

THE HEROIC FEMALE CHARACTER IN FAIRY TALES AND EPICS OF SOME ETHNIC MINORITIES IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

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Abstract

The author uses analysis, synthesis, and comparison methods to give readers a comprehensive view of the heroic female character in fairy tales and epics of some ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands. It is an exciting and unique topic since the female hero has not been paid much attention and is rarely mentioned in research papers. Therefore, in this article, the writer has made significant contributions and new findings of the brave female heroes in fairy tales and epics of the Central Highlands. Their talents, wisdom, dignity, and extraordinary health are united. They won battles against sinister villains to protect the peace, prestige, and honor of their villages and themselves when those are violated, which is similar to male heroes. In particular, the heroic female character represents the matriarchy's authority and the village's wish for wealth and happiness. Through the image of the heroine, readers will understand more about the regional culture, including customs, habits, lessons about humanity, and beautiful features in the beliefs of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands.

Keywords: Central Highlands; Character; Epic; Fairy tale; Heroic female.

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1. INTRODUCTION

According to the *Literature Dictionary (new edition)* (Lê et al., 2004), the characters in literary works are very diverse. Literary characters fall into two categories: the protagonist and the antagonist. The division depends on their status, role, or content associated with the plot of different works. This classification is also affected by the author's experience in composing, criticizing, researching, and studying different perspectives to approach literary characters.

Cao (1963)'s conception of the heroic character in fairy tales is that a hero represents the good, indomitable spirit, chivalry, health, talent, morality, and courage in the struggles caused by nature or society. A hero always protects righteousness, love, and woman.

According to the *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, the main characters of an epic are warriors representing physical and mental strength. They have the will, intelligence, and courage of their communities. They are described meticulously from the way they dress, equip, walk, and fight with the enemy to illustrious feats, and sometimes the features of their daily lives are depicted extraordinarily (Lê et al., 2004, p. 285).

Meletinsky (1974, p. 123)'s view of the epic character is quite clear:

An epic is a complete picture of people's lives in the form of storytelling about heroes in the past. In a harmonious unity, the ideal epic world and the heroic character are the key elements of the heroic epic content During that time, local interactions, clan relations, and the patriarch weakened, giving individuals fundamental freedom to express themselves positively. It is indeed necessary for the image of a warrior to emerge.

From the analysis and explanations of researchers about the heroic character in fairy tales and epics, we understand that a heroic character has more strength, talent, and quality than other people. They always perform noble and courageous actions and are prepared to face challenges and difficulties. They live with lofty ideals and great aspirations, representing their communities. They consistently achieve glorious feats that benefit people, villages, and tribes. They embody people of an era in terms of appearance and wisdom, fighting to protect the peace of their communities, tribes, and nation. The heroic character with all the above features often appears in myths, fairy tales, and epics.

2. THE HEROIC FEMALE CHARACTER

The mission of protecting the community is not just for male heroes. It is also the pursuit of heroines of the Central Highlands. We have developed our admiration for the main female character by studying the fairy tales and epics of some ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands. From being amazed to moved, we admire the bravery of heroines in battles against monsters and villains, protecting villages, prestige, and the honor of themselves and their families. They crystallize the beauty of the whole community. From

the appearance of the heroic female character, we know that this is a vivid demonstration that is rich in symbolic meaning. It attests to one thing: that the woman's essential and influential role in her family and community has gradually been revealed since the very beginning of human society. The role and strength of the matriarchy are highlighted in the heroic female character's features in the fairy tales and epics of the Central Highlands.

Fairy tales and epics seem to be so distant but very close, false but so real, like an underground circuit between the majestic mountains and forests of the Central Highlands. They flow silently through community activities, sneaking into the nooks and crannies of thoughts, dreams, and aspirations of people in the Central Highlands, which paints a wonderful picture of the heroine's beauty and talent back in those days. These female heroes are worthy of the villagers' trust and belief. We study the fairy tales and epics of the Central Highlands in the Encyclopedia of Antiquity to relive the heroic past, longing to reveal more angles of the female warriors who represent the matriarchy, the dream of wealth and happiness of the *paley* (village), etc. Therefore, when learning about female heroes in fairy tales and epics of the Central Highlands, we only consider heroines in the role of the female protagonist and in terms of a female warrior's outstanding features, such as having extraordinary strength and tremendous courage in a solid but graceful figure. They are beautiful and feminine like goddesses. These constitute their achievements in all aspects of life and in battles against villains to protect the community when "history requires combat to break the status quo and constant wars to unify the territory and gather the whole society under a strong and powerful leader" (Đinh et al., 1997, p. 155). Moreover, matriarchy has a substantial impact on society and social institutions. To clarify our understanding of heroic female characters, we will explore their backgrounds, motives and purposes in fighting, the battle evolution, and its ending.

