

2023

## Exploring the Philippine Society and Culture in Monkey Folktales

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Date received: February 10, 2023

Revision accepted: March 29, 2023

Similarity index: 0%

### Abstract

This paper analyzes the structure and content of Philippine folktales featuring monkeys (hereinafter referred to as “Filipino monkey folktales”) based on a literature review to explore Philippine society and culture. Subsequently, this paper highlights 20 cases of Filipino monkey folktales. These cases are classified: (1) nine villain type, (2) six human-origin type, (3) two prince type, (4) two trickster type, and (5) one demon type. It is observed that 15 out of 20 cases were “villain type” and “human-origin type.” Thus, it can be deduced that Filipino monkey folktales present relatively negative images of monkeys. This depiction reflects the negative aspects of human thinking and behavior, and it is thought that monkey folktales are often told to educate children and maintain social order. In other words, it can be said that monkey folktales are an honest projection of Filipino morals, human relationships, and social norms. For Filipinos, the monkey that appears in folklore is thought to play the role of a mirror, helping them reflect on themselves to ensure that their behavior is socially acceptable; thus, monkey folktales emphasize social norms. Finally, this paper concludes that the reciprocal relationships that Filipinos value the most are social and cultural norms, contrary to the cunning and selfishness exhibited by monkeys in folklore.

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*Keywords:* culture, Filipinos, monkey folktales, society, the Philippines

This paper comprises a literature survey and content analysis of the oral literature on monkeys in the Philippines. This study investigates Philippine folktales featuring monkeys (hereinafter referred to as “Filipino monkey folktales”) to understand the idea of Filipino people regarding monkeys.

In folktales worldwide, monkeys usually appear as cultural heroes or tricksters (Cormier, 2017, p. 2); some examples include Sun Wukong in China and Hanuman in India (Matsumura, 2005, p. 193). However, such folklore does not usually depict monkeys in a negative light. Hence, this section clarifies the nature of monkeys appearing in world folktales based on previous research.

In Japan, “The Momotaro,” translated as “Peach Boy,” is a popular folktale. In this tale, a monkey becomes a human retainer along with a dog and pheasant, assisting its master in exterminating ogres (Seki, 1997a, pp. 12–15). Further, in “The Monkey Liver,” a monkey escapes trouble by deceiving a turtle that seeks his liver (Shimono, 1974, pp. 220–221). In “The Saru Jizo,” translated as “a monkey guardian deity of children,” monkeys offer money to an old man who worships Saru Jizo, and when a villainous old man pretends to be Saru Jizo, they drop him into the river to punish him (Seki, 1997a, pp. 72–74). Moreover, in “Sarukani Gassen,” translated as “The Battle of the Monkey and the Crab,” a cunning monkey is killed/hurt as a result of a dispute with a crab (or toad/pheasant) over food (Kusuyama, 1983, pp. 184–193; Seki, 1997b, pp. 145–155). In “Sarumukoiri,” translated as “Monkey Bridegroom,” an unfortunate woman who is forced to marry a monkey, tricks him into driving him to the bottom of a valley (Inada, 1999, pp. 239–244).

In China, Sun Wukong, originally a rough and lustful monkey god, is transformed into a suitor in the tale “Journey to the West” (Nakano, 1985, p. 69). Moreover, there are folktales in India similar to “The Monkey Liver,” wherein a monkey deceives a crocodile (Babbitt, 2015, pp. 3–9), as well as stories about a son who turns into a monkey after his stepmother treats him wickedly (Smith, 1926, p. 375). In Brazilian folktales, on the other hand, a monkey is portrayed as a trickster who, after borrowing food from chickens, foxes, dogs, and tigers, gets the fox to eat the chicken, the dog to eat the fox, and the monkey to get away from the tiger (Elswit, 2015, p. 79).

Meanwhile, in the Caribbean, there is a folktale about the origin of the monkeys’ appearance: a monkey insulted a turtle. Coming to blows, the monkey concaved the turtle’s chest, and the turtle flattened the monkey’s face (Sherzer, 2003, pp. 71–79). A folktale similar to “The Monkey Liver” can also be found in this region (Ray, 2020, Scene 1). In an African folktale from Cameroon, a monkey tricks a chameleon into sanctioning a human being; consequently, it is treated similarly by the chameleon (Eguchi, 2004, pp. 158–161). Tanzanian folktales describe the ignorance of monkeys who try to save fish struggling in the water, only to drown themselves (Eguchi, 1999, pp. 6–7, 2000, pp. 107–108; Yebakima, 2019, pp. 109–110). On the other hand, a folktale shows a monkey revenging a lion or a hyena that previously deceived him (Eguchi, 2000, pp. 94–95). In summary, in folktales worldwide, monkeys are depicted as ignorant and furtive beings who belittle and deceive others; on the contrary, they are also presented as submissive and witty. Additionally, versions of folktales such as “The Monkey Liver” suggest that humans have a universally similar notion of monkeys, although this phenomenon may also be attributed to human migration history. Thus, human conceptions of monkeys are diverse and cannot be taken as a whole.

Therefore, this paper aims to elucidate the form in which Filipinos interpret Filipino monkey folktales and how these folktales project Philippine society and culture.

