

# Cultural Heritage Preservation through Folktales as World Literature in Minahasa, Turkey, and Vietnam

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Cultural heritages;  
Folktales;  
Minahasa;  
Turkey;  
Vietnam;  
World literature

### Article History:

Received : 08/10/2025

Revised : 13/10/2025

Accepted : 13/11/2025

Available Online:

30/11/2025

## ABSTRACT

In the contemporary era of globalization and digital culture, local folktales continue to play a vital role in preserving cultural identity and moral values amid increasing cultural homogenization. This study explores how folktales from diverse cultures express universal human values and contribute to world literature. It analyzes six folktales from Minahasa (Indonesia), Turkey, and Vietnam—regions renowned for their rich oral storytelling traditions yet often underrepresented in comparative world literature research. The study addresses two central questions: Which universal themes are reflected in these folktales, and how do they exemplify David Damrosch's three characteristics of world literature: circulation, transformation, and transcendence? Employing Damrosch's theoretical framework, alongside the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) and Thompson's Motif-Index classification systems, this qualitative comparative study identifies five recurring themes: transformation, love and sacrifice, rivalry, wisdom and betrayal, and moral justice. The findings reveal distinct levels of circulation, transformation, and transcendence among the folktales. While Minahasan folktales are more widely circulated within Indonesia, all six narratives exhibit adaptability and cross-cultural resonance, illustrating how local folktales safeguard cultural heritage while enriching global literary discourse. The study concludes that transcendence in world literature depends not only on circulation but also on a folktale's capacity to convey universal human experiences through reinterpretation, translation, and cultural adaptation across societies.

**How to cite (in APA style):** Dewi Christa Kobis, Andriyani Marentek, Aditya Lapu Kalua, & Yunaz Ali Akbar Karaman. (2025). Cultural Heritage Preservation Through Folktales as World Literature in Minahasa, Turkey, And Vietnam. *OKARA: Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra*, 19(2), 239–256. <https://doi.org/10.19105/ojbs.v19i2.22145>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Folktales have long been regarded as essential components of cultural heritage, encapsulating the values (Mphasha, 2015), beliefs, and moral codes (Dahal & Bhatta, 2021; Lebagi et al., 2025) of a community through narrative form (Goraya et al., 2025; Oktaviani, 2022). Unlike other expressions of folklore, such as rituals, songs, or proverbs, folktales occupy a central role as oral stories transmitted across generations, often functioning simultaneously as entertainment, moral instruction, and a medium of collective memory

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(Bukanya T., 2025). They not only provide imaginative narratives but also act as cultural texts that shape identity and preserve the social worldview of the people who tell them (Hamral, 2017; Ida Bagus Nyoman & Dewa Gede Agung Gana, 2018). In many societies, folktales remain indispensable to understanding both the local wisdom of a particular community and the universal patterns of human experience.

In Indonesia, for instance, folktales such as *Malin Kundang* and *Bawang Merah Bawang Putih* transmit lessons on filial piety, honesty, and justice, values embedded in the moral foundation of Indonesian society (Putri et al., 2025; Permatahati et al., 2022). Similarly, Turkish folktales, including the witty tales of Nasreddin Hodja or the romantic narratives like *Ashik Kerib*, serve to sustain cultural norms and ethical reflections (Çelik, 2018). Vietnamese folktales, influenced by Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist traditions, often combine supernatural elements with moral struggles, as seen in the widely known *Tam and Cam* or *Son Tinh and Thuy Tinh* (Quynh, 2019). Across these regions, folktales exemplify the dual role of preserving cultural identity while engaging audiences through storytelling.

Scholars of comparative literature and folklore studies have often emphasized the importance of cross-cultural analysis in uncovering the universal dimensions of folktales. The motif-index of Thompson and the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) classification system reveal that many narratives across the world share common tale types, such as transformation tales, animal tales, and tales of rivalry (Thompson, 2016; Uther, 2011, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c). For example, the “Cinderella” narrative is not confined to European traditions but also appears in Asian cultures, as in the Vietnamese *Tam and Cam* (Nguyet, 2017). Similarly, animal transformation narratives appear in both Eastern and Western traditions, highlighting the universality of human fascination with metamorphosis (Kaminski, 2022). Such comparisons demonstrate that folktales are not isolated cultural products but rather part of a broader transnational network of narrative traditions.

However, many comparative studies have remained limited to classification, motif cataloging, or regional focus, without engaging more expensive literary frameworks. This is where David Damrosch’s theory of world literature offers a valuable lens. He defines world literature not as a static canon but as a mode of reading and circulation, wherein a text gains new life as it travels beyond its original cultural and linguistic context. He identifies three characteristics for a literary work to be considered world literature.

