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MYTHOLOGY MARCHES TO MODERNITY

YŌKAI IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN

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ISOHANNI, HEIKKI: Mythology Marches to Modernity - Yōkai in Contemporary Japan

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Abstract: Yōkai are a class of Japanese folklore creatures that have crept to the fame of Japanese popular culture. Their past and cultural relevance has been researched intensively, but little is studied of their place in contemporary society. This thesis, using the foundation laid by folklorists and scholars of past and today, will present how yōkai are viewed by the modern Japanese and how their standing has changed from Edo-period ghost stories to modern media platforms. The research was done using both present literature and fieldwork done in Japan. From these findings it can be said that folklore and cultural belief surrounding yōkai have indeed changed, but still there exists a vast space of yōkai imagery and narratives suited for a more modern audience. Yōkai also reflect the society itself, as seen from emerging new types of narratives that exhibit problems and fears stemming from modern society.

Keywords: Yokai, monster, folklore, popular culture, Japanese society, Japan

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Introduction

Japanese mythology is rife with terminology and words regarding the paranormal and the entities therein. Monsters and apparitions that appear in Japanese folklore vary from the mundane to ones of almost deified status. In reference to this supernatural world, the term "*yōkai*" has become widespread in popular culture in both domestically and internationally in this past decade. Anyone who frequently consumes Japanese popular culture, either natives or foreign consumers, will inevitably encounter this term. Moreover, *yōkai* has silently crept into Japanese soft power, often being at the mercy of translators who surely struggle when deciding whether to use the original Japanese word itself or to try to search for an equivalent in the target language. Eventually – as in my case – the term appears so frequently that at some point it becomes relevant to ask, what does "*yōkai*" actually mean?

What inspired me to research this topic for my thesis was not that question, but rather what transpired after I decided to look into the definition in more detail. Translators and dictionaries often render the word with vague descriptions such as "a ghostly apparition" or "a type of Japanese monster", which barely substitutes as an answer and often creates more questions. What constitutes as a *yōkai*? What is and, most importantly, what is not a part of that definition?

Before consulting online sources such as Wikipedia, I asked a few Japanese acquaintances to explain the term for me, to acquire a native understanding of it. What surprised me was the amount of variation in definitions I heard, some contradictory and some vague, to the extent that when I further questioned some of my respondents, I received confessions that they were not completely confident in their original answers. The result led me to question the knowledge of *yōkai* in Japanese society and the status of this age-old term. At the same time, the Japanese landscape and media were brimming with *yōkai* or characters clearly inspired by the mythology, be that in cartoons, comics or even mascots in tv-shows. Additionally, urban legends and other modern forms of tradition namedrop and refer to motifs and settings used in stories of older tradition, some deeply connected to older *yōkai* culture. I therefore determined that a vast culture of *yōkai* has become so commonplace in daily life that the populace may not be aware of, or has forgotten, its origin.

During my research it became clear that *yōkai* is defined differently by academics and laymen. For example, in folkloristics, *yōkai* have been amply studied in folkloristics with particular attention to its more specialized offshoot *yōkaigaku* (*yōkai* studies). Additionally, vast records of old stories and traditional aspects of *yōkai* in Japan can be found. One aspect that receives less attention, however, is the relevance of *yōkai* on modern society and popular culture. Nevertheless, it is highly likely that most modern Japanese people have come in contact with *yōkai* in some regard. Such exposure may have come through academic texts, tradition or other means of popular culture.

While the academic world and *yōkaigaku* have defined *yōkai* after extensive scrutiny, a point I will explain later in my text, I planned to research how far the definition extends to the minds of the general populace of Japan. For this I planned my own fieldwork in Japan to investigate how the modern Japanese view, practice and apply their mythology and folklore. Additionally, I will establish how the concept of *yōkai* has changed over time. What interests me in particular is how the Japanese society, distinguished by being modern and scientifically advanced, still practices old customs and folk beliefs. Such practices may be in the form of large-scale events like festivals (*matsuri*), oral tradition or usage of folk imagery, such as statues or wall scrolls. My focus will be on the newer generations of Japanese youth, those who are undoubtedly modern, but still in contact with the culture as evident by the "*yōkai* boom" that is currently in vogue all over the country. I am interested in investigating how do these people become the audience of this transforming tradition.

My thesis will start off by introducing the *yōkai*, the old culture around them and the triangle of interaction between yōkai, the vernacular and academia. In the beginning chapters I will review the literature related to *yōkai* and previously conducted research to demonstrate how they were seen in the past societies, after which I will focus on my own research and fieldwork done to study the role of *yōkai* on modern Japanese society. Laying the foundation of what *yōkai* are supports the introduction of my fieldwork and subsequent results and analysis.

Lastly for this introduction, a brief explanation for my conventions in translation and usage of Japanese words: For the romanization of Japanese language, I will be using the modified Hepburn romanization, which is the most commonly used romanization system. For Japanese names I will be using the proper Japanese naming convention in which the family name precedes the first name, but in case of artists I will be using the name or style that they are known for the best. As Japanese words, such as *yōkai*, have no plural form of their own, I will be using them interchangeably in my thesis.

Chapter 1: What are Yōkai – Defining the Weird

1. Parading monsters from Hyakki Yakō Emaki (late Muromatchi period, 1333-1573). Yōkai come in many sizes and shapes, and drawing common ground with these creatures does not come easily. From Japan National Diet Library Digital Archives.

At the beginning of the 20th century, folklorist and scholar Ema Tsutomu described yōkai as "mysterious, strange creatures".[1] At the time, it was an ample description. But we have to assert that the description fits only the framework of thought that was upheld at the time. That is because yōkai are strange creatures, but they also *were* something more. In this chapter we shall thoroughly look at the past historical context of yōkai and the very definition of the word, based on the literature at hand. We cannot just lump yōkai into a translation of "ghost" or "monster", because the very meaning changes from person to person, from the traditions of local populaces to the books of academics. Thus, before framing yōkai in modern framework, we must consider what is yōkai in both academic and layman's terms. Long-time yōkai scholars like Michael Dylan Foster, whose studies are my prime sources and used by other researchers as well, point out the difficulty of defining these folklore entities. It is not only difficult to explain yōkai to a non-Japanese, but also to have consensus between the definitions by the native populace. That is because the discourse on yōkai is a hybrid one[2]: it amasses other discourses to form its own logical definition. We can see and study the different threads that have formed into yōkai discourse and see that they often go through multiple different outlets of tradition or popular culture, depending widely on the person and the products of both outlets they are consumers of. This was both the start and the reason for this very thesis.

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[1] Reider 2012 p.189
[2] Foster, 2009 p. 3

The Yōkai Spectrum

Before looking at the conventions and history behind the word yōkai, I feel it is appropriate to first give a few examples from the pool they inhabit. Briefly introducing the most well-known members of the yōkai clique gives us some context before I focus on the cultural status of these Japanese monsters. Throughout this text I will be presenting a multitude of other yōkai as well, but let us first have a brief outlook at what we are going to face. When I first started to read about yōkai from old monster-catalogues, I made four self-appointed categories to arrange them for easy listing and referential purposes, and for the sake of variety I will introduce a few yōkai from every category. The presentations will be brief, as analyzing even one yōkai would warrant a chapter of its own. On an interesting note, most of these self-made categorizations are not much different from many other proposals for categorizing yōkai that were devised by academics during the periods of yōkai studies, so we can see some clear distinction with these creatures early on.

The first category includes animalistic yōkai. Japanese mysticism is inherently animalistic[3], and these kinds of animal spirits were most likely the first type of yōkai to emerge. They draw inspiration from real-life animals and despite their natural appearance are thought to be supernatural and to have their origin from the otherworld. The favored members of animalistic yōkai are undoubtedly *tanuki* and *kitsune*, raccoon dog and fox respectively. These two make a good example also in showing the different natures of yōkai. Tanuki is often depicted to be a jolly hedonist with a mischievous side that manifests as pranks. *Kitsune*, however, has a more sinister side and sometimes is even depicted as evil antagonist to humanity.[4] The nature of these yōkai is apparent when taking the depicted nature of the animals they represent. Those familiar with Japanese popular culture may know kitsune's nine-tailed variant *kyuubi*, that is often more prevalent on the big screen.

Secondly, we have the "monstrous" yōkai. These differ from the aforementioned as, instead of being based on one animal, these are more like amalgamations of different animals or items. The ideal model for this group is the *kappa*, a water-inhabiting yōkai often depicted with the shell of a turtle, beak like a duck, webbed limbs and body of a monkey. These kinds

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[3] Foster, 2012 (1)
[4] Komatsu, 2017 p. 46-48

of depictions are often drawn from nature, but underline the purpose of eerie otherworldliness with such chimeric hybrids. The kappa acts similarly to many other water spirits from western mythologies, like the kelpie or the neck: they drown unsuspecting animals or children that venture into deep waters.[5]

The third group includes the sentient or possessed items or item-like entities of yōkai stories. Things like *kasa-obake*, a vampiric parasol, and *nurikabe*, an insurmountable wall are obvious members of this category. Western folklore also contains stories of possessed items, but in the case of Japanese folklore, the stories draw a specific emphasis on mundane, daily-use items that "lose their purpose and gain grudge"[6], which makes this group similar to the concept of *tsukumogam[7]i*, a term that will be focused on more later.

2. Yamauba and Kintarō by Kitagawa Utamaro (1753-1806). In one of his origin stories, the ledengary folk hero Kintarō was raised by the mountain hag. Yamauba may not be the most well-known monster of Japanese folklore nowadays, but its presence in folklore has been credited as tremendous. From Wikipedia Commons (open domain).

Lastly are the humanoid yōkai, meaning monsters that look essentially human with either strange powers or bodily abnormalities. *Yamauba*, the mountain-hag, is a womanly yōkai living in the high mountains, its depiction often ranging between a cannibalistic hermit to a messenger to gods[8]. On a stranger side is the *rokurokubi*, a yōkai with an abnormally long neck or a detachable head. One important point to understand about humanoid yōkai is that they are humans only superficially: by the definition they are a part of the realm of monsters and have no relation to humanity, as evident through the folk stories and their morals. The distinction between humanity and the strange is important: moral of the stories depicting yōkai often include the difference they have with the human world.

These groups are not absolute in categorizing yōkai, as there is always one creature that will stand out and break the fold. *Tengu* is one of the yōkai that has

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[5] Foster, 2009 p.46-52
[6] Komatsu, 2017 p.7
[7] Reider, 2009
[8] Komatsu, 2017 p.128-129

different (but coherent) descriptions and has deep connotations to Buddhism.[9] *Tengu* is often divided into the more popular *daitengu* and the lesser *kotengu* (also known as *karasu-tengu,* "crow tengu"). The *tengu* are wicked creatures, trying to sway monks off their path, acting as a tempter to evil. Much like kitsune, *tengu* are one of the stronger yōkai, able to control winds and take flight. Also, like *kitsune* and *yamauba*, *tengu* has been worshipped to some extent.

The world of supernatural creatures is rarely homogenous. These examples already showcase the variety and disparity of different creatures within the framework of yōkai. After this concise presentation we shall look more into the word, the culture of yōkai and the span of cultural domains held by this mysterious group of folklore creatures.
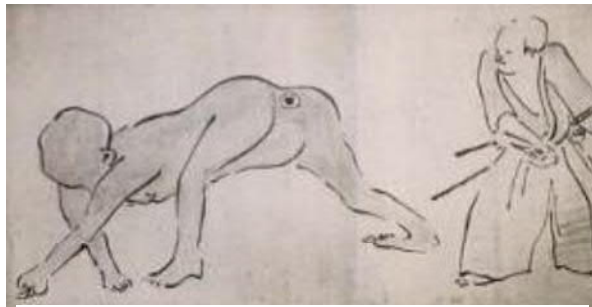
3. Shirime by Yosa Buson (1716-1784). The strange and weird sometimes included humorous entities: shirime (尻目, "rear eye") was certainly humorous even its old context. From Buzon Yōkai Emaki (蕪村妖怪絵巻, 1754-1757).

Behind the Word

Witnessing an intangible, translucent human being standing in a dark hall would make anyone describe the being as a ghost. In the English language, there is little error when describing otherworldly apparitions. However, yōkai seem to work differently. The word itself contains little information. Translation of yōkai to "monster" is not so simple. The western perspective of "monster" is often physical creature of some might, but still in stories seem to abide to the confines of the physical realm.[10] Yōkai differ in this regard. Yōkai act as intangible force between the spiritual and physical. Even in Japanese framework the

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[9] Komatsu, 2017 p. 115-120
[10] Foster, 2009 p.15-16

Western concept monster is seen as different and is often translated phonetically into *monsutaa* instead of using the original naming conventions of the Japanese language.

Let us first analyze yōkai linguistically, that being by its kanji layout(妖怪). 妖 by itself has the meaning of "weird", "bewitching" or "calamity" and is mostly used in context of supernatural. 怪 means "mystery" or "strange", and appears in context when describing something odd or eerie. So, yōkai, by its word, means something like "bewitching strange". By this we can mostly surmise that it is something weird, possibly malevolent, and most certainly something that is not explicable. But this scrapes only the surface of the context the word yōkai has. This is because yōkai does not simply define the shape or nature of a monster, but the discourse and historical context the term itself holds.[11]

It is most likely that yōkai was originally used to denote cases of paranormal activity, as presented in *Shoku Nihongi* (797 CE), where the word makes its first appearances. As yōkai gradually became more present in society through a multitude of defining moments (Chapter 2), the concept of yōkai itself became more involved with society and tradition.[12] It is important to acknowledge that yōkai was not a common (academic) term until the Meiji restauration, when Inoyue Enryo started using it to denote the case of strange phenomena and bringing up the birth of yōkai studies (*yōkaigaku*).[13] Before that, yōkai was used to denote the strange, but within the context people were familiar to use it with. The theory that yōkai was originally used to mean just strange occurrences, but later shifted into becoming the cause of those events is very much possible, but as this happened before large-scale depictions and writings of yōkai, it is quite hard to assertively discern.

Defining yōkai is to define the difference between similar definitions in Japanese language, the most probable candidates being *bakemono, mononoke* and *yūrei. Yūrei* is the most distinct, being closest to the translation for ghost.[14] It is an intangible spirit, more specifically an *abnormal spirit of a human being.* In folk tradition, *yūrei* are inherently souls of a human, but in the case of yōkai there exists very little relation. That is because yōkai are spirits, but not from the physical realm, that being our earthly domain. More so, they can be considered

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11 Foster, 2015 p.5-20
12 Foster, 2009 p. 203
13 Klatau, 2008
14 Komatsu, 2017 p. 134-136

to be an *abnormal spirit from an abnormal body*. Yanagita Kuno also argued that while ghosts only appear and are active during the night and often haunt only specific places, yōkai have no such spatial or temporal limitations.[15] Yōkai seem to break the rules of nature itself, even those expected from supernatural entities.

Bakemono (化け物, lit. "changing thing"), also called *obake*, is the most related term to yōkai and often used interchangeably in literature and media. This is mostly because yōkai also share the concept of changing.[16] Illusions and deceptions are common for many yōkai, for instance the popular creatures such as *kitsune* or *tanuki*. The meaning of "changing" does not need to be taken for just one instance, and can also mean things that change corporeal states or have changed once before, so it includes illusions, transformations, creations and such.[17] The concept of changing has an enormous presence in Japanese mythology, affected by both Shintoism and Buddhism. I bring one example: In Shinto legend, the goddess of birth and death, *Izanami* (or *Izanami no Mikoto*) dies and falls into the land of the dead (*Yomi*). Her husband, *Izanagi* (or *Izanagi no Mikoto*) comes to take her back, but it is revealed that she cannot, as she has eaten the fruit from the underworld. Refusing to leave her, *Izanagi* stays, but after seeing her true, rotten and maggot-ridden body in a flash of light, runs away in fear. The plot is surprisingly similar to many ghost stories told in the Edo period, and may reflect how the motif of change and reveal has great influence in Japanese storytelling (chapter 2). As *bakemono* and *obake* are essentially the same, for brevity when one of those words is referred, the other is also implied.

Before the applied usage of yōkai there existed yet another terminology for the supernatural. *Mononoke* (物の怪, lit. "mystery of a thing" or "thing of mystery") shares both the meaning of "thing", be that tangible or not, and the character shared with yōkai, as said before, denoting the mysterious and unpredictable. Related to *mononoke* and closely resembling the idea of *bakemono*, the Japanese folk of Kamakura period (1185-1333) started referring to beings called *tsukumogami*, which is based on the belief that an item, upon reaching 100 years of age, will develop a soul and come alive.[18] This can range from basic household items like lanterns and brooms to parasols and statues. The concept of *tsukumogami* follows the

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[15] Komatsu, 2017 p. 134-136
[16] Foster, 2015
[17] Figal, 1999 p.21
[18] Reider, 2009

idea of a soul, but not that of a human being.[19] What description we should be using is that the item houses a consciousness. The concept for *tsugumogami yōkai* does exist, and the fine line between the actual two is fickle indeed.

Scholars of yōkai often describe the concept of these supernatural entities as *fushigi* (不思議), weird and incomprehensible.[20] That is, not only are the creatures themselves mysterious, but the concept of the unknown and the strange also spans to the whole cultural framework in Japanese cultural consciousness that they inhabit. Yōkai occupy a concept that is so deeply rooted into the culture it stemmed from, trying to translate it would certainly give only partial understanding of it. Translators in media, commercialism and tourism have indeed started to embrace the word, and apparently have started to see it as Japanese along with things as *kimono, sakura* or *samurai*: as words that hold massive cultural context and signs of deep heritage. But, as said, yōkai has a different meaning between the academics and laymen. So how to define those creatures through academic methods?

