

5-2013

# The Roles of Women, Animals, and Nature in Traditional Japanese and Western Folk Tales Carry Over into Modern Japanese and Western Culture.

Jessica Cooper

*East Tennessee State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.etsu.edu/honors>



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Cooper, Jessica, "The Roles of Women, Animals, and Nature in Traditional Japanese and Western Folk Tales Carry Over into Modern Japanese and Western Culture." (2013). *Undergraduate Honors Theses*. Paper 166. <https://dc.etsu.edu/honors/166>

This Honors Thesis - Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Works at Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University. For more information, please contact [digilib@etsu.edu](mailto:digilib@etsu.edu).

The Roles of Women, Animals, and Nature in Traditional Japanese and Western  
Folk Tales Carry Over into Modern Japanese and Western Culture

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of Honors

By

Jessica Danielle Cooper  
The Honors College  
University Honors Program  
East Tennessee State University

April 15, 2013

---

Junko Tezuka Arnold, Faculty Mentor

---

Dr. Scott Contreras-Koterbay, Faculty Reader

---

Dr. Henry Antkiewicz, Faculty Reader

## Introduction

The position of women, animals, and nature in modern Japanese and Western culture are a partial result of the values and morals encapsulated within childhood folk tales. By comparing traditional Japanese and Western folk tales, it is possible to trace the evolution of these positions. This paper will first outline why it is important to examine the roles of women, animals, and nature in both traditional and modern Japanese and Western culture. Then values and morals will be defined. This paper will then explain why folk tales are a valid representation of these roles in society.

The roles of women in modern Japanese and Western culture are a controversial topic; the view of Japanese women is changing from 'house wife' to being capable of having a job. However, this process is slow, and many are resistant to the idea (Smith). In Western culture, women are still subjugated and seen as less capable than men—a “glass ceiling” seems to exist in most professional positions. Animals and nature continue to be surrounded by controversy. Animals tend to be viewed as beneath humans or less valuable than humans. Animal research contributes to this view point by allowing humans to perform experiments on animals that would be considered unethical to perform on humans. This treatment of animals as less than humans can be traced to biblical times. The role of nature in Japanese and Western modern culture is opposite. Zen practice in Japan advocates living as a part of nature (Hoover, 142) whereas the Western view is to conquer and live apart from nature. I will define values and morals as the system through which society functions. Though each society is different, values and morals are learned at a young age and are evident in the foundations of society. Law systems exist to protect what is considered to be that society's values and morals. For example, killing another human is

considered immoral. This is evident because laws exist that prohibit killing and punish offenders. A society's values and moral are evident in folk tales (Davies and Ikeno, 171); in Western culture, children are taught the “moral of the story.” Examining fol tales as a representation of culture is valid because society influences folk tales. Folk tales are created by members of society, so folk tales reflect the society's way of thinking and worldview (Davies and Ikeno, 171; Kitamura, 36). Like a circular pattern, folk tales also influence society. In modern society, folk tales pass from parent to child. Folk tales continue to be told because people find them meaningful and necessary as a part of life. The values and morals depicted by folk tales continue to be valuable, explaining why certain folk tales continue to survive. The values and morals learned during childhood through folk tales are evident in adult life. For example, through *The Tortoise and the Hare* children are taught that slow and steady wins the race. This same value can carry throughout life and is considered valuable in situations such as completing school or work projects. Comparing tradition Japanese and Western folk tales with modern Japanese and Western culture shows parallels in values and morals.