A literary work enters world literature through three interconnected characteristics: circulation, transformation, and transcendence (Damrosch, 2003, 2017). Circulation refers to the movement of a text beyond its original linguistic and cultural boundaries through translation, adaptation, or retelling. As a work travels across contexts, it often undergoes transformation, with its meaning, form, or reception changing with new audiences and interpretive frameworks. Through these processes, a literary work may achieve transcendence, namely the ability to resonate beyond its local origins by addressing universal human concerns such as love, morality, justice, suffering, and human relationships with nature. In this sense, world literature is not defined by nationality or canonization alone, but by the dynamic interaction between texts and readerships.

Applying this framework to folktales is particularly significant because oral narratives, though local in origin, often travel widely through anthologies, translations, and modern retellings. For instance, tales like *Ashik Kerib* circulated beyond Turkey into the Caucasus and Europe (Simyan, 2024; Yernjakyan, 2009), transforming in form and meaning as they reached new audiences. Vietnamese folktales like *Tam and Cam* have been adapted into contemporary literature and film, while Indonesian and Minahasan stories are increasingly

documented in anthologies and academic works (Kaat & Lattu, 2023; Sarimbangun, 2024). These processes demonstrate that folktales are not only cultural artifacts but also dynamic participants in the global literary system.

Despite this potential, the application of world literature theory to folktales remains relatively underdeveloped. Much of the scholarship on Damrosch has focused on canonical written texts, such as epics and novels, with limited attention to oral narratives. This creates a scholarly gap, particularly when considering how folktales, which are by nature transmittable and adaptable, exemplify Damrosch's three characteristics of world literature in distinctive ways. Addressing this gap is crucial not only for broadening the scope of world literature studies but also for affirming the role of folktales in global literary dialogues.

The current study seeks to contribute to this discussion by examining six folktales from three cultural contexts: Minahasa in Indonesia, Turkey, and Vietnam. The six tales are *The Moopoo Bird* and *The Origin of Lake Tondano* (Minahasa), *Ahik Kerib* and *The Tale of Shahmaran* (Turkey), and *Son Tinh and Thuy Tinh*, and *Tam and Cam* (Vietnam). The selection of Minahasa, Turkey, and Vietnam is grounded in both cultural and comparative considerations. First, the three regions possess strong oral storytelling traditions that remain closely connected to cultural identity, moral education, and collective memory (Çelik, 2018; Dahal & Bhatta, 2021). Second, despite their geographical distance, the folktales from these regions share recurring motifs such as transformation, sacrifice, rivalry, and moral justice, making them suitable for comparative analysis (Dundes & Bronner, 2007; Uther, 2011). Third, these regions represent different cultural and religious backgrounds, namely Austronesian Indigenous traditions in Minahasa, Islamic and Anatolian traditions in Turkey, and Confucian-Buddhist influences in Vietnam. This diversity allows the study to examine how universal narrative patterns emerge across distinct cultural systems. Finally, compared to European folktales that dominate world literature, discussions of folktales from Minahasa, Turkey, and Vietnam remain relatively underrepresented in comparative world literature scholarship (Pham et al., 2025). By considering these facts, this study is guided by two main research questions:

1. What universal themes can be identified in the six folktales from Minahasa, Turkey, and Vietnam?
2. How do these folktales exemplify Damrosch's three characteristics of world literature: circulation, transformation, and transcendence?

## 2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative comparative method (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Dundes & Bronner, 2007; Nemesio, 1999) to analyze six folktales using Damrosch's framework of world literature. The analysis applies his concepts to reveal their cultural and global relevance.

### 2.1 Data Collection Technique

The primary data in this study consist of six folktales: two from Minahasa (*The Moopoo Bird*, *The Origin of Lake Tondano*), two from Turkey (*Ahik Kerib*, *The Tale of Shahmaran*), and two from Vietnam (*Son Tinh and Thuy Tinh*, *Tam and Cam*). Data were collected from published anthologies, translated collections, and academic journals, ensuring both textual accuracy and cultural authenticity. The selection process followed three main criteria proposed by Damrosch (2017): 1) cultural representativeness, meaning the tales hold

important positions in their respective traditions; 2) thematic comparability, which ensures the stories contain shared motifs like transformation, love, sacrifice, or rivalry; and 3) circulation evidence, where the tales are documented beyond oral tradition and available in written or translated form.

The six folktales were selected purposively rather than randomly because this study prioritizes cultural representativeness and thematic comparability over numerical quantity. Two folktales were selected from each region to ensure balanced cross-cultural comparison while maintaining analytical depth suitable for qualitative comparative research. The selected tales were considered sufficiently representative because they are widely recognized within their respective cultural traditions, have been repeatedly documented in folklore anthologies and academic studies, and contain recurring motifs relevant to comparative folklore analysis, such as transformation, sacrifice, rivalry, morality, and justice. In total, the researcher reviewed more than 15 folktale sources from the three cultural regions before narrowing the corpus to 6 tales based on their relevance to Damrosch's framework of circulation, transformation, and transcendence. This limited yet focused corpus enables in-depth thematic and comparative interpretation rather than statistical generalization.

