

Functions of the *tanuki* as a trickster in Japanese popular imagination



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Word count: 14332 words

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Introduction

Mythology can be seen as a 'mirror' of society. It reflects our standards and values, the way we communicate with others and the way we see the world we live in. Myths are often passed down from generation to generation: acting as a means to bind communities together. As such, it is not hard to see why these narratives are so popular and why references to them can be found in books, video games and other forms of popular media. The same is of course the case for Japanese mythology, specifically tales involving *yōkai*. The term *yōkai*, written with the characters for 'bewitching' (妖) and 'suspicious' (怪), is used to signify a class of 'strange' entities with supernatural powers. They can be anything: humanoid, animal-like, inanimate objects brought to life or even without (discernible) form. Some are bad omens or cause harm to anyone who sees them, others are bringers of good fortune.

For the purposes of this thesis, I will focus on one *yōkai* in particular: the *tanuki*. It is a shapeshifting creature based on the real-life Japanese raccoon-dog (*Nyctereutes procyonoides*)¹. In modern day Japan, the *tanuki* is often seen as a figurine standing outside restaurants or bars (see figure 1). Its pot-bellied appearance with a jolly smile (often accompanied by a flask of alcohol) makes it look quite innocent. However, in many stories, the *tanuki* is a mischievous being which uses its powers (particularly shape-shifting and creation illusions) to fool people. These traits make him fit in with the notion of a 'trickster': a figure which appears in many different mythologies from around the world. The trickster is a being with supernatural abilities, who uses its strong magic powers to cause chaos and play tricks on others. Examples of tricksters include Loki (Norse mythology), Anansi the spider (West-African mythology) and Coyote (Native-American mythology). The trickster is also one of the so-called Jungeian archetypes, which are derived from the work of psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Jung (1875-1961). Jung claimed that these archetypes are derived from the 'collective unconsciousness': concepts stored in the unconscious mind which are shared among people of a species throughout the ages. Because of this, he stated, different world mythologies follow similar patterns and thus contain the same 'archetypal' elements: with the trickster being one of them.

¹ For this thesis, any instance of *tanuki*, raccoon-dog or similar terms will refer to the *yōkai*, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

Research question, hypothesis and methodology

The research question which I would like to answer in my thesis is as follows: what is the function of the *tanuki*'s 'trickster' nature in Japanese art and literature? My hypothesis is that the idea of what the *tanuki* is, what it looks like and how it acts, is very susceptible to change. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify three primary functions. Tricksters on one hand possess strong magical powers with which he can change his appearance or create hallucinations. This 'strangeness' surrounding the trickster figure makes him a perfect figure through which to explain the seemingly unexplainable. Likewise, the supernatural acts of *yōkai* such as the *tanuki* were used, mainly in ancient times, to explain certain (natural) phenomena (e.g. strange sounds at night were caused by *tanuki* drumming on their bellies). On the other hand, we have the foolishness of the trickster figure contradicting its god-like powers. In many trickster narratives, his pranks fail ultimately and he might even be beaten up for it. The *tanuki* has a similar reputation as a dunce, with people often seeing through his tricks. This not only made the *tanuki* an ideal character for light-hearted folktales, but also an interesting allegorical figure through which to present social critique. This can be seen in his more common disguises, which included monks or other religious figures, but also in how it is sometimes seen clashing with authority. Lastly, the dual nature of the trickster as both god-like creators and pranksters can also signify their ability as 'mediators' between two opposite factors. *Tanuki* have been used in different narratives signifying the clash of nature and urbanisation or tradition and modernity after the Meiji Restoration. This made them a symbol of the population's reluctance to leave tradition behind and embrace modernity.

A main part of the framework of this thesis will be based on the research of Carl Jung: specifically his works on archetypes and the collective unconscious. This will be supplemented by the views of other scholars who have done work on myth and the existence of a 'trickster figure', such as Claude Lévi-Strauss. The book *Theories of Mythology* by Eric Csapo will be used to describe the broadness of the word 'myth' and what problems arise in defining it. As the main focus of this thesis is creating a better understanding of how the *tanuki*'s 'trickster' nature was depicted in Japanese popular imagination, I will use a wide variety of primary sources containing depictions of the mythological creature: from the pre-modern times up until more recently. This includes of course classical literature and folktale collections, but also illustrated encyclopedias, *ukiyo-e* and even a contemporary movie. Secondary literature will be used for background information and critical reviews of these texts.

Chapter overview

The first chapter will address the definition and function of mythology, as well as explaining the notion of the 'trickster' and why they are important figures in world myths. I will also elaborate on why I chose to focus on the *tanuki* and what unique position it holds as a trickster within Japanese folklore. In the second chapter, I will focus on the function of *yōkai* within Japanese mythology as a means to give meaning to 'vague' fears of the unknown and the relation between darkness and the supernatural: elaborating on the notions of the *hyakki yagyō* and the *hyakumonogatari kaidankai*. I will also look at the origin of *tanuki* narratives and how they were described in e.g. classical literature and encyclopedias. The third chapter will look at more comedic depictions of the *tanuki*: including wood-block prints dated somewhere around the Edo-period and the cheap books meant for commoners and/or children. I will discuss how commercial growth during the Edo period brought about the increasing literacy rate in Japan, as well as how it influenced print culture. I will also address how the more well known visual characteristics of the *tanuki*, such as their oversized scrota, came to be and why many of the works offer (subtle) social critique of society and reforms during the Edo period. In the final chapter, the focus will be on *tanuki* narratives depicting a 'clash' between opposing views, usually nature versus urbanisation. The concept of '*furusato*' or nostalgia for (a romanticised notion of) the countryside will also be addressed. The main sources for these narratives include train stories which arose after the Meiji Restoration and the Studio Ghibli film *Heisei tanuki gassen pompoko* (after this: 'Pompoko').

Certain functions might be more prevalent in certain era's, which is why for example in chapter 3 I mainly focus on Edo-period works. However, it should be remembered that these views are not exclusively tied to one era, nor that only one function of the *tanuki* as a trickster exists in a certain period of time.

A short note on the term "tanuki"

A note should be made about using the term "*tanuki*", as there has been confusion regarding which creature it refers to and how it should be translated in the past. This confusion stems from regional differences in the naming of raccoon-dogs and other animals which might share some similarities in appearance, but are regardless entirely different from them. The main example is the confusion of raccoon-dogs and the Japanese badger. Depending on the region people might use *tanuki* to refer to raccoon-dogs and *mujina* to refer to badgers, or use the word *mujina* to refer to raccoon-dogs and *mami* to refer to badgers.² This has not only caused confusion in reading classical texts, but also in real-life incidents. The

² Ryuzo Sato, 狸考 (en. "Thoughts on the *tanuki*") (Tokyo: Kyoudo Kenkyuusha, 1934), pp 15.

tanuki-mujina incident refers to a court case in 1924 where a hunter was convicted for shooting a raccoon-dog, a protected animal. Whilst the court argued that the man had killed a *tanuki*, the hunter stated that to him, the animal was called a *mujina*. In his regional dialect, *tanuki* meant badger, so he assumed that killing a raccoon-dog was no problem. In the end, the court ruled in favor of the hunter. However, this was not because of the word confusion, but because of a different interpretation of the term “day of hunt”.³

Confusion on what *tanuki* actually means also persists in translations into English, or other Western research on the *tanuki*. In these works, some of which are also consulted in this thesis, the term is erroneously translated as “badger” or “raccoon”. Therefore, the reader should keep in mind that whenever this thesis mentions “badgers” or “raccoons”, it still refers to *tanuki*. If this should not be the case, I will explicitly state otherwise.

Introduction to mythology and the ‘trickster’ archetype

The main problems with defining myth

Yōkai such as the *tanuki* make up an integral part of Japanese mythology. As such, in discussing the function of the *tanuki*, it is also important to look at the role of mythology and specifically storytelling in constructing the popular imagination. Mythology may either refer to the collected myths of a group of people (e.g. ‘Japanese mythology’) or to the study of myths. Giving one clear definition of mythology and what constitutes a myth proves to be nearly impossible. There are many different disciplines involved when it comes to the study of myth and equally as many different theories.

The book *Theories of Mythology* by Eric Csapo offers an introduction to the major modern theories of myth: comparative approaches, psychoanalysis, ritual theories, structuralism, and ideological analysis. In his introductory chapter, he talks about the problems with defining mythology. He states that the first common weakness is selectivity, calling on Jane Harrison as an example. Harrison was one of the so-called ‘Cambridge ritualists’: a group of classical scholars who sought to understand myth through rituals. She stated in her work *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* that use of the word ‘myth’ “could be confined to such sequences, such stories as are involved in rites⁴”. According to Csapo, a definition

³ Takato Natsui, “狸狢事件判決再考” (en. “Reconsideration of the judgement in the *tanuki-mujina* case”), *Houritsu Ronso* 85 (2-3) (2012): 330-332.

https://m-repo.lib.meiji.ac.jp/dspace/bitstream/10291/16127/1/horitsuronso_85_2-3_327.pdf

⁴ Jane Harrison, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), pp 331.

like this tempts circularity. He states that “if the theory says that all myths are based on ritual, then the definition excludes from study everything that is no ritual. After a preliminary sorting, the mythologist is pleased to observe that what all his myths have in common is that they are based on ritual⁵”.

