

Types of Mongolian Folktale and Database Construction

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There has been for some time an urgent need to compile a comprehensive and representative index of Mongolian folktale types that takes into account previous research in the field done both locally and internationally. The present article introduces an effort to fill in the gap to a certain extent. The classification principles of the types of the Indo-European folktale are not always compatible with those of Mongolian folktales, yet it was possible to draw on standard indices in the field, especially on relevant works of a more practical kind. These were adapted to the needs of the project *Types of Mongolian Folktale and Motif Index* which is, to date, the most comprehensive and representative of its kind. This article describes both theoretical and practical considerations taken into account while doing pertinent research to complete the project, as well as the database itself. The work on the database is at its final stage and its Chinese version is available for the user in the country. However, to open it for the outside user it is necessary to get an official confirmation from the authorities. Efforts in this direction have been taken and hopefully soon the database may be accessed by anyone interested from anywhere.

The study of the types of folktales began in the second half of the nineteenth century and resulted in the development of a number of standard theoretical and operational systems by the early twentieth century. The most famous of these was *The Types of the Folktale* by Finnish folklorist Antti Aarne (1867–1925), published in German in 1910, the American folklorist Stith Thompson (1885–1976) then revised the index twice in 1928 and 1961, and the German folklorist Hans-Jörg Uther revised it into a three-volume compendium in 2004. The Aarne-Thompson tale type index for classifying folktales, commonly known as the AT (or AaTh) or ATU system, is the greatest contribution of the Finnish Historical-Geographic School to folklore studies. The ATU index is recognized as a convenient tool for folklorists interested in searching and retrieving folktales of the same type from any part of the world. Similar to surveys like 'Fauna of the World' or 'Flora of the World', this tool is of important practical value for both micro and macro studies.

However, the AT index has not been perfect. One of its serious limitations is that, despite several revisions and expansions, folktales of some important countries and regions remain underrepresented or entirely absent, such as, for instance, Chinese folktales. In addition, it was long clear that the AT classification system needed to be further elaborated (see also Uther 2004). Particular issues such as the scope and boundaries of folktales, the classification of the types of folktales, the order of folktale types, and so forth, continue to need further research and clarification. These and other shortcomings notwithstanding, the ATU system remains a comprehensive reference; and its scientific relevance in facilitating studies of folktales of the world is undisputed, as is its practical value, both of which are well recognized by scholars around the globe (Shouhua 2002: 8–9).

Importantly, the 1930s saw a breakthrough in the studies of the types of Chinese folktales by folklorists in China. The early achievements were the *Types of Chinese Folktale* (1931) by the well-known scholar Zhong Jingwen and *Typen Chinesischer Märchen* (1937) by German scholar Wolfram Eberhard. These were followed by a number of important works, including *A Type Index of Chinese Folktales* by the Chinese-American scholar Ding Naitong (1986), *An Integrated Type Index of Chinese Folktales*, in two volumes, compiled by Jin Ronghua, from Taiwan (2000–2002), *Research on the*



Figure 1. Network program main interface

Types of Chinese Folktale by the famous scholar Liu Shouhua, and *Research on the Types of Ancient Chinese Folktale* by Qi Lianxiu (2007). These publications indicate that a big step has been made in the research of the types of Chinese folktales, and not only in terms of their local variety and specific character but also in terms of the expanded scope and the academic relevance of such studies. Obviously, there is still much to be done along this line and a more comprehensive and innovative index of Chinese folktale types should be expected.

Perspectives on these traditions have great relevance for studies of Mongolian folktales as a part of the world folklore heritage. It appears that some tale types are unique to ancient Mongolian society, while others are of a more universal character. Notably, 1979 saw a pioneering work in the field, when the Hungarian scholar László Lőrincz published his *Mongolische Märchentypen* (1979), a type index of Mongolian folktales. This work summarized 443 types found in 1,500 stories, supplementing them with their brief story line and pertinent data, such as references to the sources. As the only type index of Mongolian folktales that has been produced so far, Lőrincz's index merits additional consideration here.

Lőrincz's index comprises three parts: Part 1 includes basic types of Mongolian folktales; Part 2 deals with the types listed in the AT classification system; and Part 3 discusses the types of folktales that are not included in the AT index. Most importantly, Mongolian folktales are considered by Lőrincz as a relatively independent subject, while the work offers a summary of the key characteristics of the Mongolian folktale. It should also be added that the 443 folktale types catalogued in the index cover the majority of popular Mongolian stories. Furthermore, the index discusses not only the diverse types of stories but includes illustrations of different elements (items) in Mongolian folktales.

