Keitai **Monsters:**

Re-creating *Yōkai* Characters in the *Onmyōji* Game

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Nargiz BALGIMBAYEVA

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FORMAT NOTES

The text of this thesis contains romanized words, personal names, geographic locations, and other names originated from the Japanese language. I would like to explain the format that will be used concerning all of the mentioned cases.

First, the Japanese words are romanized according to the modified Hepburn style. All the Japanese words are spelled in italics except for personal names, geographic locations, and brand names. Personal names (including character names), geographic locations, event names, objects of art, books, anime/manga/game names, as well as brand names, are capitalized. Objects of art, books, anime/manga/game names are italicized.

Yōkai names are divided into two categories: *yōkai* as character names (ex. Kappa) and *yōkai* as generic terms, or entities that belong to a particular group of *yōkai* (ex. a *kappa*, the *kappa*, etc.). In the case of using *yōkai* names as character names, these are capitalized.

Japanese personal names are spelled according to the following structure: last name + first name (ex. Komatsu Kazuhiko).

Copyright information and credits are left unchanged according to the sources.

Some of the information taken from the game (for example, passages describing characters) was translated from the Japanese language by me; therefore I am responsible for the correct presentation of such information.

For quotation, I will refer to the standards of APA format, 7th edition.

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INTRODUCTION

Basic information

The following research is an attempt to analyze the *yōkai* characters re-created in one of the most popular mobile games referring to the *yōkai* culture – the *Onmyōji* game. The images of Japanese "monsters" also known as *yōkai* (they are usually found in folk tales and *kaidan* stories) inspire the producers of mobile games to create new dimensions of popular *yōkai* content for entertainment. Therefore, the main objectives of this study are to explain the connection between the present and past *yōkai* images using the concept of intertextuality and to find out why *keitai* monsters of *Onmyōji* are re-created this way. Another crucial objective of the study is to reflect on how social transformations of postmodern Japan influence on practices of *yōkai* character re-creation.

Before proceeding to the core of the research, it is necessary to clarify that the usage of the word *yōkai* was initiated and popularized by the Japanese scholar Inoue Enryō (here Foster emphasized Meiji-period works), who was seeking for an umbrella term for mysterious and supernatural phenomena; his endeavors were known as *yokaigaku* – "yōkai-ology" (Foster, 2009, p. 5). A more detailed description of the role of Inoue Enryō in the yōkai research will follow in the Literature review and methodology chapter.

In my research, I imply yōkai as products (mainly images) created in the past and further re-created by the postmodern Japanese society.

Lastly, I would like to reflect on the problem statement of this thesis. During the coffee break of one of the workshops dedicated to imaginaries of Japanese popular culture, I was approached by a more experienced Japanese scholar, who told me that there was no point in researching *yōkai* in the twenty-first century because of how many works have already been written on the topic. At first, I was unpleasantly surprised, but later understood that the colleague probably perceived *yōkai* as a precious stone that should be solely approached by folklorists. This precious thing was once buried somewhere in the Japanese village and then carefully retrieved to be put in a museum. I understood that *yōkai* for me are not relics – they are living entities, constantly changing and adapting to the society that created them. As was investigated later, many of *yōkai* scholars were on par with the named colleague at the workshop (see Literature review and methodology chapter). Therefore, the challenge for this project is to bring into question, if not disturb the very idea of *yōkai* purity in the postmodern perspective.

Relevance of the research

Supernatural creatures or unexplainable phenomena have always been an essential part of Japanese culture. From oral traditions such as storytelling to more sophisticated genres of art including traditional woodblock printing and theatre – there has always been a place for mysterious and strange content, the substantial part of which is based on elusive and eerie creatures or phenomena widely known as *yōkai*. Although *yōkai* are largely discussed within the framework of premodern Japan, one must not neglect the fact that *yōkai* of today are massively incorporated into contemporary popular culture. A variety of anime, manga, video games, and other products tend to either use the "*yōkai*" term in the product name or refer to *yōkai* characters one way or another. By doing that not only are they engaged in the process of blending the previous discourses of the mysterious and supernatural existing in Japan with newer concepts and topics, but also in transformations of meanings and roles of *yōkai*. Therefore, it would be logical to assume that *yōkai* serve as a tool for analyzing, understanding, and tracking changing tendencies of each generation who was in charge of producing and consuming products of the *yōkai* culture.

Yōkai of today are not the shapeless objects of terror they used to be in the Heian era, nor are they reminiscent of famine or terrifying diseases, or embodying fear or awe towards deities, who were believed to transform into monsters if inappropriately treated. Rather, they are vivid characters found in many products aiming to entertain people. Undoubtedly, an active consumer of such products of Japanese popular culture is expected to know a lot about the latest trends and innovations in the world of manga, anime, games, etc. With time technologies are becoming more complex when it comes to the realization, but at the same time more user-friendly. One aspect of this convenience is mobility or portability. *Yōkai*, in this sense, are visibly changing, becoming a part of "supernatural" hiding in a pocket, ready to be "summoned" by a user. More and more anime fans prefer such services as Netflix or Hulu – one only pays a fair amount of money a month and gets the whole world of animation waiting to be explored. Although nowadays some people still buy and collect printed manga volumes, digitalized comics are becoming more popular. Now it is far more convenient to pay a membership and read manga anywhere, anytime than caring excess items in a bag (a great example of such technology is the Mecha Komikku platform). When it comes to the gaming industry, mobile games are becoming more and more popular: commercials can be seen everywhere starting from train wagons to television. According to the survey conducted by the Mitsubishi Research Institute in 2016, among 10804 respondents (starting from 15 years old), 44.9% of surveyed do play mobile games, whereas 13.3% of them pointed out that they play mobile games regularly (more than 5 days per week). The results demonstrated that more than 50% of young people (including middle school,

high school, and university students as well as working people in their twenties) are consumers of the mobile games industry[1].

A newer survey by the Sega Games Company conducted in 2017 has proven that the number of mobile gamers in Japan had dramatically increased. For instance, 34.63 million Japanese people do play mobile games, and 57% of them enjoy games from 6 to 7 days a week[2].

According to the report by Inada, Shin, and Yasuda (2014), the Japanese game market tends to have a higher competition between mobile game-producing companies rather than console game producers (p. 19). The report also revealed the most successful companies producing mobile games in Japan: Mixi, GungHo Online Entertainment and Koropura – they are referred to as the "three new houses" (*shingosanke*) (p. 19). The sales revenue achieved by Mixi in 2014, for instance, has reached 12.7 billion yen – compared to 2013, there was a dramatic shift from 2.1 billion yen; the precursor of this success was the release of the *Monster Strike* mobile game (p. 18). The Japanese mobile game market is now trying to appeal to overseas audiences to become number one within the industry –to produce worldwide famous game companies pay special attention to a visual side of the content. Some of them, rather than focusing on oriental motifs alone, rely on "internationally understandable" objects of fear and horror. The great examples of this trend were demonstrated by the "grandparents" of contemporary mobile games – video games for PC and consoles such as *Resident Evil* (also known in Japan as Biohazard) and *Silent Hill*. Both games were developed in Japan, both of them incorporated monsters of all kinds except for what one may call *yōkai,* and both of them were similarly emphasizing the "western" approach to game creation. Hereby I mean the character design peculiarities in the first place: their backgrounds, physical appearances, and names – all of these details were understandable for foreign gamers. The situation with other games – less popular, yet conceptually based on the "Japanese monsters", to my mind, is not well analyzed enough from the scholarly point of view, thus I will try to elaborate more on the topic in the thesis.

The last thing worth mentioning is the relevance of the character re-creation process: its presence has always been hidden behind the doors of production, but, similarly to the *keitai* version of Japanese monsters, received significantly less attention than it deserves from researchers. When it comes to the term describing the process of "re-creation", there are synonyms that could be used to convey a similar meaning, such as "revitalization", "remodeling", etc. Nevertheless, here I wanted to emphasize an act of "secondary" creation, as many of the

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[1] Mitsubishi Research Institute, Inc. (2016). *Sumahogēmu ni Kansuru Ankēto Kekka* [Mobile Games Targeting Questionnaire Results]. http://www.caa.go.jp/adjustments/pdf/160324shiryo1-1.pdf

[2] SEGA Games, Co., Ltd. (2017). *Sumātofon Sumahogēmu Riyō Dōkō Chōsa 2017-nen 6-gatsu* [Smartphone Usage Trend Survey for June 2017]. http://sega-games.co.jp/release/170919_1.html

yōkai images analyzed in the paper are based on some earlier images of the same *yōkai*, but still, such "re-creations" have a right to be referred to as creative projects: in the majority of cases "newer" *yōkai* might highlight problems and deal with a different meaning that has never been touched upon by previous texts.

The character re-creation is a complex process influenced by a certain period, adjusted accordingly to a current interpretation by the author or the result of technological progress (Takahashi, Yamazaki, Shimada, Terasawa & Hiromatsu, 2016, pp. 32-35). The character re-creation inspires old texts to become available and relevant for future generations; the understanding of this process allows tracking and comparing drastic changes humanity witnessed, be it art, technology, or any other sphere of life.

Research questions

In order to reveal and understand the re-creation process, the following research question and two sub-questions are being asked.

1) What are the aspects involved in the re-creation of *yōkai* character images?

2) How are *yōkai* characters re-created in the *Onmyōji* game?

3) Why are the *yōkai* characters of the *Onmyōji* game re-created this way?

Scope of the research

Yōkai database consists of a limitless amount of entities, each of which has its unique features and description. To utilize all of them in the project would be impossible – therefore the scope of this research must be defined. Among a huge number of *yōkai*, four of them seem to be especially popular and widely used in products of Japanese popular culture: *kitsune* and *neko*[3]-based *yōkai*, the *kappa*, Yuki-onna. The characters of these four *yōkai* will be analyzed in the text of the paper to explain the character re-creation model on the example of a popular mobile game – *Onmyōji* (by NetEase Games) incorporating *yōkai* characters in the text.

Yōkai studies and its importance for humanities and social sciences

Yōkai studies can be classified as a multidimensional discipline; it is approached from various perspectives through the application of various methodologies belonging to cultural anthropology, folklore, art history, semiotics, etc. In this thesis, I would like to pay particular attention to the *yōkai* characters of the present time: how they challenge everything we used to

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[3] The mobile games which I am going to take as an example have a number of characters categorized as "supernatural" *kitsune* and *neko* belonging to various types. I will try to incorporate them all to demonstrate how broad the categories of these yōkai are.

know about bizarre Japanese monsters, and how the whole *yōkai* meaning and perception by present-day people are being influenced and reshaped by the postmodern society.

Komatsu (2016) believed that modern *yōkai* studies are a sphere perceiving *yōkai* as cultural phenomena that were created by human imagination (p. 11), which means that human beings and *yōkai* have always been intertwined throughout the time: to understand *yōkai* culture we must understand the humanity at the concrete period. In this sense, *yōkai* studies as a discipline possess a potential needed for understanding us, human beings, on all our paths of development, be it processes of art creation (scrolls or woodblock prints), or approaches and practices of the Meiji period representing the modernization of Japan, when *yōkai* stopped being treated as representatives of mystical powers anymore: they were forced to be associated with human psyche (Figal, 1999, p. 51).

To conclude, my study argues that images are an essential part of social construction. One is obliged to know the process of construction simply because images are regularly used as part of public policy. From this standpoint, it can be said that the research is important in terms of its wider implication for the sake of a deeper understanding of society and its changes.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

Literature review

The research touches upon several thematically interconnected directions; each of them, however, focuses on a specific approach to *yōkai*. Among the pioneers of *yōkai* research in general were Inoue Enryō (1858-1919) and Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962), who were both able to explain and classify a complex and chaotic world of creatures invading hearts and minds of the people living in pre-modern and superstitious Japan. Inoue (2001) tried to demystify *yōkai* in a way that some of the phenomena claimed to have a "supernatural" nature, were, in fact, a result of false mystifications (*gokai*) or mystifications artificially created by people (*gikai*) (pp. 101-104). Yanagita (2016), on the other hand, tried to emphasize that *yōkai* are mainly associated with a countryside lifestyle, therefore their existence in big cities was questionable due to people's misconception about the differences between *yōkai* and yūrei – the latter are usually the one seen by the dwellers of big cities (pp. 14-15). He then explained his classification and main points why *yōkai* should be differentiated from *yūrei* (ghosts representing the souls of passed away people): *yōkai* are said to attach to certain places (mountainous areas, forests, roads, etc,), whereas *yūrei* tend to attach to a concrete person (p. 15). In *Yōkai Dangi* Yanagita revealed that the scientific approach to *yōkai* initiated by Inoue was critically perceived in his family (2016, p. 3), which could majorly impact his perspective on the topic. It can be said that for Yanagita, critical approaches arguing for *yōkai* as superstitious past of Japan are detrimental to the existence of the subject. It is also necessary to point out that when it comes to the approach of Yanagita, the research on *yōkai* should be taken as part of folk studies that he used to refer to as *kyōdokenkyū* – "hometown studies" or "local studies". It can be concluded that Yanagita "took as a premise that the Japanese and Japanese culture have been unitary and homogeneous in Japan" (Takahara, 2000, p. 54).

The development of contemporary research on *yōkai* in Japan would not have probably been successful enough without the impact of Komatsu Kazuhiko (born in 1947). His excessive research on *yōkai* has demonstrated that the previous theories on *yōkai* have lost their actuality or have failed to provide a comprehensive discourse on the matter. According to Komatsu (2016), the approach of Yanagita has many misleading conclusions – such as the idea that *yōkai* are "fallen" *kami* (gods) (pp. 192-195), or that the differentiation between *yōkai* and *yūrei* is always conditioned by their time of appearance and attachment to a concrete person or place (pp. 20-21). He also suggested using the *yōkai* term in three separate ways: *yōkai* as incidents or phenomena, *yōkai* as supernatural entities or presences, and *yōkai* as depictions (2017, p. 12). Therefore, for Komatsu, *yōkai* that were witnessed by people ("real" *yōkai* evidence based on personal

experiences) and their images as created in art, literature, folklore, and traditions reside on different levels that should be separated (2016, p. 13, p. 165). He, nevertheless, approves the existence of many patterns existing in the field of *yōkai* studies, such as *yōkai* history, *yōkai* psychology, *yōkai* art, historical sociology of *yōkai*, etc. (pp. 12-13). Moreover, Komatsu dedicated a few chapters to how modern Japanese cities and their dwellers gave birth to a newer, more applicable to its atmosphere *yōkai* stories. In these discussions, he provided substantial remarks on the factors having an impact on the shape of modern *yōkai* as well as provided concrete examples of such changes, although his main arguments were towards *yōkai* as phenomena, not as characters or their images.

Speaking of the existing studies incorporating Japanese "monsters" *yōkai* and technologies, it may be necessary to address the topic of the *Pokémon* franchise. Being based on the idea of games and mobile monsters, which are undoubtedly essential components of this paper, *Pokémon* widely incorporates the narratives of *yōkai*, Japanese mythology, and lore as was demonstrated by Sumilang-Engracia (2017). Continuing the topic, I would like to mention Allison (2006), who explained the development of Japan's commodities based on playful monsters such as *Pokémon*, referring to the phenomenon of "techno-animism" (p. 13) – the specific aesthetics of technological progress intertwined with the notion of the existence of gods, spirits and other entities, which are the pillars of religious and philosophical thoughts shared by the Japanese. Nagao (1998), as well as Foster (2009), similarly found the connection between *Pokémon* and the supernatural world of *yōkai*. Still, the universe of the Pokémon franchise does not directly promote the "classical" outlook on *yōkai* creatures: the Japanese term "*yōkai*" is not used in the context; it is rather intentionally changed into "pocket monsters" probably to appeal to various audiences from all over the world; the prominent representatives of the *yōkai* bestiary are not present here as well. However, it is highly possible that they are being vicariously addressed – at least conceptually, through the monster categorization, as Foster (2009) pointed out (p. 214).

When it comes to modernized *yōkai* in the era of technologies, it is worth mentioning the paper by Tajiri (2015), who is one of a few scholars touching upon *Yō-kai Watch*, a popular franchise mainly targeting children and incorporating *yōkai* content. She discussed the success of *Yō-kai Watch* in Japan, as well as the franchise legacy originating from various sources such as Onmyōdō practices and other popular media products such as *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō* and *Pokémon*. The strongest point of this paper is the author orientation towards *yōkai* representation in the series: she described *kawaī* and miniature *yōkai* characters of *Yōkai Watch* and explains these aspects with *yōkai*.

Gill (1998) acknowledged the presence of cultural continuities in popular culture on the example of television dramas for children. He also touched upon *yōkai* a few times, although the main stress was laid on superheroes. The author examined such character peculiarities as their color and transformations – these features are taken into consideration in my analysis.

Another aspect of current research is connected with the notion of "character re-creation" within the Japanese popular culture. Uchida (2008) demonstrated an outlook on characters of Japanese media; he also proposed the following stages of characters development in media: "the multilayered character development within one media product," a media mix or multi-use of characters in various elements of media, a secondary character re-creation happening as a result of active consumption of media products (p. 85). The methodology of Papp (2010a) based on evolutionary art approach, as well as the demonstration of *yōkai* iconography on the example of the *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō* series (created by Mizuki Shigeru) by the author, became an example how *yōkai*-based iconography was reflected accordingly to a certain period in history. Shamoon (2013) provided an overview of the *yōkai* characters in the *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō* and *Inuyasha* series, although her main idea was the notion of "*yōkai* databases".

Yōkai as characters are acknowledged in the paper by Ichikawa (2014), where he tried to demonstrate how *yōkai* appeared as a result of local people's outlook on unexplainable phenomena, and later transformed into texts or images, which later become a part of mass culture. However, this process is cyclical, and tourists attracted by vivid popularized characters tend to visit places (in particular, small villages) that are known to be a place of *yōkai* origin, and, hence, stimulate the re-creation of *yōkai* culture.

A paper by Coulton and Wilson (2012) is one of a few providing arguments regarding the *yōkai* role in mobile games. The authors argued that the use of *yōkai* in games shifts the role of the game towards the "fun" direction rather than "fear"; in this regard, *yōkai* and "gothic" monsters can be called the opposite to each other. However, due to the format of the paper (it was presented at the conference), the authors incorporated a limited number of sources on the *yōkai* topic.

The next study connected with the current topic of research was conducted by Kim (2013). The author demonstrates the process of re-creating characters from Korean folktales for the RPG game and provides explanations on how conceptual elements of characters are based on features of those creatures taken from mythology and folklore. However, this study mainly focuses on technical aspects of the re-creation process – there is no thorough analysis of the characters themselves.

Next, I would like to dedicate enough time for discussing one of the most problematic aspects of the existing studies on *yōkai* – their constant preoccupation with the problem of *yōkai*

existence or non-existence, also known as *yōkai sonzairon*. The majority of *yōkai* scholars, such as already mentioned Inoue, Yanagita, Komatsu, and also Hirota Ryūhei (2014) were trying to understand whether their research object lies within a concrete sphere: a sphere of visible, or "natural phenomena" (*shizen genshō*) or a sphere of the so-called "supernatural phenomena" (*chōshizen genshō*). Komatsu, for instance, proposed a model perceiving *yōkai* and *kami* as entities belonging to the supernatural realm, although as opposed to *kami*, *yōkai* are not worshipped by people (2016, p. 44).

Hirota continued the discourse of Komatsu and other researchers by stating that these theories treating *yōkai* and *kami* as supernatural entities are quite unstable due to various factors such as time, social culture and, of course, because both the human perception of existence and the world itself is subject to major changes (2014, p. 125). As an alternative to the approaches causing misconceptions and contradictions within the field of *yōkai* research, he proposes his model of *yōkai* existence treating *yōkai* as existing phenomena (*yōkai* existence approving model), non-existent phenomena, and phenomena which is not scientifically approachable (an agnostic perspective) (2014, p. 123). The discourse on *sonzairon* is beyond question crucial for the whole *yōkai* studies; however, the mentioned works visibly lack deeper discussions on how *yōkai* are influenced and shaped by humans.

In other words, among the works mentioned above, a few of the studies address the primary question of this thesis – how *yōkai* are re-created in contemporary Japanese popular culture – not in terms of using various software programs and design tools, but in terms of what aspects of *yōkai* characters were changed or were left untouched. For instance, Foster (2009) and Papp (2010a) acknowledged the cultural transcendence between Mizuki Shigeru's monsters and the *yōkai* of Toriyama Sekien. Although the figure of Mizuki Shigeru is undoubtedly important for the whole *yōkai* discourse, these researchers could not predict how original *yōkai* characters created by Mizuki are currently being modernized again in the latest episodes.

Shamoon (2013) and Tajiri (2015) both discussed the changes in some of the anime versions of *yōkai*, but their discussions lacked the reasons for such changes and their deeper analysis.

When it comes to the second objective of the paper, a highly limited number of studies discuss why the *yōkai* found in anime and games are different from what they once were. Although Papp's iconographic approach remains one of the most essential works on *yōkai* evolution (2010a), she limits further discussion on nowadays' *yōkai* re-creation by claiming that "*yōkai* in the twenty-first century serve the narrative as patriotic and righteous entities that guard Japan from outside forces" (2010b, p. 140). This argument seems to be too quick when one looks at colorful, bold, and modernized versions of the *yōkai* of the *Onmyōji* game – the game that was

essentially produced in Hong Kong and highly appreciated by both Japanese and international fans. Moreover, some of the monsters that were re-created in the game include the ones from Chinese folklore.

Yōkai of the twenty-first century are also often criticized, whereas their grand-grandparents, the "original" *yōkai* are being praised, if not romanticized by the elder, more experienced generation of *yōkai* researchers: Foster (1998) and Ichikawa (2014) were worried about certain *yōkai* becoming a commodity, which can understandably become a problem and lead to marginalizing the raw, rich *yōkai* culture of the past. Azuma (2009) too stressed that obsessive fans of manga, anime, and games – the so-called *otaku* – are more interested in clichéd characters rather than the narratives behind certain products. No matter how these claims seem to make sense, I still strongly believe that the notion, meaning, and depictions of *yōkai* are as transmutable as the *kitsune* or *tanuki*: they may change, but these changes are only meant to reflect the transformations of the society. Whether it is a positive or negative trait – I cannot say, nor is this the objective of my thesis. But in the end, these newer *yōkai* characters affect the livelihood of the whole concept. As Foster (1998) positively concluded in his article dedicated to one of the *yōkai* representatives: "in its revived form, in villages throughout Japan, the kappa still serves to irrigate and fertilize the land: not with water, but with tourism, local pride, and commercial success" (p. 19).

Hopefully, newer studies and discussions on the *yōkai* re-creation will appear more frequently in the future. It is of great importance to acknowledge the previous works dedicated to the *yōkai* theme, however, it is also vital to reveal any changes in the *yōkai* representation (the very notion of *yōkai* is changing rapidly) and to explain why they are being re-created one way or another at the given time frame. The conclusions may, in fact, lead one to some thoughtful insights on the Japanese society as well.

Methodology

Seeking an appropriate theory and method is a difficult task when it comes to *yōkai* studies. Being a multidisciplinary research area, topics on *yōkai* may be approached differently, depending on the focus of a current project. In the case of this paper, in particular, the key concept relates to the question of how *yōkai* creatures are transformed in mobile games, and how early *yōkai* depictions, as well as folklore elements, influenced current *yōkai* characters. Therefore, I needed to find a method which could be able to explain the processes mentioned above.

A long process of researching existing methodologies connected with textual transcendence has led me to a concept called intertextuality. The notion of intertextuality itself was first proposed by Kristeva in her work "Word, Dialogue and Novel" (first published in 1966). Kristeva's ideas were mainly inspired by the Russian scholar Bakhtin to whom she refers as "one of the first to replace the static hewing out of texts with a model where literary structure does not simply exist but is generated in relation to another structure" (1986, pp. 35-36). Kristeva follows Bakhtin's principles of "literary word" which for him was a dynamic structure touching upon various "textual surfaces" and providing a dialogue between "the writer, the addressee (or the character) and the contemporary or earlier cultural context" (p. 36). These multiple interconnections, for her, can be attributed to each and any text; and such phenomenon she called intertextuality (p. 37). However, the main critical comment of the concept created by Kristeva was connected with the lack of clarity on "what happens to a fragment of the social text when it is "absorbed" and transformed by literature" (Alfaro, 1996, p. 277).

A later concept influenced that of Kristeva and Bakhtin was proposed by Genette, who developed the notion of transtextuality. Genette defines transtextuality as "all that sets the text in relationship, whether obvious or concealed with other texts" (1997, p. 1). He subdivided transtextuality into five different categories of intertextuality, paratextuality, architextuality, metatextuality, and hypertextuality. Genette used a structuralist approach to transtextual relationships paying close attention to various elements of texts such as titles, notes, and reviews; and including such cases as parody and pastiche to the discourse of transtextuality.

There is an understandable reason why the latter approach seems convincing to some researchers studying textual transcendence. First of all, Genette was able to grasp and acknowledge a wide range of transtextual relations in his concept (e.g. a presence of one text in another (intertextuality), a transformation of one text into another (hypertextuality), etc.) – this is exactly what one may experience in mobile games about *yōkai*. For example, each character is a hypertext in relation to itself – we know and understand that Yuki-onna is a *yōkai* of snow, and we may return to an original folktale where this *yōkai* came from. Intertextuality is another widely used type of relations between texts in mobile games. Another example: to create a certain character, producers invite voice actors (*seiyū*) which could perfectly match the needed character personality – as a result, potential players see a *seiyū* name in the commercial and may guess what the character will be or look like. This is what Genette called an implicit form of intertextuality[4] or allusion (p. 2). To understand the presence of allusion in the text "high intelligence" is needed (Mirenayat & Soofastaei, 2015, p. 534), or speaking in other words, one

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[4] In this case, intertextuality can also be linked with paratextuality.

must be familiar with various products of popular culture to understand such allusions in mobile games.

The "flexibility" of Genette's ideas allowed scholars to apply transtextuality to completely different cases: Danesin (2017), for instance, incorporated the concept of intertextuality into his analysis of Scandinavian sagas re-created in manga. Herfurth & McLafferty (2018) demonstrated how the mechanism works in the *Harry Potter* book series. Evans (2015) presented the mechanisms of transtextuality on the example of Gaiman's works and emphasized how folklore and popular culture coexist in his iconography.

Although Genette's concept of transtextuality is undoubtedly more elaborate than that of Kristeva, the one acknowledged by post-structuralists – intertextuality – would be more appropriate as the main tool for this thesis. First of all, Genette's model belongs to the structuralist discourse, which assures that meanings exist independently from culture. In opposition to this notion, the results of my analysis of *yōkai* characters provide a sufficient basis for the argument that the meaning and overall concept of *yōkai* are somewhat drastically different from what they represented in the Edo period, for instance. Moreover, I would like to concentrate on how contemporary *yōkai* images found in the games are challenging previous ones; how the intertextuality mechanism allows things to change their direction, rather than trying to "fit" the examples of re-creation into specific groups or types highlighted by Genette. According to Machin and Norris (1987), all the premises pointed out above are more likely to be associated with post-structuralism, not structuralism:

> *It opens poetry up to a practice of intertextual reading that can take in philosophy, history or psychoanalysis, not on the reckoning that these are "meta-languages" or ultimate sources of truth, but in order to see how texts relate and produce new dimensions of sense.*

(p. 18)

The distinction between transtextuality and intertextuality at times can be ambiguous and tricky – as it was once for me while I was working on my master's thesis. Nevertheless, one must certainly differentiate these two concepts: unlike the latter one, transtextuality presupposes that qualitatively new ideas can never emerge from already existing texts, and based on such arguments, this theory is rather important for critical analysis of re-creation from the structural point of view.