Yōkai as Incidents, Entities, Depictions

To cast away some ambiguity while retaining the definition, scholars like Komatsu Hazuhiko have proposed to divide yōkai into three "domains", contexts that yōkai preside in regarding different cultural conventions.[21] These domains are often overlapping, and one aspect may appear in different contexts. These three domains are still active in yōkai discourse and have retained their original state while assimilating modern aspects found in popular culture and present cultural activity. One greater aspect of yōkai discursion is the interchangeable discursion between these domains and forms of tradition, be that traditional oral narrative or more modern visual narrative attributed to popular culture. Next, we shall engross into these domains as explained by Komatsu (2017).

The first domain represents yōkai as incidents. As my own self-made example, imagine yourself in the straw-shoes of an Edo-period farmer. You are walking through the woods or

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[19] Foster, 2009 p.7
[20] Figal, 1999 p.5-9
[21] Komatsu, 2017 p.12

dark streets when you hear a troubling sound, be that a rhythmic babbling or even a distorted laugh. You know that there is no one else in the vicinity, so what was that sound? Something supernatural, certainly, would think the superstitious mind. In this example, the culture of yōkai manifests as incidents. What might follow is the telling of the event to others, spreading the incident and allowing it to become an idea in the minds of others.[22]

In essence, yōkai as incidents is a way to explain odd events as supernatural phenomena caused by an another being, in this case, yōkai. The incidents may be small-scaled but exaggerated into wider appeal or widespread rumors that evolve into the works of otherworldly denizens. What makes this framework thrive is fear and awe towards the unknown. At some point, through tradition, the unknown may become known and create reoccurring incidents such as the *tanuki* orchestra, *tanuki banashi*, a rhythmic drumming believed to be caused by the jovial yōkai.[23]

Yōkai as incidents can be seen in modern context as well, such as the case of *Kuchisake-onna*, a rumor of a mutilating apparition which caused nationwide panic (and even in some parts of China and South Korea) and is still very fresh in the minds of the Japanese (Chapter 4). Komatsu emphasizes the fact that attributing events as the handwork of a specified group of apparitions shows how deeply rooted the concept of yōkai is. That is also the basis for many phenomena originally thought to be supernatural origin, such as aforementioned *tanuki banashi*. The importance of these incidents is that they do not only stay as explanations but incorporate into the cultural consciousness and often become something more than what they originally were.

Yōkai as supernatural entities is a more complex domain. As incidents, yōkai act as a narrative instrument to reason why supernatural accidents occur, but yōkai as supernatural entities focus on the beings themselves, rather than the incidents caused by them. This is part of the context of supernatural in the framework of Japanese spiritualism and mythology, which is an animalistic worldview in which the observable world is surrounded by spirits or spiritual entities. Even those with little knowledge of Japanese beliefs and mythology may still find some of these words denoting spirits familiar: *kami*, *reiko*, *rei* and *tama*. Related to this domain are the *tsukumogami,* often depicted as walking alongside other yōkai in their

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[22] Reider, 2011
[23] Foster, 2012 (1)

nightly march.[24] These entities are supernatural *themselves*, and the narratives related to them usually remind of the fact. So, even though depicted as physical entities, yōkai are still spiritual beings in a material world. Deification or worship may contribute to the supernaturality. *Kitsune* is literally a fox but is believed to have supernatural powers and is often a cause of mischief. Some shrines, notably Kyoto's *Inari Jinja*, hold places of worship for *kitsune*, meant to quell their desire for evil or calm them down at the event of misfortune. In this case they are not worshipped as a god per se, but as a supernatural being that has the capability to affect the lives of mortals.

Yōkai as depictions is the third domain and is a domain of visual depictions and imagery. Seemingly simple, amongst the other domains it has been most molded after the emergence of modern popular culture. Prior to the Medieval period yōkai had little visual presentation, the reason being dubious. The rise of art and upper class brought a wave of visual illustrations,

4. A statue of Tengu near a shrine in Hakone, Kanagawa. Tengu were often depicted as mountain-dwellers, and having one protecting a mountaneus shrine was likely a deliberate choice. Picture by author.

yōkai being one of the models. Depictions began in the form of *emaki,* wall-scroll, and acted for adoration, entertainment or visual aid for oral tradition.[25] Yōkai as depictions received a massive boost during Edo from Toriyama Sekien's illustrated yōkai-catalog *Gazu Hyakki Yagyō* (Also referred as *Hyakki Yagō*), which, with its two hundred illustrations, paved the road for yōkai depictions for centuries (chapter 2). The title roughly translates into "the nightly march of hundred demons". This nightly march is a phenomenon in which these monsters enter the realm of mortals to celebrate in a pandemonial parade and was used to explain odd sounds coming in the middle of the night, so it also has basis in aforementioned domains of yōkai as incidents and events.

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[24] Komatsu, 2017 p. 7
[25] Komatsu, 2017 p.17-19

The images produced of yōkai still hold great influence in overall impressions given to the creatures. Example of how depictions affect the general depiction of otherworldly creature is the case of oni (chapter 3), which received its universal representation from illustrations. As a remark, almost all the pictures in this thesis are imageries of yōkai and, in a sense, underline how these depictions still matter and are present in modern discourses.

5 and 6. Illustrations of Kappa and Kitsune by Toriyama Sekien. By National Diet Library of Japan.

In modern society yōkai are more common as depictions, mainly because of the influence of popular culture and the usage of yōkai imagery in commercialism and entertainment.[26] The modern visualization of yōkai is indeed the most influential reason for the present "yōkai boom" and the emergence of yōkai imagery in the fields of modern popular culture.[27] This is not limited to just drawings, but the birth of cinema, animation and interactive mediums (such as video games) have allowed new ways to depict yōkai and certainly have been a massive influence in promoting yōkai into the status it has in modern society. More about yōkai in contemporary society can be found in chapter 3 and 4.

So, the modern theory of the concept of yōkai weighs on these domains set up by modern yōkai scholars and folklorists. The overlap, or symbiosis, among these domains allows them

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[26] Freedman and Slade, 2018 p.196-206
[27] Dylan, 2012(2) p. 288

to feed ideas and nurture the culture of yōkai. Depictions are born from visualizing the supernatural entities that have caused such events that are worth sharing with an audience. But stories can be born from visualizations as well. The fact that these domains have suspended the culture of yōkai from late medieval times to present modernity shows how Japanese society has been favorable to this odd class of folklore creatures and the atmosphere of odd phenomena around them.

Chapter 2: The March of the Monsters – History of Yōkai Discourse

7. Hyakki Yagō by Toriyama Sekien. The nightly march of a hundred demons may not even be enough to contain the number of yōkai recorded. From the digital archives of Nishioshi Iwasebunko Library.

The Culture of Yōkai

The increasing interest in all things yōkai asserts the influence of *yōkai bunka*, or the culture of yōkai. Continuous traditions, motifs in yōkai and their passive influence has grown deep into Japanese culture, as explained by Komatsu (2017) and Foster (2015). As shown in chapter 1, the definition for yōkai through the domains they possess also shows how influential the culture around yōkai has been in past and contemporary folklore and tradition. The domains also define the culture around them. Explaining *yōkai bunka* in detail needs more than a few paragraphs, and it is important to grasp that it encapsulates both the domains in yōkai discourse, mentioned in the last chapter, and the following cultural and historical conventions. That is because *yōkai bunka* is not only the culture surrounding the concept, but also the very framework in which people conceptualize the belief – and disbelief – in the supernatural.[28] Much as explained in yōkai as incidents, the seed of thought that exists in the minds of the populace emerges once given the proper triggers. It does not mean that yōkai

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[28] Komatsu, 2017 p.12-15

need to be present in everyday life, but vice versa: the point of the supernatural element is that it is kept supernatural, out of the natural world order.

As Komatsu explained, the culture of yōkai holds more than traditions and aspects of culture that these folklore creatures occupy, but also those domains of culture that affect how we perceive things. Explaining strange occurrences as the work of yōkai is one aspect. Yōkai indeed held a tight grip on the minds of the people. But times change and the social narrative along with it, creating new conventions and products of tradition that fit to the framework of contemporary society.[29] Not only can we study the modern yōkai discourse, we can also compare and see the unique development of this particular aspect of Japanese folklore. One obstacle that we face when researching old yōkai traditions is that we cannot be sure of the rituals [30] and practices outside the textual evidence around them. Interpreting these documents and comparing the activities recorded to the present day gives some knowledge on how these cultures have adapted, but even though old academia might have been interested in recording these events, there exists the void of unrecorded practices.

In this chapter I will focus on the history and background of this influence and presence yōkai have had in society, with its social and traditional aspects to political and ideological hues. Most of the literature reviewed will be the works of Foster (in his studies of yōkai) and Noriko Reider (in her studies of *kaidan*), whose laid foundation is credited and used by almost every other yōkai scholar. Through the existing literature, I will cover the advancement of yōkai culture from its early recorded days to the mid-20th century. The presence in modern society will be in focus for the chapters after this. As said, understanding how the traditions and conventions surrounding these Japanese creatures sets a template that allows us to perceive the change in modern society as well. These conventions and realms of tradition do not exist in a vacuum: they change forms according to the audience, and much often reveal the changes in both tradition and society.

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[29] Klatau, 2008
[30] Ritual in this context means the continual use of a yōkai motif for a tradition, one example being the usage of *tengu* masks to scare badly behaving children during festivals

From Edo to Meiji – History of Yōkai and *Kaidan*

Under Tokugawa period (1600-1886, also known as Edo period) Japan underwent a rapid growth in natural sciences, a process which inspired scholars of various fields to contribute to the burst of Japanese knowledge, one of which was the (at the time unknown) start of Japanese folkloristics[31]. Collecting various folk tales and cataloging them under the context of yōkai was instituted by Toriyama Sekien, whose set of illustrated catalogs documented over hundreds of different yōkai. These catalogs, titled *Gazu Hyakki Yagyō* (published between 1776 and 1784) are the oldest collections of yōkai stories, illustrated by Toriyama himself. The knowledge-thirsting inspiration of creating encyclopedias and catalogs (The Encyclopedic Mode, as described by Foster (2009)) in mid-Edo period greatly influenced the creation of yōkai bestiaries and managed to start the faux-scientific method of studying the supernatural phenomenon. Actual scientific effort was miniscule, and the collections focused on amassing and illustrating these strange phenomena, but rarely to explain any potential reason. During that time, the natural truth and supernatural phenomena were kept together: there was no need to disparage those events.

The one reason of cataloguing Japanese ghosts and monsters was most likely fueled by the aspiration to distinguish yōkai from their Chinese and Korean counterparts or influences. While some yōkai indeed share characteristics with other East-Asian creatures, a lot of emphasis is placed in the *differences* between these monsters or the uniqueness of Japan-specific creatures. One example of this is the encyclopedic explanation of *kawatarō* (early depiction of the yōkai *kappa*) by the author of 1719 natural encyclopedia *Wakan Sanzaisue*, Terajima Ryōan.[32] *Wakan Sanzaisue* was also one of the first larger publications to mention other known members of the yōkai mythos too, notably *kitsune* and *tanuki*. In these encyclopedias, yōkai were considered to be part of a natural discourse and seemingly part of the existing course of nature. Underlining the uniqueness of Japanese folklore beings also helped to build up the national consciousness and pride in building an origin for these supernatural species and phenomena. Indeed, in most cases supernatural beings were fit into

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[31] Foster, 2009 p.31
[32] Foster, 2009 p.40-48

Japanese context and given Japanese names even though the inspiration of belief may have come overseas, as happened with *kitsune*.[33]

As Tokugawa period Japan closed itself from the outside world (*sakoku* policy), it found itself in self-contemplation for own identities and ingenious knowledge, something that allowed these illustrated encyclopedias to flourish and reach an audience other than the cultural high elite.[34] The illustrations by Sekien caught the attention of even the illiterate populace and possibly even spread the concept of different strange phenomena to form *kaidan*, the art of Japanese ghost stories. Tales and oral tradition of the gruesome and terrifying were not exactly new, but the publication of strange events and entities ushered the surge of collecting and sharing these stories. *Kaidan* (怪談) also shares the character with

yōkai, showing some common ground with the concept of the strange and stories of the strange. The word indeed did evolve like yōkai did, and using it in context reveals more than just calling it a ghost story. It became a highly regarded cultural phenomena, with its high point of interest blooming during the 18th century.

The structure of a typical *kaidan* ghost story is somewhat similar to the yōkai stories that formed the basis for Sekien's catalogs.[35] We can simplify the narrative into three main peaks. The introduction to the setting explains the who's and the where's, be that a lonely samurai walking along roads, a priest on a pilgrimage or a peasant tending his duties. After that follows the appearance of the supernatural phenomenon or event. In other words, something abnormal to the daily life happens. Finally, what usually concludes the story is the reason for the abnormality, the reveal of the monster in question: the odd sound may come from a parade of demons, the long-lost lover who came back may be revealed to be a dead apparition and such. This narrative is not atypical to modern versions of ghost stories and urban legends[36], something that I will analyze more on chapter 5.

Kaidan is commonly associated with the form of mid-Edo period entertainment known as *hyaku monogatari* ("Hundred Stories") or *hyaku monogatari kaidankai* ("Gathering of a Hundred Supernatural Stories"), a story-telling parlor game that allegedly would, upon

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[33] Komatsu, 2017 p. 47
[34] Foster, 2009 p. 59-61
[35] Reider, 2001
[36] Akiyama, 1985

reaching the hundredth story, allow the happening of strange phenomena.[37] *Kaidankai* stories gained massive popularity and were quickly collected into their own catalogs to be published, such as *Seiban Kaidan Jikki* (*True Records of Kaidan in the Western Parts of Harima Providence*) and *Taihei Hyaku Monogatari* (*100 Stories of Peace and Tranquility*).[38] *Kaidan* were not only ghost stories, but ways to decipher inexplicable events and rumors, such as to attribute extraordinary abilities of an individual to a supernatural origin.[39] The *hyaku monogatari kaidankai* should not only be considered as a form of entertainment that sustained the yōkai culture, as it also formed a harsh cultural refinery in which the *kaidan* were recycled to fit the needs of the audience to create a lasting form of oral tradition. *Kaidankai* allowed the convergence and discarding of stories, promoting originality and polishing the means of oral tradition, something that written literature could not do[40]. The continuous circulation of stories and motifs therein extracted the creation of named entities and characters in the narration.

Towards the end of Edo, the fascination towards the curiosities of the natural world was reaching a high point and finally the continuous fetishization of supernatural phenomena brought the spark for another aspect of the scientific world: skepticism. As Japan entered the Meiji restauration, the age of intellectuals and empiric sciences began. The dawn of enlightenment was not devoid of yōkai culture, however. The culture of *kaidan* was thriving through magazines, and news stories of yōkai activity were still published.[41] Especially university papers preferred to publish stories of hauntings and odd phenomena, which brings an interesting contrast to the normally scientific environment. Rapid modernization and industrialization surely compromised with old folk beliefs and tradition, but also introduced new settings and accounts to the existing narrative. One example of this is the development of *tanuki* stories told since Kamakura period.[42] The mischievous yōkai were no longer content with pranking travelling priests and hunters and made an appearance in the life of railway workers and train engineers. The stories often fell in a sad and metaphorical note:

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[37] Reider, 2000
[38] Foster, 2015
[39] Kabat, 2001
[40] Reider, 2001
[41] Reider, 2000 p.279
[42] Foster 2012(1) p. 4

the conductors would no longer be fooled by the ghostly sounds made by the yōkai and would kill it by collision.

The art of telling (and collecting) ghastly stories was still active after Meiji, albeit with changes. Though the tradition and culture surrounding yōkai has not been without changes, the influence of Edo-period emergence of yōkai is still very much existent in the modern world.[43] The texts and illustrations of *Gazu Hyakki Yagyō* have remained as a reference for modern day conceptions and depictions of yōkai still exert their influence in both tradition and mass culture. A form of *kaidan* still exists in urban legends and other supernatural stories, albeit mostly in the realm of internet. Still, the predecessor for these stories undoubtedly allowed the creation of a multitude of traditional ghost stories and inspiration to spooky tales that reach the modern ages as well. Japanese internet textboards and forums specializing in the supernatural and occult (*okaruto*) have shared *kaidan*-style stories enough for them to allow the emergence of newer types of supernatural phenomena more fitting in the modern framework (chapter 4).

During the Meiji restauration began the march of natural sciences and empiric skepticism. This was, of course, on a collision course with yōkai and the culture of the supernatural. However, what became of yōkai after that head-on impact was something that not only changed the nature of yōkai discourse, but rather a factor that changed the whole way people saw and described unnatural phenomena

Yōkaigaku – The Study of Yōkai

Even though the involvement of academics to Japanese folklore might seem peculiar, the idea of collecting and defining yōkai came originally from academia. The collections and illustrations of Sekien did draw yōkai together to ease the definition of the term and bringing the concept of yōkai to the wider audience, but the common usage of yōkai and the more specified definition was not established until the Meiji era scholars found the need to clarify it to the laymen. While the idea and concept of yōkai came from superstitions of the normal

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[43] Foster, 2009 p.210-215

folk, it was the Meiji era intellectuals who made the concept into a concrete term and tried to separate the truth from fiction, as I will explain next.

What actually became the study of yōkai was the interests of one man to prove the monsters of Japanese folklore as obsolete for modernity and enlightenment. At the rise of industrialism and cultural awakening, the Meiji period (1868-1912) marked a new modern course for Japan and this included the bolstering of sciences and emphasis on rationality and empiricism. The Dutch brought the idea of Western philosophy and sciences (*Rangaku*) and after the decades of solitude Japan started to open up for foreign influences, most notably natural sciences and the concept of natural, rational thinking.[44] The ones that took great deal of damage from this march of *bunmē-kaika* (civilization and enlightenment) were indeed the aspects of culture that rely on belief and superstition. The Meiji idealists sought to seek higher authority from scientific approach and wanted to separate religion and superstitions from morality and reason.[45] As these scientific approaches demanded the remodeling of old schools of thought, new disciples of studying folklore beliefs rose, not only to study and research, but to remove the superstition and belief and unveil the truth for the yet uncivilized populace.[46] The brains behind this new form of studies, *yōkaigaku* (study of yōkai or alternatively yōkai-logy), was the Buddhist reformer and educator Inoue Enryo (1858-1919).