Additionally, Csapo cautions against the use of definitions that are “mere compilations of empirical and often trivial distinctions”. He cites a story about one of Plato’s lectures in which he described man as “an animal: featherless and biped”. To which Diogenes the Cynic replied, holding up a plucked chicken: “Behold, Plato’s Man!” The definition was then amended by adding “has broad nails”. As shown in the example, every further “challenge” to the original definition, will result in further supplements being added to it. Csapo argues that an overly empirical approach is not suitable for man-made products such as myths which were never meant to “neatly” fit in categories. As he also adds later on, most of these frameworks were created by western scientists applying them to the mythology of many different cultures. As a result, they often fail to appropriately address cultural differences. In Csapo’s words: “Westerners invented the concepts of science, history and literature partly to distinguish our own cultural thought and expression from that of the mythmaking societies. How, then, could these distinctions be the same for us and for them?⁶”

Jung and mythology

As his research on the “trickster archetype” will be consulted later on, let’s look at how Jung defines myth. He states that myth consists of “original revelations of the preconscious psyche, involuntary statements about physical happenings and anything but allegories of physical processes.”⁷ Jung considers myths to be a product of the psyche. They are not meant to be taken literally, but should be seen as symbolic for processes of the human mind. Tying into this is his notion of archetypes. As stated previously in the introduction, the Jungian archetypes are a set of recurring elements which he claims are derived from the collective unconscious: containing all of the knowledge and experiences that humans share as a species. Jung sees myths as an intermediary between the (collective) unconscious and the conscious mind: it functions to bring these “hidden” elements to light and allow people to experience them. He states the unconscious psyche has an “irresistible urge to assimilate all outer sense experiences to inner, psychic events⁸.” In this sense, the prime function of myth according to Jung is to connect the inner world of the mind to the

⁵ Eric Csapo, *Theories of Mythology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), pp 2.

⁶ Csapo, *Theories of Mythology*, pp 7

⁷ Carl Jung, *Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 9 (Part 1): Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp 154.

⁸ Jung, *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, pp 6.

outside. Images from within the unconsciousness are projected upon experiences in the outside world, giving meaning to them.

Jung's analysis provides an interesting explanation as to why different world mythologies share similar events and characters. Indeed, the idea of a collective unconsciousness could prove why e.g. flood myths appear not only in Genesis, but also in Greek, Native-American and Chinese mythologies (among others). However, there are also quite a few weaknesses with Jung's arguments. Firstly, the concept of the "archetypes" is problematic. Jung only gives a vague explanation to what constitutes as a archetype and states that they are "infinitely varied and ever changing"⁹. This means that archetypes don't have a "permanent" form and thus are neither generalizable nor specific enough to adequately analyze. Post-Jungian researchers have tried to amend this by expanding upon and contextualizing Jung's work on archetypes: an example would be Joseph Campbell who did extensive research on the concept of the "hero" archetype¹⁰.

The other major issue with Jung's ideas, is that by generalizing myth and archetypes, they lose all cultural context. The regional specifics of narratives, the way in which they are shared across different cultures, fade away when all myths are considered universal. Furthermore, in his works on archetypes he frequently equates the "primitive" side of the human mind (the unconscious) with "primitive" man, most likely referring to (African) tribal communities. An example: "[Myths] hark back to a prehistoric world whose spiritual preconceptions and general conditions we can still observe today among existing primitives. [...] Primitive mentality differs from the civilized chiefly in that the conscious mind is far less developed in scope and intensity"¹¹. This citation brings to light Jung's rather problematic views on tribal society. He is essentially "othering" the myth-making societies: stating that they are "less developed" than what he describes as the "civilized", presumably meaning western men. It painfully brings to light the colonial and racist attitudes which were prevalent in the intellectual and cultural environment of late nineteenth and early twentieth century psychology and the seemingly uncritical way in which Jung embraced these ideas.

The 'trickster' archetype and the importance of chaos

Now that Jung's vision on the definition of mythology and the importance of archetypes to them has been explained, it is time to look more closely at what constitutes a 'trickster'. Tricksters, as explained in the introduction, are seen as characters who possess great

⁹ Jung, *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, pp 70.

¹⁰ See also: Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Novato: New World Library, 2008)

¹¹ Jung, *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, pp 153.

powers, but tend to use these mainly to cause chaos and play tricks on others. Often people see through their deception and they are either tricked themselves or otherwise punished for their deeds. The main characteristics of the trickster, one could say, are divinity combined with foolishness. This makes them quite paradoxical figures and it has proven difficult for researchers of mythology to accurately pin down what actually constitutes a trickster.

In his work on archetypes and the collective unconsciousness, Jung provides his own theory on the trickster archetype. He starts his analysis by looking at the notion of carnival in medieval European societies, where the usual hierarchical structure was reversed for a short amount of time and which was characterised by wild partying: a stark contrast to the strict beliefs of the Christian church. Jung states that these events demonstrate the role of the trickster perfectly: “a faithful reflection of an absolutely undifferentiated human consciousness, corresponding to a psyche that has hardly left the animal level¹².” He thus attributes the concept of the trickster, as something that seems to oppose rational thought, to the unconscious. He defines the trickster figure in myth as a “primitive “cosmic” being of divine-animal nature, on the one hand superior to man because of his superhuman qualities, and on the other hand inferior to him because of his unreason and unconsciousness.”¹³ Jung asserts that the trickster-gods in myths not only provide amusement because of their foolish actions, they also symbolize the conflict between the two opposing dimensions of consciousness.

Although Jung’s vision is unique in talking of the trickster as an archetype embedded within the human mind, he is not the first to talk about the existence of a trickster-like figure in mythology. In his article “In the Shadow of Trickster. Research Fields and Controversies in the Discourse on the Trickster Complex in the Studies of Myth” Andrzej Szyjewski provides an overview of theories considering the trickster figures and the problems encountered in analyzing this seemingly paradoxical character. He states that the first to mention the term “trickster” was the anthropologist Daniel Brinton in an article concerning the paradoxical features of the Supreme Being of the Algonquian (indigenous people of eastern Canada). Brinton asserts that “trickster”, “cheat” or “liar” are translations of names of main indigenous deities and notes the duality and paradoxicality of the trickster-figure: on one hand they were culture heroes and great creators, on the other hand they were pranksters with a tendency to fool and be fooled.¹⁴

¹² Jung, *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, pp 260.

¹³ Jung, *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, pp 264.

¹⁴ Andrzej Szyjewski, “In the Shadow of Trickster. Research Fields and Controversies in the Discourse on the Trickster Complex in the Studies of Myth”, *Studia Religiológica* volume 53 issue 3 (2020): pp 164-165. <https://www.ejournals.eu/Studia-Religiologica/2020/Numer-53-3-2020/art/17834/>

Another researcher whose work on the trickster has been often cited is Claude Lévi-Strauss. The chapter on the structure of myth in his book *Structural Anthropology*, states that myth represents a problem arising from the clashing of two cultural opposites which is ultimately “solved” through a mediator, something that exists in the realm between these two opposites. Lévi-Strauss then offers a deeper analysis of the mediators or trickster figures found in Native American narratives. He states that the reason as to why the tricksters in these narratives are often ravens or coyotes, is because of their role as “carrion-eaters” or scavengers. As they eat other animals for food, yet do not hunt, they represent a mediation between life and death. Beasts of prey (those who kill and eat animals) can be seen as equivalent to hunting and thus the concept of death, whilst herbivores (those who do not kill) can be seen as equivalent to agriculture and thus the concept of life.¹⁵ This notion is critical in understanding the duality of the trickster: the ambiguity of his character stems from his position as reconciler in between two polar opposites.

One thing that Lévi-Strauss’s analysis fails to take into consideration however, is that this is not necessarily applicable to all trickster-deities. Michael Carroll’s article “Lévi-Strauss, Freud, and the trickster: a new perspective upon an old problem” offers a critical approach to Lévi-Strauss’s claims of (a majority of) tricksters being scavengers. He first calls upon Marvin Harris who, in his book *Cultural Materialism* stated that the coyotes diet is not primarily composed of carrion, but that they actually fall more into the “predator” category.¹⁶ Carroll offers an analysis of mythical coyote tales, stating that even in myths, the coyote fits the “predator” role more than the “scavenger” role. Additionally, he argues that Strauss’s argument doesn’t account for the existence of rabbit- or hare-like tricksters in Native American mythology.¹⁷ In contrast to this, Szyjewski argues that in a later publication Lévi-Strauss did state that the hare-figure was a trickster: not because he was a scavenger, but because the harelip would represent a “split” of his body in two. Szyjewski states that scavenging should not be seen as a “sine qua non of tricksterness”, only that this could be “a strong indicator”.¹⁸

Like other archetypes, the “trickster” plays a major role in mythology. Joseph Campbell, a scholar on mythology whose work has been influenced by Jung’s ideas, states in an

¹⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books inc., 1963), pp 224.

¹⁶ Marvin Harris, *Cultural Materialism* (New York: Random House: 1979), pp 200-201.

¹⁷ Michael P. Crandoll, “Lévi-Strauss, Freud, and the trickster: a new perspective upon an old problem”, in *American Ethnologist* volume 8 issue 2 (1981): 303-304.

<https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1525/ae.1981.8.2.02a00050>

¹⁸ Szyjewsky, “In the Shadow of Trickster”, pp 168.

interview with radio-host Michael Toms: “[The Trickster is] both a fool and someone who’s beyond the system. And the trickster represents all those possibilities of life that your mind hasn’t decided it wants to deal with.”¹⁹ Tricksters represent chaos and the unknown, with their acts often used to explain things that seem unnatural or strange. They are rule-breakers who defy order, the element of chaotic energy within the divine. It is precisely this, Carroll argues, which explains why tricksters are often regarded as culture heroes. Their acts, no matter how indecent they might seem, often help human civilization flourish. Borrowing a phrase from Lévi-Straus, Carroll states that “the trickster is associated in these stories with the origin of culture.”²⁰ Similarly, Szyjewsky argues that “The role of the culture hero, who by his brave deeds acquires fire, water, light, and other boons for mankind, is also realized in the creation of the foundation of social community – the culture hero is a provider of culture goods and principles of the community’s functioning.”²¹

In summary, we can say that the trickster figure is dual and paradoxical. The function of this ambiguous character in myth is to provide contrast to the ordered structure of divinity, making the world myth more relatable for the ones who perceive it.