### Japanese Folk Tales

To understand why folk tales express the values and morals they do, it is necessary to understand the history during which these folk tales began to emerge. Because folk tales are created by society, it stands to reason that the values, morals, and themes within the folk tales are an expression of the current time's values and morals. There are not many sources available on the history of Japanese folk tales, but it can be assumed that the transmission of Japanese folk tales throughout history follows the pattern of most other countries—folk tales began orally within small towns and villages, spread to larger areas, and were eventually written down. There

are some folk tales evident in the three oldest books of Japanese literature. *Kojiki* (712 CE) contains myths, legends, and historical events of ancient Japan. *Nihon Shoki* (720 CE) contains myths, traditions, and records of clans. There are several volumes called *Fudoki* (708-733 CE) that are records of topography. In these ancient books, there are “not only motifs or fragmentary descriptions similar to those of folk tales, but also parallels to modern version of folk tales and legends in their complete forms,” (Seki, 5). Folk tales have long been passed down orally and are still presented orally today (Mayer, 215). However, the change from oral to written can lead to changes in word choice, plot, ending, etc. The word choice of an orally transmitted folktale can indicate the presenter's worldview and values in a way written plot alone cannot (Bottigheimer, 351). Every presentation of a folktale, either orally or written, has been edited in some degree. There does not exist a folktale or story that does not express the values of the creator and society. Folk tales are edited and changed over time to express what is socially acceptable (Bottigheimer, 352). It is reasonable to assume that the morals and values within folk tales are dependent on the time period's historical and societal happenings; these morals and values can change in keeping with society's changes. Japanese folk tales have also changed over time in keeping with Japanese society's changing values. However, it stands to reason that the folk tales that have continued in both oral and written tradition throughout history continue to be prevalent because the values and morals within are still valuable. In contrast to Western folk tales, the moral of a Japanese folk tale is always implicit; the moral is never explained with words. Being ambiguous is a valued aspect of the desired Japanese personality. An important aspect of Japanese folk tales should be noted—the characters within a Japanese folk tale are typically old; the folk tale either follows an old couple, an old man, or children only. This depiction of older people is because of the respect

the Japanese people feel about age. The Japanese understand the impermanence of things, and Japanese folk tales reflect this by placing emphasis on the elderly. As a result, Japanese folk tales do not follow the Western idea of a happy ending—Japanese folk tales do not end with marriage. Rather, the happy ending for a woman is to have a great family. Folk tales are still prominent within modern Japanese society. Children are exposed to folk tales through a variety of mediums. Folk tales in modern Japan are presented orally through parents, written in children's books, and visually through children's movies—folk tales included are *Kachi Kachi Yama* (The Kachi Kachi Mountain), *Saru Kani Gassen* (The Monkey and Crab Battle), and *Momotaro* (The Peach Boy). Folk tales such as *Yuki Onna* (The Snow Woman) have recently been made into films intended for an older audience. The prevalence of these folk tales in modern Japanese society demonstrates the importance of these folk tales.

### Women

Though there are many aspects of Japanese and Western folk tales, this thesis will focus on the roles of women, animals, and nature in both traditional and modern culture. Because there is limited research available on the role of women in Japanese folk tales, the conclusions I draw will be based on typical examples of Japanese folk tales. The folk tale *Uguisu no Sato* (A Bush Warbler and the House) is considered to be a representative folk tale of Japan. One day, a young woodcutter entered a grove of plum blossoms and discovered a house he had never seen before. Inside the house was a beautiful, young woman. She had to leave and asked the woodcutter to watch her home in her absence. She warned him that he must not look into the other rooms of the house. He disregarded her warning and looked into the other rooms. In the last room, he found three little eggs. He picked them up and accidentally dropped them. The woman came home and,

