Thai Folklore: The Tale of Sang Thong

Sang Thong is a very popular folktale in Thailand and it is maybe the most well-known tale among Thai people. It has been transmitted in various forms ranging from jataka tale, written literature, folk drama, local legend to television drama. The first written version is Suwan Sangkha Chadok in Panyasa Chadok (Suvannasankhajātaka, Jataka Tale). Thus, today I’d like to retell this story for you.

The Tale of Sang Thong

Sung Thong, the prince in the conch shell (photo: thaigoodview.com)

Once there was a king who had two wives. When his major wife
gave birth to a son, this son was born in a conch shell. The minor wife wanted to banish the major wife and her son from the kingdom and she was successful. The king ordered the major wife and his son, Prince Sang, to live in another place with an old couple.

Each day, Prince Sang would leave his shell to work in the household of the couple. When his mother learned about this, she broke his shell. Still the minor wife longed to get rid of the Prince. Thus, he found harbour at the place of a giant lady who took care of him.
The giant lady forbade the Prince to jump into the golden well but one day the Prince broke this rule. He jumped into the well putting on an ugly mask to escape. When he wore his ugly dark mask he was called Chao Ngo. This was when he came across the Samon kingdom. The king of Samon had seven daughters. Hence, he ordered all kings to send their sons to his place so that his daughters could choose their husbands.
Six of the king’s daughters chose a husband but only his youngest daughter Rodjana did not. To the king’s surprise and anger, she finally took Prince Sang as her husband. She was the only one who could see his golden body whereas to other people the prince appeared as an ugly dark person. Enraged, the King chased his youngest daughter and her ugly husband away to live in a rice field.
Hence, the king also ordered his other sons-in-law to bring him a 100 fish and deer. He wanted to see Chao Ngo dead. However, Chao Ngo was clever and could perform magic. Thus, he was the only son-in-law able to bring the king what he wanted. Finally, Chao Ngo was the only one who could help King Samon to protect and save the kingdom. This was when his golden body and his royal origin were revealed.

Summing up, we can say that Sang Thong is a hero who becomes finally accepted. At first he hides behind ugliness and deformation but then his true nature and beauty is revealed.

Yours, Sirinya

(Reference: Siraporn Nathalang, Thai Folklore. Insights into Thai Culture, Chulalongkorn UP 2000)