The unique position of the tanuki within Japanese mythology

As this thesis primarily focuses on the *tanuki*, it is important that we look at the unique position of this being as a trickster in the context of Japanese mythology. As previously mentioned, many (though not all) trickster-gods are based on scavengers, symbolizing their position as mediators. Canids especially are a popular choice for trickster-figures: take for example Wolf and Coyote of Native-American mythology, Huehucóyotl in Aztec mythology and Reynard the Fox in European folklore. Well-known canine tricksters in Japanese mythology are the *tanuki* and the *kitsune*. The *kitsune* is a fox-spirit who, like the *tanuki*, uses shape-shifting and illusions to fool people. They are also described as having other powers like producing fireballs aptly named *kitsunebi* (“fox fire”) and are capable of possessing humans. *Kitsune* are seen as very powerful beings, with the number of tails indicating their strength.

How can we explain this similarity in powers and form? In his book *The fox and the badger in Japanese folklore*, Willem Marinus de Visser gives an overview of Japanese and early Chinese folktales depicting foxes and badgers as creatures with supernatural powers.

¹⁹ Joseph Campbell, ‘Myth as metaphor’, in *An Open Life: Joseph Campbell in conversation with Michael Toms* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990), pp 39.

²⁰ Crandoll, “Lévi-Strauss, Freud, and the trickster”, pp 305

²¹ Szyjewsky, “In the Shadow of Trickster”, pp 166.

According to Visser, myths referencing the mysterious abilities of fox-spirits came to Japan from China, where the fox was seen as evil and a bringer of disease and death. Interestingly enough, there are very few Chinese tales describing the acts of badgers, which leaves the question of how raccoon-dogs entered Japanese mythology through these fox myths. A possible explanation can be found in the characters used to describe foxes in China. In Chinese 狐狸 was used to describe foxes exclusively. In Japanese however, 狐 is read as *kitsune* and 狸 is read as *tanuki*. Because of this, the combined characters 狐狸 (read in Japanese as *kori*) were used to signify both foxes and badgers.²² This could explain why *tanuki* myths were created in Japan, even though there were very few badger narratives in the Chinese source material.

As we have seen, there are many similarities between *kitsune* and *tanuki*. What then, sets these two apart? An important distinction is the 'divinity' of the *kitsune* in comparison to the *tanuki*. In Shinto, foxes are seen as the messengers of Inari, the goddess of rice. In her book *The Fox and the Jewel: Shared and Private Meanings in Contemporary Japanese Inari Worship* Karin Smyers gives an insight into the complexity of Inari worship in contemporary Japan. She states that it is unclear how exactly the relation between foxes and Inari came to be and offers a critical review of the most commonly-cited theories on this subject. According to Smyers, one theory states that it is because of the connection between the fox and agricultural fertility. The fox comes down to the rice fields in spring, when the crops are growing and there is much food to be found, and retreats in autumn when the rice is harvested. This makes him share basic affinity with Inari, who is associated with rice cultivation, which naturally led to them being associated with each other.²³ Foxes in mythology are depicted as highly intelligent and powerful, perhaps also because of this divine connection. The raccoon-dog, however, is not as strong or clever, as it lacks the divinity which, in De Visser's words, "gives [the fox] such a special position in the world of superstition"²⁴. This also means that (in most stories) people eventually see through the pranks of the *tanuki*, making him easily outwitted or duped. Because of this, the *tanuki* is a popular character for comedic tales, whilst narratives concerning the *kitsune* are often more serious in tone.

In short, there are multiple factors which make the *tanuki* a trickster-deity. First of all, we have its godlike powers on one hand, yet it's foolishness on the other. Its shapeshifting

²² De Visser, *Fox and the Badger*, pp 1-3.

²³ Karen Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel: Shared and Private Meanings in Contemporary Japanese Inari Worship* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), pp 73–87.

²⁴ Willem Marinus de Visser, *The fox and the badger in japanese folklore* (Yokohama: Fukuin Print. Co, 1909), pp 2.

powers also amplify the duality: not animal nor human, but something which exists in between these opposites. When comparing the *tanuki* to the similar *kitsune*, the uniqueness of the *tanuki* can be seen in the focus on its unreason. Whilst fox-spirits hold a certain degree of divinity and are thus seen as more cunning and clever, the raccoon-dog is void of any divine connection. It is likely because of this, that *tanuki* narratives put great emphasis on the foolishness of the animal.

Creepy creatures: the “haunting” aspects of the *tanuki*

Yōkai as a representation of the uncanny

In the previous chapter, the general definition and function of myth, as well as those of the trickster-figure have been established. We now shift our focus towards the realm of *yōkai*, looking at what functions they held in Japanese popular imagination. First of all, as previously stated in the introduction, the term *yōkai* primarily signifies a class of ‘strange’ entities with supernatural powers, whose forms are as varied as their characters. Other popular terms used to describe these beings are *bakemono* (“changing thing”) and *mononoke* (“suspicious or strange thing”). One might be inclined to ask what causes this great variety in beings possessing supernatural powers. In answering this, it is important to first look at what *yōkai* embody.

Michael Dylan Foster provides an overview of *yōkai* appearances and discourse throughout the ages in his book “Pandemonium and Parade: Japanese Monsters and the Culture of Yōkai”. He describes that many modern-day scholars tie the concept of *yōkai* to fear. They represent the unknown: a blank space that our imagination tries to give shape to. Often this shape comes out as human-like in some way: some in shape (as exemplified by the humanoid *oni*), some in the way they act (examples include animal-like *yōkai* such as the *kitsune* and the *tanuki* engaging in dancing and making music). Because of this nature, *yōkai* are often used to explain things that make no sense. An example includes rain on sunny days, which is described in Japan as *kitsune no yomeiri* or a fox wedding. They are embodiments of the “uncanny”, concepts which provoke fear. According to Foster, the creation of *yōkai* is, in one sense, a rational process. He states: “The translation of vague unreasoned fears into carefully individuated monsters reveals an imaginative form of ratiocination, a process similar to the production of a metaphor.²⁵” The *yōkai* can thus be seen as a metaphor for a vague sense of fear. By giving meaning to and categorizing *yōkai*,

²⁵ Michael Dylan Foster, *Pandemonium and parade: Japanese monsters and the culture of Yōkai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), pp 11.

they become “manageable”, losing their vagueness and with it also most of their scariness. Foster does state that this does not mean that the fearful qualities of the *yōkai* are dismissed outright. Rather, the same *yōkai* can exist “simultaneously as both a serious danger and a plaything, as an object of fear and an object of amusement.”²⁶

The relation between darkness and the otherworldly

Many sinister and supernatural happenings tend to happen at night, when our senses are naturally heightened. In many European countries there exists the concept of the “witching hour”, where the hours after midnight are associated with supernatural events. The veil between this world and the “other” side was supposed to be thinner, leading to appearances of ghosts and specters. Its name came from the assumption that witches often performed their magic at this time, whether that was because their powers were stronger in the hours after midnight or because the heavily persecuted magic users could only work with relative safety under the cover of darkness.²⁷ In Japan, a similar notion exists in the form of the *hyakki yagyō* (usually translated as “night procession of one-hundred demons”). After midnight, all manner of supernatural beings come together to form a parade, often singing and dancing the night away. Coming across such a spectacle was considered to be dangerous and a bad omen, to the point where many ancient texts advised against going out at certain times of the night.

In her article “Shaping Darkness in *hyakki yagyō emaki*”, Raluca Nicolae looks at the way in which these parades of the supernatural were recorded in texts and *emakimono* (“painted scrolls”): an example of the latter can be seen in figure 5. She elaborates on how the outward appearance of yokai was fabricated in a section about *yōkaika* or the transformation into *yōkai*. She states that, as *yōkai* were known to be sinister things, the artists who made the *hyakki yagyō emakimono* made sure to portray them as scary as possible. This was mainly done through hyperbolization and hybridization. Hyperbolization, exaggerating its size, especially when humans are contrastingly painted small, makes the *yōkai* appear intimidating. Hybridization (fusing two drastically different beings such as animals and humans together) erases distinctions between species, producing an “uncanny” figure. Besides this, *yōkai* were also made frightening by increasing or decreasing the number of limbs, putting grotesque emphasis on certain body parts or by making animals and plants walk on two legs.²⁸

²⁶ Foster, *Pandemonium and Parade*, pp 12.

²⁷ “What time is the witching hour and does it even exist?”, Icy Sedgwick, accessed on May 13th 2021, <https://www.icysedgwick.com/witching-hour/>

²⁸ Raluca Nicolae, “Shaping Darkness in *hyakki yagyō emaki*”, *Asian Studies III* XIX 1 (2015): pp 16-17.

Another thing which symbolizes the connection between darkness and the otherworldly are ghost stories or *kaidan*. They are stories, often orally delivered and often during the night, telling of supernatural incidents. Especially popular were gatherings called *hyakumonogatari kaidankai* (en. "Gathering of One-Hundred Ghost Stories"). During these meetings, one hundred lamps were lit and for each story told one was extinguished. After telling a hundred ghost stories and extinguishing all the lights, supposedly something supernatural would happen. A study on *kaidan* and what made them so popular is presented by Noriko Reider in her article "The Appeal of "Kaidan", Tales of the Strange". She states that there are four reasons as to why these ghost stories became fashionable during the Edo-period. First of all, there is fascination with the grotesque. As also alluded to in Nicolae's article, exaggeration with accounts of *yokai* hauntings is often done as to not only make them more fear-inducing, but also more interesting. It also functions to solidify their presence as a supernatural being: someone who belongs not here, but in the "other world". Secondly, they offer explanations for "unexplained common occurrences": a point which has only been explained earlier on in this chapter. The third point she raises is interesting: a supposed fascination of Edoites with the exotic, mainly China. Tales involving supernatural beings were one of the things which Japan "borrowed" from China (this is also the case for *kitsune* and *tanuki* narratives, as we will see later). Chinese books and culture were also extremely popular in Edo-period Japan and as many were unable to travel abroad, the country was further romanticised as a mysterious and exotic place.²⁹ The final appeal of *kaidan*, according to Reider, is its "potential to act as a literary vehicle to make indirect comments on political and/or societal institutes".³⁰ The supernatural in this sense is a means of hiding the true intent of the story: as it is not rooted in reality, the narrative cannot truly be seen as real.