after discovering her broken eggs, transformed into a bush warbler and flew away crying about her dead children. Suddenly, the house disappeared and the woodcutter was alone in the grove (Davies and Ikeno, 171-172). Later, I will discuss the aspects of the animal-wife, a category the bush warbler women technically falls under. It should be noted that only women are ever depicted as having been an animal previously; men are never degraded into animal status. However, she demonstrates some of the ideal qualities of the Japanese woman. Even though the woodcutter broke her trust and killed her children by dropping the eggs, she does not seek revenge. Perhaps she was overcome with shame at having her true self discovered. Her sense of shame, an expected virtue of Japanese women, overcomes her petty anger. She bears her grief with humility and grace (Davies and Ikeno, 172-173). The Japanese woman in folk tales is expected to have a sense of grace because graceful women are considered beautiful (Davies and Ikeno, 173). Women, especially mothers, are also expected to be self-sacrificing (Kitamura, 46). The bush warbler woman bears her grief with silence. Women are also expected to be submissive. There is a teaching in Japan that women should obey the “three submissions” rule; when young, a woman should submit to her father; when married, she should submit to her husband; and when she is old, she should submit to her sons (Kitamura, 47). Accordingly, the role of men in Japanese folk tales is typically authoritative, strong, and virtuous. When looking at the top ten most frequently told to children Japanese folk tales, the character the listener is meant to sympathize with is male 70 percent of the time (Lanham and Shimura, 37). Typically, women take on secondary roles within folk tales and usually do not succeed in anything. However, there are folk tales where the woman is portrayed in a negative light. In the folktale *Shita-kiri Suzume* (Tongue-Cut Sparrow), there is an old man that kept a sparrow as a pet. One day, when his wife

was angry because the sparrow had pecked at something of hers, she cut out the tongue of the sparrow and sent it away. The old man was very sad, so he wandered the countryside looking for the sparrow. He finally found the sparrow, and the sparrow invited the old man back to his home. The sparrow and his family allowed the old man to stay with them for several days, providing feasts for him every night. When the old man had to return home, the sparrow offered him two baskets to carry with him. Because the man was old, he asked to take only the lighter basket with him. When the old man returned home, he and his wife opened the basket to discover it was filled with gold and precious gems. The wife, being greedy, asked the old man for directions to the sparrows' home so that she might receive a gift from them. The wife found the sparrows and was invited in. When she left, she was not offered a gift but asked to take something with her so she might remember her visit. The sparrows offered her two baskets and she chose the heavier one. When she returned home, she eagerly opened the basket expecting more riches. Instead, goblin and elves sprang out of it and tormented her (Mitford, 249-250). In this folktale, the man is depicted as kind and humble while the woman is depicted as mean, selfish, and greedy. Though the woman is a non-submissive woman in this folktale, she displays unsavory characteristics. In the folk tale *A Woman and the Bell of Miidera*, there is a great bronze bell at the temple of Miidera that rang out every morning and evening with a pure, beautiful note. Women were not permitted to touch the bell because it was believed a woman's touch would pollute and dull the metal as well as bring calamity upon them. In Kyoto, there lived a beautiful woman who longed to ring the bell for herself and use its incredibly clear and beautiful surface to powder her face and fix her hair. She traveled to the bell when the monks were busy, and looked at her reflection in the bell. When she saw how beautiful she was, she reached out to

touch it and prayed for a mirror as fantastic as the bell to have as her own. When the bell felt the woman's touch it shrank away from her fingers, leaving a hollow in the bell and losing all of its polish (Hadland, 141-142). The woman within this folk tale caused the destruction of the sacred bell through her vanity. The three folk tales I highlighted depicted either the perfect qualities expected of a Japanese woman, or depicted women as possessing negative qualities that in some way cause themselves or others to suffer.

### Animals

Previously, I described a folk tale that incorporated the animal-wife. Animal-wives are a common element of Japanese folk tales. A folk tale that includes an animal-wife usually follows this narrative: a man stumbles across a beautiful woman who asks to enter his home or become his wife, he agrees, she tells him that he must never do a certain something—the forbidden thing is dependent on the story—and at some point he does the forbidden thing, she tells him they cannot be together anymore because he has discovered her true form, she turns into an animal, and she leaves. The animal-wife is unique because she typically is more assertive in the beginning when she asks if he will marry her. Even though she places a taboo on some action the man must not perform, he undermines her previous assertion by doing the action regardless. Even though the animal-wife is technically an animal, the focus is on her as a woman; the animal form she takes does not affect how she is viewed or treated. However, if there is an animal-wife marriage, humans are usually depicted as silly. This shows the respect humans have towards animals by showing the animal-woman's actions to be superior to a humans'. In an animal-wife folk tale, sometimes the man will come across an animal that is injured or endangered. He somehow saves the animal, typically at great cost to himself, and establishes himself as a