2.1. The heroine's background

The female heroes who are the main characters in fairy tales and epics of the Central Highlands have diverse backgrounds. Some female warriors were born unusually. *Đặng Giai* (*Nữ thần Đặng Giai – Xo Dang fairy tale*) is god My Kê's wife. Touched by the prayer of the king and queen, who have been married for a long time but unable to have children, My Kê sent his wife to be reincarnated as their daughter. That night, the queen dreamed that she swallowed a shining stone that had fallen from the sky. Nine months later, the queen gave birth to a baby girl named *Đặng Giai*. *Đặng Giai*'s beauty is beyond compare.

Ma Kọ (*Thần nước Jakia và nàng Ma Kọ – Churu fairy tale*) was born with a loud bang and her whole body glowed. At birth, she could crawl to her mother to ask for milk, walk, and speak fluently. When her mother passed away, *Ma Kọ* was still a child who craved breast milk but had an extraordinary ability to call the Earth god to open his mouth and swallow her mother's body. *Ma Kọ* grew up incredibly fast to become the most beautiful girl in the village, capable of conversing with all animals, objects, and plants in nature.

The heroine *Ka Yiêng* (*Ka Yiêng đánh giặc – Ma fairy tale*) was born in a strange way. Her mother went up to the field, ate a ripe melon, and got pregnant. Seven days later,

she gave birth to Ka Yiêng. As a newborn, Ka Yiêng could speak all languages, walk fast, and was well trained with a bow. Vala, Ja-Rìq's wife (*Chàng Amã Ja-Rìq*), is the daughter of the ivory god. And the heroine Tiluiq (*Chàng Jamahluq và chàng Jarumĩq* – Raglai fairy tale) originated from a divine lineage. She is the youngest daughter of ChiSrah – the thunder god.

In the K'ho fairy tale, *Sự tích núi Lang Biang, núi Voi, và suối Đa Nhim*, and the Ma and H'mon fairy tales, *Sự tích bãy tiên* and *Hai chị em Dyông*, heroines such as Ka Lang, Mạ, and Bya Phu all have gentle, hardworking parents who always love their children. In their families, brothers and sisters live in harmony and love each other. Bya Lingkoong (*h'mon Bya Lingkoong*) and Awoi Nãi Tilor (*akhàt jucar Awoi Nãi Tilor*) are brave warriors who bore difficulties: losing parents at a young age, living with aunts, uncles, etc. However, they grew up to be the most beautiful and talented women. Despite their different backgrounds, the heroines are willing to confront and fight against wicked bandits coming to harass, pillage, kidnap people, etc., protecting their loved ones, and maintaining peace for the village.

2.2. The heroine's motive and purpose in fighting

The motive for the female warriors fighting the wicked is the vicious killing by evil-doers who persecuted the heroine's loved ones and plundered, burned, and destroyed the peace in their homeland. The heroine Tiluiq killed the witch Mỏq Rỏc, who kidnapped and ate villagers. To bring peace to the *paley*, the brave Ka Yiêng defeated the bandits who tortured the elderly and children, burnt down villages, and killed buffaloes, chickens, pigs, etc. Ma Kỏ killed evil snakes to save her parents and brother. They sucked out his soul and locked him in a dungeon. To protect the village, Đảng Giai killed the hateful bird that ate animals and people. The heroine Ka Lang went up to the sky alone to ask for rain so that people in the village could have water to survive, grow crops, and raise livestock. Lady Mạ, in the fairy tale *Sự tích bãy tiên*, defeated bandits who came to her village to rob and torture people, avenging her parents whom the bandits had blinded and crippled. The female hero Bya Phu killed Blang Koong, Bloong Mak, Đảkble, Tewek, and their gangs for destroying her village. They captured people to sell, mistreated and bullied girls and children. Bya Lingkoong killed Bok Ter, his sons, and his servants in revenge for the murder and persecution of her parents and other villagers. Awoi Nãi Tilor defeated Matien and Sa-ien, the sea god's daughters, to protect her dignity. She fought bravely, defeating 17 kings, Cur and Jawa, and the evil gods, such as the fire god Tumuh, the frog god couple, the storm god, the wind god. The brave Awoi Nãi Tilor destroyed and subdued all villains to protect her prestige and honor, which was also the honor and reputation of the whole community that Tilor represented.

Thus, the motive and purpose of the heroines in fighting are practical and associated with the desire for peace in daily life. They are not illusory, far-fetched, or unrealistic. The heroines are courageous, intelligent, wise, straightforward, sincere, self-respecting, generous, tolerant, selfless, and loving. They do good and only act with good intentions. Against villains, they fought fiercely, refusing to surrender, retreat, or yield to the enemy.

