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Magical realism in Indonesian and Korean folktales: A comparative study of *Bawang Putih Bawang Merah* and *Kongjwi Patjwi*

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Abstract: *Translated literature is not merely a black-and-white reproduction; rather, it is an oil painting that stands on equal footing with its original. This study employs Wendy B. Faris's theory of magical realism to compare the Indonesian folktale Bawang Putih–Bawang Merah with the Korean translated folktale Kongjiwi–Patjiwi. The study focuses on (1) how the magical world is constructed in Bawang Putih–Bawang Merah and the translated Kongjiwi–Patjiwi, and (2) how magical characters are depicted in both tales. This is a qualitative-interpretive study centered on a comparative literary analysis of two folktales. The findings reveal that in the translated Kongjiwi–Patjiwi, three elements of magical realism are evident in its magical world: the Irreducible Element, the Phenomenal World, and the Merging of Realms. Meanwhile, the analysis of magical characters in Kongjiwi–Patjiwi—the Bull, the Frog, the Sparrow, and the Goddess—as well as in Bawang Putih–Bawang Merah, demonstrates a fusion of reality and supernatural elements that are accepted as natural within the story world.*

Keywords: *magical realism, comparative literature, Indonesian-Korean folktales*

INTRODUCTION

Comparative literature emerged from the awareness that literature is never singular and that it possesses both similarities and differences. According to Warnes (2005) and Saha (2026), similarities arise because human problems, as recorded in literature, are universal, whereas differences occur because literature is dominated by local situations and conditions. In relation to these two aspects, two things happen in comparative literature. According to Slaughter (2018), the first concerns the concept of comparative literature itself. In many definitions of comparative literature, the emphasis on comparison rests on two or more works from at least two different countries as the primary focus. The second concerns the practice of comparative literature as a field of study. The practice of comparative literature is limited to comparing two or more literary texts and attaching analysis or interpretation to the culture and social life that produced them. If the comparison involves only two or more different literary texts, the result will only reach textual similarities and differences.

In this paper, the aim of comparative literature is not merely to compare the literary texts of *Bawang Putih–Bawang Merah* (Indonesia) (2007) and the translated *Kongjiwi–Patjiwi* (Korea) (2014) in order to reveal textual similarities and differences, but also to trace their similarities and differences as products of two distinct socio-cultural lives. This comparison examines how magical realism operates in both folktales. The selection of *Bawang Putih–Bawang Merah* and the translated *Kongjiwi–Patjiwi* is based on two reasons.

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First, structurally, both stories present two sisters who are in conflict; in terms of character and family, one sister is depicted as good and diligent, while the other is full of envy, spoiled, and greedy. Second, folkloristically, both stories share similar narrative patterns and motifs. However, such similarities do not prove that one story is the direct source of the other. Similarities may arise from cultural diffusion or because similar narrative motifs develop repeatedly in different societies (Nadhira, Samsudin, & Azizah, 2025).

The focus of this study is the folktale *Bawang Putih–Bawang Merah* and the translated folktale *Kongjiwi–Patjiwi*. It is true that reading a translated literary work does not present the unmediated reality of the original. Reading translated literature means passing through the 'construction' and selection of the translator's language (Jahan, 2023). In line with this, Damono (2005) states that 'a translated literary work can never be identical to the original. Translation of literary works need not be regarded as a desperate attempt to become the same work as the original. Failure is very possible if the translator is less capable, but excellence can also be achieved by a translation (D'haen, 2024). Thus, it is not merely a black-and-white reproduction, but an oil painting that stands on equal footing with the original.' Damono's view shows that world authors' works would never be enjoyed by the majority of readers without translators who translate them. Citing this view, translated literary works hold a position equal to original works, and translated literature makes a significant contribution to the dissemination of world literature so that literary works can be read by people worldwide.