A story involving *tanuki* appears as one of the "Seven Wonders of Honjo", a series of ghost stories taking place in the Honjo area (now the Sumida ward in Tokyo). The story goes that there was constant drumming in the night. A fisherman was curious and sought out to find the origin of this sound. No matter how far he walked, he would never get close. Eventually, the man got tired and returned to what he believed to be his own home. However, when dawn came and he woke up, he was still somewhere in the woods, as the "home" he had perceived was an illusion created by *tanuki*. He returned to his real home in shame, regretting the idea of chasing strange sounds at night. This tale seems to offer an explanation for weird sounds in the night by attributing them to the haunting of *tanuki*.

²⁹ Noriko T. Reider, "The Appeal of "Kaidan", Tales of the Strange", *Asian Folklore Studies* volume 59 no. 2 (2000): 274-275, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1178918>.

³⁰ Reider, "The Appeal of "Kaidan", pp 276.

However, the drumming sounds and hallucinations at night can also be interpreted as an allegory of a dream, with the fisherman “sleepwalking”. The break of dawn ends the dream, and the man returns to reality, finding that the “strange” has vanished. *Yōkai* appear under the cloak of darkness when our vision is impaired, symbolizing our fears of the unknown. When day breaks, light is shed on their hauntings, and we can see that there was nothing to be afraid of.

An illustrated version of this tale, which includes a description of the tale, is found in a woodblock print collection by Utagawa Kunitaru (see figure 6). In this image, we can see two male figures hearing the sound of the belly-drumming and looking for its source. In the background, we can make out a band of *tanuki* dancing around. What is interesting about this image, is that there is a river separating the humans from the *tanuki*, making a clear distinction between the human world and the realm of *yōkai*. There is also a full moon, which has been associated especially with the unnatural: take for example the western belief of werewolves transforming when the moon is full.

Tanuki depictions in historical records and encyclopedia

Now that we have a better understanding of the “uncanny” image associated with *yōkai*, it is time to begin looking at *tanuki* narratives specifically. Most of the narratives depicting the *tanuki* as a creature causing strange events to happen emerge from the pre-modern times. However, there aren’t many records left from these times and those involving *tanuki* specifically are very few, as also stated by De Visser in his book. In this chapter, I will highlight some of the most famous ones.

The earliest depiction of *tanuki* actions is believed to appear in the *Nihon Shoki* (日本書紀, published in 720), a historical record of Japan. In the chapter on the reign of Empress Suiko (554-628) the following passage can be found (translation of the original text into modern Japanese provided by Kodai Nippon): “三十五年春二月、陸奥国で貉(タヌキ)が人に化けて、歌を詠った³¹”. Translated into English, this line states: “35th year (627). Spring, during the second month. In the province of Michinoku, there were *tanuki*. They changed into men and sang.” Noticeable is the character used to describe the *tanuki* (貉), which would in present-day be used to signify badgers or *mujina*. As previously stated in the introduction, in older texts the term *mujina* would often signify raccoon-dogs instead of badger, so we can

³¹ “日本書紀・日本語訳「第二十二巻 推古天皇” (en. “Nihon Shoki - Japanese translation [Part 12 Empress Suiko]”), Kodai Nippon, accessed on May 10th 2021, <http://kodainippon.com/2019/08/11/日本書紀・日本語訳「第二十二巻%E3%80%80推古天皇/> .

assume that *tanuki* is meant here. The *Nihon Shoki* account shows *tanuki* as anthropomorphic beings: animals transforming into humans and behaving like them.

An interesting example of superstition regarding the appearances of badgers and foxes alike *Nichu Reki* (二中曆, published in the second half of the 14th century) which describes what happens if these animals cry on certain days. The idea of fox howling being a bad omen, according to De Visser, likely also came from China where these animals were seen as (mostly) evil. A page of the *Nichu Reki* describes the bad omens associated with *tanuki* crying: ranging from illness and death to quarrels and even the arrival of district officers.³²

Another notable narrative is a *setsuwa* (type of poem) found in the *Uji Shui Monogatari* (宇治拾遺物語, published in the beginning of the 13th century). In this tale, a hunter visits a hermit, who tells him that he received nightly visits from the bodhisattva Fugen. The hunter, being curious, stayed until nightfall and the bodhisattva did indeed appear. However, the hunter, who thought it strange that such a pure being would show itself to a hunter, shot an arrow at the apparition, which then disappeared. Fugen appearing was the result of a *tanuki* transforming, and the hunter had seen through its trickery.³³ This is one of the first accounts in which the *tanuki* is directly seen using his shapeshifting abilities to “haunt” a person.

In ancient times, a major source of *tanuki* imagery were the illustrated encyclopedias, the first of these being the *Kinmozui* (訓蒙図彙, 1666). This encyclopedia was meant as an educational tool for children, so most of the attention is put on the visual images, labeled with Japanese and Chinese names of the object and pronunciation guide. The subjects are widely varied: from plants and animals to astronomy and geography. By categorizing these items with their “proper” names, this was a first step towards standardisation of terms. There is an entry for the *tanuki* in this encyclopedia (see figure 2): however, the description makes no note of any supernatural qualities. The image as well shows no indication of the *tanuki* being anything else than a normal animal. However, the posing is interesting, with the animal standing on its hind legs. This can call back to the anthropomorphic qualities the creature displayed in the *Nihon Shoki*. Foster states that the items in the *Kinmozui* were mostly being categorized based on corporal shape. As “*yōkai*-ness”, as he calls it, lacks a distinct shape, beings known to possess special powers and shape-shifting abilities were

³² De Visser, *Fox and the Badger*, pp 13-15.

³³ “六一〇四獵師仏を射る事” (en. “6104 The Tale of the Huntsman Shooting Buddha”), *Nihon Koten Bungaku Tekishuu*, accessed June 5th 2021, <https://www.koten.net/uji/yaku/104/>.

“either simply left out of the equation or slotted into a position determined by (their most stable) physical appearance”.³⁴

Later encyclopedias would emphasize the supernatural qualities of *yōkai* more. The image for the entry for the *tanuki* in the *Wakan Sansai Zue* (和漢三才圖會, published in 1731) is quite similar to the one in the *Kinmozui*. The interesting part of this entry is in the description, which states that “old *tanuki*, just like *kitsune*, could transform into *yōkai*” (see figure 3). This alludes to the supernatural qualities of the creature by placing it in the realm of *yōkai*. This was done more explicitly by Toriyama Sekien, who was the first to compile bestiaries consisting exclusively of *yōkai*. He produced a number of so-called *e-hons* (lit. “picture books”) on the subject: the first one being *Gazu Hyakki Yagyō* (画図百鬼夜行, published in 1776). His entry for the *tanuki* (see figure 4), at first glance, is not more interesting than those found in the previous encyclopedias. One could argue that its mere inclusion in a bestiary containing exclusively *yōkai* could prove enough to add a sense of, borrowing Foster’s words, “*yōkai*-ness”. However, in taking a closer look at the illustration, we can note a few interesting details. The *tanuki*, like in other encyclopedias, is standing on its hind legs. However, the real sense of ‘mysteriousness’ in this image stems from the background: with the moon signifying nightfall (when creepy and unusual things tend to happen) and the bridge in the image possibly a signifier for the metaphorical bridge between the human world and “other side”, the realm of spirits.

As we have seen in this chapter, the concept of *yōkai* is strongly tied to the uncanny. Man tries to give shape to things that are unclear or unknown to him. The result is the creation of otherworldly creatures, situated somewhere in the uncanny valley between human and inhuman. Strange phenomena, often happening at night when the line between this world and the “other side”, is supposed to blur, are the results of *yōkai* entering the real world. The *tanuki* fits into this perfectly, as he is a trickster by nature. Haunting people and fooling them with shapeshifting and illusions is what he does best.

Just for fun? Comedy and critique in *tanuki* texts

The flourish of society in the Edo-period

In the previous chapter we have seen that *yōkai* originated out of a sense of fear for the unknown and a need to give this fear a corporal form. Most of the types of narratives discussed in it were meant as entertainment, but the focus was put on the “unsettling” nature

³⁴ Foster, *Pandemonium and Parade*, pp 38-39.

of the otherworldly. However, in this chapter I will give examples of more light-hearted *yōkai* texts and imagery where the supernatural abilities of the beings are used as a form of comedy. Many of these more comedic narratives stem from the Edo-period, so the first step will be to look at what made the Edo-period a unique environment for storytelling and -making.