2.3. The evolution of the heroines' battles

The female heroes depict the conflict between good and evil in battles with the enemy. No female warrior won easily. They have to face many obstacles, challenges, difficulties, etc., under many different circumstances hidden within all the evil, sinister, mischievous, ferocious beasts, and villains. Tiluiq killed the demon Mỏq Rỏc with her wise and superior talent. Seeing a pot of water boiling on the stove, Tiluiq quickly grabbed the trap lever, causing the monster to fall into the pot. Tiluiq darted to Jarumũq and rubbed the magic ring he was wearing. Lightning bolts shot out from the ring and went through Mỏq Rỏc's heart. Its body melted into water, seeping into the ground. Bandits surrounded Lady Mỏ. They took firewood burning in the kitchen to burn houses and rob the villagers. The heroine Mỏ drew her sword and cut off the heads of three leaders and the other bandits. The brave Ka Yỉng grew up witnessing the bandits burn her village. They beat and brutally tortured the elderly and children. Standing on a high cliff looking at those brigands, Ka Yỉng held a grudge in her heart. She bravely raised her bow and aimed directly at the robbers. Hundreds of her poisoned arrows pierced through her enemies' chests. The surviving bandits were afraid of death and did not dare confront Ka Yỉng. Ka Yỉng rushed to arrest and lead them to the villagers for prosecution. The brave and intelligent Ma Kỏ was given the magic Yang Yum robe by the heavenly mother. She killed poisonous snakes, saved her parents and brother, and brought them back to life. The brave warrior Đỏng Giai killed a fierce monster that captured and ate people and animals. It had a long hard beak with sharp, hard horns like a rhinoceros. The sound of its beak resounded like thunder, shaking the mountains and forests like a raging storm. Not a single man could kill the evil bird. The monster swooped down to wreak havoc and eat innocent people. Đỏng Giai heroically led the army with shining swords to fight the beast. The evil bird opened its big beak when they arrived and flapped its wings. Without hesitation, Đỏng Giai calmly and bravely raised her bow and sent the magic arrow to hit the bird's chest. The evil bird was struck by the arrow and died. The villagers cheered loudly, congratulating the beautiful and talented heroine for defeating the evil monster.

Ka Lang felt pity for villagers suffering from a constant drought with no water to drink and no rice to eat. Knowing that the way to heaven was far, she insisted on crossing high mountains and deep rivers to ask for rain. Being tired, hungry, and exhausted, she collapsed beside her husband's body halfway up Gan Reo mountain and cried bitterly for her husband. Her cry echoed in the sky. The heavenly gods sympathized with her and commanded the rain god to rain down. It rained heavily for three months, watering the mountains, fields, and villages.

The heroine Bya Phu with extraordinary intelligence and appearance described as the body is big and firm like a big tree in the jungle, and the skin is as hard as a mountain stone properly punished the villains and their gangs who caused many disasters to her village (Hỏ, 2012). A fierce battle between Bya Phu and the wicked took place. The wicked were as numerous as ants. They surrounded Bya Phu, pressing on her layer by layer. Without being scared or confused, Bya Phu hurled spears, causing them to retreat and bump into each other, which twisted their legs and broke their arms. Bya Phu cornered them in a cave and blocked its entrance with stones. She collected dry wood, cut fresh

trees, and covered the entrance to light a fire. Fire and smoke poured into the cave, burning the wicked to black ash. However, Đâkble did not submit to Bya Phu. Therefore, she angrily kicked him with a tremendous force like stumping up rocks and uprooting trees. His body flew over several rows of fences, crashing into the village yard. Bya killed Bok Ter, his sons, and accomplices to avenge her parents and the villagers. Villagers were hunted down by wicked brigands every year because they do not pay a full tribute of food and treasure. The treasures are objects passed on from the ancestors of the Raglai clans, such as gongs, *mã la* (a unique brass percussion instrument of the Raglai people in the western mountainous regions of the southernmost central provinces), and *ghè* (also called *ché* – a sacred artifact, the property of the gods). Fierce combat between Bya Linhkoong and Bok Ter took place. Surrounded by Bok Ter's troops and his four sons, Bya Linhkoong managed to jump up and punch Tmun in the face. Before he could recover, he was slapped on the right and the left ear by Bya Linhkoong, causing his eyes to pop out, and his instant death. Two other men who rushed to hold Bya Linhkoong down to the ground were kicked and fell to the village yard. With strength and courage, Bya Linhkoong destroyed the wicked. The villagers were very proud of the beautiful, talented, and brave girl who alone beat all the bad guys (Hà, 2012, pp. 324-352).

