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Oni in Manga, Anime, and Film

IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN, A VIRTUAL WORLD OF ANIME (Japanese animation), film, and games offers oni and other *yōkai* unlimited potential. Manga (graphic novels)—a close relative of anime and an essential component in contemporary Japanese pop culture—is also fertile soil for oni. Japanese manga were popular in the pre-war period, but it was only after the war that the industry fully recognized its potential, most notably with the publication of Osamu Tezuka’s (1928–1989) *Tetsuwan Atomu* (*Astro Boy*).¹ In 1995, comic books were a billion-dollar industry in Japan accounting for 40 percent of all books and magazines sold (Schodt 19). Overseas as well, a San Francisco-based Japanese manga and anime company that translates Japanese work into the English language was a four- or five-man operation in 1986; by 2007 it had grown to a staff of 130.² Many anime are based on stories that appeared first in manga. Indeed, Japan’s first animated television series was the aforementioned Osamu Tezuka’s *Astro Boy* in 1963.

Susan Napier writes, “anime, with its enormous breadth of subject material, is ... a useful mirror on contemporary Japanese society, offering an array of insights into the significant issues, dreams, and nightmares of the day” (*Anime* 8). In the various array of subject materials, oni and *yōkai* are important ingredients to help understand the Japanese, as well as the broader human psyche.

As human knowledge of earth expands, and as the world becomes smaller, oni’s trope moves beyond this planet. Perhaps because it is less believable today that oni would inhabit far-distant mountains and rivers in Japan, a contemporary oni in these media is often portrayed as a creature from a

1 Tezuka is widely regarded as the godfather of manga.

2 See “Are Made-in-Japan Manga and Animation About to Be Blindsided?” 15.

different time and/or space. An oni is an alien, a hybrid of earthlings and some different species, or simply a different species on earth from the very long past, the future, or, if from the present then from a different temporal dimension. An oni's existence has also become entwined with cutting-edge technologies such as electronics, mechanics, and robotics. In cyberspace, oni often cohabit with humans as urban dwellers. Geopolitics may change; but the oni is still an alienated "other." Some oni are looking for a companion just as we saw in the previous chapter, and others exist as allegories or social commentaries. Just as the subject matters of the contemporary representative pop cultural media vary greatly, the oni's representation varies widely.

Apocalyptic and Elegiac Oni

Nagai Gō's Oni

According to Susan Napier, the most significant modes of anime are those of apocalypse, festival, and elegy; and distinctively Japanese in the Japanese vision of apocalypse is the sense of the elegiac (Napier, *Anime* 32, 199). She writes specifically the "Japanese vision of apocalypse" because the end of the world in the Judeo-Christian tradition, i.e., the final battle between the binary concept of righteous forces against evil, with a select few going to Heaven and the rest falling into Hell does not exist in the Japanese tradition.³ Still, "while Buddhist and Shinto scriptures do not contain visions of good frightening evil at the end of the world, the Buddhist doctrine of mappō or 'the latter days of the Law' does revolve around the notion of a fallen world saved by a religious figure, the Maitreya Buddha" (Napier, *Anime* 196).

Apocalyptic fiction became quite popular in the late 1960s and 70s as rapid economic growth came to Japan, and with it came pollution, and societal anxieties. Even though the Cold War was over and the nuclear threat had receded, various apocalyptic fictions were created with a background of societal intransparency and other disasters facing mankind.

3 Napier writes, "What sets Europe and America apart from Japan, however, is that they share the common tradition of the biblical Book of Revelation, the themes and imagery of which have become the fundamental version of the apocalyptic narrative: a final battle between the forces of the righteous and the forces of Satan, the wholesale destruction of the world with the evil side being cast into hell, and the ultimate happy ending with the evildoers condemned and the righteous believers ascending to the kingdom of heaven. Traditional Japanese culture has never shared in this vision" (*Anime* 194).

One of the pioneering artists portraying apocalyptic and elegiac modes of manga through the utilization of oni and demonic creatures is Nagai Gō (born 1945). Nagai often depicts oni as members of a different tribe from the mainstream Japanese race or as creatures born out of grudge, enmity, and suffering. For example, the oni in “Oni—2889 nen no hanran” (Oni—The Rebellion in 2889), which appeared in December 1969, is a synthetic human—a creation of human technology. Similar to “replicants” in the film *Blade Runner* (1982), the oni are absolutely supposed to obey the humans. But the oni rebel against the humans and their cruel treatment.⁴ While the setting is literally futuristic, the core concept of an oni as a marginalized being borne out of grudge, enmity, and suffering remains unchanged. In the following I have chosen two of Nagai’s representative works whose protagonists are oni, *Debiruman* (Devilman, 1972–73) and *Shuten Dōji* (1976–78).