An important indicator of the state of society is the country's financial and commercial wellbeing. The Edo-period (1600 -1868) marked a period of peace after the Sengoku or "warring states" period. It could be argued that, after such a long time of fighting, the country would have been struggling financially. Tamaki Toshiaki in his article "Japanese Economic Growth during the Edo Period" claims that the Edo-period actually provided the foundation for the period of prosperity that occurred after the Meiji-period (1868-1912). He presents three reasons for this. First of all, Japan had good maritime networks which the country mainly used for the export of silver, a material which they had in abundance. From the end of the sixteenth century up to the first half of the seventeenth century, about one-third of the world's silver was produced in Japan.³⁵ Secondly, the domestic economy flourished due to the low taxations put on commercial activities: meaning that they could produce more themselves and didn't have to rely on imported goods as much.³⁶ The third point that Tamaki makes is that the country had no more wars to fight, which meant that it could focus all of its attention on commerce. The peaceful situation meant that the economic position of the working class improved. However, this also meant the economic position of samurai, who had essentially become "jobless", was retarded.³⁷

Commercial growth during the Edo-period also marked the beginning of a dramatic expansion of urban literacy. Richard Rubringer provides an explanation for this phenomenon in his book *Popular Literacy in Early Modern Japan*. He states that the commercial expansion of the country and the increased urbanisation rate helped develop the merchant class. As their prosperity signified a growing need for entertainment and leisure, it gave rise to a "mass culture consisting of new forms of poetry, new tastes in reading, and new diversions in the arts."³⁸ The growth of the merchant class also meant further development of the book trade. Books published in this era covered a wide array of topics, from books on Neo-Confucian scholarship to erotica. Rubringer states that even though buying them was

³⁵ Tamaki Toshiaki, "Japanese Economic Growth during the Edo Period", *Kyoto Sangyo University Economic Review* No.1 (2014), pp 257-258.

³⁶ Toshiaki, "Japanese Economic Growth", pp 261.

³⁷ Toshiaki, "Japanese Economic Growth", pp 262-263.

³⁸ Richard Rubringer, *Popular Literacy in Early Modern Japan* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), pp. 82.

quite expensive for popular audiences, the introduction of rental services meant that reading was accessible for everyone.³⁹ This final main reason for the growth of urban literacy in Edo Japan was the establishment of private academies. Commoners could follow classes here on reading and writing, and afterwards become teachers themselves. By the end of the eighteenth century, Rubringer says, scholars would establish schools in the provinces, spreading their knowledge and literacy to the rural areas.⁴⁰

The Edo-period not only brought economic growth and changing social dynamics within society, it also meant a boom in urban literacy. Whilst in earlier times, reading and writing was restricted to the upper classes (e.g. aristocrats and scholars), the wide availability of (affordable) literature and means of education meant that there was a new audience for book-makers to market their wares to, which subsequently also meant the rise of new types of printed material.

Shaping the tanuki figure in ukiyo-e

The growth of print-culture was not only beneficial for books, but for art as well. The rise of printing culture meant that artists were able to mass-produce works of art for general consumption. The popularity of woodblock prints was amplified when *nishiki-e* (en. “brocade picture”), a technique to facilitate making multi-colored prints, was invented. The vibrant colors which could now be used gave rise to a new genre of Japanese art called *ukiyo-e* or pictures of the “floating world”. As said prior, there was a need for entertainment and pleasure fed by the growing prosperity of the lower classes. This resulted not only in a boom in art and literature, but also in the creation of “pleasure districts” filled with, among others, brothels and theatres. These constitute the “floating world”, a dream-like space where one can get away from the tediousness of daily life. Foster argues that it is the convergence of the “encyclopedic” (the “cold” categorization seen in the illustrated encyclopedias from chapter 2) and the “ludic” (the element of play found in the “floating world”) was vital to the “collection and expression of knowledge regarding *yōka*”.⁴¹

In the *tanuki*'s case, we can see that the anthropomorphic nature of the creature was further amplified. Most of the Edo-prints make the *tanuki* engage in human-like activities, sometimes even wearing clothes. An example is the print *Tanuki no yomise* (狸の夜見世, en. “The evening market of the tanuki”) by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (figure 7), where we can see *tanuki* merchants peddling their wares. What is curious however, is the mat the merchants are

³⁹ Rubringer, *Popular Literacy*, pp 83.

⁴⁰ Rubringer, *Popular Literacy*, pp 85.

⁴¹ Foster, *Pandemonium and Parade*, pp 49.

sitting on. This mat is made from the *tanuki*'s huge scrotum which it could extend at will, one of the defining characteristics of *tanuki* which came from the Edo-period. In another Utagawa print (figure 8) we can see them being used as nets and fans. Another print *Azabu Hiroo no hara Senkintan ôkindama ni odoroku* (麻布広尾原千金丹大きん玉におどろく, en. "Startled by Gigantic Testes of Tanuki at Hiroo Plain in Azabu ") by Tsukioka Yoshitoshi shows two raccoon-dogs using their huge testes to frighten some merchants (figure 9). The main difference between their *tanuki* is that the Utagawa *tanuki* appear more skinny and have elongated snouts and ears: making them look almost fox-like. They also lack the "mask" raccoon-dogs are supposed to have. On the other hand, the Tsukioka *tanuki* appear more rounded and do possess distinctive facial markings. Why the *tanuki* was given such huge testicles, is not known for sure. One of the most accepted answers, as told by Alice Gordenker in a Japan Times Q&A, is that in the past, *tanuki* skins were used by goldsmiths to stretch golden balls into sheets, as they were extremely durable. The phrase *kintama* (金玉) means "balls of gold", but can also be used as slang for testicles. It is thought that it is this association with stretching gold that led to the *tanuki* in art being depicted with huge testes.⁴²

Seemingly an oddball when compared to the lavish prints by Utagawa and Tsukioka, is the print *Tanuki no haratsuzumi* (狸の腹鼓, en. "The Belly-drumming of the tanuki") made by Shibata Zeshin in the late Edo-period (see figure 10). On this print, we can see a *tanuki* seemingly in the middle of drumming on its belly. This *tanuki* seems to not have been anthropomorphised the way we are used to from other *ukiyo-e* artists. It is not standing on two legs, nor is it wearing clothes. In contrast to the long, skinny forms the creatures held in Utagawa's prints, this *tanuki* is very short and stout: more similar to the real life animal. Additionally, the flowing brush-strokes making the creature look fuzzy combined with its big eyes and bulging belly make it look quite cute. Another point of interest is that there is no mention in either image nor poem of a supposed enlarged scrotum, which was very apparent in the other Edo-period prints discussed prior.

Critique and satire through yōkai prints

As explained before, the Edo period was one of relative prosperity. This was in part due to the Tokugawa *bakufu* (shogunate) which ended the Sengoku period and brought the peace needed for economic and cultural growth. At the same time however, the shogunate sought to tightly control the life of its citizens in order to maintain their power over the country. The book "Undercurrents in the Floating World: Censorship and Japanese Prints" talks about how

⁴² Alice Gordenker, "Tanuki genitals", *Japan Times*, July 5, 2008.
<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2008/07/15/reference/tanuki-genitals/>

the *bakufu* attempted to control art by putting it through (heavy) censorship and how this affected printmakers. In the chapter “The Politics of Japanese Prints” by Sarah Thompson, she explains that the increasing economic power of the “lower” classes of society (i.e. artisans and merchants) and the emergence of the “floating world” was seen as a threat to the strict Neo-Confucian ideology of the shogunate. Thompson states that their main concerns with regard to woodblock prints were “political subversion, sexual and social propriety and excessive luxuriance”.⁴³

Further unrest came in the later Edo period, there were years of crop failures resulting in the Tenpō Famine (1833-1837)⁴⁴. The shortages led to a period of social unrest, to which the *bakufu* responded with a series of reforms known as the Tenpō reforms (1841- 1845). These reforms clamped down hard on artists and the pleasure districts in particular, which had already been hit by the famine years prior. Publications which “could have a bad effect on morale” were banned, including images of actors or prostitutes.⁴⁵ Naturally, the artists were outraged and sought for ways to deliver “hidden” critique on the upper classes. One of the ways was using *yōkai* or other supernatural beings as caricatures. Social satire is not something new to the *tanuki*, as beast often disguises itself as holy figures or priests (as seen in *Uji Shui Monogatari*) and a print by Kobayashi Eijirō shows a *tanuki* posing as a lady-in-waiting (see figure 11: of particular note is the skirt, which is covered in little hairs (a common signifier of something made out of *tanuki* scrotum) and also appears quite phallic in form).

A print by Utagawa Kuniyoshi from 1852 depicts the great hunting party arranged by the shogun Minamoto no Yoritomo in 1193 (see figure 12). Whilst most prints depicting this hunt focus on portraying the grandeur of it, Utagawa uses it for satirical purposes. In her dissertation “Die nishiki’e-Karikaturen von Kuniyoshi” (en. “The nishiki’e caricatures of Kuniyoshi”) Noriko Deushi Brandl provides an interpretation of this image. The shogun is located on a tribune, from where he looks at the action taking place below. Brandl explains that the shogun in this print is supposed to be Tokugawa Ieyoshi who held a similar hunting party in 1849. As the Tokugawa *bakufu* had banned the depiction of current events, she states, Utagawa used the event held by Minamoto no Yoritomo as an allegory.⁴⁶ The

⁴³ Sarah Thompson, “The Politics of Japanese Prints”, in *Undercurrents in the Floating World: Censorship and Japanese Prints*, ed. Dawn Lawson (New York: Asia Society Galleries, 1991), pp 31-32.

⁴⁴ Marius B. Jansen, *The Cambridge History of Japan volume 5: The Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp 117-119.

⁴⁵ Jansen, *History of Japan*, pp 142-144.

⁴⁶ Noriko Deushi Brandl, “Die nishiki’e-Karikaturen von Kuniyoshi” (en. “The nishiki’e caricatures of Kuniyoshi”), (PhD. diss. , University of Vienna, 2009), pp 236.

shogun, as well as the countless samurai located to the side (holding up their banners) watch on silently as the hunt takes place. Amusingly, the animals seem to hunt the samurai on the “battlefield” more than they can hunt the animals. The *tanuki* is seen on the far right side of the image, beating a samurai using its large testicles. Others are bitten by foxes or get their behinds whacked by monkeys. On one hand this is a jab at the shogunate and the higher classes, who look on silently “from above” whilst the general populace struggles. On the other hand, it is poking fun at the samurai-class which in the past were fearsome warriors, but now have lost their fighting skills to the point that they are not even a match for animals.