virtuous person. To understand why the man would chose to save an animal at personal cost to himself, we must first understand how animals are viewed. Buddhism, a popular system of thought in Japan, teaches compassion to all creatures, including lower animals (Kitamura, 37). This aspect of Japanese life clearly carries over into folk tales, which encourages kindness to animals through its ethical and moral teachings (Lanham and Shimura, 40). Congenial interaction between humans and animals is often depicted, such as in *Kachi Kachi Yama* where a rabbit assists a man in taking revenge for his wife's murder. Besides Buddhism, the Japanese concept of *onegaishi* plays an important role in the interaction between humans and animals. *Onegaishi* can be translated as 'pay back.' Japanese is a society of *On/Giri*, an 'obligation to pay back.' The Japanese believe very strongly that one should always pay back when one has received a kindness. As a result, when a human selflessly helps an animal in distress, the animal in the folk tale will be obedient to the human and always try to pay that human back for his kindness. Often, the animal will not feel his debt is ever paid back, so the animal will go beyond what is necessary in an effort to repay the human. In general, animals are treated compassionately and respectfully by humans.

#### Nature

The role of nature in Japanese folk tales is strongly influenced by Zen philosophy and Shinto religion. Zen philosophy advocates for a coexistence with nature rather than a separation from it (Hoover, 142). However, I examined: *The Two Frogs*, *The Mirror of Matsuyama*, *Visu the Woodsman and the Old Priest*, *Momotaro* (The Peach Boy), *Shita-kiri Suzume* (Tongue-Cut Sparrow), *A Woman and the Bell of Miidera*, *Kachi Kachi Yama* (Kachi Kachi Mountain), *Uguisu no Sato* (A Bush Warbler and the House), and *Saru Kani Gassen* (The Monkey and Crab

Battle), and discovered that nature did not play a significant role within these folk tales. If the characters within the folktale were human, they did not interact with nature in a significant way. If the characters were animals with human characteristics, nature still did not play a role. In animal-wife tales or tales where humans interact with animals, nature was not significant. Because living harmoniously with nature is an innate part of the Japanese lifestyle, it is not necessary for nature to be emphasized within folk tales. Later, I will compare and contrast the Japanese and Western views of nature in modern culture.

### Western Folk Tales

For the purpose of my paper, I will specifically look at the Brothers Grimm folk tales that are prominent in American culture. First, I will highlight the history of the Brothers Grimm folk tales. The first edition of *Kinder-Und Haus-Märchen* or *Nursery and Household Tales* was published in 1812. *The Brothers Grimm Fairy Tales* as it is known in North America was originally intended for an older audience; the tales were not intended specifically for children (Crane, 141). The Grimms received their tales orally from surrounding neighbors, children, and the older generation. The Grimms then copied them down. The brothers felt that the folk tales of Germany were an important aspect of their cultural heritage and should be preserved in a written form so they would not become lost to history (Crane, 142). Several of the Brothers Grimm's folk tales have become prominent in America, helped along by Walt Disney's adaptations. However, it should be noted that the first edition of the *Kinder-Und Haus-Märchen* contained folk tales very different from the later editions, as well as the modern adaptations (Crane, 153). Disney has produced *Sneewittchen* (Snow White), *Aschenputtel* (Cinderella), *Dornröschen*

(*Sleeping Beauty*), *Der Froschkönig* (The Princess and the Frog), and *Rapunzel* (Tangled). More recently, modern remakes of Grimm folk tales into movies have become popular. For example, two versions of Snow White were recently released: *Snow White and the Huntsman* and *Mirror Mirror*. *Hansel and Gretel: Vampire Hunter* and *Red Riding Hood* are recent remakes of the original *Hansel and Gretel*, and *Little Red Cap*. Though these movies tell a story very different from the original Brothers Grimm version, or even the Disney version, these modern remakes are keeping these folk tales prominent within Western culture. Disney has also produced many more folk and fairy tales, but I will specifically focus on the previously mentioned Disney and modern movie remakes.

