

# **Propp and the Japanese folklore : applying morphological parsing to answer questions concerning the specifics of the Japanese fairy tale**

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Objekttyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen  
Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société  
Suisse-Asie**

Band (Jahr): **63 (2009)**

Heft 3: **Narratologische Untersuchungen zu japanischen Texten**

PDF erstellt am: **04.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-147827>

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# PROPP AND THE JAPANESE FOLKLORE: APPLYING MORPHOLOGICAL PARSING TO ANSWER QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE SPECIFICS OF THE JAPANESE FAIRY TALE

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## *Abstract*

The morphology of the fairy tale marks the dawn of structural analysis of folktales. Although it has been vastly applied in recent years to written genres, we shall go back to the origins and discuss universal and specific traits of the Japanese fairy tale via morphological parsing. The objective of this essay is to examine if, and to what extent, Propp's morphology can be applied to Japanese fairy tales and thus find out whether there is a solution for some dilemmas in the Japanese folktale research environment. For this purpose, a group of tales on the marriage between a man and a supernatural/animal bride, considered by many Japanese and non-Japanese folklorists as representative of the Japanese fairy tale heritage, are examined. The tale of the Crane-wife serves as a model case study, which is parsed to morphologically support two of the most popular theories about the Japanese tale, namely the theory about the circular plot development by Toshio Ozawa and the result of nothingness by Hayao Kawai. The study provides a possible explanation for the difficulties in perception of Japanese fairy tales abroad. In the broader sense, the results of the study suggest that, on a morphological level, the Japanese fairy tale possesses universal features.

## 1. Introduction

In the discourse on cultural differences and similarities, statements are often made that remind us of the eternal gender argument: European and Japanese folktales differ; we cannot really compare them; they are not of the same species. And indeed, when juxtaposing history, social development, religion and folk beliefs, literature and genre development, we can hardly find common features. Scholars from Japan, like for example Hayao Kawai 河合早雄 in his work *Fairy Tales and the Japanese Psyche* 昔話と日本人の心<sup>1</sup>, and from

1 KAWAI, 2007.

Europe like Max Lüthi, Rudolf Schenda, and Lutz Röhrich<sup>2</sup> carefully examine the common and different features of tales, pay particular attention to the perception of Japanese tales in Europe and agree upon a certain degree of misunderstanding. Kawai concludes that Europeans do not understand the Japanese tale, as a result of the European masculine consciousness, which is antithetical to the female soul of the Japanese people.<sup>3</sup> Yet all scholars and readers should agree that there are universal traits in the Japanese folk heritage defining the fairy tales. These traits should serve as a starting point in any research.

A possible way to define similarities is undoubtedly the depth-psychology approach suggested by Carl Gustav Jung<sup>4</sup> and applied by Kawai in *The roots of Japanese tales* 昔話の深層<sup>5</sup>. Universal archetypes such as the Great Mother, for example, are depicted in both European and Japanese fairy tales. Another successful method for comparison is the socio-historical approach of Lutz Röhrich in *Märchen und Wirklichkeit*<sup>6</sup>, August Nitzschke in *Soziale Ordnungen im Spiegel des Märchens*<sup>7</sup> and Vladimir Propp in *The Historical Roots of the Fairy Tale*<sup>8</sup>.

Such analyses will undoubtedly find a common Ariadna's thread to follow. But the mathematical approach of structuralists can also offer a useful tool to discover similarities and indicate differences. The application of western (sometimes even Eurocentric) theories to a field of Japanese studies has had its long-standing supporters and opponents, of course. Yet as "the analytical tools must be capable of dealing with works of a great variety of genres, cultures, languages and times"<sup>9</sup>, and since I believe that structural analysis and in particular Propp's morphology is such a tool, we shall apply his method to analyse an oral narrative "text" such as the fairy tale.

*Morphology of the Folktale* marks the dawn of structural analysis of folktales and has been vastly applied to written genres in recent years. We shall, however, go back to the origins and discuss universal and specific traits of the Japanese fairy tale via morphological parsing. The socio-historical background,

2 LÜTHI, 1976; SCHENDA, 1976; RÖHRICH, 1976.

3 KAWAI, 2007.

4 JUNG, 1999.

5 KAWAI, 1977.

6 RÖHRICH, 1956.

7 NITZSCHKE, 1977.

8 PROPP, 1986.

9 WATSON, 2004:115.

textual evolution, performance and story-telling tradition, depth-psychology, gender-studies analysis or linguistic expression will not be of concern here, we rather intend to prove that Propp's morphology is applicable to Japanese fairy tales and, if so, whether and to what extent it solves some dilemmas of the Japanese folktale research.