The tanuki as a dunce in folktales

In a thesis dedicated to *tanuki* we can of course not forget to talk about folktales, as there are a slew of tales where it makes an appearance. For the purposes of this thesis, I will limit myself to the two most popular *tanuki* tales: *Kachi-kachi yama* (かちかち山, en. “Kachi-kachi Mountain”) and *Bunbuku chagama* (分福茶釜, en. “Bunbuku tea kettle”). A problem often found in not only researching folktales, but also mythology in general, is that many of these tales originated in oral form. Because everyone added their own twists to the story when telling it, it is extremely difficult to find a “definitive” version of the story. In this thesis, we will look at the versions as described by Seki Keigo in his book *Nihon mukashibanashi shūsei* (日本昔話集成, en. “Compilation of Japanese Folktales”). Seki was a folklorist who collected and compiled folktales from all over Japan. In *Nihon mukashibanashi shūsei* he arranged a plethora of tales using a model based on the Aarne–Thompson–Index: a numerical system classifying fairy tales according to their central motifs or tropes.

“*Kachi-kachi*”, in the tale of *Kachi-kachi yama*, is an onomatopoeia signifying the sounds of a crackling fire. There are two parts to the story: one in which the *tanuki* plays a trick on a farmer and the second one where a rabbit gets revenge. Seki states that the parts may be told separately, but are often combined.⁴⁷ The first part of the story begins with a *tanuki* annoying a farmer at work. The farmer, having enough of the beast’s antics, ties it up and orders his wife to make stew out of him. The raccoon-dog gets free through trickery and kills the wife. After feeding the farmer the stew made from his own wife whilst disguised as her, the *tanuki* reveals the trickery, running away to the mountains. The heartbroken man is consoled by a rabbit, who promises to take revenge for him. Part two of the story has the rabbit tormenting the *tanuki* by setting fire to a bundle of firewood on its back (seen in figure 13), making him roll down the mountain whilst tied up with wisteria vines and smearing miso

⁴⁷ Keigo Seki. 日本昔話集成 第一部(動物昔話) (en. “Compilation of Japanese Folktales part 1 (Animal Folktales)”) (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1950), pp 175 - 208.

on his wounds. Finally he gives the badger an earthen boat to sail in, which of course starts to sink immediately. The *tanuki* drowns as punishment for its evil deeds.

“*Bunbuku*”, in the tale of *Bunbuku chagama*, is again an onomatopoeia, referring to the sound of a boiling tea kettle. Seki also states that when written in kanji (分福), the phrase could also mean ‘sharing good luck’. Some versions replace the *tanuki* with a *kitsune*.⁴⁸ The story begins with an old man who saves a *tanuki* from some mean kids. The badger thanks the man and transforms into a tea kettle. He states that the old man should sell him to the village temple in order to get good money. The man does as he is told and the priests are very happy with it. However, the *tanuki* as a tea-kettle runs away in pain after having been put on the fire, and he returns to the old man. He then transforms into a beautiful young girl and asks the man to sell him to a brothel. Again, the man does as he’s told, and the transformed raccoon-dog lives as a prostitute for one year. After this time, he becomes bored and returns to the old man again. This time, he transforms into a horse and states its final wish: to be sold to a noble man in a distant country. As a horse, the badger has to bear a great load, which he is not used to. The noble man abandons the *tanuki*-horse, and it is never seen again. Another version of this story, which is often used for children’s books, omits the prostitute and horse transformations, and makes the badger pay back its debts through working as a street performer, doing acrobatics as a walking teapot⁴⁹ (seen in figure 14).

When we compare the two stories, we can see parallels but also differences. What the stories have in common, is that they both highlight the transformative abilities of the *tanuki* and that its disguise is eventually broken: willingly in *Kachi-kachi yama* and unintentionally in *Bunbuku chagama*. The main difference is the nature of the *tanuki*. In *Kachi-kachi yama* he is mean-spirited, killing the farmer’s wife and making him eat her in a stew. In contradiction, the one in *Bunbuku chagama* is very kind-hearted: going out of its way to ensure the old man is paid back for the favor. This is reflected in the endings of both stories: whilst in *Kachi-kachi yama* the *tanuki* is drowned as revenge, the badger in many versions of *Bunbuku chagama* is either made an object of worship, or the old man continually prays for its rebirth in paradise.

In conclusion, we can say that the function of the *tanuki* underwent major changes during the Edo-period. This was partly due to the economic growth and rise of urban literacy, which radically changed the way books, art and other printed media were perceived and consumed. The prosperity of this era also meant the beginning of the “floating world” of play. These factors made

⁴⁸ Keigo Seki, 日本昔話集成 第二部 第三 (本格昔話) (en. “Compilation of Japanese Folktales part 2.3 (Classical Folktales)”) (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1950), pp. 1081-1091.

⁴⁹ Takejiro Hasegawa, *The wonderful tea-kettle*, translated by T.H. James and illustrated by Yoshimune Arai (Tokyo: Hasegawa & co, 1896). Scans provided by the New York Public Library, <https://archive.org/details/japanesefairytalse01no16thom/page/24/mode/2up>.

the *tanuki* shift to a more amusing and also grotesque form, as seen in the Utagawa prints showcasing its huge testicles. Its trickster nature and powers were no longer something frightening: rather, they became a form of amusement. At the same time, the “non-humanness” of the creature also made it an excellent character to use in satire and parody. Artists could use them to depict caricatures of different classes, which makes it an important signifier of the shifting social hierarchy of the Edo-period.

Rural vs urban: understanding modernity through tanuki

Nostalgia and the concept of “furusato”

In this final chapter, I will look at *tanuki* narratives which emerged as a reaction to the rapid modernisation following the Meiji Restoration of 1868. With the long period of *sakoku* (isolation from the rest of the world) and the reign of the Tokugawa *bakufu* ended, the country was heavily influenced by foreign powers. Japan started to modernise, which included rapid urbanisation and major technological advancements such as the introduction of trains. This modernisation came as a major shock to people, who feared the strange western influences. As a counter-reaction, people started longing for a return to the olden days: something often described by use of the term *furusato* (故郷). *Furusato* literally means hometown, but especially in recent years has come to refer more to a sense of nostalgia for the (a heavily romanticised image of) countryside.

Lindsay Morrison, in her article “Home of the Heart: the Modern Origins of *Furusato*”, states that there were three factors which led to the emergence of this term in the present form. Firstly, there was mass migration from the countryside to the cities in the Meiji period. According to Morrison, the abolishment of the class system following the Meiji Restoration meant that there came a new ideology of “individual personal advancement”: meaning that individuals were responsible for their own prosperity. As such, many young people moved to the cities in hopes of better education or employment opportunities. Morrison does state that they retained a sense of connection to their “hometown”: longing to return to them one day. However, the “brain drain” damaged the rural areas to the point where they became “unrecognizable”: a far cry from the image people had of their *furusato*.⁵⁰ The second factor came from the emergence of photography collections of *furusato*, which romanticised the countryside. Morrison states that the photos in these collections specifically captured “the archetype, or arche-landscape of the Japanese home”: idyllic, quaint villages and lush

⁵⁰ Lindsay R. Morrison, “Home of the Heart: the Modern Origins of *Furusato*.” *ICU Comparative Culture* 45 (2013): pp 5-6, http://subsites.icu.ac.jp/org/sscc/pdf/morrison_45.pdf.

greenery.⁵¹ She states that this “discovery” of *furusato* not as a specific, individual idea of a hometown, but as a “landscape”, an imagined construct based on general ideas, helped generalize the term. “Once *furusato* was conceived of as being a landscape, the focus shifted from the individual home to a kind of archetypal place of origin—the home of the Japanese soul.”⁵² Lastly, a major factor according to Morrison was the development of the modern Japanese nation-state, with the idea of a national “hometown” being enforced (among others) through *shōka* or school songs. The song aptly named “*Furusato*” in particular has strong themes relating to the beauty of the countryside and wishing for a return to days past. Even though many of the children singing these songs have grown up in cities, the notion of a romantic countryside is still being passed down. Borrowing Morrisons words, we can say that “present conceptualization of *furusato* has not been experienced, so much as it has been learned”.⁵³

Tanuki as a symbol of resisting modernity and yearning for the past

As seen prior, much of the “resentment” of modernity stemmed from people fearing the “strange” western influences that had taken hold of the country. We can draw parallels to similar feelings of fear and unease of the unknown from ancient times we saw in the second chapter. It probably comes as no surprise that *yōkai* such as the *tanuki* were heavily used in narratives expressing this resentment of changing the familiar, as at the same time they also were a symbol of the superstitious beliefs associated with the countryside.

In the article “Haunting Modernity: Tanuki, Trains, and Transformation in Japan” Michael Dylan Foster analyses a set of narratives concerning *tanuki* turning into trains emerging in the late 19th and early 20th century. He states that the steam train symbolized the rapid industrialization and modernisation of post-Edo-period Japan. It reshaped the landscape, breaking open local communities and exposing their identities and traditions to “foreign” influences. This also altered the relationship between humans and nature: Foster states that “as the train made progressively deeper inroads into previously mysterious terrain, perhaps it was inevitable that this metonym for modernity and industrialization, this new shapeshifter, would clash with that older icon of tradition and nature, the *tanuki*”.⁵⁴ As an example of this clash depicted in textual form, he calls upon a legend of the *nise-kisha* (偽汽車, en. “fake train”). In this legend, a train riding late at night gets stopped multiple times by what appears to be someone nearly riding into them (signified by the sound of a train coming and the

⁵¹ Morrison, “Home of the Heart”, pp 14.

