

## The Motif of Ungrateful Son in Nusantara Folklore: A Proppian Morphological Analysis of *Malin Kundang*, *Si Tanggung*, and *Nakhoda Manis*

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**ABSTRACT :** This article presents a comprehensive analysis of the ungrateful son motif as exemplified by three Nusantara folktales – *Malin Kundang* (Indonesia), *Si Tanggang* (Malaysia), and *Nakhoda Manis* (Brunei Darussalam) – through the structural lens of Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*. All three tales share a common narrative arc in which a young man seeks fortune, gains wealth and status, then shamefully rejects his origins, only to be cursed by his mother and turned to stone as divine retribution. Using Propp's framework of 31 narrative functions and character roles, we map each story's plot into a function sequence and identify key *dramatis personae*. The analysis reveals that despite surface variations in detail, the tales have markedly similar structures – including functions such as lack, departure, return, recognition, and punishment – reflecting a shared moral emphasis on filial piety. Notably, many of Propp's functions are absent or condensed in these short legends (e.g. no villain, no donor), indicating structural simplifications and cultural adaptations when compared to the Russian fairy-tale template. A comparative synthesis highlights overlapping Proppian functions and divergences in character roles (e.g. the son fulfilling dual protagonist-antagonist roles) and narrative focus across the three nations. The study also critically discusses the limitations of applying Propp's full 31-function schema to concise moral folktales, underscoring the need for interpretative flexibility. These findings affirm Propp's model as a valuable analytical tool beyond its original corpus, while also illuminating how local cultural context shapes the expression of a universal motif.

**KEYWORDS** -folktale morphology, Nusantara, ungrateful son motif, V. Propp

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Folktales of the Malay Archipelago (Nusantara) abound with cautionary stories that dramatize the consequences of filial impiety. Among the most prominent of these is the ungrateful son legend, which appears in similar forms across Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam. In each version, a young man from a humble background departs to seek his fortune, attains great wealth and social elevation, and upon returning home, refuses to acknowledge his aging mother out of shame or pride – a transgression met with a mother's curse that turns the son (and sometimes his ship and crew) to stone. The Indonesian tale of *Malin Kundang*, the Malaysian tale of *Si Tanggang*, and Brunei's *Nakhoda Manis* are all iterations of this narrative, locally referred

to as stories of *anak durhaka* or *derhaka* (a disobedient or ungrateful child). Each tale is deeply ingrained in its culture as a didactic legend, warning that one must never forsake one's parents regardless of worldly success. Indeed, the moral message of filial respect is so central that in Brunei the very mention of the petrified ship (Jong Batu) from *Nakhoda Manis* still serves as an evocative admonition against filial disloyalty.

Despite their cultural specificity – Minangkabau names and seascape in *Malin Kundang*, Malay village life in *Si Tanggang*, and the Bruneian setting in *Nakhoda Manis* – these stories clearly share a common structural core. Folklorists have noted that the legend of *Malin Kundang* became famous and spread widely, spawning variant ungrateful son tales throughout Indonesia and even in neighboring Southeast Asian countries [1]. This invites a comparative structural analysis: How closely do these three tales mirror each other in narrative form? Where do they diverge, and what do those differences reveal about each culture's values or storytelling traditions? By analyzing the tales side-by-side using Vladimir Propp's morphological framework, we can systematically identify their narrative functions and character roles, thereby illuminating both their shared motif structure and unique local inflections.

Vladimir Propp's seminal work *Morphology of the Folktale* provides an ideal analytical tool for this purpose. Propp demonstrated that many Russian fairy tales follow a sequence of functions – 31 identifiable plot actions – and a set of character roles (such as hero, villain, donor, etc.) that remain remarkably consistent across tales [2]. If *Malin Kundang*, *Si Tanggang*, and *Nakhoda Manis* indeed derive from a single underlying narrative prototype, one would expect them to exhibit analogous function sequences and role distributions. At the same time, since these Nusantara tales are moral legends rather than long adventure fairy tales, we might anticipate certain Proppian functions to be absent or condensed. For example, they lack an external antagonist; the villain is effectively the son's own pride, and the tales conclude with supernatural punishment rather than the hero's triumph or reward. An analysis grounded in Propp's morphology can thus highlight both the universality of the ungrateful son plot and the culturally specific ways each version has been shaped to convey its moral.

In this study, we systematically map the narratives of *Malin Kundang*, *Si Tanggang*, and *Nakhoda Manis* onto Propp's function schema. We present a function-by-function breakdown (in tabular form) for each story, identifying which of Propp's 31 functions appear and how they manifest in the tale's events. We then compare these mappings to discuss structural similarities, differences in character roles, and shifts in emphasis or detail reflective of Indonesian, Malaysian, and Bruneian contexts. Finally, we consider the methodological implications of applying Propp's full framework to these simpler folktales – what adjustments were necessary and what limitations were encountered – thereby assessing the adaptability of Propp's model beyond its original (Russian fairy tale) milieu. Through this analysis, we aim to contribute a structured comparative understanding of a beloved regional legend and demonstrate the value of formal narrative analysis in cross-cultural folklore studies.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW: PROPP'S MORPHOLOGY OF THE FOLKTALE AND ITS ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (first published in Russian in 1928) pioneered a structural approach to analyzing folktales by breaking down their narratives into fundamental plot units called functions. A function, in Propp's terms, is an action or event defined by its narrative significance (for example, absention, where a family member leaves home, or interdiction, where a warning or command is given to the hero) rather than by the specifics of who performs it. Propp identified 31 such functions that commonly occur in fairy tales, noting that while not every tale contains all 31, any functions that do appear will tend to follow the same sequence. In addition, Propp outlined a set of seven character roles (also known as spheres of action or *dramatis personae*) – the hero, villain, donor (provider of magical aid), helper, princess (sought-for person) and her father, dispatcher, and false hero – which interact with the functions to form the narrative structure. These roles are ideal types; in a given story, one character may fulfill multiple roles or some roles may be empty [2]. Propp's morphological method thus provides a way to map the “grammar” of a tale by listing the functions in order and assigning character roles to the actors of those functions.

Propp's theory was originally derived from Russian fairy tales, but its structural insights have proven influential well beyond that corpus. Later scholars have applied Proppian analysis to folktales from many cultures, testing its universality and adaptability. In analyzing non-Russian folklore, researchers often find that Propp's 31-function sequence is a useful template but that not all functions occur, or they may appear in modified form. For instance, Chamalah [3] applied Propp's framework to an Indonesian folklore *Princess of the Runaway Valley* and found only 24 of the 31 functions present, noting that the tale's plot complexity was lower and culturally specific elements influenced which functions appeared. Similarly, Hendriani et al. [4] identified 25 functions in the Lombok folktale *Cilinaya*, observing that while the general Proppian sequence held, some functions were omitted and the exact order had slight variations. These studies suggest that shorter-simpler or culturally distinct folktales often fulfill only a subset of Propp's full function list, omitting elements (e.g. certain battles, magical interventions, or romantic subplots) that are not pertinent to their narrative ethos. The absence of some functions does not invalidate Propp's model; rather, it indicates that folktales can be morphologically distinct while still following a broadly similar structure. In fact, Propp [2] himself acknowledged that a tale may leave out functions and that different tales can truncate the sequence at different points or skip certain steps, as long as the order of those that do appear remains consistent.

Another relevant aspect of Propp's framework is the flexibility of character role distribution. Propp's seven roles are not a one-to-one map to characters; one character can perform multiple roles or one role can be split among characters. Subsequent analyses of Southeast Asian folktales have highlighted this flexibility. For example, in the analysis of *Cilinaya*, Hendriani et al. [4] note that some characters double up roles – figures who act as both a villain and a dispatcher in the narrative. This multiplicity is highly relevant to the ungrateful son tales, where conventional roles are inverted or merged: the protagonist (ostensibly the hero) becomes effectively the villain by betraying his mother, and the mother who initially acts as the dispatcher (sending the son off on his journey) later embodies the role of a judge or agent of punishment. Such overlaps demonstrate that Proppian roles are functional categories rather than rigid character types – a single dramatis persona can carry the plot forward in more than one capacity. Recognizing these role combinations is crucial when applying Propp's model to moral folktales, which may lack clear-cut hero/villain dichotomies.

Beyond Propp's own work, the ungrateful son motif itself has been the subject of folkloristic commentary. It is classified broadly as a legend or moral tale rather than a fairy tale, often rooted in local historical context and geography. In Malay and Indonesian folklore, there are numerous local legends of disobedient children turned to stone – not only sons like Malin Kundang and Si Tanggang, but also daughters in tales such as *Batu Menangis* (The Crying Stone) in Borneo. Hasanuddin, Emidar and Zulfadhli [1] observe that the Minangkabau of West Sumatra have many such legends of *anak durhaka* (ungrateful children) which serve as social lessons and are believed as semi-historical lore by local people. These tales typically lack the full fantastical adventure common in fairy tales; instead, they focus on a single moral conflict and its resolution through supernatural punishment. This genre distinction is significant because it implies certain structural simplifications: for example, there is usually no long quest to defeat a villain, no series of magical tests, and the narrative outcome is tragic (petrification or curse) rather than triumphant. As a result, when mapping such legends onto Propp's scheme, we expect to find heavy emphasis on the initial situation and final punishment, with fewer of the middle functions that involve combat, trickery or the procurement of magical agents. Nevertheless, the core functions that do appear should align in sequence – as they represent the universal logic of the story: a lack or need motivates departure; success leads to pride and a transgression; the transgression is met with punishment.

In summary, previous research and theoretical considerations suggest that Propp's morphological analysis can be a powerful tool to dissect the ungrateful son folktales, provided we account for cultural context and genre differences. We anticipate finding a strong correspondence in the function sequences of *Malin Kundang*, *Si Tanggang*, and *Nakhoda Manis*, confirming a shared narrative structure behind their variations. At the same time, we remain attentive to which Proppian functions are absent or conflated in these tales, as these omissions can highlight the tales' narrative economy and the particular values they emphasize. This balance of

structural similarity and cultural specificity will be explored through a detailed, side-by-side Proppian analysis in the sections that follow.

### III. METHODOLOGY: DATA SOURCES AND APPROACH

The analysis in this study is based on comparative plot summaries of the three folktales, drawn from multiple sources for each story. To accurately capture variations and ensure completeness of each narrative, we consulted online published retellings and folklore compilations from Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei. For *Malin Kundang*, sources included a popular parenting website [5], a cultural heritage site [6], and a national news magazine feature [7] – each contributing details to form a composite version of the tale. *Si Tanggang* was similarly reconstructed from a Malaysian folklore blog [8], a literary essay [9], and a news portal article [10]. For *Nakhoda Manis*, we used an educational folktale repository [11], under UNESCO, a Malay historical narrative [12], and a local Bruneian source [13]. These combined sources allowed us to capture each tale's full storyline and note variant details (such as character names, specific incidents, and endings) that might bear on the structural analysis.