## 2. Structural Analyses of the Folktale in Japan

Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, an internationally recognized work on folktales, was among the first of its genre to be translated into Japanese together with Kaarle Krohn's *Die Folkloristische Arbeitsmethode*, Max Lüthi's *Das Europäische Volksmärchen – Form und Wesen*, and Antti Aarne's *Vergleichende Märchenforschung*.<sup>10</sup> It was first translated in 1972. Four years later Seki Keigo 関敬吾 commented on the theory of Propp and other structuralists<sup>11</sup> but tended to refer more often to the type-motif index than the morphology. There are a number of studies that explore motifs in order to compare or analyze Japanese folktales but Japanese folklore scholars have, although familiar with it, not focused on morphological analysis like Propp's. Japanese folklorists preferred to adhere to their own attempts at first as their reception of the Aarne-Thompson Index shows<sup>12</sup>; and very few Japanese authors like Ozawa Toshio 小沢俊夫 or Komatsu Kazuhiko 小松和彦 represent the structural analysis of the Japanese folktales. It has scarcely met any response in the Japanese folktale research environment despite the translation of Propp's morphology. From this perspective, applying Propp's morphology to analyse Japanese fairy tales is a new approach to the study of Japanese folklore, and it will be interesting to see to what extent the work of Propp can be applied to Japanese tales and, moreover, whether this approach might solve some of the most disputed problems of the Japanese fairy tale.

The study of the Japanese folktale narrative started in 1932 with the attempt of Yanagita Kunio 柳田国男 to group the Japanese tales in two – original

10 KROHN, 1926; LÜTHI, 1992[1946]; AARNE, 1908.

11 SEKI, 1981:64–78.

12 For example, when compiling his type-index *Nihon mukashi-banashi shūsei* 日本昔話集成 (1950–1958), Keigo Seki is aware of the existing type-index but prefers to disregard it. The first Japanese index applying the Aarne-Thompson classification is the work of Hiroko Ikeda (IKEDA, 1971).

(*genkei* 完形) and derived (*hasei* 派生) –, which in fact was the first classification based on analysis of structure and origin of tales.<sup>13</sup> Yanagita used this principle sixteen years later to compile the first index of tales in Japan – *Nihon mukashi-banashi mei'i* 日本昔話名彙<sup>14</sup>. Further examples of narrative study with a structuralistic approach can be found in Ozawa's work *The Cosmology of the Folktale* 昔話のコスモロジー人と動物との婚姻譚<sup>15</sup>. In the second part of his work Ozawa introduces motifems and forms two types of plot development by comparing Japanese and European tales: the linear development of conclusion and completion, called *kanketsusei* 完結性, is the European model, while the circular plot development with the end entailing the beginning, called *kaikisei* 回帰性<sup>16</sup>, is the Japanese. In other words, the marriage in European tales forms the end as a final point (as Propp's function N XXXI also shows), whereas there is no such real ending in Japanese tales but rather the implication of a new beginning as the story comes full circle at its start. Ozawa, considering the tales of marriage between humans and animals to be the truly Japanese, applies structural analysis to emphasise the specific traits of this group of tales in order to distinguish them from European ones. Ozawa applies a combined method of analysis, or as he points out, the analysis is carried out by means of formalism, structuralism and motif-analysis.<sup>17</sup>

Another author dealing with the structure of Japanese tales is Tadashi Takeda 武田正. He identifies three main themes in the Japanese tales by separating the theme from the motif: a) the marriage to a supernatural being (or animal); b) the supernatural birth and c) the supernatural realms.<sup>18</sup> In a) we have again a large group of typically Japanese tales which encompasses all narratives comprising a supernatural bride or bridegroom, wife or husband. Another author dealing with structure is Kawamori 川森博司. He examines the tale structure of Japanese tales in comparison to Korean tales.<sup>19</sup> By analysing the text structure Katō 加藤耕義 examines the problem of transformation and the disclosure of true shape.<sup>20</sup> So, as we have seen, most authors focus their attention on tales,

13 See also YANAGITA, 1998.

14 YANAGITA, 1948.

15 OZAWA, 1994.

16 OZAWA, 1994:219–222.

17 OZAWA, 1994:29; OZAWA, 1981a:307–311.

18 TAKEDA, 1992: 246.

19 KAWAMORI, 2000.

20 KATŌ, 1998.

which depict an interaction between humans and animals as representative for the Japanese folktale heritage.