Given the fact that the very essence of the current paper is centered on the re-creation of *yōkai* in the mobile games and their hybrid nature in postmodern Japan, I feel that it would be more adequate to utilize a post-structuralist framework on the *yōkai* re-creation where the main

tool is intertextuality. Napier (2016) showed a similar attitude towards anime and its actual connection with post-structuralism:

> *Indeed, anime may be the perfect medium to capture what is perhaps the overriding issue of our day, the shifting nature of identity in a constantly changing society. With its rapid shifts of narrative pace and its constantly transforming imagery, the animated medium is superbly positioned to illustrate the atmosphere of change permeating not only Japanese society but also all industrialized or industrializing societies.*

(p. 12)

Plumb (2010) too noted that intertextuality is applicable to anime and manga incorporating Japanese religion, mythology, and the supernatural:

> *Through the use of intertextuality, embedded mythological knowledge is placed into new works, re-envisioned, yet the basic meaning of the reference transcends the story, so the meaning is still visible but is left to multiple interpretations by the author and the audience.*

(p. 243)

When it comes to the comparability of the two (anime and mobile games) representatives of popular culture with regard to *yōkai* studies, I would like to refer to Papp (2010a), who investigated the *yōkai* iconography and its evolution:

> *Visual artists depicting yōkai face the complex problem of how the concept of yōkai, the moment of change itself, can be represented visually in the genres of painting and drawing, which fix a static visual moment. It seems as if sequential art, animation and computer graphics are more suitable for this task, as these are the art forms which capture transformation and transfiguration.*

(p. 19)

Truly, the animation used in mobile games can fully grasp various features of *yōkai* including their supernatural powers, and demonstrate them in dynamics. Another important point is that game creators pay special attention to sound effects such as background music, opening and ending credits, the voice-over of characters, and other sound effects. In the *Onmyōji* mobile game, for instance, character voices are done by *seiyū*, or professional voice actors who have already been engaged in a majority of other media projects, including anime and games. *Yōkai* too, are associated with particular sounds, such as the sound of beans being washed (Yanagita, 2016, p. 101) – if one hears these, it means that the creature called Azuki-Arai is somewhere not too far.

Another common feature of anime and games that should be mentioned here for the sake of clarification is that aesthetically, stylistically and conceptually anime and games may have

much in common. According to Green (2017), some "key genre tropes have evolved as part of anime's wider media mix" (p. 2). It means that the tropes that once evolved within anime as a genre are used regularly in other media forms and genres, including mobile games. These widely known features, such as character types and clichés are introduced and explained in Chapter 1.

Due to these vitally important factors, the research incorporates sections where anime plays a vital role, while mobile games (*Onmyōji*) serve as the main object of analyzing intertextual relationships existing in *yōkai* re-creation practices.

In order to understand the rationale of the *yōkai* re-creation, I will analyze modernized *yōkai* characters through the lens of intertextuality by decoding numerous allusions and references to previous examples of the *yōkai*-related texts. Moreover, I will try to look even further and find any other intertextual references which could have influenced the current image and characteristics of the *yōkai* characters to be analyzed. In other words, by "texts" I imply "an intentional message expressed in a natural language" or as "an intentional, coherent, and compact carrier of the meaning, which can rely on homogeneous, as well as on heterogeneous, semiotic systems" (Sarapik, 2009, p. 280). This approach of mine allows perceiving texts from a wider perspective, considering them units or elements of a culture – these elements include scrolls, folk tales, *yōkai*-related art.

My focus will be on two sides of each separate *yōkai* character: a visual side (all the visual aspects which have been copied, imitated, or referred to), and a contextual side (the backgrounds, personal features, and role of each *yōkai* in the game and their connection to earlier *yōkai* texts). By combining these two elements of the character I am hoping to conduct a thorough and multi-faceted analysis based on the mechanism of intertextuality. In my analysis, I will also use tables (they follow after the analysis) to demonstrate the conclusions of the analyzed data of each of the characters. The tables consist of two main sections: decoded intertextual references and respective sources where such references were found (see Tables 3.1-3.4).

That being said, acknowledging the existing intertextual relationships within the game without any explanations of the reasons for these intertextual references significantly weakens the analysis and the actuality of the work. The main argument is that without understanding why *yōkai* characters are re-created this way one might come to a misleading conclusion that studies incorporating intertextuality are solely descriptive. To escape this lop-sided trajectory, I will try to connect the analysis of intertextuality to the existing social milieu, as I argue that to a certain extent *yōkai* are constantly changing entities that depend on the current trends and other factors impacting the postmodern society. *Yōkai* of today are neither "destroyers of traditions", nor

"outstanding pieces of art" – they are just meant to portray what the Japanese society is about at the moment.

The method of analysis chosen for this project may seem lacking "objectivity" and overly dependent on interpretation, which is a constant problem of the studies involving post-structuralist approaches. On the other hand, this negative trait may eventually become a strong point of intertextual studies that seek to explain the changes in texts throughout the time. As stated by Elkad-Lehman & Greensfeld (2011),

> *The texts being encountered are associated with others known from the past, making one's reading "intertextual." The reader's personal experience, knowledge, world, ideological and political practices are all texts creating a network. Reading is a hermeneutic process based on this network. Hermeneutics originates in the dynamic movement between texts. It does not look for consolidation or stability; on the contrary, hermeneutics seeks the fluctuation between meanings that the interpreter constructs.*

(p. 261)

In order to answer the research questions, I intend to use the following methodological pattern (Table 0.1). The first part of the research is a qualitative analysis of the *yōkai* characters of the *Onmyōji* game through the lens of intertextuality. The given analysis has demonstrated that the characters are hybrid, which can be explained from the standpoint of hybridity in postmodern Japan – here I operate with the concept of hybridity using some case studies (robotization, modernized traditions, and hybrid identities). Lastly, the first research question will be addressed based on intertextuality, case studies of hybridity, as well as the literature review. The result of the analyzed data is a conceptual model of *yōkai* re-creation that helps to define aspects involved in the process of *yōkai* character re-creation.

Table 0.1. Methodological pattern of the thesis.

Research question	Methodology	Concept
1. What are the aspects involved in the re-creation of *yōkai* character images?	Conclusions based on the intertextual analysis, case studies of hybridity, and literature review.	*Yōkai* re-creation model

2. How are *yōkai* characters re-created in the *Onmyōji* game?	Qualitative analysis of intertextual connections	Intertextuality
3. Why are the *yōkai* characters of the *Onmyōji* game re-created this way?	Case studies based on the results of the intertextual analysis	Hybridity

CHARACTERS IN JAPANESE POPULAR CULTURE AND THE NOTION OF RE-CREATION

Characters and their representation in Japanese popular culture

Fans or enthusiasts of the Japanese media products are well aware of the place representing a colorful world of Japanese characters in all its glory. Akihabara station with its fancy shops and services is regularly visited by thousands of people, including both local *otaku* (passionate fans of anime, manga, games, and idols) and international customers. Some of them, however, are not so interested in buying a limited edition PVC figurine of an anime character or anything similar to it. Whenever such "newbies" enter a thematic shop they probably experience a strange feeling as if they are stuck in another dimension filled with strange local symbolics and merchandize highly appreciated and understood by everybody in the area. By "strange symbolics and merchandize" I hereby imply posters, cards, magazines, giant pillows, towels, toys, and figurines. All of them have an intriguing common feature: the industry of Japanese popular products is based on character images, or simply *kyara*.

Uchida (2008) concluded that the term "character" is regarded as an essential part of *otaku* culture, as nowadays it is usually tightly connected with the fetishization of certain characters of anime, manga, or games (p. 76). It must be said, however, that the differentiation between the "character" and "*kyara*" (a shortened Japanese word for "character") is not always clear. A manga critic Ito Go had suggested that "*kyara*" spoke for its independence from the text and in this sense would make more sense to claim that *Hello Kitty* is a *kyara* rather than a character (Uchida, 2008, p. 77). Sousa (2014), on the other hand, proposed using the combination of the two terms – "*kyaracter*", to refer to both (p. 2). In my research I will mostly incorporate the term "character", as I perceive *yōkai* characters through various perspectives, (such as visual and contextual ones); multiple dimensions of a character will be explained based on *yōkai* character narratives of mobile games.

A strong dependence on the character can be referred to as "the character image extraction", happening as a result of various media product consumption, and its importance can be connected with how the audience identifies itself with these characters. It is "an imaginative process that is evoked as a response to characters presented in mediated texts" (Cohen, 2006, p. 184). Characters exist in imaginary worlds, and when viewers are emphatic with the actions characters do or events they experience, it makes them feel in such a way as if viewers were characters themselves. In other words, characters, not the narrative from which they were taken to attract most of the audience's attention. The popular culture industry effectively uses this psychological aspect by producing character song CDs, cosplay costumes, character collectibles,

and many other items. Fans buy these items because they are attracted to characters, and want to incorporate a part of this imaginary world into their daily life.

Whenever a character becomes popular and well-known among the recipients of media products, it can lose the connection with the original text it appeared in, and it means that the only thing which matters for a character in this sense is the recognition by masses, and visual representation of this character, as well as its market value. This aspect allows using character images for different purposes – especially in commercials. A simple example is Usagi Tsukino, better known as Sailor Moon, whose image is successfully used by marketing companies for a variety of products (Figure 1.1). When consumers see Sailor Moon in the commercial, they might not remember the plot of the new *Sailor Moon Crystal* remake – in actuality, they might not even remember a thing about the character's background, or the things she or he did in the anime. In other words, for popular culture consumers, the character image extraction process usually happens unconsciously: a majority of people do not notice that the factor that stimulated their choice of shampoo was nothing but the presence of a famous character re-created for commercial purposes.

Figure 1.1. Character image: Sailor Moon from the *Chocola BB Joma* commercial video
©Naoko Takeuchi/PNP, Toei Animation

In general, characters from such sources as anime, manga, and video games (especially Japanese) may be represented in three different ways: considering their appearance or body features (including clothes), social roles, and psychological or verbal specificities (Uchida, 2008, p. 77). The first category is meant to concentrate on how characters look: they can have *nekomimi* (cat ears), wear specific clothing, or have distinctive hairstyles. For example, the term "*ahoge*" translated from the Japanese language as "stupid hair" and explained like "hair springing up like antennae" (Azuma, 2009, p. 42) (Figure 1.2) Galbraith stated that the *ahoge* trope may signal to the viewer that the character is "energetic but not too bright" (2017, p. 150).

Many of "*moe*" – an emotional "response to fictional characters or representations of them" (2009, p. 343) – characters are created with this hairstyle.

Figure 1.2. Character image: Saber from the *Fate/Stay Night* TV series

©TYPE-MOON

Important messages revealing the details of a character personality type may be represented with the help of visual elements such as the color scheme of a character (Doi, Mori & Sakai, 2014; Sakita, 2018). The choice of red may signalize that the character is portrayed as enthusiastic, energetic, passionate; blue represents a cold-blooded, calm temper; green reveals an easy-going, friendly nature of a character; yellow symbolizes that a character is of a radiant personality and is quite active; white stands for purity and innocence, whereas black emphasizes a mysterious character, which at times belongs to the villain category[5] (Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3. Character image: Hagoromogitsune from the *Nurarihyon no Mago* series.
© 椎橋寛／集英社・奴良魔京

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[5] Ichiappu. (2015, June 19). *Haishoku no Hiritsu wa 70: 25: 5! Kyrakutā Haishoku no Kimekata Kihonhen* [The Ratio of the Color Scheme is 70:25: 5! How to Decide on the Character's Basic Color Scheme]. https://ichi-up.net/2015/045

The second category represents various social categories characters are part of – these can be imaginary (like witches and wizards from the anime called *Zero no Tsukaima*), or real such as teachers (*Onegai Teacher*), brothers or sisters, close friends, family members (Nagisa's emotional family in the *Clannad* series). One of these categories, called *meido* ("maid") may be defined as highly sexualized or fetishized by *otaku* culture in particular. It is a stereotyped image of a girl housekeeper, wearing a uniform, taking care of other characters within a story. One may probably assume that this category only provides sexualized images with no dramatic personality development, but it is true only for some cases. In the *Shakugan no Shana* series, a character named *Wilhelmina* (Figure 1.4) plays a key role in the upbringing and empowering the *tsundere* Shana. She helps the main characters all the way long from her first appearance till the end of the series, and her main ability is different from what the audience expects from a maid: she is a skillful fighter, whose aim is to look after the protagonists and protect them.

Figure 1.4. Character image: Wilhelmina from the *Shakugan no Shana* TV series

©TYPE-MOON

The third type of character is far more noteworthy from a psychological point of view than the previous two: it is based on the characters' temper and behavior. A vivid example of this category is characters (usually females) who tend to argue, criticize or shout at another person, but gradually they develop their friendly and warmer side, showing compassion or even affection to them. Such characters are known as *tsundere,* originated from two the Japanese words *tsuntsun* (describing irritation and disgust), and *deredere* (meaning a more friendly or pleasant side of a person). Another way to add depth to characters is to add a dialect to their speech, create verbal patterns or clichés distinctive for them – a character from the *Rozen Maiden* series called Suiseiseki who is a typical *tsundere*, besides uses a phrase *desu* she adds at the end of each phrase. Verbal peculiarities of such characters were discussed by Nishida (2009), who concluded that typical expressions of *tsundere* can be divided into two types: expressions of worriment or excitation (similar to phonetic peculiarities such as stumbling), and expressions with the particle

"*kara*" added to conceal true feelings; statements that are opposite from what they truly feel (p. 22).

Figure 1.5. Character image: Suiseiseki from the *Rozen Maiden* TV series

©PEACH-PIT

Another way of character representation is achieved through designing a character`s voice. Voice acting in Japan is a well-paid profession popularized with the interest towards anime and gaming industry; *seiyuū* are usually as influential as pop idols. The popularity of the industry is truly remarkable: "anime-related music has its own Top 25 chart in Japan" (Milstein, 2007, p. 44). A famous voice actress and a j-pop star Hirano Aya is well-known by her ability to play characters of different types and voices: from a high-pitched voice of a schoolgirl to an adult woman's deep voice. Takeuchi Junko, who gave voice to a popular hero called Naruto, was able to create a powerful and enthusiastic teenage male character, being a forty-five years old female. These examples prove that voice is a powerful tool for character development in anime – together with the visual image of characters, their voice ranges/pitches may be used for building a more thorough character image. A study by Teshigawara (2003), for instance, has demonstrated certain correlations between voices and characters' personalities, as well as emotions represented in anime. With the help of the acoustic analysis of characters' lines, the author suggested several hypotheses of the connection between characters and their voices ("villains" and "heroes", both males and females): one of them supposed that "good" characters, or "heroes", had attractive for the audience's perception voices. The result of the perceptual experiment proved this hypothesis (2003, p. 199), although some of the proposed hypotheses (for example, a notion that male characters have a lower pitch compared to males in ordinary life, and that female characters have a higher pitch compared to what we experience every day) could not be proved or proved partially (2003, p. 197). Nevertheless, this study approved the idea that recipients of anime products pay attention to characters' voice and this fact influences their perception of the character in general.

At times, specific features of character representation are realized with the help of *henshin*, or transformation. The essence of transformations lies in the core of Buddhism, where originally this term referred to "appearances of Buddha and Bodhisattvas in various guises" (Nakamura & Matsuo, 2003, p. 74). Transformations of Japanese characters are also rooted in folklore – particularly in the stories incorporating *yōkai* and *bakemono* (Gill, 1998, pp. 45-46). In the majority of anime, the "transformation mode" is usually used to portray how a character becomes a hero, a better and stronger version of oneself. During this short-time transformation, characters may develop wings, obtain a different color of hair/eyes/clothes, as well as change clothes and a reappear with a more powerful weapon. Napier (2016) claimed that *henshin* is a mean of "inviting" a viewer to the changing world of anime, and it affects "an enormous variety of images from landscapes and natural world to machinery and architecture; the favorite object of transformation is clearly the body, however" (p. 37). The body of the character, or to be more precise, the metamorphosis of this body, shows how the character develops throughout the whole story. In terms of the composition of the series, the moments of *henshin* divide the episode into "before" and "after", so the audience understands that the next moment the "hero" will either save the ones in trouble or fight with the main antagonists. For sure, transformations are not restricted by anime alone; they often take place in other visual products, but the main idea is that Japanese philosophy, religion, and folklore initially included a similar concept, and this sort of tradition is preserved and successfully performed in products of Japanese popular culture.
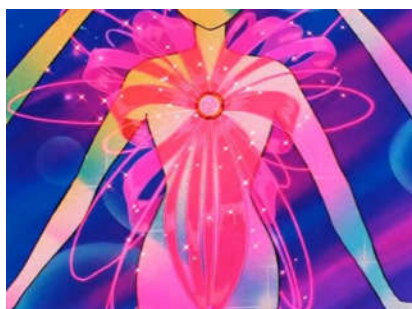
Figure 1.6. The transformation of Sailor Moon ©Naoko Takeuchi/PNP, Toei Animation

At times a concrete character is able to take multiple visual forms and appears in plural forms of media. Uchida (2008) proposed the following explanation of this process taking place in media: the multilayered character development within one media product, a media mix or multiuse of characters in various elements of media, active consumption (of media characters) caused by such factors as a secondary re-creation of a character (p. 85). He demonstrated these stages on the example of the *Lucky Star* anime TV series, which contains different "layers" or depth levels of characters. This anime depicts the daily life of Japanese schoolgirls, but despite

its simplistic topic, this title is particularly peculiar as episodes contain links to other anime, manga, movies, etc. One of the main characters, Konata (Figure 1.7), is an otaku girl, spending her free time watching anime, or playing video games and reading manga. She is smart and funny, and her character appeals to the audience through her communication with other characters. When she shares her thoughts on "perks" of wearing a school uniform in summer, a "proper" way of eating chocolate croissants, and how elections tend to interrupt her favorite TV show, the audience (especially familiar with Japanese media) identifies itself with Konata, and this exaggerated image built on parody and satire granted her major recognition as an anime character.
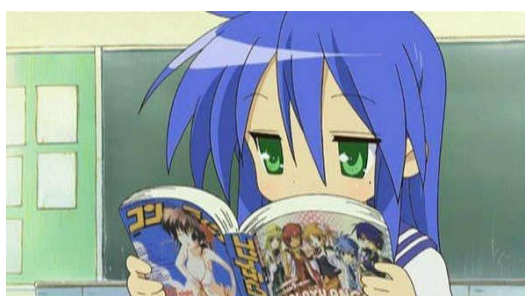
Figure 1.7. Character image: Konata from the *Lucky Star* series ©Kyoto Animation

Sometimes the anime creators use images similar to games or other media products they imitated: for example, a dialogue between Konata and her teaching scolding her for not doing her homework transforms into a gameplay interface of a popular Japanese video game, where arguing Konata and Sensei are represented as fighting robots (pp. 85-86). The example of the second stage of the process is that *Lucky Star* became more than an ordinary anime. For some episodes, the authors invited *seiyuū* from the movies or other anime they parodied; in the end, the *Lucky Star* products got connected with other media such as music industry – a couple of Character CDs were created to be offered to the most devoted fans (p. 89).

The character re-creation in Japanese popular culture

As understood from the model by Uchida (p. 85), the third stage of the media utilization occurs when recipients of media reutilize the previous images through either creating new forms of already existing characters or adding details to them. We, as consumers of media products – comics, cinema, commercials, cartoons – are surrounded by plenty of characters: some of them are even well-known to us to a certain extent. We tend to identify these representations and find connections based on visual or any other references within a character. Some of these characters, however, are designed with such excellence, extravagance, or ingenuity that at times one can

hardly recognize any connections between the old and new character. In other words, intertextual relationships can be demonstrated by multiple examples of various products related to Japanese popular culture.

A famous *Sailor Moon* anime series returned to the Japanese television in 2015 by the name of *Sailor Moon Crystal*. As can be seen in Figure 1.8, the two variants of drawing are quite different from each other. The proportions of the old TV series' Sailor Moon seem to look more realistic in comparison with the remake series. The distance between the hip, knee, and ankle is even, the head form is round, and in general, all the parts of the body have more volume – Sailor Moon does not look too "skinny". The new re-created image of hers however now looks spindling and flattened. When it comes to the basic details of the character, they stayed almost the same: the costume, hairstyle and its color, the main activities of the heroine, her behavior, and emotions have not been changed significantly.
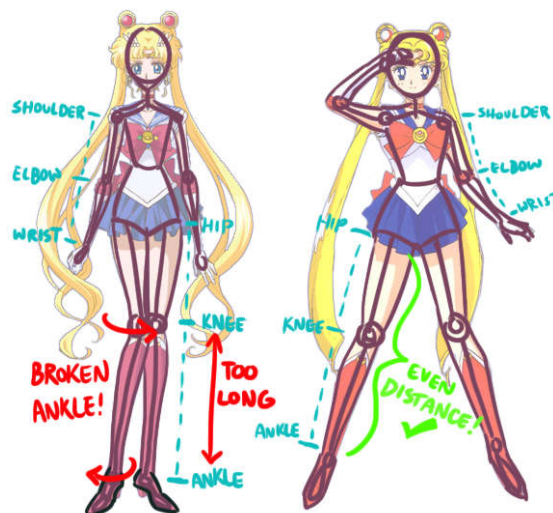
Figure 1.8. The *Sailor Moon* TV series main protagonist in both new (on the left) and old (on the right) variants.

©Naoko Takeuchi/PNP, Toei Animation

In other words, *Sailor Moon Crystal* is a reboot project based on the original manga by Naoko Takeuchi, with fewer episodes (hence, fewer fillers – "unnecessary" for the plot development episodes created for entertainment purposes) and a different style of drawing. The key characters, their characteristics, and actions are exactly what they used to be in the old series, with a little touch of novelty. Although the opening and ending songs were replaced by newer popular hits, these "innovations" did not influence the character gallery on a large scale.

An opposite tendency can be seen in other cases when a more ambitious goal is set by authors, painters, and other content makers. At times they would want to use a widely known character as inspiration or reference, but to represent it in a new light – in this regard content makers use various methods and techniques. The most basic ways of re-creation, in this case, are connected with the time frame switch, or experimenting on characters' gender and age; sometimes authors add personal stories which can help the audience to look at this character from a new perspective.

A perfect example of such changes can be found in fan art dedicated to various anime products: for instance, a practice of gender-bending, which allows fans to recreate characters' images by changing their gender. This method suggests a parallel universe, where characters swap their roles. As Leng (2013) indicated, anime fans are more likely to understand and support ideas of gender-bending, owing to the specificity of anime it is a common thing for many titles. "The manga series *Ranma ½*, for example, tells the story about a boy who transforms into a girl when he touches cold water, and changes back into a boy with hot water" (p.105).

As already mentioned before, the re-creation of a character may be based on the change of a time frame. The *Fate* franchise (*Fate/Stay Night*, *Fate/Zero*, *Fate/Grand Order*, *Fate/Apocrypha*, etc.) demonstrated an interesting outlook on famous historical or legendary figures such as King Arthur, Gilgamesh, Alexander the Great, Hercules, etc. Unfortunately, a few scholars paid attention to this particular series as to a new form of "intertextual creations through transcultural elements and syncretism involving medieval imagination" (Danesin, 2016, p. 101). The authors imagined how these characters would behave at present by reimagining their personality, appearances, clothes, armor, and other details. The great warriors of the past are supposed to take part in the Holy Grail War as servants of their masters (mages) – and this war takes place in contemporary Japan. The winner of the war gets the Holy Grail which can make one's wish come true, and it means that both mages and servants have their motivation to pursue fighting. This motivation is a base for the individuality of a character; it predestinates their behavior, actions, and attitude towards the rest of the characters. King Arthur, according to the series, is a queen named Arthuria, who had once to give up her soul for the sake of her kingdom – Britain. She is more famous as Saber (the name of the fighter class), and in the series, this character is a vivid example of the image re-creation process. Not only did the authors come up with an idea of gender-bending of the well-known King Arthur, but they also incorporated strong visual features needed for successful image re-creation. As a result, Saber has blonde hair with an *ahoge* (which automatically transformed her into a *moe* character), and green eyes, giving her a typical "western" appearance. As one may remember from the version of the legend by Sir Thomas Malory, King Arthur was also portrayed with a noble sword called Excalibur,

which he got from the Lady of the Lake. In the *Fate* series, Saber would not possibly be imagined without the sword of the same name.

Figure 1.9.Character image: Saber from the *Fate* series ©TYPE-MOON

The second point is her personality type, which has already been discussed; although some fans categorize her as *tsundere*, it is not quite right to use the term for describing this character. In fact, it would be a mistake to claim that Saber belongs to any character type when it comes to her behavioral and psychological features. She is rather calm, at times even cold-blooded, serious and sensible – this typical image of a king existed for a long time and was used by such great creators as poets and writers. For instance, Ozymandias (Ramesses), the King of Kings portrayed by P. B. Shelley was described as of "cold, stern and commanding personality" (Meza, 2004, p. 345). The interesting point, however, is that this "guest from past" gets extremely happy when she sees cute toys, or enjoys other things normal for people nowadays. This feature demonstrates how sensitive and emotional she truly is, and the contrast between the great ruler of old Britain and an ordinary person becomes even more vivid. The representation of King Arthur as imagined by the *Fate* franchise offers a viewer to think about how a royal person with no right to be an ordinary human would behave if there was a single chance to live a "normal" life: to have fun with friends, enjoy food and be free. After her descend to Earth, Saber has to deal with the dilemma of being both a regular human and a mythical hero, the mighty Arthur, whose main responsibility is to fight. Using the mixture of gender-bending, shifting a time frame, and with the help of other outstanding visual elements, the re-created character of King Arthur can be proclaimed as one of the most interesting and popular figures of Japanese popular culture.

A method when a widely known or famous character is presented to the audience in a satirical or comical form is another demonstration of intertextual mechanisms in Japanese popular culture. Such references are usually found in the comedy genre; it must be also emphasized that parodying at times serves as the self-irony of the popular industries. For instance, to portray a stereotypical fan of manga, anime, and gaming industry, a character may be

depicted holding a figure of a popular anime or manga character (Figure 1.10). References to the characters which are icons of certain anime titles are usually well understood and highly appreciated by fans.

Figure 1.10. Character image: Umaru from *Himōto! Umaru-chan.*
© サンカクヘッド / 集英社・「干物妹！うまるちゃん」製作委員会
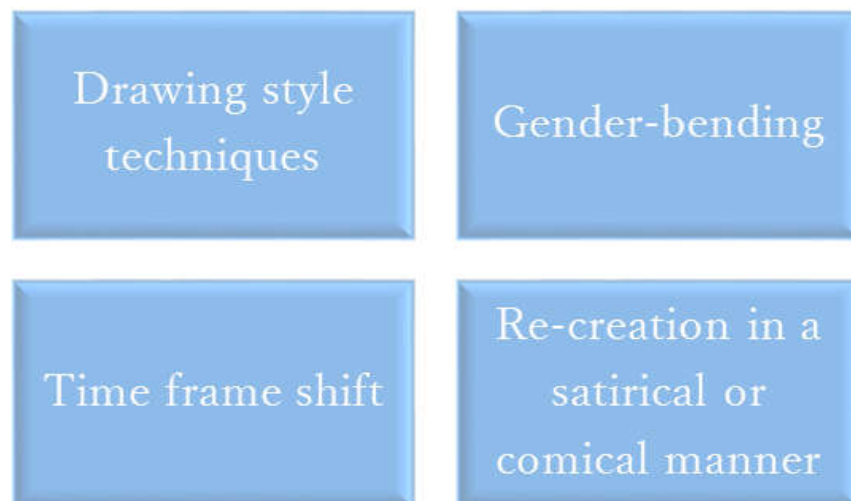
Figure 1.11. Pathways of character re-creation in popular culture (examples).