This article is a substantially revised version of Tsuji (2022a).

## Materials and Methods

This paper analyzes the structure and content of Filipino monkey folktales in literature. The literature review identified 20 cases of Filipino monkey folktales. After analysis, they are classified into the following categories: (1) nine (45%) “villain” type, (2) six (30%) “human origin” type, (3) two (10%) “prince” type folktales, (4) two (10%) “trickster” type, and (5) one (5%) “demon” type. First, the “villain” type folktales are characterized by monkeys appearing as villains that taunt others. Second, “human origin” type folktales are mainly in the form wherein an individual is transformed into a monkey appearance when their negligent behavior incurs the wrath of a transcendent being. Third, in the “prince” type folktales, a woman is forced to marry a monkey; subsequently, the monkey transforms into a prince, thus making the woman happy. Fourth, the “trickster” type folktales feature a monkey with the characteristics of a trickster (a prankster who plays tricks on others but also reverses the order of nature and society). Finally, the “demon” type folktales feature a monkey that has a demonic nature.

The folktales described in this article were summarized by the author from the original source. Broad details of the folktales are presented. Among the recorded folktales, those of the same type are integrated and presented accordingly. In such cases, brackets are placed in folklore to supplement similarities. For Aarne-Thompson Type Index (AT classification), firstly systematized by Antti Aarne and developed by Stith Thompson, indicates the type of folklore; examples of the index’s correspondence are shown in the remarks. This index is an important indicator of the similarity between world folktales. However, the purpose of this study is not to explore the typology of folktales.

## Results and Discussion

### Cases and Analyses: Monkeys in Philippine Folktales

#### (1) *Villain-type*

##### Case 1. “The Monkey and the Turtle” found among the Ilocano, Kalinga, and Tinguian

A monkey and turtle found a banana tree (or planted a banana tree together). The monkey selected the top half of the fruiting banana tree, and the turtle got the bottom half. The monkey climbed the tree and began to eat the fruit. Unable to climb the tree, the turtle asked the monkey to pick bananas for him (turtle). However, the monkey hit the turtle with an unripe banana (or banana peel/fruit on his butt/monkey shit). After some time, the monkey fell asleep. Feeling angry with the monkey’s behavior, the turtle planted sharp-pointed bamboo sticks (or sharp-pointed shells/thorns) around the banana tree. When getting down from the banana tree, the monkey was impaled by the sharp bamboo, thus dying. The turtle then cut (or roasted) the monkey’s flesh and fed it to other monkeys, who were friends of the dead monkey. Upon learning of the turtle’s actions, the outraged monkeys tied stones to the turtle and drowned it in the lake— however, the turtle surfaced by sitting atop a large fish. Subsequently, the monkeys also jumped into the lake with stones tied around their waists to catch the big fish; instead, they drowned. Only one pregnant monkey remained alive, but the turtle drowned her, as well (or the monkeys called the monster to drink the lake water to try to catch the turtle. However, when the crab cut the monster’s belly with scissors, the water overflowed and the monkeys drowned) (Cole, 1915, pp. 195–196; Cole, 1916, pp. 176–178; Ratcliff, 1949, pp. 287–288; Coronel, 1967, pp. 219–221; Eugenio, 1989, pp. 7–8; Yamada, 1989, pp. 422–423; Ramos, 1998a, pp. 48–49; Fansler, 2006, pp. 471–476; Aquino, 2007, pp. 187–191; Bayliss, 2013, pp. 185–191; pp. 223–224).

This folktale has the AT classification (AT9B), and similar folktales are found in the following parts of the world: Japan (similar to “Sarukani Gassen”) (Kusuyama, 1983, pp. 184–193; Seki, 1997b, pp. 145–155), eastern coastal and island regions of Asia (Onohara, 2004, p. 73), Africa (Eguchi, 2000, pp. 72-73), and

Borneo and Java (Cole, 1916, p. 178). The deception between monkeys and turtles can also be confirmed worldwide with the folk tale of “A Monkey’s Heart is Medicine” (“The Monkeys’ Liver”) (Uther, 2011, p. 63). The turtle is wiser than the monkey, and the monkey often ends up dead as a result of a fierce battle of wits between the two (Ramos, 1998a, pp. 57–60)<sup>1</sup>.

### Case 2. “The Clever Monkey and the Crocodile” found among the Tagalog

The clever monkey and crocodile were friends. One day, the crocodile’s wife (or mother) fell ill. The only remedy for her illness was feeding her a monkey’s liver (or lungs/kidneys). The crocodile decided to obtain his friend’s liver. It called the monkey to the riverside and invited the monkey, who could not swim, to go to the other side of the river on its back. The monkey accepts the crocodile’s offer and climbs on the crocodile’s back. On the way across the river, the crocodile told him the truth. The surprised monkey tactfully told the crocodile that his liver was hanging on a mango (or guava/macopa [Malayan phtomomom]) tree by the river and that they had to return to get it. Believing the monkey’s story, the crocodile carried the monkey back to the riverside. The monkey then climbed the mango tree and taunted the crocodile for his foolishness, telling him to climb the tree if he wanted his liver (Eugenio, 1982, pp. 270–271, 1989: pp. 1–3; Fansler, 2006, pp. 471–476; Aquino, 2007, pp. 199–200). In a similar folktale by Ramos (1998a, pp. 57–60, 65–68), the monkey outwitted the crocodile by asking a farmer to help it (Eugenio, 1982, pp. 270–271).