Kazuhiko Komatsu, another Japanese scholar, gets to the ultimate theme of Japanese folklore by structural analysis of tales and legends. He concludes that the “kill-the-stranger” folklore (*ijingoroshi fōkuroa* 異人殺しフォークロア) is typical for Japan. Examining motifs and permanent elements transmitted in the oral heritage Komatsu concludes that some of the most typical Japanese tales demonstrate how a stranger (*ijin* 異人) is sacrificed to the community or society (*kyōdōtai* 共同体) in the name of all community members.<sup>21</sup> As a structuralist, applying structural analysis to the tale of the animal bridegroom, Komatsu shows which tale elements could be substituted in different tales and derives the structure of these tales regardless of animal species, number of *dramatis personae*, acquisition of riches and so on.<sup>22</sup>

We have dealt with the history of structural analysis of Japanese folktales and seen that the human-animal marriage is a favourite subject among the characteristics of Japanese fairy tales. Yet Propp’s approach has not been applied to them so far. So we will set out to do so and start by reviewing some of the cornerstones of Propp’s method.

### 3. Propp’s Method and its Application

Most of the authors touched the work with motifs only briefly – according to Propp, examining motifs is a correct way of analysis but they are not uniform and can dissociate.<sup>23</sup> On a different level this statement could be interpreted in the following way: If tales are molecules formed by one or more atoms (motifs), then the motifs are atoms from which electrons can be released under certain circumstances. So, in order to reach higher objectivity, Propp suggests thirty-one functions and seven spheres of action for the *dramatis personae*<sup>24</sup>. A function, according to Propp, is an event interpreted according to its consequences (*ibid.*:30–34). Propp declares that the order of the functions is fixed (*ibid.*:32), he also states that functions sometimes could be transferred (*ibid.*:81–82) or, more

21 KOMATSU, 1987; KOMATSU, 2005.

22 KOMATSU, 1984a:270–287.

23 PROPP, 2001:22.

24 *Dramatis personae* and their function distribution can be found in Appendix 2.

likely, exist as a set function under another name and place<sup>25</sup>. He further concludes that some functions can change places but if the derivation is large, then one probably deals with a different type or group of tales (*ibid.*:127). If so, derivations from the main morphological pattern are due to the influence of tales of animals and anecdotes/jokes (*ibid.*:75). This statement is very important to us as it points to tales with a clear legendary character. So, one of the tasks is to determine whether there could be a new function in these typically Japanese tales which was not described by Propp. This will clarify whether additional new functions can explain the specific structure of Japanese fairy tales and the effect they have on the European public. When applying Propp's functions it is also important to note that the sequence of functions is rendered here in the same way as Propp (using the Latin and Cyrillic alphabets), "neg" is applied to mark negative success of the unit, "contr" is used to mark a contrary result to the contents of the function. The details about the units are not given in numbers (for example the leaving home of one of the *dramatis personae* does not specify whether the parents are leaving e1, the parents are dying e2, or the children are leaving home e3)<sup>26</sup>.

We shall study a group of tales which is considered emblematic for the Japanese folktale heritage, namely ordinary tales describing the marriage between a human male and a supernatural (animal) bride. The tales can be divided into three categories – a) a disclosure of the true shape and the animal leaving the man, b) a disclosure of the true shape and the animal's revenge, and c) the coercion of the animal-bride to marry. It is the first group that is represented most extensively in the Japanese folk heritage<sup>27</sup> and we will therefore have a closer look at it.

The transformation, which is a rather more natural phenomenon than magic and typical for the folklore of earliest societies, is a special feature of these tales.

25 The possible run of the plot is following the scheme: Initial situation (to which functions I–VII belong), Villainy/Lack (Functions VIII–XV), Path A with struggle, victory, end of luck and return (Functions XVI–XXII); and/or Path B with unrecognised arrival, task, recognition, punishment, wedding (Functions XXIII–XXXI). *Dramatis personae* acting in this run of events are realising seven roles: the villain, the donor, the helper, the princess, the dispatcher, the hero, and the false hero.

26 In the run of analysis it was found that not all possibilities were described by Propp, which is due to the limited number of tales he had taken into consideration. This is the reason why the specific realization of the function is not elaborated; moreover, for the set aims, this is not a significant issue.