She wears colorful beads around her neck with copper bracelets. She carries silver strings on her back and a Knôk scarf. Her head is wrapped in a shawl with a peacock feather. As she walks down to the yard, her skirt flutters slightly. The skin of her thighs sparkles brightly like a full moon, She is slim but strong like a bear. Her eyes are sparkling and very loving. She is a girl, yet willing to hold swords and spears (Hà, 2012, pp. 324).

The heroine Awoi Nãi Tilor is the leader of a *paley* in the earthly realm. She symbolizes peace and the honor of her family and is influential in the community. She has many incomparable gifts from heaven, and her beauty is breathtaking.

Oh my! So beautiful Bright like a bowl, slim like a cup. Her lips are purple as the color of a thin bowl. Her lips are like the color of a cup She looks as thin as a flower but is tough like steel (Máu, 2009, p. 1666).

The sea god heard of her fame and made a greedy plan. From the 15th to the 17th of each month, Putau Tuwaq forced people in Tilor's village to pay a tribute of agarwood as big as a thigh and elephant tusks as high as a person's head. If he is turned down, he will raise the sea level to harm the villagers. Tilor's subordinates, Anũa, Pađũa Dam Duh, Tumũh, Chi Ganruh, Dam Chi Gaval, etc., quickly set out to find agarwood and tusks. They went out for several months but returned empty-handed. The heroine Tilor decided to find the gifts herself, and a miracle happened. There was enough tribute to pay to the sea god. The agarwood was as big as a thigh, and elephant tusks were as high as a person's head. Therefore, she saved her villagers from the flood.

Tilor's second feat was a victory against Awoi Matien and Awoi Sa-ien – two daughters of the sea god. Awoi Matien and Awoi Sa-ien slandered, denigrated, ridiculed, despised, and insulted Tilor's talent and beauty. They claimed that Tilor earned precious

agarwood and big elephant tusks not with her talent, intelligence, and strength but by relying on others. Angry at being insulted, despised, and humiliated in front of the king, the queen, and the armies, Tilor drew her sword to challenge Matien and Sa-ien to protect her honor. If they can break Tilor's sword, the girls' unpleasant words about Tilor will become true. Matien and Sa-ien swung their swords and slashed at Tilor's blade. There was a loud bang, but no blade chipping was visible on Tilor's sword. As for Tilor, she did not need to swing her sword but "slightly flicked her finger to break Matien and Sa-ien's swords like splitting a peanut, like a bamboo in the fire" (Máu, 2009, p. 1787). Being defeated, the two princesses had to go to Tilor's village and work as her servants. The female warrior Tilor won another glorious victory in the battle with Jahuruoi and his army. Folk artists portray that earth-shattering war in the epic, *Akhàt Jucar*, with joy and pride. The fight started when Jahuruoi, the son of the goddess planting the banana garden, Suon Pitoi, and the man planting the betel garden, Suon Pinang, insulted Tilor on the day of her wedding with Jihia. Jahuruoi brazenly said to everyone at the wedding that Tilor is his wife, so he has the right to do that. "Now I lie on her lap, and now I touch her body, ... that's my wife Her lap I lie on, her arms I hold" (Máu, 2009, pp. 2444-2445). Awoi Nãi Tilor was very embarrassed and resentful because the insults smeared her name and dignity. She angrily chased and kicked Jahuruoi back to the edge of the fence, into the bushes. As for her brother Ujàc, he slashed Jahuruoi's horse's tail, causing him to run away in terror. Therefore, Jahuruoi angrily crossed the passes and streams to the land of 17 evil kings and gods, begging them to draw troops to fight Tilor and her brother. The army called by Jahuruoi amounted to hundreds and thousands. With extraordinary strength, Tilor raised her sword, pointing at the enemy.

Her magic sword instantly flew from this shore to that far shore, forming a big range of fire At once, I threw my sword and killed Cur, Jawa, Muba, and Cuson, the enemy from Siam (the official name of Thailand from the establishment of the Chakri dynasty in 1782 until June 23, 1939), subordinates of the other kings With just one shot, I threw the sword out and killed numerous enemies (Máu, 2009, p. 2720).

The image of Tilor on the battlefield is as majestic as an immortal goddess. Tilor pulled out the magic sword to end Jahuruoi's life – a cunning and deceitful man causing all kinds of disasters now has to pay the price with his own life.

