Keeni et al., 2018, p. 146).

4.4.4 Community Leader

Older women in Khasi communities are community leaders and take up central roles in local decision-making processes. They are members of the village councils or members in communities' decision-making forums. An older woman may lead a village council or be a member of a community organization. She acts as a mediator in disputes, as well as a source of advice and control within the members of the community (Gupta et al., 2013, p. 80).

4.4.5 Custodians of Culture

The older women are also custodians and keepers of Khasi culture. They are considered instrumental in passing on Khasi culture in terms of songs, dances, and rituals to the next generation. For instance, an older woman may be called upon to teach young girls traditional Khasi songs, dances, and rituals during cultural ceremonies or festivals. She holds a position of reverence and respect because she is passing on the tradition (Palliyalil & Mukherjee, 2020, p. 170).

In addition, not so long ago, older women in the traditional Khasi society held positions and participated highly in respect. However, as social change continues to dictate matters, women are increasingly being empowered, and therefore issues of gender equality can only vary among different communities or people in the Khasi culture (Devarani, 2019, p. 100).

4.5 Selected Khasi Folktales

Khasi folktales cannot be segregated from the rich cultural heritage of the Khasi indigenous community from the north-eastern region of India, mainly dwelling in the state of Meghalaya. Though many of these folktales have elderly wise women as the heroes, it is to know that most of the tales are orally passed down generation after generation. The elderly characters brimming with wisdom show respect and respect for aged society, the Khasi way of life. They are the custodian of the collective wisdom of experience of the community; hence, they act like a bridge between the present and the past (Hujon 2018,

pp.19-22). The wisdom of these women is basically founded upon the oral tradition of the Khasi people and passed down from generations to generations through stories and teachings.

4.5.1 Ka Sohlyngkew, the Wise Old Woman

Narration

It narrates the story of an old woman named Ka Sohlyngkew , notorious for her wisdom, who was sought after for advice and guidance by villagers. One day, a young man named Bamon sought her advice. He was in love with a girl from another village, but she had been given an impossible task to do before her family allowed him to marry her. Bamon went to seek advice from Ka Sohlyngkew and narrated his plight. The old woman listened carefully and came up with a plan to help him. She asked him to go into the jungles to pick the rarest and the most beautiful flowers around. Then she asked him to carry a basket and a pot of water while he was on his journey. And with that, Bamon was going to set off on a tough and difficult quest. He travelled through the jungles, climbed mountains, and faced different kinds of challenges. He also faced dangerous beasts and creatures in the wild. Nevertheless, he went on and delivered the flowers as advised by Ka Sohlyngkew . He reached the village and delivered the flowers to the girl's family. They were surprised by the young man's persistence and the beauty of the flowers. And so, they agreed to his proposal, and Bamon married the girl he loved. In this story, the lesson learned here is the value of seeking wisdom from experienced people. It highlights the importance of perseverance and determination in the quest to overcome obstacles. The story also shows how much emphasis should be laid on community and how the wise counsel of an old person can help shape the lives of individuals.

Interpretation

The tale of Ka Sohlyngkew teaches quite a few lessons and themes. First of all, it teaches us how, on many occasions, wisdom and guidance from experienced individuals are called for. Bamon, in the above story, recognizes the weakness of himself and sought the help of Ka Sohlyngkew, the grandmother known for her wisdom. This, in many ways, reflects the importance of seeking advice from learned people who have gathered knowledge and experience over a period of time. Again, the story teaches the importance of perseverance

and determination to overcome every challenge. Bamon faces many challenges on his quest to collect the rare flowers. He runs into dangerous creatures and travels through difficult land. Still, he persists and remains determined to fulfil the task given to him. This is the aspect of the story that asks every reader never to give up in the face of adversity. Another lesson of the tale is that of community and elder counsel. In the whole of the fable, Ka Sohlyngkew, in her old age and being an expert in her wisdom, played a very crucial role in the success of Bamon. Her guidance and instructions helped Bamon overcome the various challenges and win the approval of the girl's family. It, therefore, shows how communities bring about changes and that the counsel and guidance of an elder have a significant impact on the lives of individuals.