27 OZAWA, 1994:200.

Transformation is a very specific and significant element in Japanese tales and many authors have studied it from various angles.<sup>28</sup> Ozawa concludes that the natural transformation from animal to human in Japanese tales is evocative of the tales of Naturvölker<sup>29</sup>, while the impossibility of an enduring co-existence between the man and the animal-bride approximates the Japanese tale to the European. There is no magic (*mahō 魔法*) in the transformation – it is a natural transformation from one state into another, and this is the main difference to European tales where Christianity superseded such original folk beliefs and the strong bond to natural beings broke.<sup>30</sup> So, here we have remnants of an earlier stage of social development, a closer link to the times of myths and legends, and we can see that the Japanese tale is closer to folk beliefs than any similar representative in European tradition.<sup>31</sup> In fact, neither transformation nor disclosure of true appearance (*shōtai roken 正体露見*) is specified as a separate function by Propp, but unrecognised shape and transformation do appear as separate functions. Propp, though, leaves a door open by introducing N – unknown elements, probably of mythological or legendary character, which is a typical characteristic of the East-Asian folklore<sup>32</sup>.

The tales in question are grouped separately by Seki in *Nihon mukashi-banashi shūsei* – they belong to ordinary tales S110–119, labeled *irui-nyōbō-tan* or “stranger-wife”<sup>33</sup>: The serpent wife (S110), the frog wife (S111), the clam wife (S112), the fish wife (S113), the wife of the dragon palace (S114), the crane wife (S115), the fox wife (S116), the cat wife (S117), the heavenly wife (S118), and the flute player (S119). These are also described as ordinary tales in AaTh Index numbered AaTh 300 – 749<sup>34</sup>. The plot development of these tales is usually the following:

- 28 KATŌ, 1998; PETROVA, 2002; MILLER, 1987; and others.
- 29 Eskimos consider the marriage between a human and an animal to be of one species (*dōrui kon'in 同類婚姻*), while the Japanese is definitely a marriage between different species (*irui kon'in 異類婚姻*) (OZAWA, 1994:196).
- 30 OZAWA, 1994:146.
- 31 See also DORSON, 1975: 243–248; PETROVA, 2004: 37–38.
- 32 On the legendary character of the Japanese folktales see also DORSON, 1975.
- 33 The term is implying another than the usual wife; often tales of the celestial wife can be given as examples of this group. Here the term “stranger” is preferred because it emphasizes the difference and otherness of the bride. It is also associated with the term *ijin 異人* (stranger) used by Kazuhiko Komatsu in regard to the Japanese fairy tales (KOMATSU, 2005).
- 34 Aarne-Thompson Index numbers and reference to the Seki's collection of types are also given in Appendix 3.

1. Initial situation – A single and poor man saves an animal.
2. Core story – Marriage, followed by a taboo and its violation.
3. End – Wife leaves, man is again single and poor.

The central plot line of all these tales is the marriage between a human man and a supernatural/animal bride. On the whole, marriage is a crucial point in the *sujet*, not only as the starting point and the destination of fairy tales<sup>35</sup> but also because it is the final unit of Propp's list of thirty-one functions<sup>36</sup>. There are three types of marriage-tales in Japanese tales: the human-animal marriage (based on mythology); the desired child (based on initiation rites), and the reality marriage (based on real relationships between human men and women). Very often, marriage with a supernatural being or animal ends in separation, especially if only one party has decided that the marriage must take place – parents, the female or the male character alone, or village members.<sup>37</sup> Ozawa states that the marriage between a man and an animal-wife whose true shape is disclosed is a genuine Japanese tale as there are very few similar examples (found mainly in Korea) but no direct analogues in the collections of the world or in the AaTh Index.<sup>38</sup> One may say that the following tales could be considered typical Japanese fairy tales<sup>39</sup>, and undoubtedly, the most profoundly studied ones. The end of these tales is particularly interesting: the separation of the couple. This fact fascinates many scholars.<sup>40</sup> Ozawa calls such an end “die melancholische Stimmung des Abschiednehmens”<sup>41</sup>. This end evokes a very controversial reception in Europe as for western readers there is no “logical” end to the tale but it remains somehow open (*ibid.*:135). Hayao Kawai explains this reaction of the European public with the result of nothingness (*mu* 無) and the male/female consciousness,<sup>42</sup> which we shall revisit later.

The plot of these tales is characterised by the broken taboo and the disappearance of the initial scene. The tale starts as it finishes, and it holds neither anything good nor bad for the male protagonist: all that happens between the two

35 SEKI, 1980:162. 婚姻が昔話の出発点であり、同時にその到達点でもある。

36 The complete list of functions can be found in Appendix 1.

37 SEKI, 1980:167–169.

38 OZAWA, 1994:131; OZAWA, 1981b:431–439.

39 Similar stories exist also in European tradition (“Kinder- und Hausmärchen” N 85, 92, 113, 127) but the plot structure as well as the main theme is very different.