To conclude, there are plenty of technical aspects of character re-creation as practiced in anime, manga, films, and any other types of popular products utilizing famous characters. Some of these aspects were exemplified above to familiarize readers with the basics of re-creation. One of the goals of re-creation is achieved through changing drawing styles and applying a different styling technique to a famous character – presumably, the key point here is to represent a character in a new light more approachable for modern audiences. This can be done both by the producers of the "remake" product or by third parties no matter their primary interest (it can be both fair use or plagiarism cases). The second pathway for re-creation is the so-called gender-bending method where characters are given new forms mainly in terms of their gender: males

become females and vice versa, etc. Sometimes "old" characters such as historical figures are transformed into *kyara* of popular culture, and the whole interest towards a certain product containing such characters is based on how they try to survive in a postmodern world. Characters can also be re-created only for satirical and comical purposes; there are many cases when such cameos are meant to play on stereotypes and social clichés.

However, there is another, deeper layer needed to be regarded in cases when re-creation is a subject of analysis. In Chapter 4 I will try to provide examples and explanations of my idea of how character re-creation may also be approached from the standpoint of social trends and values existing in the society.

YŌKAI RE-CREATION ON THE EXAMPLE OF ANIME AND MOBILE GAMES

Yōkai re-creation in anime of different genres

Yōkai have not always been associated with popular characters – it is a result of the character extraction process. When it comes to *yōkai* character extraction, it started from the period when the *yōkai* phenomenon reached the peak of popularity among masses; Foster explained that three factors during the Tokugawa period chiefly influenced or contributed the *yōkai* characters extraction from narrative or event. These factors were the re-creational aspect of *hyaku-monogatari*, the rise of commercial publishing, and the popularity of encyclopedic mode (Foster, 2009, p. 54). *Hyaku-monogatari* or story-telling sessions were a widespread practice during the Tokugawa period. The key principle of this event was to gather together late at night and retell a hundred scary stories. Foster provided a translation of the retelling procedure taken from Asai Ryō's passage describing that before the event had started a hundred of paper lanterns were lit, and once one of a hundred stories had been told, one of the lanterns were extinguished "until the gathering was eventually thrown into blackness – and something mysterious was supposed to happen" (2009, p. 53). Gradually mysterious phenomena transformed into creatures having certain shapes and names associated with particular places or regions.

According to Ichikawa, it can be said that *yōkai* characters are re-created in two forms: text and images (2014, p. 186). By taking anime as the framework for explaining the character image re-creation process, and considering the peculiarities of the genre as was explained earlier, it is possible to perceive *yōkai* characters in anime visually and audibly. Another point to consider is that *yōkai* images will be different depending on the genre or target audience of animation.

Anime narratives in its contemporary form are inspired by a multitude of topics: *nichijō seikatsu* (an everyday life) motifs depict how characters develop as human beings: they find new friends, fall in love, fight their complexes and try to understand what path they will take in future (*Mimi wo Sumaseba*) or make fun of our everyday rituals or habits (*Lucky Star*, *School Rumble*). Fantasy subgenre invites the audience to new dimensions and worlds, where magic and time-traveling are conventional activities (*Zero no Tsukaima*, *Tales of Phantasia*, *Chrono Crusade*); *mecha* represents a world of high technologies where robots are an essential part of human beings life (*Mobile Suit Gundam*, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*). There are also such distinctions as *shōjo* (for girls) and *shōnen* (for boys): the first category usually includes romantic stories (*Yamato Nadeshiko Shichi Henge*), drama – whereas the second is connected with adventure,

action, and sports (*Kuroko no Basuke*, *Naruto*). In must be noted, however, that both *shōjo* and *shōnen* categories can be used as blanket terms for various genres: *shōjo* anime can belong to the romantic comedy genre, whereas *shōnen* can cover adventure and *mecha* genres. An essential genre is horror, where the main emphasis is on dark atmosphere, mysterious events, and monstrous creatures like vampires (*Shiki*, *Ayakashi*). Other anime categories to mention are *ecchi* and *hentai* which both imply sexual contents within a story: the first one can be described as a softer form of narrative including slight overtones of sexual interaction compared to *hentai* which is a more vivid example of such interaction (Achmad et al., 2018, p. 82). *Ecchi* can also be a mixture of such genres as comedy, harem (when main characters are surrounded by some characters they are attracted to), or drama. Lastly, the category of *kodomomuke*, or anime for children, which includes various topics: usually its main themes are adventures, friendship, fantasy, etc.

At time anime series tend to use *yōkai* characters as a metaphor. Their images can be subject to grotesque parodying, namely in comedy genre representatives. *Yōkai* themselves are a concentration of irrational and hyperbolized images representing people's fears and imagination. Thus, *yōkai* in comedies widely appear as references to the things and concepts associated with them. A good illustration of *yōkai* parodying is episode 4 of *School Rumble*, where the main character, a schoolgirl Tenma Tsukamoto is secretly in love with her classmate Karasuma. On a rainy day, she intentionally stays at school after classes, to suggest sharing her umbrella with Karasuma-kun, as in her opinion it could make them closer and create a romantic atmosphere. After asking him about this idea, he answers: "*boku kappa dakara*" ("I have a kappa/I am Kappa"). The irony is that in Japanese kappa can mean both a raincoat and represent a *yōkai* name. Tenma understands that Karasuma-kun already has a raincoat, and her proposal is canceled. A few frames later he appears in a *kappa* costume, wearing typical elements of the *kappa* look: a beak, a plate on his head, and a turtle shell on his back, covering himself with a large leaf.

Figure 2.1. Kappa re-created in the *School Rumble* series. ©小林尽/講談社・マーベラスエンターテイメント

Fantasy, adventure, or action anime series often incorporate *yōkai* characters in their stories. For instance, a *Naruto* series tells a story about a young ninja enthusiast Naruto, who is "possessed" by a Nine-Tailed Demon Fox (Kyūbi) – the monster is sealed in the boy's body, giving him an incredible amount of chakra (power or energy). The visual image of the Demon Fox reminds of the works by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797-1861), a Japanese master of woodblock prints of the Edo period.

Figure 2.2. Character image: Nine-Tailed Demon Fox from the *Naruto* series. ©岸本斉史　スコット/集英社・テレビ東京・ぴえろ.

Not only was the character image of the fox from Naruto reimagined by visual means of colors and shapes (certain parts of the body), but also through such aspects as voice acting and a personal story within the plot of the series. According to the authors of the series, the fox named Kurama is a powerful creature able to destroy towns bringing death and devastation as well as help people. The dual nature of the creature is revealed during the plot: the first impression a viewer gets of Kurama is that he is sly, cruel and malicious, but later it can be understood that he had some reasons to hate people who only wanted to use the power of legendary animals while treating them like monsters. In the end, he becomes a friend and a companion of the protagonists, including Naruto himself. The speech of Kurama is another remarkable feature in the series: he uses the pronoun *washi* ("I", "me"). Kinsui (2003) defined a character language type called *hakasego* (the "professor" language), which is used by old people in manga and anime. Kurosaki examined that the word *washi*, a typical for the Edo period word, can be also regarded as a remarkable part of the *hakase* language together with *ja*, *nu*, *n*, *oru* (Kurosaki, 2011, p. 13). This idea allows supposing that with the help of the speech style, a character is given more detailed characteristics: in this case, Kurama is represented as a wise and old-fashioned character. His usage of *washi* refers to the period of Edo when *yōkai* became a distinctive element of mass culture. The voice of Kurama is mature, terrifying, and brilliantly performed by a Japanese voice actor Tessho Genda, who is famous for his voice-over of Arnold Schwarzenegger in Japan. To

sum up, in *Naruto yōkai* characters are given a new form of supernatural animals. They play a secondary role as helpers or allies.

A TV series *Nurarihyon no Mago* is another representative of the fantasy genre, which incorporates the topic of supernatural creatures differently. The concept of this anime series lies in the idea of the coexistence between *yōkai* and humans: the main character Rikuo is a grandson of the infamous *yōkai* named Nurarihyon, but rejects his belonging to the world of supernatural power and tries to live a "normal", "ordinary" life. As can be seen from Figure 2.4, Nurarihyon of the anime series reminds us of the Edo period scroll *Hyakkai Zukan* depicting this *yōkai*. However, the new Nurarihyon looks closer to an ordinary old man with a very specific head shape; he is also not so tall, just like its "predecessor" in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3. Nurarihyon by Sawaki Sūshi (*Hyakkai Zukan*).

Figure 2.4. Character image: Nurarihyon from the *Nurarihyon no Mago* series. ©椎橋寛 / 集英社・奴良組

In the series, his clothes, age, and gender are not changed with respect to the scroll depiction. As the head of the clan, Nurarihyon represents authority for the rest of the clan members. This seriousness and a desire to obey traditions are reflected in how the character looks. The reason for this might be hidden in the main idea of *Nurarihyon no Mago* – to depict *yōkai* as an important part of the historical memory of the Japanese people; with the appearance

of up-to-date technologies and the development of science people might no longer take them seriously, but their images still seem to have a visible impact on their imagination and mentality. Similarly, here *yōkai* represent an old family clan, the members of which live in a big house, wear traditional Japanese clothes (kimono), and try to maintain their influence on human beings by making them afraid of the supernatural.

Figure 2.5. The house of the *Yōkai* clan from the *Nurarihyon no Mago* series.

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On the other hand, Rikuo is not completely a *yōkai* – his mother is a human, he studies at a "normal" school and looks like an ordinary boy. At night, his *yōkai* blood makes him change his appearance, and he looks entirely different. It might be a reference to shape-shifting abilities especially typical for *yōkai*, and *bakemono* in particular. This is a way of portraying how a character tries to balance between the "human" and "*yōkai*" worlds, a kind of the amalgamation of contemporary and traditional elements (for example, Rikuo's classmates in contemporary school uniform versus his clan wearing kimono and carrying katana swords).

As Rikuo is a future head of the noble *yōkai* family, he is surrounded by many servants, who are also *yōkai*: for example, Yuki-onna (Snow Maiden) is one of his devoted servants, but despite the typical image of Yuki-onna, portrayed as a creepy *yōkai*, here she is an enthusiastic, rather emotional teenage girl, always ready to help and protect her master. She has a supernatural ability to freeze enemies with her breath, which is a reference to the folktale recorded by Lafcadio Hearn (2005). When talking to her master, Tsurara (her "human" name in the series meaning "icicle") uses *keigo*, a polite form of speech used in the Japanese language. Another thing to consider is that in the series, to be a *yōkai* means to belong to a certain bloodline. For instance, Tsurara is not the only Yuki-onna in the anime: her mother was a Yuki-onna too. Hence, in the series, Tsurara and her mother are bounded by the same name (Yuki-onna) which represents a category these characters belong to, similarly to a nation or race – the categories used by humans to identify each other. Even though Yuki-onna is a member of the *yōkai* clan,

she is willing to blend with ordinary people: she goes to the same school as Rikuo does, so she can always be next to her master (later it becomes clear that she is in love with Rikuo). Her appearance changes when she is in her "human form". The main changes can be seen in her eye color which becomes blue when she is in her human form – in contrast with her "*yōkai*" amber eyes with dark brown circles. When at school she wears a scarf to keep her deadly freezing breath inside of her body. In the series, Yuki-onna does not want to harm humans.

Figure 2.6. Character image: Tsurara Oikawa (Yuki-onna) from the *Nurarihyon no Mago* series.

©椎橋寛 / 集英社・奴良魔京

As was previously mentioned, some anime characters are re-created in terms of visual re-creation and with the help of audio effects. In the case of *Nurarihyon no Mago*, key characters are introduced in the compilation of songs sold in the form of CDs, similarly to the *Lucky Star* series.

These compilations are created by the same company which produces an anime product. Such types of CDs are also known as "image albums". These pieces are popular among anime fans because they "supplement the anime and often "explain" confusing or underdeveloped elements" (Milstein, 2007, p. 44). Songs are recorded with the same *seiyū* who took part in character voice acting. Voice actors are considered "pop idols" to a certain extent and tend to have a huge fan base including international fans, which is why the popularity of image albums is understandably high.

In the comment section of the internet page where the CD is sold, people expressed the following opinions: "I was able to understand the connection of Yuki-onna and the Crow brothers," and "I did not know that modern Yuki-onna is a school student."[6] In other words,

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[6] Amazon. (n.d.). TV Anime "Nurarihyon no Mago" Kyarakutā CD Shirīzu: Yukionna, Sanbagarasu (Kurōmaru, Tosakamaru, Sasami). Customer Reviews [TV Anime "The Grandson of Nurarihyon" Chaarcter CD Series: Yukioona, Sanbagarasu (Kurōmaru, Tosakamaru, Sasami). Customer Reviews]. https://www.amazon.co.jp/product-

character image albums do play a major role in further character development. Thus, the re-creation process in anime is more complex than in manga: visual and audio features combined constitute a holistic and well-developed character.

Such genres and categories as fantasy, adventure, *shōnen* also imply scenes of fights and other confrontation in action which means that *yōkai* are usually allowed to demonstrate their magical abilities and power similar to those mentioned in folklore tales. *Yōkai* are active characters within the plot, they either defend or attack other characters; usually, they also demonstrate magical or any other supernatural powers.

In the case of *shōjo* and *ecchi* categories, the *yōkai* re-creation process is mainly connected with issues of romanticization or fetishization of characters. *Shōjo*, as a category, can be characterized as "decorative and expressive artwork, along with stories that emphasize the inner feelings of the characters" (Takahashi, 2008, p. 114). Consumers of *shōjo* anime, as can be understood from the name meaning "girl", are chiefly young females. Some of the aesthetic aspects of *shōjo* anime are characterized by big watery eyes, "sparkling" particles, flowers (for instance, sakura petals), and bright colors in the background when characters dream or being emotional (Figure 2.7).

Figure 2.7. A "fantasy" background often used in shōjo anime when characters dream or experience strong emotions. From the *Kamisama Hajimemashita* series.

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Men in *shōjo* anime, especially main characters, are highly romanticized and have typical body image representation: they are usually tall, slim, have narrower eyes than women's. These features can be easily applied to *yōkai* characters: a good illustration of such tendencies is represented in the *Kami-sama Hajimemashita* series. The main heroine named Nanami meets a *yako* (fox able to possess a human's body) guy Tomoe at the local shrine and falls in love with

him. Later Tomoe realizes his feeling to Nanami – this love storyline composites the main plot of the anime. Here *yōkai* are also connected with the religious and spiritual side of Japan, creating the connection between Shinto and *yōkai*. The key storyline starts from the moment when Nanami visits the shrine and finds out that she has supernatural power. Later she becomes the Goddess of the local place. Kimono, Japanese architecture, and elements of religious traditions of Shintoism are visual elements helping to connect Nanami with the *yōkai* world. When she sees the shrine for the first time it looks like an ordinary "old shabby shrine," for her. When she meets Tomoe and his friends for the first time, she panics and claims that the place is indeed a "*yōkai* shrine".
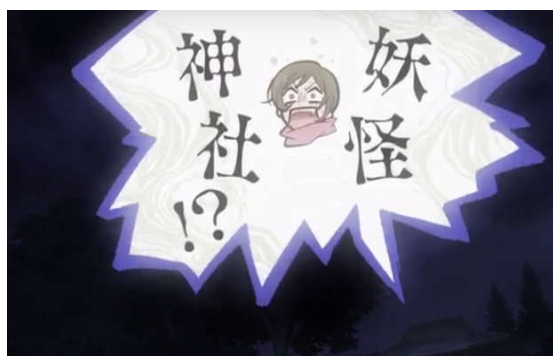
Figure 2.8. Nanami defines the shrine as of "*yōkai*" inhabitance.

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When one looks at the image of Tomoe, it may be interesting to compare his ears and the *nekomimi* of Ritsuka – the main character of another *shōjo* anime dedicated to the *shōnen ai* topic (boys' love) – *Loveless*. Although Ritsuka is not a *yōkai*, the *mimi* (as well as tails) in *shōjo* anime indicates a certain amount of *moe* (attractiveness) of male characters with animal ears – similarly to other anime categories where *moe* is praised, although girls are usually the ones who have the *nekomimi*.

Figure 2.9. Character image: Tomoe from the *Kamisama Hajimemashita* series.

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Tomoe is a tall "handsome guy" (according to Nanami, when she meets him), who has ash-blonde hair, fox ears, tail, long claws, and two fangs. In *emaki* scrolls, foxes used to be depicted either as animals, or animals trying to look like human beings – in the *Hyakkai Zukan* scroll series by Sawaki Sūshi, a fox is portrayed as a woman in kimono, although animal features still can be recognized. As the image of a fox exists in the framework of the *shōjo* genre (where male characters images are a priori romanticized if not fetishized), it is understandable why the *yōkai* fox character is male. Tomoe's personality in the first episode is portrayed as an arrogant, easily-explosive, even selfish guy. Nevertheless, in future episodes, his character gradually develops: he starts feeling like he is truly in love with Nanami, and his temper becomes more balanced than in the first episodes – in this regard it is also possible to characterize his personality as a male *tsundere*. His supernatural power is to control and use *kitsunebi* (foxfires) (which is considered as a common ability of *yōkai* foxes in folk tales) to combat enemies or for any other purposes; he can also disappear in the air and fly. During the storyline, more *yōkai* males appear (for instance, Kurama who is a *tengu*), some of them fall in love with Nanami, which creates "love triangles" – an attribute specific to the harem category, but in this case targeting young females.

Harem anime for boys often include *ecchi* elements, and female characters have abnormal body proportions similar to those of female characters in superhero comics: "balloon breasts, tiny waists, and impossibly long legs" (Smith, 2014, p. 108). In the *Rosario + Vampire* series the Japanese *yōkai* Yuki-onna exists along with thousands of other monsters of different origins: the main female characters are a vampire, a succubus, and a witch.

The image of Yuki-onna in the series is comprised of various *moe* elements combined, such as "*kawaī*" or cute outfit (striped stockings and a short skirt are probably the key elements of the clothing), *ahoge*, and a chocolate stick she constantly keeps in her mouth. Her personality type is closer to often fetishized types such as a *yandere* (violent, psychotic characters showing affection towards the main male character of the series) at the beginning of the series, and *kūdere* (calm, even cold-tempered and emotionless characters showing affection to the main male character) in later episodes. In this sense, the image of typical Yuki-onna as described in folk tales correlates well with both of these personality types, with the one serious difference: in the *ecchi* category, the image of a heroine becomes more sexualized. Here as well, Yuki-onna is rather a descriptive name – the real name of the character is Shirayuki (meaning "white snow") Mizore. She demonstrates her supernatural power during the storyline as well, but the emphasis is on her attractive look and an appealing personality.

Figure 2.10. Character image: Mizore from the *Rosario + Vampire* series.

©池田晃久／集英社・陽海学園新聞部

To sum up, contemporary images of *yōkai* characters in anime are influenced by Japanese folklore based on the *yōkai* tales and legends, and *yōkai* art. Re-creation patterns may differentiate a lot, although the intertextual relations between a contemporary *yōkai* character and its previous depiction are usually well understood by the audience. Modernized *yōkai* characters may also relate to other popular products and media elements.

Character images are re-created with the help of visual and audio effects. The appearance of characters (clothing, hair color); their social position (family member, friend); personality (speech and psychological type) equally play a fundamental role in the developing of the character's image along with audio elements (a character's voice and its appearance on "image albums"). *Yōkai* characters and their re-creation pattern may also change according to an anime genre/category: *yōkai* may be powerful creatures in fantasy and *shōnen* anime types, for instance. Both *shōjo* and *ecchi* categories tend to recreate *yōkai* characters in a fetishized way paying attention to *moe elements* of the character. The characters here are the type that would seem appealing to most fans. Also, some of the *yōkai* characters I have discussed might seem "oldfashioned": they wear Japanese traditional clothes, use specific types of speech (such as *hakasego*), and reside in traditional houses or even shrines. Despite their connection to the tradition, these characters are still a part of the contemporary world. Some of them try to be on par with the current Japanese society: they go to schools and wear *seifuku* (school uniform), and use public transport trying not to be exposed by human beings.

Figure 2.11. *Yōkai* (Yuki-onna and Kubinashi from the *Nurarihyon no Mago* series) try to look "normal" and blend with human beings. ©椎橋寛 / 集英社・奴良組

These were examples of *yōkai* image re-creation in certain genres of anime. Although the backgrounds of particular *yōkai* mentioned above were not specified, the main idea was to portray the general tendencies of the character re-creation process in some anime series. In the next section, *yōkai* characters will be compared and thoroughly described on the example of mobile games of various genres.

Yōkai re-creation in mobile games of different genres

The mobile game market is rapidly expanding and slowly taking over other entertainment spheres. For instance, the mobile game segment has proved to be ranked first among Google Play Store application categories from the year 2016 to 2019[7]. As was discussed in the Introduction part, the percentage of the Japanese people playing mobile games regularly is quite impressive, but on the other hand understandable – the Japanese game market has always had enough intriguing products to offer. From game slot machines to legendary consoles such as Sony PlayStation and Nintendo Wii, the Japanese approach to game production repeatedly keeps the global game market updated. The reasons explaining such popularity and appreciation of mobile games among Japanese mobile users are truly obvious – one of them is time-consuming commuting during which some would prefer to read a book or play a favorite mobile game. Many game producers in Japan focus on cute or cool characters and the overall concept of the game – they know exactly what is needed to create a new trend. For example, the game Bandori used a popular character of Hatsune Miku (Vocaloid) for its commercial (Figure 2.12).

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[7] Statista. (2020, January 20). Most popular Google Play App Store Categories from 1st Quarter 2016 to 4th Quarter 2019, by Number of Downloads. https://www.statista.com/statistics/256772/most-popular-app-categories-in-the-google-play-store/

Figure 2.12. An episode of the *Bandori* mobile game commercial video.

©Bang Dream! Project ©Craft Egg Inc. ©bushiroad ©Crypton Future Media, INC.

Overall, mobile game companies pay close attention to a gamer-friendly interface of the application; a simplified gaming process allows enjoying the game anytime anywhere. A relatively low cost and well-designed system of rewards also play an important role in increasing the popularity of mobile games not only in Japan but all over the world.

Another point to mention is the use of the GPS in some mobile games, which may transform famous locations to new dimensions of play and exploration. Hjorth (2011) refers to such games as "pervasive" or "location-aware" games and points out that "by using both online and offline spaces, pervasive games can offer new ways of experiencing place, play, and identity" (p. 360). One of the most prominent examples of this type is the Pokémon GO game, where the current physical location of players is identified as the location of a certain "pocket monster" to be caught and collected.

Some of the popular genres of mobile games include RPG, adventure, action, simulation, shooting, race, sports, card, and puzzle games. For this study, in particular, the RPG genre is the main object of interest since *Onmyōji* belongs to this genre. RPG or role-playing games are usually set in a fantasy or fictional world, where players identify themselves as characters; they may also travel the fictional world as part of the narrative. Gamers have to complete quests and develop the character they play. Especially captivating is the ability of RPG games to recreate folklore elements of various cultures; they may also either refer to medieval times or reconstruct these stylistics demonstrating the most elegant and romanticized elements of the given historical period. Scholars such as Gerber (2009) and Kim (2013) have touched upon this notion as well. Milspaw and Evans (2010) provided a peculiar explanation on the essence of RPG games and their connection with other narrative genres:

The narrative worlds created in RPGs draw on the world of fantasy and science fiction literature from which they frequently borrow their subject matter, but, more importantly, they create structures that mirror those of traditional narrative genres.

<div align="right">(p. 212)</div>

RPGs tend to be focused on the stories behind characters – narration and gradual character development from zero are the strongest points of this genre, since a player is instantly becomes engaged in the process of playing. Sometimes genres may be used to characterize a certain mobile game – an RPG card game, an action shooting game, and many other combinations.

In the previous chapter, it was shown how *yōkai* characters are re-created in anime – one of the main elements of the contemporary popular culture of Japan. Hereby I will try to provide a similar explanation on the example of mobile games to investigate the essence of the *yōkai* character re-creation process taking place in mobile games of various genres.

It has been revealed earlier that *yōkai* characters in anime are re-created according to the anime genre and tastes of target audiences. Whether anything similar to that model is applicable in the case of mobile games is about to be explained on the examples of prominent *yōkai* games found in the Google Play Store database.

The very first title appearing as the result of entering the word *yōkai* in the search box is the game called *Yōkai Hyakki Tan!* This is an RPG game with *ranobe* (light novel) contents. Both the game name and the information provided by the game creators define it as a *bishōjo* (pretty girl) game, or a game the main characters of which are beautiful girls with whom a player (presumably a man) interacts. Such interactions at times include romantic affiliations, dating, or even sexual intercourse. Kimi (2017) provided explanations on the appearance of the *bishōjo komikku* (comics about pretty girls) phenomenon that surpassed the popularity level of *eromanga* (erotic comics) at the beginning of the '80s; the main feature of this genre, according to the author, is a different approach to a female depiction – an image far from reality, *kawaī* and pretty female characters with a touch of anime features (p. 21).

Given the specificity of this game, all of the *yōkai* characters are female. There are over 250 characters in the game, and similarly to anime, *yōkai* here are characterized by their physical appearance, behavior, and voice or speech peculiarities.

Figure 2.13. Character images: Kappa and Nekomata from *Yōkai Hyakki Tan!* game.

© KADOKAWA CORPORATION 2014 / powered by Mynet Games Inc.

Former animal-looking *yōkai* are represented as beautiful females – the practice of depicting animals as humans is often found in manga, anime, and games, and it correlates positively with the notion of anthropomorphism/zoomorphism in Japanese culture, including specific animal-based *moe* characteristics. Sone (2014) exemplified the phenomenon of *otaku* and found its connections with earlier cultural influences, such as religion:

> *The sociocultural matrix of contemporary Japan might be described in terms of layers of influences, including the traditions of Shintoism and Buddhism, as well as those derived from Chinese culture. Japanese myth and traditional animism encourage a relationship with nonhumans such as animals or plants, and even non-organic objects such as rocks, by anthropomorphizing them. Japanese anthropomorphism is a reflexive mechanism where the observation of animal behavior reflects back upon the human observer, an approach detailed in traditional myths.*

(p. 200)

This passage can fully explain the phenomenon of otaku culture when an otaku male is romantically or sexually attracted to virtual images of female characters and even non-human characters such as *yōkai* – that is why the game is popular in the first place. The very idea that a human may have any sexual interactions with *yōkai* is understandable for those who extensively researched on Japanese folklore. There are numerous examples of those interactions: a kitsune fell in love with a human and married him, or when a girl O-Yuki turned out to be Yuki-onna, a mysterious snow *yōkai*, who also married a human and even gave birth to children (a deeper

discussion about the two *yōkai* follows). *Yōkai* playing "human roles" in such texts become a factor helping "the tale's listeners to distance themselves more easily from the situation in question, thus allowing them to observe and to absorb its lessons with less resistance in an entertaining fashion" (Koopmans-de Bruijn, 2005, p. 82). Apart from the obvious didactic or cautionary function, there is another dimension of meaning: "viewers, as well, might mask themselves in a character and safely enter a dangerous or unexplored world" (Miller, 2010, p. 74) – in other words, a rich gallery of monsters, half-human, half-*yōkai*, allows a player to connect with a dark realm of the supernatural rather smoothly through partial identification with a certain character.

 Yōkai characters represented in the game have distinct features in their appearance, speech, voice, and behavior. For instance, Nekomata becomes the first companion of the player: she explains the gaming process and is truly happy when a player wins a battle against "bad monsters". Her playful attitude, the use of the *nekogo*, as well as her calling a player "*aruji*" (which both means "master" and "husband") creates a very positive "*genki*" character of this *yōkai*.

Figure 2.14. Nekomata and her speech peculiarities from the *Yōkai Hyakki Tan!* game.

 When taking a closer look at her appearance, one may find that her *nekomimi*, over-knee socks (with a reference to *zettai ryōiki*[8]), bust, V-line with a cat paw print, and a double tail in

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[8] A term used to describe an area of bare skin becoming visible when a girl wears a skirt (short pants) and knee socks; it is situated right between the lower skirt and upper knee socks line.

the shape of a heart are key elements defining this character as *moe*, sexy and a highly fetishized version of Nekomata.