In this regard, Hegerfeldt (2005) and Bietti et al. (2019) say that folktales play an important role in preserving and transmitting cultural values through the delivery of moral messages, ethics, and understanding of social and individual life. The Indonesian folktale *Bawang Putih dan Bawang Merah* and the translated Korean tale *Kong Jwi Pat Jwi* are two folktales that both address the life of a stepchild facing conflict and various life trials. Although they originate from different cultural backgrounds, places, and periods, both contain values such as kindness, perseverance, courage, sacrifice, and justice. This study employs a comparative literary approach to examine the similarities and differences of magical realism in both stories. The comparison examines how magical realist elements operate in the two tales. This study investigates how the magical and the real are narrated in *Bawang Putih–Bawang Merah* and the translated *Kongjiwi–Patjiwi*, specifically (1) the magical world in both folktales, (2) how magical characters are portrayed in both folktales, and (3) the beliefs and myths in both folktales based on the elements characterizing magical realism. The purpose of this study is to help literary readers and the general public understand folktales, particularly *Bawang Putih–Bawang Merah* and the translated *Kongjiwi–Patjiwi*. The understanding gained will concern the characteristics and degrees of magical realism within them in highlighting locality.

Magical realism is viewed as a response to modernism that presents conflict resolution (Chin, 2022). However, the form and function of its magical elements differ in relation to the Korean and Indonesian cultural backgrounds. *Ureong Gaksi* displays magical elements related to Korean beliefs and folklore, while *Keong Emas* exhibits magical elements characteristic of Indonesian fairy-tale traditions.

Puspitoningrum's (2024) study entitled "Magical Realism in the Popular Panji Tale *Dongeng Panji Laras* and Its Relevance in Literary Learning" discusses magical realism as shown through the blending of real life with various events that are magical or beyond reason, yet are depicted as natural parts of the story. This study shows that magical elements not only serve as entertainment but also strengthen cultural, moral, and character values in the Panji story.

Furthermore, Kolcu and Uysal (2025) study on the extraordinary element explains that in fantasy narratives, the extraordinary element is built through the presence of a world, creature, or event that is supernatural and accepted as part of the laws of reality within the story world. In contrast, science fiction tends to present extraordinary phenomena through the development of science and technology, which have empirical characteristics (Greenhill & Rudy, 2014). Meanwhile, magical realism in that study depicts events that are magical or irrational within an environment without providing scientific or supernatural explanation, thus making them easily accepted by readers.

The novelty of the article entitled "Magical Realism in the Folktale *Bawang Putih–Bawang Merah* (Indonesia) and the Translated Folktale *Kongjiwi–Patjiwi* (Korea): A Comparative Literary Study" lies in its effort to bring together the concept of magical realism with comparative literary studies across Indonesian–Korean cultures through two folktales that have relatively similar narrative patterns and motifs. This study produces findings on how magical elements are present in the magical world and magical characters in both folktales.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Franz Roh, a German art critic, introduced the term magical realism in the 1920s to refer to a tendency in painting in the Weimar Republic that sought to reveal the mysterious dimension behind empirically visible reality (Zamora & Faris, 1995). The concept later developed and was used in literary studies to explain narrative works that combine realistic elements with magical events without placing them as something entirely outside reality (Parnian, Almasi, & tabar, 2018). According to Yoon (2024) and Cooper (1998), magical realism departs from a realistic world and presents various life problems that can be recognized in reality, yet within it there are events or magical elements presented as natural parts of narrative reality. Thus, magical realism does not construct a completely imaginary world but presents magical elements within a realistic environment so that the boundary between reality and magic becomes indistinct (Arva, 2008).

According to Dewojati & Zuliana (2022) and Liu (2025), magical elements in literary works can be understood as representations of various phenomena beyond the limits of conventional empiricism and rationality, such as religious beliefs, superstitions, myths, and legends In the context of magical realism, these elements are not merely placed as something impossible or contrary to reality but are presented as natural parts of the characters' lives and the narrative world. Rajabi et al. (2020) explain that the magical realm in magical realism encompasses various forms of experience and belief that oppose the empirical worldview, including religion, superstition, myth, legend, and voodoo.

According to Faris (2004) magical realism has five main interrelated elements. Faris uses these elements to explain how magical realist texts combine the everyday