However, the work is not free of shortcomings. First, the index was chiefly based on the material collected by Lőrincz among Buryats and Kalmyks in Russia, and only some of it in Mongolia where an international team of researchers of Mongolian folk literature was active in the 1960s and 1970s. Second, the 1,500 stories covered in the index are still only a small portion of the material that is available today, while variants of many of Lőrincz's types have not been documented outside of his survey, and thus, the accuracy of the research is somewhat uncertain. Third, the information on primary sources does not appear to be sufficiently complete, hence, it cannot always serve its purpose as a useful tool for further research.

As the first type index of Mongolian folktales, it is illustrative of the folklorist's pioneering spirit and enthusiasm. Clearly, this first classification of the folktale types in accordance with the characteristics of Mongolian folktales has not lost its value as a great reference work even today.

Unfortunately, this important publication (originally written in Hungarian and then translated into German) has not been translated into Chinese so far, and thus has remained largely unknown to scholars in China.

Mongolians and Mongolian Folktales

The Mongolians today live mainly in China, Russia, and Mongolia, diverse groups of the people separated by vast distances. The geographical factor, thus, makes it much more difficult for them to maintain and develop their cultural unity. In this general context and in the particular field under discussion, there is an urgent need for a collective effort on the part of folklorists and researchers of Mongolian studies. This will finally enable a breakthrough in the systematic research and in-depth investigation of the types of Mongolian folktales and make it possible to arrive at a comprehensive macro study of the folktale in all its possible variety and richness. This study will require a creative integration of methods of macro and micro research to promote the further expansion of Mongolian folktale studies' scope and relevance.

The Mongolians have a history of their own, as well as a distinguished culture. An important part of their cultural heritage, Mongolian folklore serves as the foundation for Mongolian literature, playing a never-diminishing role in the imaginative, artistic, and spiritual life of the people. The last century saw remarkable achievements in the studies of Mongolian folklore both at home and abroad. Scholars from different countries have published numerous monographs devoted to Mongolian folk literature; and, in particular, the Mongolian folktale has attracted the attention of the international academic community. However, despite many achievements in the field, there is an obvious lack of a type index of Mongolian folktales, which should be compiled following the recognized international practice to cover all folktale material available. It appears that the research of Mongolian folk literature is suffering from the lack of such a fundamental work, and the development of disciplines related to Mongolian folktale studies in China is hindered as well. The urgency of such a work is still greater in the context of international research, where it would facilitate a better understanding of the Mongolian folktale and help further integrate these traditions into the world's folktale system for the purpose of further research within broader frameworks.

The analysis and study of folktale types is an approach commonly used in international academic circles, and it is of equal relevance for the researchers of folktales within China. There is an urgent need in the field for a compilation of a scientific, comprehensive, and representative type index of the stories that can provide a broad platform for folktale research. Such an index will lay a solid foundation for comparative studies of the types of folktales of several

related ethnic groups. The project Types of the Mongolian Folktale and Database Construction proposed by the present author is the first of its kind to look into folktale types of different Mongolian groups residing in different regions. When compiled, the type index will serve as the basis for the design and collection of a database to promote the analysis of Mongolian folktale types, according to the internationally recognized ATU classification method. This will be a broad platform for research in the field, especially in terms of comparative studies of the Mongolian folktale with folktales of different ethnic groups around the world. Its far-reaching significance for Mongolian folktale research is self-evident, while, as a foundational reference work, such an index will be an invaluable contribution to the current efforts to protect intangible cultural heritage.

Building the Taxonomy

To compile an index of folktale types and motifs is a taxing endeavour, owing to the immense abundance of material to be processed. Originally spread by word of mouth and often transformed in the process of transmission, the stories would vary greatly, so the task of identifying their types is not easy. In our classification, we proceed from what has already been achieved in the standard type indices, but at the same time we were not inhibited to make additions and changes when these were necessary. The complexity of Mongolian folktales, characterized by complicated storylines and diverse motifs, makes the task especially challenging. A number of techniques and principles have been used in the project to cope with this situation. These may be briefly described as follows.