4.5.2 Ka Lawei-Lyngdoh

Narration

One common Khasi folktale based on wise old women is that of Ka Lawei-Lyngdoh. Ka Lawei-Lyngdoh is a legendary wise woman well known for dealing with more difficult issues or problems. She is an old woman who lives in a hidden village. In the tale, there are several events or conflicts that arise around the village, from fights between persons to problems that affect the entire village. Whenever such happens, the villagers go to seek advice from Ka Lawei-Lyngdoh. Her wisdom and knowledge are very attractive to many people. Ka Lawei-Lyngdoh hears what the villagers have to say and then gives her advice. She offers fair and equal solutions that have the community's welfare at heart. In a way, she helps to address the conflicts, reinstate peace, and maintain the social cohesion of the village.

Interpretation

Ka Lawei-Lyngdoh is an archetype of the wise elder, exhibiting great wisdom and insight. The elderly woman thus symbolizes her knowledge and experience and her exceptional wisdom by solving the respective difficult issues confronted in the village. The village that is remote for others is basically a village in which various problems and conflicts happen to be universal. These problems range in the sphere of individual disputes to those whose concern cuts across the whole community. The villagers value Ka Lawei-Lyngdoh's outlook to the extent of seeking her counsel whenever the situation pushes her into it. The

news of her sagacity runs all over the place, and people from distant places go to her. Her outlook to solving problems, therefore, is characterized by attentive listening to the concerns and perspectives of the people with whom she handles issues. Her solutions are not only just and fair but also entail the well-being of the community. She knows that each person's interest must align with the collective harmony; and, therefore, she knows her people and understands well the interrelatedness and interdependence within the village.

4.5.3 Ka Nongthymmai (The Wise Grandmother)

Narration:

This folktale is about an old wise woman who assists a young hero to solve different problems and teach him good lessons in life. "Ka Nongthymmai," or "The Wise Grandmother" is the name of a well-known folktale in the Khasi people. The story revolves around a young girl named Ka Nongthymmai and her wise grandmother. The grandmother of Ka Nongthymmai is pretty old and has great knowledge of the natural world. The grandmother is pretty kind to her granddaughter and teaches her about the importance of respecting nature and how all things in nature are interconnected. The old wise grandmother has a special gift to communicate with animals and plants. She teaches the granddaughter the same lesson. One day, the village faces a severe drought, and the crops start to shrivel. All the villagers are worried about the shortage of food and water. Ka Nongthymmai goes to her grandmother to ask for her advice. The grandmother advises her to ask the animals and plants of the forest for help. She orders her grandchild to collect all the animals and plants from the forest and bring them back to the village. Ka Nongthymmai follows her lesson she learned from her grandmother: she enters the forest, calls out to the animals and plants, and lo and behold, they reply to her and march back to the village. Every animal and plant come with its gift that will enable the villagers to fight the drought. The elephants bring their mighty trunks so that they may dig the well. The birds call the rain clouds so that it will pour rains. The trees provide shade and shelter while the bees pollinate the crops. All the animals and the plants cooperate as a confluence of artistry to ensure the village is safe. Thanks to Ka Nongthymmai's bravery and her grandmother's wisdom, the drought ends, and the village thrives once again. The villagers learn that they should be living together harmoniously with nature and showing respect to all living things.