Tilor's majesty, resilience, and courage on the battlefield make us think of Quạ (Tạo Quạ) in the epic, *Chuong Han*. When Chuong Han killed her husband, Quạ gathered other generals to fight for her. She rode the elephant, Sinh Tong, with three million soldiers, bravely fighting against Chuong Han's "million horses and elephants" army to avenge her husband. She aimed at Chuong Han, who was in the middle of the army, and rode the elephant straight toward him. She swung her sword and slashed at Chuong Han's troops, who were besieging and blocking her along the outer perimeter. The female warrior fought with Khun Dia, but was hit by his sword and died. Chuong Han admired the beautiful female warrior and her bravery, so he ordered his troops to solemnly mourn her and to engrave a stele with two words *Nàng Hùng* (heroine) to honor her. People over

many generations will remember a heroine who had fought fearlessly to protect the village, and her and her husband's honor and virtue.

Thus, brave heroic female warriors do not only appear in fairy tales and epics of the Central Highlands! Perhaps the beautiful image of a heroine will appear in any of the 54 ethnic groups in this S-shaped country whenever evil-doers destroy any piece of land, mountain, or river of any ethnic group. When villagers are beaten, tortured, murdered, or their honor is insulted, any girl, under those circumstances, will not forget her great sacred responsibility and duty. They will be ready to take up arms, bravely sacrifice themselves to defeat the wicked, and protect the village's reputation and their honor, bringing joy, happiness, and peace to the community. They deserve to be praised and honored in all genres of Vietnamese literature.

2.4. The ending of the heroine's battles

The female warriors who went to battle never doubted their ability to win. Against any violent and cruel villain or monster, they did not give in, back down, or surrender. They have beauty in appearance and morality. They embody extraordinary strength, talent, will, courage, intelligence, ingenuity, etc. Those features of the female warrior made her brothers, sisters, friends proud, and even wild plants and animals are tamed. They all respect and support the heroine. Therefore, when the female warriors go battle, they indeed gain victory. Is this an affirmation of the matriarchy power in the period when the nation was transforming from a "primitive society to a society with status" (Mẫu, 2009, pp. 30-31). After each battle with evil, villagers can live in peace, happiness, and prosperity. The separated family members can now reunite. The wicked are punished. The community elects the female warrior to be the village leader and a king. She will marry a talented and virtuous man. They live happily together with their loved ones. There is a female warrior who returns to earth and lives happily with her relatives after punishing all the wicked and bringing peace to her village (*Nữ thần Đấng Giai – Xo Đàng* epic).

2.5. Highlights of the heroic female character

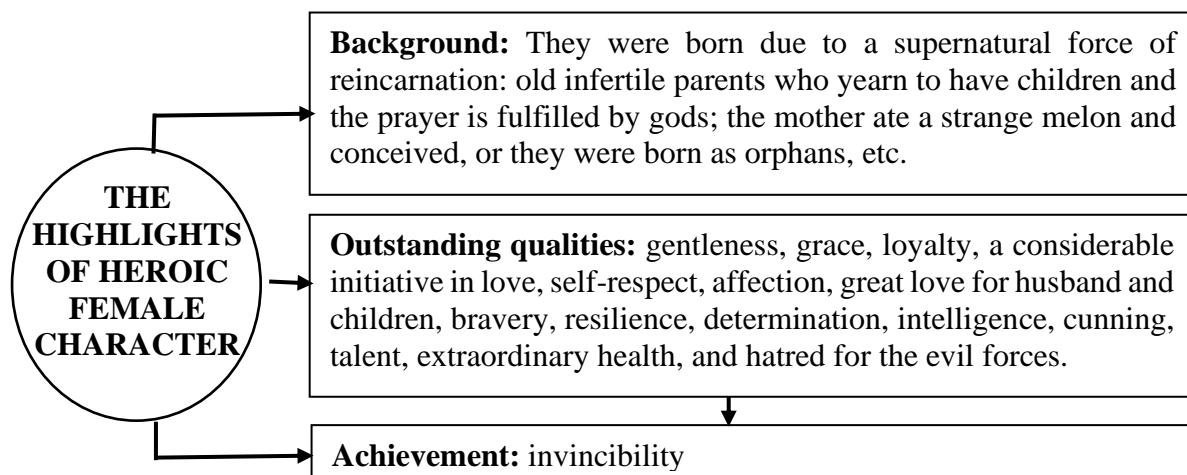


Figure 1. Synopsis: The highlights of the heroic female character

2.6. The heroic female character in relation to the heroic male character

In fairy tales and epics of the Central Highlands, the heart of each literary work is the image of a warrior. It is even more exciting and unique when the central characters in each folklore genre can be both male and female heroes. These two images reflect and complement each other to create an attractive and artistic picture for readers since they have similarities and striking differences.