Type indices specific for different regions have been compiled to serve as the basis for the *Type Index of Mongolian Folktale*, a comprehensive survey of the stories covering different regions. This has allowed presenting an objective picture of the ways that Mongolian folktales spread in different regions of the world. Also, as far as possible, an accurate description of the basic characteristics of different types of the folktale is given. In its general premises, this work was based on the ATU classification method. In practical terms, Thompson's *Types of the Folk-Tale* (1973) was of special relevance; Naitong's *Type Index of Chinese Folktales* (1986) and Ronghua's *Integrated Type Index of Chinese Folktales* (2000–2002) were used as additional references. Thus, the stories are divided into two categories: types included in the ATU system and types that are not. Granted that the classification system for European folktales is not always suitable in the case of Mongolian folktales, this has been adapted to arrive at the classification system specifically designed for the latter, often by carrying out similar practices. First of all, the types of the Mongolian folktale in the ATU classification system were borrowed and then renamed. The types that were absent from this index were then examined closely

within a new classification and coding system, referred to as the 'SM classification system'. This was constructed on the basis of the characteristics of the Mongolian folktale, which makes it easier for use.

Notably, myths and legends are included into the list of stories, understood, in a broader sense, as 'folktales'. The folktales in the index, therefore, comprise fantasy tales, life stories, folk fables, folk jokes, myths, and legends. All possible variants of the stories were collected and then examined via a meticulous comparison between variants to identify their similarities and differences. This allowed the identification of motifs and types of stories with clarifications of their basic structures, subsequent composition of their summaries, analysis of the core motif of a particular type, and highlighting of the basic pattern of a given story. Every type was named, according to their characteristics, and supplemented with the data on the sources; and finally, a map was drawn to show the distribution of the common types of Mongolian folktales in different regions of the world, with every type bearing its mark.

The core motif of each tale type is described. It should be noted in this connection that it is accepted in the project that a motif is the basic element of a story, while the plot of a story often results from organic combinations of several motifs. This interpretation is based on previous research, which argues that:

The permutation and combination of a series of comparatively fixed motifs constitute the plot of a work. A change of the motifs and a new permutation and combination of them can constitute a new work and even change its genre. A motif is the smallest unit of narration for such narrative genres of folk literary works as folktale, myth, legend, and epic. As for comparative studies, a motif is more international than a plot (Wanchuan 2008: 7).

Therefore, it was thought relevant to add a detailed *Index of Core Motifs* to the classification of the story types. In this part of the project we draw on Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (1932–1936, revised 1955–1958), with necessary additions and changes made in terms of coding, classification, description, and arrangement of the stories in question. The coding of motifs follows the logical principle 'from general to specific'. The first code is the general motif and the following codes stand for the motifs related to specific texts. To make it more visible, a decimal point is used to show the corresponding level of the classification. For instance, the following example illustrates three levels of motifs in the index:

B120 Intelligent animal

B120.1 Intelligent fox

B120.1.1 Fox trying to steal things
from others by faking death

The general practice for names of types was to adopt those used in the ATU classification. Of relevance was also the principle of identifying the characteristics of a given ethnic group to aid readers in their searches. The codes and names of the story types are thus given in accordance with Aarne-Thompson-Uther's *Types of the Folktale*, Naitong's *Type Index of Chinese Folktales* (1986), and Ronghua's *Integrated Type Index of Chinese Folktales* (2002–2002), and appear in English, Chinese, and Mongolian in brackets under every type; this is intended for the convenience of researchers to facilitate their search and comparative analysis of the material.

The Database

Drawing on the sources mentioned above, as well as taking advantage of the powerful, convenient formats, and mass storage potentialities of computer technologies, we have designed and constructed a type-analysis database, the most comprehensive to date, which is compatible with such languages as English, Chinese and Mongolian. This resulted from the digital processing of the Mongolian folktale data, including its classification, input, sorting, markup, analysis, and retrieval, which finally made it possible to share these resources. Notably, the concepts and methods for the design of the database were as follows:

To differentiate between dynamic and static information, Mongolian folktales are divided into four interlinked objects – i.e. tables – of the database. These appear under titles, such as *story information*, *story type*, *story motif*, and *story plot*; because they are linked with ID numbers, the parameters can be transmitted between different tables. The static information mentioned above refers to the information contained in a given story, which includes its attributes, such as its name, language, distribution area, etc. The dynamic information refers to the results acquired through analysis rather than that included in the story, and thus linked to the subjective judgments of an examiner, preoccupied with the analysis of a motif, type, or other parameters.