40 See also PETROVA, 2002.

41 “The melancholic mood of the farewell”. OZAWA, 1993:489.

42 KAWAI, 2007.

poles of “nothingness” is that the animal which shows gratitude or good intentions and brings some happiness to the lonely bachelor is lost to the human beings once they have “touched” the beautiful.<sup>43</sup> The essence of the taboo is usually a visual one – *miru-na* – not to see the true face or the body of the partner; and it is of mythological origin – not to see the face of God. Seeing means knowing, knowledge is a revelation of sacred nature corresponding to Adam and Eve and the apple.<sup>44</sup> Typical for the Japanese example is the wife’s departure in the end, the wife disappearing forever. Folktale scholars have been interested in interpreting the wife’s disappearance for a long time. The taboos are all connected to different female actions like giving birth, breastfeeding, bathing, weaving, cooking, etc.

The divine pair Izanagi and Izanami also separate because of a broken taboo – according to mythology, Izanagi sees Izanami rotting in the Land of Death. Watching his wife without her consent brings the final separation upon the couple. Then, in fact, the taboo is not the supernatural being’s primary reason to leave but the disclosure of its true nature.<sup>45</sup> Another possible explanation could be found in another group of tales – the tales of ghosts *bakemono*. *Bakemono* reveal their true shape only after death, whereas they exist in a different shape while they are alive.<sup>46</sup> A spider, a badger, or a crab could appear in the shape of a monster or ghost, and only after being killed assume its original animal shape (tales like S261, S266, S269, etc.). By drawing parallels between the two types of tales, one could suggest that the revelation of the animal-wife’s true physical body literally leads to death, so she is bound to leave, as she, like the animals just mentioned, has died already. She belongs simultaneously to both worlds – unlike human beings who cannot exist in an animal’s realm, and although the human and animal worlds overlap in parts, they cannot co-exist for long.

The “uniqueness” of the Japanese tale illustrated by the circular plot development, defined by Ozawa, and the result of nothingness due to the feminine psyche, suggested by Kawai, will be discussed again from a different perspective – by applying Propp’s morphological parsing. On the one hand, according to Kawai we have the result of nothingness in Japanese tales due to the “gender” differences in the European and the Japanese psyche. On the other hand, Ozawa

43 See also KATŌ, 1998:64.

44 KAWAI, 1977:83.

45 KATŌ, 1998:61–63.

46 OZAWA, 1998:17.

speaks of linear (Europe) and circular (Japan) plot development which might be an explanation of this uniqueness. The first is a conclusion based on depth-psychological analysis, the second a conclusion based on structural analysis. Now, we shall see whether it is possible to define and explain the difference by applying another structural approach, namely Propp's morphology. As both Ozawa and Kawai come to the conclusion of the "uniqueness" of the Japanese tale by analyzing the same tale of the crane-wife, we shall also focus on it. The story exists in many versions; here, we render the one offered by Inada 稲田浩二, which follows the most popular run of events.

### 鶴女房

男が鶴の命を助けると、鶴が女に変身して男に嫁してくる。鶴の嫁は機を織り、仕上がった反物を男に売らせて家に富をもたらす。嫁が、機を織る姿を見るな、といっていたにもかかわらず、男は、機織部屋をのぞき、鶴が羽根で布を織っているのを目撃する。正体を知られた嫁は、鶴の姿に戻って飛び去る。<sup>47</sup>

### The crane-wife

A man saves the life of a crane, the bird transforms into a woman and marries the man. The wife starts weaving; the man sells the woven cloth at a high price. Although the wife asks the man not to watch her while she weaves, he peeks into the weaving room to find a weaving crane. Being exposed, the wife returns to her original bird-shape and flies away.

The function sequence of this tale could be represented in several ways:

#### I. Circular plot development

Function	Propp №	Contents	Japanese text
А	VIII	Lack occurs.	Most versions speak of a single poor man
Д	XII	Male character tested by donor (mercy tested by saving a bird in need)	男が鶴の命を助けると
Г	XIII	Male character responds to the donor	

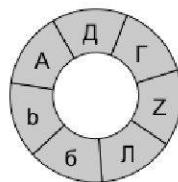
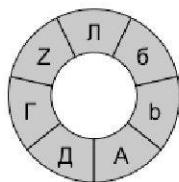
47 INADA, 2001:145–146.