world with the supernatural, as summarized in the following table of the five characteristics of magical realism. (1) *Irreducible Element.* The first characteristic of magical realism is the Irreducible Element. This refers to elements in the text that cannot be explained according to natural laws as formulated in Western empirical discourse—that is, based on logic, common knowledge, or existing beliefs. According to Faris (2004), readers experience difficulty assembling evidence to answer questions about the status of events that normally cannot be verified by sensory perception, so that the irreducible element rarely provokes commentary from the narrator and characters, leading readers to accept it despite the magical paradox that remains visible and is narrated as ordinary or as if real. (2) *Phenomenal World* The characteristic of the phenomenal world describes in detail the phenomenal world. The phenomenal world combines empirical elements of realistic life with magical elements. Faris (2004) states that the phenomenal world in its depiction can be recognized through its references in history. This detailed world is what presents the impression of reality in magical realism. (3) *Unsettling Doubts.* According to Faris (2004), this element appears before the categorization of an element as an irreducible element. In this characteristic, readers hesitate between two conflicting understandings of events, experiencing doubt that is never resolved. Furthermore, doubt can vary so as to blur the Irreducible Element. Unending doubt relates to the cultural context familiar to the reader. The familiar context can be seen in whether the reader is familiar with an empirical culture that sets aside magical logic, or whether the reader is more familiar with magical logic so that the reader feels close to the magical existence in the work. (4) *Merging of Realms.* Merging of Realms is the fourth characteristic of magical realism. (5) *Disruption of Time, Space, and Identity.* The final characteristic of magical realism is the Disruption of Time, Space, and Identity. Magical realism also re-examines readers' consciousness not only in relation to space and time but also identity. In this element, time, space, and identity are closely related in magical realism and create events in which the past and present influence each other. The five elements of the irreducible element can be seen in tabel 1.

Table 1. Five elements of the irreducible element

No.	Element	Concept
1	Irreducible Element	Supernatural events that cannot be explained rationally and are accepted as part of reality in the story.
2	Phenomenal World	Magical events occur in a realistic and convincing world.
3	Unsettling Doubts	The text creates doubt regarding an event understood rationally or as a supernatural event.
4	Merging of Realms	The blending of the boundaries between reality and magic so that they become blurred.
5	Disruption of Time, Space, and Identity	Shifts in time, space, and identity are no longer stable, fixed, or linear.

METHOD

This study is a qualitative-interpretive study focusing on comparative literary analysis of the folktales *Bawang Putih dan Bawang Merah* (Indonesia) and the translated folktale *Kongjiwi–Patjiwi* (Korea). The data sources in this paper are the folktale *Bawang Putih–Bawang Merah* (Leman, 2007) and the translated folktale *Kongjiwi–Patjiwi* (Wahyudi, 2014). These two folktales were selected because, as texts, both explicitly and implicitly reveal matters of magical realism and are interesting to examine

comparatively. The data consist of linguistic units in the form of dialogue and narration containing magical realism in the dimensions of the magical world, magical characters, and beliefs or myths in both folktales. The data, in the form of linguistic units containing elements of magical realism, are interpreted by the author as the research instrument. The interpretive construct of words or sentences containing magical realist elements is carried out inductively, built from the analysis of specific matters and producing general statements in the analysis. Creswell (2009) states that the interpretive construct is carried out inductively, built from a process of analysis from specific matters, then producing general statements. Data in the form of words, sentences, and dialogue as well as narrative depictions containing magical realist elements are collected through library research—that is, by reading the two folktales thoroughly and deeply. The interpretation of the texts of *Bawang Putih–Bawang Merah* and the translated *Kongjiwi–Patjiwi* is carried out impressionistically, intuitively, and interpretively, while transforming the imagination contained in the texts into analytical insights. The analysis process in this comparative study has four stages: (1) reading the texts of *Bawang Putih–Bawang Merah* (Indonesia) and the translated *Kongjiwi–Patjiwi* (Korea); (2) identifying words, sentences, and narratives containing magical realist elements in depth; (3) interpreting the context in the two folktale texts; and (4) formulating conclusions and results of interpretation in accordance with the theory of Magical Realism (Zamora & Faris, 1995).

RESULTS

The analysis identified several forms of magical realism in the two folktales, *Kongjiwi–Patjiwi* and *Bawang Putih–Bawang Merah*. The findings were organized into two major dimensions: the magical world and magical characters. The comparison shows that both folktales combine ordinary social and physical environments with supernatural events that are presented as natural parts of the story world.

The Magical World

The magical world in *Kongjiwi–Patjiwi* is characterized by the transformation and return of Kongjui after her death. After being drowned by Patjui, Kongjui reappears through a series of transformations. Her presence first appears in the form of a white lotus flower, which is later burned and transformed into beautiful beads. The beads subsequently transform back into Kongjui. These events occur within an otherwise recognizable social environment involving the Judge, servants, a house, a kitchen, and everyday activities.