Our approach was to perform a Proppian narratological analysis on each tale independently, and then compare the results. For each folktale, we followed these steps:

- a. **Narrative Segmentation:** We divided the story into its constituent episodes and key events in chronological order. Each event was then examined to determine if it corresponds to one of Propp's 31 functions (as enumerated in *Morphology of the Folktale*). In this process, we looked for the presence of classic functions such as absention (e.g. a parent or the son leaving home), interdiction (e.g. the mother's warnings), violation (disobedience to those warnings), lack (poverty motivating the journey), departure, recognition, punishment, etc. We also noted any function omissions (e.g. no villainy at the start, no magical agent obtained) and any unique events that did not fit Propp's original definitions, marking those for discussion.
- b. **Character Role Identification:** We identified the primary characters and assigned Proppian roles based on their actions. In these tales, the son is initially positioned as the hero (as he ventures out to improve his lot), the mother can act as a dispatcher (giving her blessing or condition to leave) and later as a quasi-villain or avenger (when she curses him), the wife or princess he marries may fulfill the role of the princess (a high-status prize associated with the hero's success), and interestingly, the hero himself ultimately performs the role of villain through his betrayal. We paid special attention to these role shifts and combinations, as they represent structural deviations from the archetypal fairy tale where hero and villain are distinct persons. No classical donor or helper characters appear in these tales, but we remained alert to minor characters (ship captains, crew, villagers) who facilitate the hero's journey in non-magical ways.
- c. **Function Mapping:** Using the results of the above steps, we constructed a mapping table for each story, aligning the tale's events with Propp's function sequence. In these tables (presented in the Analysis section), each row corresponds to a Proppian function (in standard order), and we indicate whether that function is present in the story and, if so, describe the event that realizes it. If a function is absent, we note it accordingly. This provides a visual footprint of the tale's morphology, allowing easy comparison across the three tales.
- d. **Comparative Analysis:** After mapping all three tales, we compared the sequences to identify commonalities and differences. We specifically examined which functions appear in all three narratives (indicating a strong shared structure) and which appear in only one or two. We also compared the ordering and contiguity of functions – though all three generally follow Propp's canonical order where functions are present, we checked for any compressions or shifts (for example, if some functions are implicit or merged). Additionally, we compared character role distributions: How does each tale handle the lack of a distinct villain? Does the mother's role differ in nuance between versions? How is the hero characterized relative to Propp's expectations?

Throughout the analysis, we remained mindful of the limitations of directly applying Propp's framework. Propp's 31 functions were meant to describe long fairy tales with multiple episodes, often involving the hero's departure, adventure in a faraway kingdom, and triumphant return. Our tales, by contrast, are succinct moral legends concentrating on a single ethical lapse. Therefore, we anticipated that many mid-sequence functions (such as tests, struggles, victories, and rewards) might be absent. In such cases, our mapping simply notes the absence; however, we also discuss how the narrative logic of those missing functions may be reflected in simpler forms. For example, instead of an explicit villainy initiating the tale, the lack of wealth serves as the initial motivator; instead of a battle with a villain, the critical struggle is an internal one – the son's test of character when confronted with his poor mother.

By combining strict structural mapping with interpretive commentary, our methodology allows us to use Propp's model flexibly, highlighting where it fits perfectly and where it must be stretched or trimmed to accommodate the tales at hand. This approach yields both a structural comparison and a critical evaluation of Proppian analysis in a cross-cultural context. The following section presents the results for each tale, followed by a comparative synthesis.

#### IV. ANALYSIS

In this section, we present the Proppian function mapping for each folktale – *Malin Kundang*, *Si Tanggang*, and *Nakhoda Manis* – and then synthesize their structural and thematic comparisons. Each story's analysis includes a table enumerating Propp's functions 1 through 31, with an indication of which functions occur in the narrative and what events correspond to them. This is followed by a brief discussion of the tale's structure, character roles, and any notable features. All three analyses are then brought together in a comparative discussion highlighting shared patterns, divergences, and the influence of cultural context on the motif's expression.

##### *MALIN KUNDANG (INDONESIA): PROPPIAN FUNCTION MAPPING*

**Story Summary:** *Malin Kundang* is a legend from West Sumatra about a poor boy who seeks fortune overseas and becomes a wealthy merchant, only to reject his widowed mother upon returning to his village. In punishment for his arrogance, his mother's curse turns him (and, in some versions, his ship) to stone during a sudden storm. Table 1 maps the key events of the *Malin Kundang* story onto Propp's functions:

Propp Function (No.)	<i>Malin Kundang</i> : Occurrence and Narrative Event
<b>Initial situation</b> (0)	<b>Present.</b> Malin Kundang is introduced as the only son of a poor widow (Mande Rubayah) in a seaside village. His father had gone abroad and never returned, leaving mother and son in hardship. Malin is depicted as a smart, adventurous boy (with one version noting a childhood accident that left a scar on his arm).
<b>Absentation</b> (1)	<b>Present.</b> A family member departs or is absent. Malin's father's departure is an initial absentation – he went to sea seeking fortune and vanished, creating the single-parent household. This absence sets the stage for Malin's responsibilities and later actions. (Malin himself will later leave home, but that is counted under Departure.)
<b>Interdiction</b> (2)	<b>Present (implied).</b> A warning or command is given to the hero. When Malin decides to go overseas, his mother is initially opposed and fearful of losing him. In effect, she interdicts his departure by pleading with him not to leave her as his father did. In some versions, she consents only after Malin promises to return once successful. This promise ("do not forget your mother") functions as an implicit interdiction.
<b>Violation of interdiction</b> (3)	<b>Present.</b> The hero ignores the warning. Malin proceeds with his plan to sail away despite his mother's reluctance. Although he technically departs with her blessing, he violates the



Propp Function (No.)	Malin Kundang: Occurrence and Narrative Event
	deeper interdiction by failing to keep his promise to stay in touch and return. Years pass with no news to his mother, effectively breaking the condition she set (that he not abandons her).
Reconnaissance (4)	<b>Absent.</b> No villain is present to perform reconnaissance. There is no malicious figure searching for information in Malin's story. (At this stage, Malin's own ambition drives the plot, and there is no external antagonist.)
Delivery (5)	<b>Absent.</b> Since there is no villain, no information is unwittingly delivered to a villain. (Malin's tale has no element of an enemy learning about him or his home.)
Trickery (6)	<b>Absent.</b> No villain attempts to deceive the hero at this point; Malin encounters no trick or trap. (The narrative has no trickery sequence – the dangers Malin faces on his journey are natural, like storms, not machinations of a villain.)
Complicity (7)	<b>Absent.</b> No victim is tricked by a villain. (Malin's mother is not deceived by anyone; she simply lets her son go. Malin is not tricked into leaving – it is his own choice.)
Villainy or Lack (8)	<b>Present (Lack).</b> Instead of an initial villainy, the story establishes a lack: Malin and his mother lack wealth and live in poverty. This lack prompts Malin's desire to improve their lives. The absence of a villainous antagonist means the motivation for Malin's quest is the need to overcome hardship, not to undo a wrong. (In Propp's schema, lack is a recognized alternative to villainy as the driver of the tale.)
Mediation (9)	<b>Present.</b> Misfortune or lack is made known; the hero gets the call to action. Here, Malin himself perceives the lack – he recognizes the dire economic situation and decides something must be done. He expresses to his mother his resolve to seek fortune so as to change their destiny. This corresponds to the moment where the hero's mission is defined (to alleviate the lack of wealth). The mother's eventual reluctant agreement can be seen as the dispatcher function: she allows him to go, thus effectively dispatching him on the quest to remedy their poverty.
Beginning of counteraction (10)	<b>Present.</b> The hero decides to act in response to the lack. Malin prepares to leave his village and joins a merchant ship to work and learn trade. This is the beginning of his proactive effort to counter their misfortune. He bids farewell to his mother, assuring her he will come back successful.
Departure (11)	<b>Present.</b> The hero leaves home. Malin Kundang sets sail from his village on a ship, embarking on his journey overseas. His mother watches him depart, sorrowfully yet hopeful. This marks the clear separation of the hero from home – a key turning point in the narrative.
First function of the Donor (12)	<b>Absent (or implicit).</b> There is no explicit magical donor figure who tests or offers an item to Malin. One might interpret the ship's captain who takes Malin aboard and mentors him as a non-magical donor of opportunity (he tests Malin's diligence, which Malin proves, thus earning promotion). However, the story does not highlight a specific testing scene or gift; Malin's success is due to his own hard work rather than a single donor's magical aid. We consider this function not distinctly present.
Hero's reaction (13)	<b>Absent (no donor).</b> Since no clear donor test occurs, there is no distinct moment of Malin's reaction to a donor's challenge. (Malin's positive qualities – bravery, industriousness – are demonstrated generally throughout his work on the ship, rather than in a single trial scene.)

Propp Function (No.)	Malin Kundang: Occurrence and Narrative Event
Acquisition of magical agent (14)	<b>Absent.</b> No magical agent (such as a weapon, potion, or helper) is obtained by Malin. In a metaphorical sense, one could say Malin acquires wealth and status as his agent – for example, he gains a ship and crew of his own after years of trading – but these are not supernatural aids, just the results of his labor. We do not count them as a Proppian magical agent.
Spatial transference (15)	<b>Present.</b> The hero is led or guided to the object of search, or moves between realms. In Malin's case, this is the voyage to a distant land and his extended stay there. After departing, Malin's ship encounters a storm and he becomes stranded on a foreign shore (in one version). With the help of locals, he settles and thrives in that new land. This journey and change of location correspond to the spatial movement often found in tales (from home to elsewhere where fortunes can change).
Struggle (16)	<b>Absent (no direct confrontation).</b> There is no physical combat with a villain. Malin's struggle is represented by the hard work and enterprise he undertakes to become wealthy, and perhaps by overcoming natural challenges (like the initial shipwreck). However, the tale does not narrate a single adversarial clash; the dramatic struggle is postponed until the confrontation with his mother, which is an emotional/moral struggle rather than a fight.
Branding, marking (17)	<b>Present.</b> The hero is marked or acquires a distinguishing token. Unusually, Malin Kundang's marking occurs early: as a child, he received a scar on his arm when he fell and injured himself while chasing chickens. This scar later becomes crucial evidence for his mother to recognize him upon his return. Thus, the tale includes a clear instance of branding – a permanent physical mark on the hero. (It's worth noting that Propp typically places the branding during a struggle with the villain, but here it's a prior accident; nonetheless, it serves the classic purpose of facilitating recognition in function (27).)
Victory (18)	<b>Absent (or implicit).</b> There is no single moment of victory over a villain. However, if we consider Malin's initial quest (to overcome poverty) as an implicit struggle, then his attainment of wealth could be seen as a victory over adversity. By the time he is an adult, Malin has become a successful trader, owning a fleet of trading vessels and marrying a wealthy merchant's daughter. This success might be viewed as the hero's victory in the economic sense. Yet, because there was no personified antagonist, we mark the formal victory function as not applicable, except as the completion of the lack-resolving mission.
Liquidation of lack (19)	<b>Present.</b> The initial lack is resolved. Malin Kundang indeed fulfills the goal that drove him: he amasses a fortune and rises to high status. By marrying a rich woman (in some versions described as a princess) and becoming wealthy, he has ostensibly remedied the poverty that spurred his journey. In Proppian terms, the lack (function 8) is liquidated – though importantly, this happens well before the story ends, setting the stage for the ensuing moral crisis. (Malin's mother, however, has not yet benefited from this resolution, which is key to the conflict.)
Return (20)	<b>Present.</b> The hero returns to the vicinity of home. After years abroad, Malin Kundang's ship anchors off his home village on the Sumatran coast. This is usually portrayed as a coincidental stop during his trading voyages. The villagers notice the splendid ship and speculate about its noble passengers. Malin's return is initially incognito – he does not announce himself. This marks the beginning of the climax sequence, as the elements of recognition and confrontation gather.
Pursuit (21)	<b>Absent.</b> There is no chase scene. Typically, pursuit involves a defeated villain chasing the