These folktales express how the monkey is witty while the crocodile is foolish (Tsuji, 2021a, p. 23). This folktale has the AT classification (AT91) and is thought to be connected to the “Monkey Liver” folktales from Japan, India, and the Caribbean (Shimono, 1974, pp. 220–221; Nagasawa, 2005, p. 169; Babbitt, 2015, pp. 3–9; Ray, 2020, Scene 1). Similar folktales can also be identified in Africa (Eguchi, 1999, pp. 27–42).

### Case 3. “The Monkey and the Crocodile”

Monkeys and crocodiles are enemies. One day, the monkey king learned that many bananas were on the other side of the lake. The monkey king wanted to eat the bananas but hesitated to ask the crocodile king’s help to cross the lake. Finally, the monkey king made up his mind and visited the crocodile. The monkey king asked the crocodile the number of his servants, later saying that his servants numbered higher. He promised to take the crocodile to show his servants. On the pretext of counting the crocodile’s servants, the monkey king asked the crocodiles to float in a line on the lake. The crocodile king called upon his servants to line up. The wise monkey king walked on the crocodile’s back and began to count the crocodiles. Subsequently, when he reached the other shore, the monkey king jumped out and thanked the crocodile king for letting him cross the lake. He then merrily headed to the banana forest (Eugenio, 1989, pp. 4–5).

This folktale probably originated from the same root as the Japanese folktale “Inaba no Shirousagi” translated as “The White Hare of Inaba.” In this folktale, the rabbit is skinned for disrespecting the crocodile and the shark (Kurano, 1963, p. 43). In the Vanuatu folktale, the chicken is plucked for its feathers (Runa et al., 2007, pp. 1–10); however, in “The Monkey and Crocodile”, the crocodile does not seek revenge on the monkey.

In contrast, a similar folktale involves a monkey tricking an angry crocodile into eating red pepper and tormenting it (Fansler, 2006, pp. 471–476)<sup>2</sup>. In Filipino folktales featuring monkeys and crocodiles, the monkey has the upper hand in a power relationship. Furthermore, in the Philippines, monkeys are

1 In the Philippines and Indonesia, there are many folktales about monkeys drowning or being punished by getting their hands caught in the shells of other animals (Miyoshi, 1942, p. 86; Goto, 2017, p. 223).

2 Also, in the Philippines and Indonesia, there are many stories about monkeys tricking crocodiles and sharks that results in the monkeys running on their backs to the shore; however, when the deception gets discovered, the crocodiles and sharks bite the trickster monkeys in these stories (Goto, 2017, p. 223).

sometimes replaced by mouse-deer (Tsuji, 2021b, p. 54, 2022b, p. 38; Yu et al., 2022, p. 51). Although this folktale can be seen as a “trickster type” (Yamada, 2017, pp. 162), this paper focuses on the negative aspects of the monkey highlighted in the tale and classifies it as a “villain type.” In trickster-type folktales, monkeys do not necessarily appear to be bad entities. Globally, in such accounts, monkeys transform into jackals, foxes, rabbits, and chickens; animals unknown to the region are transformed into known animals in the stories (Aarne, 1973, p. 47; Uther, 2011, p. 45).

#### Case 4. “The Monkey and the Dragonfly” found among the Bicolano

Feeling exhausted, a dragonfly rested in a tree inhabited by monkeys. However, the monkeys arrogantly chased the dragonfly away. When the king of the dragonflies learned this, he declared war on the king of the monkeys. As the two sides began to fight, the monkeys with their clubs swung them at the dragonflies perched on their foreheads. The dragonflies dodged the monkeys’ attack, and the foolish monkeys struck themselves in the head and thus killed themselves (Fansler, 2006, pp. 477–479). Two similar Philippine folktales, “The Monkey and the Butterfly” and “The Monkey and the Sea Cucumber”, are found among the Sama. In the former, the monkeys attempted to strike down butterflies perched on their foreheads, swinging their clubs down on their own foreheads, thus killing themselves. Only one monkey survived and coexisted with the butterflies (Ramos, 1998b, pp. 66–68; Schroeder, 2019, p. 84). In the latter, monkeys became entangled in the sticky substance of the sea cucumber and drowned at high tide (Schroeder, 2019, pp. 83–84; Kauman Sama Online, 2021, pp. 2–19).

This form of folktale has the AT classification (AT222), and similar folktales are widely distributed worldwide.