Inoue's education and upbringing were both religious (his father was a head priest for a Buddhist temple) and western-laden and in his early age he saw religion as a hindrance to science and rationality. He established his own school, *Tetsugakukan*, today's Toyo University, which was the first educational institution in Japan to form a foundation in western thinking and philosophy. His ultimate goal was to remodel Buddhism to modern, rational framework and weed out all the superstition that people were afflicted with.[47] As he saw Christianity as a hindrance to Western philosophy, he began to impute Buddhist philosophy and traditional folklore as a corresponding affliction to what Christian beliefs had in Western countries.[48]

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[44] Jackson, 2016 p.4-10
[45] Reitan, 2016 p. 59
[46] Foster, 2009 p. 78
[47] Reitan, 2016.p. 60-62
[48] Rimer, 2014 p.242

Inoue's attempts to encapsulate the concept of weird and strange phenomena began as a gradual process.[49] He first introduced the term *fushigi* (mystery), but later delineated it to *fushigi-yōkai*, until finally settling for yōkai.[50] This indeed can be considered the defining point for the word and the start for yōkai to become the term and concept for this particular phenomenon. Inoues fervor no doubt played a part in spreading the concept around Japan.[51] His lectures spanned around Japan and China, spreading the concept to both scholars and laymen alike. What Inoue may have not anticipated was his involvement in creating a name for the strange occurrences that the "uncivilized mass" spoke about, confirming its stance in old folklore.

Yōkaigaku's first draft was the *Fushigi Kenkyūkai* (Mystery Research Society), which was formed by the students of many fields, Inoue included.[52] The members of the society collected a massive amount of data related to Japanese folklore and supernatural phenomena. The findings gathered from the Society's few meetings drove Inoue to form his publication of *Yōkaigaku kōgi* (Lectures of Yōkaigaku, 1893-1894), a massive two-thousand-page long presentation of yōkai and their relation to *bunmē-kaika*. These lectures formed the basis in which Inoue built his study of yōkai.[53]

Like many collectors before him, Inoue amassed vast collections of beliefs and stories, but unlike the others, included vast essays of explanations and rational reasons why these stories occur.[54] Indeed, Inoue did not as much as collect these stories, he tried to debunk and solve the mysteries, and instead of collecting stories, he collected *explanations*.[55] His essays and publications have been published later in such collections as *Yōkai Hyaku Dan* (*One Hundred Yōkai Tales*, 1898) and *Zoku Yōkai Hyaku Dan* (*One Hundred Yōkai Tales Continued*, 1900). Inoue used harsh rhetoric to discredit the paranormal, but in his zeal, would sometimes overindulge in his diction and present his case in an almost humorous way.[56] This would be detrimental to his attempts at educating, as his works had become more of an entertainment value. This in turn might have actually enhanced the popularity of these stories. The yōkai

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[49] Figal, 1999 p.38-41
[50] Foster, 2009 p.80-81
[51] Minichiello, 2001 p.151
[52] Foster, 2015 p.73
[53] Foster, 2009 p.85
[54] Komatsu 2017, p.51-56
[55] Figal, 1999 p.53
[56] Klatau, 2008

did not become the target of ridicule, but the storyteller who feverishly tries to rationalize unexplainable phenomena.

While modern *yōkaigaku* is more of a remnant of a specific field of studies, it still has extensive influence with its archives and libraries, consisting of studies of yōkai that have been collected for over a century by both folklorists and other academics. Inoue Enryo may not have succeeded in stomping out the occult beliefs and superstitions, but instead dug out the goldmine of data for folklore and yōkai researchers. His nickname, *Yōkai Hakase* (Dr. Yōkai)[57], echoes great irony for the man that tried to assert the redundancy of supernatural phenomena in Japanese society.

Modern *yōkaigaku* is often incorporated into Japanese folkloristics (*minzokugaku*).[58] The initiative for wider folklore studies came from Kunio Yanagita (1875-1962), who is still widely referred to as the father of *minzokugaku*.[59] It gained friction during the periods of war, when Japan started to look back into its national origins and started to value tradition and heritage as a national pride.[60] The academic narrative took an odd turn as general populace was again to be educated – not into modernity – but back to national traditions and to a sense of "Japanese people" with common background and cultural heritage. *Yōkaigaku* followed suit, albeit the archives of Inoue were enough for the time and yōkai acted as more of a referential material. The original intent of Japanese folklore was to enforce the importance of traditional family values and the conventions of Japanese traditional spiritualism. Nevertheless, the pursuit of folklorists for finding the "common ground" amongst the general populace was an aim that helped to rise folklore and tradition into social consciousness, as recorded by Yanagita. He stressed the importance of art in folklore, and the depictions in emaki scrolls indeed became an important tool for folklore studies.

An important term to know in yōkai discourse is the *hanshin-hangi*, half-belief and half-doubt, that was also used by Inoue in his studies.[61] The concept of believable disbelief acts as a very strong incentive to continue the culture of the supernatural, even while dismissing it. The concept is not foreign to western folklorists, as ambiguity when retelling supernatural narratives is often in order to build the credibility of the narrator. In Inoue's case, it may

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[57] Yoda, Alt and Morino, 2013 p.12
[58] Foster, 2015 p.93
[59] Foster, 2009 p. 139
[60] Morse, 2015 p. 51-53
[61] Foster, 2011 p.111

indeed be possible that his own skeptical involvement only fueled the *hanshin-hangi* of local populace and "gave the permission" to practice yōkai bunka in the context of the sceptic contemporary framework.

The academic studies of Japanese folklore were not without agendas, but nevertheless managed to build an extensive library of studies of yōkai, which are still used as a source for researching Japanese cultural heritage. Now that we have established what yōkai did in academia, we shall move on to the context of history, folklore and the place of weird amongst the populace of Japan up to this point. What yōkai are at this point in time is largely the result of centuries' worth of molding and transforming. Indeed, like yōkai themselves, the definition is an ever-shaping mass to surprise both academics and laymen.

Yōkai booms

As we have seen the path yōkai have taken through the centuries, we can pinpoint four peaks of interest in yōkai, so-called yōkai booms[62], in which the interest in strange phenomena took a rise and warranted a greater study or activity in cultures of yōkai. The exact timeframe and number of these peaks are often argued, but I will be using the framework created by Michael Foster, explained through my own findings. Toriyama Sekien's catalogues are obviously the first burst of interest in yōkai, and he will always be the one that is kept credited for the retrieval of Japanese folklore and yōkai heritage. The echo of the first yōkai boom can be heard until this day.[63]

At the aftermath of the first peak in yōkai were the *kaidan* and *kaidankai[64]*, the rise of yōkai imagery and sudden increase in superstition and reports of odd phenomena.[65] Thus, enter *bunmē-kaika*, Inoue Enryo and *yōkaigaku*. The academic involvement resulted in the acceleration of collections and scientific definitions. This boom gave an authoritative name for this concept of strange: yōkai.[66] Of all the other words for odd phenomena, yōkai was established as the de facto and started making appearances in all forms of written text.

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[62] Foster, 2009 p.4
[63] Papp, 2010 p. 9-14
[64] Reider, 2000
[65] Komatsu, 2017 p.17-18
[66] Klatau, 2008

Modernity and enlightenment did much to change the course of the cultural narrative and yōkai discourse: while yōkai did start to lose its grip in belief and superstition, it became an established trait, an important aspect of Japanese culture and long-lasting tradition.

After Meiji, now that yōkai were established in Japanese culture and the vast collections of recorded tradition satisfied the academic world, the one portion that was left to conquer was politics. Indeed, at the dawn of the 20th century, Japan – much like any country involved in the incoming wars – was in dire need of fortifying its national identity and sense of self.[67] The chaff of modernity became a shining light for nationalists. Instead of dismissing it, yōkai culture was embraced and seen as a part of Japanese national heritage. This seems like odd irony: Japan's industrial and financial sectors were crippled by the depression of 1930, giving increasing appreciation towards "true" Japanese heritage and old traditions. [68] The nationalistic embrace in yōkai brought the emergence of using yōkai imagery as traditional and promoting Japanese values. *Kappa* started to become the poster boy for clean waters, *tengu* as the protector of forests.[69] This sort of "mascotism" and characterization of old imagery has indeed spread wide to this day as well, as evident to anyone who walks along the Japanese street view (this will be covered more later).

After mid-20th century the modern popular culture was gaining concrete form and became a new stepping stone for yōkai culture to conquer. The key player in this case, much like Sekien and Inoue, was Shigeru Mizuki. Visual portrayals of yōkai in Mizuki's works, most notably *GeGeGe no Kitarō*, originally *Hakaba Kitarō*, played a fundamental part in bringing forth a new way of presenting folklore in modern context.[70] *GeGeGe no Kitarō*, began as a Japanese comic series but soon spanned into a franchise of animation, books, goods and commercial imagery. It tells the story of a boy Kitarō, the last member of an old tribe of ghosts (*yūrei zoku*), who, along with a myriad of supporting characters, tries to solve the problems between the world of humans and yōkai. The series could be described as typical *shonen manga*, a youth comic with self-containing episodic format, making it accessible for any new readers in the decades-spanning presence. What, I think, also made *GeGeGe no Kitarōu* accessible

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[67] Rimer, 2014 p. 101-103
[68] Harootunian, 2011 p. 202
[69] Foster, 2009 p.207
[70] Foster, 2009 p.160-164

was its presentation that did not need prior knowledge of yōkai or traditional folklore. Shigeru Mizuki was not only credited as artist and entertainer, but also an educator of sorts.

While the traditional yōkai have well survived to this modern period, in terms of traditional context they are starting to become overshadowed by new apparitions stemming from the fears of current society, something that I will discuss more in chapter 4. Indeed old, traditional creatures of Japanese folklore have been popularized into more comical and cleaner versions of themselves.[71] Shigeru Mizuki had gracefully presented yōkai in their more fearful appearance while still making them sympathetic to the audience.

The nightly march of yōkai into modernity has indeed been a bumpy road, culminating in cornering the domain of popular culture and mass media. The defining aspect of each peak of interest is that they all contributed to the contemporary and future yōkai discourse. It is also important to understand that every peak influenced the emergence of the other: the collections and catalogs of yōkai gave ample material for *kaidan* to draw sources from.[72] The high interest in supernatural phenomena as a parlor game to mass entertainment ushered the counter-culture of denying the supernatural and debunking it, inadvertently creating a massive academic support and archival of yōkai discourse. This institutional material became a prime ammunition for raising up the national pride and cultural heritage, which, as a final turn, made a soft transfer to popular culture and mass audience.

As Michael Foster also states, the current yōkai boom is still very much in effect[73], and that I intend to show in more detail next. As with any tradition, yōkai continuously go through a complex device of cultural conventions that define the narrative and presence of them in products of modern folklore and popular culture. Seeing how *yōkai bunka* stretches to fit the present contemporary framework of popular culture gives a valuable insight on how this last yōkai boom affects the yōkai in general. It is hard to predict if there will be another boom in the horizon, for it will most likely require a new cultural convention. However, the aftermath of present interest in yōkai and culture of yōkai will indeed most likely last as long as the audience shows interest in it.

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[71] Papp, 2010 p.63-68
[72] Reider, 2001
[73] Foster, 2009 p.203

Chapter 3: Ghostbusting Under the Rising Sun – Fieldwork in Japan

My figurative hunt for yōkai went through the busting commercial streets to the homes of the Japanese populace and finally to the minds of the youth and the overlapping domains of popular culture. Merely by walking through the commercial districts one could see ancient Japanese folklore and tradition represented in some form or another. Yōkai culture is clearly evident all around Japanese society and mediascape. However, to further delve into the domain that is the yōkai presence in society, the views and opinions of the Japanese populace become an important piece of the puzzle. Fieldwork was indeed deemed an important part of this thesis.

After a short while, I realized that to get the people to talk about their culture and traditions requires more than just idle monitoring. And in many cases, the people were enthusiastic about talking about their heritage, some in form of expressing their tradition, some emphasizing the influence yōkai have in popular culture. As preliminary material suggested, it was necessary to prepare to gather my own data, as the answers would not be found from any previous or governmental studies. Indeed, the important trait for my data would be its freshness.

Data presented in this chapter was gathered during my studies in Tokyo in late-2017 to early 2018. The data collection was two-tiered, and consisted of questionnaires and notes taken from small-scale interviews and conversations. Thus, the collected data came through multiple channels, the first opener for my fieldwork being the survey, presented next. After the survey I had planned for a more deeper study, as one purpose of the answers was to give me insight what terminology and keywords are important in yōkai discussion with the general populace.

Because of the unpredictability of the answers I would receive, from the very beginning it was deemed necessary to use close reading and grounded theory as my methodologies of choice. An in-depth analysis of all the responses for my questions in field was needed to define the answer for my own research question. More on my analysis of both the questionnaire responses and the interviews will be found on this chapter.

Presenting the Questionnaire

The questionnaire represents my first attempt at gathering data from contemporary sources. As I lacked prior experience in proper fieldwork in Japan, especially regarding Japanese folklore and tradition, preparing an open survey would not only reveal data, but act as an opener to a more detailed world of yōkai culture. For certain, academic jargon would only get me so far with people wanting to talk openly.

The purpose of the questionnaire was to be qualitative: I needed more define answers to questions that would allow the respondents to answer in their own words. I could not seek the vocabulary of laymen yōkai discourse from academic material, I needed to get it straight from the source. Choosing between qualitative and quantitative was my first big research choices, but I understood the risks involved in large-scale quantitative research in Japan[74] and opted for the route that would, at very least, kickstart my fieldwork and prepare myself for further study.

The underlying design philosophy in the questionnaire was based on the following questions: How do the native Japanese view their old folklore and the culture of yōkai? How conscious are they of it? How did they learn about it? How is it still supported and practiced? Does it have any other merits than being a part of their folklore? These questions remain underrepresented in recent studies. Indeed, seeing how integrated yōkai culture has been in the society, it is easy to assume as self-evident to both the native Japanese and the scholars to study it. To truly investigate and answer these questions satisfactorily however, a questionnaire was developed to explore the definition of yōkai in the minds of the indigenous populace. The questionnaire was crafted with assistance from my language teachers at Rikkyo University to ensure proper language use and clear questions. I also saw the need to ensure that my questions would sound "authentic" in Japanese, to have a form of credibility to the respondents and thus ensure truthful answers. My teachers also helped me to find participants for the survey.

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[74] Bestor, Bestor and Steinhoff, 2006 p.196-216

The questions and the reasoning behind them go as follow. The questionnaire is attached to this text (Appendix 1). For practical purposes, from this point onwards the questions will be referred by their numerical designation.

(1) And (2): Age and home town. These questions were mostly for organizing, if deemed necessary.

(3): What are yōkai? The respondents are asked to describe yōkai by their own words. The premise for this was to help the respondents to conceptualize yōkai in their mind, something that contributes to the subsequent inquiries.

(4): How did they come to know of yōkai, be that through television, comics or tradition.

(5): Do they still participate in yōkai culture. The question also included a brief explanation of the word.

(6): Whether they considered yōkai to be a part of their national identity[75].

(7): Whether they would be interested in participating in a more detailed interview.

With the questionnaire, my purpose was to map how a native Japanese person views this part of their culture. A wide range of answers were expected, all of which correspond to a different framework of evaluating one's culture. The outcome of the questionnaire also lines the basis for my methodology. Building my research through grounded theory helps me avoid any shortcomings that might arise when analyzing the questions. I formatted the questions in such a way that they allow both short and longer, descriptive answers, so the respondents could answer in a way that they were comfortable with. I was ready for any sorts of results.

The questionnaire was developed as a Webropol survey behind an easily accessible electronic link. All respondents had access to the questionnaire through a handout (Appendix 2), with the address for the site along with a QR code to the same address. I had a chance to present my research to a classroom of Japanese students, during which most of the handouts

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[75] For the term "national identity", I included both terms *nashonaru aidentiti* (ナショナル　アイデンティティ)　and *gokumin ishiki* (国民意識) by the advice given by my Japanese teacher, as there is apparently a generation gap between the two words and including them both would make the question more understandable.

were distributed. Handouts were also distributed among my other informants. I also encouraged the spread of the handouts to the acquaintances of my original informants as well.

Results Analysis

The Webropol page was open to access from December 2017 to the end of January 2018, during which the questionnaire received 44 respondents. The length and depth of the answers varied from one respondent to another, but the data was sufficient for a qualitative analysis. Up next, I shall review the answers and analyze them in the context of contemporary yōkai discourse. Responses for questions 1 (age) and 2 (home town) are graphically presented on the next page.