Debiruman (Devilman)

Debiruman (Devilman, 1972–73) is one of Nagai’s most influential and popular works. This oni, as the name Devilman itself indicates, is definitely more akin to the Judeo-Christian “devil” than to Japanese oni. The author uses the translation of “*akuma ningen*” for Devilman rather than something like “oni *bito*,” and the architectural framework of Devilman is predominantly Christendom. Indeed, when Nagai’s representative works are compiled, *Devilman* is often categorized by itself, separate from his “oni series” that include “Oni—The Rebellion in 2889” and *Shuten Dōji*.⁵ Yet, various oni aspects that appear in *Devilman* make this story part of oni as we shall see later. *Devilman* ran as serials of manga and TV anime almost simultaneously, but the manga serial is much more violent and cruel with many atrocious scenes typified in the dismembering of Miki’s body (Miki, a main character, is the protagonist’s love).⁶

The basic plot of the manga version of *Devilman* is as follows: a long time ago, demons, an indigenous race, had ruled the earth, but a cataclysm

4 See Nagai, *Nagai Gō kaiki tanpenshū* 1–112.

5 See for example, Nagai’s *Debiruman wa dare nano ka*. When Nagai’s work is classified according to genre, both *Devilman* and *Shuten Dōji* are categorized under *denki* (strange stories, romance) with an English subtitle, “legend.”

6 Nagai has a broad spectrum of subjects. While he is celebrated for violent manga, he is also famous for comical, sexy, and/or erotic manga such as *Harenchi gakuen* (Shameless School, 1968–1972) and *Kyūti Hanī* (Cutie Honey 1973–74). In fact the *Devilman* serial comes almost in between *Shameless School* and *Cutie Honey*. For an insightful observation on *Cutie Honey*, see Napier, *Anime* 73–76.

imprisoned demons in ice. The demons are skilled transformers, or more precisely, amalgamators (*gattai*) who combine with other beings, and their pleasure is to kill sentient beings. The time moves to the present day and the place is Japan. The protagonist is Fudō Akira, a gentle, righteous, but timid teenager. Ryō, Akira's best friend, one day tells Akira that the demons that had been imprisoned in the glacier are resurrected and will destroy humans to have the earth back. In order to save mankind, Akira transforms into Devilman by allowing himself to be possessed by one of the most powerful demon warriors called Amon. As Devilman, Akira has a human heart and the demonic power of Amon; he is not shy any more. Devilman battles against various demons to protect humans, but then demons begin indiscriminate amalgamation (*gattai*), murdering countless humans. Examining this mysterious phenomenon, a Nobel Prize winner of Biology, Professor Rainuma, concludes that the demons are actually humans. In a plot twist resembling a medieval witchhunt, humans, who have heard the professor's statement, start to torture and kill suspicious people and those who may turn into demons. To complicate the story, Ryō turns out to be Satan, whom the demons worship as their god. Akira/Devilman decides to form the Devilman Army to counter the demons' indiscriminate attack on humans. Eventually the humans all kill each other out of distrust. With no humans left on earth, the final campaign of Armageddon begins, with the Demons' Army led by Ryō/Satan against Devilman's Army. After twenty years when the final battle is over, Ryō/Satan speaks to Akira/Devilman. He explains that long ago, God tried to destroy the demons that were ruling the Earth. Satan went against God's will, and stood on the side of the demons. Victorious demons went into a long sleep in the ice—they were not encased in the ice against their will—but when they woke up, humans were devastating earth, so the demons decided to destroy humans. Satan realized that what the demons did was exactly the same as what God had tried to do to the demons earlier. After Ryō/Satan's confession, he apologizes for his action to Akira/Devilman, but Akira/Devilman dies of his battle wounds.