⁵² Morrison, “Home of the Heart”, pp 17.

⁵³ Morrison, “Home of the Heart”, pp 19.

⁵⁴ Michael Dylan Foster, “Haunting Modernity: Tanuki, Trains, and Transformation in Japan”, *Asian Ethnology* volume 71 no. 1 (2012): 10, <https://asianethnology.org/downloads/ae/pdf/a1737.pdf>.

blowing of a steam whistle). When the train is stopped however, there is nothing to be seen. One night, the conductor elects not to stop, continuing seemingly without a problem. The next morning, a dead *tanuki* is found on the tracks: the “train” had been an illusion. Foster argues that the raccoon-dog in this narrative symbolizes the traditional, community life, which struggles against (and is ultimately overpowered by) the “foreign monster” of modernity. In doing this, he claims, the *tanuki* story offers a “counter-narrative to the glorious and romantic official story of modernity”.⁵⁵

Another artist who used *yōkai* such as the *tanuki* to express a clash between modernity and ancient beliefs is mangaka Mizuki Shigeru (1922-2015). His most famous manga, *GeGeGe no Kitaro* (ゲゲゲの鬼太郎) focuses a young boy modeled after a *hitotsume-kozō* (一目小僧), en. “one-eyed child”) named Kitaro who has many adventures filled with encounters with the supernatural and references to old Japanese popular imagination. An image in which *tanuki* are using their testes as a drum in order to lure Kitaro out of his house (figure 15) bears a striking resemblance to a print by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (figure 16). Mizuki existing ideas surrounding *yōkai* and the concept of the supernatural, and re-shapes them for the modern age, even coming up with a few new creatures himself. Foster in *Pandemonium and Parade* sees Kitaro as a mirror of Mizuki himself: “struggling to protect *yōkai* and the (super)natural world from fading into irrelevance”⁵⁶. By popularizing elements of the supernatural and “strange” through media such as manga, he is essentially doing the same thing as *shōka* did for the *furusato* notion: creating a fictionalized space of “nostalgia” to contrast modernity and urban life. The clash between these two concepts is made even more noticeable in the most recent adaptation of the *GeGeGe no Kitaro* anime, released in 2018 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the original 1968 anime.⁵⁷ The premise of this adaptation is set in the 21st century, where people have seemingly completely forgotten about the existence of *yōkai*. As a series of strange phenomena torment the residents of the human world, Mana (a young girl who still holds some beliefs in the supernatural) uses the so-called “*Yōkai* Post” to call for help from Kitaro. In this series, Kitaro and his friends are shown as being far removed from modern society: living in a hut near a swamp and not knowing what smartphones are. This is also shown in his initial belief that humans and *yōkai* should not mingle with each other. Mana acts as a mediator between Kitaro and the realm of the supernatural and the human world: warming him up to the idea of *yōkai* and humans coexisting side by side.

⁵⁵ Foster, “Haunting Modernity”, pp 12.

⁵⁶ Foster, *Pandemonium and Parade*, pp 167.

⁵⁷ Kōji Ogawa, *ゲゲゲの鬼太郎* (en. “GeGeGe no Kitaro”), television series (Tokyo: Fuji TV, 2018).

Eco-terrorist tanuki: a case study of Pom Poko

Perhaps the most famous depiction of *tanuki* fighting against urbanisation in order to preserve the pastoral can be found in the Studio Ghibli film *Heisei Tanuki Gassen Pompoko* (平成狸合戦ぽんぽこ, en. “Heisei-era *Tanuki War Pompoko*”: hereafter *Pompoko*) released in 1994⁵⁸. The movie follows a group of *tanuki* whose habitat is threatened by a development project for housing. They start off by fighting amongst each other for the little space and food left, but eventually decide to unite in order to hopefully put a hold to the assault on their home. A matriarch teaches them how to use their powers of shape-shifting (which they had forgotten since the Edo days) and with these powers they attempt to haunt people, scaring them away from their lands. However, these efforts remain useless, as people don’t have the same fear of the unnatural as they used to in the olden days. Even their greatest haunting, a recreation of the *hyakki yagyō*, is claimed to be a publicity stunt by the amusement park Wonderland. The depression that follows, splinters the *tanuki* into different fractions. One group takes an eco-terrorist route and tries to move out the builders by force, eventually getting killed by the riot police. Another fraction, seemingly delusional, tries to escape reality by forming a dancing cult and taking a boat to “the shores of paradise” (essentially committing suicide). The remaining *tanuki* either try to physically plead to the humans for help or research ways to assimilate into the human world (as foxes are shown to have done). When all else fails, they stage one final illusion: shortly restoring their homeland to the way it used to be. In the end, those who have mastered shape-shifting live as humans, whilst the others remain in their animal forms and struggle to survive in an urban environment.

Throughout the movie, the *tanuki* are shown to take on three distinct forms: an animal form, a human form and an anthropomorphic form (shown in image 17). During the main portion of the movie, when they exhibit full control over their shapeshifting, they frequently change between these forms. It can be argued that during these scenes of the movie, they are fully showcasing their “trickster-ness”. On one hand, they are shown to be able to work together and conjure plans which make excellent use of their transformative capabilities. They do successfully scare a few people away, even if those are immediately replaced by others. On the other hand, there are plenty of scenes showcasing their foolishness as well: engaging games and partying over the deaths of a few humans and getting distracted by food. This is more subtly shown in the fact that the *tanuki*, despite their efforts, do lose their homeland. At the end of the movie, they have to choose: either become a human and have the best chance of “fitting in” or change into animal form and try to survive in an environment only

⁵⁸ Isao Takahata. 平成狸合戦ぽんぽこ (en. “Heisei-era *Tanuki war Pompoko*”) Movie. Tokyo: Studio Ghibli, 1994.

slightly accommodating them. Although the last scene does show them partying in anthropomorphic form, they arguably have to give up “trickster-ness” to continue living.

The movie also ties in very well to the concept of *furusato*. The *tanuki* try hard to make people remember the connection to the pastoral: first through the *yōkai* transformations and the parade. The grotesque *yōkai* depictions look like they came from Sekien’s scrolls and are a reminder of a time where these creatures were allegories of fear. In modern age however, humans have lost their connection to the rural and with it their belief in the superstitious. Whilst most people were excited or scared by the parade initially, as no records of the event remained and media coverage of it petered out, so did their interest. The seeming “blindness” of the humans towards the acts of the supernatural taking place in the city is perfectly demonstrated during the scene showing the drunk men at a street stall during the parade. They overhear children talking about the apparitions and lament that in the past, they too believed in such things, whilst supernatural creatures frolic in the background (figure 19). The illusion at the end of the movie shows the romanticised homeland in its full glory, with people living their lives in balance with nature. There is even a moment showing a mother and child bowing before a small shrine, showing the attachment to the supernatural in old traditional communities. The sense of nostalgia is further amplified when one of the humans is shown to recognize her grandmother in the illusion (figure 20). Even the *tanuki* themselves are not immune to this, as a few *tanuki* recognizing their younger selves amongst the trees is what eventually causes the illusion to break.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I discussed the mythological creature known as the *tanuki* and what functions it has as a ‘trickster’ in Japanese popular imagination. As stated, the trickster is a paradoxical figure within mythology: having god-like powers, but uses these in perverse ways. The *tanuki* fits into this archetype as it has great powers of shapeshifting and illusion-making, but is still considered a foolish beast who tricks and is tricked. The main characteristic of a trickster-deity, stems from duality: positioning itself between two (polar) opposites. The archetype of the trickster is one that can be found across many different mythologies, so in that sense it could be said that the figure is universal. However, we should be careful when adding mythological figures under the banner of “trickster”, as every individual trickster is also quite clearly shaped by the cultures from which they emerge. What remains critical when researching tricksters in mythology, is to consider their cultural and historical context.

It is quite clear that the *tanuki* has been shaped by historical and cultural influences as well. In ancient times, it was thought that *tanuki* and other *yōkai* were beings from another, “supernatural” realm and that at night they were able to cross over to our world. Their rambunctious acts were used to give meaning to seemingly “unexplainable” phenomena that occurred mostly under cover of darkness. The “weirdness” of *yōkai* such as the *tanuki* was amplified by making him anthropomorphic: an animal which could shapeshift into human form and perform feats such as singing and dancing. This is also an expression of the duality of the trickster-figure: not animal, nor man, but something in between.

The economic growth and rise of print-culture in the Edo period further revamped the *tanuki*, particularly its image. The addition of colored inks and the invention of *ukiyo-e* gave rise to a plethora of *tanuki* imagery. With people becoming less fearful of the dark and more interested in entertainment, the function of the *tanuki* shifted from being an allegory for fears of the unknown to being a symbol of the “floating world” of pleasure established during this period. Many prints and texts involving the animal focus on its unreason and use its powers and trickery as a source of laughs. At the same time, the later Edo-period was also home to social unrest due to strict government regulations and one of the worst famines in Japanese history. *Yōkai* such as the *tanuki* became a preferred way for artists to provide social critique and resist the strict Neo-Confucian ideals of the shogunate. The *bakufu* had banned the use of imagery of the Tokugawa family and as these supernatural beings were not supposed to be seen the same way as humans, they became a perfect way to surpass these laws.

A final great shift in functionality of the *tanuki* as a trickster can be seen during the Meiji period. After a long period of isolation, Japan came into full contact with Western inventions and ideals, which urged a period of rapid modernisation. Many felt hesitant to accept the changes and there was a general feeling of (imagined) nostalgia for the rural *furusato*. This in turn gave rise to a series of narratives in which *tanuki* came face to face with the consequences of modern- and urbanisation. The reason why raccoon-dogs were used for these stories was on one-hand due to real-life raccoon-dogs losing their natural habitat due to urbanisation and as a result showing up more often in cities and/or getting killed by trains or traffic. On the other hand, the paradoxical nature of the *tanuki* as a trickster makes it a perfect mediator between the rural and the urban and due to its powers/ the creature is able to both imitate (the dangers of) advancing technology, as well as remind people of the nature that used to be all around them.