As the *bishōjo* genre closely relates to another concept of *rorikon*, the so-called "loli-characters" are also present in the game (Figure 2.15). This character type is completely different from conventional "sexy" characters – it is based on the concept of the affection towards miniature and often child-like looking females. According to Kimi (2017) in the 80's the word *rorikon* would rather describe a "pretty (female) mate, that is very cute and fragile" (p.22), than physical attraction to little girls. These characters have distinct features of children: a *yōkai* called Sodehiki Kozō ("a sleeve-pulling child") is depicted as a little girl eating a lollipop and holding a woman's kimono sleeve. She also asks questions attributed to children, for instance, "why is the sun red?". Another representative of the *yōkai* characters of this game which may be classified as a *rori* is Tatarimokke. She is dressed up as Cheshire Cat from *Alice in Wonderland*. The elements of *moe* here are more visible; besides, an interesting point is that the game demonstrates intertextuality, and re-creates two characters instead of one: a *yōkai* and Cheshire Cat. This character too is depicted with the nekomimi and knee socks, but compared to Nekomata, Tatarimokke gives an impression of a shy teenager.

Figure 2.15. *Moe*, fetish, and loli elements of characters from the *Yōkai Hyakki Tan!* game.

Here one might come across another layer of meaning referring to sexual or emotional attraction to human-looking animals, and, of course, *yōkai*. The explanations on this particular subject will be provided in Chapter 4 describing the Onmyoji game female characters – Sanbi no

Kitsune, Nekomata, Bakeneko, and Yuki-onna – as all of them are shaped and re-created as beautiful, attractive, *moe* and *bijin* characters.

The last point to mention is how the game frames *yōkai* in general. Aruji, the main character to be played for does not belong to the *yōkai* world in the first place. Aruji tries to invoke a spirit, and as a result, becomes intertwined with *yōkai*. The game map bears resemblance to the map of Japan, and the first scene takes place in the Meiji period at the Imperial University of the capital. However, the game still uses fictional elements and makes no claims as to historical authenticity. Even the location names are intentionally changed and spelled differently. For instance, the word "Japan" used here is not 日本 but 日ホン – this probably creates a different dimension for a player yet still it is possible to find any connections with the original places. *Yōkai* represent an allied side, whereas a mysterious army called *rikiddo* is the enemy of all *yōkai* creatures. At times a player has to battle against *yōkai* as well, although their actions are caused by *rikiddo*, who are trying to enslave *yōkai* by obscuring their minds; gradually these *yōkai* become a part of a player team. Like any other RPG, *Yōkai Hyakki Tan!* gives prominence to battle magic and implements a system of ranks or levels for both player and fellow *yōkai* creatures. All *yōkai* are grouped according to rarity (from normal to extra rare characters), attributes referring to five elements (wood, fire, earth, metal, and water), and 7 *yōkai* types: half-human and half-*yōkai*, ghosts and demons, animal *yōkai*, *tsukumogami*, *kami*, heroic *yōkai*, and special *yōkai*. Abe no Seimei, whose character will be examined later, is also present in the game and belongs to the heroic *yōkai* group; this historical figure has gone through a significant transformation through the gender-bending practice which again proves that the target audience defines how characters look in this particular case. The location of certain *yōkai* is connected with some areas on the map, which may be a reference to the results of various ethnographic studies of *yōkai*, such as this of Mizuki Shigeru (Mizuki & Aramata, 2011). As to the *yōkai* role in this game, these creatures are representatives of the "natural" world – they are just fighting for their right to exist, being the defenders of nature. On the other hand, human beings are presented as villains. They created robots that are trying to get rid of all the *yōkai*. Humans assume that *yōkai* are a big threat to the modernized world, and must be destroyed. It can be said that *yōkai* here represent ecological problems of these days, however, this idea is hidden behind numerous images of "pretty *yōkai* girls".

Overall, it can be said that although the game information proclaims it as oriented mainly towards male-players, *yōkai* characters presented in *Yōkai Hyakki Tan!* are amusing and well-designed; the variety of these characters will surely anyone interested in the world of *yōkai*.

The next category of games illustrating different tendencies in the *yōkai* re-creation will be an adventure game presented as a horror escape game called *Yōkai Yashiki kara no Dasshutsu*.

In escape games, a player has to solve puzzles, pick up certain items, combine them, and apply to surroundings in order to find a way out from a location. Often a player is followed by mysterious figures or ghosts to raise the tension level of the gaming process.
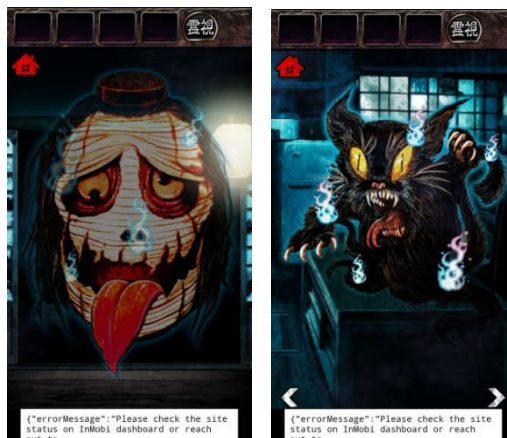
Figure 2.16. *Yōkai* characters (Chōchin Obake and Nekomata) as portrayed in the *Yōkai Yashiki kara no Dasshutsu* game.

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As has already been discussed earlier, *yōkai* represented frightful and strange phenomena before the era of modernization of Japan. However, it would be a mistake to suppose that *yōkai* nowadays are not connected with something unexplainable and terrifying. The example of *Yōkai Yashiki kara no Dasshutsu* implements the classic representation of *yōkai* as spirits and supernatural beings living in Japanese villages and hidden from human eyes. The main character is a young male who comes to visit his grandfather living in the village during summer vacation. When exploring a small village in the mountains, he gets lost and starts feeling nervous. Suddenly he sees the silhouette of a small girl who is waving her hand. She invites him into an old house. Inside the house, there is nobody but a beautiful *onmyōji* female, who becomes a player companion. Being locked in the mysterious haunting house, a player has to find all five *kotodama* – magical pearls obtained after interaction with *yōkai* needed to unlock the entrance door.

The atmosphere of the game reminds that of *kaidan* stories – a dark house with strange sounds and prominent elements of Japanese culture – paper lanterns, *azuki* beans, sake, ikebana utensils, *oshiire* (a Japanese closet), *hishaku* (a bamboo ladle), etc. *Yōkai* cannot be seen by an ordinary human being, but the main character possesses a special ability called *reikon* (an ability to see ghosts and spirits). When activated it allows seeing any *yōkai* available for this particular location. When a *yōkai* is exposed, haunting background music appears. There are 25 *yōkai*

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characters in the game – some of them are hidden, and to find and collect them all (they will later be recorded in a *yōkai* encyclopedia), a player has to replay the game a few times.

All the *yōkai* characters have two forms: the first one is a reproduction inspired by Edo scrolls depicting *yōkai*. When a *yōkai* collection becomes available in the root menu, a player can click on the *yōkai* icon and see detailed information about a concrete *yōkai*. The image is "painted" on a piece of a scroll stylized as old paper. Some of the Japanese monsters bear resemblance with the works of Toriyama Sekien and Sawaki Sūshi. For instance, the image of Yuki-onna is visibly influenced by the famous *yōkai* depiction of Sawaki Sūshi (Figure 2.17).

Figure 2.17. A stylized version of a *yōkai zukan* re-created in the *Yōkai Yashiki kara no Dasshutsu* game.

© ESC-APE

There is also another form of *yōkai* in the game; this form is designed to match the game process. Whenever a *yōkai* refuses to cooperate with a player, there is always another *yōkai* who can demonstrate its "demonic" power and chase "the bad *yōkai*" away. For example, Nekomata looks like a little girl with the *nekomimi* when encountered by a player. Her image is slightly grotesque and reminds of the works of Mizuki Shigeru (Figure 2.18). She also transforms in a "demonic cat" (Figure 2.16) when a player needs her help with banishing stubborn and cunning *yōkai* that prevents a player from solving a puzzle. The image of Nekomata depicted in the *yōkai* encyclopedia of the game is a clear reference to the work of Toriyama Sekien. Her speech includes the use of *nekogo*, similar to the previous example of Nekomata. Each *yōkai* character talks to the protagonist in a special way and some *yōkai* even use old-fashioned words and grammar such as *tte mī* and *jarō*. Their words are reflected on the screen together with a character icon. Although the character voice feature is completely absent in this game, some

yōkai particularly associated with sounds such as Azuki Arai, are accompanied with impressive sound effects.

Figure 2.18. Yuki-onna sleeps inside the refrigerator. Nekomata demands her meal. Characters from the *Yōkai Yashiki kara no Dasshutsu* game.

© ESC-APE

When compared to the Yuki-onna depiction in the *yōkai zukan,* the game character is far from its scroll inspiration. The color scheme of the character mainly consists of white and blue colors, and the image itself is closer to manga and anime stylistics. Yuki-onna is a shy *yōkai*, rather harmless and asking for help. A player is to help this creature by turning the refrigerator on, where she can sleep peacefully now. She does not show her magic powers during the game but instead gives an idea of how *yōkai* can be reimagined in the present time. She constantly resides in the refrigerator, which transforms a mighty *yōkai* of snow into a cute house spirit. However, some elements of the classic representation of Yuki-onna still can be seen in this case: she is dressed in white kimono and has long black hair. These features directly point to the element of traditionality, which always comes into play when it comes to *yōkai*-related content in mobile games. For instance, the journey of a player starts in an old village, inside of an abandoned house, which means that the game connects *yōkai* activity and the concept of an old Japanese village in the first place.

In general, *yōkai* play two main roles in *Yōkai Yashiki kara no Dasshutsu:* they represent a mysterious power or a hidden threat for a player – they block the entrance or prevent a player from getting a needed item. On the other hand, they are willing to help and protect the main characters. If a player decides to collect all the *yōkai* presented in a *yōkai* encyclopedia, it is

possible to get a positive ending of the game where the *yōkai* a player encountered with, are willing to rescue both characters. It can be said that the notion of duality is strongly emphasized in the game representation of *yōkai* – they are both antagonists and protagonists, powerful but some of them act childishly, connected with the concept of old Japan, but on the other hand depend on human beings and their innovations: a refrigerator necessary for Yuki-onna and a blow dryer detrimental for Nurikabe.

This chapter section briefly explained the *yōkai* character re-creation in mobile games belonging to the bishōjo and horror adventure game genres. In the next chapter, a thorough analysis of *yōkai* characters will be conducted on the example of the *Onmyōji* game.

YŌKAI RE-CREATION IN THE ONMYŌJI GAME

About the game

Onmyōji is an online RPG game created for mobile phone users by NetEase Games. A player is to explore a mysterious world of wonders taking place in the Heian capital, choosing one of four main characters to battle against destructive entities or *ayakashi* and bring peace to the capital city. The word "*ayakashi*" can be characterized as synonymic to "*yōkai*": Kikuchi (2014), for example, utilizes it together with "*yōkai*" and *"obake"*. In the work of Yasuda (1990), both *"ayakashi"* and "*yōkai*" are written identically (p. 75). Abe (2004) specified that in his work "*ayakashi*" has a similar meaning with "*yōkai*", however, the word also refers to a mask *ayakashi* that is used in Noh performances (p. 80).

The game name derives from the word "*onmyōji*" (individuals possessing supernatural powers to protect the balance of two Worlds belonging to Light and Darkness). These people were brave enough to challenge scary monsters of the Ying World (The World of Darkness) and stop them from creating disorder in the universe. One of the main characters is legendary Abe no Seimei (Figure 3.1). According to Shigeta (2013), it is known that Abe no Seimei was an outstanding practitioner of the Onmyōdō craft, and although he was not a member of the Onmyōryō office (a special governmental institution in charge of astrology, fortune-telling and calendar compiling) at the time Emperor Ichijō was planning to move into a new palace, he was still able to impress the emperor with his skills; moreover, Abe no Seimei was even allowed to perform complicated rituals for the sake of the emperor (p. 78).

The image of Abe no Seimei as a real historical figure and as a game character seems to differ a lot: the character re-created in the game is a handsome young man with long white hair and a charming voice of Sugiyama Noriaki, a famous *seiyū*. As a result, the game represents Abe no Seimei as a romanticized hero of a fantasy world. Using his outstanding magical abilities and help of *shikigami* (spirits invoked to help an *onmyōji*) Abe no Seimei is to travel around the game map to recover his memory lost under strange circumstances. He is in charge of using *ayakashi* as his companions in battles. Together with the main story walkthrough, a player may also collaborate with other players to fight powerful monsters, as well as to battle against the most experienced players. A crucial element of the game is increasing abilities of the main character (including Abe no Seimei and other available characters) and companion *ayakashi* (*shikigami*) to win battles, gain achievements and items, necessary for further character upgrade.

When it comes to visual features of the game, its characters are represented as two-dimensional and three-dimensional figures. Throughout the whole game process, a player can

see animated 3D characters: for instance, the main menu page shows Abe no Seimei standing still, holding a fan and moving his hands. The clothes are also slightly waving in the wind. Battle mode, of course, demonstrates more complex movements of characters such as attacking each other, casting spells, and disappearing if hit. Two-dimensional depictions are shown during the game is loading (in the majority of cases it would be concept art connected with special seasonal events), in the illustrated catalogue section, character skin illustrations, and several other cases.

Figure 3.1. Character image: Abe no Seimei from the *Onmyōji* game.

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The *yōkai* characters of the game can be described as ambiguous creatures. On the one hand, *yōkai* belong to the World of Darkness and in many situations, they are capable to cause panic and chaos among humans: some of them steal things and others may bring havoc to the capital. On the other hand, the majority of the *yōkai* in the game are not ultimately evil, or chaotic evil according to the alignment system proposed in the *Dungeons & Dragons* game (designed by Gygax and Arneson, first published in 1974). Some of *yōkai* regularly visit Abe no Seimei to ask for help and save that *yōkai* who are in danger. Moreover, a player becomes attached to some *yōkai* anyway during *yōkai* collection and "upbringing" – this also reflects on a personal perception of *yōkai* in the game. Due to personal stories of each *yōkai*, even the "worst" characters can cause a player's sympathy.

A more detailed description of *yōkai* characters and their re-creation peculiarities will be analyzed below.

Kitsune

There are several fox characters in the game – similarly rich is the gallery of fox characters existing in Japanese culture. Foxes are skillful tricksters and able to take any shape they want – this is the way *Onmyōji* can provide a rationale for its fox characters, quite diverse and not looking alike.

One of the fox characters is Sanbi no Kitsune, or Three-tailed Fox. It is a beautiful vixen with three tails, fox ears, long claws, and paws. She wears a stylized kimono, and its design is rather a bold allusion to traditional clothes than a regular one: a right sleeve is dropped down, and a side-slit up right above the hip (Figure 3.2).

> *A charming demon-fox. Her beauty leaves people powerless over her attractiveness. But it seems there is sadness always hidden in her eyes. Anyone would certainly be astonished by her graceful silhouette standing still under the myriads of fluttering cherry blossoms. "It is impossible to meet someone like this twice in a lifetime", - they would say. Maybe, the same feeling she hides inside her heart, too.*
>
> *(a character description found in the game, my translation)*

A vital element of the description is an image of cherry blossoms and a lonely silhouette of Sanbi no Kitsune standing under the tree. This can be addressed as an aesthetic principle of *mono no aware* existing in Japanese culture. Prusinski (2012) approaches *mono no aware* as "fleeting beauty in an experience that cannot be pinned down or denoted by a single moment or image" (p. 27). Such experiences are commonly translated into a visual language in films, manga, and anime to create a specific emotional and sensual atmosphere. The *sakura* tree described in the game passage is a self-contained symbol by definition. Cavallaro (2013) associates *sakura* trees with "the ephemerality and fragility" of beauty, love, and life, as well as with death (p. 48). In *Onmyōji sakura* also becomes a symbol of fragility: Sanbi no Kitsune realizes that friendship, trust, and human life are similarly fragile and ephemeral things.

At first thought, one may find that Sanbi no Kitsune bears a striking resemblance with a courtesan (*oiran*) of the Edo period, and several indicators are approving this idea. First of all, her hairstyle has a lot in common with popular courtesan hairstyles of those times called *yokohyōgo*. Then, her story and background within the game mention her skillfulness in the art of seduction. As was stated earlier, her image has a strong sexual implication in the first place. "*Hey, you there, don't you want to have fun with an older sister?*" – asks Sanbi no Kitsune whenever a player clicks on her image. These words may both be an act of seduction and her readiness to strike an enemy during the battle. Considering the tattoos of Sanbi no Kitsune, it can be also said that in the Edo period "many courtesans in the pleasure quarters of Yoshiwara took

part in tattoo culture (Pagan, 2016, p. 22). Pagan also notes that for the majority of Japanese people tattoos are stigmatized and bound with mafia, gangs; they may indicate that a person is unwilling to be a part of the "mainstream" culture (pp. 21-22).

The combination of all these visual factors is used to shape an outcast character. With the help of the character description, however, a player understands that the character of Sanbi no Kitsune is deeper than it may seem. There is a second layer of the character concealing her true feelings and emotions. The psychological aspects of Sanbi no Kitsune are perfectly reflected through the aesthetic representation of the *sakura* tree.

Figure 3.2. Character image: Sanbi no Kitsune from the *Onmyōji* game.

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The color scheme used in the character design is chiefly composed of red and its undertones. The choice of this color as the main for Sanbi no Kitsune may be explained by its symbolical meaning. First of all, it demonstrates boldness and passion, as well as aggression. This character in the game is qualified as a descent "attacker", which can cause serious damage to an opponent team. Another meaning of red in many cultures is associated with women and blood. Females were believed to control a mysterious and strange power because of how their bodies function according to a lunar cycle (Varichon, 2009, p. 99). This notion of a female as "dangerous" and "otherworldly" is undoubtedly applicable to the character of Sanbi no Kitsune. Red is also the color associated with the goddess Inari, whose sacred animal was the *kitsune*. The shrines dedicated to Inari usually tend to incorporate a lot of red: the Japanese gates (*torii*) of Fushimi Inari Taisha located in Kyoto are one of the most vivid examples of this tendency. These red gates represent "good magic" (Gill, 1998, p. 42). One of the skills Sanbi no Kitsune uses in the game is called *kōgan dohatsu*, which loosely can be explained as an enraged person

(of a blushed face and hair standing on end). In this case, the kanji "*beni*" meaning "deep red" is equated with anger and fury.

Overall, Sanbi no Kitsune gives the impression of a mature temptress, and understandably the word *eroi* (sexy) is found regularly in the character comment section. The image of Sanbi no Kitsune perfectly illustrates certain expectations toward female sexuality in the realities of the contemporary world. In particular, the image of Sanbi no Kitsune represents male fantasies about a grown-up experienced partner with big breasts, long legs, and small waist: the type of a sexualized character that often can be seen in manga, anime, and games. The big breasts fetish in Japan seems to have originated from the popularization of western beauty standards – "eye folds, round eyes, longer legs, light hair and skin, and so on" (Isa & Kramer, 2003, p. 42). Other underlying aspects were highlighted by Allison (2000), who acknowledged "permitted" and "prohibited" desires as factors that also play a vital role in the formation of certain sexual imagery, such as big breasts and disclosed body parts. "The grammar of desire that emerges – conditioned as it is by the materiality of everyday life and the cultural and familial nexus that inform what paths what people take to make what kinds of lives – does not prevent the production of pleasure as much as pattern it in terms that reflect rather than inhibit social taboos" (p. 27).

In addition, it must also be said that the visual design of Sanbi no Kitsune, is chiefly determined by contemporary aesthetics and the definition of a perfect product from the marketing perspective. Nowadays many goods in Japan are being promoted through anthropomorphization of a target product, thus making a mascot character out of not only animals and plants, but also everyday items, particularly those attributed to Japanese culture. The process of anthropomorphization is referred to as *gijinka* in Japanese. As an example, Wada, Shimada, & Watanabe (2017) developed a mascot manga-based character aimed to promote traditional sandals (*geta*) as a product to media. Game developers often tend to play with numerous *gijinka* options to create unique characters, which would symbolize a specific item – in the case of *Food Fantasy* (by Elex Wireless), all characters are either drinks or foods. The character design is constructed through copying and re-creating specific characteristics of a particular meal/drink: the Black Tea character is a dark-haired elegant woman wearing a black dress, whereas Milk is a white-haired female character who is reminiscent of an anthropomorphized cow.

Galbraith also mentioned the term *moe gijinka,* claiming that the concept of techno-animism proposed by Allison (2006) relates to the attractiveness of non-human characters – "their indeterminacy requires the affectivity of the human form, but not the reality of the human body" (p. 354). It seems that anthropomorphized animal-based *moe* characters, however, only

possess some of the animal features that are popularly accepted as physically attractive: in most cases, only ears, tails and paws are depicted on a character's body – no excessive fur instead of alabaster skin, a character skull structure does not comply with an actual animal skull, etc. Any more realistic features added – and instead of a *moe* vixen, for instance, we are looking at the eerie hybrid, either an unpleasant one. This meticulous approach to "what is human" and "what is animal" when it comes to animal anthropomorphization, seems to matter in cases when potential users of a product must be strongly attracted to what they see. In this case, Sanbi no Kitsune is meant to seduce human males, therefore, her character is mainly constructed as a female body with only a few parts implying her beastly side.

On the other hand, no evident sexual implication in its contemporary understanding can be seen in historical fox depictions (Figure 3.3; Figure 3.4). The images are rather advocating for such features as secretiveness, mysteriousness, and the mischievous nature of foxes. As opposed to the disclosed fox features of Sanbi no Kitsune, these characters are willing to cover their true form: one fox is covering her face with a paw; another one can only be exposed by her shadow reflected on the screen.

Figure 3.3. Yako by Sawaki Sūshi (*Hyakkai Zukan*).

Figure 3.4. Kuzunoha by

Utagawa Kuniyoshi (*Genji Kumo Ukiyoe Awase*).

That being said, the motives of seduction, sexuality, as well as the connection between foxes and female attractiveness are not completely absent in earlier Japanese texts referring to *kitsune*. One of the most well-known texts portraying foxes in disguise that used their charms to seduce men, is a legend of Tamamo no Mae, a court lady who soon became an emperor's favorite. She was an exceptionally beautiful and wise woman, and everyone could see how truly special she turned out to be when one stormy night all the lights in the room went out due to a strong wind. In this darkness, however, there was she, standing and astonishing both the emperor and all the nobles around – Tamamo no Mae was glowing and radiating a mysterious light compared to the morning sun. After this strange occurrence the emperor was struck by a disease, and the court exorcist Abe no Yasunari had concluded that Tamamo no Mae was a source of the emperor's illness. He performed a special ritual, which would have helped to cure the illness, but it was a trick to make Tamamo no Mae participate in the ritual and reveal her true shape. The exorcist was able to understand that the emperor's favorite was a dangerous demonic fox of nine tails. Being exposed, she only had to run away from the emperor's warriors who were aiming to catch and kill the beast. Although the evil creature was too swift to be caught, with the help of prayers to Kannon-sama (the Buddhist deity), one of the warriors was able to hit her with an arrow. Leaving her physical form, the spirit transformed into the so-called Murder stone – any living thing daring to come closer to the stone would die immediately. However, later a monk Gennō was able to calm the vengeful spirit by reading the Lotus Sutra.

The story of Tamamo no Mae emphasizes the connection of Japanese and Chinese narratives – the fox of nine tails caused trouble not only to a Japanese emperor Toba but to the kings of India and China, which was reflected in *Sangoku Yōkoden*, a nineteenth-century tale. The tale episodes were also portrayed by many Japanese artists such as Katsushika Hokusai and Utagawa Kuniyoshi.

An interesting point in this regard is that there is a character of Tamamo no Mae in the game; however, this character is codified as an SSR (super super rare) rank *shikigami*. That means Tamamo no Mae is a character that cannot be easily obtained during the game. The "legendary fox" is also re-created as of nine tails, a more complicated costume, and a mask – all of these details create an overtone of mystery and exceptionality of the character in comparison with Sanbi no Kitsune. Not only she looks "disclosed" (nothing is hidden, even her tattoos meant to demonstrate her opposition to norms and rules), but she also has three tails: a symbolical sign that she belongs to a lower rank of *ayakashi* in the game bestiary. Therefore, the number of tails *kitsune* characters are armed with can be deciphered as a marker of rarity or fabulousness of a certain *kitsune yōkai*.

The motif of a beautiful and dangerous fox lady in the legend of Tamamo no Mae not only represents a popular narrative pattern demonstrating the shape-shifting abilities of *kitsune*. It reveals major sociocultural problems of Japanese society, such as a very specific attitude towards women as perceived by Buddhist monks, who were portraying their frustrating experiences in relationships in the *setsuwa* texts as was mentioned by Bathgate (2004). Wilson (1996) earlier suggested that fears toward females were a common motif in Buddhist texts: the female body is represented there as a "mantrap" (pp. 95). Bathgate also explains the connection between foxes and the "cosmological imagery of onmyōdō", where foxes were treated as "dark" creatures able to feed on males: "the influence of such a creature on a human male is essentially vampiric, drawing vital energy from the victim to balance her own" (p. 40). In many tales, on the other hand, foxes are portrayed as wives, and in some cases, these stories imply melancholic overtones when a mother-fox decides to leave the family when her true nature is unveiled (p. 42).

Another text portraying negative influences of vixen toward men belongs to the twelfth century – it is *Kobiki* or *Records of seductive foxes* by Ōe no Masafusa. This text of the Heian era is incredibly hard for a contemporary interpretation; however, there is a mentioning of a nine-tailed fox, also a skillful seductress. Overall, it can be said that it is in the Heian era when foxes started being widely associated with the supernatural. In the end, the *kitsune* becomes an ambiguous character: it is a trickster, and nobody knows what to expect from it; on the other hand, there is a hidden undertone of loneliness and implacable fate when an exposed fox is doomed to live in exile as in the case of the story of a fox wife from Mino, where a woman turned out to be a fox in disguise and could stay with her beloved husband only at night. Since then, it is believed that the word *kitsune* means "come and sleep" (Sakaita, 1996, pp. 1317-1316).

Similar ambivalence can be decoded in the Sanbi no Kitsune story. On the one hand, she is portrayed as a dangerous seductress; on the other – she is an outcast, misunderstood by a girl serving as *miko* (a priestess), who refused to accept the fact of friendship with the fox. Conversely, a drastically different thing about the game character is her complete detachment from the topic of wives and female-male relationships. Instead, the game focuses on such themes as friendship and mutual understanding, as well as trust between friends and an ability to accept one as they are. That being said, the connection between *miko* shamans and magic foxes is not a completely new discourse introduced by the *Onmyōji* creators. It is something widely discussed in the framework of Japanese shamanistic practices, especially practices of exorcism dealing with fox-possessions, or *kitsune-tsuki*. In such discourses, foxes usually represent malicious spirits possessing certain individuals, who are then "cured" or "purified" by *miko* shamans. *Miko* priestesses are believed to be able to banish fox spirits straight out of a person's body, whereas Buddhist monks and *shugendō* practitioners use other techniques such as substitution (when a

spirit is removed from a body and transferred over another individual called *yorimashi*) (Kawamura, 2006, p. 74). Thus, in the game, the conflict between the human realm and the *yōkai* realm becomes the key problem of the relationship situation happening between Sanbi no Kitsune and her *miko* friend. The game highlights the prejudices towards a "malicious nature" of foxes supported and accepted for centuries; it transforms them into a didactic lesson to avoid judging someone by their cover. At the same time, according to the game, foxes remain to be tricksters, at times unpredictable and dangerous – after all, Sanbi no Kitsune is still a seductress and possesses power and knowledge of seduction magic.