Interpretation:

The Ka Nongthymmai folktale is a description of how the Khasi people value nature and how they realize the interdependence of humans and the natural world. It embodies the wisdom of the older generation as well as the strength of unity and cooperation in overcoming every hurdle that is thrown in the way. The old woman in the story is one of the most vital characters within the story as they are an astute and sagely mentor to the protagonist. The old woman possesses the wisdom and experience that she uses in order to get the main character over all the obstacles of life and learn a few important lessons about life. The old woman is portrayed as a grandmother many times, who realizes the unique features and qualities of the girl. She turns into her most loyal confidante, mentor, and guardian. She teaches and counsels the young girl to overcome the challenges her nature sets out for her. The elderly woman is the well of knowledge about the village and its traditions, as well as the nature of mankind. She teaches precious life lessons and morals to the main character and states that the best life value is being kind, modest, and persistent. Under her wise guidance, the old woman not only explains what real beauty is but also makes a virtuous person out of the girl. In several versions of Ka Nongthymmai, it is often depicted that she has supernatural or magical abilities. She gives the protagonist some magical objects or spells to help her on her journey or protect her from harm. It makes her a supernatural guide and mentor figure more vividly.

4.6 Comparative Analysis

In the given context, our study focusses on the comparison between Chinese and Khasi depictions of women. In the following segment, we observe the presentation of wise old women in the Chinese and Khasi folktales. We also discuss the most important characteristics that characterize these wise old women's important roles in the chosen Chinese and Khasi folktales discussed above. We further try to determine how such characters evolve through the folktales. We first discuss what defines these wise old women in Chinese folktales; we follow this with what defines these characters in Khasi tales.

The Old Woman and the Tiger: Chinese Folktale

1. **Wisdom:** It is often stereotyped that the old woman was wise and experienced because of having lived long enough to gain knowledge through experience. She displays a lot of wit and resourcefulness facing any problem.
2. **Kindness:** The old woman is usually defined as a kindly woman who is willing to help everyone who needs it. She is usually depicted as giving generously of her wealth and showing sympathy to anyone in need.
3. **Tenacity:** The old woman is characterized by determination and endurance. She doesn't back off easily in the face of adversity and continues with her actions and decisions in more determination.
4. **Resilience:** The old woman is depicted as strong in danger or problems. She is often portrayed as strong enough to withstand all such hard times and find ways to overcome the conditions.
5. **Ingenuity:** The old woman is ingenious and inventive, using her intelligence and wit to outsmart her enemies. She uses cunning strategies and even uses her knowledge to find clever ways out of problems.
6. **Spiritual Connection:** In most variations of the fairy tale, the old woman can be connected to a higher spiritual power or can possess supernatural powers for talking to animals or summoning a higher power.

The Old Lady Meng (Chinese Folktale)

1. **Wisdom:** Meng Po has tremendous knowledge, information, and enlightenment concerning the human soul in this cycle of life and death. She is fully aware of the afterlife and how complex it was meant to be, as well as the significance of forgetting her previous lives before releasing her souls to embark on their new journey.
2. **Compassion:** Meng Po is compassionate, even though she will be the cause of forgetting. She feels for the souls that have died and the emotional burden they carry with them from their previous life. Meng Po is there to assuage their distress and enable them to start anew without the baggage of the past.
3. **Patience:** Meng Po is very patient, particularly in her work. She prepares the Forgetfulness Soup very accurately and makes sure that it is consumed with the correct number of herbs and all other ingredients. Meng Po waits for the souls to

come to her world and helps them forget, thus enabling them to start anew without the burden of the past.

4. **Tranquillity:** Meng Po is a peaceful and composed soul with an aura of serenity around her. She demonstrates serenity within the midst of the chaos created by the souls passing into another life. Calmness always has a way of calming the souls while making them embrace the forgetfulness she administers to them.
5. **Nourishing:** Meng Po nourishes. She feeds souls that are passing through her world. She knows just how fragile the spirits of the dead are and feeds them by giving them Forgetfulness Soup. The care displayed by Meng Po ensures her soul is ready and ready for the next level in her spiritual journey.
6. **Ritualistic:** Meng Po is deeply attached to the rituals and customs that accompany her work. She follows the procedure of forgetting, which ensures that every soul gets its share of soup that totally clears out their memories. In fact, it is the ritualistic nature of her work that ensures the right way of the mechanism of the circle of reincarnation.