Most of the respondents were between the ages of 10-30, as I had originally planned. The small discrepancy of having few outside that age group can be explained, as I had given the permission to share the handout between students and teachers. The respondents were from surprisingly different prefectures, which was a pleasant surprise and could add a lot of variation to the answers, considering how different yōkai culture can be in different parts of Japan.[76] Nevertheless, the age and hometown portions had little data for my actual research question, but were a good choice just in case, along with having concrete confirmation that my questionnaire was mostly a case study with university age youth.
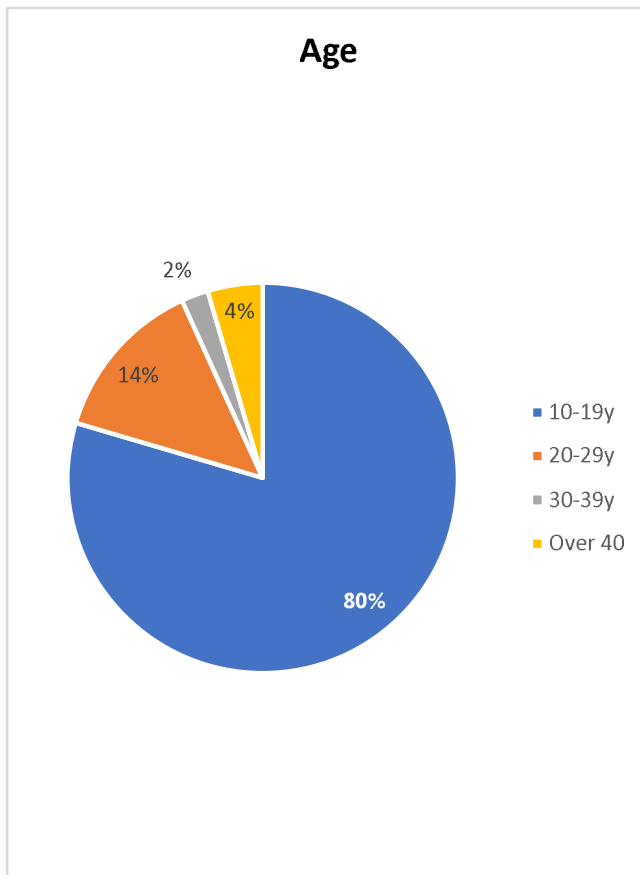
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[76] Komatsu, 2007 p. 79

Figure 1: Respondents divided by age.

Prefecture	Respondents
Tokyo	10
Chiba	9
Saitama	6
Kanagawa	3
Nagano	2
Fukuoka	2
Hyōgo	2
Aomori	1
Iwate	1
Kagawa	1
Hokkaidō	1
Ibaraki	1
Okayama	1
Gifu	1
Other[77]	3

Table 1: Respondents by prefecture

Question 3 (what are yōkai) was an important one for multiple reasons. As explained in chapter 1, yōkai as a term is not something that can be easily explained or defined, due to its delicate balancing between cultural discourses. Asking the correspondents to answer in their own words would preferably allow more free-worded responses and diversified analysis. Indeed, the answers varied in context. For example, fifteen respondents used the word *obake* or *bakemono* to describe yōkai, fortifying the association between the two words (chapter 1). Somewhat recurring answers were descriptions of yōkai as products of human mind when science could not explain strange occurrences (3 respondents) and creatures from legends and stories (10). The knowledge of where yōkai come from or forming a basis for mythological entities shows that the respondents are still well aware of this topic in their

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[77] Answers that did not specify a prefecture.

folklore. Understanding how the respondents would describe yōkai became exceedingly important for the big picture of defining yōkai in contemporary framework. As it also became present in the discussions with my informants, self-definitions formed a large front for building one's own personal interpretation. As said, very little can be surmised from the general description of yōkai: as a part of their culture, most Japanese effectively grow into yōkai bunka and are both affected by it and allow their own personal views to affect their concept of the culture. Understanding these concepts became an important factor for defining yōkai in contemporary society.

An important aspect of the question was to have first-hand explanations for what yōkai are to the Japanese. It has become clear that *bakemono* or *obake* are synonymous with yōkai, though the odd irony is that it really does not clear the answer much to a foreign researcher such as me. I assume that we can draw the conclusion that *bakemono* is somehow more descriptive or more nonspecifically used of paranormal than yōkai. Like explained in chapter 1, *bakemono* (with very little change to error) is read as "changing thing". We also know that bakemono is closest to the English equivalent of "monster" in describing truly monstrous creatures or is used even as an insult. Bakemono does carry a less detailed status, mostly because the word itself had little process through centuries, like yōkai. And on the same note, layman usage for bakemono was of course to be expected to differ from the one defined by academia.

So, yōkai are truly from the past, according to the answers. The aspect of otherworldliness is also present, defined by the descriptions of them as monsters and the answers describing them as "not human". The metaunderstanding that yōkai were used to explain strange phenomena is also known by some. The variation in answers shows that yōkai can be described in a multitude of ways, each however leading to a common conception. To compile the answers: yōkai are various monsters of old Japanese stories and legends, that existed when people had no (scientific) explanation for the weird and bizarre, and while they were considered scary and dangerous, much of those traits have been lost during their shift to modern culture. This resembles the academic perception of these creatures, albeit in a more straightforward sense, in layman's terms. In turn, these perceptions develop from the influence of others. From exactly what was the question that would follow suit.

Most of the responses for question 4 (how did the respondents come to know of yōkai) explained that the information was presented at them at a very young age, most often at elementary school, the most influential informants being television and literature. Hearing my informants, indeed old folklore is rarely taught at schools, so the role of educating about such things often remains for the media or literature to handle. Only few responses indicated oral tradition, such as stories from parents or between friends. This was expected among participants in a modern society. Tradition and culture are very rarely just assimilated into practice, but need to be quietly present and affect the society to take form into social consciousness. Thus, understanding how the culture of yōkai is still present in modern society requires us to find out how people accept and inherit the culture into their own social and cultural framework. The influential actors in procuring knowledge of yōkai are old literature along with modern media and popular culture products. Also, the fact that most respondents stress that they were exposed to yōkai bunka at an early age is also an important factor to consider. Seeing how yōkai and other forms of cultural traditions would take shape from childhood to older age would warrant a study of its own but at this point remains a thing to keep in mind. To the modern youth the concept of yōkai started as an exposure to more traditional aspects of yōkai bunka until being developed into a more complex context in exposure to popular culture and witnessing other forms of interpretations to the tradition and characters.

Question 5 (whether the respondents have participated in yōkai culture) was purposely worded in such way that the respondents themselves could define the extent of participation and their role as a participant. Most of the answers ended up being quite short and may indeed indicate that the concept of *yōkai bunka* is not so apparent to the general populace. That is, the answers did not contain any self-analyzing on behalf of the respondents in theirs answers in the same way as for example in question 3. Twenty-six of the respondents indicated that they are or have been in touch with yōkai culture some way of another. Again, popular culture plays some role in the answers, 11 answering participation through consumption of media, especially manga or animation. Surprisingly, 4 answers did mention *kaidan* (Chapter 2) and other forms of oral tradition (rumors, other forms of ghost stories) typical to yōkai, meaning that that specific aspect of *yōkai bunka* is still somewhat existing. A few answers did point out the possible influence of yōkai in many other cases of popular culture, such as the characters of a certain shows having features that are more attributed to yōkai and the generic

atmosphere feeling like it has homages to old traditions (no examples were given, though). It is obvious that it is the case: yōkai motifs and inspirations are greatly present in many Japanese popular culture products, be that intended or not.

The presence of Shigeru Mizuki and his works, notably *GeGeGe no Kitarō*, is apparently evident in contemporary yōkai culture, based on the respondents for questions 4 and 5. In question 4, 12 of the respondents mentioned *GeGeGe no Kitarō* by name, 4 answered simply through animation or comics. Beside *GeGeGe no Kitarō*, most notable series that featured yōkai in the 90s were the likes of *Naruto, Bleach, Dragon Ball* and *Doraemon*. The influence of animation and comics in modern Japanese youth culture is apparent, but what lies behind the fact is that the respondents still knew and acknowledged that the drawn apparitions are considered yōkai, so much that they remember them as such in the answers. The ability to recognize aspects of one's culture shows not only awareness of cultural aspects but also that those aspects are recognizable: motifs, settings and attributes become a part of identifying and interpreting one's culture and also sense of national heritage. We can make a separation between cultural products, such as *GeGeGe no Kitarōu* and *Mononoke*, that actively advocate yōkai and from the start hold the premise that it is influenced by old tradition, and other products that, while still have their own premise, namedrop and present motifs common for yōkai and other traditions.

Question 6 (yōkai and national identity) was something that I found little studies about. Certainly, yōkai and yōkai bunka are inherently Japanese, but what is the opinion of the populace? As with the third yōkai boom in the beginning of 20th century, yōkai, along with many other traditional aspects of Japanese culture, received more exposure during the building of national pride and sense of heritage.[78] It was this sense of pride in tradition that influenced to bring yōkai into broader audiences in popular culture, but it is difficult to know how much of that is still present in contemporary views in *yōkai bunka*. From a foreign perspective it is quite hard to deny the "Japanese-ness" of yōkai, but the Japanese perspective may not indeed be the same. This question was not only to see how they view yōkai in nationalistic framework, but also their concept of relation between yōkai, tradition and culture and national identity. I also tried to enforce that the respondents would explain their

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[78] Harootunian, 2011 p. 202

reasoning, first of all to avoid only short yes-no answers and also to see how the Japanese would view the relation between culture and national identity.

The results had varying depth: 13 of the respondents answered negatively, 2 did not know. Rest of the 29 answers responded positively with varying explanations. The most common answers emphasized the fact that as yōkai have their roots in Japanese history and culture they are inherently Japanese, which would be the most obvious and acceptable answer for laymen to wonder the national importance of yōkai. What I found more interesting was the length of the answers respondents used to explain their reasoning, especially in the case of confirming responses. The simplest responses consisted of just stating that yōkai are from Japan and thus carry the aspect of Japanese identity in them, but some answers emphasized the difference of yōkai to other supernatural phenomena overseas. Few answers mentioned the "atmosphere (*fun'iki*) of yōkai", which related to the discourse of yōkai as incidents discussed in chapter 1. The "Japanese-ness" of yōkai is also prevalent in the outside mediascape and scenery. Yōkai usually wear traditional Japanese clothes, and in case of *tsukumogami* possessing items that are typically attributed to Japan (masks, instruments, paper lanterns etc.). In essence, yōkai themselves are not only Japanese, but the stage where they act in depictions and stories feature heavily typical Japanese scenery and props. Looking back at old depictions of yōkai, it appears that they have since the beginning carried Japanese motifs, and indeed were in the early stages of cataloging used to pinpoint the "unique Japan" -aspect of their folklore.

There was an interesting counterpoint to yōkai in national identity which I should disclose. One negative answer for question 6 pointed out that as modern *yōkai bunk*a is so heavily influenced by Shigeru Mizuki and modern popular culture, it should no longer be considered as a part of Japanese national identity, meaning that the works of one man or the global internet community do no longer contribute to a nationwide identity. This is, in its own, a completely valid point. While only being a single answer to my questionnaire, the point cannot be disclosed in a bigger context than just an explanation to an answer, but it still brings a good viewpoint to a modern yōkai discourse. Nevertheless, despite the antiquity of the culture surrounding old folklore, the past century has still well received and adapted yōkai into modernity. The influence of Shigeru Mizuki in the appeal of yōkai in today's society is quite undeniable, whether we argue its place in national identity. In the minds of modern youth and children, *GeGeGe no Kitarō* is still relevant, having its 6th season airing this year,

marking the series' 50th anniversary.[79] The attraction towards the series is discernible, and we can add to that the fact that the series is still well in the minds of modern youth even though they might not consider themselves as fans of the manga or animation, nor avid practitioners of folklore. So, while confirming the series' influence and presence brings little new, it underlines the significance of questioning how and in what ways the works of Mizuki affect the youth culture to this day.

The results also confirmed many pre-existing facts from contemporary *yōkai bunka*. Academics knew the importance of Mizuki for modern view of yōkai but seeing how even at grassroots level people still cite and acknowledge the influence of Shigeru Mizuki and *GeGeGe no Kitarō* in their perception of yōkai gives a more profound understanding in contemporary views on all things yōkai. To summarize the results of the questionnaire, the common medium for spreading yōkai *bunka* is mostly youth literature and in some cases oral tradition, though more modern than the common *kaidankai* two centuries ago. The respondents saw themselves practicing the culture of yōkai somewhat: media consumption, retelling of old *kaidan* and retelling of visual aspects in arts, especially those heavily related to Japanese culture. Yōkai are mostly seen as a Japanese thing for the native populace, which was expected, but the negative answers also gave me some insight. What I gained from these results is that I proved much of contemporary views on yōkai and also learned a lot new for the future.

As said before, this questionnaire was my first attempt at gathering fresh data from the field, and mostly acted as an opener for further study and inquiry. The results and answers game me ample data on terminology and vocabulary used by the people, which in turn aided my oral data collection. While the raw data gained from the questionnaire contributes somewhat less than anticipated, the inspiration and contribution for my further research was a major factor. Visualizing how contemporary Japanese youth themselves view their folklore not only grants major handicap in rhetoric, but also allows to get inside their views of yōkai bunka. Also, knowning how and where typically Japanese have assimilated the culture allows me to have a good basis for analyzing other answers. So, after grasping this logical concept, the next step was to step outside and start to gather data face-to-face.

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[79] Asahi Shimbun, 2018

Fieldwork Continued: Mingling with the Locals

Inspired by the results of the questionnaire, I realized extreme potential in discussions with native Japanese and their culture and practices regarding yōkai. Having acquired the necessary keywords to open a discussion in the context I wanted was exceedingly important in opening conversations and steering the discussion to the relevant matter. Also having credibility with small scale trivia (such as knowing the background of kappa as *kawatarō*) most certainly helped in gaining data through discussions, even sometimes instigating my partners to show their wits by presenting their own trivia as a form of applying themselves.

My first subjects were people who helped me build the questionnaire and later wanted to participate in later discussions. Alongside those people I had some "stable" informants: people I knew beforehand and met multiple times to discuss about the subject. They were also a great help by feeding me with news and information regarding contemporary yōkai culture and possible leads on new findings. This was great to fix one of my problems: I was not exactly an avid consumer of anime and manga culture, so getting feed on those matters helped me greatly. In some cases, I would talk to random people in restaurants and diners. This kind of quick interaction would sometimes work in my favor: people unprepared for questions about their folklore and tradition would tell their honest opinion and their straight impressions. During long discussions it was not rare for the participants to remember details and examples of *yōkai bunka* they have encountered or practiced. This further proved that the culture is rooted in the consciousness and was difficult to separate in an instant.

Introducing myself as a master's degree student with the intention of studying yōkai and collecting modern depictions of odd phenomena worked in both ways. Most of the conversations were in quite casual environment and I tried to steer away from the academic interview -style atmosphere as much as I could, after realizing that people had certain preconceptions when interviewed in a strictly formal manner. It was not rare for people to start reciting their own supernatural encounters after some ice-breaking. The conclusions from different discussions will be covered throughout the next chapters, depending on the context. At first it should be appropriate to cover the generic topics and overviews until I focus on more detailed accounts on specific subjects. Some themes and topics in conversations were prevalent, more so that they seemed to warrant a chapter or subchapter

of their own. In a simplified manner, all the discussions could be divided into two groups: those focusing on events and phenomena surrounding the society as a whole, and individual experiences and opinions on the matter.

The most important matter that I focused on at first was the usage of the terms and conventions quintessential in yōkai discourse. That is, terms such as *yōkai bunka*, *kaidan*, *fushigi* and *hanshin-hangi*. Drawing the outlines for grassroots yōkai discourse also shows the basic understanding and concept people have of yōkai and their cultural conventions. When stepping into the territory of personal beliefs, the flow of the discourse had its changes. The concept of yōkai was not much used, the reason often being that it has become too unbelievable a term. Indeed, yōkai have suffered development into more cute and fantastic, compared to a supernatural entity.[80] In discussion the more prevalent terms were *obake* or *bakemono* and in hauntings *yūrei*. Much as I deduced from the results of my questionnaire, it seems that *bakemono*, having lesser cultural stigma and background, is easier to use in contemporary context. A usual agreement was that, if hearing a ghost story, it would instantly become less believable if the narrator would use the word yōkai to describe the creature. The modern mass appearance of yōkai in media and popular culture certainly have made it less appealing to use in a serious context due to the associations most contemporary folk draw out from them. This also proves that the existence of yōkai in popular culture is well apparent.

Hanshin-hangi also played a surprising role in the discussions. The term was also acknowledged, though surprisingly when brought up, the discussants became often more careful with their words, as if bringing up the term would make them more self-aware. Of course, I rarely would try to bring up the academic discourse on yōkai into the discussion. When I had a chance to talk with groups of people, often other listeners tried to rationalize and explain what the weird occurrence might have been. Ghastly stories and odd phenomena still have their place in Japanese society, and the odd discourse between the supernatural and spirit of modernity closely mimics the concept of *hanshin-hangi*. Entertainment plays also a role in the matter. If a mysterious event narrated would not gain friction, it was fairly common that people would draw humor out of it. As one informant laughed when people presented disdain to his story: "I hope it was a ghost, because I would not want to be scared by a cat".

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[80] Reider, 2003

This kind of longing for the supernatural is also an interesting case of trying to bring mysterious aspects to the known world.

The modernity that creeps from the ghost stories of my informants presented itself in motifs and sceneries of urban Japan. Indeed, the more I researched and conducted discussions, the more it became exceedingly harder to discuss yōkai in modern context without considering the transformation they have gone through, especially after entering popular culture and the subsequent entry to the "cute Japan" archetype. Bringing up the case of *kappa* would inevitably lead to mentions of its appearance in morning cartoons and related toys. This also formed a concrete generation gap, as most informants that were children during the entry of yōkai in popular culture were more proficient in reciting the media in which the creatures appeared than more traditional aspects of culture. This was also evident in my questionnaire. Worthwhile to mention is that I would label *GeGeGe no Kitarōu* as more leaning towards traditional depictions of yōkai than most modern series and shows, as the series often teaches old beliefs and concepts related to the yōkai it introduces. On *GeGeGe no Kitarōu*, one interesting case emerged. The two supporting characters in the franchise, *Nezumi-otoko* ("Rat man") and *Medama-oyaji* ("Eyeball father") are both original creations by Mizuki and have no real basis in "real" yōkai[81] other than strong use of motifs for the strange.[82] However, it was not uncommon for my informants to think that those kinds of made-up characters would not be yōkai. This brings up to the concept of "yōkai canon": what can be safely said to be a part of the troupe?