Sanbi no Kitsune has a charming and sexy voice of a famous *seiyū* Sawashiro Miyuki. For many players that are not very well familiar with such industries as anime or games, this factor may tell nothing. However judging from the perspective of *intertextuality*, some connections can be found in how particular *seiyū* influence the character image they represent. For example, Sawashiro has played numerous roles throughout her career history, although one of the most recognizable roles of hers was a character of Mine Fujiko from the *Lupin III* series. This woman is a femme fatale – a high-class criminal and perfect shooter. She manipulates her beauty and able to use it to get what she wants. Another interesting detail is that her name "Fujiko" refers to the Fuji mountain peaks and is meant to accentuate her breast size. As one can see, this type of a character reminds us of Sanbi no Kitsune a lot, and in the *seiyū* industry, popular actors usually have "quite distinct characteristic voices that are easy to recognize in whichever role they are playing" (Heinst, 2017, p. 21). Game producers would try to find a specific *seiyū* who would be able to create a needed character type judging by their previous works. It must be said, however, that Sawashiro has a specific voice, which can be suitable for both female and male roles.

As was said before, *Onmyōji* contains several *kitsune* characters. As opposed to a sexy character of Sanbi no Kitsune, a cute fox-helper of Abe no Seimei called Kohaku looks innocent and does not specialize in seduction practices.

> *A white fox-shikigami, who is a loyal helper of Seimei. After Seimei has lost his memory, he is always next to him. Kohaku is a cheerful character, but he hates when someone treats him like a puppy. Nobody knows what his true form is.*
>
> *(a character description found in the game, my translation)*

The first thing to point out in the character design is the image of a white fox, or *byakko*. According to Casal (1959), white foxes, as well as black foxes, are "friendly, and their appearance of a good omen" (p. 3). Nakamura's (2017) explanation in relation to white foxes as a good sign is more substantial in the sense that he provided concrete thoughtful reasoning for

such a concept. The idea of white and black foxes to be interpreted as good sign most likely originates from Chinese texts, and then becomes a part of a Japanese discourse on white foxes: *Nihon Shoki*, as well as *Shoku Nihongi* both contain this information (pp. 8-9). However, in further written sources, the information about white and black foxes is not substantial enough to claim they were associated with good luck, which means that this notion had been relevant from a mid-seventh century up to the mid-eighth century (p. 10).

The phrase "true form" or *shōtai* is constantly found in the Japanese texts referring to foxes. It is meant to demonstrate foxes as creatures transforming into human beings, other animals, and even objects. However, in some tales, the true form of a fox is exposed in the end, and it is exactly a fox form. The true form of Kohaku is revealed by Abe no Seimei in one of the cinematic videos that are also an essential part of the game. This video shows how small Seimei saves the fox spirit from enslavement, and later they become friends. Abe no Seimei comes up with a new name for the *kitsune* – this is how Kohaku obtains his name. The bell (*suzu*) on Kohaku's neck (Figure 3.5) plays a symbolic role in cleansing. To save the fox from black magic causing Kohaku to kill people, Seimei performs a ritual. The cleansed fox awakes near a white tree of the Dream Mountain. The *suzu* bell belonging to Seimei hangs on the tree branch. *Suzu* are usually used in many Shinto rituals; the sound of bells is meant to summon gods (deities) and purify a zone where a ritual is taking place.

Figure 3.5. Character image: Kohaku from the *Onmyōji* game.
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Masks and foxes are tightly connected in the context of Japanese culture. The art of Noh and *kyōgen*, for example, includes using various masks to personify a certain character of a play. The *kitsune* mask is used in a kyōgen play *Tsurigitsune* (*The Fox and the Trapper*), where the main character is a fox in disguise willing to have revenge upon a fox trapper. To portray *kitsune*, an actor is required to obtain certain skills and a decent level of mastery. Salz (2007) states that

"the kyōgen actor must embody the mystery of the "fox" as a legendary beast possessing transformative power with an oxymoron, "abstract realism", (*chūshōteki shajitsu*) to reveal the truth (pp. 185-186).

The tradition of *matsuri*, or festivals, again demonstrates the presence of *kitsune* masks in Japanese rituals. Fox masks are used in Kagura dancing performances, and other annual events such as the Inaho Festival in Kudamatsu, Yamaguchi prefecture (Figure 3.6). This is a celebration meant to bring prosperity and fertile crops to local people.

Figure 3.6. Kitsune no Yomeiri, or a Fox Wedding Ceremony, which is a part of the Inaho Matsuri festival.

Masks are also used at the Oji Fox Parade (*Kitsune no Gyōretsu*) dedicated to the New Year's Eve, when people disguised as foxes participate in a special procession while holding lanterns – an allegory of foxfires (Figure 3.7). The procession ends at the Oji Inari Shrine, where a special blessing ritual is performed. In this case, masks become a popular commodity among both Japanese people taking part at the event, and foreign guests – people are even ready to spend a significant amount of time queuing in front of the souvenir shop just to purchase a fox mask. The mask allows participants to fully immerse themselves in the atmosphere of the event, to become *kitsune* themselves, so to speak.

Figure 3.7. The Oji Fox Parade, Tokyo.

All the examples above may be used as an explanation of why some of the fox characters in *Onmyōji* are depicted as wearing masks – in the contemporary Japanese culture, the fox becomes directly associated with masks. The mask Kohaku wears is somewhat similar to the mask called Otafuku (Figure 3.8). It is the face of a cheerful woman who has red lips and round cheeks – this character represents good luck and has a positive meaning in Japan. Therefore, the image of Kohaku, in general, is perceived positively; the depiction creates an impression of a cheerful character causing good luck to its master – Abe no Seimei.

When it comes to certain aesthetical choices for this character, in particular, it is inarguable that Kohaku was designed as a *kawaī* character in the first place. The characteristics of the cute character can be decoded in numerous elements starting from his name containing the kanji *"ko"* (meaning "small"). The size of his body becomes smaller after transformation from an antagonist to the kind Kohaku. Another vivid argument may be found in one of the game episodes when a friendly *yōkai* called Kyonshi Imōto was patting Kohaku and treating him like a puppy. This situation did not please him, although it was clear that Kohaku was enjoying the process (Figure 3.9). In this regard, it is possible that *Onmyōji* creators constructed the image of Kohaku based on the contemporary image and meaning of a pet: for their owners, pets can substitute babies and children; in the case of dogs in particular (Kohaku is constantly being compared to one), such attachments "may also contain a strong element of reassurance and a feeling of security" (Archer, 1997, p. 241). Interestingly enough, in Chinese folklore foxes and dogs were almost always considered rivals: dogs were able to recognize whether it is a real human or another shape-shifting illusion initiated by the fox (Johnson, 1974, p. 43; Doré, 1918, p. 701; Watters, 1874, pp. 61-63). Japanese folktales similarly follow this fashion: according to the tale of the Mino fox, the fox wife is afraid of the dog living with the family. She even asks her husband to kill the animal, however, the man refuses killing it. In the end, a newborn puppy

exposes the fox and chases her away (Sakaita, 1996, p. 1317). In the case of Kohaku, *Onmyōji* erases the boundaries between foxes and dogs. The fox obtains all the positive features of the dog: its loyalty, playfulness, and the desire to follow and protect its master. From a certain perspective, it can be even said that the game transforms this rivalry into a comical situation to entertain players between "serious" and tiring battles against enemies.

Although Kohaku is not a playable character, he serves as the archetype necessary for plot unraveling. From this point of view, Kohaku is a secondary, supportive archetype, or the so-called "ally" of the main hero. According to Vogler (2007), allies "serve the important function of humanizing the heroes, adding extra dimensions to their personalities, or challenging them to be more open and balanced" (p. 71). As a matter of fact, without Kohaku Abe no Seimei would have probably lost his connection to the realm of human emotions and feelings, as he is a very serious, self-contained character in the first place. Through the communication with Kohaku, Abe no Seimei expresses a whole specter of feelings: he is worried when Kohaku and other allies are in danger or attacked by villains; he is grateful to Kohaku when this small companion helps to find a lost object or person with the help of his *kitsune* powers, etc.

Figure 3.8. The Otafuku mask.

An intertextual transcendence of the *kawaī* image can also be discussed from the standpoint of the character voice, which was performed by Ōtani Ikue, who is famous by her roles of Pikachu and Tony Tony Chopper in the *Pokémon* and *One Piece* series respectively. The status of these characters as iconic *kawaī* creatures is beyond all question, therefore a well-recognized pitch of the voice actress allows creating an image of a cute, adorable ally.

Figure 3.9. Kohaku being treated like a puppy.

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The next *kitsune* character to be analyzed is called Yōko – it a fox disguised as a young man wearing a mask and scrolls on the back (Figure 3.10). Being a typical *kitsune* character, he is portrayed with a big puffy tail similar to the images of Sanbi no Kitsune and Kohaku. Other elements of the character signalizing that he belongs to the world of *ayakashi* are his pointy ears and yellow eyes with vertical pupils.

Figure 3.10. Character image: Yōko from the *Onmyōji* game.

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*A demon-fox disguised as a man in the mask. He is holding a fan. By calling himself shōsei (*an old word meaning "me"*), he creates an impression of an elegant man. He has a lot of hobbies and unique talents. Talks a lot. However, one should not judge a book by its cover. Although he says he is a friendly yōkai not causing harm to human beings, anyone who is to talk to him has to be on guard.*

(a character description found in the game, my translation)

In the game, Yōko was trying to kidnap a carp fairy, Koi no Sei, to use her energy for his own purposes. Abe no Seimei and his friends were suspicious of his actions in the first place, but

Yōko was able to lull the vigilance of the protagonists, as he is good at telling lies. At the end of the story, Abe no Seimei saves Koi no Sei from the villain, who later escapes without being caught.

In Japan, it was in the middle of the Heian period when tales about the yōko had appeared (Takahashi, 2017, p. 60). One of the most famous narratives mentioning this particular *kitsune* type is *Sangoku Yōkoden* (discussed on page 64). Although in many folktales yōko are portrayed as female characters, the *Onmyōji* version is a male fox. Early Chinese sources mention male foxes that were primarily portrayed as intelligent old men, the so-called "professor" type (Pan, 2015, p. 166).

I find this gender-bending choice well-corresponding to nowadays' understanding of a creepy antagonist promoted by horror movies and other popular narratives. In this context, "the functions of monster and hero are more frequently represented by males and the function of victim far more garishly by females" (Clover, 2015, p. 12). This notion perfectly describes the relationship between Yōko and Koi no Sei – a dangerous kidnapper and his victim. In Japanese folktales, however, many antagonists were females – especially when it comes to the *kitsune*.

A prominent attribute of Yōko is the mask which symbolizes secrets and mysteries. In the case of Kohaku the mask emphasizes a "friendly" personality; it does not fully cover his face. The situation with Yōko is opposite – in the game, the mask is described as *bukimi*, or unpleasant. There is something strange and dangerous in this mask – the lines of it are sharp and the eye area is quite narrow, which creates an image of a sly, smirking face. This feature concerning manga and anime characters was discussed by Brenner (2007), who differentiated between "large, round eyes" and "narrow, squinty eyes": the first type of eye shape is used to portray "innocence, purity, and youth", and the second type is used to emphasize a character that is "evil, sadistic, and vicious" (p. 42). For example, I find many common features between Yōko and Ichimaru Gin from the *Bleach* series: both have the sinister "narrow eye" look and a manipulative personality. "A man in the mask cannot be trusted, right?", – says Yōko, as if he is teasing someone in front of him, and makes one unsure of his real intentions.

A substantial detail of the character is revealed in episode 7 of the *tansaku* (search) mode. Trying to vindicate him of being the *yōkai* who is responsible for mysterious cases of dweller disappearance in the region, Yōko claims to be "an ordinary *shosei*". *Shosei* is a term referring to students of the Meiji and Taisho period, or individuals who would live in the house of a certain person (usually a writer or an artist), for whom they had to carry out various assignments while studying (Shinmura, 1998, p. 1347). The costume of Yōko is analogous to the clothes typically

worn by *shosei* back in the days. We see a kimono, a striped *hakama* and *geta* sandals – the combination of these items might lead to a misconception that Yōko is an obedient student.

Yōko is depicted with a huge scroll (*makimono*) on his back and a few of them attached to a front section of the clothes. On the one hand, *makimono* may be understood as a sign of literacy and a passion for reading, writing, and learning; on the other – the contents of these scrolls are never revealed or explained. Like the ninja scrolls appearing in the *Naruto* series, the scrolls of Yōko may contain secret techniques and spells. At the end of the episode, the truth is revealed: a special technique of binding was used by a malicious fox to enchant the poor Koi no Sei and prevent her from running away, or making any movement.

When paying attention to the color scheme of the character, one may find how cold colors (blue, violet, white and gray) create an illusion of a cold-blooded, unaffectionate persona, as well as connect us with the dark world of Yin. As was discussed in the previous chapter, *kitsunebi* are spheres of fire appearing as a result of *kitsune* activity, and they are usually described as blue lights (Kanda, 1993, p. 76). Yōko demonstrates battle techniques in the game, and according to the skill icons in Figure 3.11, the magic he uses is exactly blue with white highlights. Although in the game, the Yōko attack animation is more of violet undertones.

Figure 3.11. The icons demonstrating the skills of Yōko.

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The last detail worth mentioning about the character is how an "ordinary student" Yōko tries to fool everyone with his disguise, even though his sharp, pointy ears and a puffy tail might signalize that he belongs to the realm of supernatural animals. In many folk tales, foxes disguised as human beings seem to not care much about the tail – in the play *Tsurigitsune:* "the Fox is well disguised, but not totally; his tail peeks out beneath his priest's garb" (Salz, 2007, p. 179). In the game, there is a mode where a player is supposed to fight a certain type of *yōkai* several times; in

the description, there is a short story describing the needed *yōkai*. According to the story, somebody meets a stranger (Yōko) and decides to accompany him as they are going one direction, and then the person suddenly gets a sight of a tail and understands his accompanier is a fox.

To sum up the details and concepts concerning Yōko, he is a mysterious and even creepy character; despite this fact, players are attracted to him anyway – he is quite powerful and may become a decent member of a *shikigami* team of Abe no Seimei. The category of villains in manga and anime can be easily decoded by fans – "bad characters" are quite shady and trying to pretend to be friends of main characters; they also have specific voice pitch and tend to prolong words, their laughter is hysterical and not pleasant to listen to. Unlike the previous two characters, Yōko perfectly fits into the category of strange and dangerous villains. Despite legends mentioning the concept of *yōko* as a demonic fox mainly transforming itself into a female, through the process of gender-bending, the yōko of *Onmyōji* allows us to interpret this character as a villain relevant for many generations and not necessarily having nine tails and influencing kings and rulers.

On the other hand, the character of Tamamo no Mae is present in the game, so the two characters represent diverse images of Japan's mysterious, if not malicious, foxes. Incidentally, Tamamo no Mae is a very complex character that is represented as the main antagonist of the game, the "ultimate evil" planning to destroy the Heian capital. Its complexity reaches to the point where the whole idea of a demonic fox gender is irrelevant: Tamamo no Mae is a male character in the first episode of its appearance, however, later the fox takes a form of a beautiful lady. As the character designers of Tamamo no Mae pointed out, "it is the beauty exceeding the distinction between sexes"[9]. Such an approach to foxes, however, cannot be called revolutionary whatsoever: goddess Inari is normally attributed female qualities, however, it may take various forms, including a male one, or no specific gender at all (Smyers, 1999, p. 8).

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[9] Onmyōji Game. (2007, September 21). Shikigami "Tamamonomae" no Tanjō Monogatari ~ Genga to Bijuaru Dezain-hen [A story of the Birth of the Shikigami "Tamamonomae": Original Art and Visual Design]. https://www.onmyojigame.jp/news/official/2017/09/27/25567_714091.html

Figure 3.12. Fun'ya no Asayasu as Tamamo no Mae by Utagawa Kuniyoshi
(*Oguranazorae Hyakunin Isshu*).

© Marega Collection, Universita Pontificia Salesiana

Figure 3.13. Ichimura Kakitsu IV as Tamamo no Mae by Utagawa Kunisada (*Toyokuni Kigō Kijutsu Kurabe*).

The idea of Tamamo no Mae being an elegant male character is also reflected in the kabuki aesthetics as all the roles were performed by male actors. Figures 3.12 and 3.13 demonstrate paintings by Utagawa Kuniyoshi and Utagawa Kunisada (respectively) portraying Fun'ya no Asayasu and Ichimura Kakitsu IV as Lady Tamamo. There are a lot of common details and colors between the Edo depictions given above and the game image of Tamamo no Mae. The game offers some characters' changeable looks; this option adds more variety to the gaming process. Before being upgraded, *yōkai* are default characters with relatively low characteristics, and after the upgrade, they become stronger. The upgraded version of Tamamo

no Mae represents her as a court lady in all her glory with nine ghostly tails seen floating in the air behind her back (on the left, Figure 3.14). The main colors used for the character are red, blue, white, and navy green. Her robes look complex and have many layers; the character is also portrayed holding a fan. This is exactly what can be seen on Kuniyoshi's depiction (Figure 3.12). A male representation of Tamamo no Mae in the game (on the right, Figure 3.14), on the other hand, has several details similar to the painting by Utagawa Kunisada (Figure 3.13): the main colors for both depictions are dark blue, emerald green, red and a little bit of white. The fan is also present in both cases, including the fox head (fox mask for the game character) and white tails; however, the Edo depiction portrays nine tails. In the game, Tamamo no Mae first appears in front of Abe no Seimei as someone he knew in the past, and later the infamous fox transforms several times. The before-after versions of this *yōkai* may be perceived as a demonstration of the Tamamo no Mae transformation and development as a character. The male version of Tamamo no Mae has two white tails, whereas an upgraded female version is depicted as having nine tails. Before losing his beloved ones, Tamamo no Mae is shown as a male character, and after the tragedy happens, the powerful fox decides to destroy the capital and gazing the havoc in the Heian capital as a female version, the Lady Tamamo. Such element as fox ears is also an important part of the contemporary fox character image, but unlike the fetishized *moe* characters, the fox ears of Tamamo no Mae are the embodiment of mystery, strength, and otherworldliness.

Figure 3.14. Character image: Tamamo no Mae as a female (on the left) and male character (on the right) from the *Onmyōji* game.

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An interesting fact about the lady Tamamo's re-creation in the game is that the character is an old friend of Abe no Seimei's mother called Kuzunoha. The latter is a character of the *Shinodazuma* legend and appears in some other texts and plays (*kabuki* and *bunraku*). The connection between Tamamo no Mae, Kuzunoha, and Abe no Seimei is demonstrated through an

interesting story, where Abe no Seimei has to stand against a powerful enemy, with whom he shares precious memories of the past. The anger and aggression of Tamamo no Mae is explained through an animated movie. The following passage describes the story of the infamous demonic fox.

Tamamo no Mae falls in love with a shrine priestess (*miko*), but gods are against their love, and send a thunder down to earth. The thunder kills *miko*, but she is able to protect her husband and their two children. A nine-tailed fox is crying near her breathless body, and his grief turns into anger. The thought of an unfair decision of gods drives him mad to the point that he starts burning everything down using his demonic powers. The babies cannot stop crying because of the fire and havoc surrounding them. Feeling guilty, Tamamo no Mae decides to transform into their mother to calm the children down. The children and their father are happy together; they come to visit another fox, Kuzunoha, who is a kind and caring *ayakashi*, and teaches Tamamo no Mae's children how to take a human form. One day, a local *onmyōji* finds out a source of strange energy – this source was Tamamo no Mae's children. The sorcerer got rid of the only precious creatures Tamamo no Mae had, and since then the fox has been searching for the killer of his children.

As can be seen from the passage, the story re-creates Tamamo no Mae as an independent character with a personal story quite different from the original legend about a beautiful lady of the emperor court. Although the tension between an *onmyōji* and a fox is still relevant in the game, the character is completely detached from its original context. It can be said that the *Onmyōji* game presents a contemporary *monogatari* or a new outlook on the character. Moreover, the gender-bending decision allows us to perceive a demonic fox as a comprehensive, unique creature staying beyond our understanding.

The last fox character to be mentioned in this chapter is Kudagitsune, or "a fox of the pipe". It is a small fox able to fit a bamboo pipe (Ishizuka, 1959, pp. 28-34). These foxes are said to be used as familiars by some families to gain wealth (Sakurai, 1980, pp. 103-104). The phenomenon of *kudagitsune* is connected with fox-possessions (*kitsune-tsuki*).

In the game, Kudagitsune is a white fox sitting on a bamboo pipe and floating in the air. He has a long body, pointy ears, and a big tail (Figure 3.15).

> *This is a demonic fox that lives inside of a small bamboo pipe. He is always next to his mistress as a friend and as a pet. Kudagitsune is ready to protect the mistress wholeheartedly in a dangerous situation. Nonetheless, not all foxes may become kudagitsune. However, be it an ordinary fox or a fox of the pipe, they are happy as long as they have somebody around.*

The character of the game was once an ordinary fox transformed into a fox spirit by a female *onmyōji*, who is the owner of Kudagitsune. He was always following her and wanted the girl to grow up to become an ordinary person. Nevertheless, these dreams never became reality: the girl decided to dedicate her life to *onmyōji* practices, and almost lost all her life energy to create her fox-familiar. Although regretting this decision, Kudagitsune is happy to have someone he could take care of. He becomes a loyal guardian of the girl.

Figure 3.15. Character image: Kudagitsune from the *Onmyōji* game.
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There are a few details that may be interpreted as a key to understanding this character. First of all, unlike all the previous fox-characters, Kudagitsune had never been connected with *ayakashi* until the transformation happened. This fox character has only one tail, and this detail probably emphasizes the simplicity of Kudagitsune compared with other legendary fox figures such as Tamamo no Mae. He also does not seem to possess shape-shifting abilities, nor does he aim to communicate with the human world that much, except for the mistress. Together with Kohaku, who is a white fox-familiar too, Kudagitsune similarly respects his owner and tries to be useful for her. Although there are vivid distinctions between the two foxes: Kohaku is a cute character with big eyes and behavior of a puppy; Kudagitsune, on the other hand, is a serious, mature fox. His facial expression denotes his readiness to fight and protect the mistress by all means. When fighting, he uses the bamboo pipe as a bazooka. There is a direct connection with a popular archetype, the so-called "tough guy" that we see in action movies, such as *Rambo*, *The Terminator*, etc.

We can also see a sacred rope (*shimenawa*) tied around the pipe. According to the explanation given by Scheid (2012),

Shimenawa are simple ropes of straw and can be used to surround a sacred space or a natural object of awe-inspiring size or shape like a 'divine rock' or a 'divine tree'. More often, however, shimenawa are attached to a torii or hung below the entrance of a shrine building indicating the presence of a kami.

<div align="right">p. 79</div>

Thus *shimenawa* together with zigzag paper streamers called *shide* create an impression of a sacred object to which the bamboo pipe may belong. In this regard, Kudagitsune himself may be understood as a holy spirit inhabiting this object. Of course, he can only be a personal *kami* for the girl, not for everybody else – this feature is a distinct aspect of all the *kudagitsune*. "Foxes of the pipe" may bring great fortune to the family that keeps them; for other families, they may cause only poverty and negative influences.

The deep voice of Matsuda Kenichiro who is famous for playing "tough" male roles (many of them are "tough" soldiers and fighters), transforms Kudagitsune into a real warrior. With this voice, Kudagitsune can be interpreted as a skillful fighter and a wise, experienced fox. The speech of the character is similar to that of Kurama the fox from the *Naruto* series discussed on page 38 of this paper. The use of *hakasego* (the "professor" language) in the case of Kudagitsune is clear as he regularly uses *washi* (instead of *watashi*) and *ja* (instead of *da*).

To conclude, power, experience, and wisdom are the main characteristics of Kudagitsune of the Onmyōji game. The image of this *yōkai* lacks any unnecessary or eccentric details – in the past, he was a normal fox who later was transformed into a *yōkai* purposely. His bamboo pipe decorated with Shinto elements connotes its connection with sacred objects and, hence, portrays Kudagitsune as a positive character in general.

Foxes in the game are represented as quite different characters, and each of them possesses unique features and has its role in the fantasy world of the game. Moreover, the authors of the game were able to rephrase or re-create old tales and legends of foxes in such a manner, that these contemporary *monogatari* would be interesting for a present-day audience, but would still contain markers that could be identified as distinct elements of traditions or more sophisticated culture of Japan. It is unavoidably obvious that popular culture nowadays tends to re-create *kitsune* as cute characters in the majority of cases, however, at times, a more thorough analysis is needed to understand the whole spectrum of concepts connected with foxes popular culture operates with. This tendency may vary depending on the genre and target audience of products. There are many cases of portraying a fox as a sly and evil character in Japanese popular culture. Hagoromogitsune from the *Nurarihyon no Mago* series is a bold villain character, who is cruel and murderous towards both human beings and "good" *yōkai* trying to

protect the world from her actions. Fantasy worlds and the genre of fantasy as portrayed by anime, manga, movies, and games often require the presence of villains and heroes. Hence, genres and their respective audiences are keys to analyzing *yōkai* re-creation in products of popular culture.

To conclude, there are several trends in the character design associated with specificities or certain characteristics of fox-characters represented in the game:

-masks are often used in the fox design; some of them may signalize that a character hides something and tries to trick others;

-white foxes-familiars are positive characters connected with the notion of loyalty and the sacrament; they are also bounded up with certain religious aspects (Shinto);

-fox tails may reveal the information regarding magic abilities and powers of a fox, its exceptionality and rarity;

-fox characters are represented as different characters of various backgrounds and genders; the method of gender-bending applied in order to re-create some characters in a way that allows perceiving already familiar *yōkai* differently;

-various aspects of foxes mentioned in folklore texts (a seductress, a trickster, a familiar, a shape-shifter) are demonstrated in the game.

The table below summarizes the intertextual analysis of all five fox characters of the *Onmyōji* game.

Table 3.1. *Kitsune* (fox) characters of the *Onmyōji* game.