**Table 1**  
Rationale for Folktale Selection

Region	Number of Tales Reviewed	Selected Folktales	Main Selection Rationale
Minahasa (Indonesia)	1. The Legend of <i>Watu Pinawetengan</i> ; 2. The Story of <i>Toar and Lumimuut</i> ; 3. The Golden Snail of Minahasa; 4. The <i>Moopoo</i> Bird, 5. The Origin of Lake <i>Tondano</i>	The <i>Moopoo</i> Bird and The Origin of Lake <i>Tondano</i>	Strong oral tradition, ecological motifs, and local cultural identity
Turkey	1. <i>Nasreddin Hodja Stories</i> 2. <i>Kerem and Asli</i> 3. The Maiden Tower Legend 4. <i>Ashik Kerib</i> 5. The Tale of <i>Shahmaran</i>	<i>Ashik Kerib</i> and the Tale of <i>Shahmaran</i>	International circulation, adaptation, symbolic transformation
Vietnam	1. The Betel and Areca Story, 2. The Legend of <i>Hoan Kiem</i> Lake, 3. The Bamboo Tree, 4. <i>Son Tinh</i> and <i>Thuy Tinh</i> , 5. <i>Tam</i> and <i>Cam</i>	<i>Son Tinh</i> and <i>Thuy Tinh</i> , and <i>Tam</i> and <i>Cam</i>	Strong moral themes, global Cinderella motif, educational circulation

The candidate folktales were initially reviewed based on their cultural prominence, availability in documented or translated forms, and relevance to comparative thematic analysis. However, only six folktales were ultimately selected because they most clearly demonstrated recurring motifs and the three dimensions of Damrosch's world literature framework: circulation, transformation, and transcendence. This selective process ensured analytical focus and thematic consistency across the comparative corpus.

Damrosch's theory was operationalized through three analytical indicators, as mentioned previously. Circulation was identified through evidence of translation, adaptation, educational use, publication, or cross-cultural dissemination. Transformation was analyzed by examining shifts in narrative meaning, function, symbolism, or audience reception across historical and cultural contexts. Transcendence was identified through the presence of universal human concerns, including love, justice, sacrifice, morality, ecological balance, and perseverance, which enable the folktales to resonate beyond their local origins.

## 2.2 Data Analysis Technique

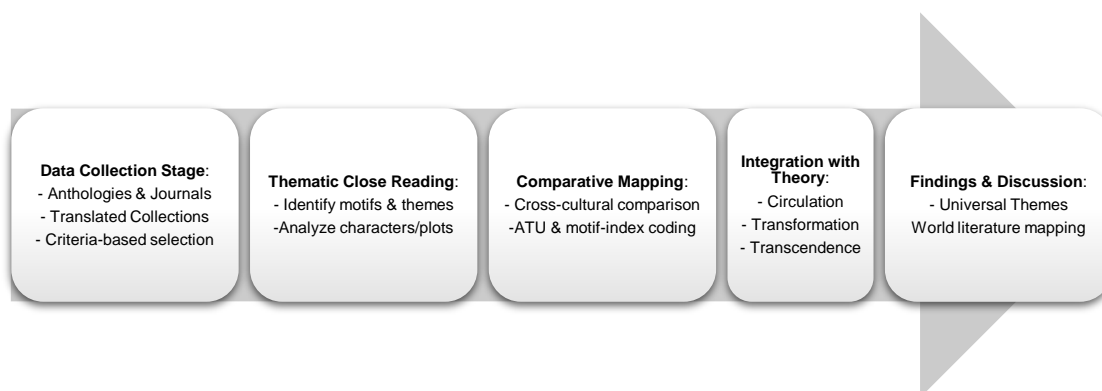
The data were analyzed using qualitative comparative analysis through several interconnected stages. First, each folktale was closely read multiple times to identify recurring themes, narrative structures, character functions, symbolic elements, and cultural values. During this process, important narrative units such as transformation scenes, moral conflicts, acts of sacrifice, rivalry, and justice were manually coded and grouped into broader thematic categories. The coding process was conducted comparatively across all six folktales to ensure analytical consistency and to identify recurring cross-cultural patterns.

Second, the identified motifs and narrative patterns were classified using the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) Index and Thompson's Motif-Index of Folk-Literature. These classification systems were used to map similarities and differences among the folktales, particularly regarding tale types, transformation motifs, persecuted heroine patterns, divine rivalry, and symbolic moral structures.

Third, the findings were interpreted using David Damrosch's framework of world literature. The concept of circulation was examined through evidence of translation, adaptation, publication, educational use, and transnational dissemination. Transformation was analyzed through changes in narrative meaning, symbolic interpretation, social function, and audience reception across contexts. Meanwhile, transcendence was identified through universal human concerns reflected in the folktales, including love, morality, justice, perseverance, ecological balance, and human relationships with nature. Through this layered analytical process, the folktales were examined not only as local cultural narratives but also as dynamic participants in world literature.

## 2.3. Flowchart of Research Methodology

In brief, the flowchart below summarizes the research methodology for this study.