2.6.1. Similarities

Heroes and heroines in the fairy tales and epics of the Central Highlands all have thrilling backgrounds. Some are of supernatural descent who are reincarnated into infertile families. Some were born with features similar to animals, such as squirrels and pigs, or their mother ate a particular animal. Moreover, their mother might relate to rain, sunshine, eating fruit, drinking water in rock crevices, tree hollows, etc. Miraculously born, both male and female warriors grow up very strangely. As soon as he came out of his mother's womb, one hero, whose feet were as big as an elephant's, could jump over seven mountains. Another hero, born with a shield, a sword, a spear, and a water gourd, jumped to the ground, named himself, and asked to build a big house for his mother. A female warrior – a newborn with a glowing body, could walk, speak clearly, and skillfully use a bow and arrows. Although the mothers of the warriors conceived under different circumstances, heroes and heroines were all born in strange ways. Some brave warriors were born after just seven days in the womb, others three or six months, or even up to three years. Every warrior born is the most handsome and beautiful person in the village. They grew up fast and healthy to be courageous with extraordinary abilities. They are willing to overcome obstacles to fight the wicked. There seems to be no "aggression" in these warriors. Before any war, the warriors will try to understand the cause of conflicts. They even advise the enemy not to fight for such minor misunderstandings. They are the image of an ideal person, carrying the mission of protecting the community. They are beautiful from the outside to the inside, from appearance to the soul. They live with respect, honor, forgiveness, generosity, nobility, kindness, loyalty, and love. They are good-natured, pure-hearted, humble, selfless, always supporting the community, their loved ones, and those around them. In the battles against the wicked, they always gain victory. After performing a feat, some brave warriors choose to go to another place as if nothing happened. They fly back to heaven or transform into rocks and refuse to become kings when revered. These actions and attitudes of the brave further enhance their brilliant, yet straightforward beauty, deeply depicting the good and humble nature of the brave men and women of the Central Highlands. With their romantic imaginations, people have found ways to idealize the heroic character in fairy tales and epics. When capturing the enemy, the warrior justifiably punishes them. If the enemy repents, they will not be sentenced to death. Even if the enemy and their accomplices are killed, they are blessed with resurrection, admonished to be good and righteous, and set free by the warriors. The distinction between friend and foe is always made clearly and consistently by the heroes and heroines. Thus, the warriors are perfect people.

2.6.2. Differences

Besides similarities, male and female warriors have different characteristics. The most apparent difference between these characters is the scale of their battles with the wicked. The fighting of male warriors with the wicked takes place fiercely and dramatically on a large scale, with battle after battle. The fight is not limited to inside villages and tribes but is much more significant. There is a central base on the battlefield to plant the command flag and to arrange troops and hundreds to thousands of war elephants and horses. Weapons to fight against the enemy of the male warriors are not only swords and spears but also flintlocks, guns, cannons, etc. The army going to the battle is armed with steel helmets, sailing across the sea in big ships that can accommodate many soldiers to confront the evil, brutal, and insidious invading forces, such as Cur, Jawa, and unpredictable monsters. The enemy are so numerous that their bodies pile up when they are killed, filling rivers and seas or blocking the estuary water (*akhàt Jucar Udai-Ujàc*). The warriors must destroy different evil-doers who are malicious, mischievous, and unpredictable. The supporting force participating in the wars of male warriors with the wicked is divided into the good gods and the evil gods. Good gods support and help warriors overcome all difficulties, obstacles, and dangers to fight the enemy. They achieve heroic feats to bring peace to the *paleys*. The evil gods and the forces representing destruction, cruelty, evil arrogance, etc., must all make atonement according to what they have attempted to sow in the fate of another community. The fighting of male warriors with their opponents can occur anywhere. The battles extend from the ground to the forests and mountains. They can be on the sea, in the air, in the underworld, underwater, in countries like Cham, China, Siam, Laos, and even in heaven. The fighting lasts for one month, two months, three to four years, or even a lifetime. In some battles, the male hero's heart is filled with the desire to expand his territory. If possible, "make their mountain my mountain, make their nation my nation, make their village my village" (*akhàt Jucar Sa Ea*). Where the male warriors live is near a wharf market. The towns rose next to magnificent castles surrounded by four to five bronze and iron fences. On the other hand, the female warrior's battles most often involve one town and rarely more than one. Battles between heroines and their enemies are described briefly and concisely; they occur in narrow surroundings (tribal area, village, or region). The fighting does not last long (one to seven days, eight days, or a month). The heroine's true enemies are invaders, bandits, evil birds, etc. The purpose of the female warrior in defeating the villains is to bring peace to the *paleys*, tribes, etc. After winning bloody wars, the female warriors go to big rivers and seas to cleanse. They let the waves wash away the obsessions of guilt, jealousy, and sorrows to begin a bright and peaceful new life. The male warrior is allowed to marry the daughter of the king, chief, or even the enemy's daughter to neutralize the hostility. However, folk artists do not mention the female warriors after their battles against the evil forces.