Three elements of magical realism are particularly apparent in *Kongjiwi–Patjiwi*: the Irreducible Element, the Phenomenal World, and the Merging of Realms. The Irreducible Element is represented by Kongjui's return after death and her transformation from a human being into a lotus flower and then into beads. The Phenomenal World is evident because these supernatural events are embedded in detailed and recognizable everyday settings. The Merging of Realms occurs because Kongjui, despite having died, is able to communicate with living people, influence events, and eventually return to her former life.

In *Bawang Putih–Bawang Merah*, magical realism is also constructed through the combination of ordinary life and supernatural events. Two prominent examples are Nini Buto Ijo's unusual kitchen and the bamboo stalk containing gold and jewels. The kitchen

contains objects resembling human body parts, including a ladle resembling a human hand, a dipper resembling a human skull, and firewood resembling bones. Nevertheless, Bawang Putih continues to perform her domestic task in the kitchen.

The second example is the bamboo stalk given to Bawang Putih. She is instructed not to open it until she reaches home. When the bamboo is opened, it contains gold and jewels. The origin of the valuable objects is not explained through ordinary logic. The supernatural event is nevertheless incorporated into the sequence of everyday activities in the story.

Table 2. Comparison of the Magical World in the Two Folktales

Magical Realism Element	***Kongjiwi–Patjiwi***	***Bawang Putih–Bawang Merah***	**Main Finding**
Irreducible Element	Kongjui returns after death; she appears as a lotus flower, becomes beads, and later returns to human form.	The bamboo stalk unexpectedly contains gold and jewels; the origin of the objects is unexplained.	Both texts contain events that cannot be explained through ordinary rational or natural laws.
Phenomenal World	Magical events occur within recognizable settings involving a pond, house, kitchen, servants, and family relationships.	Magical events occur within familiar settings such as villages, houses, fields, forests, kitchens, and family life.	The supernatural is embedded within realistic environments.
Merging of Realms	Kongjui communicates with living people and returns to life; the supernatural and human worlds coexist.	Supernatural objects and beings coexist with ordinary human activities, particularly through Bawang Putih's encounter with Nini Buto Ijo.	The boundary between the ordinary and supernatural worlds becomes indistinct.
Disruption of Time, Space, and Identity	Kongjui's identity shifts through death, transformation, and return to human form.	Nini Buto Ijo's kitchen creates an unusual and frightening space that differs from an ordinary kitchen.	Both stories disturb ordinary perceptions of identity and/or space, although the manifestation differs.
Overall pattern	Transformation, resurrection, and interaction between the dead and living.	Supernatural spaces and magical objects embedded in domestic and village life.	Both texts integrate magical events into recognizable social realities.

The comparison indicates that *Kongjiwi–Patjiwi* places greater emphasis on transformation, resurrection, and interaction between the living and supernatural realms. In contrast, *Bawang Putih–Bawang Merah* emphasizes magical spaces and objects that emerge within familiar domestic and rural environments.

Magical Characters

The analysis also identified magical characters in both folktales. In *Kongjiwi–Patjiwi*, the magical characters include the Bull, Frog, Sparrow, and Goddess. Each character interacts directly with Kongjui and provides supernatural assistance when she faces difficult tasks.

The Bull helps Kongjui plough the field after her stepmother deliberately gives her a broken hoe. The Frog helps her solve the problem of a leaking jar by transforming itself

into a plug. The Sparrow and other sparrows assist Kongjui with the difficult task of husking rice. The Goddess appears through a ray of light and helps Kongjui complete her weaving task before attending the feast. These characters possess abilities that exceed those of ordinary animals and humans, but their presence is treated as an ordinary part of the narrative.

In *Bawang Putih–Bawang Merah*, Nini Buto Ijo functions as the central magical character identified in the analysis. Although she initially appears frightening and different from an ordinary elderly woman, she acts protectively toward Bawang Putih. She provides shelter, protects her from Kakek Buto Ijo, returns her clothes, and gives her the bamboo stalk containing gold and jewels.