**Figure 1.** Research Methodology Flowchart

Figure 1 illustrates the overall stages of the research methodology applied in this study. The process began with data collection from folklore anthologies, translated collections, and academic publications, followed by purposive selection based on cultural representativeness and thematic relevance. The next stage involved close thematic reading to identify motifs, narrative structures, and moral themes in each folktale. Afterward, comparative mapping was conducted using the ATU classification system and Thompson's

Motif-Index to identify cross-cultural similarities and differences. Finally, the findings were integrated with Damrosch's world literature framework to analyze the circulation, transformation, and transcendence of the selected folktales.

The analytical instruments in this study complemented one another throughout the research process. Thematic close reading was used to identify central themes, moral values, symbolic representations, and character relationships within the folktales. The Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) classification system helped categorize folktales into internationally recognized tale types. At the same time, Thompson's Motif-Index was used to identify recurring narrative motifs and symbolic patterns across cultures. David Damrosch's world literature framework was then applied to interpret how the folktales circulate, transform, and transcend beyond their local cultural origins. Together, these instruments enabled a multilayered analysis connecting folklore structure, cultural meaning, and global literary circulation.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Universal Themes Identified through ATU and Motif-Index Classification

This study does not aim to generalize the entirety of Indonesian, Turkish, or Vietnamese folklore traditions. Instead, the six selected folktales function as representative comparative samples that illustrate recurring narrative patterns and thematic similarities across different cultural contexts. In qualitative comparative folklore research, limited but culturally significant texts are often used to explore symbolic structures, narrative functions, and cross-cultural resonance rather than statistical generalization.

The analysis of six folktales (2 from Minahasa, 2 from Turkey, and 2 from Vietnam) using the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) Index and Thompson's Motif-Index of Folk Literature reveals a shared system of universal motifs and moral archetypes. Despite differing cultural contexts, these tales converge around five central thematic axes: *transformation, love and sacrifice, rivalry, wisdom and betrayal, and moral justice*. These recurring motifs indicate that folktales across diverse regions often embody similar moral concerns and narrative structures, reflecting shared human values despite geographical distance. Moreover, the consistency of these themes demonstrates the deep interconnection between storytelling traditions, suggesting that cultural identity and collective morality are often expressed through parallel symbolic forms in world folklore. The data are shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2**

Classification of Six Folktales based on ATU and Motif-Index Systems

Origin	Title of Folktale	Brief Summary	ATU / Motif Classification	Central Theme	Narrative Function
Minahasa (Indonesian)	<i>The Moopoo Bird</i>	A kid insists on following his grandfather to the forest to gather wood. He becomes lost and later transforms into a bird whose calls echo his longing for his family (Ellitan, 2009)	ATU 400; Motif D15000 (Transformation of human to bird)	Transformation, sacrifice	Symbol of purification through love and loss

(Continue on the next page)

Table 2 (Continue)

Origin	Title of Folktale	Brief Summary	ATU / Motif Classification	Central Theme	Narrative Function
Minahasa (Indonesian)	<i>The Origin of Lake Tondano</i>	Two lovers from rival families whose forbidden relationship leads to a great flood that forms Lake Tondano (Talanggai, 2021)	ATU 302; Motif A12000 (Creation of landscape through moral conflict)	Love and human-nature relation	Etiological explanation of moral and ecological harmony
Turkey	<i>Ashik Kerib</i>	A poor minstrel leaves his beloved to seek fortune and returns years later after trials of faith and endurance, rewarded for his unwavering love (Lermontov, 1994)	ATU 400; Motif T580 (Faithful lovers separated and reunited)	Love, virtue, perseverance	Demonstrates divine reward for loyalty
Turkey	<i>The Tale of Shahmaran</i>	A young man discovers Shahmaran, a wise serpent woman, betrays her trust for worldly gain, faces tragic consequences (Kúnos, 1913)	ATU 425A; Motif D1501 (Human marries serpent)	Wisdom, secrecy, betrayal	Conflict between sacred knowledge and human greed
Vietnam	<i>Son Tinh and Thuy Tinh</i>	Two deities compete for a princess's hand; their eternal rivalry causes yearly floods (Đặng, 2012)	ATU 313; Motif A255 (Rivalry of divine beings)	Rivalry and cosmic balance	Allegory for human-nature conflict
Vietnam	<i>Tam and Cam</i>	A kind girl oppressed by her stepmother and stepsister is reborn multiple times until she got justice (Quốc, 2006)	ATU 510A; Motif K1911 (Persecuted heroine rewarded)	Virtue, jealousy, moral justice	Reinforces karmic retribution and rebirth

Looking at the data in Table 2 above, it reveals that the Minahasan tales (*The Moopoo Bird* and *The Origin of Lake Tondano*) express strong ecological and moral dimensions. Transformation and sacrifice are tied to natural metaphors that turn grief into transcendence and human emotion into landscape formation. In brief, these folktales underwent transformation in their contemporary adaptations, as folktales usually do (Illana, 2021). Both emphasize that nature embodies moral memory. In contrast, Turkish tales highlight divide faith and wisdom. *Ashik Kerib* celebrates perseverance and spiritual reward, while *The Tale of Shahmaran* explores the tension between knowledge and betrayal. Both align with Islamic moral allegory and metaphysics, suggesting a spiritual transformation beyond the human realm. Meanwhile, the Vietnamese folktales exhibit strong moral dualism. *Son Tinh and Thuy Tinh's* tale represents cosmic rivalry, such as that between mountain versus sea. It is like a metaphor for the natural cycles of stability and chaos. Meanwhile, *Tam and Cam's* tale portrays virtue rewarded after trials, echoing the global "Cinderella" archetype but infused with Buddhist reincarnation motifs.