The Old Woman Who Lost Her Dumplings (Chinese Folktale)

1. **Elderly:** The old woman is described as old. This describes her as a person with wisdom, life experience, and vulnerability. The piece of information about her age is an important trait in the story because it marks her requirement for help and support.
2. **Poor:** The old woman is described as poor. This portrays her as someone who is economically weak and has very little to survive. This makes her sympathetic and in contact with the audience.
3. **Hardworking:** Though she was old and poor, the old woman is portrayed as hardworking. She was seen working in the fields and preparing her food with much diligence. This character portrays resilience, determination, and willingness to do whatever is required to survive.
4. **Forgetful:** The main idea of the folktale is forgetfulness. In this folktale, the forgetfulness of the old woman is the theme. She forgets to cook the dumplings on several occasions because of forgetfulness. This character introduces humour into the story and allows for events to occur.
5. **Resourceful:** Despite her forgetfulness, the old woman is resourceful in her

problem-solving. She sought help from the animals and used their suggestions to solve her problem. This character portrays her adaptability and her ability to create the best out of the situation.

6. **Kind-hearted:** The old woman is a kind-hearted person. This is portrayed in her willingness to help others. When animals approached her for help, she willingly accepted to help them even though she needed the help herself. This character portrays sympathy and generosity.
7. **The persistence:** Throughout the folktale, the persistence of the old woman is presented. She has been having struggles and setbacks, but she just keeps going on to the goal, which is making a perfect dumpling. Her persistence shows that no one should ever give up and inspires the reader or listener.

Ka Sohlyngkew, the Wise Old Woman (Khasi Folktale)

1. **Wisdom:** The title claims that Ka Sohlyngkew is wise. She possesses profound insight and knowledge, which she nurtures in others through her actions and words. She is wise enough to overcome hardships and make wise decisions.
2. **Experience:** Ka Sohlyngkew is an old lady who has lived a long time. She has many experiences and knowledge gained from them. Experiences allowed her to see things differently. She is hence capable of providing valuable advice and guidance to other characters in the folktale.
3. **Compassion:** Ka Sohlyngkew is a wise woman and an old woman; yet she is compassionate, and she cares deeply about others. She is genuinely concerned about the well-being of her people and shows concern for everyone who needs her help. She promotes her actions in the folktale.
4. **Problem-solving skills:** When Ka Sohlyngkew faces problems or dilemmas, then she possesses excellent problem-solving skills. She takes the time to analyze situations and find practical solutions that will benefit all parties involved. Her problem-solving skills often put her among the respected and wise members of the society.
5. **Courage:** Ka Sohlyngkew is courageous. She is never afraid to stand for the right, even if everyone else is opposed to her. Her courage encourages others and gives them the confidence to do what is right.
6. **Generosity:** Ka Sohlyngkew is very generous. She willingly gives her knowledge,

wisdom, and other resources to those who need it, and she does not ask for anything in return. Her generosity draws people together and has a good impact on them.

7. **Leadership:** Forming part of the leadership of the folktale, Ka Sohlyngkew portrays her wisdom, compassion, good problem-solving skills, and bravery. From her, others look up to guide and help them out, therefore recognizing her as reliable and respected. Her leadership qualities support the solution of conflict, the development of other plotters, and other remarkable developments of the story.

Ka Lawei-Lyngdoh (Khasi Folktale)

1. **Wisdom:** Ka Lawei-Lyngdoh is the wise woman, full of experience and knows the ways of life well. She offers very prudent advice and solutions that are applied to the problems that happen to her characters. That wisdom comes with years and a spiritual relationship with the nature and other spiritual realm.
2. **Resilience:** Despite her old age, Ka Lawei-Lyngdoh shows immense resilience. She is in a position to overcome the many challenges and roadblocks she faces. She is a woman determined to survive adversity, and often finds a creative solution to her problems.
3. **Spirituality:** Ka Lawei-Lyngdoh is an integral part of the spiritual world, whose powers she embodies. She can converse with the spirits, have the power to divine the future, and tap into the energies of nature. Her spirituality and practices shape the folktale.
4. **Compassion:** The old woman in the story shows compassion toward other people. She is always ready to assist other needy people and to guide and advise them. Compassion towards others in her actions and words is manifested in the way she deals with all other characters in the story.
5. **Independence:** Ka Lawei-Lyngdoh is an independent woman who lives life by her own standards. She believes in herself and is very self-sufficient and does not bow to the whims of society or standards. This independence gives her the power to make her own decisions and follow her own path.
6. **Generosity:** The old woman is generous. She freely gives her characters with her knowledge, resources, and wisdom without hesitation. She gives the impression of wanting to uplift and help other people around her. Generosity does not even end at human standards but encompasses animals and the natural world.