Z	XIV	Hero is given the magic object – typical Z9: helper offering herself to the hero	鶴が女に変身して男に嫁してくる
Ι	XIX	Initial lack is resolved – man is no longer single and poor	鶴の嫁は機を織り、仕上がった反物を男に売らせて家に富をもたらす
6	II	Interdiction – wife asks husband not to watch	嫁が、機を織る姿を見るな、といっていた
b	III	Interdiction violated – man sees true shape of wife	(にもかかわらず)、男は、機織部屋をのぞき、鶴が羽根で布を織っているのを目撃する
A	VIII	Lack appears. Crane leaves and man is single and poor again.	正体を知られた嫁は、鶴の姿に戻って飛び去る

This sequence of functions solves the dilemmas of the crane-wife type of Japanese fairy tales to a great extent. It is easy to see that in this analysis the tale ends with functions 6 b, which, according to Propp, are typical for the initial situation and can be found in the beginning of the tale only. The initial situation is hereby marked by A, not by i, because it is believed that in this tale marriage and riches are not seen as a final point but as a lack and the resolution of lack.

Is the end of this tale then implying new functions not described by Propp? This is hardly the case because the combination “6 b A” is following Propp's description very precisely, the only difference is the place in the tale. How should we then interpret an initial situation combination appearing at the end of the story? Is this not reminiscent of Ozawa's conclusion on the circular development of the Japanese tale? Here, the tale develops further into a new initial situation instead of finishing with the resolution of lack – the end takes us back to the beginning. Ozawa's conclusion is evidently described by the sequence of Propp's functions. The tale “The fish wife” also abides by this sequence (S112).

Thus, the circular plot development could also be represented graphically in the following way:



Here, as one can see, the circular plot development starts with **Д** and ends with **A**, while a typical linear plot development would start with **б** to end with **П**. The idea of Ozawa is that the end of this type of Japanese tales implies a new beginning – a conclusion strongly supported by the sequence of Propp's functions because the linear representation of the circle corresponds with Propp's sequence.

Yet there could be another way of interpreting the end of this tale. If we consider the taboo to be a task (double meaning of functions), then, after lack has been resolved, we have a difficult task 3 (taboo task), the task accomplished with negative result (hero fails to accomplish the task) – Pneg; and a contrary result in the last function marriage and acquisition of riches – C<sub>B</sub> contr. In this way the same tale about the crane wife could have the following sequence of functions, this time in a perfect linear shape:

## II. Linear plot development

Function	Propp №	Contents	Japanese text
i		Initial situation	Most versions mention a single poor man.
Д	XII	Male character tested by donor (mercy tested by saving a bird in need)	男が鶴の命を助けると
Г	XIII	Male character responds to the donor	
Z	XIV	Hero is given the magic object – typical Z9: helper offering herself to the hero	鶴が女に変身して男に嫁してくる
П	XIX	Initial lack is resolved – man is no longer single and poor	鶴の嫁は機を織り、仕上がった反物を男に売らせて家に富をもたらす

3	XXV	Wife sets the male character a task – not to watch	嫁が、機を織る姿を見るな、といつていたにもかかわらず
Pneg	XXVI	Task not accomplished by man – man fails to keep the promise	男は、機織部屋をのぞき、鶴が羽根で布を織っているのを目撃する
C <sub>B</sub> contr	XXXI	Acquisition of riches and wedding lead to a contrary result – Wife changes back into crane-shape and leaves; man is single and poor again. No successful marriage.	正体を知られた嫁は、鶴の姿に戻って飛び去る

When analysing the tale in this way, we discover that the functions of Propp are perfectly in line with the story of the crane wife which is considered one of the most typical Japanese tales and one of the most difficult tales for European readers to comprehend. On a morphological level the tale is an ordinary fairy tale, the only difference being the negative and contrary result, determined by the last two functions, that mostly comes unexpected to the reader. This is, however, not in opposition to Propp's morphology but agrees with it completely. It is the European reader's expectation of a positive result, rendered by the two final functions that makes him think the tale is incomplete (see also KAWAI, 2007:187–220). The separation of animal-wife and human-husband is a sad and beautiful parting or, in other words, an expression of a Japanese aesthetic concept such as *mono-no aware*, implying melancholic emotions in viewing the beauty of evanescent phenomena. The negative and contrary realization of these last functions is in fact an illustration of this aesthetic view but other devices of analysis would be needed to explain this end – namely, the means of world-view and aesthetics. Since this is not the aim of this study, it might be a new topic for future research.