Fox character	Intertextual references	Sources of references
Sanbi no Kitsune	*Mono no aware* (sakura tree)	Japanese aesthetic and philosophical principle; a well-known trope used in films, manga, anime, games, etc.
	Sexuality (*oiran* image, big breasts), connection with sexual / love magic	Fetishisized or popular beauty standards (western beauty in Japan) (Isa & Kramer, 2003, p. 42); A stereotypical or sexualized image of a female character in anime, manga, games; a story of Tamamo no Mae; *Sangoku yōkoden* (a nineteenth-century tale),

		setsuwa texts (Wilson, 1996; Bathgate, 2004); *Kobiki* (a twelfth-century text by Ōe no Masafusa)
	Red color	Connection with the main color of the Fushimi Inari shrine; Sanbi is a strong attacker, and red is widely associated with aggression; an image of a dangerous female
	Anthropomorphism	*Moe gijinka* – a tendency to transform objects into attractive female characters in anime, manga, games
	Ambiguous relations with humans	A tale of a fox wife from Mino (Sakaita, 1996); a negative image of foxes in religious systems (*kitsunetsuki*, or a fox possession)
	Seiyū	A similar character was played by a voice actress of Sanbi – Sawashiro Miyuki (*Lupin III* series)
Kohaku	*Byakko*	A "good omen" (Casal, 1959, p. 3; Nakamura, 2017)
	Kawaī	Cute, small characters in manga, anime, games
	Mask	Contemporary Japanese culture associating fox with masks (festives) and traditional arts where masks were used for foxes (*noh* and *kyōgen*); the mask of Otafuku
	Suzu	Shinto rituals of purification

	Connection with dogs	Chinese folklore (dogs and foxes are rivals) (Johnson, 1974, p. 43; Doré, 1918, p. 701; Watters, 1874, pp. 61-63); a tale of a fox wife from Mino (Sakaita, 1996); a contemporary image of dogs as loyal friends
	Seiyū	A similar character was played by a voice actress of Kohaku – Ōtani Ikue (*Pokémon*, *One Piece*)
Yōko	Villain (mask, narrow eyes)	Narrow eyes in the character design may signify a villain in manga, anime, games (Brenner, 2007, p. 42); other similar antagonists with narrow eyes (Ichimaru Gin from *Bleach*)
	Shosei	"Students" of Meiji and Taisho periods
	Incomplete disguise (fox tail revealed)	A *kyōgen* play *Tsurigitsune* (Salz, 2007, p. 179)
	Cold color scheme	*Kitsunebi* (Kanda, 1993, p. 76)
Tamamo no Mae	Androgyny	Inari goddess (Smyers, 1999, p.8)
	Color scheme, design	Depictions of *kabuki* actors as Tamamo no Mae by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1846) and Utagawa Toyokuni III (1865)
	Connection with Kuzunoha	*Shinodazuma* (plays of *kabuki* and *bunraku*)

	Mask	Contemporary Japanese culture associating fox with masks (festives) and traditional arts where masks were used for foxes (*noh* and *kyōgen*)
Kudagitsune	Bamboo pipe (bazooka)	"Tough guy" archetypes in popular culture
	Byakko	A "good omen" (Casal, 1959, p. 3; Nakamura, 2017)
	Shimenawa, shide	Sacred objects in Shinto (Schied, 2012, p. 79)
	Seiyū	A similar character was played by a voice actor of Kudagitsune – Matsuda Kenichiro (*Naruto*)
	Hakasego	Speech of "professors" in manga, anime, games (Kinsui, 2003)

Neko

Cat characters are probably one of the most popular animals which can be seen in anime, manga, and games. The *nekomimi* element itself has become an iconic attribute of Japanese popular culture; it is widely associated with playful and cute *moe* characters. Let us take a look at what cat *yōkai* represent in the world of *Onmyōji*.

The first character to be examined is Nekomata or a cat with two tails – a well-known Japanese *yōkai* re-created in the game. This is a small girl with white hair tied in a knot, wearing a stylized kimono. She has green eyes with vertical pupils; her eyebrows are inspired by the tradition of *hikimayu* or practice of shaving eyebrows and painting oval-shaped eyebrows on the forehead instead. As Tatebayashi (2010) explained, in the Heian period women belonging to aristocracy would practice *hikimayu* when becoming of age (a practice of removing eyebrows and repainting them on the forehead instead); the final result is also known as *maromayu* (p. 18). In the case of Nekomata, *maromayu* is an intertextual reference towards some features of the

Heian female beauty. Moreover, nowadays *maromayu* is a vivid element of character design that is needed to emphasize certain characters. Another prominent element of the character image is a huge white cat with two tails on the Nekomata's back. The cat is smiling and holding a coin in its paws. The white cat and Nekomata have similar features – probably this is a representation of how she looks in her true shape. An interesting point of Nekomata from *Onmyōji* is that instead of giving her a typical double-forked tail or transforming her into an actual cat, designers added the "backpack cat" detail. There is another variant of how she looks in the game: the alternative skin depicts her having two long ponytails that represent "the tail". The elements discussed earlier, such as *shimenawa*, *shide,* and *suzu* are also used in the character design.

Figure 3.16. Character image: Nekomata from the *Onmyōji* game.

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A double-fork tailed demonic cat who works at a famous Japanese pub. There is a scent of alcohol in the air; she is smiling, and her eyes are glowing. Both humans and yōkai come to the pub, but everyone is safe here. This harmony is achieved thanks to the strength of her. However, almost nobody knows that she was once an ordinary stray cat-yōkai. She is, in fact, a very shy and humble creature.

(a character description found in the game, my translation)

Here I should point out one highly remarkable detail – the connection of the Nekomata image with such concepts as a welcoming atmosphere, hospitality of a small Japanese shop, and good fortune. The elements of the character design approving this idea is *soroban* (a Japanese abacus) as well as the money/coin detailing of the costume. Moreover, the phrases Nekomata says in the game describe her as a hard-working, caring hostess of the pub. For example, "*my shop is busy every day from morning till night*"; "*my shop is my treasure*".

Taking these facts into account, I would like to propose the idea of the Nekomata image being based or inspired by the *maneki neko* ("a welcoming cat"), a popular symbol meant to attract guests and bring good fortune to merchants and enterprise-holders. Casal (1959) describes this talisman as "usually made of porcelain, with a white body and black splotches, it sits on its haunches and raises the left paw to beckon" (p. 65). As can be seen in Figure 3.16, Nekomata too has white fur with black splotches on her tails. *Maneki neko* are also usually cute-looking cats with a smiling face, and a similar smiling face is typical for both the heroine and her tiny cat on the back. Pate (1996) noted that the origins of the *maneki neko* concept can be found in a folk story about a stray cat coming to a small shop; the owner of the place, however, took good care of the poor thing, and in return, the cat started beckoning customers by sitting in front of the shop (para. 8). A similar story is introduced in the game: Nekomata was a stray cat not knowing how to properly use her magic abilities. She used to come to the pub, where a kind woman, the hostess of the shop, was nice to the cat and always fed her. Later she transformed into a girl and came to the shop again, and surprisingly, the woman recognized her. Since that time Nekomata had started helping the woman with her work at the pub.

This positive attitude to a *nekomata* character is rather different from its typical "*yōkai-ish*" portraits. According to Opler (1945), up to the fourteenth-century cats had been associated with upper classes and aristocracy, as only noble and wealthy families could afford to keep a cat as a pet; later the believes perceiving old female cats as monstrous creatures *nekomata* started invading the minds of people (p. 269). Cats could also take shape of somebody's wife by simply wrapping a wife's towel around its head (Casal, 1959, p. 62). In paintings too, nekomata were often portrayed with a towel around their heads (Figure 3.17; Figure 3.18); a tendency to depict the *nekomata* walking on its back legs can also be seen in the picture. A personal diary of a Japanese poet Fujiwara no Teika called *Meigetsuki* contains a story of a *nekomata* who had devoured an old woman's body, and transformed into her; later it happened to reveal its true shape due to alcohol intoxication (Toki, 2012, p. 154).

In opposition to all the scary legends describing the *nekomata* as a dangerous creature, Nekomata of the *Onmyōji* game is a very positive and cheerful character; she tries to make everyone, be it a human or a *yōkai*, in the pub feel comfortable and able to stop fights that are about to happen. Similar to Kudagitsune, she uses *hakasego:* this type of speech may be understood as a symbol of her wisdom and authority. Her attacks in the game are effective but not so violent compared to other characters: she summons her little cat helpers who then attack enemies. This image seems to be opposite of a demonic cat notorious for its malicious nature towards humans. A similarity with the *folkloric* nekomata image, however, still can be seen in

the depiction of a cute little helper of Nekomata standing on its back legs next to her in Figure 3.16.

The voice of Nekomata was done by a famous Japanese seiyū Horie Yui, for whom Nekomata is not the first cat character in her voicing career. She is famous for her cat characters, such as Catora (*Miss Monochrome: The Animation 3*), Carla (*Fairy Tail*), Black Cat (*Corpse Princess*), and Felix (*Re: ZERO – Starting Life in Another World*).

It is possible that character designers wanted to create two different cat-*yōkai* characters: one that would be closer to protagonists, and promoting hospitality and unity (Nekomata), and the other that would cause trouble to the main characters (Kyūmeineko). That is probably why Nekomata in *Onmyōji* possesses only several "key features" of the infamous double-tailed *yōkai* – an ability to transform itself into a human (to take a female form in particular) and its iconic tail.

Figure 3.17. Nekomata by Toriyama Sekien (*Gazu Hyakki Yakō*).

Figure 3.18. Nekomata as Mishima by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (*Sono Mama Jiguchi Myōkaikō Gojūsanbiki*).

The second *yōkai*-cat character existing in the game is Kyūmeineko, which can be translated as "a cat of nine lives". She has black cat ears and a black forked tail. She wears a short brown dress with huge voluminous sleeves. Her massive paws with sharp claws and strange fires coming out of them are her main weapon. Kyūmeineko also wears Japanese wooden sandals *geta* and a *suzu* necklace. She is depicted in a dynamic pose as if she is ready for a battle.

Just like the previous character Nekomata, she can be referred to as the *nekomata* because of her tail, although these two cats are complete opposites. Kyūmeineko is one of the first enemies to battle against in the game. She is egoistic and resentful; she is the one responsible for devouring a small sparrow, who is a close friend of Inugami, another fellow companion of Abe no Seimei. After being defeated by the mighty *onmyōji,* she decides to take vengeance on Seimei and all of his friends.
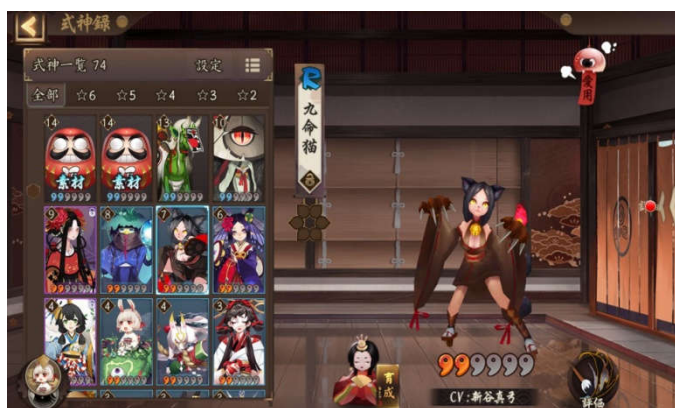
Figure 3.19. Character image: Kyūmeineko from the *Onmyōji* game.

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A catgirl with ears and a tail. Her favorite phrase "meow" makes her sound cute even if she is angry. After all, a cat is still a cat. Be careful when approaching her anyway – she has a bad temper. Although in a dangerous situation you may try petting her on the head gently; maybe she will change her mind. No matter how bad her attitude is, she is still a cute cat.

(a character description found in the game, my translation)

Being referred to as a "dangerous" creature, Kyūmeineko bears more resemblance with the evil goblin cats from *kaidan* stories compared to positive and cheerful Nekomata. Another similarity between Kyūmeineko and a typical demonic cat can be demonstrated by the fact that in folk tales and legends malicious cats were often depicted as beautiful females in disguise.

Some animals were believed to represent "the female, dark, negative, passive and terrestrial principles" of the yin dichotomy – this principle may be decoded in *netsuke* art: animals depicted in pairs usually belonged to different categories, either yin or yang (Volker, 1975, p. 7). Also in the Edo period dogs were more favored than cats – they were perceived as loyal to their masters, whereas cats were said to be "animals of the yin side" (*injū*); their skins were used for *shamisen* production, and at times instruments would sound strange because of grief and offense of killed animals (Toki, 2012, p. 154).

Probably one of the most vivid examples of this notion is an old legend called *The Vampire Cat of Nabeshima*. It is a story about the prince of Hizen who is suffering from a strange illness. This illness is caused by the black magic of a goblin cat that had attacked and killed prince's favorite court lady, and then transformed into her to foul and harass the man: she comes to his bedroom every night to put charms upon him (Milford, 1871, pp. 200-206). This legend is similar to the story of Tamamo no Mae to a certain extent; in both cases, goblin animals disguised as beautiful women caused trouble to a patriarchal society of old Japan. Another story portraying cats as dangerous and vengeful animals is *The Cat of Arima.* A kabuki play called *Arimatsuzome Sumō Yukata* is based on this story. The cat transforms into a monster after her owner (a lady called Otaki) had been killed by a jealous woman. The cat starts killing and devouring human flesh, and in the end, the whole Arima clan is slained by the cat. In other words, Kyūmeineko is indeed a bad-tempered and vengeful demonic cat that is on a par with the cat characters of the mentioned *kaidan* stories. However, she is represented less cruelly, even though she had killed one of the game characters. After all, it seems that the game creators were trying to emphasize her cuteness by giving her the *suzu* bell necklace – the one that pet owners would put on their favorite pets. In this regard, I would also like to point out the *nekogo* elements in the Kyūmeineko speech that additionally create an image of a cute cat.

Kyūmeineko is depicted as a black cat (she has black hair, ears, and tails), and according to the Taoist prejudices, both old and black cats are the ones to be careful with as they may develop into a monster (Volker, 1975, p. 27). However, some sources claim that black cats are regarded as lucky, although these cats are always connected with mysterious powers and called *karasuneko* (Simon, 1952, p. 287).

Taking a closer look at Kyūmeineko's paws, we can see that they are brown opposing to her ears and tails. There is a huge cat eye on each of her paws which radiates mysterious lights. This character detail may be a reference to the *nekomata no hi* phenomenon that stands for mysterious lights created by demonic cats. The phenomenon was described in a collection of *kaidan* tales called *Yamato Kaiiki* (1708): these strange lights (approximately of a *temari* ball size) appeared once at the household of a samurai; as soon as the goblin cat had been slain, all

the strange events at the household stopped (Kanda, 2005, Chapter 6, Section 1, para. 2). Kanda then explained the physics behind the phenomenon of glowing cat eyes connected with their physiology (Chapter 6, Section 2).

The voice of the character was created by Shintani Mayumi, who has worked for such projects as *The King of Fighters 2002* (a video game), *Kill la Kill*, and *FLCL*. Her character Angel from *The King of Fighters* is an eccentric young female, who teases her opponents in a very aggressive way and says *nya* occasionally. Similarly weird and troublesome are her other roles for anime, such as Nonon from *Kill la Kill*. Her unique voice has transformed Kyūmeineko from Onmyōji into a loud and annoying creature that is extremely self-centered.

Kyūmeineko is undoubtedly an antagonist who constantly tries to spoil the plans of the main characters. However, I cannot claim she is evil – her behavior reminds us of an ordinary cat who is at times naughty and mischieving. Thanks to the *kawaī* (*moe*) elements of the character (her necklace, the *nekogo*-based speech, the *nekomimi*), the overall impression is that of a spoiled cat who lacks love and attention.

To conclude, both characters are re-created as demonic cat goblins with double forked tails called *nekomata*. The common characteristics of both Nekomata and Kyūmeineko are their cat ears and tails, although in the case of Nekomata her tail represents an element of the "costume". Compared to Nekomata, Kyūmeineko has a more aggressive concept: she has sharp claws and depicted in a specific pose that may be interpreted as her readiness to fight. Both Nekomata and Kyūmeineko are depicted as attractive females. Nekomata in the game represents a lucky talisman rather than a monster cat.

Table 3.2. *Neko* (cat) characters of the *Onmyōji* game.

Cat character	Intertextual references	Sources of references
Nekomata	*Maromayu*	A Heian beauty standard; a feature of character design used in manga, anime, or games
	Connection with business	*Maneki neko* in contemporary Japanese culture
	Hakasego	Speech of "professors" in manga, anime, games (Kinsui, 2003)
	Cat standing on its back paws	The popular image of cats in folklore; depictions of *nekomata* by Toriyama

		Sekien (1776), Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1848)
	Seiyū	Cat characters were played by a voice actress of Nekomata – Horie Yui (*Miss Monochrome: The Animation 3*, *Fairy Tail, Corpse Princess, Re: ZERO – Starting Life in Another World*)
Kyūmeineko	Villain	*Kaidan* stories; The Vampire Cat of Nabeshima (Milford, 1871, pp. 200-206), The Cat of Arima
	Nekogo	A trope – a language of cats as perceived by manga, anime, games
	Color scheme (black)	Monster cats (Volker, 1975, p. 27)
	Cat eye	*Yamato Kaiiki* (Kanda, 2005, Chapter 6, Section 1, para. 2)
	Seiyū	Similar characters were played by a voice actress of Kyūmeineko – Shintani Mayumi (*The King of Fighters, Kill la Kill, FLCL*)
	Kawaī, moe	Types/stereotypes used in manga, anime, games

Kappa

Kappa is both a famous *yōkai* dwelling in the water and the name of the next *Onmyōji* game character to be analyzed. He has green skin, a bird beak, webbed hands and feet; a turtle carapace can be seen on his back. Kappa's headpiece element is analogous to an eggshell. Some plants are growing out of this headpiece. He is dressed in stylized Japanese clothes (probably inspired by children's clothes) of a dark blue color. The color scheme of the character includes dark blue and green undertones that emphasize the connection between Kappa and the water element. A massive neck warmer is covering up a substantial part of his face and neck. The character is holding a bubble in his hand. Kappa is wearing a hairstyle widely known as *okappa* ("bob cut"), which imitates a kappa head.

Kappa is an ayakashi dwelling in the water; he lives in a pond not far from the capital. It is obvious for everybody else except for Kappa himself that all of his thoughts are concentrated on Koi no Sei. But will Kappa be lucky enough to gain her attention? It would be better for him to find the courage to express his feelings, but Kappa is probably happy just to be near her.

<div align="right">(a character description found in the game, my translation)</div>

Figure 3.20. Character image: Kappa from the *Onmyōji* game.

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Kappa is one of the protagonists in the game. In one of the story mode episodes, Kappa reaches Abe no Seimei to ask for help: a stranger is caught spying on the girl living in the same pond. Kappa likes her but is unable to reveal his feelings to her. Koi no Sei (Carp Fairy) is, on the other hand, a cheerful *yōkai* who enjoys playing and talking to Kappa. Later she is kidnapped by the malicious fox, Yōko.

As can be understood from the description above, Kappa is an extremely shy, even harmless creature. However, it is also necessary to take a look at the *kappa* image back in the days.

A more or less clear definition of the kappa character, as well as its appearance, was already formulated in the second half of the eighteenth century: people acknowledged a specific plate on the kappa head filled with water that was believed to make the creature strong; these mysterious creatures were also considered big lovers of the sumo wrestling (Ozawa, 2011, p. 28). Yanagita wrote that the stories about kappas challenging people to wrestle were popular in the Western part of Japan compared to its Eastern regions; he also mentioned that *kappas* would gradually come from the back to catch people, even if they were able to win the sumo fight with one of their representatives (2016, p. 73). The characteristics of the kappa may vary depending

on the region, but the common features are a body of the same size as that of a child, a "plate" on the head, and the hairstyle called "okappa" (Kim, 1994, p. 17).

In legends, the kappa is notorious for pulling humans and horses into the water: a legend from Tateshina (the Nagano prefecture) described a *kappa* (here the *kappa* is called *kawatarō*) who was living in the nearest Akanuma pond, and took a shape of an eleven or twelve-year-old child; he then climbed up a rock where he was sitting and inviting the people passing by to pull his finger, and at the end, he was able to fool many people and pull them into a pond (Shioiri, 1996, p. A20). Shiina (2013) mentioned that one of the actions typical to this *yōkai* is their hunt for *shirikodama*, a mysterious thing situated in a human fundament (p. 82); in other words, the kappa would take its victim to a river or pond, where they would pull the *shirikodama* out of a human body.

Foster (1998) generalized the relationship between the folk and the kappa as following:

Clearly, the kappa is recognized as a threatening and mischievous creature with lethal tendencies, in many ways a metaphor for the violent potential of the natural world. But there is also a sense of both foolishness and honesty associated with it; these aspects hint at the dual nature of the kappa as a trickster figure with negative and destructive qualities, and also a water/agriculture deity with positive regenerative qualities.

(p. 8)

In art, earlier representations of the *kappa* referring to the eighteenth century (*Wakan Sansaizue* and *Nihon Sankai Meibutsuz*ue), had one particular feature: authors were depicting the *kappa* similar to the monkey, with short hair covering the body (Ozawa, 2011, p. 31, p. 32). Starting from the second half of the eighteenth century, the *kappa* image started changing: the example of the Toriyama Sekien's depiction already demonstrates combined features of the frog and turtle (p. 34). The nineteenth-century *kappa* image transforms into something similar to its newer shape widely described as including the green carapace, a pointy mouth and a cute small body (pp. 38-39). Figures 3.21 and 3.22 depict variations of the *kappa* images typical for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively.

The meaning of the word "kappa" itself which can be translated as "river child" seems to have impacted the *Onmyōji* character a lot. Kappa is truly a child: he wears the *okappa* hairstyle which was popular among the Japanese children. He cannot cope with some problems himself and desperately needs the help of friends. Even though Kappa throws his bubbles to fight enemies during the game battle process, he is also able to use these magical abilities to save Koi no Sei.

Being unable to deal with difficult situations himself, Kappa is still a caring and compassionate friend. The headpiece on his head has replaced the infamous *sara* (plate) – this detail transforms the character into a baby bird that has just come out of the egg. A scarf or muffler is so big that it makes Kappa's face seem smaller, therefore creating a disproportion typical to *kawaī* characters. Foster suggested that such trends of the *kappa* depiction are initiated by the process of folklore evolving into folklorism – the *kappa* images found in manga and other popular sources are not "grotesque" or "malicious", they are usually cute characters embodying nostalgia; these characters tend to borrow the most notable parts of the original kappa images such as the plate, the beak, the carapace (1998, p. 15).

Figure 3.21. Kappa by Sawaki Sūshi (*Hyakkai Zukan)*.

Figure 3.22. Kappa: 12 types by Sakamoto Kōsetsu (*Suiko Jūnihin no Zu*).

© National Diet Library

It may seem the game praises and nourishes a cute side of the *kappa*, ignoring the richness of its image existing in folk legends, yet if one investigates more during the game process, it is possible to find something substantial and worth analyzing. For example, Kappa is one of many children of the *kappa* family who is constantly being bullied by his brothers. Kappa

is kind towards humans, whereas his brothers find it necessary to make human females marry them against their will. Similarly, in folk legends and local *kappa* lore, women were the ones to be assaulted and harassed by *kappas* (Takemura, 2008, p. 30). Even though Kappa likes hiding in the water and spying on humans, he does this only because he wants to know about the human world as much as possible. Kappa admits that the human world is warm and welcoming, and dreams about becoming a human himself.

Kappa speaks using the so-called *teineigo* or a formal type of speech, which is "any inflected form that ends in –*mas(u)* or *des(u)* (Wetzel, 2004, p. 8). This type of speech is used "to show a speaker's respect or politeness directly to the listener, as well as to make his speech elegant" (Shinoda, 1973, p. 66). In other words, this specific speech pattern chosen for the character emphasizes his humble nature towards both humans and fellow *yōkai* creatures.

The seiyū of Kappa is Hoshi Sōichirō, who is famous with his young male characters-protagonists, such as Kaoru from *Ai Yori Aoshi* and Kira from *Mobile Suit Gundam SEED*. His gentle and young voice may have become a perfect match for naive, soft-hearted Kappa.

To sum up, Kappa from *Onmyōji* is undoubtedly the black sheep of his kappa family. Unlike dangerous creatures that are notorious for killing people and dragging livestock underwater, Kappa, on the other hand, is attracted to the human world. Yet his appearance is comprised of such iconic elements as the carapace, the bird beak, and green skin, some features are changed to represent a cuter, less aggressive-looking character. Although Kappa has the power to control water, he prefers using this ability for good purposes.

Table 3.3. Kappa character of the *Onmyōji* game.

Intertextual references	Sources of references
Okappa hairstyle	Common hairstyles for children in Japan
Kawaī (big eggshell, beak, oversize scarf)	Types/stereotypes used in manga, anime, games
Teineigo	An image of a polite speaker (Shinoda, 1973, p. 66)
Seiyū	Similar characters were played by a

	voice actor of Kappa – Hoshi Sōichirō *(Ai Yori Aoshi, Mobile Suit Gundam SEED)*

Yuki-onna

The last *yōkai* character to be analyzed in this thesis is Yuki-onna (literally translated as "snow maiden"). She is a female *yōkai* wearing a long cape and a short dress. Yuki-onna is depicted flying in the air. The color scheme of the character is mainly comprised of white and blue undertones. Two fur pompoms and a blue ribbon are used as dress decoration. Her clothes are covered with the snowflake ornament. The headpiece element resembles both feathers and icicles.

A beautiful girl who can control snow and cold winds that are strong enough to freeze your whole body. Her single word can cause a tempest; she summons snowstorms with a single movement. It is impossible, however, it is impossible to see into her soul – her face usually says nothing about her feeling. Does this mean her heart is as cold as her facial expression is? Nobody truly knows anything about her past. In the end, will anybody show up to melt her heart?

(a character description found in the game, my translation)

Figure 3.23. Character image: Yuki-onna from the *Onmyōji* game.

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The very first thing to point out when it comes to the game version of Yuki-onna is the color scheme of the character. The legends about Yuki-onna mention her immaculate beauty and her white clothes (Hearn, 2005, p. 113). A *Sōugi Shokoku Monogatari* collection of stories composed by Sōgi, a Japanese poet and traveler, contains a story describing a mysterious ghostly,

almost transparent, woman whose face, skin, kimono, and even hair were all white (Sōgi, 1685, pp. 89-91).

The hair color of the Edo period Yuki-onna, however, transforms into black with the help of Sawaki Sūshi, who was one of the first painters to create a visual image of the *yōkai*; subsequently, the following attempts to depict her were mainly inspired by the *Hyakkai Zukan* scroll series created by Sawaki Sūshi (Figure 3.24). It needs to be pointed here, however, that there is another image of Yuki-onna found in the Edo period scroll collection known as *Bakemono Zukushi* (author unknown), where Yuki-onna is barely seen, and rather represents a transparent silhouette than a woman with certain features. Each work depicting Snow Maiden is inevitably inspired by the artistic trends popular at a concrete period: for instance, a particular (at times even idealistic) look females depicted on scrolls and paintings had. In the case of Sawaki Sūshi's depiction, one needs to consider the beauty specificities and standards of the Edo period, when *bijinga* (depictions of beautiful women) were praised. Therefore, it is understandable that these clichés and ideals were reflected in the work. For example, black hair had been a "symbol of feminine beauty since the Heian period" (Chō, 2012, p. 244). Some of the typical female representations found in many *bijinga* examples were of "round faces, straight eyes with flat eyelids, and small receding chins" (Miller, 2000, p. 177), which also can be seen on the painting created by Sawaki Sūshi.

Figure 3.24. Yuki-onna by Sawaki Sūshi (*Hyakkai Zukan*).

Figure 3.25. Yuki-onna by Toriyama Sekien (*Gazu Hyakki Yakō*).

The outfit of Yuki-onna from *Onmyōji* is on first sight inspired by distinct elements of the traditional kimono: for instance, the left side of the dress is wrapped over the right side. The right sleeve is long and voluminous as that of the kimono. The main color of the dress and cape is white just as the Yuki-onna clothes described in Hearn's version of the story, but with a strong presence of blue (it is presumably associated with ice), dark grey and gold undertones as well. The presence of white can also be found in the work of both Sawaki Sūshi (Figure 3.24) and Toriyama Sekien (Figure 3.25), which also present Yuki-onna as the woman in a white kimono that is harmoniously blended with the "snowy" background. However, it is also vital to mention here that the blue pigment already existed: indigo, for instance, was used for various paintings (Yamasaki & Emoto, 1979, p. 14). Judging by the same scroll series, Sawaki did incorporate blues into his works, although not in the case of the Yuki-onna painting. To analyze this perspective, it might be important to elaborate more on the depiction and aesthetics of snow in Japanese art. An Edo period series of scrolls illustrating the Ise Monogatari collection of narratives contain a depiction of the Mount Fuji covered with snow. The outer side of the mountain is painted white, the blue color used here to emphasize the inner part of the mount that is also covered with white dots – this is an unnaturalistic outlook on snow (Matsuoka, 2012, p. 5). The blue color was also associated with water, and some works, such as one of the winter landscapes by Utagawa Hiroshige (*Meguro Drum Bridge and Sunset Hill*) included both snow and water to create an impression of stillness based on "the contrast of white snow and blue river" (Wang, 2016, p. 116). Moreover, it seems that within the Japanese realm of perception many natural phenomena such as "moonlight, dew, frost, and snow were almost always considered white" (Shirane, 2011, p. 46). Shirane also points out that snow, together with other notions and topics connected with winter "constructed a monochromatic landscape that shares much with

Muromachi ink painting (*suibokuga*) and rock-and-sand gardens (*kare-sansui*)" (p. 50). Thus, it can be said that such a "monochromatic" perception of snow could have become a factor influencing on the typical image of Yuki-onna, particularly on the color of her clothes.