7. **Connection to nature:** Ka Lawei-Lyngdoh has a deep sense of being connected to and reverence for nature. She knows that humans and the natural world are interconnected. Her bond with nature strengthens her powers and increases her wisdom to draw inspiration and guidance from the environment.

Ka Lawei-Lyngdoh (Khasi Folktale)

1. **Wisdom:** Ka Lawei-Lyngdoh is known for her wisdom, which is considered unequalled within the village. Her strong understanding of human nature, social dynamics, and ethical principles make her an excellent provider of profound guidance toward solving issues and making complex decisions.
2. **Problem-solving abilities:** With her great problem-solving skills, Ka Lawei-Lyngdoh is able to catch hold of complicated problems that crop up within the village. She has an adult mind, cool, and always takes time to carefully ponder over every perspective and the possible consequences attached to every possible decision.
3. **Listening and empathy:** Ka Lawei-Lyngdoh's listening skills are considered exceptional along with the very empathetic nature. She very easily connects with the villagers, and all one needs to do is come forward with issues and complaints, in a very safe environment because she patiently listens to them. Her empathetic nature allows her to understand the underlying emotions and motivations behind conflicts and, as a result, creates understanding and cooperation.
4. **Fairness and justice:** In the process of advising, Ka Lawei-Lyngdoh follows the principle of fairness and justice. She knows the rights and interests of the parties involved, and she gives equitable solutions that are not biased. Her advocacy for justice puts back confidence and trust in the community.
5. **Community-based approach:** Ka Lawei-Lyngdoh's advice always keeps in mind the welfare of the entire village. She knows that people are all interconnected within the community, and she emphasizes solutions that promote unity and collective well-being. Her ability to balance the interests of individuals in the greater good holds the social strand of the village together.
6. **Integrity and moral compassion:** Ka Lawei-Lyngdoh is of a very strong level of integrity and a very strong moral compass. She maintains ethics and principles that guide the villagers to act in ways that also benefit the greater good and those who

act in ways that are true to the moral right. Her integrity is what has earned her respect and the admiration of the whole community.

7. **Reputation and influence:** Ka Lawei-Lyngdoh is respected worldwide because she has always been wise and has good problem-solving skills. Many people seek her counsel because they can get assurance of trust and advisability. Her influence does not stop at the local region; she enjoys a huge following all over the region and has been accorded supreme status.

Ka Nongthymmai (The Wise Grandmother) (Khasi Folktale)

The grandmother is the bearer of the Khasi culture and traditions. She passes down ancestral knowledge, rituals, and customs from one generation to another. She stands for the values and beliefs of the Khasi people, making it easier for them to stay true to their identity and heritage.

1. **Wisdom:** Grandmother is shown to be very intelligent and well-informed. She carries deep wisdom in life, nature, and human nature. She informs her people about different species of humanity that exist within the village. Her knowledge is of immense value among the village people, and her advises are very costly.
2. **Experience:** The grandmother has lived a long life, and through her experience, she knows the world. She has witnessed and experienced most of the things of life. Her experiences will be very helpful to provide practical solutions and advice to her granddaughter and others.
3. **Deep Connection to Nature:** The grandmother understands the natural world very well. She knows the rhythms and patterns of the natural world and teaches her granddaughter to respect and appreciate nature. She provides insights about flora, fauna, and the environment and emphasizes the need for maintaining balance between the human beings and nature.
4. **Storytelling ability:** The grandmother is a good narrator. Through different narratives, she teaches her granddaughter important life lessons, the moral values to be adhered to, and the traditions that are characteristic and unique of the community where she was born. In short, she passes knowledge by narratives from one generation to the other.
5. **Compassionate and Empathetic:** The grandmother is an extremely compassionate and empathetic person. She feels the problems, fears, and longings

of her granddaughter and others. She is sympathetic in nature and provides solace and motivation. She will assist her granddaughter to encounter the problems and help develop a feeling of self-confidence.