So far, we have discussed the morphological explanation to the circular development of the plot of the Japanese tales suggested by Ozawa. We have also seen the result of nothingness, defined by Kawai, in the negative and contrary results of the tale – nothingness, because there is no positively accomplished final function. The question, now, is whether by applying Propp's morphology we can explain the result of nothingness due to the feminine and masculine psyche – a conclusion offered by Kawai (KAWAI, 2007:314).

## III. The role-swap

Function	Propp №	Contents	Japanese text
i		Initial situation	Most versions speak of a single poor man.
Д	XII	Male character tested by donor (mercy tested by saving a bird in need)	男が鶴の命を助けると
Г	XIII	Male character responds to the donor	
Св	XXXI	Marriage and acquisition of riches by man as main character.	鶴が女に変身して男に嫁してくる。鶴の嫁は機を織り、仕上がった反物を男に売らせて家に富をもたらす
X	XXIII	Hero arrives unrecognised. Role-swap and crane-wife becomes main character.	鶴が女に変身して男に嫁してくる。鶴の嫁は機を織り、仕上がった反物を男に売らせて家に富をもたらす
З	XXV	Wife sets the male character a task – not to watch	嫁が、機を織る姿を見るな、といっていた
Pneg	XXVI	Task not accomplished by man – man fails to keep the promise	にもかかわらず、男は、機織部屋をのぞき、鶴が羽根で布を織っているのを目撃する
Y	XXVII	Hero is recognised. Role-swap.	正体を知られた嫁は、
T	XXIX	Hero is given a new appearance. Role-swap.	鶴の姿に戻って
Св contr	XXXI	Acquisition of riches and wedding lead to a contrary result – Wife leaves, no successful marriage	飛び去る

Notes: Here X, Y and T are functions belonging to female character seen as main character, female character is also acting as a donor in functions Д and Г, while male character acts as main in functions Г, З, Р, Св.

The above list provides a solution to the question raised. X, T, Y are typical functions for the hero's sphere of action (see Appendix 2). In the tale about the crane, however, the bird arrives unrecognised in the shape of a woman, and after its true appearance is revealed, it is given a new one (so crane arrives in the shape of an unrecognized woman, the true appearance of the crane is disclosed to the male character by taboo violation, then the crane transforms into the shape of a bird to fly away and can thus not accomplish the function of marriage and acquisition of riches). This type of analysis is controversial because typical hero-

functions are attributed to the helper/donor. In this tale the main male character is granted functions “е а Δ Г З Pneg Св contr”, while the character of the crane-wife embodies the donor, helper and princess. This is not new to the tale because Propp notes that for grateful animals it is typical to act in several spheres of action.<sup>48</sup> According to Propp, it is also possible for the helper to act in the spheres of the hero.<sup>49</sup> Propp also points out that one sphere could be divided between several characters acting in the tale. So, in this tale we see how the animal inhabits three spheres, while it acts as a hero in functions X, T, Y (such function-swap is also seen in the tales of this sequel S112, S113, S116). Here we have a very interesting phenomenon – the female-animal character is granted more “power” in the fairy tale: at a certain point the female *persona* becomes a leading character of the *sujet* (we can speak here of a complex 2-step tale: in step 1 the main character is the man, and the story ends with marriage and acquisition of riches, while in step 2 the crane-wife and the man swap roles as protagonists and the story ends with separation or Св contr.). This could be a result of tale contamination (two separate tales merge) but it is most probably this morphological feature that confirms Kawai’s theory about the feminine Japanese psyche as opposed to the masculine European one, which prohibits female and male characters from swapping roles effortlessly (we do not consider tales of female heroes).

In this type of tales we have often the function of the wedding Св appearing twice but with contrary meaning. The first marriage is of the male character as main role, and it is a happy-end story. The plot develops further into a new story with a very active female character and a marriage again, yet this time the end is unexpectedly “unhappy”, and the story ends with the separation of the two partners. This complex tale develops gradually and is reminiscent of the examples given by Propp.<sup>50</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

By studying tales of the group of “celestial wife” and by applying Propp’s method of morphological analysis, we could find answers to several questions. First, Propp’s morphology is applicable to Japanese fairy tales, even to the most