In conclusion, this thesis shows that the *tanuki* is an extremely malleable figure within Japanese mythology. Whilst it maintains the general characteristics of a “traditional” trickster-deity, the functions of the creature in popular imagination change frequently based on the ideas and events of the time and the public which consumes these narratives.

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Appendix: Images



Figure 1: Tanuki statues found at the Kuragari Gorge near Nagoya.



Figure 2: The entry for “tanuki” (狸) in the Kinmozui (訓蒙図彙, en. “Collected Illustrations to Instruct the Unenlightened”) by Nakamura Tekisai (1666). Scan provided by Nichibunken.

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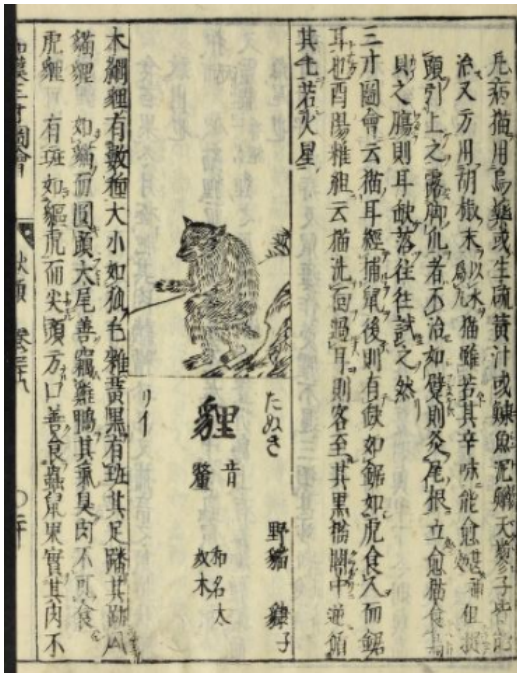


Figure 3: The entry for “tanuki” (狸) in the *Wakan Sansai Zue* (和漢三才圖會, en. “Illustrated Sino-Japanese Encyclopedia”) by Terajima Ryoan (1731). Scan provided by University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. <https://archive.org/details/wakansansaizue37478800/page/n82/mode/1up>.



Figure 4: The entry for “tanuki” (狸) in the *Gazu Hyakki Yagyo* (画図百鬼夜行, en. “The Illustrated Night Parade of a Hundred Demons”) by Toriyama Sekien (1776). Scan provided by the Smithsonian Libraries. <https://archive.org/details/GazuHyakkiyagyo3Tori/page/n20/mode/2up>.



Figure 5: Excerpt of the Hyakki Yagyō Emaki (百鬼夜行絵巻, en. "Painted Scroll on the Night Procession of a Hundred Demons") by Kanō Osanobu (18th century). Scan provided by the Tokyo National Museum. <https://webarchives.tnm.jp/imgsearch/show/C0043198>.



Figure 6: "Tanuki bayashi" ("狸囃子, en. "Tanuki band"). Part of the series "Honjyo Nana Fushigi" (本所七不思議, en. "Seven Wonders of Honjo") by Utagawa Kunitaru (1886). Scan and translation provided by Zack Davison. <https://hyakumonogatari.com/2010/08/18/the-procession-of-the-tanuki/>.



Figure 7: “Tanuki no yomise” (狸の夜見世, en. “The evening market of the tanuki”). Part of the “Tanuki” (狸) series by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1844-1846). Scan provided by the Kuniyoshi project.

[http://www.kuniyoshiproject.com/raccoon%20Dogs%20\(R209\).htm](http://www.kuniyoshiproject.com/raccoon%20Dogs%20(R209).htm).



Figure 8: Dashi (出汁, en. “Broth”) and Tango no sekku (端午の節句, en. ‘Boy’s festival’). Part of “Aratamete tanuki no tawamure” (あらためて狸の戯, en. “More fun with Raccoon-dogs”) by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1844-1846). Scan provided by the Kuniyoshi project.

<http://www.kuniyoshiproject.com/More%20Fun%20with%20Raccoon%20Dogs.htm>.



Figure 9: “Azabu Hiroo no hara Senkintan ôkindama ni odoroku” (麻布広尾原千金丹大きん玉におどろく, en. “Startled by Gigantic Testes of Tanuki at Hiroo Plain in Azabu”). Part of the series “Tōkyō Kaika Kyōga Meisho” (en. “Crazy Pictures of Famous Places in Tōkyō”) by Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (1881). Scan provided by the Museum of Fine Arts Boston. <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/462358>.



Figure 10: “Tanuki no haratsuzumi” (狸の腹鼓, en. “The Belly-drumming of the tanuki”) by Shibata Zeshin (late Edo period). Scans provided by the Museum of Fine Arts Boston. <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/213940>.



Figure 11: “Kanjo” (官女, en. “Lady-in-waiting”). Part of the series “Shinpan tanuki asobi” (志ん板狸あそび, en. “The latest tanuki entertainments”) by Kobayashi Eijirō (1884). Scan provided by the Princeton University Library. <https://catalog.princeton.edu/catalog/5180808>.



Figure 12: “Minamoto no Yoritomo-kō Fuji no mine makigari no zu” (源頼朝藩富士峰巻狩之図, en. “The shogun Minamoto no Yoritomo’s hunting party near the peak of Mount Fuji”) by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1852). Scan provided by the Kuniyoshi project. [http://www.kuniyoshiproject.com/Warrior%20trptychs%201851-1852.%20Part%20II%20\(T270-T288\).htm](http://www.kuniyoshiproject.com/Warrior%20trptychs%201851-1852.%20Part%20II%20(T270-T288).htm).

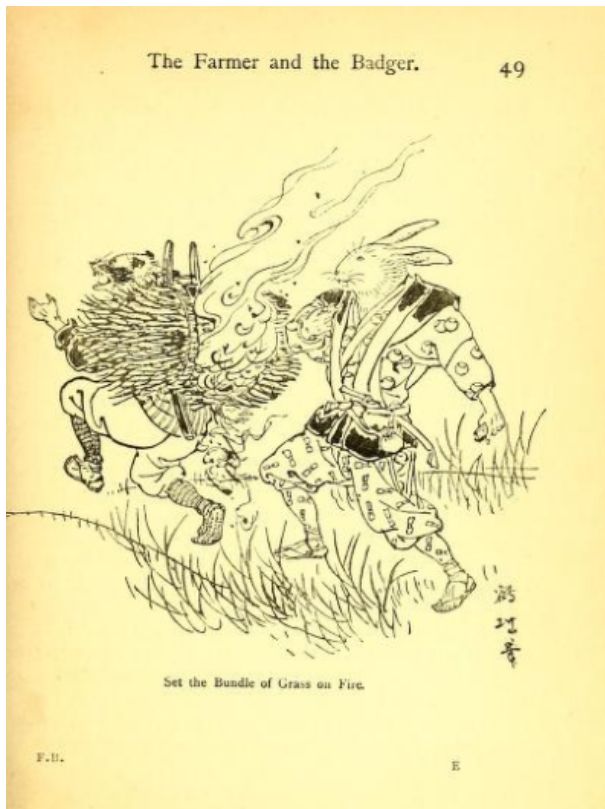


Figure 13: Scene from the story of “Kachi-kachi yama” as depicted in *The Japanese Fairy Book* (1903) by Sazanami Iwaya (Here, the tale is referred to as “The Farmer and the Badger”). Illustration by Kakuzō Fujiyama. Scan provided by the University of North Carolina. <https://archive.org/details/japanesefairyboo00oza>.



Figure 14: Scene from the story of “Bunbuku chagama” (here it’s called “The wonderful tea-kettle”). Part of the “Japanese Fairy Tale Series” by Mrs. T.H. James (1885-1899). Scans provided by the New York Public Library. <https://archive.org/details/japanesefairytales01no16thom/page/24/mode/2up>.



Figure 15: Colorized panel of the chapter “Tanuki bayashi”. Part of the manga series “Shin GeGeGe no Kitaro” (新ゲゲゲの鬼太郎, en. “New GeGeGe no Kitaro”) by Mizuki Shigeru (1978). Scan provided by Gegege no Wikitaro. <https://gegegenokitaro.fandom.com/wiki/Tanuki-Bayashi>



Figure 16: “Hatsu-uma no tanuki” (初午の狸, en. “Tanuki on the First Day of the Horse”). Part of the “Tanuki” (狸) series by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1844-1846). Scan provided by the Kuniyoshi project. [http://www.kuniyoshiproject.com/raccoon%20Dogs%20\(R209\).htm](http://www.kuniyoshiproject.com/raccoon%20Dogs%20(R209).htm)



Figure 17: The different forms of the tanuki: animal, human and anthropomorphic. Excerpts from the movie “Heisei tanuki gassen Pompoko” (平成狸合戦ぽんぽこ, en. “Heisei-era Tanuki War Pompoko”) directed by Takahata Isao (1994). Screenshots taken and edited by author.



Figure 18: Drunken men appearing oblivious to the rokurokubi (轆轤首, en. “Pulley neck”) behind them. Excerpt from the movie “Heisei tanuki gassen Pompoko” (平成狸合戦ぽんぽこ, en. “Heisei-era Tanuki War Pompoko”) directed by Takahata Isao (1994). Screenshot taken by author.



Figure 19: A woman recognizing her grandmother in the final tanuki illusion. Excerpt from the movie “Heisei tanuki gassen Pompoko” (平成狸合戦ぽんぽこ, en. “Heisei-era Tanuki War Pompoko”) directed by Takahata Isao (1994). Screenshot taken by author.