Propp Function (No.)	<i>Malin Kundang</i> : Occurrence and Narrative Event
	hero on return, or some agent trying to undo the hero's success. In Malin's story, instead of being pursued by an enemy, the hero is metaphorically pursued by his past – i.e. his mother seeks to meet him. But no literal pursuit occurs; rather, Malin tries to flee from his mother's presence. We treat function 21 as not applicable.
<b>Rescue (22)</b>	<b>Absent.</b> No rescue from pursuit is needed (since 21 is absent). There is no helper intervening to save Malin from danger at this stage. Instead, the focus shifts to the mother's attempt to rescue her son's moral integrity (which ultimately fails).
<b>Unrecognized arrival (23)</b>	<b>Present (inverted).</b> The hero arrives home or in another country unrecognized. In Malin Kundang's case, his arrival is initially unrecognized by the community – the villagers see only a rich merchant and do not realize he is the local boy who left years ago. However, the mother immediately recognizes him, notably by the telltale scar on his arm. This leads to a twist on the usual unrecognized arrival: here it is the hero who refuses to recognize his own origin. When Malin's mother, Mande Rubayah, rushes to greet him, Malin denies that he knows her, ashamed to present this poor old woman as his mother in front of his elegant wife and crew. So, while Malin himself is known to his mother, he tries to remain unrecognized as her son to others. This inversely fulfills the spirit of function 23 – the long-absent hero is not openly acknowledged at home, due in this case to his own deceit.
<b>Unfounded claims (24)</b>	<b>Present (inverted).</b> A false hero presents unfounded claims. In Propp's classic scenario, a falsehero might claim the credit for the hero's deeds or pretend to be the hero. In Malin's tale, we have a reversal: Malin, the actual hero of the economic quest, now makes false claims about himself – essentially attempting to recast his identity. In one version, he had earlier told his wife that his parents were aristocrats who had passed away. When confronted by his living, humble mother, Malin declares her an impostor and insists she is not his mother, stating that his true mother is long dead. This is an unfounded claim intended to preserve his false noble persona. Thus, Malin himself plays a role analogous to the false hero, falsifying the truth of his origin.
<b>Difficult task (25)</b>	<b>Absent.</b> No one sets a specific difficult task for Malin to accomplish at this stage. (In some fairy tales, a king might demand the hero complete a task to prove himself if a false hero is present, but here society's challenge to Malin was moral, not a formal task.) One could argue metaphorically that the difficult task would have been for Malin to humble himself and acknowledge his mother – a test of character rather than a literal assignment. This, he fails, but since it is not framed as a task by another character, we mark it absent.
<b>Solution (26)</b>	<b>Absent.</b> Consequently, there is no solution to a non-existent task. Malin does not solve any challenge; rather, he fails the moral challenge presented implicitly by his mother's appearance.
<b>Recognition (27)</b>	<b>Present.</b> The true hero is recognized (usually by someone who had doubted or by a token). In <i>Malin Kundang</i> , recognition has a tragic irony. The mother recognizes Malin as her son by his scar immediately, which instigates the confrontation. However, full recognition in the societal sense occurs only through divine intervention: when Malin's ship is wrecked by the ensuing storm and he is turned to stone, it becomes evident to all that the old woman truly was his mother and that this man was indeed <i>Malin Kundang</i> , now punished for his wrongdoing. In one version, Malin himself finally acknowledges his mother's identity and his own guilt at the last moment – as the storm rages, he “realizes” that the old woman is indeed his mother and calls out for forgiveness, even kneeling before her in



Propp Function (No.)	<i>Malin Kundang</i> : Occurrence and Narrative Event
	repentance. But this recognition on his part comes too late to avert fate. Thus, recognition is achieved but in a devastating manner, confirming identities only in the moment of irreversible consequence.
<b>Exposure (28)</b>	<b>Present.</b> The false hero or villain is exposed. In this narrative, Malin's false claims are exposed by the outcome. The mother's curse and the miraculous petrification serve to expose <i>Malin's lie</i> – if there had been any doubt among onlookers that the old woman was truly his mother, the curse's fulfillment is proof of the true relationship. Malin Kundang is thereby unmasked as an ungrateful son. The exposure is more symbolic and divine than driven by human agency: God exposes Malin's misdeed by making an example of him.
<b>Transfiguration (29)</b>	<b>Present (as transformation).</b> Propp's transfiguration function usually involves the hero gaining a new appearance or being given new garments/signs of honor. Here we have a dark twist on transfiguration: Malin is physically transformed into stone as a result of the curse. In some versions, the entire ship and even sea creatures around are turned to stone as well. This literal petrification is a transformation of the hero, though it is a form of punishment rather than glorification. Earlier in the tale, one could argue Malin underwent a positive transfiguration of status when he rose from pauper to prince-in-law, but the final transfiguration is the one emphasized in the legend's moral lesson – the proud son fixed forever in stone, kneeling in remorse.
<b>Punishment (30)</b>	<b>Present.</b> The villain is punished. In the context of this tale, Malin himself is the wrongdoer and thus the one punished. The mother's solemn prayer – essentially a curse conditional on whether the man was truly her son – is answered by a sudden tempest that destroys Malin's ship and ultimately punishes him by turning him to stone. This is the climactic moral denouement: the act of divine retribution that punishes Malin's filial impiety. Notably, there is no separate villain character to punish; the function is fulfilled by the fate of the ungrateful protagonist.
<b>Wedding (31)</b>	<b>Absent.</b> The tale does not end with a celebratory wedding or ascent to a throne. In fact, the hero's earlier marriage to a wealthy woman is part of the rising action, not a finale. The conclusion is tragic, focusing on Malin's punishment rather than any form of reward or marriage. The usual fairy-tale wedding function is therefore absent. The story ends with catastrophe and a moral, not nuptials.

**Table 1: Proppian Function Mapping of *Malin Kundang***

Analysis of *Malin Kundang's* structure: The mapping above shows that *Malin Kundang* contains roughly half of Propp's 31 functions in a clear sequence, while the others are either absent or altered. The narrative strongly follows a lack-and-redress structure: the lack of wealth (8) leads to departure (11), followed by success that liquidates the lack (19), and then a return (20) that triggers the moral crisis. Notably, the tale lacks any villain-driven conflict at the start; instead, lack substitutes for villainy as the initiating incident, a common pattern in moral folktales where the enemy is circumstance or one's own failing. As expected, mid-sequence adventure functions (12–17) are minimal – there is no donor or magical aid, and Malin's heroic achievements occur “off-screen” in a montage of working hard and prospering, rather than through distinct miraculous events.

One interesting Proppian element present is the branding/markings: Malin's childhood scar, which is unusual in these legends (the other two tales do not emphasize a physical token for recognition). This detail serves to structurally enable the recognition (27) by the mother, anchoring it in a concrete sign – a classic fairy-

tale device. In *Malin Kundang*, recognition and exposure are essentially fused with the punishment scene: the story's resolution compresses recognition (27), exposure (28), transfiguration (29), and punishment (30) into one dramatic episode (the mother's curse and the storm). This compression is a hallmark of the legend's brevity and moral focus; once Malin commits the villainous act of denying his mother, the narrative rushes to retribution without any further complications.

In terms of character roles, *Malin Kundang* features a very small cast: primarily Malin and his mother (and briefly his wife). Malin is initially the hero by virtue of being the story's protagonist who goes on a quest. However, structurally he also becomes the villain at the climax when he mistreats his mother – effectively the tale's central act of villainy is committed by the hero. The mother, Mande Rubayah, plays multiple roles as well: she is the dispatcher (allowing and motivating Malin's journey, albeit reluctantly) and later the agent of punishment (a role akin to judge or even a moral donor of sorts, giving a curse instead of a boon). There is no separate false hero character, but Malin's own deception about his identity means he temporarily acts in the capacity of a false hero (making false claims to uphold a false identity). This convergence of roles aligns with observations in other Indonesian folktales that one character can embody several of Propp's dramatis personae functions.

Overall, the Proppian analysis of *Malin Kundang* reveals a narrative that, while simpler than a long fairy tale, still maps logically onto Propp's sequence in many respects. Functions such as absentation, interdiction, departure, return, recognition, and punishment appear in an order consistent with the morphology. The omissions (villain, donor, tasks, etc.) highlight the tale's single-minded moral trajectory: the story is essentially built around a moral test rather than an adventure, with the initial lack resolved by the hero's effort and the final villainy (ingratitude) immediately rectified by supernatural justice. This structure underscores the cultural message – the complex (wealth, success) is rendered meaningless by the simple moral failing of disloyalty, which the narrative punishes unequivocally.

#### **SI TANGGANG (MALAYSIA): PROPPIAN FUNCTION MAPPING**

**Story Summary:** *Si Tanggang* follows a narrative almost identical to *Malin Kundang*'s, with local names and nuances. Tanggang is the son of poor village folk; he leaves to become a sailor, rises to captain (*nakhoda*) and marries a princess, then returns and refuses to acknowledge his humble parents. His mother curses him, and he and his ship turn to stone amid a supernatural storm. Table 2 presents the Proppian function mapping for *Si Tanggang*:

Propp Function (No.)	<i>Si Tanggang</i> : Occurrence and Narrative Event
<b>Initial situation</b> (0)	<b>Present.</b> The tale opens by introducing Si Tanggang's background: he is the only son of a very poor family of villagers (his parents often named as Si Talang and Si Deruma in Malaysian versions). They live by the sea; the father is a humble fisherman. Tanggang is portrayed as industrious and ambitious despite his poverty. The setting establishes the ordinary world and the characters' identities.
<b>Absentation</b> (1)	<b>Absent (in most versions).</b> Unlike <i>Malin Kundang</i> , Si Tanggang's father is generally present and alive at the story's start. Both parents play a role in his life. There is no mention of a family member already missing. (In some Malaysian tellings, the father accompanies the mother in the crucial scene later, indicating he was not absent.) Thus, no initial absentation occurs. The family's poverty and the son's longing for a better life drive the plot instead of a prior loss.
<b>Interdiction</b> (2)	<b>Present.</b> Tanggang asks permission from his parents to leave with a merchant ship and seek his fortune. His parents are reluctant to let him go – they worry for his safety and fear he might never return. This parental concern functions as an interdiction: they effectively warn him about the perils and urge him not to forget his duty to return. Tanggang promises