Devilman's appearance resembles the devil named Mephistopheles that appears in the legend of Faust lithograph by French artist, Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863) or Lucifer, King of Hell, an illustration to the Divine Comedy by Gustave Doré (1832–1883). As the term "Armageddon" suggests, the framework of the story is based upon Biblical literature, especially the Revelation of St. John the Divine. Indeed, when Akira declares that he is

going to form the Devilman Army that could battle against demons, Ryō compares Akira's idea to the Armageddon, explaining,

It's in the Revelation of St. John the Divine. God tells His prophesy to John who was on Patmos and told him to write the prophecy down. Satan, who was encased in the ice by God's desire, will be resurrected after the time of eternity and will bring calamities with his army. God's Army will meet Satan's Army. All the beings on earth will be divided into two groups: good and evil. This battle is called "Armageddon."
(Nagai, *Devilman* 4: 186–87)

It should be noted that a part of Ryō's statement above, "Satan, who was encased in the ice by God's desire," comes from the *Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri (1264–1321). In *Divine Comedy*, Satan is bound in the ice to his mid-point in the place just past the last circle of Cocytus, the ninth and final circle of Hell called Judecca. The Revelation of St. John the Divine simply states that Satan is chained and thrown into an abyss to be sealed for a thousand years. Nagai freely adapts famous descriptions from the work of Christian literature and mixes them to meet his needs, making the work more appealing to a wide audience.

Interestingly, in response to Ryō's statement, Akira believes that his Army, i.e., the Devilman's Army, corresponds to God's Army in the Revelation of St. John the Divine. But his Army loses the campaign at the end the story. The term and meaning of Armageddon is widely known among contemporary Japanese mainly as a result of an incident in 1995 in which, a religious/cult group called the AUM Shinrikyō attempted to force Armageddon by planting sarin gas in Tokyo subways in 1995, killing twelve commuters and injuring many others. But when *Devilman* was serialized in the mid-70s, the notion of Armageddon, let alone its term, was unfamiliar to majority of Japanese. It was in that sense a fresh concept in the manga world.

So why is the Devilman story considered an oni story in spite of its overwhelmingly Judeo-Christian theme? To begin with, there is no "good" or "evil" in support of just one religious belief in this story. As mentioned earlier, oni and the Judeo-Christian devil are distinctly different. The devil or Satan as evil exists in opposition to God, without whom the devil does not exist. But even in the sense of "good" in terms of righteousness against "evil," there is no absolute "good" against absolute "evil" in *Devilman*. Neither Satan's Army nor Devilman's Army is the completely righteous one. While Akira is Devilman, he has the virtuous Akira's heart and soul.

He is more akin to an oni with its own righteousness in his heart.⁷ As we have seen, oni have both positive and negative aspects, and the demons in *Devilman* also possess both positive and negative sides. Despite Ryō's explanation that "the demon's purpose in life is to kill. The demon does not possess 'love.' They are indeed devils" (Nagai, *Debiruman* 1:114), some major demon characters such as Serene and Kaimu do understand love. In fact, the death scene of Serene and Kaimu who offered his life to Serene is quite elegiac. In the anime version of *Devilman*, Akira dies at the very beginning and it is the brave demon warrior Devilman who is protecting Miki and her family against other demons. Indeed, Ryō tells Akira, "Devils existed. The legends of *yōkai* that exist all over the world such as devils, oni, werewolves, vampires, *tengu*, *kappa* (water imps)—aren't they demons?" To this, Akira responds, "come to think of it, Japanese oni look like an amalgamation of humans and oxen" (Nagai, *Debiruman* 1: 100–101). I should mention that in Japan in the 1970s the word, "gattai" (amalgamation) was a very popular, catchy word, especially among children. While shouting, "gattai!" children would pretend to transform into something different; one transforms into something else, into something more powerful, by amalgamating with another being. It is human to desire to transform oneself into a more desirable or powerful being.

Fighting a lonely fight, Devilman is a marginalized being. He is of a different species. He is the "other." I should note that the protagonist's name, Fudō Akira, is written in *kanji* characters 不動明. If one adds the character 王 (*ō*, king), it becomes Fudō myōō 不動明王 (Ācala Vidyārāja, Immovable Protector of Dharma),⁸ the most venerable and best known of the Five Wisdom Kings (*godai myōō*), who represent the luminescent wisdom of the Buddha. Fudō myōō 不動明王 is a manifestation of Mahāvairocana—the fundamental, universal Buddha of esoteric Buddhism, and has a fearsome countenance as he destroys the delusions and material desires of humans in exchange for the salvation of mankind. He is a conqueror of the evil. As we have seen in chapters two and four, it is an oni and oni's progenitor who

7 This reminds me of a group of folktales called "Oni no ko Kozuna" (Kozuna, Oni's Child) in which the protagonist, Kozuna, is kind to humans. Kozuna is a half-oni and half-human child, and it is implied that the kind side is his human side. His cannibal oni side is latent but Kozuna asks to be killed whenever he feels an urge to eat humans. Kozuna is an oni with a human heart.