Table 3. Comparison of Magical Characters

Aspect	***Kongjiwi–Patjiwi***	***Bawang Putih–Bawang Merah***	**Main Finding**
Magical character	Bull	Nini Buto Ijo	Both interact directly with the protagonist and influence the course of the story.
Magical character	Frog	—	The Frog possesses the ability to communicate and transform its body to solve a human problem.
Magical character	Sparrow	—	The Sparrow communicates with Kongjui and participates in solving her problem.
Magical character	Goddess/Fairy Mother	—	The Goddess possesses supernatural abilities and helps Kongjui complete her task.
Function	Providing assistance to Kongjui during difficult tasks.	Protecting and assisting Bawang Putih.	Magical characters generally function as helpers or protectors of the protagonist.
Relationship with humans	Animals and the Goddess communicate directly with Kongjui.	Nini Buto Ijo communicates directly with Bawang Putih and provides physical assistance.	The supernatural characters are integrated into human social relationships.
Narrative effect	Magical assistance enables Kongjui to overcome obstacles imposed by her stepmother.	Magical assistance enables Bawang Putih to survive the encounter and receive a reward.	Magical characters contribute to the resolution of conflict.

Overall, the results show that both folktales construct magical realism by combining supernatural elements with familiar human experiences. The major difference lies in the form of magical manifestation. *Kongjiwi–Patjiwi* emphasizes supernatural characters and transformations, whereas *Bawang Putih–Bawang Merah* emphasizes magical spaces, objects, and a supernatural helper.

DISCUSSION

Magical Realism in the Magical World

The findings demonstrate that magical realism in both folktales operates through the integration of extraordinary events into recognizable everyday realities. This finding corresponds to the central concept of magical realism, in which magical events are not necessarily presented as completely separate from reality but are incorporated into a realistic narrative environment (Arva, 2008; Cooper, 1998; Parnian et al., 2018; Yoon, 2024).

In *Kongjiwi–Patjiwi*, the strongest manifestation of magical realism appears in the transformation of Kongjui. Her death does not constitute a final boundary between life and death. Instead, her existence continues through several forms: a lotus flower, beads, and eventually a human body. The transformation is not accompanied by a scientific or rational explanation. This corresponds to Faris's (2004) concept of the Irreducible Element, in which an event cannot be explained according to conventional empirical logic but is nevertheless incorporated into the narrative as if it were ordinary.

The lotus-to-beads transformation further demonstrates how magical events are presented without disrupting the narrative's realistic surface. The Judge sees and appreciates the lotus as part of his ordinary environment, while Patjui recognizes the flower as connected to Kongjui. After the lotus is burned, the emergence of beads is treated as another stage in the narrative rather than as an event requiring rational explanation. This reflects the principle that magical realism can make extraordinary events appear natural within the narrative world (Faris, 2004; Rajabi et al., 2020).

The finding concerning the Phenomenal World is also important. The supernatural events do not take place in an entirely imaginary universe. They occur in recognizable settings involving a pond, household, servants, meals, marriage, and family relationships. The detailed representation of these everyday elements creates a realistic framework within which supernatural events become believable. Faris (2004) describes the phenomenal world as an important feature through which realistic details provide the foundation for magical events. Thus, the supernatural in *Kongjiwi–Patjiwi* becomes more convincing because it is embedded within ordinary social life.

The Merging of Realms is particularly visible when Kongjui communicates with her husband after her death. She crosses the boundary between death and life and is able to influence the Judge's understanding of what has happened. Her body is subsequently found and returns to life. The event demonstrates that the boundary between the human and supernatural realms is not stable. Instead, the two realms coexist within the same narrative space. This interpretation is consistent with the understanding of magical realism as a narrative mode in which the distinction between realistic and magical realities becomes indistinct (Arva, 2008; Faris, 2004).

The magical world of *Bawang Putih–Bawang Merah* demonstrates a somewhat different pattern. Rather than emphasizing resurrection and transformation, it presents magical realism through unusual spaces and objects. Nini Buto Ijo's kitchen is simultaneously a domestic space and an unsettling supernatural space. The presence of objects resembling human body parts disrupts the ordinary understanding of a kitchen.

Nevertheless, Bawang Putih continues her domestic work in that environment. The coexistence of fear, ordinary work, and supernatural imagery illustrates the interaction between realistic and magical elements.

This finding can be related to Faris's (2004) concept of the Disruption of Time, Space, and Identity. The kitchen is not simply a conventional domestic setting; it becomes a space in which ordinary spatial expectations are disturbed. The familiar function of the kitchen remains, but its objects and atmosphere transform the meaning of the space. The result is a setting that simultaneously belongs to everyday life and to the supernatural world.