Propp Function (No.)	Si Tanggang: Occurrence and Narrative Event
	faithfully that he will come back successful. Their eventual consent is conditional on this promise.
<b>Violation of interdiction (3)</b>	<b>Present.</b> Tanggang departs and for a long time does not return, thereby violating the spirit of his promise. He becomes absorbed in his new life and fails to send word or maintain contact, causing his parents to despair (the father even worries Tanggang may be ashamed of them). When years later his ship docks near his home village, Tanggang indeed breaks the implicit rule of filial respect by not immediately acknowledging his parents. Ultimately, his outright rejection of them when they approach is the blatant violation of what was expected of a dutiful son.
<b>Reconnaissance (4)</b>	<b>Absent.</b> There is no villain seeking information about Tanggang. The tale has no antagonist searching out the hero or his family. (The only reconnaissance element, if any, is villagers recognizing the big ship and informing Tanggang's parents of its arrival, but that is not villainous.)
<b>Delivery (5)</b>	<b>Absent.</b> No information is delivered to a villain. (Tanggang's identity is not betrayed to any foe; indeed he himself tries to hide his identity from those around him once home.)
<b>Trickery (6)</b>	<b>Absent.</b> No villain appears to deceive Tanggang at any point. (There is no trickery subplot; Tanggang's misfortune is self-wrought, not due to a deceiver.)
<b>Complicity (7)</b>	<b>Absent.</b> No one is tricked into helping the villain. (Tanggang's mother and father are not complicit in any deception; they simply allow him to leave.)
<b>Villainy or Lack (8)</b>	<b>Present (Lack).</b> As with Malin Kundang, the driving force is a lack (of prosperity). Tanggang's family is extremely poor, living in very simple conditions. Tanggang's yearning to improve his and his parents' life indicates the lack (of wealth, status) that must be remedied. No initial villainy (such as a monster or persecutor) exists; the tale is propelled by the need to overcome poverty and social limitation.
<b>Mediation (9)</b>	<b>Present.</b> The lack is made known and a plan is conceived. Tanggang is drawn to the sight of trading ships and feels a call to adventure – he expresses his desire to work on a ship and seek fortune. When a merchant ship arrives, it provides the opportunity. The parents, though anxious, recognize that Tanggang's leaving might be inevitable for a better future. They give him their blessing after extracting his promise to remain grateful and return. In Proppian terms, the hero is dispatched on his mission to eliminate the lack.
<b>Beginning of counteraction (10)</b>	<b>Present.</b> Tanggang prepares and begins to act. He joins the crew of the passing ship, bidding farewell to his parents. He likely takes with him some simple provisions or tokens (one version mentions his mother preparing his favorite snack, smoked bananas, which later becomes symbolically important). This marks Tanggang's initiative to fulfill his vow.
<b>Departure (11)</b>	<b>Present.</b> Tanggang physically leaves his home village aboard the ship. This is a clear departure as he sets sail to foreign ports. His journey at sea commences the second act of the narrative, away from home.
<b>First function of the Donor (12)</b>	<b>Absent (no supernatural donor).</b> Tanggang's rise is aided by natural mentors and his own effort rather than a magical donor. The captain of the ship takes a liking to him due to his diligence and honesty, eventually promoting him to first mate. While this captain could be seen as a kind of donor figure (providing Tanggang the chance to become a <i>nakhoda</i> ), there is no explicit testing scene; the test is essentially Tanggang proving himself through work. Since no singular event of donor trial appears, we mark this function as not

Propp Function (No.)	Si Tanggang: Occurrence and Narrative Event
	distinctly present.
<b>Hero's reaction</b> (13)	<b>Absent.</b> With no specific donor-orchestrated test, there is no discrete moment of reaction. (Tanggang's positive qualities are continuously shown, rather than one pivotal decision in response to a donor's challenge.)
<b>Acquisition of magical agent</b> (14)	<b>Absent.</b> Tanggang gains no magical item. His agents of success are his seamanship and eventually the ship he captains. At the narrative level, one could consider his new title and wealthy bride as rewards akin to magical agents, but they do not function as tools to overcome a villain, so we do not count them.
<b>Spatial transference</b> (15)	<b>Present.</b> Tanggang travels far from home across the seas. Over years, he visits many ports and his reputation as a trader grows across the archipelago. He eventually marries a royal princess, which likely occurs in a distant kingdom (implying a shift into a faraway realm of sorts). His attainment of the title <i>Nakhoda Tanggang</i> (Captain Tanggang) signifies his integration into a different social world. All these travels and transitions indicate spatial movement from the familiar village world to the broader maritime world, consistent with function 15's journey between regions.
<b>Struggle</b> (16)	<b>Absent (no combat).</b> Tanggang faces no monster or enemy to fight. His struggles are implicitly with nature (surviving storms, succeeding in trade) and with himself (remaining humble). None of these are depicted as a single decisive confrontation. The eventual confrontation is with his own parents, but that is a moral conflict, not a battle in the typical sense.
<b>Branding, marking</b> (17)	<b>Absent.</b> Unlike Malin, the Si Tanggang stories do not highlight any physical mark on Tanggang for later recognition. His mother and father recognize him on sight due to parental intuition and the context (their son returning in glory). The story does not use a scar or token as a device. (The smoked bananas his mother brings could have been a potential token of identification or memory, but instead they serve as a symbol of her love that he spurns.) Thus, no branding is present.
<b>Victory</b> (18)	<b>Absent (no combat victory).</b> Tanggang's victory is essentially his worldly success – he becomes wealthy, respected, and weds a princess. This is analogous to triumph, but since it's not victory over an antagonist, we do not count a formal victory function. It is the resolution of the lack, which comes next.
<b>Liquidation of lack</b> (19)	<b>Present.</b> The initial poverty is conclusively overcome. Tanggang is now rich and of high status, erasing the material lack that defined his youth. He has achieved what he set out to do: changing his and presumably his family's fortune. (However, crucially, this triumph has not yet been shared with his parents at home, and therein lies the impending tragedy.)
<b>Return</b> (20)	<b>Present.</b> Tanggang sails back to his home waters. At the peak of his success, he anchors his grand ship near his natal village (often by coincidence or to shelter from weather). News of the ship's arrival spreads, and the villagers inform Tanggang's parents. Thus, Tanggang has returned to the vicinity of home, setting up the reunion. He does not initially go ashore to see them; instead, his parents come out to meet him, indicating that although he is physically near home, he maintains a social distance.
<b>Pursuit</b> (21)	<b>Absent.</b> As with Malin, there is no one pursuing the hero. If anything, one could metaphorically say the parents pursue the son by coming out in a canoe to reach his ship. But since they are not villains and he is not fleeing, this is not a pursuit in Propp's sense. On the contrary, Tanggang is trying to avoid them once he sees them – he instructs his

Propp Function (No.)	Si Tanggang: Occurrence and Narrative Event
	crew to prevent the old couple from coming aboard. But we treat the pursuit function as not applicable.
<b>Rescue (22)</b>	<b>Absent.</b> No rescue occurs. Tanggang does not need saving from an aggressor. There is no helper intervening to extricate anyone – tragically, no one saves Tanggang from the consequences of his own actions either.
<b>Unrecognized arrival (23)</b>	<b>Present.</b> The hero arrives home unrecognized (initially). When Tanggang's magnificent ship arrives, the villagers do not immediately recognize the captain as their former neighbor – they are simply excited that a noble-looking vessel has arrived. Tanggang himself does not declare his identity. His mother, however, suspects it might be her son's ship and, along with his father (in most versions), goes to confirm. Upon reaching the ship, the mother calls out Tanggang's name. At first, Tanggang pretends not to know them; he is effectively attempting to remain unrecognized in his homeland, due to shame. Thus, this function is present both in the basic sense (the hero returning in altered form that people do not recognize) and in the more direct sense that Tanggang refuses recognition of his parents. The dynamic is the same inversion seen in Malin Kundang: recognition is offered by the parent (the mother), but the hero withholds acknowledgement.
<b>Unfounded claims (24)</b>	<b>Present.</b> Tanggang engages in deceit about his identity and lineage. When confronted by his poor, aged parents on the ship's deck, he loudly proclaims that his parents are long dead and that these villagers are impostors or beggars. In one version, he throws away the food his mother brought (smoked bananas) and calls her a mad old woman. These cruel actions are based on Tanggang's false claims: he has told his aristocratic wife and crew that he comes from noble origins, so he must maintain this lie. Thus, like Malin, he plays the role of a false hero figure, denying the truth. The unfounded claim here is his assertion that he is not the son of these lowly people.
<b>Difficult task (25)</b>	<b>Absent.</b> There is no challenge set for Tanggang by others at this stage. The task – to accept and honor his parents – was an implicit moral obligation rather than an explicit test imposed by someone in power. Since he utterly fails this, one might say he could not do the one thing required of him, but it is not framed as a formal task in the narrative.
<b>Solution (26)</b>	<b>Absent.</b> No solution is achieved; rather than solving a task, Tanggang creates a problem by his denial.
<b>Recognition (27)</b>	<b>Present.</b> True identities come to light. After Tanggang's denials, the true nature of the situation is confirmed through divine intervention. In all versions, the mother calls upon God to affirm whether she is indeed his mother, essentially asking for a sign or punishment if her claim is true. When the storm hits and Tanggang begins to panic, he at last recognizes his parents – realizing these poor people are truly his mother and father – and he calls out to his mother, begging forgiveness. This remorseful acknowledgment indicates that Tanggang finally accepts the truth (too late). The recognition in the eyes of onlookers also occurs as the curse unfolds – it becomes clear that the old woman's claim was valid, exposing Tanggang's lie. So, recognition is achieved concurrently with punishment.
<b>Exposure (28)</b>	<b>Present.</b> Tanggang's false pretenses are exposed. The supernatural storm and petrification serve as proof to everyone of Tanggang's guilt and the veracity of his mother's words. In the end, Tanggang stands exposed not as the nobleman he pretended to be, but as an ungrateful son receiving divine punishment. The legend often emphasizes that the stone remnants of the ship and crew bear witness to this truth henceforth.



Propp Function (No.)	<i>Si Tanggang</i> : Occurrence and Narrative Event
<b>Transfiguration</b> (29)	<b>Present.</b> Again, we have a transformation as the outcome. Tanggang, his wife, and his ship are turned into stone. Some tellings describe a rocky outcrop or island that is said to be Tanggang's ship, forever reminding people of his story. This petrification is the literal transfiguration – an awe-inspiring metamorphosis that in a moral sense freezes Tanggang in the act of supplication or terror. As with Malin Kundang, this is a punitive transfiguration rather than a glorifying one.
<b>Punishment</b> (30)	<b>Present.</b> The villain (Tanggang himself in the role of unfilial son) is punished. The mother's curse is fulfilled as the storm destroys Tanggang's ship and petrifies all aboard. The punishment is comprehensive – not only Tanggang but also his innocent wife and crew are turned to stone in some versions, underlining the severity of the moral judgement. Tanggang's personal punishment is the focal point: he loses his life and everything he gained, suffering eternal shame.
<b>Wedding</b> (31)	<b>Absent.</b> The story ends with punishment, not celebration. Tanggang's earlier wedding to a princess is part of the tale's rising action (the peak of his worldly success), but it is subverted by the ending. There is no final wedding or reward – on the contrary, the marriage is nullified by the curse as the wife is often said to be petrified with him. Thus, no happy wedding function concludes the narrative.

**Table 2: Proppian Function Mapping of *Si Tanggang***

Analysis of *Si Tanggang*'s structure: The Proppian profile of *Si Tanggang* is remarkably similar to that of *Malin Kundang*, confirming the two are true cognate tales. All the same major functions appear: lack (poverty) initiates the action, followed by departure, return, and the sequence of recognition-punishment at the climax. *Si Tanggang*'s story also omits any villain-driven elements or donor magic. One difference is the absention (1): Tanggang's father is present, so the family unit initially is intact (apart from poverty). This makes Tanggang's betrayal arguably even more stark, as he rejects both parents. (In some versions the father is more passive, and it is mainly the mother who is vocal and thus issues the curse, but his presence means there was no early loss.) In Proppian terms, absention often creates a vulnerability or need; here that role is played not by a missing family member but by their collective impoverishment.

Another subtle difference is the lack of a branding moment. Tanggang's recognition by his parents relies purely on their memory and his features, without a scar or token. This suggests that, structurally, the Malaysian versions put less emphasis on an identifying mark and more on emotional bonds (the mother brings his favorite food, which should have been a symbolic marker of her love and his origin, but tragically he rejects it). This does not affect the Proppian function sequence except that function 17 is absent, but it indicates a narrative choice: the recognition (27) comes from relational memory rather than a scar or object.