6. **Resilient and Strong-Hearted:** The grandmother is a strong-willed and strong-hearted woman. She would have surely gone through numerous tribulations and ordeals in life, which makes her stronger and more matured. She would teach the granddaughter to face these tribulations and to be stronger than them.
7. **Culture preservation:** Grandma embodies Khasi culture and traditions. Through successive generations, she passes on ancestors' knowledge in rituals and customs. Her values and beliefs are emblematic of the Khasi, making it that much easier for them to remain themselves and their rich heritage.

Both Chinese and Khasi folktales are very rich in storytelling. Wise old women are part of these tales, but the tales may include a variety of characters and themes, such as themes of friendship, valour, and loyalty. Even though such characters share some similarities in their representations, differences in the narratives, cultural contexts, and values of each share the same characters. To explore this further, the following are comparative analyses of two folktales featuring wise old women.

4.7 Observations and Inferences

The graphs below present the distribution of more than twenty attributes existing within the given sample of stories, that is, both Chinese and Khasi stories. Figure 1 presents one chart that gives an outline of the attributes mentioned above as extracted from each community's stories, showing their non-uniform distribution. This information will therefore be useful in the comparative analysis of the very profound role played by wise old women within their folktales. Like in the previous chapters, the mentioned attributes relating to each of the folktales as shown in Figure 1 below will be compared.

| Traits Highlighted | | Frequency of occurrence | |
|--------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| | | Chinese Folktale | Khasi Folktale |
| 1. | Wisdom | 2 | 3 |
| 2. | Kindness | 1 | - |
| 3. | Tenacity | 1 | - |
| 4. | Resilience | 1 | 1 |
| 5. | Ingenuity | 1 | - |
| 6. | Spiritual connection | 1 | 1 |
| 7. | Compassion | 2 | 3 |
| 8. | Patience | 1 | - |
| 9. | Serenity | 1 | - |
| 10. | Nurturing | 1 | - |
| 11. | Ritualistic | 1 | - |
| 12. | Hardworking | 1 | - |
| 13. | Resourceful | 1 | - |
| 14. | Persistent | 1 | - |
| 15. | Experience | - | 2 |
| 16. | Problem-solving skills | - | 2 |
| 17. | Courage | - | 1 |
| 18. | Generosity | - | 2 |
| 19. | Leadership | - | 1 |
| 20. | Independence | - | 1 |
| 21. | Connection to nature | - | 1 |
| 22. | Judicious | - | 1 |
| 23. | Community-oriented | - | 1 |
| 24. | Integrity | - | 1 |
| 25. | Influential | - | 1 |
| 26. | Storyteller | - | 1 |
| 27. | Preserver of culture | 1 | 1 |

Table 1: Chart of Traits and their Frequencies in Chinese and Khasi Folktales on Wise Old Women