#### Case 5. “The *Bakwa* and the Monkey” found among the Ilonggo

A *bakwa* (blackbird) and a monkey lived in a bamboo grove. They were friends. One day, the monkey asked the *bakwa* to alert him at sunrise because he wished to catch a bird. When the sun rose, the *bakwa* cried out, alerting the monkey. To his surprise, the monkey caught the *bakwa*. The outraged *bakwa* shouted, “Aren’t we friends?” However, the monkey replied in the negative. The monkey plucked the *bakwa*’s feathers and later, laughing, left the *bakwa* on a tree stump. Eventually, the *bakwa* recovered from his wounds and was able to fly. He devoted his time to building boats. One day, marveling at the *bakwa*’s boat, the monkey asked him where he was going. The *bakwa* replied that he was going to Borneo; the monkey offered to accompany him. The *bakwa* agreed to this and asked the monkey to tie a stone to his waist, saying he would need additional weight to keep the boat afloat. The *bakwa* and the monkey row the boat out to sea. When the boat began to sink with the weight, the *bakwa* flew into the air. The monkey begged for help, but the *bakwa* taunted him, saying they were not friends. The *bakwa* returned to his nest, and the monkey sank into the sea (Esteban et al., 2011, pp. 140–142).

This folktale is a play of revenge by the *bakwa* against the arrogant monkey, and the monkey loses his life as a consequence. The tale also shows the foolish side of the monkey.

#### Case 6. “The Monkey, the Turtle, and the Crocodile” found among the Tagalog

There was once a monkey who deceived everyone. The monkey had many enemies. One day, the monkey met a turtle and a crocodile, exhausted on their journey. The monkey decided to trick these animals. He approached the turtle and crocodile and offered them a place to stay, including food. The turtle and crocodile followed the monkey and ate pumpkins from a field; a short while later, the monkey disappeared. After the human owner of the plantation discovered what had happened, he killed the turtle and crocodile (Eugenio, 1989, pp. 25–26; Fansler, 2006, pp. 480–481).

This folktale presents the image of the monkey as someone who deceives and misleads others. It also shows the poor quality of his cunning, which takes the lives of others. This folktale is also thought to convey the lesson that one should not trust others easily.

**Case 7. “The Folktale of the Monkey” found among the Ilocano**

When a monkey climbed a tree, a thorn got stuck in his tail. When he asked a barber to help him, the barber cut off the tip of the monkey’s tail using a razor blade. The angry monkey demanded that the barber provide him with a razor blade. Later, the monkey met an older woman and exchanged the razor blade for firewood. The monkey then met another woman in town and traded the firewood for a cake. The monkey with the cake encountered a dog who bit the monkey, resulting in the monkey’s death. The dog then flattened the cake (Cole, 1916, pp. 183–184).

This folktale depicts that what the monkey is supposed to get does not belong to him. Furthermore, the monkey is viewed as an unpleasant being.

**Case 8. “Two Cats and a Monkey”**

Two cats found a rice cake on their journey. They attempted to divide it equally. However, they quarreled over the size of the bisected rice cake. They asked a monkey who was passing by for help. The monkey put the rice cake halves on a scale. One of the cakes is heavier than the other, so the monkey bit into it, saying he would adjust the weight. Again, the weights of the rice cake pieces were not balanced, and the monkey ended up eating both rice cake pieces. He even said he had settled the matter fairly (Wrigglesworth, 1981, pp. 43–44).

This folktale illustrates the cunning of the monkey. In this tale, the monkey is smarter than the cats. Thus, this tale shows that the monkeys’ cunning is preeminent in the animal kingdom.

**Case 9. “An Old Couple and a Monkey”**

A long time ago, an old couple who were initially tolerant of monkeys lived in a forest clearing. However, many monkeys gradually began to devour the bananas the couple had cultivated. The old couple discussed this matter with the monkeys but could not accept their claim that the bananas belonged to them. Consequently, the couple set out to exterminate the monkeys, but to no avail. Therefore, they devised a plan. The wife pretended that her husband was dead and locked the monkeys inside the house when they came to see him. The couple then eradicated the monkeys (Ramos, 1998a, pp. 108–110).

This folktale addresses the battle of wits between monkeys and humans. As a result of rough monkeys ravaging bananas grown by humans, the humans kill the monkeys. The point of eradicating the monkeys shows the extent to which they cause a nuisance to humans. This tale also shows that the wisdom of humans surpasses that of monkeys.

**(2) Human-origin Type**

**Case 10. “The First Monkey” found among the Tagalog**

The father (or mother) was unrepentant when he criticized his son, who was hated in the village for bullying his younger siblings, climbing trees, and throwing stones at passersby. Eventually, his son transformed into a monkey when he beat him with a whip (or ladle). As a result, the boy lost the ability to speak, his body got covered with hair, and he grew a tail. God punished the boy by transforming him into a monkey, who fled into the forest. Thus, the boy became the first monkey on Earth (Jocano, 1969, pp. 151–152; Eugenio, 1996, pp. 366–368).

This folktale is thought to warn children that they will be transformed into monkeys if they misbehave. This shows that being a monkey is shameful for people who share this folktale. Further, we can also read the cultural background in which beating children with a whip or ladle is a socially acceptable way of disciplining children.

#### **Case 11. “The First Monkey” found among the Tagalog, Ilocano, and Tinguian**

A lazy and bored girl (or boy) living with a patient cloth weaver goddess (or an old woman/mother) defied the goddess' command to wash cotton and make her own clothes. The girl wore fur (or threw coconut shells to the goddess). Angered by the girl's laziness, the goddess hit her with a stick (or whipped/poked the stick up her anus). The girl then transformed into a monkey with a tail. Cotton spread over her body, turned brown and became monkey fur. The goddess told the monkey to live in the forest trees and find food for herself. Thus, the first monkey was born with fur and a tail. People drove monkeys out of town, and they came to live in the forest (Cole, 1915, p. 190; Cole, 1916, pp. 202–203; Eugenio, 1996, pp. 366–368; Ramos, 1998a, pp. 14–17; Fansler, 2006, pp. 527–529).