*Si Tanggang*'s version often elaborates a bit more on the pre-return period: he gains a title (*Nakhoda*) and fame, which in narrative terms is an extended liquidation of lack phase – he did not just become wealthy, he was honored. Yet, like Malin, these achievements only inflate his pride. The function of unfounded claims(24) is strongly present: Tanggang explicitly lies about his parents, demonstrating how the tale casts the hero himself as a species of false hero. The mapping shows that functions 23 (unrecognized arrival) and 24 (unfounded claim) work in tandem in this story to set up the dramatic irony – the real mother is at the hero's doorstep, and he's lying to save face.

In terms of character roles, we see the same overlapping: Tanggang is protagonist/hero through most of the tale, yet his actions at the climax are villainous. The parents collectively function as dispatcher (sending him off with expectations) and later as victim and judge. The mother, especially, becomes the instrument of divine retribution – she prays for justice, akin to a hero invoking a higher power to defeat evil. Only here, the evil is her

own son's arrogance. There is no separate villain or helper; natural forces (the storm) act as the agent of punishment, which one could metaphorically liken to a helper of the wronged mother (though not personified). Tanggang's wife plays the princess role only superficially (as a high-status spouse, part of his reward for success), but notably, she does not save or redeem him in any way – she is simply collateral damage to the curse. This underscores that the tale's moral center is the parent-child relationship, not the marriage as it would be in a romantic fairy tale.

The structure of *Si Tanggang* is highly linear and concentrated, which aligns with Propp's observation that tales may abbreviate the action by skipping functions. From the mapping, *Si Tanggang*'s tale hits the critical functions and then ends; it does not continue into any reconciliation or secondary plot. The effect is a tight cause-and-effect morality narrative. The similarities between *Si Tanggang* and *Malin Kundang* mappings affirm their shared origin, while minor differences (like absention and branding) highlight how cultural retellings modify small elements without altering the fundamental plot functions. For example, Malaysian versions include the detail of smoked bananas thrown into the sea – an image that carries local flavor but still symbolically serves the villainy function (Tanggang's cruel rejection of his mother's gift).

In summary, *Si Tanggang* fulfills essentially the same Proppian pattern as *Malin Kundang*, confirming that the ungrateful son narrative has a stable morphology across these regions. Functions 1, 17, and some donor-related ones are absent here, but the core sequence from lack to punishment is intact. The story reinforces the message that social elevation (wealth, title, marriage) is part of the hero's path but not its end – the final functions turn that success on its head, making the tale a cautionary reversal of the typical hero's journey. In a Proppian sense, the hero achieves an anti-hero status by the conclusion, serving as his own villain who must be vanquished by higher moral forces.

#### NAKHODA MANIS (BRUNEI DARUSSALAM): PROPPIAN FUNCTION MAPPING

**Story Summary:** *Nakhoda Manis* (literally Captain Manis) is the Bruneian variant of the ungrateful son tale, closely paralleling *Malin Kundang* and *Si Tanggang*, with some distinctive local elements. In this story, Manis is a young man who ventures out from Brunei's Kampong Ayer (Water Village) to trade, becomes a prosperous ship captain, and returns with a noble wife. When his devoted mother (sometimes named Dang Ambon) comes to greet him in her small canoe, Manis refuses to acknowledge her, claiming his mother was wealthy and could not be the poor woman before him. The mother's heartfelt curse brings forth a storm that capsizes Manis's ship and turns it into the famous rock outcrop Jong Batu in the Brunei River. Table 3 shows the function mapping for *Nakhoda Manis*:

Propp Function (No.)	<i>Nakhoda Manis</i> : Occurrence and Narrative Event
<b>Initial situation (0)</b>	<b>Present.</b> The legend begins by introducing Manis and his mother in Brunei. Depending on the version, their initial status varies: some accounts say they were reasonably comfortable or even wealthy (with the mother owning many storehouses of riches), while others depict them as of modest means in Kampong Ayer. This variation is notable – one version sets them as initially <i>prosperous</i> , which is a twist on the usual poverty start. Nevertheless, the key relationship is that Manis is a beloved only son and his father is absent (the father is typically not mentioned, implying the mother is widowed or single). The mother's deep affection for Manis (evidenced by her singing him lullabies) is established as context.
<b>Absentation (1)</b>	<b>Present (father absent).</b> The story implicitly has an absention: Manis's father is not in the picture (we infer he is deceased or gone, as only the mother is mentioned raising Manis). Additionally, if we consider the version where the mother initially has wealth, the decline of that wealth over time (as Manis is away) could be seen as the absence of fortune or security. But the clearest absention is the missing father figure, leaving the mother-son unit alone.

Propp Function (No.)	<i>Nakhoda Manis</i> : Occurrence and Narrative Event
<b>Interdiction (2)</b>	<b>Present.</b> Before Manis departs, his mother is hesitant and concerned. She initially resists his wish to travel for trade, fearing for his safety and that he might not return. She finally consents but only on the condition that he promise to return home when his trading journey is done. This maternal stipulation – essentially “Do not forget to come back to me” – serves as the interdiction. In some tellings, she also imparts moral guidance, reminding him to stay humble and remember his origins. Manis agrees to these terms and leaves with her reluctant blessing.
<b>Violation of interdiction (3)</b>	<b>Present.</b> As in the other tales, Manis’s long absence and eventual denial of his mother constitute the violation. He does not return for many years, and no word comes, which already breaks the intent of his promise. When he finally is back in Brunei, he directly violates his mother’s foremost wish by refusing to acknowledge her. Upon seeing her in her ragged canoe, he is ashamed and orders his men to push her away, insisting that his true mother could not be alive in such a state. This act is the blatant violation of his duty as a son and of the condition under which he left.
<b>Reconnaissance (4)</b>	<b>Absent.</b> There is no villain figure seeking information. No one is spying on Manis or trying to find his weak points. (The only seeking happening is the mother searching for her son’s return, but that’s from love, not villainy.)
<b>Delivery (5)</b>	<b>Absent.</b> No information is passed to a villain. (At most, villagers bring news to the mother that a great ship has arrived, but this is part of the mother’s perspective, not a villain’s scheme.)
<b>Trickery (6)</b>	<b>Absent.</b> No villain deceives Manis. There’s no trickery subplot; Manis’s downfall is self-inflicted rather than a result of being tricked.
<b>Complicity (7)</b>	<b>Absent.</b> The mother (victim) is not tricked by anyone, and Manis is not led astray by false promises; he leaves by choice. No complicity stage.
<b>Villainy or Lack (8)</b>	<b>Present (Lack).</b> The primary motivator is again a lack, though interestingly it can be framed two ways in this tale: In versions where the mother and son start off wealthy, what Manis lacks is perhaps adventure or personal accomplishment, rather than material needs – a lack of experience and fame. More commonly, however, the tale emphasizes the typical lack: Manis desires to seek wealth and see the world (implying their current life is not enough). We will consider lack to be the operative function. There is no initial villain; nothing “bad” happens to them to force him out. It is his ambition and the perceived need to gain status that drive the story.
<b>Mediation (9)</b>	<b>Present.</b> The lack is understood and the hero is spurred to act. Manis’s yearning for travel and trade is the response to either economic or existential lack. He requests permission to go, making the case to his mother. Eventually, seeing his determination, the mother relents, effectively dispatching him with her prayers and admonitions. At this point, the mission is clear: Manis will go make his fortune and then return. The mother’s emotional send-off (some versions mention she sings a parting lullaby or gives him blessings) underscores the call-to-action phase.
<b>Beginning of counteraction (10)</b>	<b>Present.</b> Manis actively prepares for and embarks on his journey. He joins a merchant expedition or assembles a trade venture. The narrative does not detail his departure preparations extensively, but we know he sets out to sea to conduct trade, marking the commencement of his efforts to address the lack (improve his fortunes). His mother likely provides some provisions and many tears; she stays behind praying for him daily.

Propp Function (No.)	<i>Nakhoda Manis</i> : Occurrence and Narrative Event
<b>Departure</b> (11)	<b>Present.</b> Manis departs from home. He leaves Kampong Ayer, sailing down the Brunei River to the open sea, heading for distant trading ports. This physical departure separates him from his mother's world, initiating the main part of his journey.
<b>First function of the Donor</b> (12)	<b>Absent.</b> Manis' success, as usual, does not involve magical donors. Along his journey, he presumably gains allies or patrons (perhaps the Brunei tale imagines he had connections, or simply through his own skill he prospers). No direct donor function.
<b>Hero's reaction</b> (13)	<b>Absent.</b> With no donor, there is no test to react to. Manis' positive attributes (intelligence, charisma) are manifested in his trading success but not as a single event.
<b>Acquisition of magical agent</b> (14)	<b>Absent.</b> Manis acquires wealth, a ship, and a noble wife, but no supernatural agent. His ship itself becomes significant only in that it is the object transformed into Jong Batu at the end. But originally, it's just a splendid ship, not a magical item.
<b>Spatial transference</b> (15)	<b>Present.</b> Manis travels far across the seas. He likely visits places like Malacca, Java, Sumatra, etc., given he gains region-wide renown. One version notes he operated during a historical Sultan's time, placing him in a broader regional context. After departing Brunei, he does not return for many years, effectively establishing a new realm where he builds his life. His marriage to a noblewoman indicates entry into a high social circle, akin to being in a different world from his humble origin. All these imply the spatial (and social) transference function.
<b>Struggle</b> (16)	<b>Absent.</b> There is no physical duel or fight. Manis' challenges are in commerce and perhaps surviving voyages. The story does not highlight any singular conflict on his journey. The main conflict is deferred until he encounters his mother, which is moral rather than physical.
<b>Branding, marking</b> (17)	<b>Absent.</b> No specific mark or token is mentioned for <i>Nakhoda Manis</i> . There is an interesting narrative device, however: the mother's lullaby. In one version, the mother copes with longing by singing a lullaby that she used to sing to Manis as a child. When she meets him again, she is too choked with sorrow to sing it. While not a physical token, this song is a sort of emotional identifier of their bond. But since it is not used to prove identity to others, we will not call it a mark in Proppian terms. Thus, no concrete branding occurs.
<b>Victory</b> (18)	<b>Absent (no combat victory).</b> Manis' victory is his tremendous success as a merchant and captain – he becomes wealthy and gains noble status through marriage. This achieves the goal of his quest. Yet it is not victory over an opponent, just attainment of prosperity. So formally no villain defeat to mark.
<b>Liquidation of lack</b> (19)	<b>Present.</b> The initial lack is fully remedied. Manis has amassed wealth, and if the mother was wealthy originally, arguably he has at least maintained or increased the family wealth. In the version where they were not poor, one could say the lack was more abstract (adventure or fame) and he has achieved fame and high status. In any case, by the time he returns as <i>Nakhoda Manis</i> , the initial motive for leaving (to gain fortune/honor) has been satisfied abundantly. Notably, as with the other tales, this resolution occurs offstage and sets up the dramatic irony that he should now be in a position to honor his mother – yet he does the opposite.
<b>Return</b> (20)	<b>Present.</b> Manis returns to Brunei. His great ship arrives and anchors at Kampong Ayer. The villagers are excited by the arrival of such a renowned trader. Crucially, upon hearing of a big ship, the mother suspects it might be her son and goes out to confirm. The return function is clearly present: the hero has come back to the vicinity of his home, albeit not