The fine line between yōkai and non-yōkai is seemingly decided by both personal opinions and this culture-based yōkai canon. Rather, we should not think what is yōkai, but what is accepted into the caste by both traditional and popular culture consciousness. If we look at the booms of yōkai discourse (chapter 2) we can see that each time the yōkai discourse has reinforced the concept and given form for what we *think* are yōkai. In the last boom, Shigeru Mizuki being a key player, the products of that time are used to ratify what can be counted into the caste. The discussions with my informants strengthened this theory. Or course, there is no set rules as to what counts as yōkai and what does not. But the cultural consciousness

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[81] Kabat, 2001

[82] It should be noted that in-universe neither of those characters are actually a yōkai: *Nezuki-otoko* is a half-yōkai with human parent and *Medama-oyaji* is the mummified remains of the main character's father. Both of these facts however are only known for those who have actively followed the series.

has adapted the idea of this canon authority so that it receives very little resistance, as while people see this authority it does not stop them from using their own conventions of yōkai for their own purposes. To put it more simply, these different yōkai canons are considered in their own context, the largest being the canon proper.

The discussions regarding the yōkai canon would sometimes span into long all-nighters as I would try to unveil the reasoning beneath what would count as a yōkai for my informants. It was common to describe yōkai, for starters, as a mythical creature. So, for this I would sometimes ask that would they consider, for example, the Loch Ness monster as a yōkai (for some reason "Nessie" is quite well-known in Japan as also evident by the fact that I never had to explain it). They would obviously deny it, and narrow the definition. With my informants we managed to narrow and conclude their views into a summary that is rather similar to the one that I managed to get from my questionnaire: Yōkai are mysterious beings from old (Japanese) stories, are not humans neither ghosts and because people no longer believe in them they have become more of a fantasy in modern society. So, the self-evident nature of yōkai is vehemently defended, but still the definition always lies behind a long discourse. This is certainly not a negative aspect, but also underlines my theory how the concept of yōkai has been taken for granted and that there is little discourse of the concept itself.

Not only the social consciousness matters in this case, but apparently an important aspect is the validation: if there is no authority to point it towards the yōkai canon, there is no safe say for calling a mysterious apparition a yōkai.[83] In yōkai discursion, the main authorities in this case indeed seem to be Toriyama Sekien, Inoue Enryo and Shigeru Mizuki.[84] In the realm of popular culture, we can say that there are other, smaller authorities for the fanbases therein (for example, using the term yōkai in clearly original creation), but those rarely affect the canon proper as I was given the impression.

In contemporary yōkai discourse there is yet another divide between two factors: things that do not exist that are talked about, and things that exist that are not talked about. What I refer with the latter is the usage of yōkai motifs and imagery in daily life, the apparently self-evident side of *yōkai bunka*. We have established that people know of yōkai, their basic

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[83]Komatsu, 2017 p.12
[84] Foster, 2009 p. 40, p. 173

history and their presence in contemporary society and popular culture. However, despite this self-consciousness, yōkai imagery is still rampart and the motifs and all things attributed to this cultural aspect are used in arts and commercialism, denoting that yōkai have another side in this society. Thus, was revealed the other important aspect of my field work: to go outside and observe the street and landscape.

In the Streets, Shops and Restaurants

One does not need to travel far into commercial streets to find the most well-known imagery of yōkai appearing amidst the street view. The most apparent creature is not easy to find only because of its appearance, but also the internet fame it has gathered. *Tanuki* is a yōkai I have covered before. A symbol of prosperity and exuberance, statues of tanuki are quite common in front of shops and markets.

8 Two tanuki statues in front of a restaurant in Asakusa. Photo by author.

The characterization of tanuki has indeed changed to be more of a symbol of life-enjoyment and acceptable hedonism.[85] From the stories of old, tanuki also suffered the fate of being a hoist of their own petard: while pranking their victims they would often go too far and meet their end.[86] The creature has had wide characterization by both old tradition and modern depictions in media. Outside, *tanuki* commonly appear in commercial streets. Tanuki statue in front of a shop beckons to the people traveling: this shop is authentically Japanese. What indeed strikes peculiar, which was confirmed by the few shopkeepers that admitted it, that

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[85] Melek, 2013 p. 256-259
[86] Foster, 2012 (1) p.3-5

tanuki statues are not really meant for foreign customers: some even expected that overseas tourists do not understand the meaning of the statue, only its humor value. For someone seeing one at the first time, tanuki indeed looks humorous with its whimsical facial expression and oversized scrotum. My Japanese informants, as we walked through the commercial streets to find a proper coffee shop, did not pay much heed however. This is of course expected, considering the long presence of tanuki and their depictions in Japanese society.[87] But while the outer appearance is extrinsic, the symbolism and meaning behind the depiction of the yōkai holds importance, as evident from the fact that the statues are still used and expected to appeal to customers. Those familiar with the works of Studio Ghibli may recognize tanuki from the 1994 movie *Pon Poko*. The movie received only minor attention in western countries, and even after the success of Spirited Away and the rise of fame for Studio Ghibli in the west it was still considered a niche amongst the more popular movies of the studio.[88] The reason may indeed be that is was too foreign for the western audience, and underlines how different cultural aspects are seen differently from the audience's own framework[89]. Tanuki indeed is a good example of how two different views in their own context affect the overall depiction of a certain creature.

Much like some of the respondents answered, yōkai are inherently a Japanese "thing" and have presence in national and cultural identity. The usage of yōkai imagery to promote this aspect in commercialism would be the next logical step in the modern environment of product appeal. One example of this is the *yōkai-dōri* (yōkai street, also known for its real name *Ichijoo-dōri*) in Kyoto. The street was a rather common commercial street or mostly local small businesses serving the local neighborhoods until the local storeowners decided to refresh the street view by producing and displaying statues of yōkai and *tsukumogami* into the street. Now brimming with over 30 statues, the street has become popular enough to be featured in local tourist brochures. While the explanation for the statues was to revitalize the street and bring local flavor, there is little to deny that yōkai imagery was specifically used for its present boom. Nevertheless, the presentation of these sculptures is a modern example of usage and interpretations of yōkai imagery and adds to the domain of yōkai as depictions, as each statue created must have had some inspiration.

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[87] Foster, 2009 p.36-37
[88] Foster, 2009 p. 209
[89] Foster and Tolbert, 2015 p.41-42

Walking along the commercial streets - be they for locals or tourist attractions – gives a lot of information which yōkai are favored and how these people depict their tradition to form a feeling of "true Japan". The places of commercialism embrace traditional aspects, but there are also locations with yōkai specifically in mind. The best possible example of that in modern society is the Mizuki Road, which – as much as this point can be guessed – is a commercial area dedicated to Mizuki and his works. Located in Mizuki's old hometown in Sakaiminato of Tottori prefecture, the road, despite its inconvenient location, is still a favored tourist and commercial attraction. The street is lined up with statues and other imagery from Mizuki's art and series, from which yōkai will gain the obvious focus from me. It should be noted that Mizuki's yōkai art was the most presented of them all, even though his impressive works on the Second World War are also highly respected.

One interesting example of yōkai presence in commercialism that crept into the scene is the Kappabashi-dōri commercial street in between Ueno and Asakusa districts in Tokyo. While the word kappa (合羽) in the name means an old-style raincoat[90], as a homophony with the name of the river imp it was adapted into the street's scenery and advertisement: the street view shows depictions of the yōkai and it has become an inseparable member of the community.[91] The creature was deliberately chosen as a mascot for the street and presents itself as having both traditional values and also promoting the "true Japan" aspect. It should be noted that the street is mostly known for kitchen utensils and furniture, which are heavily promoted as local quality. Associated with the street is also the kappa-dera, a Buddhist temple that turned into a house of veneration for Kappa in the early 19th century after the death of Kihachi Kappaya, the man who is thought to be the dignitary for the Kappabashi-doori as well.[92] A local custom is to donate cucumbers for good fortune, as kappa in many cases were believed to have a skin like that of a cucumber, an association that is still used in many a context.[93] The street and the temple do not only show how yōkai have been adapted to a commercialized and local environment, but also how yōkai have been toned down as symbols of prosperity and locality, as evident from the murderous drowner of livestock and children turned into cute mascot would demonstrate. Both of the places are close to the

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[90] The origin from the word comes from the Portugese word *capa*, which has the same etymology with the English *cape*.
[91] Kappabashi.or.jp, 2018
[92] Sogenji.jp, 2018
[93] Komatsu, 2017 p.78-79

bustling tourist streets of Asakusa, and while they reach their share in overseas tourism, the street and the temple are more focused on locals. Or course, promoting local flavor works in both ways, but the inclusion of the kappa lore and subsequent imagery adds to the fact that they want to promote old tradition and heritage.

9. Scenery from Kappabashi. The road features Kappa in many a form. Picture by author.

The places to conduct fieldwork when researching culture and tradition in modern context are not only outside in the field, but also in the data realms of internet. Internet ethnography is also a very important part of my data collection and seeing how anonymous internet users and netizens produce material that is considered to be a modern form of oral tradition. Ghost stories, urban legends and subsequent adaptations of *kaidan* are all examples of modern development of storytelling and the contemporary usage of narratives that drive the fame for these newer forms of oral tradition, even if being text based. Physical meetings among horror enthusiasts are becoming less common in the face of possible anonymity through the internet. The modern versions of *kaidankai* have been affected by a massive generation shift and telling of ghostly stories belongs to a more younger age group in modern society.[94] Ghost stories have still entertainment value, but amongst youngsters who would tell these stories

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[94] Reider, 2000

together for fright and fun. In this modern society, the culture of telling *kaidan* to strangers would befall for the anonymous internet communities: usually to simple textboards. Even though textboards have been less popular in favor of more modern forms of imageboards and active forums[95], the textual narrative is still strong in many communities that actively pursue to create new narratives for ghost stories. This will be covered more in the next chapter as I analyze more of the modern versions of yōkai narratives in present context.

As yōkai have their place in Japanese culture, they have laid roots in language as well. Sayings, aphorisms and idioms featuring yōkai are used even in modern environment. Someone with a face red from anger – or intoxication – could be called a *tengu*. Those who are avid swimmers may be called to be like a *kappa* in river. This yet again shows the presence of *yōkai bunka* in social consciousness and the recognizability and common traits of yōkai. Especially stories and anecdotes featuring the creatures were most likely the largest agent in producing character to the monsters, even though the art of telling stories of yōkai was been in decline due to the emergence of media and popular culture. To give an example of how old oral tradition presented some of the yōkai, I present a story that was told by one of my informants, which she had heard from her childhood: Stumbling upon a kappa, there was a danger that the creature would drag the child into the rivers. However, (as is common for many other yōkai stories) there was a way out. Kappa has a very distinct weakness: the depression on its forehead is filled with water, something that helps the creature travel out of its natural habitat. That is why there was a simple way of defeating the yōkai: bowing. Kappa, in its odd courtesy, would bow back and the water on its forehead would fall out, disabling it. This is an example of a simple story with a motive for teaching children: in any situation, be courteous. Kappa indeed has many appearances in sayings and stories of old oral tradition, and at this point I must start to underline the flexibility that kappa has shown in the face of modern tradition. It is evidently hard to search any aspect of yōkai discourse without stumbling into the creature.

Yōkai have crept into all small spaces in modern society and cultural consciousness: it was quite hard to find a place in which they could not have presence. This was also the result of an active search: in many a case old tradition has successfully blended into the view, be that in form of usage of traditional motifs and settings or even the direct application of yōkai

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[95] An image board is an online forum that operates on posting pictures along with accompanying text, a text board operates only through written text.

culture to promote whatever aspects they represent in a context. In whatever state yōkai exist in these spaces is also entirely dependent on how they are viewed and visualized by the society itself. As said, the discourse of yōkai is hybrid one and amasses all the possible cultural and societal renditions to itself to produce the present contemporary product. I would go as far as to argue that this very hybrid discursion is the reason why yōkai are so prevalent in social consciousness: there is always at least one end from which *yōkai bunka* influences and supports the existing phenomena.

Chapter 4: Demons in the Parade – Oni and Yōkai

10. Aka Oni and Ao Oni. This traditional imagery of the two oni is on the par with the modern portrayal of the demonic entities. These creatures were crafted into traditional inrō container usually used to contain medicine and may signify some protective purposes. From Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Undoubtedly the strangest case I encountered while studying yōkai in both literature and my fieldwork on contemporary *yōkai bunka* was the involvement of *oni*. Oni (鬼, translated often as ogre or demon) proves an odd "missing link" in yōkai discourse. It developed separately, being quite close to Buddhist framework of opposing malefactor. Inhabiting the concept of demons, oni are usually dealt in Japanese demonology than *yōkaigaku*.[96] Still, often when looking at the direction of yōkai discourse, oni will often appear at some point. Oni and yōkai are by motifs and placement in cultural narrative too similar to ignore, but at the same time too different to be lumped together in one category. A brief analysis of oni and their relation to yōkai is in order to grasp the magnitude of the cultural motifs that are used for these two similar groups, along with the relation the alleged demons of Japanese folklore share with the odd and the strange.

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[96] Reider, 2012 p.51

Before analyzing the connection between oni and yōkai let us see the visual aspects of oni. When we look at modern depiction of oni there is little to misunderstand: even my informants in Japan – even though from widely different prefectures – rarely gave contradicting descriptions. A collected description and characteristics that I gathered from my informants and partially from the media (due to the fact that it is quite hard to ignore, even when not actively participating) is this:

> Draped in loincloth, the oni is a muscular creature, skin blue or red, head full of wild hair with a single horn or a pair. Some modern depictions also prefer to make a pair of oni, one with blue skin, and one with red (commonly referred as *ao oni* and *aka oni*, respectively). Oni usually wield a club or a naginata spear. Oni are brutal and violent, with the offsetting trait of being stupid or gullible.

The description differs little from the ones made by other scholars.[97] Oni has been studied and fit into the timelines of folklore, but not without excessive dialog. For the purposes of this chapter, I will mostly present oni in the spotlight of yōkai discourse and their common ground with the other side of Japanese folklore. The connection between oni and yōkai is a deeply discussed point in yōkai discourse. Scholars like Noriko Reider have stated that "the general perception of oni as one of the yōkai is undeniable".[98] The argument lies in the fact that in every context yōkai have appeared, oni fit too. In other words, the cultural framework in which yōkai reside in cultural consciousness is specific enough to house oni also. In the yōkai imagery oni rarely look out of place: Oni are frequently seen marching alongside yōkai in illustrations dating even to Sekien. In fact, it should be noted that the even the eponymous catalog for the nightly march of demons indeed refers to kanji character for oni. In the second book of Sekien, *Konjaku Gazu Zoku Hyakki* (1779) oni was catalogued and drawn as a hairy, trollish cannibal. So, the oni discursion is on the same line with its siblings: there are so many definitions and concepts held for the creature, meaning that fully defining oni in Japanese culture is a work of excessive study.

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[97] Komatsu 2017 p.98-99
[98] Reider, 2013 p. 189
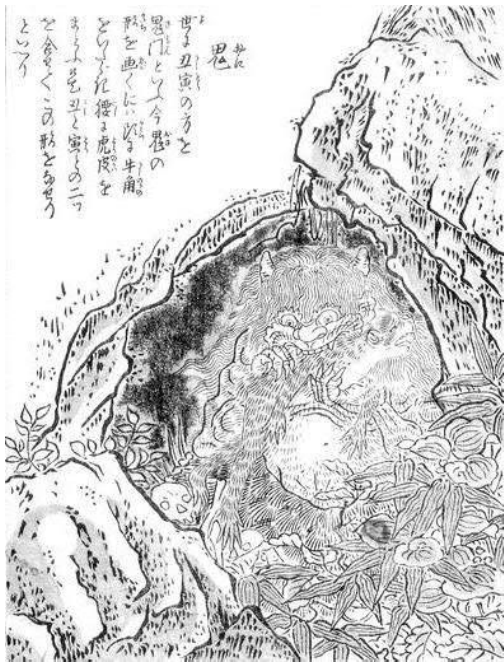
11. Illustration of oni by Toriyama Sekien. From Konjaku Gazu Zoku Hyakki (The Illustrated One Hundred Demons from Past and Present), 1779.Sekien's portayal of the trollish demon has still similarities with modern version of the beast. By National Diet Library of Japan.

Regarding the kanji character for oni, let us again quickly bring up *GeGeGe no Kitarō*. The name of the character Kitarō (鬼太郎) is a pun from the common suffix for boy's names (*tarō*) along with the letter for oni. So, we can see that Shigeru Mizuki understood the relevance between oni and yōkai. However, Mizuki featured oni very little in his series, if at all. In this case there is a need to separate between the oni entity and the oni phenomena: as explained earlier, oni has a wider cultural presence along with its physical description, even though it has been fading since becoming part of a wider cultural audience, especially in modern environment.