In this folktale, also, a child is transformed into a monkey after disobeying an adult. The difference between monkeys and humans is also distinguished by the presence or absence of fur and a tail.

#### **Case 12. “An Old Man became a Monkey” found among the Maranao**

There once was an old man who was a selfish orchard owner. He did not share the harvest of his orchard with his neighbors. One day, while some children were climbing trees in the orchard and picking fruits, he threw stones at them, injuring them. When their parents learned of this, they consulted a wise man who lived in the cave. The wise man pretended to be a beggar and begged the old man for fruit; however, the old man refused. Then, as soon as the wise man said, ‘You will regret your selfishness,’ the old man's appearance changed to that of a monkey (Eugenio, 1996, pp. 366–368).

Some folktales between the Maranao and Tinguian say that the first monkey was a boy (or girl) who stole food and was hit by his sister (or mother) with a ladle. The monkey's tail is said to be made of a ladle, and children are careful to hit others with the ladle to avoid becoming monkeys (Cole, 1915, p. 190; Eugenio, 1996, p. 368). A folktale from Cotabato City, Maguindanao, Mindanao, is similar: a mother, angry at her children's quarrels, whipped them, and the children who fled to the shore became a people called Samal, while those who fled to the mountains became monkeys (Coronel, 1967, p. 39). A similar folktale can also be identified in which a king and queen hold a lavish party and ill-treat an old beggar woman who shows up at the party, making everyone laugh; this causes the old woman, now transformed into a beautiful woman, to turn all the partygoers into monkeys (Aquino, 2007, pp. 202–203).

#### **Case 13. “Why Monkeys are Clever” found among the Tagalog**

Once upon a time, a poor man had seven sons. Except for the youngest son, they all cooperated and efficiently supported their father. Later, a plague raged in the town, and all but the father and the youngest son died. The father lay on the floor, but his son did not care for him. He fled to the forest, and his father drew his last breath. God cursed him and took away his ability to speak. He then sentenced him to live in the forest as a monkey. This reflects that monkeys cannot talk but inherit their cleverness from humans (Eugenio, 1996, p. 396; Fansler, 2006, pp. 527–529).

This folktale shows that, in addition to mischief and laziness, filial neglect also transforms children into monkey figures. It then states that the monkey is an incarnation of man and that its propensity to misbehave originates from man.

**Case 14. "How the Child became a Monkey" found among the Bukidnon**

One day, a mother took her children to boil dye leaves in a pot to dye their clothes. When she stirred the dye with a spoon, she burned it. The children laughed at her and subsequently transformed into monkeys. The transformed monkeys' claws were black because they were helping their mother to dye their clothes (Cole, 1916, p. 130; Cole, 1956, p. 129).

In this folktale, a child who laughs at the misfortune of others is transformed into a monkey. This type of monkey folktale is considered to have a moral, educational function for children. The monkey is, thus, recognized as an amoral being. Folktales in the above form are widely distributed throughout the mountainous areas of Luzon, the Philippine lowlands, and Mindanao. In many cases, a boy who does not listen to his mother's instructions is transformed into a monkey, a lazy or greedy man is transformed into a monkey, or a grandson who ridicules his grandmother is transformed into a monkey. Thus, transformation into a monkey occurs as a warning against laziness, selfishness, and disrespect (Eugenio, 1996, pp. xl–xli, pp. 355–356). This may also be linked to Filipino social culture, which is averse to stinginess and endorses respecting elders.

**Case 15. "Creation of the Monkey" found among the Tagalog**

When the Creator and His servant descended to Earth, He created man. The servant, jealous of the Creator's power, also tried to create a man. However, he molded the clay into a human form and attached a tail-like projection to the human form. Thus, a monkey was born (Eugenio, 1996, pp. 365–366; Fansler, 2006, pp. 527–529).

This folktale is thought to originate in the "Old Testament" and indicates that the monkey was created as a result of failure in creating man. The notion that humans are superior to monkeys can be, thus, seen in this folktale.

**(3) Prince Type****Case 16. "Juan in a Monkey's Skin" found among the Kapampangan and Bicolano**

A childless human couple adopted a baby monkey. When the monkey, named Juan (or Hoang), grew up, he ran away from home in search of a wife. One day, he dreamed of a beautiful princess. He told the king about his dream. In turn, the king of the castle told Juan that if he brought the princess to the castle, he would marry her, but that if he failed, he would behead him. Juan went out to look for the princess. On his way, he met a bird who was in trouble. He asked her to bring him a magic ring as payment for helping her. When he got the ring from the bird, he frightened the wizards guarding the princess and built a bridge to the island where the princess lives. When Juan met the princess, he offered her the ring and asked her to marry him. He returned to the castle with the princess, but the king threw her out of the castle to marry a monkey. Juan confided to the princess that he was a human and shed his monkey skin. He then took the form of a young human man. Thus, Juan became a prince and lived happily ever after with the princess (Fansler, 2006, pp. 228–233).