These folk tales continue to exist in Western culture because they are considered valuable; the importance of tradition and the values and morals within are preserved. Folk tales continue to be passed within families, between friends, and within classrooms and social settings. This is a tradition that began before the Grimm brothers and continues to present times. A main purpose of passing these folk tales on to children is they teach values and morals (Crane, 140). Everyone is familiar with the phrase “the moral of the story is...” because we are told to remember the values we learn from folk tales. Folk tales are an effective way to teach values and morals to young children because they are embedded within entertaining stories. It is more enjoyable to listen to a story rather than a philosophical teaching. It is important to note that the values and morals are usually implicit within folk tales; they are understood through the folk tale rather than as a phrase. Regardless, moral phrases such as “be grateful for what you have” are widely known. Folk tales are an important mode of transmitting values and morals because they do so in an entertaining and inherent way.

## Women

To create a comparison of modern Japanese and Western culture, I will look at the roles of women, animals, and nature in Western folk tales. To have an accurate representation of Western culture, I will focus mainly on the modern adaptations that children grow up with. The role of women in Western folk tales has been examined since the 1970's (Lee, 132). Women are typically either paragons of the virtues that society expects of women or are role of evil villain or step-mother (Lanham and Shimura, 38). Western folk tales, especially Disney representations, show women as domesticated, submissive, and typically unable to fend for themselves. Women are expected to be beautiful (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz, 714) and capable of enduring hardships in silence (Weber, 110). In *Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, and Rapunzel* the female lead character depends on a male hero to save her from her hardships—the women in these stories are submissive and dependent on men. Technically, these were ideal qualities of women. In the same stories the villain is also a woman, technically the so called “wicked step-mother” (Weber, 94-95). Based on these two roles women typically fill in Western folk tales, it is logical to assume that these are a representation of both the woman's ideal image and the woman's inherent faults.

## Animals

The role of animals in Western folk tales has two different sides, but both cases show the animals as being below humans, either through their evil deeds or their supplicating roles. In the lesser known Grimm Brothers tale, *Der Wolf und der Mensch* (The Wolf and the Man), a fox is talking to a wolf about the power of man, how no animal can stand up to man, and how animals must be cunning to save themselves from men. The wolf says that if he ever saw a man, he

would attack the man nonetheless, so the fox tells the wolf to come see him the next day and the fox will show the wolf a man. The next day, the wolf and the fox met on the path the huntsman travels every day. They first see an old discharged soldier that the fox says used to be a man. They then see a young boy that the fox says will one day be a man. Finally, the huntsman comes by with a double-barrel gun and a sword. The fox says that is the man the wolf must attack, but the fox is going home to his den. The wolf attacks the man. The man says it is unfortunate that he has not loaded his gun with bullets yet, so he fires a load of shot into the wolf's face. The wolf does not let himself be frightened, so he continues to charge at the huntsman. The huntsman gives the wolf the second barrel of shot, but the wolf ignores the pain and continues to attack the huntsman. The huntsman then draws his sword and slashes the wolf a few times. The wolf then runs bleeding and howling back to the fox. The fox asks how the wolf got along with man, and the wolf says that man's power is much greater than he ever imagined. The wolf says the man took a stick off of his back, blew into it, and caused something awful to fly into the wolf's face. He says the man blew into the stick again and lightning and hale flew up his nose. He says when he got next to the man, he pulled a naked rib from his side and beat the wolf with it so badly he almost died (Grimm and Grimm). This folk tale is meant to show the power of man and that animals are beneath humans. The tale is told from the animals' point of view, so the reader can truly see how respectful animals should be of men. In *Rotkäppchen* (Little Red Cap), the wolf eats the grandmother and the little girl; the wolf is clearly the villain of the tale. Animals also play the role of subservient to humans, especially females. In *Cinderella* and *Snow White*, the princesses have animal helpers; the princesses can call on the animals to assist them with domestic chores such as cleaning and sewing. The animals show a slave-like relationship with