To make these aspects of the database clearer it is necessary to discuss some details. For instance, the table of story information is constituted of 16 fields, including the ID of the story, its name, etc. The table of story type comprises 8 fields, such as the ID of the story, its sequence number, and motif. And the table of a story plot is made up of 4 fields, including the ID of the story, the story plot, the plot structure, etc. Major operations of the relational data model include those of 'inquiry', 'insert', 'delete', and 'update data'. These operations should meet the condition of the integrity constraint of the relations. The relation integrity is constituted of entity integrity, referential integrity, and user-defined integrity. The links between these tables should be seen as the greatest advantage of the database. While the information is arranged in different tables under different

themes, one can refer to the data between different tables, which can be realized with the public fields. Thus, the Mongolian Folktale Database is designed in such a way that one-to-many relationship is realized between the table of story information and the table of a story motif, and the table of story information and the table of a story type respectively; a one-to-one relationship is realized between the table of story information and the table of a story plot; and a many-to-many relationship is realized between the table of a story type and the table of a story motif. For detailed information, please refer to the following tables:

Table 1. Attribute Value of Table of Story Information

ID	0001
Interviewer	###
Interviewee	###
Distribution area 1	Inner Mongolia
Distribution area 2	Chifeng
Distribution area 3	Baarin Right Banner
Page	123
Publication year-month	2005-8
Story type	Compound
Type code	0001+0003
Story text	###

Table 2. Attribute Value of Table of Story Type

Sequence number		
1	ID	0001
	Name of the story	The camel and the deer
	Story type	Animal story
	Type 2	Wild animals
	Type 3	Domestic animals
	Type 4	Camel, deer
	Additional info	###
2	ID	0001
	Name of the story	The camel and the deer
	Story type	Animal story
	Type 2	Strange animals
	Type 3	###
	Type 4	###
	Additional info	

The application programme of the Mongolian Folktale Database is programmed with C# language on the new generation of Dot Net platform of Microsoft. The text and related information of the Mongolian folktale collected from all over the world is stored in the database of Microsoft Access 2010. Technical problems involved in the process include the display of traditional Mongolian in the vertical setting of type on the developing interface and the realization of the retrieval function in Mongolian. After solving these two problems, we basically realized the function for