This folktale is of the "animal groom" type and addresses the marriage between a monkey and a human. The monkey uses his wits and solves a difficult problem to marry the princess. The king's dislike of the marriage between the monkey and the princess suggests that man's dislike of animals is at the root of the story. This aversion makes it difficult for monkeys and humans to be married. Therefore, this folktale concludes the story amicably by transforming it into a marriage between humans, with the monkey as an incarnation of the prince.



Moreover, the monkey is an incarnation of human youth, and the negative aspects of the monkey, such as his wiles and stupidity, are, thus, erased. This folktale, which shows that the monkey is a human being once he peels off his skin, can be positioned as a tale of transformation. Alternatively, it can be classified as a “molting-type folktale” (Goto, 2017, pp. 253–259). Hence, the monkey is also a human incarnation, and in the Philippines, it cannot be said that the monkey is a bad guy. Because this folktale belongs to the AT classification (AT425B), it is likely to be borrowed from other regions.

#### **Case 17. “The Monkey King” found among the Bicolano**

Once there was a royal palace located by the forest. A witch who lived in the forest did not get along with the king. The witch hatched a plot against the king. She made a handsome prince fall in love at first sight with a maiden who was an incarnation of the witch. The prince confided his desire to marry the maiden, but the king strongly objected. Consequently, the prince decided to marry another woman. When the witch learned of this, she became ferocious. The witch told him that the royal family would be ruined and that he and his family and servants would be transformed into animals. The prince then transformed into a monkey. However, his curse could be broken if a maiden falls in love with him. The monkey prince kept waiting for a maiden to break the spell. One morning, a beautiful maiden appeared. Heartbroken, she was about to commit suicide in the forest. When the monkey prince appeared before her, she initially got startled and screamed. However, she saw the nobility in the monkey’s eyes and gradually became more sympathetic. One day, the maiden’s admiration for the monkey turned into love. When the maiden awoke, she found herself in the palace. Gone was the strange monkey, and a handsome young prince lay in his place. When the prince woke up, he kissed the maiden on her lips. Then, the king and his retainers changed from an animal to a human form, breaking the spell cast by the witch. The prince married the maiden. When the king grew old, the prince succeeded the throne and ruled the kingdom wisely (Ramos, 1998b, pp. 73–76).

In this folktale, the prince, transformed into a monkey by a witch, meets the maiden in despair. Initially, the maiden hates the monkey; however, she gradually changes her opinion as his dignity impressed her. It is worthwhile, and the prince returns to his original form. Then, when he kisses the maiden, the spell breaks; all is restored, and they get married. This folktale can also be classified into the “animal groom” type.

#### **(4) *Trickster Type***

##### **Case 18. “The Monkey, the Dog, and the Buffalo” found among the Tagalog**

The monkey, dog, and buffalo were friends. Becoming tired of city life, they went to the countryside to hunt. On the first day, the buffalo prepared food for his friends. Subsequently, a forest giant appeared, defeated the buffalo, and devoured the food. The next day, the dog prepared food. Again, the giant appeared, threatened the dog, and ate the food. The next day, the monkey prepared food. When the giant appeared, the monkey politely entertained him and asked him to sit on a chair. The giant fell into a hole dug underneath when the monkey pulled the chair away. The monkey filled the hole with earth, but when the dog and buffalo returned, they dug the hole back up, and the giant was still alive underneath. He jumped out of the hole and killed the dog and the buffalo. The monkey escaped into the tree and got away. One day, while walking through the forest, the monkey found a beehive above the vine. Suddenly, the giant appeared. The monkey told him the king had ordered him to ring a bell every hour. When the giant pulled the vine, the bees flew around angrily and chastised the giant. The giant became angry and sought the monkey, only to find him playing with a python. The monkey offered the giant his belt (i.e., the python). The giant wanted the beautifully colored belt and ordered the monkey to drape it on him. When the monkey wrapped the python around the giant, the python strangled the giant (Fansler, 2006, pp. 60–64).

This folktale represents the monkey as a wise being, unlike the buffalo and dog. The story depicts how

the monkey tactfully used bees and pythons to kill the giant. Another similar folktale is “The Wise Monkey and the Foolish Giant” in which a crocodile finally eats the giant (Ratcliff, 1949, p. 287).

**Case 19. “Monkey and Juan Pusong Tambi-Tambi” found among the Visayas**

A man named Juan Pusong Tambi-Tambi (or Masoy) captured a monkey that was destroying his fields. However, he let the monkey go because he said he would return the favor one day. Later, the monkey visited Juan and advised him to marry a princess (or the king’s/the village chief’s daughter). The monkey went to the royal palace with stolen gold and told tall tales about his wealthy master, Juan. After the monkey visited the palace several times, flashing gold and silver, the king wished to see Juan. The monkey stole the clothes of a wealthy merchant bathing in the river and showed them to the king as his master’s clothes. As the monkey told Juan to marry the princess, he followed the monkey’s instructions. The monkey tactfully took possession of a castle that once belonged to a monster by exterminating the witch living in it and made around him answer that Juan is rich; thus, convincing the king. The princess did not like Juan’s looks, but she had to marry him (or she would die of a broken heart/she would live happily ever after). Then, Juan became king, and the monkey became the vizier (Ratcliff, 1949, p. 289; Ramos, 1998b, pp. 81–88; Fansler, 2006, pp. 413–419).