The bamboo stalk containing gold and jewels provides another example of the Irreducible Element. The object itself is ordinary, but its unexplained contents are extraordinary. The narrative does not provide a rational explanation for how gold and jewels come to exist inside the bamboo. Instead, the event is incorporated into the protagonist's journey and subsequently influences the family's circumstances. This corresponds to the function of magical elements in folklore, where supernatural events can communicate moral meanings while remaining embedded in the narrative's social reality (Hegerfeldt, 2005; Puspitoningrum, 2024).

The comparison therefore indicates that the two folktales employ magical realism differently. *Kongjiwi–Patjiwi* emphasizes transformations, resurrection, and the interaction of the living and supernatural worlds, whereas *Bawang Putih–Bawang Merah* emphasizes magical objects and spaces within village and domestic life. Nevertheless, both demonstrate the characteristic blending of realistic and magical elements.

Magical Characters and the Blurring of Reality

The findings concerning magical characters further strengthen the identification of magical realism in the two folktales. In *Kongjiwi–Patjiwi*, the Bull, Frog, Sparrow, and Goddess perform supernatural actions while maintaining direct relationships with Kongjui. Their ability to speak, understand human problems, and provide practical assistance challenges conventional distinctions between human and non-human beings.

The Bull, for example, does not merely appear as an animal. It understands Kongjui's emotional condition and responds to her request by completing the agricultural task that she cannot perform. Similarly, the Frog communicates with Kongjui and transforms its body into a plug to stop the jar from leaking. The Sparrow participates in the resolution of Kongjui's problem, while the Goddess appears from a supernatural source and completes the weaving task.

These characters represent the Irreducible Element because their abilities cannot be explained through ordinary empirical reasoning. At the same time, their presence does not produce a prolonged conflict between rational and supernatural explanations. Kongjui accepts their assistance, and the narrative continues without requiring a scientific explanation. This is consistent with Faris's (2004) description of magical realism, in which magical elements are presented as part of the ordinary narrative world.

The finding is also consistent with Ganzin et al. (2020), who associate magical thinking with forms of reasoning that move beyond conventional rational explanation. In the folktale, magical characters do not merely function as fantastic decorations. Their actions influence the plot and provide solutions to concrete problems faced by the protagonist.

Faris (2024) further demonstrates the relevance of animal figures in magical realism. In the present analysis, the Bull, Frog, and Sparrow occupy an intermediate position between the human and supernatural worlds. They retain their animal identities but possess human-like communication and agency. Their presence therefore contributes to the blurring of boundaries between humans and supernatural beings.

Nini Buto Ijo in *Bawang Putih–Bawang Merah* functions differently. She is presented as a supernatural figure, but her role is not exclusively threatening. Although her appearance initially frightens Bawang Putih and her household is associated with Kakek Buto Ijo, Nini Buto Ijo provides protection and assistance. She allows Bawang Putih to stay overnight, protects her from danger, returns her clothes, and gives her the bamboo stalk.

This duality is important because it prevents the magical character from being reduced to a simple opposition between good and evil. Nini Buto Ijo occupies a complex position between the frightening supernatural world and the familiar world of human kindness. Her interaction with Bawang Putih illustrates how magical figures can become integrated into moral and social structures in folklore.

The contrast between the two texts is therefore significant. *Kongjiwi–Patjiwi* presents several magical helpers whose supernatural abilities directly solve the protagonist's problems. *Bawang Putih–Bawang Merah* concentrates its magical characterization on Nini Buto Ijo, whose supernatural identity is combined with a protective and benevolent role. Both patterns demonstrate that magical characters are not isolated from human reality. Instead, they participate directly in the protagonists' social and emotional experiences.

Comparative Meaning of Magical Realism

From a comparative literary perspective, the two folktales demonstrate that similar narrative patterns can produce different manifestations of magical realism. Both stories feature a conflict involving two sisters, a suffering protagonist, an antagonistic sister or stepfamily relationship, and supernatural intervention. However, the magical elements are shaped differently by the narrative worlds of the two traditions.