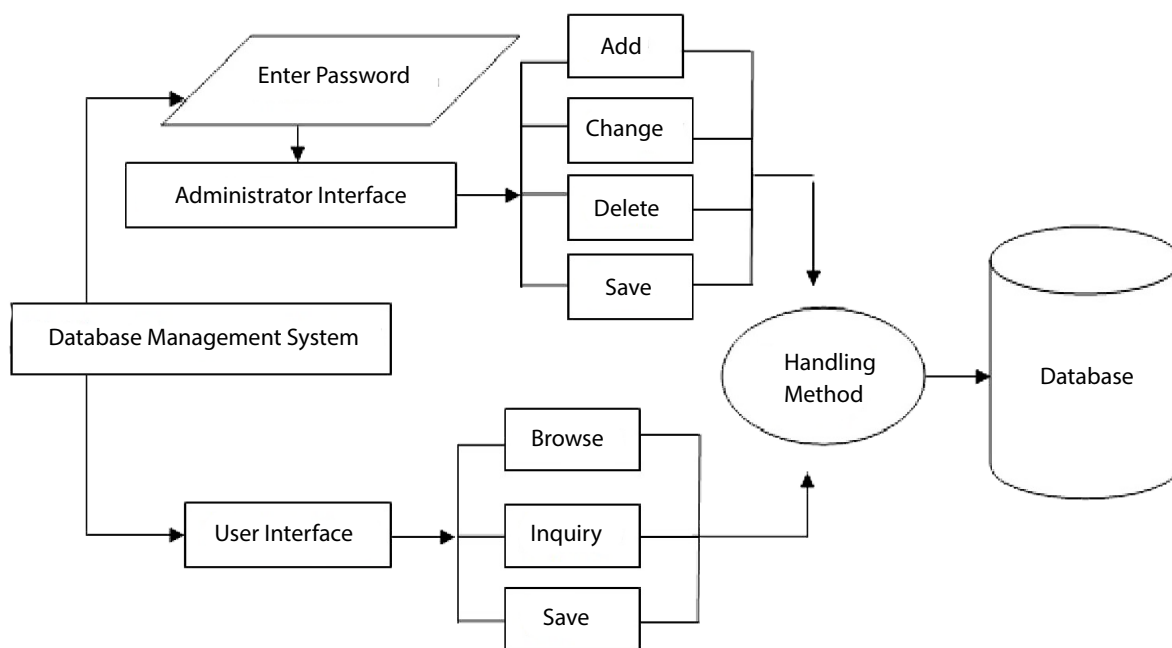


Figure 2. Flow chart of the Mongolian Folktale Database Application

the inquiry of Mongolian folktales on the geographic map. The flow chart of the Mongolian Folktale Database Application is shown above.

The database application comprises two levels, namely the administrator and the user. The first level is the administrator interface (Fig. 3 on page 16). With the highest level of administrative authority, the interface can realize the detailed analysis, editing, and other operations related to the Mongolian folktale. All the media information concerning the Mongolian folktale is managed by the administrator of the database, who is in charge of the collection, its classification based on the international AT and SM systems, providing all the pertinent markings of such information parameters like type, motif, and so forth. At the same time, the administrator can perform such database functions as 'add', 'delete', 'change', 'edit', 'revise', 'analyze', and so on, concerning the contents of the database. The five functional modules on the administrator interface include text editing, type analysis and labeling, motif analysis and labeling, audio and video editing, and basic information editing.

The user interface (Fig. 4 on page 16) is intended for the communication and exchange between the user and the machine, with its further differentiation into perceptual and emotional levels. The perceptual level refers to visual, auditory, and tactile interface between the user and the machine, and the emotional level refers to the harmonious relationship between the user and the machine realized through communication. In short, the design of the user interface is user-centered under the guidance of the design concept of a system of simplicity, convenience, and precision in classification. The user interface of the application of the Mongolian Folktale Database is developed for the

clients of the application. Researchers can easily check out information about the stories on the interface. When a user double-clicks the name of a story in the story catalogue text box on the user interface, the corresponding story text, results of the analysis of the story type and the story motif, as well as other related information, will be displayed in the text boxes of story contents, its type and motif, and the information on the story structure respectively.

Users can also search for other information pertinent to stories, under different conditions and according to their needs. One can search for the distribution region of the story, its type and motif, the name of sources, the name of stories, etc., as well as combinations of such data. The database contains not only textual information but also video, audio, and other media files of folktales. Users can read text while simultaneously enjoying presentations contained in vivid and interesting multimedia files. In addition, they can check the geographical distribution of Mongolian folklore, the analysis of the story types, and the notes on motifs on the map, which provides a panoramic view of a given story and its storyline in a virtual way.

The on-line version of the Mongolian Folktale Database Application is completed with a JavaScript, HTML5.0, CSS3.0, and DIV. IE (version 10 or above) browser that is adopted for the correct display and layout of the traditional Mongolian script. Currently, the Microsoft IE in the mainstream browsers can fully support the display and processing of Mongolian material and the CSS 3.0 rule is also compatible to Mongolian. With the writing-mode: tb-lr, the layout of vertical setting from top to down and from left to right is possible. See the main interface of the on-line version on page 16.