Across these narratives, the use of transformation, rivalry, and moral justice underlines the shared ethical imagination of humanity. Folktales thus serve as both moral codes and artistic expressions, validating Dundes' (2007) argument that claimed the persistence of tale types across cultures reflects shared psychological structures of meaning.

### 3.2 Folktales within the Framework of World Literature (Damrosch)

While the ATU and Motif-Index analyses establish structural similarities, David Damrosch's world literature theory deepens the understanding by focusing on how stories circulate, transform, and transcend beyond their cultural origins.

#### 3.2.1 Circulation

David Damrosch (2003) defines circulation as the movement of literary work across linguistic and cultural boundaries. This process can occur at several levels: 1) *local*, when a tale remains within its community; 2) *national*, when it enters a country's institutional or educational system; 3) *transregional*, when it spreads across neighbouring cultures; 4), *international*, when it crosses distinct nations through translation or adaption; 5) *global*, when it reaches audiences worldwide; and 6) *temporal*, when it endures across generations through reinterpretation. These forms of circulation reveal how stories evolve and gain new meanings as they move through diverse contexts. The circulation levels of the six folktales are shown in Table 3 below.

**Table 3**  
Levels of Circulation and Cross-Cultural Movement of the Six Folktales

Folktale	Level of Circulation	Scope of Reach	Evidence of Movement
<i>The Moopo Bird</i> (Minahasa, Indonesia)	National	Within a single nation-state (Taught in schools, published nationally, part of national identity)	Oral and educational retellings within Minahasa, later documented in local blogs and nationally published in Indonesian folktale anthologies.
<i>The Origin of Lake Tondano</i> (Minahasa, Indonesia)	National	Within a single nation-state (Taught in schools, published nationally, part of national identity)	Archival documentation, school storytelling, published in local and national languages by the Language Center of North Sulawesi ( <i>Balai Bahasa Sulawesi Utara</i> )
<i>Ashik Kerib</i>	International	Across multiple nations (Translated or adapted between distinct cultures and languages)	Translation, film, cross-cultural adaptation
<i>The Tale of Shahmaran</i>	Trans-Regional	Across neighboring ethnic or linguistic groups within nearby countries (Shared within related cultures or regions, such as Turkish-Kurdish)	Turkish–Kurdish retellings, visual art
<i>Son Tinh and Thuy Tinh</i>	National	Within a single nation-state (Taught in schools, published nationally, part of national identity)	Vietnamese textbooks, folklore collections
<i>Tam and Cam</i>	Global	Worldwide recognition, multiple media and cultural forms (Circulates globally through translation, film, and international anthologies)	Bilingual anthologies, modern films

Based on the data presented in Table 3, the circulation of the six folktales demonstrates varying degrees of cultural movement and transformation. The following discussion elaborates on each folktale's circulation pattern in greater detail.

*The Moopoo Bird* demonstrates *limited circulation*. This Minahasan folktale survives primarily through oral transmission and localized retellings within the community. It is occasionally used in regional education to promote moral values and local identity, such as the importance of obeying parents and elders (Mapasa, 2025). One of a folktale's major purposes is to give moral values (Hendratno, 2017). It means *Moopoo Bird* has served its purpose. It has been published nationally through a retelling in the national language by a well-known national publisher of children's literature (Moncol, 2019). However, it has not yet been widely published or translated into foreign languages.

Similarly, *The Origin of Lake Tondano* represents *national circulation*. The tale has been archived and officially documented by the Minahasa Cultural Department, which recognizes it as part of North Sulawesi's intangible heritage (Soriton, 2025). It has been published in both local and national languages (Talanggai, 2021). Its movement from oral tradition to institutional preservation signifies an early stage of circulation beyond oral tradition.

In contrast, *Ashik Kerib* demonstrates *international circulation*. Originating from Turkish oral tradition, it was adapted by Mikhail Lermontov into a romantic narrative, later translated into Russian and English, and even adapted into a 1988 Soviet film (Brooke, 2024). *The Tale of Shahmaran* exhibits *transregional circulation*. It is widely known across Turkish and Kurdish regions, circulating through oral narratives, contemporary visual art, and feminist reinterpretations (Ozturk, 2025). The figure of Shahmaran has appeared in modern exhibitions, environmental activism, and gender studies, highlighting its evolving symbolic power in Anatolia.