Propp Function (No.)	<i>Nakhoda Manis</i> : Occurrence and Narrative Event
	with the intention of a homecoming; it seems he docked for business or supplies. Still, physically he is home, which triggers the final act.
<b>Pursuit (21)</b>	<b>Absent.</b> No villain chases Manis. If anything, the mother is pursuing her son by hurrying to meet him upon return, but that is out of love, not a chase in anger. Manis himself tries to escape confrontation – he orders to set sail quickly to avoid his mother – but the storm intervenes. So, no conventional pursuit function.
<b>Rescue (22)</b>	<b>Absent.</b> No rescue from pursuit. There is no rescue for Manis at all; when the divine punishment comes, no one saves him. (From another angle, one might say the mother's curse rescues her dignity and the moral order by removing the ungrateful son, but that is stretching the term. In Propp's sense, no hero is saved here.)
<b>Unrecognized arrival (23)</b>	<b>Present.</b> The hero arrives home and is not immediately recognized as the same person. In <i>Nakhoda Manis</i> , the effect is much like <i>Tanggang</i> : Manis has been away long enough and returned in such finery that common folk do not identify him as the local boy. His mother does recognize him right away – some tellings say she calls out affectionate phrases and tries to climb the ship. However, Manis denies his identity. He tells those around him that this poor woman is mistaken or crazy, and that his mother would never dress so poorly. Thus, he enforces an unrecognized. He ensures that his aristocratic peers do not see him as the son of a beggar. This again is an inversion: rather than a hidden hero trying to reveal himself, we have a revealed hero trying to hide. So, yes, unrecognized arrival applies through Manis' willful non-recognition of his mother.
<b>Unfounded claims (24)</b>	<b>Present.</b> Just like the other two stories, Manis makes false claims about his background. He asserts that his mother was a rich, beautiful woman and thus the old, impoverished Dang Ambon cannot be her. He likely had told his wife and crew a fabricated story (similar to <i>Tanggang</i> 's scenario). In doing so, he essentially establishes a false narrative where he is not the person the old woman says he is. This is the false hero motif playing out as the protagonist's deceit. Meanwhile, the mother begs and insists, referencing her carrying him for nine months and her sacrifices (a common trope in Malay cultures to remind children of parental debt). Her pleas highlight the falseness of his denial. The unfounded claim is clearly present in Manis' lies.
<b>Difficult task (25)</b>	<b>Absent.</b> No challenge is issued for Manis to prove himself at this point. There is no king or authority setting a task to reconcile claims (as sometimes in fairy tales with false heroes). The only task would be for Manis to accept his mother, which he fails spontaneously.
<b>Solution (26)</b>	<b>Absent.</b> No solution occurs. Instead of a solution, there is a catastrophic consequence.
<b>Recognition (27)</b>	<b>Present.</b> The truth is revealed and acknowledged ultimately. After Manis' harsh rejection, the mother calls out to God, reciting how she bore and raised Manis, and asks that if she truly is his mother, that God show the truth through punishment. When the curse takes effect – the sudden storm and the transformation – it confirms to everyone that she was indeed his mother and that Manis was lying. There is a form of recognition in that moment: Manis himself, as the ship is overwhelmed, realizes with horror that the curse is real and that this woman was truly his mother all along (in some narrations he might cry for forgiveness when it is too late, akin to the other versions). So, the real identities and relationships are laid bare through divine sign. This function merges into the punishment event.



Propp Function (No.)	<i>Nakhoda Manis</i> : Occurrence and Narrative Event
<b>Exposure</b> (28)	<b>Present.</b> The exposure of Manis' falsehood happens concurrently. The storm and the petrification of the ship (Jong Batu) serve to expose Manis' ingratitude to all. The community learns of what happened, and his name becomes synonymous with filial impiety. In local tradition, the rock formation itself stands as an exposed testament of the story – people can literally see the evidence of Manis' sin. Thus, the false claims are definitively exposed by supernatural action.
<b>Transfiguration</b> (29)	<b>Present.</b> A transformation takes place: Manis, his ship, and according to some, those aboard (including his wife and crew) are turned to stone, forming the rocky islet called Jong Batu in the Brunei River. This is the equivalent transfiguration to Malin and Tanggang's cases. Some local beliefs say you can still hear ghostly sounds of his household near the rock, which attests to the enduring nature of the curse. The transfiguration is the physical manifestation of the judgment, petrifying the moment of reckoning for eternity.
<b>Punishment</b> (30)	<b>Present.</b> The ungrateful son (villain of the moral narrative) is punished by divine force. The mother's curse is essentially a prayer to God to punish her son if she truly is his mother and he has wronged her. The result is immediate: thunder, lightning, massive waves – and the ship is shattered, sinking with all its treasures, while Manis and those with him are turned to stone. This catastrophic punishment is the climax of the tale. As in the other versions, it is an absolute, irreversible punishment, serving the story's didactic purpose.
<b>Wedding</b> (31)	<b>Absent.</b> There is no final wedding or reward. Manis's marriage occurs before the climax (and ironically leads to further impetus for his pride and downfall). The story ends in tragedy, with no celebratory closure. In fact, in this tale, even the wife (the princess he married) is punished alongside him, which starkly contrasts with the wedding = reward ending of typical fairy tales.

**Table 3: Proppian Function Mapping of *Nakhoda Manis***

Analysis of *Nakhoda Manis*'s structure: The Proppian mapping for *Nakhoda Manis* aligns with those of *Malin Kundang* and *Si Tanggang*, reaffirming the stable structure of the ungrateful son motif. There are, however, a few unique features and cultural inflections in the Bruneian version:

One notable difference is the initial situation regarding wealth. Some Brunei tellings emphasize that Manis' mother was initially wealthy (the detail of seven storehouses of riches on land and seven at sea). This is a departure from the standard poverty-driven lack. If taken literally, this would mean lack is not material in that version – perhaps it is a lack of adventure or contentment. However, even in such versions, as time passes while Manis is away, the mother's fortunes decline (her house becomes dilapidated, her wealth diminishes). Thus, by the time of return, she is in a poor state, thus re-establishing the rich/poor contrast. In any case, all versions converge on the fact that when the mother greets Manis, she appears as a poor old woman. This implies that the structural function lack can be interpreted flexibly here – if not lack of wealth for the son, then lack of gratitude or perspective perhaps. But for our mapping, we treated the impetus as similar (Manis wanting more than what he has).

*Nakhoda Manis* also places strong emphasis on emotional and spiritual elements. The inclusion of the lullaby that the mother sings (absent in the other tellings) adds a poignant emotional motif, though it does not change the Proppian count. It highlights the mother's unwavering love and hope – making Manis' betrayal even

more heart-rending. From a structural view, it is extra characterization feeding into the eventual curse (the mother's silence replacing her song when heartbroken is a dramatic touch).

The function sequence in *Nakhoda Manis* is essentially the same as the others: a lack leads to departure, the hero gains everything, returns incognito, then the confrontation triggers recognition, exposure, transfiguration, and punishment. No donor, no external villain, no extraneous quests – just a straight line to moral retribution. All of Propp's combat/adventure functions are absent here too.

In terms of character roles, Manis, like Tanggang and Malin, embodies the roles of hero (during the quest) and villain (at the moment of disowning his mother). The mother again is dispatcher (letting him go with admonitions) and later the instrument of punishment (her curse). One could also argue that the divine or nature plays a role akin to a helper or executor of justice – the storm is almost a character in its own right, responding to the mother's plea. This is a cultural nuance: the invocation of God in the curse underlines the Islamic-Malay belief that divine justice will intervene. Propp did not have a specific role for supernatural enforcer of moral law, but in these tales, that role is fulfilled by the natural elements (sea and sky) acting on behalf of the wronged mother. The wife in Manis' story, as in Tanggang's, is a passive princess figure who unfortunately shares in the punishment.

One cultural adaptation in *Nakhoda Manis* is the localization of the legend in geography. The formation Jong Batu (literally Ship Rock) is a real place in Brunei, and the tale serves as an origin story for it. This gives the story a place-based significance; it is a cautionary tale tied to a physical landmark. Propp's functions do not directly account for moral of the story or folklore explanation, but the presence of the enduring petrified ship stands as a constant exposed evidence (function 28) that reinforces the tale's moral beyond the narrative itself. In the culture, telling the story of Jong Batu is both entertainment and moral instruction – “remember what happened to Nakhoda Manis” is an implicit warning to children.

From a structural perspective, *Nakhoda Manis* perhaps leans even more into the filial piety theme: the mother's curse speech in Bruneian versions explicitly references her sacrifices (carrying him, childbirth pain, etc.), which is a direct moral argument seldom spelled out in the other two tales. This does not change the Proppian structure but deepens the villainy of the son's act. It also frames the punishment as not just personal but cosmic justice for violating a sacred parent-child bond.

In conclusion, *Nakhoda Manis* conforms to the same morphological template observed in *Malin Kundang* and *Si Tanggang*. The differences lie in setting and emphasis rather than structure: whether poor or initially rich, the protagonist leaves to improve his situation, and the crux is his treatment of his mother upon return. All three tales share the crucial sequence: lack → departure → success (lack resolved) → return → unrecognition/denial → mother's curse (villainy by hero) → punishment (divine justice). Functions that are irrelevant to this moral legend format (like donor sequences, chases, etc.) are uniformly absent. What *Nakhoda Manis* adds to the comparative picture is an affirmation that this story pattern survives with minor cultural tailoring (lullabies, historical context of the Brunei Sultanate) but its skeleton remains the same. Propp's framework handily captures that skeleton, and any adjustments (such as accounting for the absent father or the lack of an initial poverty in one version) are relatively small tweaks to the overall alignment of functions.

#### COMPARATIVE SYNTHESIS OF THE THREE TALES

Having mapped the three folktales – *Malin Kundang*, *Si Tanggang*, and *Nakhoda Manis* – onto Propp's morphology, we can now compare their structures, character roles, and thematic emphases side by side. The analysis confirms a high degree of overlap in their narrative functions, affirming that these stories are variant tellings of a single underlying motif. At the same time, there are subtle divergences and cultural adaptations that distinguish each version. This comparative synthesis highlights both the common Proppian function pattern that undergirds all three tales and the notable differences in execution and emphasis.