This folktale is isomorphic to “Puss in Boots” (Stephens, 2018, pp. 23–30) and can be inferred to have arisen through borrowing<sup>3</sup>. The monkey plays the role of a trickster who makes a poor man wealthy.

Although the princess does not like Juan because of his appearance, as this folktale states, it is the animal that the bride fears and dislikes (Lüthi, 2017, p. 31), and it is likely that she dislikes Juan because he was associated with the monkey. Thus, this folktale shows that even if he becomes a success, the monkey is still perceived negatively in the Philippines.

**(5) Demon Type**

**Case 20. “Pet Monkey” found among the Tagalog**

A pious man owned a monkey who obeyed him well. One day, when a priest visited the man, the monkey hid. The clergyman, distrustful of the monkey in the corner of the room, made a cross sign toward the monkey and sprinkled holy water on him. Subsequently, an explosion sounded like a gunshot, and the monkey disappeared with a puff of smoke. Therefore, according to the clergyman, the monkey is an evil spirit, and the man was not cast into hell as he did the cross signs nightly before bed (Eugenio, 2005a, pp. 192–193).

This folktale depicts the monkey as the demon incarnate. It expresses man’s distrust of monkeys and hints at the difficulty of a symbiotic relationship between monkeys and humans.

**The Monkeys and the Filipinos**

These 20 examples of Filipino monkey folktales were classified into five typologies, and their contents were analyzed. In terms of the number of sources, the most popular Filipino monkey folktales are “The First Monkey” (n=16), “The Monkey and the Turtle” (AT9B) (n=10), and “The Clever Monkey and the Crocodile” (AT91) (n=7). The “Monkey and the Turtle” and “The Clever Monkey and the Crocodile” are AT-classified folktales; the same type of folktales can be found worldwide. However, the AT classification of “The First Monkey” is unknown. From the typological viewpoint, the “villain” type folktales and the “monkey originating from humans” type folktales, which accounted for 15 out of 20 cases (75%) in this

<sup>3</sup> Cats replace foxes in an Italian folktale (Calvino, 2004, pp. 260–272).

report, can be regarded as the ones in which monkeys have been overall perceived in a negative light in the Philippines. In the “villain-type folktales,” monkeys can be roughly classified as bad guys who cheat and incite others. The “villain-type folktales” can be roughly unified in depicting monkeys as evil, deceptive, and inducing others to evil; these folktales also show monkeys as stupid. In the “Monkeys’ Human Origin Folktale,” a mischievous or lazy child is transformed into a monkey as punishment. This folktale is also a cautionary tale that bad behavior will result in losing one’s identity by transforming into a monkey who misbehaves. This also indicates that monkeys are beings who were originally humans<sup>4</sup>.

However, this paper also reveals that monkeys have not always been viewed only in a negative light. The “prince-type folktales” and “trickster-type folktales” support this notion. They tell of the happy-go-lucky side of monkeys, such as monkeys transforming themselves into princes or tactfully marrying off poor young men to princesses. Thus, Filipino monkey folktales can be interpreted as creating a paradoxical nature of monkeys, wherein on the one hand, monkeys are viewed negatively, while on the other hand, they are seen as benefactors to humans. However, one can also see the intense dislike of humans regarding monkeys in these folktales. Most Filipino monkey folktales place monkeys in a lower position than humans. This reflects a general Christian or Western worldview supported by the “creation of monkey” folktales. The logic behind this is that monkeys are inferior to humans and cannot be compared to humans.

As mentioned above, Filipino monkey folktales portray monkeys in a relatively negative light. It is thought that this reflects the vice aspects of human thinking and behavior, and that monkey folktales have often been told to educate children and maintain social order not to fall to the monkeys. In this process, the notion that monkeys are cunning and stupid has probably taken root through folktales. Filipinos learn the folktales of “The Monkey and the Turtle” and “The First Monkey” in elementary school. The “Monkey and the Turtle” may have contributed to forming an unwritten rule (Hollsteiner, 1977a, p. 45) or morality that underlies Filipino culture that happiness should be shared with one’s fellow Filipinos. This is because Filipinos most dread being told that they “cannot share” (*wala siyang pakikisama or hindi siya marunong makisama*) (de la Costa, 1971, p. 47). The folktale of the “first monkey” is rooted in the Filipino value of special loyalty to superiors in social life (Lynch, 1967, p. 172; Yengoyan, 2004, p. 22). Profaning one’s superiors can deteriorate the value of social relationships (Hollsteiner, 1967, p. 134), including family and friends, which the average Filipino considers desirable. Furthermore, among the 20 folktales treated in this study, monkeys have also been viewed as objects of murderous intent, with monkeys killed by others in five cases (20%). This implies a norm in Filipino society where acting as the monkeys act in the folktales could lead to death or grievous harm. In other words, the monkey folktale is a good projection of Filipino morality, human relations, and social norms (Tsuji, 2022a, p. 133).

