

**Towards A Theory of Eco-Care:  
Indigenous Folklore and Ethnobotany of Taiwanese Bunun People**

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**Abstract**

This paper aims to develop and supplement current conceptualization of care in socio-ecological contexts of indigenous knowledge and cultural production. Specifically, it foregrounds the connections between folk narratives and native ecological knowledge by drawing examples from the picture book *Grandma Ibu and the Magic Beans* (Book in Original 「伊布奶奶的神奇豆子」, 2017), authored by Bunun artist Neqou Soqluman. The story plot not only harkens back to the classic English folklore, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, and a hint at Oedipus's anxiety, but the book's female experiences of bonding and story-telling also suggest that folklore traditions, figured and performed particularly by women, have the potentials for encouraging the biodiversity and sustainability of indigenous eco-knowledge. While the Bunun is basically a patrilineal society, the preservation of its rich indigenous botanical knowledge is predominantly located on maternal figures of the houses and maternal legacy of oral tradition. In folklore such as "The Furious Hundred Pace Snake," "The Capture of Adal," "The Story of Cooking Millet," "The Beans' Pact," and so on, the female characters are more than the conduit or passive recipient of culture, but rather play an active role in shaping, conserving, and even procreating their culture.

The uniquely female domains of cultural legacy and means of transmission deserve a close and more nuanced reading. Why does gender matter in comprehending folklore traditions and transmissions? As the subjects of many of the folk tales revolve around plants, animals, spirits, and agriculture, can myths and folk tales be considered reliable and legitimate sources of traditional ecological knowledge of Taiwanese Indigenous peoples? How does folklore become a test ground for culture and indigenous science? Ultimately, by tracing the various links between folk narratives and indigenous eco-care thinking and practices, the paper will demonstrate ways in which folklore—as well as its discursive conditions and participants—are a fertile field of study for facilitating or measuring indigenous ecological knowledge and cultural industry. (WC: 326)

**Keywords:** Eco-care, Indigenous knowledge, folklore, gender codes and taboos, *Jack and the Beanstalk*