So, what makes the two folklore entities different? Yōkai and oni differ most in the power associated with them. Yōkai, as discussed in chapter 1, are composed of odd and strange elements, whereas oni depict a more brutal and violent side of humanity.[99] Both still symbolize the darker side of humanity and nature, and along with some similarities like worshipping (not as deities, but supernatural entities) and variations of oral narrations related to them show that the concept of oni may actually stem, or at least influence the, concept of yōkai, as well.[100] Yōkai usually stem from the other side, a realm of spectral entities and odd phenomena, oni are often thought to come from the Buddhist concept of hell: the depiction of oni in contemporary society reflects this. In some context oni are depicted as very similar to the Christian views on demons, they live in hell (*jigoku*), tormenting the wicked under the service of the Buddhist lord of the underworld, Enma (also known as Yama).[101] In less religious context, oni follow the line of trolls in Scandinavian mythologies, living alone or in small groups outside human settlements, often causing harm with their greedy and violent

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[99] Komatsu, 2017 p.97-99
[100] Foster, 2011
[101] Reider, 2012 p. 65

ways.[102] Oni can effortlessly be fit between the line of Buddhist and traditional animalistic framework. From a modern perspective, it can be said that yōkai come from the otherworld, oni from the underworld.

While oni can be used to signify a single species, there exists a concept of oni similar to yōkai. That is, a thing can be both an individual, unique entity and an oni, much like in yōkai discursion. The mountain hag yamauba, also a part of yōkai caste, is an example of such categorizing.[103] Indeed, like the domains of yōkai, the presence in which the term oni lies constantly overlaps with different cultural aspects and views. This is partly because oni can be explained to also be a state of mind. An angry, brutal being can be called oni, and even in modern society it is not too rare to call a person oni for violent tendencies.[104] So oni is not only an entity, it can also express a *label*. While yōkai and the entities within the concept can be used to describe a person, as discussed earlier, they are usually used to denote a person's skills or looks. Oni, instead, brings the allusion of a monster of a man. This aspect of oni as a label is important when considering how we perceive oni in yōkai discursion. A difference that – even though considered minor – has effect in the divide between the two monstrosities of Japanese culture.

In literature, oni appeared little before yōkai (the concept) in the traditional literature.[105] In cultural framework and consciousness oni exhibit similar traits to yōkai but almost all characteristics towards them are negative: yōkai can be venerated and displayed in a sympathetic light, but oni by definition are harmful and antagonistic. This might also be the cause and symptom for their demonic approach: like the western versions of demons and imps, they are quite difficult to display in a positive light. Indeed, oni are seemingly easy to approach from a western perspective because of their designated role as religious antagonist.

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[102] Komatsu, 2017 p.103-105
[103] Reider, 2012 p. 88
[104] Komatsu, 2017 p. 101
[105] Reider, 2012 p.30

Oni in the Field

When asking about oni from my informants, it was a common to say that "people from the north" know more about them. Indeed, the northern parts of Japan such as Iwate and Akita and the other neighboring prefectures have a rich lore on oni and other folklore creatures associated to them, and due to regionalism may see the depiction as different. I had a chance to do some fieldwork related to oni as I travelled to Morioka and surrounding regions in Iwate prefecture. The name Iwate (岩手, lit. "rock hand") itself is believed to be based on a story called *Oni no Tegata* (Oni's Handprint). Surprisingly, the story is very difficult to find translated, so I present my own abridged translation:

> In ancient times, when the area of Iwate was much smaller with only villages around, there existed a massive rock called Mitsuishi that was born when Mount Iwate erupted. Near there lived an oni called Rasetsuki, who kidnapped and tormented the people of the nearby village. The village folk turned to the god of Mitsuishi to relieve them from the evil oni. Seeing the acts of Rasetsuki, the deity went immediately to defeat the beast. When the god planned to imprison the oni in Mitsuishi, the demon wept and asked for forgiveness, promising he would never cause any harm. The god pitied the oni, and made him promise never to lay step in the region again. To seal the promise, the oni marked the Mitsuishi rock with his handprint, and left. Even to this day, the handprint is clearly visible and has been the origin to the name Iwate.[106]

This story is shared in the tourist portal to Iwate, even though only in Japanese. Seeing how especially folklore heritage is not presented to the foreign tourists adds to how Japanese soft power is shared domestically and internationally. The Mitsuishi rock is a common sightseeing spot in Iwate and plaques signing the way to the "demon rock" were abundant. Oni-related memorabilia and imagery was obviously present, signifying that oni indeed have presence in commercialism and street view folklore. Iwate advertises its historical and cultural importance in great manner, and oni as a mascot for the region acts as an important actor for inland soft power and cultural authority. From my fieldwork standpoint, especially those from rural areas were more confident in their own views on Japanese folklore and

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[106] Bunka.pref.iwate.jp, 2018

tradition which also brings the add duality between tradition – modernity and countryside – and city centers.

12. Mitsuishi Rock. The fabled hand print is located at the top of the mineral. Note the shimenawa-rope surrounding the stone along with protective charms, signifying that the place still holds religious significance. Photo by author.

Oni as an entity also has culturally similar cousins, especially around northern Japan and Iwate. From the neighboring prefecture of Akita originates a creature called *namahage*, a character with similar motifs and characteristics to oni.[107] Despite the similarities, from the perspective of folklore *namahage* are not considered *oni* but a lesser god. Many of my informants referred to them as oni and it is a quite common mistake to mix pictures of oni and pictures of *namahage* together, especially as they share the looks of a red ogre-like creature. The practice of dressing like *namahage* is a regional one, only practiced in Akita and explains why similar looking entities may be mistaken together. Besides *namahage*, there exists multitudes of creatures and practices similar to oni, such as *amahage*, which is an almost completely similar creature found from the south of Akita in Yamagata prefecture.

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[107] Komatsu, 2017 p.98-100

For modern folk, mixing two folklore entities together is not uncommon, and similar cases also emerge in Japan. The Shinto god Sarutahiko is often mistaken for *tengu* due to the illustrious red face and long nose the two have in common.

My travels in Iwate also brought some interesting insight on contemporary views on oni and yōkai. The statement that oni belong to the same category as yōkai was met with some resistance during my travels in Japan. My informants who hosted me in Iwate and their associates were quite vehement that oni do not belong in the caste of yōkai. Also, in my questionnaire there was not a single mention of oni, but it can be possible it was dismissed as such an obvious case that there was no need to even mention it. Considering the rich oni lore Iwate and the surrounding regions have, could we consider them to be more authoritative in the discussion? Or, did their framework in cultural consciousness become different from other regions of Japan at some point? These questions would warrant a broader study of their own, but for the purposes of this chapter we can surmise that the fact that in contemporary society there exists a notion that the two are not perceived as the same. That brings the argument of Reider into another angle, but as I had no quantitative material of the fact it remains as a niche factor. Nevertheless, the seed of doubt that was present showed that the discourse of oni and yōkai is not completely one-sided.

So, yōkai and oni encompass similar domains and motifs and seemingly walk along the same nightly march but still differ so that they cannot be fully considered to be one and the same. From the viewpoint of Japanese society there might be little difference between the two beings, but from a cultural angle it seems that they have aspects that need to be cleared before bundling them together into a single entity. Also, as my Iwate informants taught me, there still exists a cultural thinking that oni and yōkai are different.

Much like yōkai, oni also went through a series of changes when appearing in popular culture. That is, while they retained the demonic motifs and aspect of evil, the culture shift to modernity started to portray them in a more comedic and cute manner.[108] There are ample cases on transformation of folklore entities into modern pop culture, and next I will present a modern emergence of oni into a – for the lack of better word – cute idol.

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[108] Reider, 2003 p. 137

From an Insult to Pop Culture – The Case of Hinomoto Oniko

The usage of folklore and traditional motifs to signify national heritage is common in the discourse of yōkai and oni. A weird example of this is the creation of character Hinomoto Oniko and the subculture that followed. [109] The character showcases an odd creation of a phenomena stemmed from a national discourse and the inclusion of Japanese traditional heritage and symbolism in modern popular context.

The origin of the character stems from the hostile dialog between Japanese and Chinese activists. The Chinese word *rìběn guǐzi* (日本鬼子, lit. Japanese devil) is a common derogatory term for people of Japanese descent, and in today's escalating conflicts between China and Japan has become quite a common insult in demonstrations and especially in the realm of internet discussions. The netizens of Japanese internet communities however turned the insult into an internet phenomenon with the applied usage of common folklore motifs and old tradition.

Without engrossing too much into linguistics, it should be noted than in Japanese, the Chinese letters can be read differently depending on context (the *on'yomi* and *kun'yomi* readings) and whether it is used in a context of names. The suffix *ko* (子) is extremely common in girl's names, and it did not take long for Japanese netizens to realize that the insult could be read as a girl's name. Thus, was created the character Hinomoto Oniko. The kanji for oni (鬼) became a major aspect for the character, and it was modeled after the folklore demon. This detail in the pejorative was the very one that went together with the cultural consciousness and allowed the creation of the character, modeled after the very cultural image oni had in Japanese society. The character is presently maintained by the Hinomoto Oniko Project, a webpage and a web portal dedicated to upkeeping new depictions, stories and events related to the character and the small canon around it. Oniko has been featured in thousands of artworks from both amateur and professional artists.[110] Usually depicted wearing a kimono, the character has the classic oni motifs – horns, fangs, color red – along with traditional Japanese aspects like kimono or jinbei, a *nō* mask or naginata spear.

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[109] Chinahush.com, 2010
[110] As of 2018, the Japanese online community for artists, Pixiv, has over 2700 results for the character.

What is interesting in this case is not only the usage of cultural motifs to create a character based on an insult, but the example of transformation of oni into the modern "cute" culture dominated by the internet. The applied usage of Japanese cultural motifs along with the modern "*kawaii*" subculture makes Hinomoto Oniko a remarkable example how modern folklore works in tandem with past traditions.

Hinomoto Oniko is not the first and not the last case of oni lore in modern context, but one of the better examples of how traditionalism and cultural appearances are quick to react to even in a political environment. The character has become an independent creation aside from the political environment which it spawned from and the purpose of the character is not to create any more conflict regarding the matter, as stated by the official site for the character. It also shows a softer side of internet activism: procuring content without excessive provocation is also why the character had such a warm welcome outside activism groups, and also shows a possible glimpse of a new form of social tradition.

Also, turning these age-old demon brutes into cute characters in popular culture is not modern thing, however, but has shown some development from the days of the comic *Urusei Yatsura* (1978, also known as *Lum the Invader Girl*)[111]. One of the main characters, Lum, is self-described oni from outer space, and while the character bears some motifs of an oni, notable the tiger loincloth and brutish attitude, the principal popular culture version of oni today is more detailed. The development of the cute oni subculture has been widely studied and is one of the key areas in mapping the transformation of folklore entities into popular culture mascots. While oni have been in popular culture for decades, I use Hinomoto Oniko as an example of how oni and its folklore motifs are used in modern context by contemporary (and vernacular) authors.

The involvement of oni in yōkai discourse is important for understanding how the two different entities have walked over the common ground in Japanese folklore. The reverence and religious importance oni holds keeps it separated from its ghostly counterpart but shows how the Japanese have modeled their folklore in modern context. While there exists an argumentation whether oni truly belong to the yōkai caste or just march alongside them in the road of folklore, the main aspect is that oni are an inalienable part of yōkai discursion and Japanese traditional heritage. Oni, as much as yōkai, bear the motifs of Japanese tradition

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[111] Foster, 2011, Reider, 2010 p.144-150

and thus have become quite unseparated from the traditional and cultural discursion.[112] So, in contemporary discourse oni inhabit the same sphere of influence with yōkai: both have their value as tradition and folklore heritage, but meanwhile are not sterilized into remnants of the past, instead being shifted at the whims of modernity and popular culture. My contribution to oni discourse was less significant than related to the one in yōkai presence, but nevertheless it stays as an important aspect to include in this thesis. The boundaries of *yōkai bunka* are not discernible, and the inclusion of oni into yōkai discourse even more blurs the lines between what is the stance of yōkai in contemporary society.

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[112] Reider, 2010 p. 1-20, 90-92

Chapter 5: Modern Monsters – Yōkai in Contemporary Discourse

Yōkai have left the seat of an antagonist into a wider spectrum of popular culture fame. But still, these old creatures manifest themselves in old traditions and as a prop for Japanese scenery. Positioned in both sides of the vernacular, old folk tradition and popular culture, yōkai are in a continuously fluctuating state. Their main essence in this modern society however, is their recognizability.[113] This fact was further enforced by my discovery of how Japanese can recognize and name yōkai at a glance. Most yōkai have very easily recognized features, be that the red long-nosed face of a *tengu*, the exaggerated characteristics of a *tanuki* or the head of a *kappa* with hair or leaves forming a tonsure-style bald spot. The recognizability directly affects how these creatures stay in cultural consciousness and in the memory of the people. Simple, defining features have more staying power in the minds of the common folk than convoluted motifs or long backstories.

Even though we may speak of modern folklore, it should be noted that even that modernity might become "old" in the eyes of the contemporary people after a generation or two. Traditions in all aspects evolve quite fast in a society, and the culture surrounding yōkai is no different to that. Even though the "father figures" of contemporary yōkai presence, Toriyama Sekien, Inoue Enryo and Shigeru Mizuki, have laid the foundation in which even present contemporary yōkai culture draws from has changed little, the perceptions and concepts of it are in continuously fluctuating state. They are heavily dependent on other aspects of culture: popular culture, emergence of new traditions or bolstering of old, regionalism or even global events.[114] The data gathered from my fieldwork in Kantō, Kansai and Tōhoku will also be present in this chapter, as when bringing the new frameworks and conventions used in modern portrayal of yōkai and *yōkai bunka*, no other information is fresher than the one straight from an informant.

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[113] Foster, 2009 p.54
[114] Komatsu, 2017 p.172-175

Modern *Kaidan* – Horror in Cinema and Comics

As introduced in Chapter 2, *kaidan* is a ghost story with emphasis on the supernatural and cultural context of the mysterious. A while after Meiji period the tradition of *kaidan* storytelling and the associated *kaidankai* gatherings lost traction, the tradition took new roads to modernize itself to the contemporary audience. One influential example is the Japanese horror cinema, which has enjoyed global popularity and multiple movies are still regarded as the foundation for modern horror. Many examples from the tide of Japanese horror, especially in movies and theatre, have the premise based in old folklore or cultural conventions relating to the unknown.[115] These mediums have scooped influence from the pool of folklore, and also act as a paradigm on how old traditions can change mediums, thus becoming interpretations of the producers and artists thereof. As the culture of *kaidan* developed during the Edo period, it also laid a framework for modern Japanese horror narrative to form.[116]

One of the earliest examples showcasing this transference into two different contemporary frameworks is the story of *Yotsuya Kaidan* (Yotsuya Ghost Story), first appearing as a kabuki play in 1825 and gaining multiple adaptations into the big screen and other forms of entertainment since the start of the 20th century.[117] As the name suggests, *Yotsuya Kaidan* follows the plot of a supernatural horror story, though depending on the adaptation may feature less supernatural elements in favor to the dramatic love triangle featured in the story.[118] Though having multiple alterations, the basic story often stays the same: Ronin Iemon marries Oiwa after having her father killed. Iemon's admirer Oume conspires to have Oiwa killed by Iemon, and after succeeding the two marry. Tormented by the ghost of his previous lover, Iemon kills his new bride before taking his own life. The contributing factor to the tragedy is the *yūrei* (or more specifically a wrathful ghost, *onryo*[119]) of Oiwa. Even though the apparition in question is more of a ghost, the story often features some elements from yōkai discursion, most notably the inclusion of item possession and the inclusion of elements used in typical *kaidan* structure. *Yotsuya Kaidan* is not only an example of

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[115] Schneider, 1999
[116] Wada-Marciano, 2007
[117] Freedman and Slade, 2018
[118] Shimazaki, 2016 p. 113-114
[119] Shimazaki, 2016 p. 155

narratives used in different contemporary context, but has become a form of meta-folklore itself, creating subcultures which create adaptations and analyze the themes and visualizations of the old ghost story. To this day *Yotsuya Kaidan* is the most referred and interpreted story throughout the Japanese art history. The simplistic structure that draws from old *kaidan* forms has also contributed as a basic framework in forming horror narrative.[120] Many popular Japanese horror movies also follow the same structure, most notable examples being *Ringu* (The Ring, 1998) and *Ju-On* (The Grudge, 2003), which closely draw inspiration from the *kaidan* narrative.[121]

More yōkai-related media that is seemingly favored by horror enthusiasts is often in the form of manga or anime. It is important to note the difference in narrative between traditional oral storytelling with illustrations when compared to comics. How this change of narrative is handled by an artist or an author and how it is interpreted by the audience is an important aspect when analyzing this new form of entertainment and storytelling. One such modern manga-artist (*mangaka*) is Junji Ito. Ito's rare usage of yōkai imagery or motifs adds to the thought that contemporary *yōkai bunka* is a little too "soft" to be used in a serious horror context.[122] However, worth noting is the inclusion and importance of mystery and unexplainable phenomena in the works of Ito. What I have observed is that postmodern horror usually tries to distance itself from traditional narrative, but the aspect of beings outside the natural order is a theme that has been part of the

13. *The ghost of Oiwa possessing a paper lantern by Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849). This form draws great inspiration from the concept of tsukumogami and is one of the oldest folklore motifs present in Yotsuya Kaidan. From the archives of Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum.*

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[120] Schneider, 1999
[121] Wada-Marciano, 2007
[122] Foster, 2009 p. 207

yōkai narrative since the first catalogs of Toriyama Sekien. So, while yōkai as a theme is losing friction – partly for the reason I believe because it is not considered to be believable as an original setting – the underlaying motifs and narrative options have stayed and contributed to the success of these fresh but still familiarly paced products of contemporary literature.

Still, what I have learned from my informants and from my own experiences, the manga horror culture does not really create new modern ways of storytelling, but acts as an adaptive medium to depict and visualize versions of *kaidan* and stories of the supernatural. This is not to be thought as a negative trait, though. Depictions and interpretations of oral tradition into a visual medium itself is a powerful form of art and a way of continuing tradition in modern framework. Also, interestingly, fans of specific artists are often enthusiastic if their idol decides to develop artwork or their own interpretation of a specific story or setting known for *kaidan*, as I learned from my informants. Japan has a wide culture of artist-fan interaction through internet community platforms such as Pixiv.