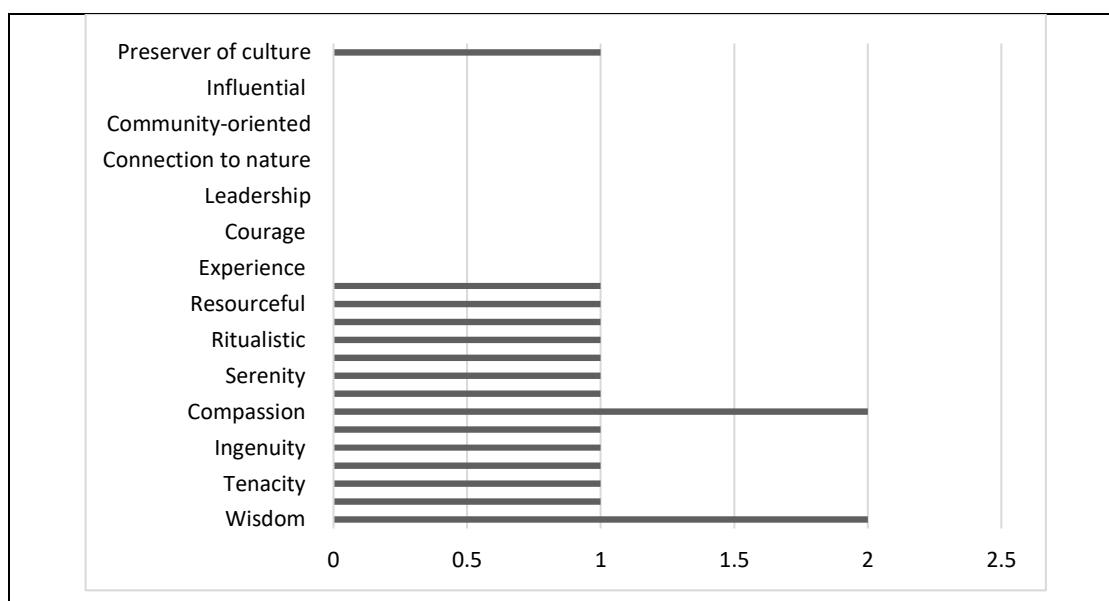


Figure 1: Assessment of Traits in Chinese Folktales on Wise Old Women

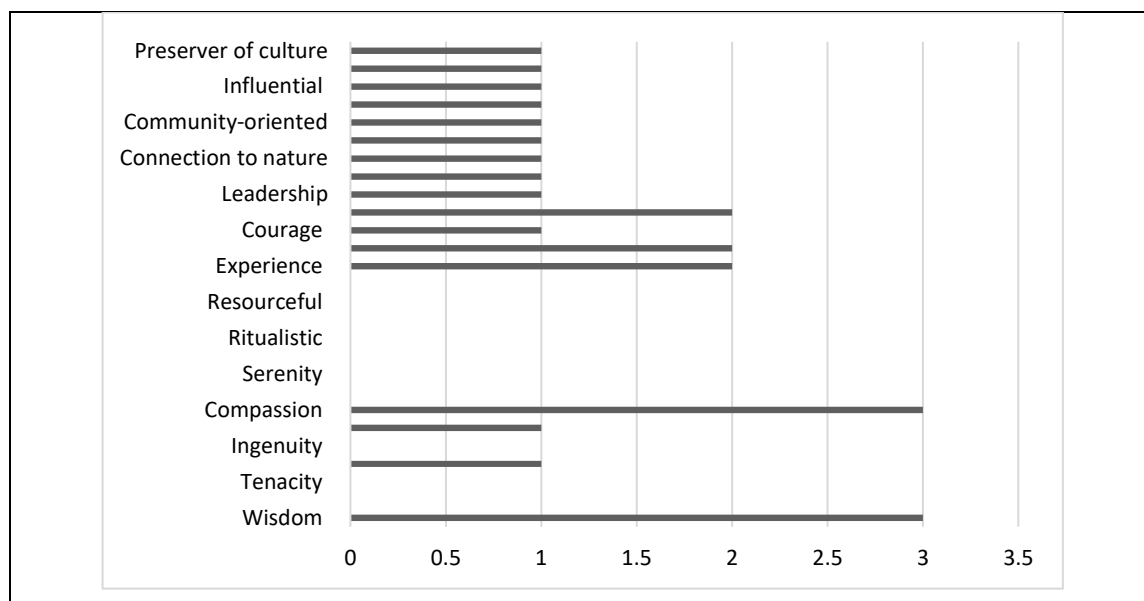


Figure 2: Assessment of Traits in Khasi Folktales on Wise Old Women

4.7.1 Cultural Context

Chinese Folktales:

Chinese folktales reflect a civilizational tension between filial piety, authority, and social harmony. Ubiquitous existence of the wise old woman signifies not only age respect but also the Jungian "Great Mother" archetype, who guides and serves through sagacity (Jung 83). Her authority is symbolic but non-institutional and nonetheless legitimizes moral advice in the context of a patriarchal culture. In the view of feminist folklorists, the character stands as the go-between the confines of gender roles and the stage on which women's voices turn up in oral traditions (Radner and Lanser 19).