This supports the argument that comparative literature should not be limited to identifying textual similarities and differences but should also consider the cultural contexts in which literary works develop (Slaughter, 2018; Saha, 2026). Similar narrative motifs do not necessarily indicate that one story directly derives from another. Rather, similar patterns may emerge through cultural diffusion or the recurrence of comparable narrative motifs across societies (Hyun, 2023).

The two folktales also demonstrate the function of folklore as a medium for transmitting cultural and moral values. Folktales can preserve social understandings, moral messages, and collective experiences through narratives that combine familiar life situations with extraordinary events (Bietti et al., 2019; Hegerfeldt, 2005). In both texts, magical elements contribute to the eventual resolution of the protagonist's suffering and reinforce the significance of perseverance, kindness, sacrifice, and justice.

The comparison also confirms that magical realism should not automatically be equated with fantasy. In these folktales, magical events are not developed as completely separate fictional systems governed by explicit supernatural rules. Instead, they occur within recognizable environments and are integrated into everyday social relationships.

This distinction is consistent with discussions of extraordinary elements in fantastic narratives, where the treatment of supernatural events depends on how the narrative establishes its relationship with reality (Greenhill & Rudy, 2014; Kolcu & Uysal, 2025).

In addition, the findings support previous studies of magical realism in Indonesian and Korean literary contexts. Magical elements in Indonesian narratives can function as representations of cultural beliefs, moral values, and local traditions, while Korean narratives can similarly incorporate culturally specific supernatural figures and beliefs (Dewojati & Zuliana, 2024; Puspitoningrum, 2024; Yoon, 2024). The present comparison extends this perspective by showing that two culturally different folktales can employ comparable magical-realist mechanisms while retaining distinct narrative manifestations.

Finally, the use of a translated version of *Kongjiwi–Patjiwi* is relevant to the comparative interpretation. A translated literary text is mediated by the translator's linguistic and cultural choices and therefore cannot be regarded as an entirely unmediated representation of the original text (Jahan, 2023). Nevertheless, translation can facilitate the circulation and reception of literary works across cultural boundaries. As Damono (2005) and D'haen (2024) argue, translated literature can occupy an important position in world literature rather than being viewed simply as an inferior reproduction of an original. Therefore, the translated *Kongjiwi–Patjiwi* remains productive for comparative analysis, particularly when the purpose is to examine how magical-realist elements are represented and understood across cultures.

CONCLUSION

The following are the results of the analysis of the magical world and magical characters in the comparative literature of the folktales *Kongjiwi–Patjiwi* and *Bawang Putih–Bawang Merah*. First, the magical world in the story shows three elements of magical realism, namely the Irreducible Element, the Phenomenal World, and the Merging of Realms. The Irreducible Element is visible from events that cannot be explained by natural law, such as Kongjui being able to be present after death and her transformation into a lotus flower and fragrant white beads. These events are accepted as part of the story's reality without rational explanation. The Phenomenal World element is visible when magical events are depicted realistically and blend with the characters' everyday lives. Kongjui's presence through the lotus flower and beads is not positioned as something entirely separate from the real world, so readers accept the phenomenon as part of the story's reality. Meanwhile, the Merging of Realms is visible through the blurring of boundaries between the real world and the magical world. Kongjui, who has died, can return, interact with her husband, and influence events in the human world. Meanwhile, the magical world in the folktale *Bawang Putih–Bawang Merah* contains elements of magical realism shown through the disruption of space and the presence of events that cannot be explained logically. The depiction of Nini Buto Ijo's kitchen resembling human body parts shows the disruption of time, space, and identity, while the bamboo stalk containing gold and jewels is an irreducible element because it has no rational explanation in everyday reality. Thus, the magical elements in the story blend with the characters' lives and are accepted as part of the story world, forming the characteristics of magical realism in the folktale *Bawang Putih dan Bawang Merah*. Second, the magical characters in the story *Kongjiwi–Patjiwi*—the Bull, Frog, Sparrow,

and Goddess—as well as *Bawang Putih dan Bawang Merah*, there is a fusion of reality and supernatural elements that are naturally accepted in the story world. The presence of animals that can speak, a goddess figure, and magical objects and events demonstrates the irreducible element in magical realism, while the depiction of village life, houses, forests, fields, and relationships between characters reflects a phenomenal world rooted in everyday reality. Thus, the magical characters in both texts are formed through the blurring of boundaries between the real world and the supernatural world, so that magical elements are present as natural and inseparable parts of narrative reality.

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