Meanwhile, *Son Tinh and Thuy Tinh's* tale shows *national circulation*. The Vietnamese legend is regularly included in national folklore collections and school curricula (Nguyen, 2025), symbolizing resilience and the harmony-conflict duality within nature (Long et al., 2018). Its continued presence in education and cultural festivals demonstrates its sustained role within Vietnam's national identity. *Tam and Cam's* tale reflects *global circulation*. The folktale has been published in bilingual anthologies, translated into English, and adapted into several modern Vietnamese films, thereby reaching audiences beyond Southeast Asia. Its transformation into multiple media forms and global accessibility mark it as a world folktale that transcends cultural and linguistic boundaries (Lutz, 2021). These folktales demonstrate the diverse levels of circulation within world literature from local to global. While *The Moopoo Bird* and *The Origin of Lake Tondano* remain nationally rooted, *Ashik Kerib* and *The Tale of Shahmaran* reach international and trans-regional audiences. Ultimately, *Tam and Cam* from Vietnam exemplify global circulation, showing how oral traditions can evolve into world literature through translation, adaptation, and cross-cultural transmission.

### 3.2.2 Transformation

David Damrosch (2003, 2017) claims that transformation involves shifts in meaning, structure, or reception as a story adapts to new audiences or contexts.

**Table 4**  
Types of Narrative Transformation and Reinterpretation Across the Six Folktales

Folktale	Type of Transformation	New Context / Interpretation
The Moopoo Bird	Oral → Didactic	School-Based Ecological Teaching
The Origin of Lake Tondano	Oral → Institutional	Archival Documentation
Ashik Kerib	Religious → Romantic	Secular Adaptation by Lermontov
The Tale of Shahmaran	Mythic → Symbolic	Ecofeminist and Ecological Symbolism
Son Tinh and Thuy Tinh	Minimal	Retains Mythic Function in National Curriculum
Tam and Cam	Moral → Feminist	Modern Feminist Readings and Media

*The Moopoo Bird* was once a moral story warning against disobedience and selfishness, rooted in local oral storytelling. In recent years, particularly through education reinterpretation in Minahasa schools, it has been reframed as an environmental allegory that teaches empathy, respect for nature, and the importance of ecological preservation (Andrian, 2018). A folktale's literary influences shape children's care for nature (Triana et al., 2022). The tale's moral focus has shifted from interpersonal obedience to collective responsibility, aligning with modern educational goals and environmental ethics (Aslam, 2024; Rizki, 2020). This transformation highlights how folklore remains adaptable to new pedagogical and social contexts.

*The Origin of Lake Tondano* was originally an oral legend recounting the tragic love and sacrifice that led to its creation; this tale has undergone transformation through institutional preservation and medium change. It has been transcribed, archived, and officially recognized as part of North Sulawesi's intangible cultural heritage, marking its movement from local storytelling to written documentation within cultural policy (Nayamenggala, 2023). This shift not only ensures its survival across generations but also redefines it as a cultural asset that represents regional identity and environmental history (Aragon, 2012; Pratiwi et al., 2024). The transformation from oral to written form illustrates how institutional involvement contributes to the tale's circulation and legitimization as part of national heritage.

*Ashik Kerib* was once a "Sufi Parable" from Turkish oral tradition. *Ashik Kerib* emphasized divine love, spiritual devotion, and the journey toward union with the sacred. However, in Mikhail Lermontov's adaptation in 1837, the story was transformed into a romantic narrative centered on human endurance and faithfulness. Lermontov recontextualized the mystical elements into a tale of personal perseverance and moral integrity, illustrating how love and loyalty transcend social and geographical barriers (Shafaghi & Owrang, 2024). This transformation reflects a shift from religious didacticism to humanistic romanticism, showing how cultural translation can reshape a story's moral and emotional focus.

*The Tale of Shahmaran* was a myth originating in Turkish and Kurdish cultures. It has evolved from a cautionary legend warning against betrayal and secrecy into a symbolic narrative of ecofeminism and spiritual harmony. In its modern interpretations, it spans the visual arts, literature, and activism. Shahmaran represents wisdom, the sacred connection between humanity and nature, and the resilience of the feminine spirit. The serpent–woman figure, once feared as dangerous, is now reimagined as a guardian of ecological balance

and female knowledge (Deniz, 2020). This transformation reveals how traditional myths can be reclaimed as tools for environmental and feminist awareness in contemporary discourse.

*Tam and Cam* has undergone significant reinterpretation across time and media. Traditionally, it served as a moral tale promoting obedience, patience, and karmic justice, in which Tam's virtue is rewarded, and Cam's cruelty is punished. However, modern adaptations, particularly in contemporary feminist readings and Vietnamese cinema, have reframed the story as a narrative of female agency and resistance (Kim, 2022). Tam's endurance is no longer viewed as a passive virtue but as an active assertion of autonomy against oppression (Ngoc Bui, 2009). This transformation underscores a growing dialogue between folklore and gender discourse, revealing how traditional narratives can evolve to empower rather than subdue women's voices.