The modern active participation in urban legends and *kaidan* promotes the older traditions, though oral storytelling is giving way for internet as a medium.[123] New ways of forming a *kaidan* narrative also shows how the narrative itself evolves as it seeks an audience from the new medium, this meaning that internet storytellers and artists have had to pursue *kaidankai*-styled refinery of narratives to create one that fits the medium. As modern forms of tradition and platforms for those traditions emerge from the contemporary society, so does modern forms of folklore creatures. There is ample proof that originality is not dead in modern folklore. Some of these modern products of tradition, such as independent comics and small-scale urban legends, may stay as a niche phenomenon, but it is not too unbelievable to see the emergence of new types of apparitions and beliefs to the supernatural rise even amidst the ranks of the modern populace. The yōkai discourse is a driving factor in procuring these strange entities from the collective consciousness of society.

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[123] Foley, 2012

The Birth of Modern Yōkai

For *kaidan* to be memorable it usually needs a suitable antagonist. The recognizability and motifs on yōkai usually build a character that becomes stable in the culture of the narrative as well.[124] In case of modern *kaidan* and other horror narratives, we can also presume that they need modernized villains to actually fit into the modern framework and become popular. What effectively encourages the existence of *yōkai bunka* in modern environment is the emergence of new types of monsters that appear as the topics for today's society. Often the vogue targets a single entity that leaps from the vernacular often to popular culture and to the collective mind of the whole populace. That is, these entities spawn from smaller incidents and form a strong support base that helps the spread to larger audiences. For this I will bring up two examples: *kuchisake-onna* and *hasshaku-sama*. One is a creature of an older story ("older", as in contemporary context), the other has become quite familiar with horror enthusiasts recently.

Kuchisake-onna (口裂け女, slit-mouthed woman) was an urban legend and mass hysteria that followed suit in 1979.[125] Those who lived in Japan during the time the urban legend was in full swing remembered it well. It was featured in news, talk shows and received a lot of attention from media in all forms. Only one informant I met did not know the story, and was quickly educated by the other members of the group, which also gave me an excellent chance to see how they would form the narrative to the being. Some who would not know the story would remember the moral panic that followed the emergence of the apparition. Younger informants knew the case, mostly from media or hearing the original urban legend itself. What greatly separated the youth and the older folk in this case was that those who knew the panic that emerged had, of course, more first-hand experience and sometimes even emotional connections to the times, especially if they were parents to young children at the time. Despite the attention it was given and the shock the phenomenon caused in Japanese society, very few would admit the existence of the specter, but still joined the panicking mass as a precaution: the creature may have as well existed. Mimicking the style of Inoue Enryo, who wanted to rationalize the supernatural, people had their own explanations what actually

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[124] Reider, 2001
[125] Foster, 2009 p. 189

happened and caused the idea of a wrathful ghost.[126] The concept and explanations will be covered later, but let us first focus on the specter itself. The story and its multiple versions are easily found from the internet and urban legend collections, and here is an abridged version of the story that I combined from the interpretations of my informants:

> In the narrow streets of urban centers, one can meet a woman with a flu mask. The woman would come to you and ask, "am I pretty". Answer yes and she will take off the mask, revealing a terrible mouth spanning from ear to ear, and ask again: "am I still pretty". Answer either way and the woman will attack you and either (depending on the story) will eat you or cut your mouth like hers. [127] The only way to escape is to answer "so-so (*maa maa*)" or "(you look) average (*futsuu*)" or give her sweets. Running or fighting is out of the question, as the monster has superhuman strength and will catch you.

The story itself differs very little from source to source, which mainly add some regional aspects. If we analyze the story as a whole, we can pick up a lot of motifs and conventions common for oral tradition around the world. The urban legend and moral panic that followed has been investigated by scholars of both folkloristics and its Japanese cousin *minzokugaku*, often contemporarily, meaning that the specter's presence in today's society has little attention. What I intent to present is not only the previous studies that have been done, but also my own deductions, comments from more contemporary Japanese people and details that have been less present in previous studies.

Modern discussion of *kuchisake-onna* carries a close relation to the venerated yōkai *yamauba*, [128] the mountain hag mentioned in the first chapters. Famed folklorists like Komatsu Kazuhiko stand behind the argument that she is undeniably a cultural descendant of the old yōkai.[129] Even so, it is still known that *kuchisake-onna* must be analyzed in modern framework. Knowing these connections between old and new folklore gives us incredible insight how cultural conventions work and how cultural products mimicking old motifs stand out from the mass of similar productions. However, during my own fieldwork I had no

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[126] Foster, 2009 p. 78
[127] It should be noted that the story includes a pun. The word beautiful (*kirei*) sounds quite similar to the noun cut (*kiru*). So, when the apparition asks, "am I pretty (*kirei desuka*)" it can be understood as a permission or order to cut. How much this is intentional is not known.
[128] Reider, 80-89
[129] Komatsu, 2017 p.130-133

mention to *yamauba* at all, which brings a new factor to the case. Whatever influence the mountain hag has is little acknowledged by the youth, at least in present context. The importance of the legacy of *yamauba* may indeed be a little shadowed in contemporary yōkai discourse by the general populace. It could be however, that she has become part of the social consciousness as much as many other yōkai that still influence the narrative, but are not actively presented in contemporary context.[130] Still, *kuchisake-onna* is clearly influenced by other womanly yōkai, even by its naming convention. *Onna* (lit. woman) is a very common suffix for (specially) female yōkai, one of the most popular entity of the category being *yuki-onna* (雪女, lit. snow woman), which also strikes similar motifs and settings to the modern yōkai-woman. According to the old stories, *yuki-onna* would appear in middle of snowstorms

to offer protection from the storm with the large sleeves of its kimono. Taking the offer would leave the poor victim frozen as the entity would drain all warmness from them. [131] How much and how deliberately such motifs and settings have been inspired to create new forms of oral tradition such as *kuchisake-onna* cannot be proven with accuracy, but there is little reason to completely deny that older forms of oral narration still greatly affect modern frame of mind in producing these entities.

By looking at the new generations of youth after the *kuchisake-onna* craze, we can see how some old influence can be lost in traditions. Indeed, as Komatsu encourages the analyzing of *kuchisake-onna* in modern context[132], in this case we may have to look at it in an even more modern way as contemporary society no longer has such deep interest in the same being as presented 30 years ago. We can see some

14. Statue of kuchisake-onna as designed by Shigeru Mizuki. From Shigeru Mizuki Road. [digital picture]. By 京浜にけ - 美術著作物の 題号：「口裂け女」設置場所：水木しげる ロード著作者：水木しげる, 日本著作権法 46 条／米国フェアユース, https://ja.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=249 7579.

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[130] Foster, 2015 p.61

[131] It was most likely that people died hypothermia would be thought to be the victims of *yuki-onna*. It would also explain some of the eroticism involving the apparition, as those afflicted with hypothermia in its final stages would take their clothes off due to the feelings of burning up.

[132] Komatsu, 2017 p.133

reminiscence in the event that happened, but as modern youth has little experience, it is inevitable that interpretations and perceptions of the creature and story fit to the new contemporary narrative. Which, in turn, gives way of new forms and continues the cycle of traditional storytelling, even if in modern framework. *Kuchisake-onna* was at the time of its emergence a case of modern yōkai. As time has passed, the creature and its modern context have indeed changed, as is typical of forms of tradition.[133]

Now, the question that should be answered is: how is this related to yōkai? We could only analyze *kuchisake-onna* as an urban legend similar to many others, but at the case of this apparition, it actually became a yōkai in the social consciousness through an acknowledged author. *Kuchisake-onna* effectively became part of the yōkai canon after being featured in the works of Shigeru Mizuki in his depictions of the nightly parades of monsters.[134] This further emphasizes the influence Mizuki had in yōkai discourse: his authority in the matter was unquestionable as *kuchisake-onna*, even as a small cameo, was instantly recognized as a member of the caste of the strange and the weird. The motifs, and setting the apparition is associated with also, reference to the influence of *yōkai bunka*. One way to escape the situation was to give candy to the monster, a motif that mimics some of the weaknesses for older yōkai as well, such as *kitsune*'s passion for fried tofu.[135] Also, the members of some prefectures also specified what sweets were the most effective in satiating the monster, the thing in question often being the specialty of the particular area, such as chocolate-coated apples as explained by my Morioka informant. This kind of adding of "regional flavor" is very typical in oral tradition and shows how regionalism plays part even in modern folklore.

The motifs in the story of *kuchisake-onna* indeed do bear the scariness of normal life. The scene of the story is quite common for anyone who commutes long distances between home and work or school. The iconic trademark of the monster, its flu-mask, is extremely mundane and common, and during flu seasons streets and trains are brimming with concealed faces. Still, these are completely normal and mundane, but in the context of the story become a tool of horror, something that conceals the true face of the monster, much as shape-shifters did in older stories. We could even interpret the usage of the mask as a modern way of depicting

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[133] Foster, 2015 p.62-63
[134] Foster, 2009 p.200
[135] The relation to kitsune and fried tofu is so well-known that noodles with fried tofu is commonly called *kitsune udon/soba*

deceiving illusion, a believable version of magic. As common for folklore stories and urban legends, believability certainly plays a massive role in this story. The concept of *hanshin-hangi* is again prevalent, most storytellers doubting that the phenomenon actually existed, but still bringing up the looming possibility, so the concept of believability is again ever present in this ghastly story. Moral panic evolving into mass rumors and finally into commercialized environment and mass culture is not a new process: those who know of early 19th century British urban legend of Spring-Heeled Jack should be aware of the popular culture craze it had until the end of mid-20th century. And, on a more grotesque note, the startup of urban legends and the birth of cannibalistic killer archetype from the stories of real-life killers like Ed Gein (1906-1984) is still extremely popular in both East and the West.[136] In this sense, *kuchisake-onna* follows the same trend, applied in a very Japanese context.

Another modern female apparition that has risen from *kaidan* to being a ghost idol is the *Hasshaku-sama* (八尺様, lit. Mrs. eight-feet tall[137]), an apparition that is a little younger but has been slowly appearing in popular culture. Due to that, in academic texts the ghost-lady has been almost nonexistent. The origin the female monster cannot be assured, but it is often refenced to first appear in a story posted in Japanese textboard 2channel in 2008[138].[139] My own abridged version of the story goes as follow:

> The narrator has travelled to the countryside to see his grandparents. At some point he hears strange laughter and sees an enormously tall woman (in some versions of the story the woman is behind a fence and the narrator discovers her height only after seeing her feet showing under the base of the fence), dressed in summer clothing. The woman laughs in an odd, manly manner, described as sounding like "po po po". Retelling the encounter to his grandfather, he is told that the woman is actually a terrible monster which was, as a legend tells, bound to the region by four *jizo*-statues[140]. By showing herself the creature – now introduced as *hasshaku-sama* – has

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[136] Schechter, 2001 p. 29-33
[137] *Shaku* is a unit of length, approx. 0,995 feet.
[138] Google Trends, 2018
[139] Devlin, 2017 p. 1060/3404
[140] *Jizo*-statues are small, cute statues of Buddha-imagery often meant to protect young children or bring closure to women who have miscarried. Featuring these specific statues in the story is most likely a deliberate choice by the author.

chosen the narrator to become her next victim. The only way out was to leave the area where the apparition was bound. But, as the sun is setting, it is already too late and they decide to wait until come morn, taking as many protective charms to the narrator's room as possible. What follows is a night of terrors, during which the narrator is taunted by the apparition which cannot enter the room because of the salt and charms. At one point the specter even mimics the voice of the narrator's grandfather in attempt to get the boy out. After sunrise, the narrator leaves the house in a car envoy, helped by the other members of the village. Even during the car ride the apparition laughs in her odd voice and taunts him, alluring him to look at her, an action that would spell death. Finally, after a terrifying ride the narrator arrives at the edge of the countryside, safe from the apparition. He was however already branded and returning to the same place would be fatal. The story ends with the narrator telling of his grandfather's passing, ten years after the first events, and that one of the statues supposedly keeping *hasshaku-sama* at bay has been toppled and shattered. Imagination or not, the narrator has been hearing the odd laughter more and more ever since.

How this story differs from the one of *Kuchisake-onna*, is the featuring of more traditional Japanese storytelling conventions and the inclusion of a religious motifs. *Hasshaku* also might allude from a much older yōkai called *taka-onna* (lit. tall woman) mentioned very briefly in *Gazu Hyakki Yagyō*. While the stories seemingly differ, there still exists a presence of yōkai discourse that at least influenced the creator of the story. The structure of Edo-period *kaidan* has its roots up until the descriptive stories of Toriyama Sekien, and not even modern storytelling is completely without it.[141] At first, we might have the descriptive fluff, to build up atmosphere and credibility. That is followed by the first high note: the encounter with the apparition, be that dictated as apparition yet is up to the narrative in question. After the encounter comes dilemma or the reveal, mainly the problem that the main character faces, in *kuchisake-onna*'s case it is the question and *hasshaku-sama*'s story features the reveal of the nature of the apparition and subsequent attempt to escape. Finally comes the solution: the end to the story. This ending is rarely positive, often ending in a tragic end or vague implications. This basic structure is quite simple and proper analysis in the structure of *kaidan* often requires a more detailed orientation towards the narrative. Nevertheless, the

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[141] Akiyama, 1985

structure presented here is one of the most common narrative methods used and is quite similar to the narrative structure of modern urban legend narration as well.[142]

Hasshaku-sama will most likely not be as popular as *kuchisake-onna*, but nevertheless is an influencing factor of yōkai discourse on the internet and modern Japanese media platforms. The two are born from a different age and platforms, so straight comparison would be ill-judged. *Kuchisake-onna* is an example of how urban legends can stir panic, but *hasshaku-sama* exhibits a more popularized appearance of folklore from the get-go. The case of the tall yōkai is an example of how new folklore aspects form from the internet, which as a platform for modern folk tradition is still fairly young, compared to its precursors, television, radio and newspaper. *Hasshaku* was namedropped a few times during my fieldwork, and some of my informants did know of the story, albeit not as well as *kuchisake-onna*. But, in the realm of popular culture, *hasshaku-sama* has gotten an increased presence. The story was featured prominently in an adult horror novel series, which even later produced an animated series. This was most likely a crucial step for the apparition to gain presence and recognizability. Despite the contemporary differences in the two yōkai, both share a lot of common in motifs and the usage of old folklore and beliefs in modern context. Analyzing the creatures in their contemporary context and in the setting of Modern Japan we can unveil a great deal of the contemporary framework in tradition and modernity.

Ero guro and Edo-*Kaidan* – The Birthing Pits for Modern Monsters

While analyzing the two apparitions in their respective stories, we can unveil the cultural motifs and aspects in social consciousness that exist in Japanese society and allow the promotion of these stories into larger audiences. Both versions of modern *kaidan* have not only been influenced by the cultural refineries of past *kaidankai*, but also modern emergence of different horror narratives and settings for contemporary fears. Japan is often credited as a forerunner in postmodern horror narratives as explained before, and the influence from that respected status has certainly been part in creating the modern folklore that exists in contemporary *kaidan* and urban legends. The Edo-period traditional aspect of modern horror

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[142] Reider, 2001

narrative has been briefly explained, so let us first see what modernity had to offer to the present narrative.

It is most likely not a coincidence that both *kuchisake-onna* and *hasshaku-sama* happen to be female. As I intend to explain more later, the female body is a common instrument in horror and has been studied intensively in movies, literature and many other forms of media. In filmography it has been a tool of horror on numerous examples[143], and Japanese cinema is of little difference as Yotsuya *Kaidan* and its presentation of a wrathful female ghost was the likely influence on *Ringu* and other modern portrayals of the Japanese horror narrative. The reason why stories like *kuchisake-onna* and *hasshaku-sama* have gained popularity and attention in Japan may not only lie in old traditional aspects and motifs they hold but also Japan's involvement in macabre narrative that formed in the early 20th century. *Ero Guro Nansensu* (*Ero guro* Nonsense, often shortened to *Ero Guro*) was an artistic movement in the early 1920's that had postmodern focus on sexuality and moral decadence. The term stems from English, meaning "erotic grotesque", and is applied to the uncanny and overtly natural aspects of human sexuality. In the studies of yōkai, the meaning of the term becomes familiar as Michael Dylan Foster, in his own analysis of *kuchisake-onna*, mentions Freudian concept of "uncanniness", drawing fear and anxiety from things that should be familiar to us into making them too familiar.[144] This "naturality" becomes an aspect of the plausibility of modern horror, and sexuality is indeed an aspect even in traditional oral storytelling that was long ignored.[145] The effect that *ero guro* might have left in the modern yōkai discursion can also be slated into the third peak of increased yōkai interest: the beginning of the 20th century marked the interest in all things traditional, monsters included. As the new form of expression took over the mass audience of Japan, there is a high possibility that strands of yōkai discursion and culture were caught in the web.[146] By that time Japan already had impressive archives of yōkai by academics, so there was much to draw inspiration from.

While I will not devolve too much into gender issues in traditional narratives, lest to derail my own research question, it is still important to underline the influence that sex and sexuality in Japanese society has in cultural consciousness and folk narrative. That can be assumed

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[143] Creed, 2012 p. 9
[144] Foster, 2009 p.13
[145] Schechter, 2001 p.61
[146] Silverberg, 2007 p. 33-34

from both traditional and modern cultural products.[147] We can see that the two modern yōkai seem to draw their sexual content in different streams, which in turn shows how the two entered into popular culture so differently. The story of *hasshaku-sama* did have a more male-oriented sexual side, while *kuchisake-onna* appealed to the fears of maternal instincts and death of a child. So yes, the slit-mouthed woman brought a valid base for panic, whereas the tall woman brings up the topic of true legends and the threat of dismissing old wisdom. In modern Japanese popular culture both apparitions have been a part of fetishization of horror and not only have their place in Japanese tradition but also in erotic horror that will most likely become a form of tradition itself, considering the new emergence of *ero guro* and subsequent increase of grotesque and uncanniness in modern art and media. If we were to draw a link between modern types of horror influenced with *ero guro* and the influence it has on modern folklore, we can state that modern monsters such as *kuchisake-onna* might as well be a part of the modern conscious of what is considered to be scary. There is no doubt that sexuality and the concept of monstrous-feminine play a part in the narratives of both modern apparitions.