#### OVERLAPPING PROPPIAN FUNCTIONS AND STRUCTURE

All three tales follow a broadly similar Proppian function sequence:

- a. **Initial Situation (0) & Lack (8):** Each story establishes a mother and son living in humble circumstances (or at least the son perceives their life as lacking something). In two cases, the absence of the father is a feature (explicit in *Malin Kundang* and *Nakhoda Manis*, implicit in *Si Tanggang* where the father is present but not a barrier to leaving). The lack(function 8) of wealth or status is the inciting condition in every tale. No external villain initiates the action; instead, poverty or ambition does – a substitution Propp allowed for (villainy or lack can drive the tale). This alignment shows that the tales share the same structural cause for the hero's departure: economic or social need.
- b. **Departure (11) and Journey (15):** In all three, the son departs from home with his mother's reluctant permission. The mothers in each story issue some form of interdiction (2) – usually a plea to return or remember them – which the son later violates (3) by not returning or forgetting his promise. The journey spans years and brings the hero great success, fulfilling the liquidation of lack (19) as he becomes wealthy and marries into high society. Throughout this, classic adventure functions like donor encounters, battles, or magical aids are absent in all versions. This uniform absence underscores that these legends are structurally condensed: they leap from departure to success without intervening fantastical episodes. In Proppian terms, they all skip from around function 11 to 19, illustrating that shorter-simpler folktales often omit numerous middle functions while still following the general sequence of functions in broad strokes.
- c. **Return (20) and Incognito Arrival (23):** Each hero eventually returns to the vicinity of his home village by ship. The arrival is grand and initially unrecognized (23) by the local community. Crucially, in all three tales the mother immediately recognizes her son – either by a scar (*Malin Kundang*) or simply by knowing his appearance and heart (*Tanggang* and *Manis*). However, the son in each case refuses to acknowledge her, attempting to maintain his false identity as a nobleman. Thus, the pattern of unrecognized arrival (23) followed by the hero's deceitful denial (a form of unfounded claim, 24) is consistent across the three stories. This inversion of the usual recognition trope – where the hero is recognized but rejects the recognizer – is a hallmark of the motif. All three heroes make virtually the same unfounded claim: that the old woman is not their mother (with *Tanggang* and *Manis* explicitly claiming their “real” mother is dead or different). In all versions, the function of the false hero is internalized; the protagonists become their own false heroes by propagating a lie about themselves. This overlap demonstrates a shared structure: the climatic conflict is not physical but a moral test at home, which the hero fails in each tale.
- d. **Recognition (27), Exposure (28), Punishment (30):** The conclusions align almost point for point. After the son's denial, the mother in each story invokes a higher justice – cursing or praying for divine verification and vengeance if indeed she is the true mother. What follows is a supernatural storm that strikes suddenly and wreaks destruction. In all three stories, the storm's result is the transformation (29) of the hero or/and his ship into stone. This doubles as the punishment (30) of the ungrateful son and the exposure (28) of his wrongdoing – the dramatic event proves the mother's claim and reveals the son's true, shameful identity to onlookers. The final functions are collapsed together in each tale's final scene: recognition and exposure occur through the act of punishment/transfiguration itself. For example, in *Malin Kundang*, Malin's petrification as he kneels in regret serves to expose his guilt and stands as the punishment; in *Si Tanggang*, the entire ship and crew turning to stone eternally exposes Tanggang's story; in *Nakhoda Manis*, the creation of Jong Batu is both the punishment and a public testament to Manis's sin. All three thus share the same cataclysmic resolution: a thunderous divine retribution that is unmistakably the structural climax (fulfilling multiple Proppian functions at once). None of the tales has a happy ending or wedding(31); that final function is explicitly absent in all, replaced by a didactic tragic ending. This uniform ending across three cultures emphasizes how the narrative structure is harnessed to deliver the identical moral: betrayal of one's mother is met with irreversible doom.

#### DIVERGENCES AND CULTURAL ADAPTATIONS

While the three stories are structurally near-identical in the macro sense, a closer look reveals small divergences and culturally-driven variations in detail and emphasis:

- a. **Function Omissions and Additions:** There are slight differences in which ancillary functions are present. For example, *Malin Kundang* uniquely includes a branding (17) function with Malin's childhood scar serving as a recognition token. Neither *Tanggap* nor *Manis* have an equivalent – their mothers recognize them without a physical mark. This may reflect the influence of specific sources or storytellers; the scar detail in *Malin Kundang*'s narrative adds a literary touch that aligns with European folktale devices, perhaps an influence of written retellings. In contrast, *Si Tanggang* and *Nakhoda Manis* as (rather) oral legends did not emphasize such a device, relying on emotional recognition. Furthermore, *Si Tanggang* offers a detail that *Malin Kundang*'s main source versions do not mention: the father's presence. In *Si Tanggang*, the father is alive and accompanies the mother (though he plays a less active role); and in *Nakhoda Manis*, while the father is absent, the story sometimes compensates by initially not making them poor. These differences affect absention (1): present in *Malin* (father absent), absent in *Tanggap* (both parents at start), and present in *Nakhoda* (father absent). However, these variances do not significantly alter the trajectory of the plot; they are more about setup context. Another difference is in interdiction (2): all mothers give warnings, but the form of the warning can reflect cultural norm – e.g., in *Malin* and *Tanggap* it is "Do not leave me for too long/Do not forget us," whereas in *Nakhoda Manis* it is explicitly tied to a religious tone "Return when you are done, may God protect you" (implied from the mother's prayers). Again, these are nuanced variations rather than structural changes.
- b. **Character Role Emphasis:** While all three stories merge roles (hero becomes villain, mother as dispatcher and punisher), the presence of the father in *Si Tanggang* slightly alters the dynamics. In *Tanggap*'s story, the father shares in the mother's heartbreak, but it is the mother who speaks and curses. In *Malin* and *Manis*, the mother is alone, so she fully occupies the role of both grieving victim and curser. Culturally, the Malaysian *Tanggap* versions often highlight the mother's role just as strongly – Malaysian sources explicitly title the story *Si TanggangSi Anak Derhaka* (The Disobedient Son) focusing on the son's betrayal of the mother – the father's presence does not dilute the moral, but it adds a dimension that *Tanggap* shames both parents (filial impiety to mother *and* father, though mother's curse is what counts). The Bruneian version gives the mother (Dang Ambon) a personal name and sometimes a bit of backstory (her prior wealth), which may evoke a sense of tragedy of fortune lost, a nuance not appearing in the other two versions. Also, Brunei's telling imbues the mother with almost a sacral quality – she sings lullabies and her curse is almost a formal *doa* (supplication). These cultural textures do not change the roles per se, but rather accentuate certain aspects: the mother in all is the moral center, but in Brunei she is very a pious figure; in Malaysia/Indonesia, she is depicted as long-suffering but perhaps a bit more ordinary. All three mothers operate beyond Propp's standard roster – they are dispatchers who turn into the agent that calls down punishment, a role not common in European tales where usually an outside power (like a king or magical force) punishes the villain. Here the mother herself invokes the punishment, reflecting the cultural elevation of a mother's curse as potent and fearsome in Malay cultures.
- c. **Narrative Detail and Moral Emphasis:** Each culture's version incorporates details that resonate locally. In *Si Tanggang*, the smoked bananas the mother prepares (and *Tanggap* throws away) are a specifically Malaysian touch, symbolizing humble home-cooking and love. This detail emphasizes *Tanggap*'s contempt for his origins in a concrete way. *Malin Kundang* includes the detail of fish (anchovies, mullet, mackerel) turned to stone alongside the ship in one version, reflecting Minangkabau folklore where petrification often extends to surroundings (similar motifs appear in other Sumatran cursed-into-stone legends). *Nakhoda Manis* weaves in Bruneian geography and possibly historical context, giving it a quasi-historical legend feel. These details shape the moral emphasis

slightly differently: *Malin Kundang*'s versions often stress the personal regret of Malin in his final moments (one account shows him realizing his wrong and kneeling just before petrification), highlighting remorse. *Si Tanggang*'s tellings emphasize the public shame – the whole ship, crew, and even the wife are petrified, making him an example to all. *Nakhoda Manis* emphasizes the spiritual warning – the ghostly echoes around Jong Batu and the invocation of God anchor it as a lesson about divine witness to filial impiety. These emphases show each culture tailoring the lesson: Indonesia's *Malin* focuses on the filial duty in Minangkabau matrilineal society (where disowning one's mother is especially egregious); Malaysia's *Tanggang* on broader social hypocrisy and humility; Brunei's *Manis* on religious filial obligations and communal memory of sin (the rock as permanent moral reminder).

- d. **Hero's Background Variation:** One interesting divergence is *Nakhoda Manis* potentially not starting with poverty. This variant where the son leaves not out of dire need but out of wanderlust or ambition despite relative comfort adds a layer to the moral: Manis had no economic necessity, making his betrayal even more wanton (he was not escaping hardship, he just wanted more). This contrasts with *Malin* and *Tanggang* where one might sympathize with the initial desire to escape poverty. The Bruneian version thereby sharpens the moral absolutism: even if a child has everything, pride can lead to ingratitude. Structurally, it does not remove the lack, it just defines it differently (lack of contentment). It is a cultural storytelling choice showing how the core structure can endure even if a surface element (rich vs. poor start) is flipped, because ultimately by the time of return the situation (rich son, poor mother) is uniform.
- e. **Narrative Scope and Simplification:** All three tales are relatively short and linear, but one could argue *Malin Kundang* versions read more like a literary narrative (with the scar detail, interior remorse, etc.), whereas *Si Tanggang* has a "folksier" style with repetitive moral phrasing (*anak derhaka*) and *Nakhoda Manis* includes lyrical elements (the lullaby) and explicit moralizing. These stylistic differences reflect their sources: *Malin*'s summary combined from magazine and cultural site had a more polished storyline, *Tanggang*'s from blogs and Patriots.asia a mix of in-depth description and straightforward admonition, and *Nakhoda*'s from UNESCO compilation and local lore emphasizes cultural context. Despite style differences, their function structure remains congruent. This reinforces that Proppian analysis cuts through to the underlying plot functions, which remain stable even if narrative tone or depth varies.

Overall, the differences observed do not disrupt the core sequence of functions but rather show adaptive storytelling: the tales incorporate relevant cultural motifs (food, songs, local landmarks, religious references) and adjust character details (presence of father, initial wealth) to their audience, all while adhering to the same essential plot beats. These adaptations prove the tale's flexibility – there is a template onto which each culture can paint its values. Propp's framework accommodated these differences by simply marking certain functions as absent or noting where roles are doubled. For instance, the fact that none of the tales have an independent villain is notable; in Propp's original formulation, function 8, villainy was primary, but here all use lack and later incorporate villainy in an unusual place (the hero's own act). This is a pointed deviation from typical fairy-tale structure, yet Propp's model, as expanded by researchers, can handle it by recognizing the limited applicability of some functions in certain cultures and the possibility that roles like villain can be internally fulfilled. Such an adjustment echoes the academic findings that folklore elements are very likely to be influenced by the originating culture and that not all Proppian functions will manifest if the cultural narrative does not require them.

#### APPLICATION OF PROPP'S FRAMEWORK: ADJUSTMENTS AND LIMITATIONS

Mapping these Nusantara folktales onto Propp's morphology also highlights some challenges and limitations of applying the full 31-function schema to short moral tales:



- a. **Partial Function Sequences:** Each story utilized roughly half of the Proppian functions. By our analysis, *Malin Kundang* and *Si Tanggang* each displayed about 14-15 of the 31 functions, and *Nakhoda Manis* similarly. This is consistent with other research on Southeast Asian folktales which often find between 19 and as low as 14 functions present in a given tale. It underlines that shorter single-episode legends do not have the narrative breadth to cover all functions. Functions related to extended adventure (such as donor sequences, pursuit, rescue, difficult tasks) were completely absent. As a result, a strict Proppian analyst must accept that absence of functions is normal here and does not affect the tale's completeness in a negative way. The tales feel structurally whole despite missing segments of Propp's sequence – they have a clear beginning, middle, and end focused on the moral incident. In Propp's terms, these tales would be classified as single-move tales (only one sequence of complication and resolution) without the multi-move or embedded move structures that longer fairy tales often have. Our mapping had to note "absent" for many functions; while this might seem like a limitation in the model, Propp's own assertion was that any given tale might not contain all functions, and indeed these tales exemplify that. The key is that the functions that do appear follow the expected order, which they largely did.
- b. **Role Compression and Shifts:** Another area of adjustment was dealing with unconventional role assignments. Propp's character theory anticipates that roles can be combined, but in Russian tales, the hero usually does not become the villain. In these stories, we had to interpret the son as both hero and villain. This duality is unusual but not outside the scope of Propp's abstraction, which focuses on functions: at one point in the story, the protagonist performs a villainous function (causing harm to a family member). We addressed this by effectively switching the lens: in the final act, the mother becomes the hero in a sense (the wronged party whose perspective the audience shares) and the son is the villain who is punished. One might say the tale does a role reversal midstream. This is an adaptation that a Proppian analysis can describe (by noting who fulfills the function of villainy and who enacts punishment) but it challenges the typical notion of a singular hero arc. The moral framework of these tales required the hero to fail, which is something Propp's functions allow (the functions do not guarantee a happy denouement; e.g., function 30, punishment can apply to the villain even if that villain was initially the hero). However, in writing the analysis we had to carefully articulate this inversion. It demonstrates a limitation: Propp's model does not explicitly discuss tales where the hero is punished instead of rewarded – that is more in the realm of legend and fable than fairy tale. Yet by stretching the definitions (treating the son's betrayal as the tale's central villainy and his petrification as punishment of the villain), we made the model fit. This indicates that while Propp's functions are adaptable, the interpretation can become non-intuitive when the story's moral stance differs from the heroic norm. Scholars have indeed noted that not all folk narratives aim for the hero's triumph; in some, like these, the didactic point is the hero's downfall. Our analysis essentially repurposed the tail-end functions (recognition, exposure, punishment) to fit a tragedy rather than a victory/wedding conclusion.
- c. **Cultural Context Beyond the Schema:** Propp's morphology, being formalist, does not directly account for why certain functions are present or absent – that requires cultural analysis. In comparing these tales, we saw that cultural norms (the sanctity of a mother's curse, the value of humility) dictated the narrative trajectory. All three tales omit the wedding at the end because a celebratory closure would undermine the moral; instead they end with punishment. Propp's scheme might consider that an incomplete tale (no function 31), but in context it is purposeful. The absence of functions like wedding or villain punishment (when there is no villain) creates a less complex plot structure but is a feature of the specific culture's storytelling. Thus, these Nusantara tales are simpler in plot complexity but intense in moral focus. The implication for using Propp's full framework is that one must be careful not to force every tale into a 31-step Proppian straightjacket. Instead, as we did, one should identify which functions legitimately occur and which do not, and then interpret the significance of those omissions. In our case, the omissions themselves were revealing: the lack of a donor or helper underscores that no

one can help the son once he goes astray, reinforcing individual moral responsibility; the absence of a triumphant return sequence (like task completion, false hero defeated, etc.) highlights that these tales are not about social integration of the hero back home but about retribution.

- d. **Tableau vs. Plot Progression:** Another limitation we navigated was that these tales end in a tableau (stone figures) rather than a dynamic situation. Propp's final functions (like recognition, transfiguration, punishment) all happen almost simultaneously as a single event. In our mapping, we described each separately, but in reality, they are fused. This raised the issue that Propp's linear breakdown can sometimes artificially segment moments that the narrative presents as one symbolic stroke. In analysis, we mitigated this by explaining how those functions overlap in these climaxes. It suggests that applying Propp might require some flexibility in understanding that functions can co-occur or be compressed in very short tales.
- e. **Explanatory Power vs. Moral Interpretation:** Propp's framework excellently highlighted the structural parallels among the three tales, but it does not by itself explain the powerful moral resonance of the stories. Our analysis supplemented the structural mapping with discussions of moral and cultural context, which is necessary to fully appreciate the tales. This is not so much a flaw of Propp's method (which was not designed for moral analysis) as it is a reminder of its scope. For instance, Propp can tell us that punishment is a function present at the end of all three stories, but not that in all three nations in question there is a cultural belief that a parent's curse is potent and will come true, if the child is truly in the wrong. That understanding we had to bring in from outside the morphology (e.g., noting the invocation of God in the curse, the local belief of hearing sounds at Jong Batu, etc.). Thus, while mapping the functions gave us a skeleton, we still needed the flesh from cultural knowledge to explain why that skeleton matters.

In all, the application of Propp's theory to these Nusantara folktales proved to be illuminating and largely fitting, but it required acknowledging the tales' simplicity and didactic nature. We confirmed that many of Propp's functions are either irrelevant or naturally absent in a concise moral tale. In turn, we had to adjust by focusing on the functions that did appear and not treating the missing ones as gaps but as conscious exclusions. When using the full 31-function framework in such contexts, one might adopt a strategy similar to Chamalah [3] or Hendriani et al. [4] – tally which functions appear and which do not, and interpret what that means for the tale's complexity and focus. We effectively did that in our tables and discussion: for instance, noting that the absence of a donor and magical agent in all three tales emphasizes that the protagonist's rise is purely through his own effort and thus, his hubris has no one else to blame – a thematic point.

In conclusion, through the comparative Proppian analysis we found that *Malin Kundang*, *Si Tanggang*, and *Nakhoda Manis* are structurally isomorphic: they share a sequence of narrative functions that deliver the same moral narrative. Differences in cultural detail do not significantly alter the morphology; rather, they decorate a common framework. Propp's analytical toolkit, when applied carefully, was able to dissect this common framework and make the comparison explicit, while also highlighting how each tale adapts the form to its cultural milieu. The need to adapt Propp's model slightly (accepting function absences and role merges) underscores the importance of not applying it rigidly. Folktales like ones in question require a flexible, culturally informed application of the morphology – doing so allows us to appreciate both the universal structure of the ungrateful son motif and its particular incarnations in the Nusantara region.

## V. CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis demonstrates that the Indonesian, Malaysian, and Bruneian versions of the ungrateful son folktale – *Malin Kundang*, *Si Tanggang*, and *Nakhoda Manis* – are fundamentally analogous in narrative structure, even as they bear unique cultural inflections. Using Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* as an analytical framework, we mapped each story's plot into a sequence of functions and found a striking correspondence among them: all three tales follow a linear trajectory from initial lack and departure, through the hero's successful fortune-building, to a climactic homecoming that culminates in filial impiety and

supernatural punishment. Each story's protagonist embarks on what would typically be a heroic quest (seeking wealth and status to improve his family's lot), yet upon return he performs the tale's pivotal villainous act by renouncing his mother. This triggers the *deus ex machina* of maternal curse and divine retribution, which swiftly delivers functions of recognition, exposure of the hero's true character, and punitive petrification. In Proppian terms, the tales share a common spine of functions – absention, interdiction, violation, lack, departure, return, unrecognized arrival, unfounded claim (false heroism), and punishment – largely in the same order and with the same narrative purpose in each case. The consistency of this structure across three countries attests to the robustness of the folktale motif and suggests either a shared origin or longstanding cross-cultural transmission of the legend [1].

At the same time, our comparative study highlights how cultural context shapes the expression of Proppian functions. The core narrative is adapted in each locale through specific characterization and details without altering its fundamental morphology. For instance, *Malin Kundang's* story, set in a Minangkabau milieu, introduces a recognition token (Malin's scar) and emphasizes his final moment of remorse before petrification, underscoring individual repentance. *Si Tanggang's* Malaysian renditions incorporate vivid local details – such as the mother's offering of smoked bananas and the son's use of Malay epithets like *anak derhaka* (unfilial son) – to accentuate the theme of shame and social class denial. Nakhoda Manis, rooted in Bruneian Islamic culture, frames the mother's curse as an invocation of God's justice and ties the tale to a physical geography (Jong Batu rock) that stands as an enduring moral monument. These adaptations do not change the sequence of functions, but they do influence how certain functions are realized. For example, the *Interdiction* function (the parent's warning) takes on local color: in all three, the mother's plea is “do not forget your mother”, but the Bruneian version adds “may God bring you back safely,” reflecting religious nuance. The villainy at the story's heart – the son's rejection of his mother – is portrayed with different degrees of cruelty: Tanggang striking his mother's hand and tossing her bananas into the sea in one version, versus Manis quietly but coldly ordering his men to turn her away in another. These differences highlight the moral emphases of each culture: the Malay telling stresses active disrespect, the Bruneian stresses spiritual violation (breaking a sacred bond), and the Indonesian blends both with an added pathos of regret. Nonetheless, the outcome is uniformly the same morally and structurally: the son's transgression unambiguously triggers supernatural punishment, and the didactic message – filial impiety will be met with the harshest of consequences – comes through unequivocally in all contexts.

Our analysis also engaged with the practical limits of applying Propp's full 31-function schema to these folktales. It became evident that these legends, being relatively short and single-threaded, do not and need not contain the complete catalog of functions. Consistent with findings from other Propp-based studies of Southeast Asian folklore (e.g., [3]; [4]), we saw that only about half of the functions were realized in each tale. Functions related to complex adventure narratives – such as the donor sequence, tests, magical agents, battles, and pursuits – were absent, since the tales' plots are morally rather than adventurously driven. This underscores a key point: Propp's morphology is highly useful for comparing narrative structure, but one must account for genre differences. These ungrateful son tales are moral legends or exempla, not fairy tales rich with trials and triumphant returns; hence their morphology is truncated and concentrated around the essential conflict. The simplicity is a feature: as Propp himself noted, tales may omit many functions without losing their coherence, and indeed each of these stories forms a perfectly intelligible arc without the need for dragons to slay or princesses to rescue. Applying Propp's framework required recognizing where to mark functions as absent and interpreting those absences. The lack of a separate villain, for example, is telling – it reflects the cultural intention that the hero's own character flaw is the villainy. In our Proppian tables, we effectively treated the son's betrayal as fulfilling the villainy function (Propp's function 8) in an atypical location near the story's end, a necessary adaptation of the model to fit the narrative logic. Similarly, the final reward function (wedding/ascension) was uniformly missing – instead of a wedding, we have a petrification. In Propp's formal terms, these are omissions, but from the folktales' perspective, they are deliberate narrative choices to enforce the moral rather than celebrate the hero. Thus, a critical discussion accompanies any strict Proppian mapping:

one must explain that not all Proppian functions apply to all tales, especially when the tale's purpose diverges from the typical heroic journey.

We found that with mindful adjustment, Propp's model can be applied to these tales without distorting their essence. It required flexibility – acknowledging, for instance, that the hero and villain can be the same person at different points of the story, and that the sequence condenses dramatically in the climax. By doing so, we were able to use Propp's functions as a set of comparative coordinates, aligning the narratives to see their common structure clearly. The exercise validated Propp's claim of stable elements and sequence in folktales, even outside his original dataset: despite different cultural trappings, the Nusantara tales conform to a shared structural pattern. At the same time, our comparative analysis went beyond the formal sequence to incorporate context, showing how each culture layered its values onto that structure – whether it be Minangkabau notions of *derhaka* (ungratefulness), Malay ideals of humility vs. pride, or Bruneian Islamic ethics of gratitude towards parents.

In conclusion, analyzing *Malin Kundang*, *Si Tanggang*, and *Nakhoda Manis* through Propp's morphological framework has illuminated both the unity and diversity of this Southeast Asian folktale motif. Structurally, the tales are nearly identical – a testament to the enduring power of the narrative and its clear, cautionary logic that transcends borders. The differences lie in character portrayal, narrative detail, and emotional tone, which are tailored to each audience but do not alter the fundamental plot progression. The ungrateful son motif thus serves as a canvas onto which Indonesian, Malaysian, and Bruneian storytellers have painted their cultural values, all the while preserving the outline of a story that is instantly recognizable across the region. Propp's morphology proved to be a valuable analytical tool in dissecting this outline, enabling a systematic comparison that highlights how form and content interact: the form (functions sequence) is stable, while the content (roles, symbols, expressions) is variable. Such an approach underscores the usefulness of structural analysis in folklore – it helps us see the bones of the story – but it also reminds us to respect the flesh that local tradition adds. Ultimately, the folktales of *Malin Kundang*, *Si Tanggang*, and *Nakhoda Manis* – when studied collectively – reaffirm a shared moral heritage in the Nusantara world: a profound cultural injunction to honor one's parents, dramatically illustrated through narrative structure and passed down through generations as both entertainment and ethical education.

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