humans. These three tales show that animals are not on equal ground with humans. In *Der Wolf und der Mensch*, the wolf is naïve about the power and status of man, while in *Rotkäppchen* the wolf is both easily defeated by the man and is the villain.

### Nature

In Western folk tales, nature is typically considered to be something that induces fear and anxiety. A common theme in Western folk tales is "...the forest inhabited by....wild animals and outlaws and frightening spirits—forests that provide a refuge, but whose darkness breathes danger" (Weber, 96). In *Rotkäppchen* (Little Red Cap), the message emphasizes the importance of never leaving the path in the woods rather than to be mistrustful of animals. The last line of *Rotkäppchen* is Little Red Cap thinking to herself "[a]s long as I live, I will never leave the path and run off into the woods by myself if mother tells me not to," (Grimm and Grimm). Little Red Cap was tricked by the wolf into leaving the path through the woods so that the wolf could reach Grandmother's house first. She believes that leaving the safe path through the woods is what caused her grief. In the Walt Disney depictions of folk tales, there is often a scene that involves the helpless princess desperately attempting to make her way through the dangerous woods. In *Snow White*, both in the Brothers Grimm version and the Walt Disney version, Snow White escapes into the forest where she is terrified. Especially in the Walt Disney depiction, every tree in the forest has scary faces, every sound is scary, and every animal is wild and frightening. Snow White is only safe once she reaches a man-made house and is living among people. Though *Beauty and the Beast* is not an original Brothers Grimm folk tale, it serves the same purpose of communicating values and morals to young children. In the Walt Disney version of *Beauty and the Beast*, Belle must make her way through a dangerous forest. The image of the

forest is the same as *Snow White*; the forest is dangerous and Belle must be wary of the things in it. In the original *Rapunzel*, as punishment for allowing a man up into her tower, Rapunzel's hair is cut off and she is sent into the wilderness to suffer for the rest of her life (Grimm and Grimm). In the Walt Disney adaptation, Rapunzel is warned she should never leave her tower because the outside world, including the forests, is dangerous and filled with wild animals and thieves. The image of nature in Western folk tales shows a clear delineation between man and the natural world—nature is something to fear and man must remain separate from it to survive.

### Modern Japanese Culture and Modern Western Culture

#### Women

The role of women in modern Japanese and Western culture is similar. In Japan, women are treated as less than men and are expected to primarily be homemakers and mothers (Smith, *Japanese Views on Gender Roles*). In Western culture, women have faced the same expectations. Recently, in both Japan and the West, women are fighting for gender equality. However, Western women still face the expectation that they be family rather than career focused. Though gender discrimination within the workplace is illegal in Western culture, it is difficult for women to reach the same achievements as men. In Japan, a large number of women want to work, but the number of women who want to work versus the number of women who are actually employed is very different. The Statistics Bureau of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication reported in 2010 that 71.6 percent of men were employed whereas only 48.5 percent of women were employed (*The Japan Times*). Both Western and Japanese women are expected to endure in silence (Weber, 110). However, a major difference between the two cultures must be noted—Japanese culture prizes a group mentality whereas the West is individualistic. The Japanese

people focus on the success and well-being of the group while Western people place great importance on the success of the individual person. This difference is evident when looking at the success of women with careers. Women in the West are closer to gender equality than women in Japan are. Another major difference between the cultures is the Japanese prefer not to draw special attention to themselves. This is evident in the Japanese language, specifically the humble and extra-modest forms. In Japan, it is expected that one does not draw attention to one's own achievements or special abilities. Even families do not talk about their children's achievements. If someone draws attention to another's abilities, that person is expected—though I use the word expected lightly. Rather, it is an innate part of the Japanese mentality—to answer with the equivalent of “no no, not yet. I am just okay.” Social status is also an inherent part of the language; men refer to women with a different word for 'you' than they do to other men or someone higher in status. Women may not use this form of 'you' when speaking to a man. Though it is more acceptable in the West for women to desire equal rights, women in both Japan and the West continue to face traditional social expectations.