The game version of Yuki-onna seems to be inspired by an earlier tradition of using white in the design of snow-related supernatural creatures. Also, white hair is a feature that is often associated with "cold-hearted" characters in the anime and manga realms (Doi, Mori & Sakai, 2014, p. 253). Intentionally or not, in this sense it can be said that there is a clear intertextual reverence towards the story told by Sōgi – at least, in the depiction of her hair color. In the context of its importance within the design framework of the Yuki-onna from *Onmyōji*, white becomes more of secondary importance, while the main accents are made on the use of blue undertones. In contemporary software design, blue is widely associated with cold temperatures (Brown, 1999, p. 76). Another compelling example of contemporary understanding of blue undertones and their connection to the "coldness" concept is a festive version of Hatsune Miku created as a Hokkaido-promoting mascot. Although an original character is designed as of mainly green undertones, for the Yuki Miku character inspired by "snow" motifs, the color scheme was changed into white and blue (*mizuiro*) colors (Asami, 2015, p. 43). To conclude this part analyzing the color choices used for the character of Yuki-onna, it can be said that the latest trends in animation production and design have inarguably impacted the approach to character design, not to mention the influence of western animation on Japanese media, and vice versa. Times change and so does a symbolical meaning of colors, as well as technological progress allows creators playing with textures, shadows, and color combinations that had never been used before.

Other elements of the Yuki-onna costume such as the white pom-poms, blue ribbon, and over-knee socks are something that is incorporated into female clothes of today on a mass scale. The *zettai ryōiki* detail, therefore, helps to construct a typical *moe* character. In the game, Yuki-onna can barely be referred to as a "woman" – the game defines her as a "girl" (*shōjo*), which is something drastically different from what one may find in the folk tales or depictions introduced earlier. As I explained earlier in the Nekomata part, in the setting of contemporary Japanese culture or, it will be more correct to say "subcultures" (*otaku*, etc.), the image of a young and attractive female is widely being fetishized. If in the case of Sanbi no Kitsune and the cat-girls from *Onmyōji* one of the main fetishized aspects is connected with anthropomorphism and the appealing image of "furry" girls, in the case of Yuki-onna one may notice praising and attraction to "cold" female characters, or *kūdere.* The term implies a certain type of *moe* characters that do not express any emotions at all but still are attracted to main male characters. It seems that in many cases Yuki-onna re-created as a character of anime or manga is perceived as a *kūdere* type

(for instance, in the *Rozario + Vampire* series, refer to page 45). In the case of the Japanese "Snow Maiden", the distinct elements of her appearance such as her connection to snow, and white hair perfectly match the *kūdere* personality. Here it must be pointed that there is nothing new in fetishizing unemotional, robotic, or non-human female characters in the case of Japan. Some of the origins connected with this attraction to non-existent characters, including fetishizing and sexualizing robots, may be explained through the framework of "Shinto-techno-animism", which is "a cosmology that keeps the boundaries between nature and culture, subject and object, humans permeable and fluid" (Kaerlein, 2015, p. 368). Kaerlein himself, however, criticizes the so-called "techno-animism" theories for their potential threat to trigger people being "treated like things and not the other way around" (p. 369). Together with the mentioned "techno-animistic" theories, equally important are other premises explaining the existence of various *moe* types (including *kūdere* characters). I imply social, historical, and psychological aspects reflecting hidden hopes and unrealized expectations of men towards women: their social and hierarchical roles within the Japanese society, in particular. As an example, the Yuki-onna tale presented by Hearn can be understood as a narrative revealing the dualistic nature of a woman. First, Yuki-onna is portrayed as a dangerous supernatural creature bringing death to unfortunate souls, and later, disguised as a beautiful lady, becomes a wife and mother. The sacred aspects of femininity – life and death – are rooted in Japanese mythology and philosophy. They are embodied as the goddess Izanami, who is both a creator of the Japanese islands (together with her husband Izanagi) and a fierce ruler of the Land of the Dead (Yomi no Kuni). Thus, the image of Yuki-onna conceals both of these aspects, and in its contemporary form delivered by the *Onmyōji* game, the attractiveness of the character is expressed through the *moe* elements, while her connection with death is clear and undeniable.

The intertextual connections between "the old" and "the new" positioning of Yuki-onna become even more vivid when one tries to analyze how Yuki-onna is "framed" within the game. Folk tales more or less touching upon the Yuki-onna image are often intertwined with death and the dialogue between a human and the *yōkai* world. For instance, in the Akita prefecture (Ogachi district, Ugo town, Nishimonai area) Yuki-onna was believed to be a malicious spirit of a woman who had passed away during the snowstorm (Hoshi, 2010, p. 22). The Hearn story, as was already pointed out, too describes the interaction of a man with the Snow Maiden, who had taken the life of the man's close person. The motives of "*yōkai* interacting with a human" and "a human experiencing death" also correspond with what one may find in the character description section of the *Onmyōji* game – this allows interpreting such re-creation as an example of intertextuality, as both of the motives are typical for the discourses containing the Snow Maiden. According to the story, Yuki-onna once meets a strange man who is desperately looking for

something in the middle of a heavy snowstorm (which, of course, initiated by her in the first place). He mentions that he is hoping to find a rare magical flower, a "snow lotus", to place it on the grave of his passed away wife. Sadly, in the end, the man dies. However, Yuki-onna decides to bring the flower instead of him, although she is astonished by how irrational, if not stupid, his act is. In this story, there is a footprint of *mono no aware* – the image of a beautiful flower lying on a snowy grave reminds how truly fragile human life is. Although there is no pictorial representation of this scene in the game (it only exists in a textual form), our imagination and emotions are instantly engaged in processing and visualizing the scene.

No matter how visually appealing or fetishized the image of the character is it does not impact the plot of the game by any means. The key emphasis here is not on how Yuki-onna was perceived by a man – as in the case of the tales mentioning Yuki-onna (tales by Sōgi, Hearn), but on how she perceives the human world with all its temporariness and irrational actions. From this point of view, one may find that the image of Yuki-onna as positioned in the game has common points with the philosophic principle of *mujō* (impermanence, lack of constancy) and other premises of the Buddhist view of life. Possibly, it is due to her skeptical outlook on the human world she accompanies "the bad guy" of the game and plays an antagonist role for a while. Nevertheless, she later helps Abe no Seimei during his travel in the Heian Kitan (Heian Tales of Wonders) episode of the game.

Speaking of other intertextual aspects of the game, there are some points to note regarding the *seiyū* of Yuki-onna, a Japanese voice actress Suwa Ayaka. Some of her famous roles were too connected with *kūdere* characters, such as Ninjabayashi Ruri (*Kanojo ga Furagu wo Oraretara*) and Azuma Tokaku (*Akuma no Ridoru*).

On the first gaze, Yuki-onna appears to be a ruthless and dangerous character due to her connection with death and destructive tendencies. On the other hand, her pictorial and behavioral image contain elements of *moe* characters, which contrasts with her actions. The relation to the main characters is ambiguous. Being a senseless creature that does not approve humans' actions, at times she seems to be interested in how human beings perceive the world. After being defeated by Abe no Seimei and his friends, she starts helping the protagonists.

Table 3.4. Yuki-onna character of the *Onmyōji* game.

Intertextual references	Sources of references
White color, death motif, connection with a man	A version of the folk story by Lafcadio Hearn (2005)

White color, connection with a man	*Sōugi Shokoku Monogatari*
White color	*Hyakkai Zukan* scroll series created by Sawaki Sūshi
Death motif	Folk stories (Akita prefecture) (Hoshi, 2010, p. 22)
Seiyū	Anime (*Kanojo ga Furagu wo Oraretara, Akuma no Ridoru)*
Mujō, mono no aware	Japanese aesthetic and philosophical principles
Kūdere, moe	Types/stereotypes used in manga, anime, games

Summary

The analysis of intertextual references and relationships has revealed that the *yōkai* in the *Onmyōji* game are inspired and influenced by the *yōkai* art, legends, and folktales of the past. However, it can be said that the mentioned references provide thoughtful insights related to the present issues and tendencies of contemporary Japan.

First of all, the game acknowledges its connection with the Heian period, although some elements of the character design may be recognized as referring to the periods other than Heian (the examples of Sanbi no Kitsune and Yōko); there are many references towards concepts familiar for contemporary society. The game creators also play with such traditional elements as *kimono*, masks, *suzu* bells, and other objects that are used in order to create a certain character image. In addition, they mix original *yōkai* notions with other concepts as was in the case of Nekomata – she represents a weird amalgamation of the *maneki neko* and the infamous cat monster in the game. Thus, by combining multiple concepts and ideas from different spheres of Japanese culture, history, and religion – the game re-creates *yōkai* in an eclectic, hybrid form. Similar hybridity is what characterizes Japan nowadays – it is tangible in society, architecture, fashion, religion, and other spheres.

In other words, from the standpoint of post-structuralist theory, meanings and images are quite unstable and constantly changing. By identifying intertextual references existing in the text we can define their origins and track drastic changes in these objects. Hence, *yōkai* for those

creating games and consuming them, become a reflection of culture, society, and trends. How these factors potentially affect images of *yōkai* is going to be explained in the next chapter.

YŌKAI RE-CREATION AS THE REFLECTION OF THE JAPANESE SOCIETY

Hybrid *yōkai*, hybrid Japan

One of the patterns characterizing the *yōkai* characters of the *Onmyōji* game is their hybridity – a mixture of elements belonging to opposite realms, time frames, and concepts. Numerous intertextual references coexist in one character, but this seemingly chaotic composition of ideas only contributes to our deeper understanding of the *yōkai* re-creation phenomenon.

The *Onmyōji* universe is the place where *yōkai* interfere in the human realm. They imitate humans by taking their appearances and doing "human" jobs – or at least they pretend to do so. As a result, the infamous *yōkai* end up looking like humans, but not exactly humans – Sanbi no Kitsune looks like someone representing the Japanese courtesan class, and Nekomata reminds us of that cheerful *izakaya* owner in the neighborhood, except for some monstrous features, of course. Kappa too, desperately wants to become a human, although his family members follow the scenario typical to folk tales: they prefer kidnapping women and cause trouble to humans. In the game, the border between the human and monster worlds becomes so thin, that the majority of characters are human-like, except for their paws, claws, tails, and other elements of "monstrosity".

The hybridization does not end just there, however. A "classic" *yōkai* – Yuki-onna – obtains the qualities of a *kūdere* character – a sort of the cliché used in the character-building in manga, anime, and games. This is an example of *intertextual* connections and interdependency of popular industries – the *yōkai* of *Onmyōji* become hybrids in the sense that they are the result of the interaction of these popular industries.

Tamamo no Mae is hybrid too as this character is male and female at the same time. The transformation, in this case, goes beyond the popular motif where a beautiful girl transforms into a fox.

The characters are also hybrids when it comes to the number of details referring to modernity and traditions. On the one hand, both Kohaku and Kudagitsune are foxes that are widely associated with magic and religious practices – the real objects used in Shinto rituals, such as the *suzu* bells, the *shimenawa* rope exist in the character design to emphasize the connection between the fox and the sacred. On the other hand, other details of these characters denote their relation to modernity: the bamboo pipe of Kudagitsune, which is a very tradition-inspired element of design, suddenly transforms into a bazooka.

The actions and personalities of popular *yōkai* are dramatically changed. In *Onmyōji* the characters become hybrids of past *yōkai* tales and present-day concerns. The fox is still a seductress, but the main conflict for her is the conflict between *uchi* and *soto* – her willingness to be part of the human world and further rejection by the human friend. Another fox character is a creepy male stalking young and reckless creatures to get what he wants – the motif rarely seen or even absent in folktales about the *kitsune*.

Some of the playable monsters such as Brother and Sister Kyonshi do not belong to the Japanese bestiary, although regarded part of the *ayakashi* (*yōkai*) realm according to the game. In this regard, the very notion of *ayakashi* (*yōkai*) becomes hybrid more than ever. For example, although the *kitsune* concept was massively influenced by Chinese folklore, I am convinced that a few *yōkai* fans in Japan acknowledge its "foreign" origins. Not only does the game remind of such an intertextual and transcultural legacy, but it also reimagines the *yōkai* notion and its meaning for the present.

The vast number of examples of such hybridization leads to the question of why *yōkai* are re-created as hybrids in *Onmyōji*.

I suggest that the hybridization of the game's *yōkai* is similarly reflected in the postmodern Japanese society, and thus it is a continuation of the current trends and tendencies existing in Japan.

Japanese Society as a Postmodern Society

It is vital to start with why I label contemporary Japan as a postmodern society, and why this assumption has a right to exist in the framework of this research. Several theories deal with modernity: some of them presuppose that contemporary Japan is a postmodern society, and others simply question such a statement.

Similarly to post-structuralism (where I position my research on intertextuality), postmodernism advocates for the existence of multiple ideas and agendas. These ideas might contradict with each other and be mutually exclusive. Postmodernism in its essence is a continuation of the language-based theory of deconstruction applied to the "world as a whole" (Grenz, 1996, p. 6).

Dunn & Castro (2012) provided some characteristics of the postmodern society including "self-pluralism", advanced technologies, and "materialistic believes" (pp. 356-357). In the framework of this research, all three aspects are meaningful and correspond well to the current route Japan is following as a society. Moreover, Kensy (2001) argues that Japan has historically

developed specific cultural features (the language, *zen* principles, etc.) that allow the country to survive and exist in the postmodern social milieu (p. 77).

Although in this research I do not aim to approach Japan from the standpoint of any modernity theory, including postmodernism (the study is mainly concerned with the construction and deconstruction of *yōkai* images), I still strongly believe that the notion of postmodern Japan should be integrated into the discussion of how contemporary society can manipulate meanings and able to change images and thoughts.

Hybridization in relation to Japan

The concept of hybridity is inarguably a broad framework of research. This notion appeared in Bhabha's (2004) critical discussion of cultural essentialism. He argues for the existence of the hybrid theory which would create a "third space" for both colonizers and colonized and hence contribute to the postcolonial discourse.

Kraidy (2005) suggested the following definition of hybridity: "Rather than a single idea or a unitary concept, hybridity is an association of ideas, concepts, and themes that at once reinforce and contradict each other" (p. vi). A similar mixture of various concepts and ideas was acknowledged by scholars specializing in the studies of Japanese Culture and Society. In opposition to the Nihonjinron discourse, perceiving Japan as a homogenous society with a culture exclusively nurtured and raised by the Japanese people, some of the contemporary researchers argue that such positioning of Japanese culture is, in fact, detrimental to a deeper and complex understanding of the subject. Kubota (2003) is convinced that "…Japanese culture cannot be defined as mono-ethnic or purely unique; rather, it has integrated experiences of various groups, constituting a hybrid culture" (p. 77). Some studies discussing and analyzing Japan incorporate the notion of hybridity and approach it from various perspectives: Japanese weddings (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2001), visual kei (a popular music genre) (McLeod, 2013), gender and race in Japanese magazines (Darling-Wolf, 2006), hybrid identities of *hāfu* in Japan (Kamada, 2009). These examples are illustrative of Japan's feasibility in terms of representing cultural and social hybridity.

As Krady stated, "both empirical and textual approaches to hybridity must therefore be situated in a context whose structural elements ought to be explained" (2005, p. viii). Similarly to this pattern, I will subsequently discuss the following elements exemplifying the existence of hybridity in postmodern Japan. At the same time, these elements are the logical continuation of the intertextual analysis of the *yōkai* characters from *Onmyōji*, which allows understanding the rationale behind character re-creation on a deeper level.
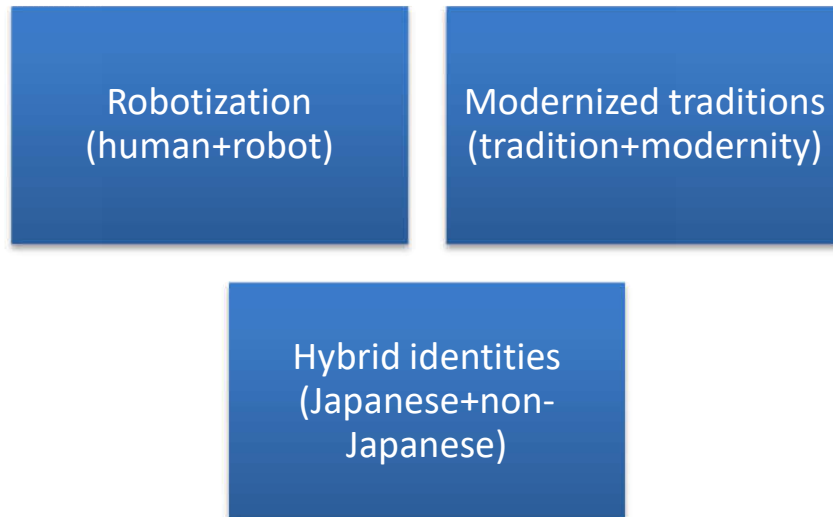
Robotization (human+robot)	Modernized traditions (tradition+modernity)

Hybrid identities (Japanese+non-Japanese)

Figure 4.1. Aspects used as the examples of hybridization in postmodern Japan.

Robotization

The *Onmyōji* game universe is a fantasy version of Japan, where humans are only part of the discourse. Throughout the game, players come across the characters that may look human-like and even have a close connection to ordinary folk. However, the majority of them are still *ayakashi,* no matter how hard they are trying to prove their benevolence towards humans. Many of the game characters such as Sanbi no Kitsune, Kappa, and Yuki-onna are driven by the question of the essence of being a human. In a sense, these characters constantly live on the border of monstrosity and humaneness: they have an opportunity to blend with humans by the means of shape-shifting or remain invisible while silently watching humans doing their "weird" everyday things.

The idea of "striving to understand what it takes to be a real human" is a concept often appearing in contemporary art and popular culture of Japan. The *Roppongi Crossing 2019: Connecxions* exhibition that took place at the Mori Art Museum in Roppongi, Tokyo, presented a couple of memorable pieces of art that were questioning the nature of a human. Let us also not forget about the famous anime movie by Mamoru Oshii – *Ghost in the Shell* – similarly dedicated to this concept. And, what is more crucial, in both of these cases humaneness is approached and perceived from the same angle: cyber technologies and robots.

In postmodern Japan, robotics is a rapidly developing sphere of production. Some of the Japanese companies providing public services already use robots that discharge some of the staff's duties. Asami (1994) differentiates between an industrial robot (engaged in production) and a service robot – "a substitute that would replace one like a servant" (p. 22). Such substitutes

can cope with numerous tasks: from house cleaning to entertainment. When it comes to the factors stimulating the demand for service robots, Asami pointed out the following ones:

> *Shortages in the simple labor market, created by the popular trend toward higher education levels, shortages in the aging specialized labor market, created by the increasing ages of highly skilled technical personnel, and trends toward replacing manual by robotized operation in hazardous work.*

(1994, p. 24)

In 2017, a famous chain of sushi restaurants *Hamazushi* completed the task of introducing the Pepper robot in all 488 restaurants all over Japan[10]. The robot has a cute smiling face and the high-pitched voice of a child. Whenever customers enter the shop, Pepper serves as a receptionist and politely asks the number of guests and suggests choosing between a table and a counter. Guests simply touch the screen to make a choice. Another example, yet slightly more bizarre than the previous one, is a Japanese brand of hotels called *Henn na Hotel* (Strange Hotel) that is operated by robots. The hotels are especially famous because of their receptionists: one is a robot, another one is a female attendant robot, and the last one (which is also able to "speak" English) is a dinosaur.

Another function of robots in Japan is nurturing and taking care of elderly people. According to Tanioka (2019), "as the demands and needs for quality health care rise particularly in environments poor in human resources, and among the older adult population, the use of human-machine processes are intensified" (p. 19). In order to fully understand the problem stated by Tanioka, it is necessary to acknowledge its roots or factors that led to the current situation in Japan. It is known that in 2009 the aging rate of Japanese society reached 22.8%, and in 2040 it is expected to dramatically rise to 40.5% (Imaizumi et al., 2010, p. 63). Aside from this factor, Japan is also struggling with the so-called *koritsushi* ("solitary death") problem: when elderly people in Japan who are living alone suddenly collapse, and in many cases, their bodies remain unnoticed until the neighbors start complaining about the odour. Kanawaku (2018) provided the data regarding the increasing percentage of the *koritsushi* cases: the statistics from the Tokyo area demonstrated that the cases of "unnatural deaths involving *koritsu-shi* has been increasing year after year, with 36% of cases being *koritsu-shi* in 2016" (p. 100). The author also mentioned that men are more subject to the *koritsushi* compared to women, and concluded that "*koritsu-shi* cases are expected to increase in Japan in the future" (p. 100). For Japan, in particular, the elderly are a highly vulnerable stratum that needs specific attention of the society. Therefore, the

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[10] Robotstart, Inc. (2018*). Pepper ga Hamazushi no zen 488 Tenpo ni Dōnyū! Pepper Taiken Shiyō Kyanpēn wo Jisshi*. https://robotstart.info/2018/02/06/hamazushi-pepper.html

introduction of robots in nursing care is promoted and supported by the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry, as well as the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare[11].

Robots and robotic devices created for the elderly are massively developed and produced in Japan at the moment. Robot Innovation Research Center (AIST – National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology) has developed 98 devices for nursing care, and "15 commercial products have been deployed for nursing care" (Hirukawa, 2018, slide 18). Not only do robots help elderly people with maintaining physical health, but they also have a positive effect on mental health. One of the famous products developed by AIST is Paro, a robot designed in the form of a baby harp seal. When it comes to therapeutic effects of Paro on the elderly, it was investigated that "interaction with Paro improved their moods, making them more active and communicative with each other and caregivers" (Wada et al., 2005, p. 2785). Another well-known robot model is AIBO, a robot dog produced by Sony. Fujita (2004) demonstrated that AIBO can activate human emotions and assist with human-to-human communication.

Aside from public services, medical and health keeping spheres, robots in Japan are also entertainment. There are already certain robot models that are created to perform on the stage as singers and dancers. For some people the need for such performers might remain questionable; however, there are still those who appreciate the mixture of technology and entertainment. One of the most successful cases of such mixture is the Crypton Future Media Company that created good-looking characters that perform songs in front of large audiences with the help of the Vocaloid software. The characters including Hatsune Miku have achieved the status of idols both in Japan and internationally. It can be said that in postmodern Japan so-called "robot idols" and other humanoid robots used for entertainment purposes are a rapidly developing and promising sphere of robotics (Nakano et al., 2012, p. 1).

To conclude this part of the chapter, I would like to emphasize how the postmodern Japanese society starts depending on technologies to increase the quality of life. Major social problems push Japan to seek newer approaches such as "hiring" robots instead of regular human workers, which allows stating that year by year Japan is one step closer to a hybrid society where human and non-human units coexist and cooperate.

Modernized traditions

The approach to character building and design in the *Onmyōji* game is a striking example of one of the traits characteristic of postmodern Japanese society - the coexistence of traditions and modernity. Although *yōkai* prevail among the *shikigami* group, which is understandable as

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[11] Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. (2017). Revision of the Priority Areas to Which Robot Technology is to be Introduced in Nursing Care. https://www.meti.go.jp/english/press/2017/1012_002.html

onmyōdo practitioners used *yōkai* as their familiars, there are also outstanding characters personifying culturally important objects as one of the Noh masks (Hannya), the legendary sword (Onigiri), Shinto deities (Inari Miketsu), even the character from Taketori Monogatari – Kaguya Hime. Such manipulations with traditional or even better - widespread notions of *shikigami* in a sense represent the influence of postmodern tendencies on popular culture and imagination. The fox seductress and the fox familiar residing in the bamboo pipe are traditional and historically correct reproductions of earlier *yōkai* images, however, their design and background stories are made to be successful in the postmodern society.

I would like to start with the case of Japanese corporate culture as one of the spheres where modernity and traditions are overlapping, not mutually exclusive components.

The biggest companies of the Japanese and international markets usually have connections with Shinto shrines. Some of the examples are the shrines that are affiliated with Toyota, Mitsubishi, Mitsui, and other significant companies.

Unlike some other religious and philosophical systems, Shinto is close to "down to earth" problems, such as prosperity and wealth. It allows approaching wealth from a spiritual perspective: there are numerous gods and goddesses that may help a person in need of food, money, success in business and studies. Therefore, it is not rare when companies pray to gods and make offerings to reach success on the Japanese and international markets. About this matter, Dobbelaere (1986) argued that Shinto is, in fact, a civil religion that "plays an important role in strengthening the communal bonds in the companies" (p. 139). According to Honda (1984) companies are "the new "villages" in the industrial society, corresponding to the old villages in the previous agricultural society". (p. 27). "Consequently, either they support the traditional local festivals, or they have their own annual matsuri" (Dobbelaere, 1986, p. 139). In other words, companies are modernized rural communities that were able to stay in connection with their deities.

Figure 4.2. A platform with a giant lantern (*nebuta*) with the names of companies on it.

Companies, as already stated above, have successfully integrated themselves into locally based events and festivals that are organized regularly. One of the crucial moments of the preparation for such festivals is creating a banner with a sponsor company name that would be seen by numerous visitors and tourists. Sometimes banners are separate pieces installed on the streets. Banners can also be part of the platforms parading through the streets of cities during festivals. One such example is Figure 4.2 depicting a platform with a beautiful lantern in the shape of mythical creatures, demons, and gods related to the local lore of Tsukuba city. The sponsors' names can be seen on the banners adjusted under the main *nebuta* object.

Another case of traditions influenced by modernity is images and activities of Shinto and Buddhism organizations (mainly shrines and temples) in postmodern Japan.

According to Inoue (2003), "it goes without saying that all customs are directly influenced by social change, and Shinto customs are no exception" (p. 196). The differences between Shinto in the past and its current form are inarguably distinct and can be tracked on many levels. The perspective I am going to approach in regards to this topic is the popular divination service shrines provide. It is *omikuji*, or divination where lots are drawn to reveal what the gods have prepared for an individual. Itō (2003) found the following:

> *Early methods included the drawing of marked strips of paper, wood or bamboo, or the waving of a sacred stick (gohei) over a pile of scraps of paper until one piece stuck to the stick. During the medieval period the drawing of lots was exclusively a religious rite, but during the Edo period (1600-1867) secular lotteries of various kinds became common.*

(p. 101)

Inoue continues that "advances in technology and the advent of the new age of information and globalization account for the dissemination of non-traditional divination methods" (2003, p. 193). But this statement does not imply such methods as *omikuji* completely lost their popularity among Japanese divination enthusiasts. Not only does this system continues being highly demanded, but it has taken a contemporary form. Hereby I refer to a queer transformation from a traditional method where *gohei* are used into a capsule machine divination. Such capsules are widely known as *gashapon* or simply *gacha gacha*. This form of entertainment was first introduced in 1977 by the Bandai company[12]. The machines are mechanisms containing toys and other small goods packed into plastic capsules. To get a toy, one puts the coin into a slot and turns the handle. Instead of toys, plastic spheres are filled with

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[12] Dengeki Online. (2017, May 25). Kotoshi wa Gashapon 40 Shuunen. Hanbaiki, Kapuseru, Shōhin no Shinka no Kiseki ga Koko ni! [This Year is Gashapon's 40-year Anniversary. Miracles of Evolution of Vending Machines, Capsules, and Products are Here!]. https://dengekionline.com/elem/000/001/521/1521153/

papers revealing a fortune-telling message. There are far more complex variations of *omikuji* machines, such as automatized *omikuji* machines, or *omikuji* robots (Figure 4.3).