2.6.3. The female warrior's role in the male warrior's feat

Studying the fairy tales and epics of some ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands, we find that the talented, brave, and courageous female character also plays an essential role in the outstanding feats of the male warrior. Interestingly, in some fierce

fights between the male hero and the villain, the heroine is the only one and the last to defeat the most powerful villain. With that crucial role, the heroine contributed to honoring the male hero's notable feat because they represent the matriarchy and the core of the entire historical and social events surrounding it (Trần, 2020). At this time, the Central Highlands society was basically a society according to matriarchal neighboring commune in which women play a crucial role. Economically, women manage assets in the family and children are born with their mother's surname. The husband stays in his wife's house, helps his wife's family in working, developing social relations, and managing property (Đinh et al., 1997, p. 757). "When the war starts, the female warrior immediately takes action" (Phan, 2002, p. 49). Whether directly or indirectly participating in the battles of male warriors with evil-doers, the female warriors always play an essential role, showing up at critical times. They are the "knot" that turns the situation around, bringing the initiative and tremendous help to the male warriors in battles against the evil forces ravaging and destroying the peace of the tribe where they live. Therefore, the feat of the brave man is made possible by the miraculous contribution of beautiful, young, intelligent, talented, and courageous female characters. With great talent, powerful magic, and the ability to demoralize the enemy's power, they help the male warriors create glorious victories. "The female character is a brave and talented comrade who helps the male hero secure a glorious victory over opponents" (Phan, 2006, p. 108). Lady Phêla (Giarai fairy tale – *Cha con Đăm Bông Pha*) fought the demon to save Xin Xay's life six times. The seventh time fighting the devil, she was killed. Later on, Xin Xay's wife saved his life. She revealed the secret of killing the evil spirit to save the village to him. Miss H'bia Mơ Sê (Churu fairy tale – *Cha con Tăm Đông*) flew up to the sky to help her nephew kill the wicked demon, ending the battle that Tăm Đông valiantly fought for seven months. Rang Hu, Jên Yuron, Xem Yang, Rang Nar (H'mon epic – *Giông nghèo tám vợ, Giông cứu nàng Rang Hu*), Xe Đak (H'mon epic – *Giở dòi*), and Nãi Vala-Ujác's wife (*akhàt jucar Udai-Ujác*) were talented, determined, and courageous beauties. They can fly to the sky to participate in aerial battles, chase opponents underground, cast magic ropes, or swing swords to kill the fire king. Side by side with her husband, Lady Vala (*akhàt jucar Chàng Amã Ja-Rìq*) defeated the unruly and cruel army of King Putau Pitrai. They beat the Cur and Jawa invaders, causing them to panic, surrender, and vow never to invade their land again. The powerful Xe Đak, with powerful magic, broke the spell and helped Giông, her brother-in-law, recover his strength to kill the wicked. Lady Hơ-bia-Bơ-lao (*khan Xing Nhã*) killed Pơ-rong-Mung herself, and saved the hero Xing Nhã when he was in danger. She helped him complete his duty of destroying evil to avenge his parents and villagers. The two daughters of the moon god helped the warrior ChiSa (*akhàt jucar Amã ChiSa*) subdue the force of Tumuh – the evil fire god. Thus, it is not always the male hero who wins and takes the initiative in some situations. Sometimes, they were at a disadvantage and needed help from the beauties. Thanks to the assistance of his wife or charming ladies, the male warrior is never alone in battles. These talented women became teammates willing to assist and to play a decisive part in the male warrior's victory. Female warriors help the men fulfill their mission to defeat the wicked and bring peace to the village.

3. THE MEANING OF THE HEROINE'S IMAGE

The heroic female character is a work of oral literary art. The female warrior is the ideal image, the convergence point of the community, tribal, and people's aspirations in ancient times. They have become the role model that the Central Highlands people always admire, praise, and look up to.

Talented, brave, and heroic female warriors are feminine, benevolent, selfless, tolerant, generous, full of affection, good-natured, self-respecting, and faithful. Like so many other ordinary women, they cherish true love, yearn to be a good mother, a loving wife, a devoted lover, etc.