Filipinos’ negative conception of monkeys may be related to the colonial experience of the Philippines. By the 15th century, the Philippines had been heavily influenced by Arabs, <sup>5</sup>Hindus, and the Chinese (Hollsteiner, 1977b, p. 4). <sup>6</sup>Subsequently, the Philippines became a Spanish colony from the early 16th to the late 19th century (1565–1898). During this period, Christianity was propagated. Today, Christian thinking has taken root among the majority (approximately 95%) of the population in the country. The awe of monkeys does not occur in the West (Morris, 2015, pp. 8–9), and Filipinos have a history of

<sup>4</sup> Here, elements like monkey-like hair growing all over the body and a tail are used to instill fear. Specifically, hair has been used repeatedly in legends, works of art, and history to distinguish humans from animals, citizens from barbarians, neighbors from foreigners, and friends from enemies worldwide (Stenn, 2017, p. 90).

<sup>5</sup> The claim that monkeys are not awe-inspiring in Christianity and Western thinking is Western-centric and needs verification.

<sup>6</sup> Thus, the islands of Southeast Asia, including the Philippines, have long been affected by foreign cultures such as Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, and it should be noted that culture and mythology have undergone major transformations (Goto, 2002, p. 10; Lopez, 2006, p. xxii).

being eroded by such Western values.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, in addition to the Spanish colonial experience, the Philippines experienced colonial rule from the US (1898–1946). Today, English is the official language of the Philippines, along with Tagalog, and the English word “monkey” is also defined as a verb “to play with, to misbehave, to play silly games” (Morris, 2015, p. 6).<sup>8</sup> Thus, through the American colonial experience, Filipinos may have developed an even more negative image of monkeys. Additionally, the Philippines experienced colonial rule from Japan (1939–1945). To distance themselves from monkeys, the Japanese projected negative aspects of humans onto them and turned them into scapegoats as funny animals who mischievously imitated humans (Onuki, 1995, p. 14). One can speculate that the multifaceted feelings of the Japanese toward monkeys (Hirose, 1990, p. 34) may have also influenced Filipinos. As mentioned above, the background of the negative perception of monkeys in the Philippines may have been influenced by their long colonial experience.

Thus, the roots of Filipino folktales may include a complex mixture of other factors, such as the migration of people throughout human history, the introduction of Christian values by missionaries, and the introduction of foreign folktales by the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) who formed a part of Filipino culture (Tsuji, 2022, p. 133).<sup>9</sup> I point out here that this is a significant problem that is beyond the scope of this paper.

## Conclusion

This paper brings to light that monkeys in Philippine folktales have been interpreted in a roughly negative way, but on the other hand, there are also cases in which they benefit humans, thus, revealing their ambivalent status. Such ambivalent status can be described as a monkey in the folktale having both good and evil sides or human and animal traits. However, the monkey is predominantly seen as a socially deviant being, embodying the negative aspects of human behavior and thinking in Philippine society and culture. Deviations from the norm are subject to sanctions in real life, and people may have restrained themselves from disrespecting morality by sanctioning monkeys in folktales. For Filipinos, monkeys in folktales are thought to serve as mirrors for self-examination to monitor one’s own words and actions in society and emphasize the importance of norms. It can be concluded that, contrary to the cunning and selfishness of the monkey in folktales, the monkey is symbolic of pursuing the virtues of a culture rooted in reciprocal relationships, which Filipinos value the most.

Monkeys also appear in proverbs and riddles. Although it was not possible to introduce them in detail in this paper, only negative sayings, such as “Even if monkeys are wise, they are still stupid,” have been handed down throughout the Philippines (Eugenio, 2002, pp. 373–374; Alcina, 2004, p. 115). In riddles, monkeys also appear sinful and crude beings, such as “those who are captured and imprisoned for life for no crime” (Eugenio, 2005b, pp. 333–334). Thus, proverbs and riddles also reinforce the negative image of the monkey appearing in folktales. Folktales must be imbued with a base way of thinking, dealing with nature, and dealing with animals that people seem to have without realizing it (Ozawa, 1994, p. 24). Examining Filipino monkey folktales contributed to our understanding of the relationship between monkeys, Filipinos, and humans. I wish to continue developing my research on animal ethnography, starting with Filipino monkey folktales.

7 Monkeys are avoided not only in Christianity but also in Islam which Arabs have influenced. However, in Hindu-infiltrated Bali, Indonesia, monkeys are sacred (Peterson & Riley, 2017, p. 206).

8 The author has confirmed that among the indigenous people of Palawan Island in the Philippines, the suffix “monkey (ujaw)” is added to words to indicate things of low value in general (Tsuji, 2013, p. 115).

9 For example, “The Maiden and the Monkeys” is equivalent to “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” (Ratcliff, 1949, pp. 272–273). In this folktale, a dwarf appears as a monkey.

## **Acknowledgments**

The SPJRD editorial staff supported a lot in the publishing of this paper. The anonymous referees gave me useful and progressive feedback on the draft. Mrs. Alessandra Marie Javier-Tsuji, a consultant at Alliance Française de Manille in the Philippines, generously checked the draft.

This work was partly supported by the JSPS KAKENHI Grant Numbers JP19K01200.

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