Five of six tales exhibit notable transformation, either in form, meaning, or social function. The tale of *Son Tinh and Thuy Tinh* remains relatively static, preserving its mythological form across generations without significant reinterpretation. This illustrates that transformation is not mandatory but indicative of a tale's ongoing adaptability. As Damrosch (2009) observes, transformation keeps a text alive by inviting renewed acts of reading and retelling.

### 3.2.3 Transcendence

Transcendence in world literature occurs when a story moves beyond its local origin and speaks to universal human experiences such as love, loss, morality, and wisdom (Damrosch, 2007). The six folktales in Table 5 below demonstrate varying degrees of transcendence depending on how deeply their themes resonate across cultures.

**Table 5**

Levels of Transcendence and Universal Human Values Reflected in the Folktales

Folktale	Level of Transcendence	Universal Values Reflected
The Moopoo Bird	Moderate	Love, grief, transformation
The Origin of Lake Tondano	Limited	Ecological justice, heritage
Ashik Kerib	Strong	Love, loyalty, perseverance
The Tale of Shahmaran	Strong	Wisdom, transformation, balance
Son Tinh & Thuy Tinh	Moderate	Human-nature balance
Tam and Cam	Strong	Virtue, justice, autonomy

*The Moopo Bird* somehow still shows *moderate transcendence*. Originating from the Minahasa oral tradition, it tells the story of a young boy who insists on following his grandfather to gather firewood in the forest despite being told not to. Lost and exhausted, the boy eventually transforms into a bird, leaving his grandfather in grief. Although the tale remains local, its themes of disobedience, love, and regret resonate across cultures (Mapasa, 2025). Rooted in the Minahasa worldview that links humans and nature, the story quietly transcends its regional origin through its universal portrayal of affection, loss, and transformation.

*The Origin of Lake Tondano* employs *limited transcendence*. It tells a story about human disobedience and divine consequence. While primarily tied to local ecological and cultural identity (Nayamenggala, 2023), it holds potential universal appeal in its moral on

environmental respect and balance (Suherni, 2022). Its transcendence remains latent, awaiting reinterpretation within global ecological discourse.

*Ashik Kerib* embodies *strong transcendence*. Originally a *Sufi* parable about divine love and devotion, *Ashik Kerib* became a romantic tale of endurance and loyalty in its film adaptation. By transforming spiritual faith into human perseverance, the story transcends its Anatolian roots, celebrating universal values of love, loyalty, and moral strength that resonate with readers worldwide (Shamsizadehmaleki, 2014).

*The Tale of Shahmaran* possesses *strong transcendence*. Once a myth warning against betrayal, *The Tale of Shahmaran* now symbolizes wisdom, transformation, and ecofeminism. Reimagined in art and literature, *Shahmaran* represents harmony between humanity and nature and the resilience of feminine knowledge (Abiha, 2016). Its universal themes of forbidden wisdom and redemption allow the tale to resonate beyond its Middle Eastern origins.

*Son Tinh and Thuy Tinh's* tale shows *moderate transcendence*. It depicts the eternal struggle between the Mountain God and the Water God; this myth explains Vietnam's seasonal floods (Zukas, 2025). Although less reinterpreted outside its origin region and country, it embodies the timeless tension between humanity and nature (Devi, 2024), a universal ecological concern (Le Duc, 2025). Its transcendence lies in his shared recognition of natural cycles and resilience.

*Tam and Cam* somehow had employed *strong transcendence*. It parallels the global Cinderella archetype, embodying the moral triumph of virtue over cruelty. Traditionally, Tam's patience and goodness are rewarded, while Cam's envy results in her downfall (Nguyet, 2017). However, its transcendence extends beyond moral dichotomy. The tale addresses justice, morality, endurance, and the cyclical nature of good and evil, values deeply embedded in human consciousness across cultures. In modern feminist reinterpretations, particularly in Vietnamese cinema, the story evolves into a narrative of female agency and resistance against oppression, further amplifying its universal reach (Tran, 2025). This adaptability demonstrates Damrosch's notion that a text enters world literature not by its origin but by its transformation and reception, as *Tam and Cam's* tale continues to engage new audiences through its exploration of virtue, autonomy, and karmic justice. Overall, while tales like *Ashik Kerib*, *Shahmaran*, and *Tam and Cam* exhibit strong transcendence, *Moopoo Bird* and *Son Tinh and Thuy Tinh* exhibit moderate transcendence, and *The Origin of Lake Tondano* exhibits limited transcendence, all still demonstrate how local folktales resonate universally through themes of morality, transformation, and the human-nature relationship.

The analysis of six folktales from Indonesia, Turkey, and Vietnam demonstrates that local narratives carry both culture-specific meanings and universal human values, confirming the initial hypothesis that folktales across regions share common motifs and moral structures. The results show varying levels of transcendence: *Ashik Kerib*, *The Tale of Shahmaran*, and *Tam and Cam* exhibit strong transcendence, capable of resonating across cultural and linguistic boundaries; *The Moopoo Bird* and *Son Tinh and Thuy Tinh* show moderate transcendence, while *The Origin of Lake Tondano* has limited transcendence. These findings support the hypothesis that folktales, even when locally rooted, can convey universal themes such as love, justice, perseverance, and human-nature interaction.