The heroine Ka Yiêng is very tolerant, generous, and selfless. After defeating the enemy, she advised those who survived not to do evil deeds, sent them back to their place, and even provided them with food. The female warrior Bya Phu killed Đâkble to save the villagers. He begged her to give him a swift death, and Bya Phu agreed. Lady Ka Lang respects the relationship between husband and wife. She sued heaven, forcing it to rain to save her people. She cried and died beside her husband's body when her wish was fulfilled. It is proof that the husband and wife bond is sacred and immortal. The female hero Bya Lingkoong is always full of love for her children. Her heart broke as she burst into tears when she saw her two children, who were still "young and their eyes were so innocent" when they started fighting the enemy, but now "they are old with full growth beards" (Hà, 2012, p. 325). With love for her children, she rushed into battles fighting the enemy to avenge her family and village.

Female warriors respect honor. When honor and their reputations are violated, they are determined to challenge and kill their enemies to prove their nobility, dignity, and virtue. They are courageous when fighting evil. But in love, the heroine is gentle, timid, and shy in front of her lover. They always appreciate and respect their oath of fidelity. "Lingkoong has received your beaded necklace. I will not accept anyone's beads. If Dyông accepts it from anyone, I'll hold on to your loincloth. I'll hold on to you so that you cannot go anywhere" (Hà, 2012, p. 370). They can hold a sword and take care of their family. They are also good at farming, skillful in embroidery, etc. They "have hands that can create many beautiful patterns and are skillful in the kitchen and also in the fields" (Hà, 2012, pp. 308). They are thoughtful, open-minded, wise, skillful, and flexible. The brave female warrior Awoi Nãi Tilor used her power to force Matien and Sa-ien, the two daughters of the Sea god, into a marriage relationship with Chi Ganruh and Chi Ganval, whom they do not love. The two girls still have their hearts for Chi Yàc and Chi Jaràc, who are talented, courageous, and ready to roam on the battlefield. Witnessing and feeling the steadfast love of the two girls, Awoi Nãi Tilor understood that marriage without love is never happy. She canceled the previous marriages and organized weddings for the two loving couples. Married couples want to love and be loved. We also admire Nãi Vala and Nãi Tahla for successfully giving birth on the battlefield, which can also be the illustrious and remarkable feat of the female warrior. The brave heroines who fought fearlessly in battles and won did not forget their duties as wives and mothers. Abundant, sacred, and beautiful motherly love is flowing in Awoi Nãi Tilor. She longs to protect and take care

of her children as a gentle mother. All those qualities unite and form the image of a female warrior in the Central Highlands. These brave women are the ones who earnestly protect the community's customs and affirm the supremacy of the matriarchy in all aspects of social life in the Central Highlands. In marriage, economics, production, etc., they always hold the most powerful position and play a key role. They are invincible against the wicked and against beasts. The village leaders – female warriors – represent the bravery and intelligence of matriarchy. They understand the traditional senses and dare to tear down the wall that customary law prescribes. They apply the typical law principle to a flexible and harmonious marriage with the motto “love can't be forced.” They flexibly assist couples in (forced) arranged marriages to give up on a loveless marriage and actively seek true love.

4. CONCLUSION

The image of a female warrior is the unity of appearance, quality, and intelligence of Central Highlands women in particular and Vietnamese women in general. By using figurative language, such as description, simile, hyperbole, etc., folk artists have painted a picture of brave female warriors in battles that is not inferior to male warriors, such as K'Pro, K'Sur, K'Pút, Đăm Thí, Porông Pha, Đam Săn, Xing Nhã, Udai, Ujàc, ChiSa, and Sa Ea. The heroines converge the qualities, noble feelings, dreams, aspirations, extraordinary talent, courage, and bravery of the whole community. They are invincible. If they must fight, they will eventually win. If they dare to do something, they take complete responsibility for it. The feats and achievements of the brave female warriors have several meanings: increasing prestige and authority, protecting the honor for the community and themselves, and bringing a peaceful and prosperous life to the whole *paley*. The more aggressive the opponents, the more brilliant the heroines' feats and the more memorable and exciting their battles become. The more complicated circumstances, situations, and conflicts in the fierce fighting between female heroes and enemies, the more unique and attractive their solutions are. The community appreciates and proudly praises their achievements. The heroine's beauties are braveness, intelligence, and femininity with extraordinary health, talent, and wisdom. Having a heroine in charge of governing villages and tribes, the villagers can rest assured that they will never have to be afraid of any evil coming to invade, harass, or destroy their village. In general, the heroine is a multi-functional character. The heroine might be a beauty, a bride at a wedding, a mother, a wife, the lover of a hero, and an incredibly courageous warrior unmatched in battles with evil. Therefore, the image of a heroine has left a permanent imprint in people's hearts. Even when they have killed the wicked, flown to heaven, or gone somewhere no one knows, etc., people still cherish a strong belief that the brave female warriors are always by their side. When the community needs them, they will fight to protect their village.

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