However, the application of gender and sexuality is not new in yōkai discourse and Japanese storytelling. Stories of yōkai that appear in the guise of a beautiful woman were told at least in Edo period. Taihei Hyaku-Monogatari (*Hundred Stories from the Times of Peace*), a collection of stories from 1732, contains the story of a yōkai called *jorōgumo* (literally "a whore spider", alternatively "binding newlywed")[148]. *Jorōgumo* is said to be born when a spider reaches 400 years of age, similar to the motif of *tsukumogami*. Its appearance ranges often from one depiction to other, but it carries the theme of deceiving beauty which bewitches to an inescapable fate, fitting to a creature associated with spiders.[149] Nevertheless, much like *jorōgumo* and aforementioned *yuki-onna*, the female body has been applied in folklore numerous times, and from a traditional bipolar aspect of deathly beauty has carried to modern folklore as well. This traditional aspect is present in older legends such as the creation myth featuring *Izanami* and *Izanagi*, and in yōkai such as the aforementioned *yuki-onna* and the skeletal lady *hone-onna* and specially in *onryo* ghost stories like *Yotsuya kaidan*.

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147 Creed, 2012 p.88-90
148 Murakami, 2000 p. 190
149 Reider, 2000

The tropes and motifs in the stories, especially in case of *hasshaku-sama*, follow closely the traditional narrative in *kaidan*. "*Mitamono wa shinu*" (those who see it, die) is a common trope for many deathly yōkai. Humanity as a deceiving mask is also a common motif on many Edo period ghost story, and another recurring line that plays in these stories acts as a warning or satirizes the people of the time: "Although acts human, it is a thing that deceives humans" (*Hito wo shite, hito wo bakasu mono*)[150]. *Kuchisake-onna* and *Hasshaku-sama* follow the same notion quite clearly. Seemingly human, both have themselves revealed as monsters. Looking at these two modern yōkai, it can be seen that the guise is never perfect, and the monstrous side inevitably reveals them as they are. This also seems like a modern version of traditional morals of such stories: cautious seldom err. The modern fears of society often stem from the idea that the monster comes from the inside: it is something that we *think* is familiar and safe, in this case we can point to the female and maternal aspect that both yōkai seem to inhabit, also including that both the settings in the story are prominently "homely".[151] Those being the road to home and residence of grandparents. The fine line between familiarity and uncanniness invokes the primal fears from human consciousness and supports the belief to the supernatural.[152] There would be no reason in horror narratives if we knew it to be completely false. The motifs and settings are the key factor in building the authentic Japanese setting to the stories.

It is this transformation of *kaidan* into modern consciousness that indeed keeps traditional horror narratives in strong support, along with the *yōkai bunka* that influences these stories. Just like Foster argues that yōkai have "survived the cultural imagination because of their very ability to pivot easily between the credible and the incredible"[153], this is also what I argue with my concept of believability in yōkai discursion and the very origin of the Japanese concept of *hanshin-hangi*. The urban legend of *kuchisake-onna* applies to this case strongly in modern context. The pure interest people still have towards the unknown is a sure indicator that *hanshin-hangi* has its grip on modernity, and maybe gives a fresh (albeit horrifying) breeze of the unknown, unthinkable and unspeakable.

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[150] Farge and Doak, 2016
[151] Foster, 2009 p.137
[152] Schneider 1999
[153] Foster, 2009 p. 13

Modernity and Folklore

Traditional folklore still has a very strong presence in Japanese culture and belief system.[154] Harvest festivals and customs predating the Edo period such as the *Obon* festival are still yearly practiced by both believers of Buddhist faith and the general Japanese populace. The heavy traditionalism Japan keeps has sustained these traditions to this modern age. The problem folklore and tradition often face in the spirit of modernity is the change and new cultural consciousness that repels the old belief system.

It should be noted that disbelief and self-doubt sometimes play part in traditional oral storytelling. The mystery aspect in disclaimers such as "it could be real, who knows" adds to the overall theme of the unknown. In the internet, the medium allows the stories to a have more mysterious ending: In the story of *hasshaku-sama*, the narrator notes that one of the protective stones had fallen from place, hinting that the monster is free once again and most likely after him. The narrator also plays an important part in making the story believable, as is common with any other written horror narrative. In the original *hasshaku-sama* story, the narrator repeats his disbelief of the explanations given by his elders, but along the story starts to doubt himself in his conviction. Narrative commentary is quite common in many narratives, especially those of horror stories and urban legends, and adds to the fact that the self-doubt the narrator expresses brings mysterious credibility to the story:[155] it should not be real, but it allegedly happened.

We can surmise the Japanese populace is aware of ghost stories and know how to tell them, but very few admit themselves as a practitioner of the culture, either as a storyteller or an active listener of different narratives. The telling of ghost stories face-to-face in modern society is no longer at the shoulders of expert narrators like in Edo-period *kaidankai*, but rather have become a common pastime, a part of every sleepover or camp night in the woods. Modern versions of Japanese tradition and especially *yōkai bunka* and the culture of *kaidan* have become involved with the internet communities of Japan and the *otaku* subculture, as evident from the collected stories around the internet.[156] This is apparent to the emergence of folklore motifs in Japanese animation and other forms of modern entertainment mediums.

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[154] Dorson, 2011 p.19-20
[155] Harding, 2006 p. 24-26
[156] Devlin, 2017, 2018

Japanese folklore and tradition have become completely entangled with popular culture and media, and they often work in odd synergy when creating new products of contemporary folklore and popular culture. For this the internet hosts a massive platform for vernacular discourse.[157] It is to be reminded that horror in text form is relatively new when compared to oral tradition. How quickly this narrative was molded to fit even the platform of an anonymous textboard shows how dedicated horror enthusiasts are in attempts to form new forms of narrative storytelling. The birth of this new form of narrative storytelling that still manages to draw inspiration from old *kaidan* structure is immensely important even in the face of contemporary horror literature and tradition.

Most critics who argue against the internet as a platform for storytelling complain about the lack of social interaction between the storyteller and the audience. That is, the storyteller can see the reactions to the told story on the get-go and can adjust his narrative respectively. Such interaction between the author and the audience is not present. What is often ignored is, however, the importance of internet and anonymity in the face of social activity and spreading stories through different platforms. Internet as a medium has remarkably adapted to the new form of urban legends and horror narrative. This narrative, as explained, has also been present in modern filmography and art.[158] Internet especially carries the tradition of stories without author: the anonymous platforms allow the creation of stories with greater credibility due to lack of "commercial" maker.[159] This anonymity and lack of authority itself creates a believable story when compared to "produced" products.

While very few yōkai of older times have survived into modern society as believable entities, there exists an odd exception, mainly because of the mundane, believable aspect of the yōkai. *Tsuchinoko* (槌の子, lit. "child of a hammer") could be called a "living fossil" of yōkai discourse.[160] First sights of the creature emerged during the 18th century in encyclopedias like *Wakan Sansai Zue* (Illustrated Sino-Japanese Encyclopedia, 1712), describing the creature's appearance that of a snake with a flat, wide belly compared to its head and tail.

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157 Howard, 2008 p. 490
158 Harding, 2006 p. 57-58
159 Foley, 2012 p.75
160 Foster, 2009 p.1-2

15.Illustration of tsuchinoko (named as nozuchi here) by Toriyama Sekien. From Konjaku Gazu Zoku Hyakki (The Illustrated One Hundred Demons from Past and Present), 1779. By National Diet Library of Japan.

Apparently, the creature can jump long distances and is poisonous, even if not deadly. Throughout history the narrative surrounding *tsuchinoko* has had very little changes. But in all accounts, *tsuchinoko* is still a quite unremarkable, albeit unique, creature. Looking at the craze the creature has spurned, the sub-cultures that carry the tradition of looking for it and all the media attention, we can say that *tsuchinoko* has received a status of similar to cryptoids in western cultures.[161] The creature has been reportedly sighted multiple times with pictures of it and its remains being abundant. Still, there exists no concrete proof that the thing is real. The search for the creature has warranted multiple bounties for some sort of proof of existence. One such case is the annual *Tsuchinoko* Search Party (*Tsuchinoko tankentai*) held in Nunagawa, Niigata prefecture. This year's (2018) search party rewards the photographer of the creature with the cash prize of 1 million yen, while a concrete proof of existence would net one hundred million yen.[162] There is a hint of sensationalism surrounding the creature, but it seems that there are a lot of believers for the odd creature. As said before in the case of *kuchisake-onna*, the reason why the flat-bellied snake also has support in this skeptical modern environment is that the creature is both believable and recognizable. The creature might as well exist: there is no reason for the thing *not* to exist, as the search party website bluntly states. Also, as one of my informants commented, some of the participants might not even care whether the thing can be found in those excursions, some might think it as a fun holiday event with socializing: the 13th annual search party even advertises the event as *mankitsu*(満喫), which is a common term for relaxation events with

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[161] Eberhart and Downes, 2002 p. 563-564
[162] Nunagawa.ne.jp, 2018

no set schedule. Even in this case it is a reminiscent of *kaidankai,* which also were held in socializing and entertainment in mind, while the aspect of yōkai was the driving force behind the events.[163] It should also be noted that the search party and its website are hosted by the official site for Nunagawa municipality, so there is also the aspect of commercialism and usage of yōkai as figureheads to promote tourism.

As society develops new fears and forms of uncanniness, obviously the old pioneers of ghost story antagonists move aside to give way to new monsters such as *kuchisake-onna* and *hasshaku-sama.* Tanuki and other mischievous shapeshifters may have "died under the train" as told in the old Meiji period stories[164], but the modernity itself has transformed into a scene of ghastly events. How modern society portrays its fears and vices manifests itself in these urban legends and apparitions that haunt our modernity, as showed with *kuchisake-onna* and *hasshaku-sama.* This is the contemporary view in the strange and bizarre, and come next generation with new fears and vices that complement the society's fears spiced with the motifs from social and cultural consciousness

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163 Reider, 2000
164 Foster, 2012 p. 22

Conclusion

Yōkai have an intangible presence in society and folk consciousness. This is not only because of preservation through cultural practice, but also how *yōkai bunk*a has effectively sustained a lasting discursion between cultural traditions and contemporary social frame of mind, meaning that even though being cultural products dating to centuries past, the culture and framework surrounding yōkai are continuously up to date with the modern framework. This is how yōkai entered the popular culture consciousness, and how they still continue their march in the guise of newly emerging popular culture trends.

As said at the beginning of my thesis, when we look at yōkai, their appearance and motifs associated to them, we can see the importance of their recognizability. The clear appearance is one of the aspects that surely has kept these creatures memorable. And it is this recognizability of yōkai that does much to support the presence of folklore entities in media and popular culture. Japanese data collection site Goo Ranking (goo ランキング) carried out a survey in which participants were to identify yōkai. Number 1 was the wall-yōkai *nurikabe* with a clear 100 percent answer rate, the second being *konaki-jiji*, an apparition of an old man with a child-like cry. Both are characters featured prominently in the works of Shigeru Mizuki, indeed pointing out the obvious influence. But they are also memorable because of their unique, yet simple appearance.

The Haunting Modernity

So, the discourse between folklore and modern society is the driving factor for modern depictions of yōkai. It may be that yōkai are so well adapted to cultural consciousness that they can be applied to any possible modern framework in contemporary tradition and media. In all forms of modern narratives yōkai do have a presence, one way or the other, be that in physical form or as in the appearance of yōkai motifs and settings. This subconscious attendance of typical *kaidan* structure and folklore motifs even in highly modernized cultural products may not be evident to its practicers.

My fieldwork in Japan revealed much in the contemporary status of yōkai in the minds of the members of the general populace. Especially when compared to studies made in the 70s and 80s, we can see that we are in a generation turning point for *yōkai bunka*: the influx of popular culture and social media has affected greatly the presence of oral narratives and other forms of cultural tradition.[165] The narrative for yōkai is transforming to conform the internet as a definitive base of media platform. This in turn brings new forms of narrative storytelling and modern tradition. Highly modern internet narrative forms such as ARG (Alternative reality game) combine real life activity with transmedia storytelling to produce a fictional narrative with the real world as a platform. The inclusion of paranormal elements in these narratives is not rare, and often they do follow the supernatural motifs typical in the culture they are presented in for a sense of familiarity and believability.

In contemporary society the platform that is becoming the main medium for spread and practice of new traditions is in the internet and the communities that utilize internet as their platform of contact. I do not expect oral tradition to completely disappear: as long as people continue to socially interact and exchange dialog we can still expect a form of *kaidankai* to exist even in highly modernized society. Products of Japanese popular and mass culture such as manga and anime continue to spread and even teach tradition as well.

Despite the age of modernity and science, folk still turn to the supernatural and unbelievable. The innate desire to believe in things outside the natural order is evident in the case of *kuchisake-onna*. Even if people stripped the supernatural layer from the story, they still chose to believe in the suppositions surrounding the urban legend. This is clearly on line with the very concept of *hanshin-hangi*, and we can presume to see the same style of modern superstitions appearing in the future, too. The parade of monsters illustrated since the days of Toriyama Sekien is not showing signs of stopping, even though the rhythm and beat may have changed.

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[165] Glenn, 2008 p.499

The March Continues

One thing we can ask about yōkai culture is: what next? We have seen the development of yōkai discourse and culture in the span of three centuries, can we expect another change, another "yōkai boom" that will change the discourse into another direction? First of all, we can say we are still living the aftermath of the fourth boom, at it looks far from calming down. One sign of that would be the fading interest in the works of Shigeru Mizuki, which looks quite unrealistic for now. Mizuki's passing in 2015 has fueled the further interest in his arts and books, and the growing creation of homages and inspirations to his works has spread the influence of yōkai and supernatural culture around contemporary art. Not only have we seen the increased interest in yōkai in popular culture, but also the emergence of new apparitions and usage of yōkai motifs in contemporary folklore, as evident from the cases of *kuchisake-onna* and *hasshaku-sama*. The inclusion of modernity into yōkai discursion indeed bears great news for possible new forms of narrative options and traditional conventions. Can we expect *tsukumogami* infesting modern tools such as computers and smartphones? Indeed, such a topic has already risen in comics and is one of the basises for the modern yōkai-cartoon *Yōkai Watch*, which incorporates modern setting into traditional folklore. Depending on the audience itself, we may be seeing modern hauntings emerge in other areas of popular culture as well.

Japanese popular culture still holds tight grip to traditional aspects and motifs, and it would seem that thanks to it, people still know and recognize their old heritage, along with spreading it overseas. Like with yōkai, the practice of these traditions is not the single important aspect of appreciation, but also the depictions and the presence in cultural consciousness. The three domains that *yōkai bunka* inhabit are still present, even though yōkai as incidents have lost territory in favor of depictions, a domain that is fueled by popular culture and access to modern tools of depiction. Internet can be considered to be the ultimate platform of communication and connection, at least for now. We could start to fantasize yōkai in the realm of virtual reality or concepts of science fiction, but for contemporary perspective the internet is plenty enough as a modern form of tradition.

To return to my original question: what are yōkai? The immersive presence they have in both social and cultural levels, along with modern popular culture and commercialism is ironically

similar to the traditional view of yōkai as the mysterious force living between the material and immaterial. They are monsters in stories, mascots in popular culture and models in tradition. They have endured much in their march from their appearance to modern culture, and their ranks seemingly only grow as they tread towards the future. And that description fits the yōkai discourse aptly: it is an ever-fluctuating presence in social and cultural consciousness that is affected by both traditional and contemporary frame of mind. Now that they are conquering the popular culture internationally too, it seems like these monsters are not limited by neither time nor space.

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Appendix 1 (1/2): Survey

妖怪に関するアンケート調査

「妖怪」は中世から現在に至るまで文化や民族的に大切なものです。
現在の日本社会は妖怪について、どのように考えているか調査しています。
アンケートにご協力お願いいたします。

1. 年齢

○ 10代

○ 20代

○ 30代

○ 40代

○ 50代以上

2. 故郷

_____

3.「妖怪」というのは、何ですか。自分自身の言葉で説明してください。

_____
_____
_____

4. いつ、どうやって「妖怪」を知りましたか。

_____
_____
_____

Appendix 1 (2/2): Survey

5.「妖怪文化」に触れることがありますか。
妖怪文化は、妖怪に関する伝統（物語・うわさ・美術・娯楽など）です。

_____

_____

_____

6. 妖怪は日本のナショナル・アイデンティティ、あるいは国民意識の一部だと思いますか。それはどうしてですか。

_____

_____

_____

7. アンケートの後で、もっと詳しくインタビューさせていただいてもよろしいでしょうか。よろしければ、メールアドレスを書いてください。ご協力いただける方には12月、1月にフォローアップインタビューをさせていただきたいと思います。

名前	_____
メールアドレス	_____

Appendix 2: Survey handout

「妖怪」に関するアンケート調査に

協力お願いいたします

私は現在の日本人が妖怪について、どのように考えているか調査して修士論文を書く予定です。もしよろしければ、ご協力をお願いいたします。携帯でもパソコンでも入ることができます。

https://link.webropolsurveys.com/S/7B36D0AD36F35CC5

社会学部　東アジア研究科修士課程

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