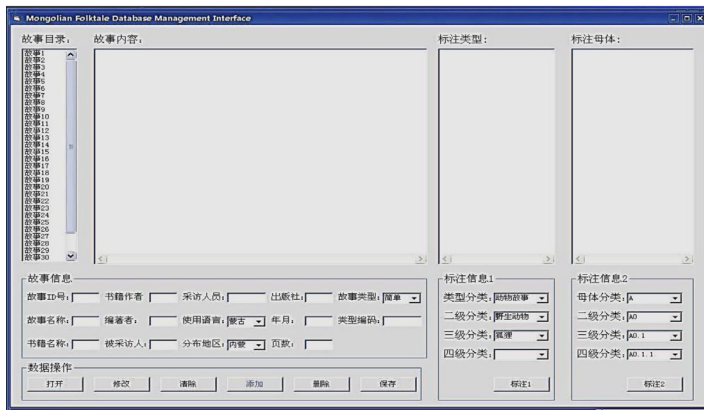


Figure 3. Administrator interface

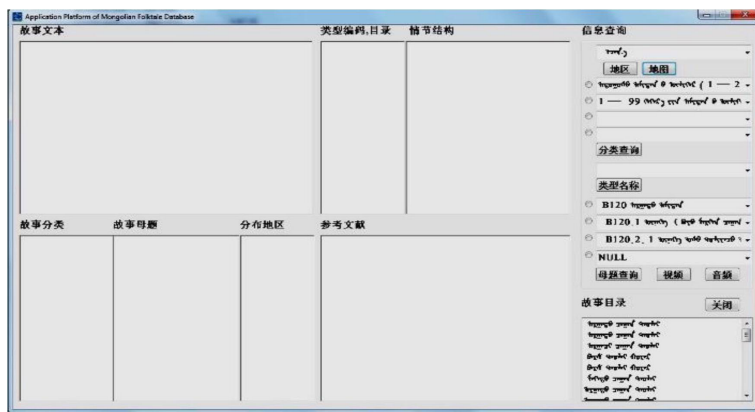


Figure 4. User interface

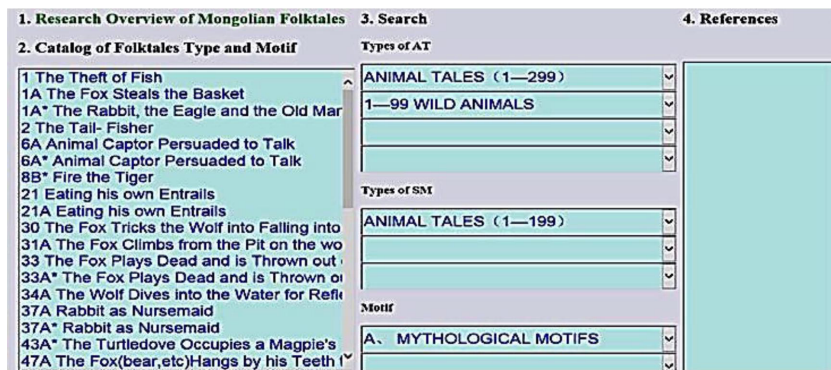


Figure 5. Information query interface

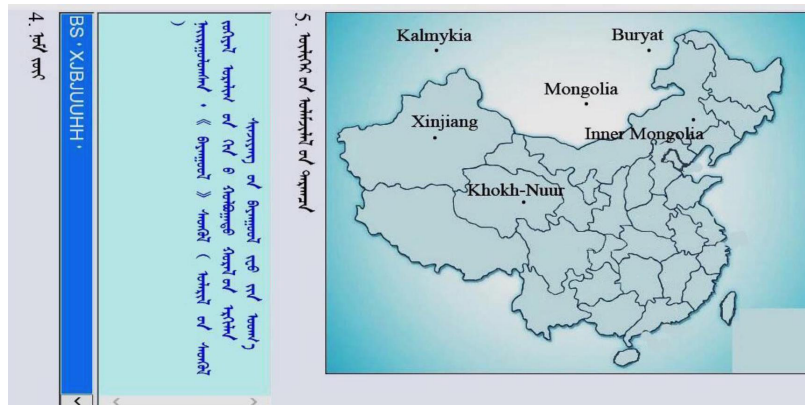


Figure 6. Distribution area query interface

Conclusion

Thus, while working on the compilation of the Mongolian folktale type index, we have been able to make a relatively comprehensive collection of the relevant textual information based on Mongolian folktales. This covers Mongolian folktales of Xinjiang, Qinghai, and Inner Mongolian in China, of Mongolia, and of Buryatia and Kalmykia in Russia. One can argue that the present *Types of Mongolian Folktale and Motif Index* is, to date, the most comprehensive and representative of its kind. In terms of statistics, this means that 8,795 stories are classified into 852 types; 340 types of the total number are unique of Mongolian folklore tradition, while the other 512 types belong to the class of internationally recognized types of stories. A small portion of the indigenous types show minor differences from similar stories in the west or are known to neighboring ethnic groups as well.

According to preliminary statistics, over two thirds of Mongolian folktales display multinational, international or universal characteristics. Mongolian variants of the stories that are similar to the Indo-European ones indicate that they might have spread gradually, in a wave-like pattern, which was first suggested by the scholars of the Finnish School. Also, it seems that the classification of the types of Mongolian folktales may be further refined, granted their regional specifics, because the closer the regions are, the greater are the similarities between the local variants. This, again, fully agrees with the basic principle of Finnish Historical-Geographic Method.

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