Thus, an alternative *omikuji* practice represents an entertainment packed into a technologically progressive and reasonably more fun form.

Figure 4.3. An *omikuji* robot (the project of the Yaskawa corporation) inside of the

Kurosaki Station, Fukuoka.

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Some temples are similarly evolving into their modernized versions. One of the examples is a temple Ryōhōji situated in Hachiōji, Tokyo. The concept of this place is inspired by the *kawaī* aesthetics, and the main deity of Hachiōji is re-created as a cheerful character that is more related to manga or anime rather than a religious institution. The temple attracts *otaku* fans from both Japan and foreign countries. This example shows that anime aesthetics seems to play an important role in revitalizing traditions in local areas by appealing to a larger number of visitors. By being fans of certain anime titles people start supporting tourism in local areas that promote anime characters. Thus, they gradually become fans of local vicinities, or in other words, supporters of *machizukuri* practices (Yamamura, 2009, p. 9). Kamaishi (2011) elaborates on such practice he called "anime pilgrimage" on the example of the anime-related event held in Toyosato, a town situated in Shiga prefecture – the city where the story of the *K-On!* anime series takes place. Multiple cases of content tourism in Japan advocate for the harmonious cooperation between historical legacy, or traditional for certain places' appealing points (be it religious practices, crafts, or anything else) and postmodern influences on them – anime popularity, robotization, etc.

Hybrid identities

It has been investigated that the characters of *Onmyōji* are not just creatures based on Japanese folk stories and legends. There are also characters inspired by other cultures, for instance, Chinese zombie-like monsters (Kyonshi Brother and Kyonshi Sister)*,* or a poisonous bird Chin. The game mixes cultures and thus creates its own alternative space where Japanese *yōkai* and other creatures amalgamate into a single bizarre unity although labeled as the "fantasy world of Heian". I find this aspect corresponding to multicultural/hybrid identities in Japan, therefore I will respectively address the issues in the following section of the dissertation.

First, I would like to discuss the notion of hybrid identities that I will operate within this section of the thesis.

It is vital to mention that the influence of multiculturalism on identities has been extensively discussed by Bhabha, who assumed that individuals of hybrid identities reside in a space he referred to as a "third space" (2004). These individuals represent an outstanding category "whose double consciousness or multiple belongings seem obvious particularly in a world still conditioned by structures to ensure racial purity" (Voicu, 2011, p. 173). As Voicu pointed out, people of mixed race are often understood as such "cultural hybrids" (p. 173). Thus, hybrid identities are identities that stay out of focus of the existing dichotomies based on the differentiation between "self" and "other" or "Japanese" and "non-Japanese".

Such "third space" can be represented by contemporary Japan where not single, but many cultures, languages, and identities coexist.

According to Graburn & Ertl (2008), in the early 1990s, a new generation of immigrants coming to Japan has influenced the academic interest of Japanese multiculturalism (pp. 4-5). Now, in 2020, the term multiculturalism does not seem inapplicable to postmodern Japan. In order to solve major social and economic problems of the country (declining birthrate, aging population, labor shortage), the government aims to stimulate immigration. It follows that the cultural and ethnic strata of Japan will become even more diverse with the implementation of immigration strategies.

In opposition to the Nihonjinron discourse perceiving Japan as a homogenous society, progressive contemporary scholars shift their focus to the problem of various identities existing in Japanese society. One of such studies by Kamada (2009) operates with the notion of hybrid identities within Japan on the example of young *hāfu* individuals, or people of mixed ethnicity (usually it refers to children with one Japanese parent and one non-Japanese parent). According to Kamada, *hāfu* is "a fairly new word, which came into common use over the last half century

in Japan after WWII" (p. 35). Greer stated that h*āfu* tend to "develop a multicultural outlook on life which is manifested in an eclectic mix of language, tastes, and worldviews" (2005, p. 948).

Kamada indicated the following regarding the individuals presented in her study (young mixed-ethnic girls born and raised in Japan):

> *What is particularly interesting about this group of mixed-ethnic youths – and what is shown in this book – is that while these girls often struggle to positively maneuver themselves and negotiate their identities into positions of contestation and control over marginalizing discourses that disempower them as 'others' within Japanese society, paradoxically, at other times within alternative more empowering discourses of ethnicity, they also enjoy a celebrated status that they discursively create for themselves.*

(2009, p. 5).

In other words, being a *hāfu* can seemingly trigger social alienation and misunderstanding between these individuals and social groups to which they belong, however some advantages must not be neglected in this regard. For instance, an ability to speak more than one language, a tendency to "appreciate different cultures", higher chances to engage in international industries, as well as remarkable physical features that could be well appreciated in modeling and show business (Royer, 2016, pp 26-27). In recent years, many *hāfu* individuals have become successful celebrities and common guests on Japanese television. Watanabe Naomi is a popular comedian and model – she is of half-Japanese and half-Taiwanese descent. Rola, a highly successful model of mixed Japanese, Bangladeshi and Russian ethnicities, is another vivid representation of commercially relevant *hāfu* individuals. However, Want (2016) concluded that despite a high demand of *hāfu* models in Japanese commercials, there are negative aspects of their popularity, such as the appearance of numerous stereotypes about *hāfu,* as well as a discriminating notion that some individuals are "not *hāfu* enough" (p. 96).

It is possible, however, that with further growth of multiethnic marriages in Japan, the term *hāfu* will eventually lose its original meaning, and newer generations of Japan's residents will become not *hāfu* or even *dāburu* (another popular term that is, according to some individuals, a more appropriate synonym for *hāfu*), but truly hybrid in their ethnic descents, and, possibly, identities.

Hybrid identities can also be attributed to individuals of Japanese descent who have experienced living abroad although under certain circumstances had to return to Japan. These "returnees" are also known as *kikokushijo*. Kanno (2003) noted that after coming back to Japan such individuals often face certain difficulties connected with readaptation in Japanese society. Shimomura (2014) also pointed out that "many returnees tend to face discrimination and

harassment upon their return for their "differences" acquired or developed as a result of expatriation" (para. 4). In other words, returnees have trouble with "being Japanese" (Yashiro, 1995, p. 139).

It would be a mistake, however, to claim that readaptation leads to no positive results. Yoshino (1998) noted the following:

> *While returnees are often reported to undergo a stressful process of readjustment because of their foreignness, that acquired foreignness is also a resource that they can, and often do, exploit to pursue their interest as a new generation of internationalized Japanese in a society where internationalization is a national agenda.*

(p. 29)

Finalizing the chapter

In previous sections of the chapter, I tried to reflect on how certain trends and aspects of the postmodern Japanese society represent hybrid structures that are unstable and subject to change. This hybridity was explained by the examples of robotization, modernized traditions, and hybrid identities of contemporary Japanese people. In my opinion, such transformations found their way to the *yōkai* imaginaries of *Onmyōji* characters. Thus, following the framework of post-structuralism, characters can be treated and perceived as complex multifaceted images not only shaped by the imagination of their authors but also heavily influenced by what is happening in the society at this concrete time.

YŌKAI RE-CREATION MODEL

Yōkai re-creation: a theoretical model

As was earlier investigated *yōkai* characters found in the *Onmyōji* game represent hybrid entities influenced by certain factors. Similar hybridity was found in the examples including robotization, modernized traditions, hybrid identities of Japan in the postmodern era. In this chapter, I would like to propose a model that could be useful in terms of understanding and analyzing *yōkai* re-creation as an important phenomenon of Japanese culture.

Both of the concepts that constituted the major parts of two previous chapters acknowledge the importance of plural aspects influencing the re-creation of *yōkai*. In the case of intertextuality, a dialogue between the past and the present seemingly plays a key role in character re-creation: one has to refer to the historical depictions or images of concrete *yōkai* to re-create a *yōkai* character. Aside from the existing *yōkai* images influencing newer images, one must not neglect the fact that re-creation is a subjective artistic process, where imagination is a factor of paramount importance. In other words, imagination as a complex structure having an impact of cultural background, various life experiences, and other influences: natural and acquired, conscious and unconscious. Both Inoue (2001, p. 120) and Komatsu (2016, p. 11) also believed in the power of human imagination that resulted in the appearance of the *yōkai* phenomenon. Based on the same idea of already existing *yōkai,* a person or a group of people may get different results out of the re-creation process. Following this logic, it would be adequate to treat past experiences as consisting of both imagination and re-imagination elements.

For hybridity, the discussion went far beyond "then" and "now". Technological progress and public needs were similarly important in the examples of robotization and modernized traditions of postmodern Japan. These notions are on a par with Allison's (2006) idea of techno-animism, or the co-existence of spirituality and technologies. Regarding popular culture transforming traditional or conservative outlooks, it was already stressed that *yōkai* are often re-created for certain purposes, including entertaining young people and attracting tourists to places associated with *yōkai* through creating *kawaī* or just likeable mascots. In other words, the target audience is also taken into account.

Thus, three social factors can be synthesized from the analysis provided through the analysis based on intertextuality, hybridity examples, and existing literature. They are past experiences, technology, and the target audience. Let us appoint a color for each of the factors (red – past experiences, blue – technology, violet – target audience) and transfer them to a graph.

Figure 5.1. The development of a theoretical model. Step 1.

It would be indecorous however to focus on the given factors alone and ignore further social incentives that motivate *yōkai* enthusiasts to create new *yōkai* or re-create already existing character images. While trying to identify further crucial points I found that the same aspects kept appearing in the studies initiated by Inoue, Yanagita, and Komatsu.

Inoue, as already was reflected in Introduction, dedicated his research to rational explanations of the *yōkai* phenomena that were experienced by rural dwellers of Japan. He criticized prejudices and tried to analyze their causes within the realm of the human psyche. Inoue proposed four main internal factors that should be considered while taking a look at illusions mistaken for *yōkai* "appearance" in front of people: imagination, anticipation, judgment, and fear (2001, p. 120).

Yanagita also admitted that fear had been one of the aspects that remained unchanged for years and years; on the other hand, it was Japanese people's religious faiths that saw numerous changes, and as a result, the negative influences were ascribed to *yōkai* (2016, p. 24).

Fear of the darkness is one of the key parts of Komatsu's narration about *yōkai*. He stated that primordial fear of darkness had transformed into other, more relatable to a modern life fears, including fear of places that are associated with death (hospitals, places of road accidents, cemeteries) (2016, p. 173), or enclosed spaces (elevators, toilets, cars, etc.) (p. 175). Following the logic of Komatsu, it is because of these drastically more relatable fears, new *yōkai* keep appearing.

At the same time, some researchers emphasized that *yōkai* were also embedded with humor and playfulness. Komatsu briefly touched upon a humorous aspect of modern *yōkai* stories being an amalgamation of *tanuki* transformation stories and modern agendas (he was talking about the *yōkai* stories connected with railway stations) (p. 159). The tendency to portray *yōkai* humorously is not completely new for the *yōkai* realm of modern Japan. Foster stated that *yōkai* found in the *Hyakkiyagyo emaki* scroll were already "depicted with playfulness and wit,

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their purpose seemingly not to frighten or warn but to entertain" (2009, p. 8). I have also discussed how *yōkai* keep being represented in a comical, at times even sarcastic way in plenty of anime.

Fear, as well as laughter, as could be concluded from the essential literature pieces and empirical basis, should be a segment representing an emotional response to *yōkai* which will be consequently reflected in the model (marked blue) (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2. The development of a theoretical model. Step 2.

Furthermore, let us imagine how the results of the above mentioned logical conclusions can be represented in a model. The circle consists of elements embed by the human realm in the notion of *yōkai*. The segments of the circle will represent "ingredients", or elements necessary for *yōkai* re-creation. It is crucial to emphasize that the elements may follow in any combination depending on the context of a finished character image. A finished character is indicated as a rectangular shape of the same colors with the elements used for re-creation. To put the model to a test, I would like to provide several examples of re-created *yōkai* and the respective graphs representing their re-creation essence.
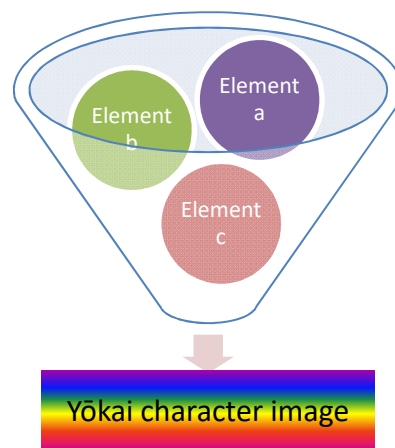

Figure 5.3. A theoretical model of *yōkai* character re-creation.

Technological progress has literally "killed" the old *yōkai*. Paradoxically enough, it is partially due to technologies that the *yōkai* of today transformed into moving, dynamic creatures, only in a form of entertainment. It is especially true when it comes to the attractions for both children and adults. One of the examples illustrating the idea of *yōkai* meeting technology is the exhibition dedicated to the legacy of Mizuki Shigeru and his iconic manga *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō*. Unlike typical exhibitions where visitors are usually not allowed to touch and interact with objects of art, this event encourages people to try to connect to the world of *yōkai* utilizing interactive displays and automated *yōkai*. A giant Kasa-obake suddenly starts moving up whenever a visitor stands in front of the exhibit (Figure 5.4).

Figure 5.4. Character image: Kasa-obake from *Ge Ge Ge 100 Stories of Yōkai Exhibition*.
©水木プロダクション

Given the fact that the image of Kasa-obake is based on the *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō* series, it is chiefly impacted by the artistic style of Mizuki, as well as by previous stories and images of the same entity (past experiences). Moreover, the exhibition was meant to target the fans of the manga and anime series about Kitarō – including a whole generation of Japanese who were growing up while exploring the *yōkai* of Mizuki (target audience). Lastly, the exhibition incorporated a variety of tools, including computer screens, complex audio systems, and automated machines to create a unique immersive atmosphere (technology). The respective model is depicted in Figure 5.5.
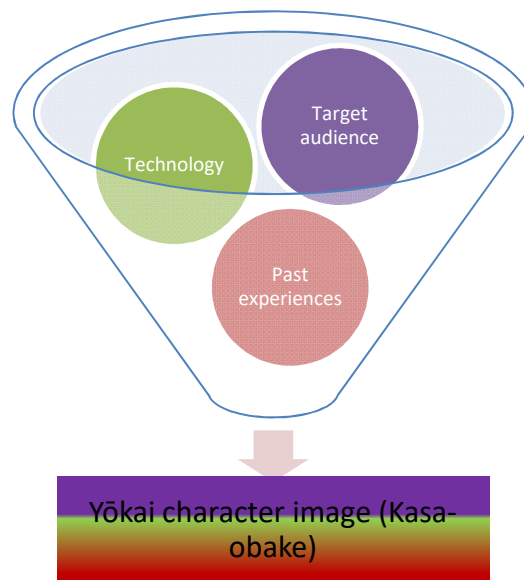
Figure 5.5. A theoretical model of *yōkai* character re-creation: Kasa-obake.

The *Yo-kai Watch* anime series is another example of putting "good old *yōkai*" to a test in a postmodern world (Balgimbayeva, 2019). As a result, the creators of the *Yo-kai Watch* shape and transform *yōkai* in a way that *yōkai* obtain new shapes and original meanings. One of the *yōkai* is called Mudazukai, which can be translated as "unnecessary expenditures" (Figure 5.6). This *yōkai* looks like a wallet with a giant red tongue and an eye looking from inside. This monster persuades people to spend their money on unnecessary, highly-priced items – which is an excellent concept of an updated *yōkai* of postmodern consumerist society.

Based on the character image of Mudazukai, it can be said it has some common visual and conceptual features with the *yōkai* belonging to the *tsukumogami* category (an object used by humans with human features), which is, of course, a part of past experiences.

On the other hand, this *yōkai* has never been known before the *Yo-kai Watch* franchise; Mudazukai is also a concept that is understandable judging from a postmodern perspective. These features allow suggesting that this particular type of *yōkai* is a result of postmodern imagination and a humorous, playful approach to *yōkai* depiction. In this case, the emotional response segment is also impacted by the target audience of the franchise – young people.
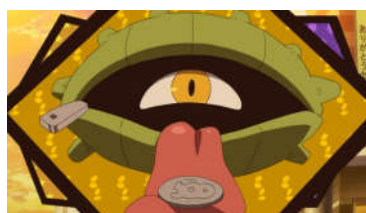

Figure 5.6. Character image: Mudazukai from the *Yo-kai Watch* series.

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By combining all the given factors, the character image of Mudazukai in constructed with the help of such elements as past experiences, imagination, target audience, and emotional response (a humorous approach to *yōkai* depiction) (Figure 5.7).
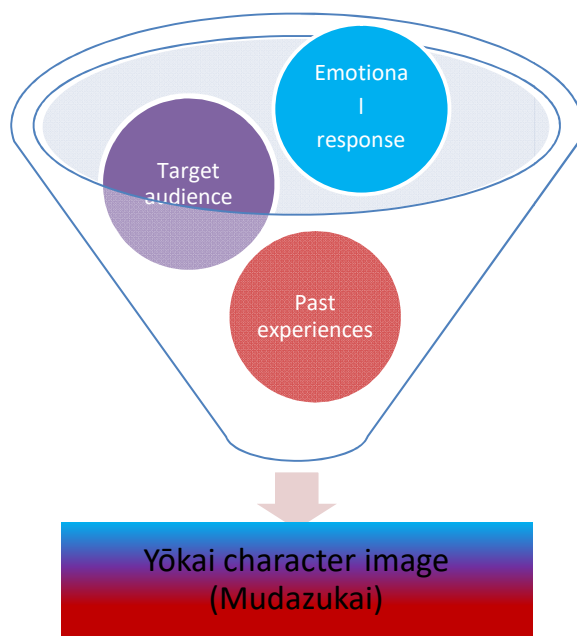

Figure 5.7. A theoretical model of *yōkai* character re-creation: Mudazukai.

These were vivid examples of re-created *yōkai* characters transferred into a model of re-creation. It is of paramount importance to acknowledge readers that the model is a result of my analysis which is, frankly speaking, a subjective opinion due to the complexity of factors playing key roles in re-creation. I do not claim this is the only way to approach *yōkai* re-creation and the problem of idea re-creation in general. However, no matter how subjective my approach is, it can be said that the model seeks to understand and describe the process of concept reconstruction concerning the transformations happening in the postmodern society.

Practical application of the model

This part of the chapter is concerned with how young artists perceive re-creation through the usage of the proposed model.

I proposed the model to inspiring character creators, artists, and design enthusiasts to find out what depictions of *yōkai* they would create. The results of our collaboration are given below. The first artist decided to create a scary *yōkai*-robot based on the image of the *rokurokubi*. In her design, she was inspired by metal plates, chords, and wires (Figure 5.8). The second artist used

her previous experience as a designer of books for children; therefore, her depiction of the *kitsune yōkai* is more of *kawaī* aesthetic principles and proportions (Figure 5.9).
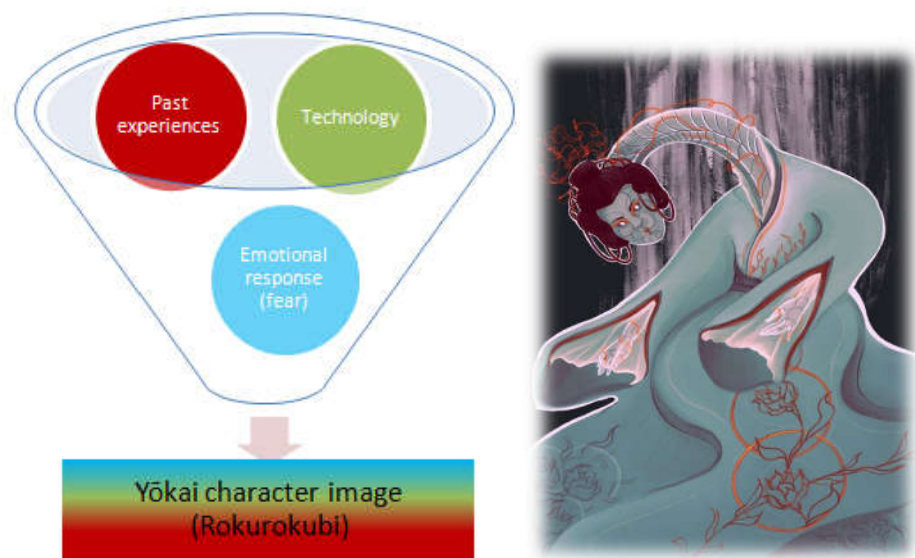

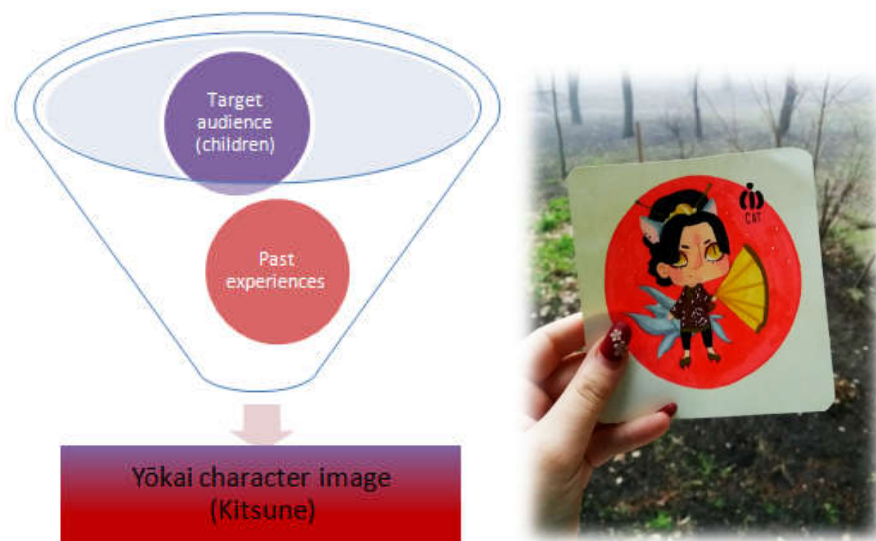Figure 5.8. Character concept: a re-created version of the *rokurokubi yōkai*.

Figure 5.9. Character concept: a re-created version of the *kitsune yōkai*.

CONCLUSIONS

Summary

This thesis provided a comprehensive discussion on the *yōkai* character re-creation on the example of the *Onmyōji* game in the context of postmodern Japan. I tried to approach the transcendence of *yōkai* images from a wide range of topics (aesthetic principles, differences in color schemes, attitudes, and backgrounds of *yōkai*, etc.) to understand the process of re-creation as well as the reasons behind such transformations.

The analysis of *yōkai* character images of the *Onmyōji* game was based on the concept of intertextuality that argues for the existence of previous texts in a text. Through qualitative analysis, it was investigated that the majority of *yōkai* characters are inspired by the previous images and notions of *yōkai*, including the *yōkai* art of premodern Japan, elements, and motifs typical for the *yōkai* or earlier periods. Additionally, the characters of the game had many unique features that help the characters to stand out from the previous ideas: the images were decorated with the elements regarded traditional or having a religious basis for Japan (sacred ropes, bells, masks). On the other hand, the characters were extracted from their past backgrounds to be put in the frames of imaginary Heian, where everything is impacted by contemporary trends. Abe no Seimei is a handsome young man with long silver hair, Kudagitsune uses his pipe as a bazooka to battle enemies, and Yuki-onna is a typical *kūdere* character. Lastly, although the given characters were visibly influenced by the *yōkai* culture, many of the examples have proven the idea that the meaning and understanding of *yōkai* has dramatically transformed: *yōkai* of *Onmyōji* are vaguely referred to as *ayakashi*, and many of them are characters having no relation with already existing Japanese *yōkai* entities. There are already personified items, Shinto gods and non-Japanese monsters among them.

Otherwise speaking, the characters are ultimate hybrids representing the dialogue of past and present. Empirical cases have illustrated that similar hybridity is, in fact, one of the traits of the postmodern Japanese society. I tried to support these thoughts using respective examples in such spheres as robotization of Japanese services and businesses, traditions becoming intertwined with modernity, and hybrid identities existing in contemporary Japan.

Finally, I came up with the concept of *yōkai* character image re-creation to grasp the gist of process, namely, the factors having an impact on how a character will look like in each particular case. From the standpoints of intertextual analysis, it was already clear that it is through dialogue between past and present new re-creations are being born – it is the element of past experiences and an individual's experience on which a re-created character is based. However, there were another, equally critical for our understanding aspects that should also be

included in the discussion of re-creation. For instance, emotional response to *yōkai* has always been a serious agenda for prolific *yōkai* researchers. In addition, such characteristics as the target audience of *yōkai* characters, and technological progress should not be ignored. As for the practical application of the model, I decided to add a little more creativity to my project and asked my acquaintances to create their *yōkai* characters based on the given model.

One of the main arguments of this paper was the notion that *yōkai* is not something static – it is the idea of adapting and adjusting to the existing conditions of society. Intertextuality together with hybridity are paramount concepts of the thesis, and both can be framed by a post-structuralist argument with regards to the social transformations of Japan. It is undeniably wrong, however, to argue that a post-structuralist perspective on society is the only appropriate for understanding the matter, as one of the biggest weaknesses of the theory is its subjectivity. Conversely, I strongly believe that post-structuralism allows one to perceive society as a changing substance that gives a chance to approach it comprehensively and thoroughly. For a long time, there were little efforts to develop a scholarly perspective that would treat *yōkai* as an important social construct indicating major transformations of humanity. Therefore, I do hope that my project will help *yōkai* to keep changing and evolving not only in the minds of people but in the spheres of research and character creation as well.

Future possibilities and recommendations

The model of *yōkai* re-creation provided in the thesis could be offered to character designers to help them with the construction of certain *yōkai* images. The model allows creating characters that would suit a wide arrange of genres and audiences. Imagination and inspiration from previous sources are also a vital part of the model, thus it does not hinder the process of creation but complements it with certain elements that could be helpful in the creation of a newer version of a well-known *yōkai*. By collecting opinions, creating polls, and conducting interviews with character designers and entertainment companies producing *yōkai* characters the model may be sufficiently improved in the future – for instance, not mentioned elements, such as business strategies implemented when *yōkai* characters are being designed.

Another implication of the model is further research on *yōkai* in general, as well as their re-creation in anime, manga, movies, and games. There is a high possibility that new approaches and pathways of re-creation will arise in the future. Due to the limitations of my knowledge of the existing *yōkai* images, future scholars might seek other intertextual sources from the works that were not mentioned here. Besides, the number of *yōkai* creatures exemplified and analyzed was also limited to a few that are most used as intertextual sources. It would be also great to find

more information on the re-creation of those *yōkai* characters that are significantly less popular than the subjects of my thesis.

Although I mentioned that gender aspects are crucial in decoding certain *yōkai* images, I feel this is a broad field worth of attention with regards to *yōkai* depiction or iconography and its roots. It would be interesting to see more inspiring works on how gender perspectives change with time and influence of how *yōkai* characters look like.

I also hope to contribute to the spheres of intertextual research and hybridity studies using *yōkai* as a bridge between the fields and disciplines. I strongly encourage *yōkai* enthusiasts to approach Japanese supernatural creatures from newer perspectives.

When it comes to my future scholarly endeavors, I would like to continue working with intertextuality as a tool of analysis – this time I will be looking forward to approaching Japanese mythological figures and their respective depictions in games. Unlike many countries that treat their mythological systems as cultural heritage of the past only, in the case of Japan the belief in Shinto deities is still alive, yet certainly it underwent substantial changes with time. Many of the pantheon's representatives are re-created as the characters of games that provide their unique vision of ancient powers. Therefore, I am quite interested in approaching female deities such as Izanami from the intertextual perspective as seen in such games as *Smite* and *Shin Megami Tensei*.

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