Comparing these results with previous studies, the findings align with Dundes' (2007) observation that similar tale types persist across cultures, reflecting shared psychological

structures. They also extend Damrosch's (2003, 2007) world literature theory by showing how circulation and transformation contribute to a tale's global relevance. For instance, *Tam and Cam*'s modern feminist reinterpretations demonstrate how traditional narratives adapt to contemporary social discourses. *At the same time, the Moopo Bird's* environmental allegory illustrates the capacity of local folklore to address universal ecological concerns.

The implications of this study are broad. First, it emphasizes that folktales are not only cultural artifacts but also carriers of moral education and universal values. Second, it highlights the potential of comparative folklore research to promote cross-cultural understanding and preserve intangible cultural heritage. Third, it provides a methodological framework combining ATU/Motif-Index analysis with world literature theory, useful for future studies of narrative circulation, transformation, and transcendence. This research also offers a new understanding that transcendence is not solely determined by global circulation but also by a story's ability to resonate with universal human experiences through adaptation and reinterpretation. However, limitations include a focus on only six folktales, which may not fully represent each culture's folklore. Future research may expand the sample size, include more regions, or examine multimedia adaptations to understand further how local narratives enter world literature and influence global audiences.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine six folktales from Indonesia, Turkey, and Vietnam through the lens of world literature, focusing on their circulation, transformation, and transcendence. By analyzing these narratives, the research sought to understand how local folklore can convey universal values and resonate with audiences beyond their cultural origins. The findings offer insights into the ways traditional tales adapt over time and across contexts, highlighting both their cultural specificity and global relevance. First, among the six folktales analyzed, *Ashik Kerib*, *The Tale of Shahmaran*, and *Tam and Cam* exhibit strong transcendence, demonstrating their capacity to resonate beyond their cultural origins. *The Moopoo Bird* and *Son Tinh Thuy Tinh* show moderate transcendence, reflecting their universal themes while remaining largely regionally grounded. Meanwhile, *The Origin of Lake Tondano* has limited transcendence, tied primarily to local ecological and cultural contexts.

Second, within the framework of world literature, the study confirms that folktales can achieve global significance not only through circulation but also through transformation and resonance with universal human experiences. These narratives adapt over time, engaging contemporary audiences through reinterpretation, moral lessons, and cultural relevance. Folktales thus function both as expressions of local identity and as carriers of universal values, such as love, justice, perseverance, and relations between humans and nature. Third, this research highlights the practical and scholarly benefits of comparative folklore studies. It contributes to cultural preservation, informs cross-cultural moral and educational frameworks, and provides a methodological model for analyzing the circulation, adaptation, and transcendence of narratives. Ultimately, the study reinforces that local folklore can achieve global relevance, offering new insights into how traditional narratives maintain their significance and enter broader literary and cultural discourses.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. The analysis focuses on only six folktales from three cultural regions, which may not fully represent the diversity and complexity of Indonesian, Turkish, and Vietnamese folklore traditions. In addition, the

study primarily examines written and documented versions of the folktales rather than live oral performances or multimedia adaptations. Future research may expand the corpus by including more folktales from additional regions, integrating ethnographic approaches, or analyzing contemporary digital adaptations such as films, animations, and social media reinterpretations to further explore how folklore continues to circulate within global culture.

#### Acknowledgment

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the Institute for Research and Community Service (*Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat/LPPM*) of Universitas Sam Ratulangi for their institutional support. Special thanks are also extended to Mr. Deni V. J. Mapasa, S.E., the head of *Talikuran* Urban Village, and Mr. Veky Soriton, the Village Chief of Noongan Dua, for their valuable contributions as resource persons from Minahasa. Their insights and assistance were greatly appreciated.

#### Availability of Data and Materials

Some of the data collected for this study can be accessed online through the links provided in the references. However, some data, such as reports and interview transcripts from the interviewees, are available from the authors at reasonable request.

#### Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

#### Funding

This research and the preparation of this manuscript were financially supported by the Institute for Research and Community Service (*Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat / LPPM*), Universitas Sam Ratulangi, through the RDTU3 (Universitas Sam Ratulangi's Leading General Basic Research Scheme) funded by PNBP Universitas Sam Ratulangi.

#### Authors' Contribution

Dewi Christa Kobis conceived and designed the research framework, developed the main conceptual ideas, wrote the first draft of the manuscript, and acted as the corresponding author. Andriyani Marentek contributed to refining the research design and literature review. Aditya Lapu Kalua was responsible for data collection, data processing, and the provision of analytical tools for the study. Yunaz Ali Akbar Karaman contributed to the historical contextualization, provided comparative perspectives, and assisted in the interpretation and discussion of the findings, especially the ones in Turkish.

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