### Animals

Buddhist philosophy, a system popular in Japan, advocates kindness towards animals and any other lesser being. That being said, animals are still considered to be below humans in both Japan and the West. In the West where Christianity is prominent, animals are considered to be less than humans because they lack a soul, speech, or the intelligence that separates humans from animals. Within Christianity, God is believed to have placed animals on earth specifically for human use. Within Buddhism, Shintoism, and Zen, there is not a divine creator that created animals specifically for humans. Perhaps the attitudes about animals within Japanese and

Western culture is reflective of each culture's specific ideology.

### Nature

The view of nature in Japanese and Western culture is vastly different. In Japan, Zen philosophy advocates living within nature. The Japanese viewpoint is to passively accept nature and blend with it whereas the Western viewpoint is to separate from nature and establish identity independently (Kitamura, 90). By comparing Japanese and Western traditional housing designs, this difference is evident. Japanese traditional housing designs incorporated and blended with nature rather than separated from it. Western housing designs are traditionally separate from nature—the builder first goes against natural design by cutting out trees and establishing a flat area. The builder then creates a house that sits against nature rather than using it to his advantage. For example, a Western house may sit on top of a hill, overlooking the surrounding countryside. However, this position does not protect the house from wind, rain, and cold temperatures. In contrast, a Japanese house is much more likely to work with nature to be protected from natural forces. Animism within Shintoism, the official religion of Japan, strongly influences Japanese people's interactions with nature. Animism is the belief that spirits or deities exist within natural elements. As a result, the Japanese hold a very deep respect for all of nature because important deities exist within nature. A major problem in the West is litter. Walk outside any Western street and one is likely to find garbage and cigarette butts everywhere. However, Japan is the complete opposite. The Japanese show a respect for nature that includes being very careful with trash disposal; trash is still evident in the streets, but nowhere near as badly as in the West. In the West, forests are considered to be scary places where one must travel cautiously (Weber, 97). As children, we are taught to fear the woods. Modern movies capitalize on this as well by depicting

forests as the setting for scary movies.

### Conclusion

The roles of women, animals, and nature in traditional Japanese and Western folk tales have carried over into modern Japanese and Western culture. In both Japanese and Western folk tales, women either take on a submissive, domestic, helpless role or somehow cause others to suffer, either through their evil actions as the villain or through their inherent faults. This view of women as unequal to men is evident in modern Japanese and Western culture. The view of animals in modern Western culture is similar to the attitudes portrayed in Western folk tales; animals are wild, can pose serious danger, and are inherently less than humans. In Japanese folk tales, people are often portrayed as selfishly helping animals or congenially interacting with them. Though the animals are not treated as posing a danger to humans, they are treated as having unequal status with humans—it is fortunate for the animals that humans sometimes assist them out of dangers. In the animal-wife tales, the animals are grateful to humans for some help they have received and wish to repay the humans by marrying them. In Western folk tales, nature is portrayed as a dangerous, scary thing that either must be avoided or conquered. This view of nature persists in modern Western culture through the continual portrayal of the wilderness as scary via movies. However, the harmoniously existing with nature idea that is represented in Japanese folk tales continues in modern Japanese culture as well.