48 PROPP, 2001:94.

49 PROPP, 2001:97.

50 PROPP, 2001:148–156.

specific ones. The example we have studied – The tale of the Crane-wife – is considered typically “Japanese” and is referred to in most works dealing with the characteristics of the Japanese fairy tale. The 31 functions that Propp elaborated were found in the Japanese texts but no new ones. Propp’s functions, however, must be read and understood in a new way in order to be applied directly to the Japanese tales. The transformation of animal into human and the retransformation is a remnant of earlier folklore strata and could either be ignored or marked N. The sequence of functions is not disrupted, yet some possible derivations may occur. Sequence of functions may explain the circular plot development of Japanese tales, suggested by Ozawa, where the end of the tale implies a new beginning. Functions in their negative and contrary state may explain the difficulties in perception of Japanese fairy tales by the European public. A new combination pattern stands out, and there is a specific distribution of roles between *dramatis personae*, which is more explicit than in the European tradition. In a complex 2-step tale the male character is the protagonist in the first stage, while the female-animal character is in the second. The new reading and understanding of functions may also solve some issues regarding the character of the Japanese fairy tale and could offer explanations for the reception of Japanese tales by the European public.

Of course, only a limited number of tales was considered in this study. It will be of great interest to apply Propp’s morphology to tales about the supernatural bridegroom and tales of the supernatural birth, which are also representative for the Japanese folktale heritage. Nevertheless, the study above managed very briefly to solve some dilemmas concerning Japanese fairy tales by applying a structuralistic methodology, which has not been carried out so far via Propp’s approach. Although the study has proved the applicability of Propp’s morphology, it will be worthwhile to examine the extent of this applicability in future by applying it to further texts in order to answer more questions related to the Japanese folktale research.

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## Appendix 1: The thirty-one functions of Propp:

I.	e	A family member leaves home
II.	б	Interdiction (“don’t do”, prohibition)
III.	в	The interdiction is violated
IV.	в	The villain makes and attempt at reconnaissance
V.	w	The villain gains information about the victim
VI.	г	The villain attempts to deceive the victim (gaining confidence)
VII.	g	Victim taken in by deception
VIII.	А	Villain causes harm/injury or a lack appears
IX.	В	Misfortune or lack made known
X.	С	Hero-seeker agrees to or decides upon counteraction
XI.	↑	Hero leaves home
XII.	Д	Hero tested by donor
XIII.	Г	Hero reacts to donor
XIV.	Z	Hero acquires a magic object
XV.	Р	Hero is transferred to the object sought
XVI.	Б	Hero and villain join in direct combat
XVII.	К	Hero is branded (mark)
XVIII.	П	Villain is defeated
XIX.	Л	Initial misfortune or lack is resolved
XX.	↓	Hero returns
XXI.	Пр	Hero is pursued
XXII.	Сп	Hero is rescued form pursuit
XXIII.	Х	Hero arrives unrecognised
XXIV.	Φ	False hero claims
XXV.	З	Difficult task proposed to hero
XXVI.	Р	Task accomplished
XXVII.	У	Hero is recognised
XXVIII.	О	False hero/ villain is exposed
XXIX.	Т	Hero is given a new appearance
XXX.	Н	Villain is punished
XXXI.	Св	Marriage of hero and acquisition of riches

## Appendix 2: Dramatis Personae and Function distribution:

1.	Antagonist	А, Б, Пр
2.	Donor	Д, З
3.	Helper	Р, Л, Сп, Р, Т
4.	Princes	З, Ж, О, У, Н, Св
5.	Dispatcher	В
6.	Hero	С↑, Г, С
7.	False Hero	С↑, Гneg, Φ

Appendix 3: Stranger-wife tales *irui-nyōbō-tan* 異類女房譚

S number = Number as in *Nihon mukashi-banashi shūsei*, Keigo Seki

AT number = Aarne–Thompson Index of types

SE number = Types of Japanese folktales by Keigo Seki (English edition)

1.	The serpent wife (S110)	蛇女房	AT 413C	SE141
2.	The frog wife (S111)	蛙女房	AT 413E	SE142
3.	The clam wife (S112)	蛤女房	AT 413B	SE143
4.	The fish wife (S113)	魚女房	AT 470B	SE144
5.	The dragon palace bride (S114)	竜宮女房	AT 470B	SE145
6.	The crane wife (S115)	鶴女房	AT 413A	SE146
7.	The fox wife (S116)	狐女房	AT 413D/671	SE147
8.	The cat wife (S117)	猫女房	AT NO	SE148
9.	The heavenly wife (S118)	天人女房	AT 400	SE149
10.	The flute player (S119)	笛吹婿	AT 312D	SE150