Khasi Folktales

Khasi oral narratives, rooted in a matrilineal society, foreground women to the forefront as cultural bearers who are custodians of ancestral wisdom. The old, wise women are characteristically linked to earth and cycles of nature, describing ecofeminist understandings of women's inherent connection with nature (Merchant 3). To be grand dames and tradition-carrying protector-ratu making tradition home reiterates matrilineal sociology that interprets lineage and inheritance as validating women's symbolic power in communal life (Gurdon 74).

4.7.2 Characterization of Wise Old Women

Chinese Folktales:

Older women characters are sages or hermits who sit in liminal locations such as mountains or deserts. Their spiritual knowledge and divinity depict the Crone archetype, who in Jungian parlance embodies transformation through wisdom (Jung 134). Their counsel—upholding virtues such as humility and perseverance—reaffirms cultural norms even as it illustrates how women's functions, although limited in public life, can be extended symbolically in folklore (Warner 56).

Khasi Folktales

Among Khasis, wise elderly women are custodians of oral memory and traditional law. Their cultural authority illustrates feminist folklore theory, which highlights the manner in which oral traditions work to preserve women's roles as mediators, healers, and judges in the face of historical exclusion (Jordan and Kalcik 10). In Khasi folklore, these women embody ancestor continuity and practicality equally, a direct reflection of matrilineal inheritance structures which place female elders in centre stage in family and community hierarchies (De and Ghosh 7).

4.7.3 Themes and Lessons

Chinese Folktales:

Stories featuring wise old women tend to center on the moral traits of selflessness, humility, and loyalty. Old women in the tales tend to be the harbinger of wisdom for the hero, emphasizing the Confucian virtue of respect for the elderly (de Reincourt 152). They may also be seen as a feminist response, where women turn not into passive domesticated creatures but into symbolic agents of wisdom that guide male heroes' journeys (Radner and Lanser 27).

Khasi Folktales:

Khasi stories link wise elder women to environmental and community harmony. Their wisdom highlights human-nature interdependence, echoing ecofeminist philosophy on

environmental stewardship and cultural sustainability (Shiva 45). They emphasize the importance of balance, ancestor respect, and community prosperity—core values of Khasi matriliney and shared way of life (Devarani 61).

4.7.4 Narrative Structure

Chinese Folktales

Typically quest-based, Chinese mythology features the hero encountering a sage woman who offers cryptic advice, symbolic objects, or moral instruction. This structural strategy accommodates Campbell's hero journey framework but reverses it by inserting the "female mentor" that aids transformation (Campbell 109). The sage woman in this instance is peripheral yet central: peripheral in social power but central to the hero's development.

Khasi Folktales:

Khasi myths are episodic, however, integrating ancestral spirits, the natural world, and communal duty. The aged woman is the mediator between the human and spirit worlds, her function tracing back to Eliade's definition of myth as the mode of reascent cosmic order (Eliade 97). Her narrative function is centred on continuance of cultural practice with an interest in maintenance over heroic individual action.

Both traditions have wise old women as narrative focal points, yet their roles diverge across cultural contexts. In Chinese folklore, they reinforce Confucian moralities and embody the feminine wisdom archetype in patriarchal structures. In Khasi folklore, they embody matrilineal authority and ecological sensibility, denoting both ancestral safeguarding and the general welfare. A gender-theoretical reading thus illustrates how the "wise old woman" necessarily subverts and sustains cultural norms.