Folk tales clearly affect society because the views expressed in traditional Japanese and Western folk tales continue to be valuable in modern culture. Though both Japanese and Western viewpoints of women are similar, the viewpoints of animals and especially nature are different. Because certain folk tales are valuable within specific societies, those societies continue to

enumerate those values encapsulated within the folk tales. The reason these values depicted within folk tales continue to be valuable is because people learn to value these tales and their morals from a young age, a time when children are impressionable. Children view their parents as authority figures and typically parrot their parents' values. Parents continue the tradition of passing on culture by telling their children folk tales. The folk tales continue to be a part of everyday life, through books, school activities, and varying age-appropriate movies. When children become parents, it is a natural progression to pass on the same folk tales to their children. As a result, the values and morals children learn through folk tales, specifically the views of women, animals and nature, continue to be evident through their adult life and behaviors.

## Works Cited

- Baker-Sperry, Lori, and Liz Grauerholz. "The Pervasiveness and Persistence of the Feminine Beauty Ideal in Children's Fairy Tales." *Gender and Society* 17.5 (2003): 711-26. *JStor*. Web. 4 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3594706>>.
- Bottigheimer, Ruth B. "Fairy Tales, Folk Narrative Research and History." *Social History* 14.3 (1989): 343-57. *JStor*. Web. 2 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4285792>>.
- Crane, T. F. "The External History Of The 'Kinder- Und Haus-Märchen' Of The Brothers Grimm. I." *Modern Philology* 10 (1917): 577-610. *JStor*. Arts & Web. 3 Mar. 2013.
- Davies, Roger J., and Osamu Ikeno, eds. Canada: Tuttle Publishing Company, 2002. Print.
- Davis, Hadland. *Myths and Legends of Japan*. London: George G. Harrap and Company, 1917. 141-42. Print.
- Grimm, Jacob, and Wilhelm Grimm. *Kinder- und Hausmärchen (Children's and Household Tales)*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1819. Print.
- Hoover, Thomas. *Zen Culture*. New York: Random House, 1977. Print.
- Kitamura, Mariko. *The Animal-Wife: A Comparison of Japanese Folktales with their European Counterparts*. Los Angeles: University of California, 1982. Print. Lang, Andrew. *The Violet Fairy Book*. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1901. 125-26. Print.
- Lanham, Betty B., and Masao Shimura. "Folk Tales Commonly Told American and Japanese Children: Ethical Themes of Omission and Commission." *The Journal of American Folklore* 80.315 (1967): 33-48. *JStor*. Web. 3 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/53841>>.
- Lee, Sung-Ae. "Re-Visioning Gendered Folk Tales in Novels by Mia Yun and Nora Okja Keller."

*Asian Ethnology* 68.1 (2009): 131-50. *JStor*. Web. 3 Mar. 2013.

<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25614524>>.

"Married Women Want to Work." *The Japan Times*. N.p., 4 June 2012. Web. 4 Mar. 2013.

<<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2012/06/04/editorials/married-women-want-to-work/#.UTTa9zDw-Ag>>.

Mayer, Fanny H. "Japan's Folk Tale Boom." *Journal of Japanese Studies* 4.1 (1978): 215-24.

*Jstor*. Web. 2 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/132081>>.

Michaelis-Jena, Ruth. "Oral Tradition and the Brothers Grimm." *Folklore* 82.4 (1971): 265-75.

*Jstor*. Web. 2 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1260545>>.

Mitford, A B. *Tales of Old Japan*. Vol. 1. London: Macmillan and Company, 1871. 249-50. Print.

Seki, Keigo. "Types of Japanese Folk Tales." *Asian Folklore Studies* 25 (1966): 1-220. *JStor*.

Web. 2 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1177478>>.

Smith, Jennifer. "Japanese Views on Gender Roles." *Helium*. N.p., 21 Apr. 2008. Web. 1 Mar.

2013.

Weber, Eugen. "Fairies and Hard Facts: The Reality of Folk Tales." *Journal of the History of*

*Ideas* 42.1 (1981): 93-113. *JStor*. Web. 2 Mar. 2013.

<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2709419>>.