8 Fudō or Ācala, i.e., immovability, refers to his ability to remain unmoved by carnal temptations.

conquer the very oni. Thus, while the Devilman's world is futuristic and set partly within the Judeo-Christian mode, an influence of Hindu-Buddhist art and concept is undeniable. The gravity of the oni brings Devilman into their terrain. In that sense, although *Devilman's* world is Christian-oriented, Devilman himself is deeply rooted in the traditional Japanese world view.

As the story develops, such familiar motifs as "demonic people" become foregrounded. For example, in one episode, American cavalry possessed by demons massacre a Native American tribe. When Devilman arrives on the scene of murder, the cavalymen look at Devilman and cry, "it's a devil!" But Devilman shouts at them, "No, the devils are within you!" (Nagai, *Debiruman* 3: 186–87). So readers may predict Professor Rainuma's statement, "The true identity of demons is humans." The professor's explanation for the cause of human's demonization, however, reveals a contemporary societal tendency. He explains, "The humans' strong desire has changed the biological cells of human bodies and has transformed themselves into demons. ... The accumulation of contemporary men's pent-up frustrations turned them into demons" (Nagai, *Debiruman* 4: 254–55). In other words, it is the angry, frustrated human psyche that takes the shape of demons. This is an interesting theory when one considers the country's situation then: Japan was just starting to enter an affluent phase, and yet, there were various societal anxieties such as the political unrest of the 1960s and the pollution that came with the rapid adoption of modern conveniences. Aggravation and uneasiness toward the present and future, and an identity crisis for that matter, took the physical form of demon. The professor's statement triggers the "human-hunt" similar to "witch-hunt" of the medieval period of western civilization. "Suspicion will raise bogies" is repeated throughout human history.

Devilman's influence has been enormous on later manga and anime works, including the *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (*Shin seiki Evangelion*, 1995–96), a spectacularly successful manga and anime serial (see Ōizumi 97–100). *Devilman*, which essentially portrays a series of great battles for hegemony over the earth, may be taken as an allegorical war story. Nagai writes, "I started to look at Devilman as a symbolic story of wars. For example, Miki is Akira's fiancée who waits for Akira's return at home, the members of the Devilman Army are combatants, and humans are civilians." But then, he quickly adds,

...sometimes there are some people who swallow my story [at face value]. So I will clearly declare here. This symbolism is just one result

of a ‘simulation game’ ... *Devilman* is not a prophecy—it is a simple manga that I created. Don’t ever think that Japan is planning wars, and don’t be deceived by weird cult groups! (Nagai, *Debiruman way dare nana ka* 48–51)

Nagai is saying that *Devilman* is a creation for entertainment, and understandably he does not want *Devilman* to be an inspiration for an ideologue or a cult group that may become dangerous to the public. This statement, in turn, speaks to how manga and/or his creation may influence modern readers’ ways of thinking and acting so much so that the author has to draw the readers back to its pure entertainment value.

Shuten Dōji (A Child Handed from Heaven)

While *Devilman*’s oni is written in the framework of Christendom, *Shuten Dōji* is clearly cut from Japanese oni cloth, right down to the oni’s traditional masculine appearance with horns. Serialized in *Shōnen Magajin* (Boy’s Magazine) from 1976 to 1978, *Shuten Dōji* is a story whose time and space span the tenth through the twenty-first centuries, from the Earth to the universe, to the realm of oni. Although the title, *Shuten Dōji*, is pronounced the same as the medieval *Shuten Dōji* 酒顛童子 or 酒呑童子 as “Drunken Demon,” Nagai Go uses different characters for his *Shuten Dōji* 手天童子, which literally means, “a child handed from heaven.” Indeed, the protagonist, Shutendō Jirō, is so named because “the child was handed [to the couple] from heaven,” and his name also reflects the most famous oni, *Shuten Dōji* (Nagai, *Shuten Dōji* 1:41). Nagai’s *Shuten Dōji* is roughly divided into three parts: the first is a school-horror in the present Japan; the middle part is a psychic action story that depicts Shutendō Jirō and his friends fighting against a dark religious group that worships *Daiankoku shiyajarai* (Great Evil Deity of Darkness and Death); and the third part is written totally in science fiction mode—with spaceship, cyborg, time machine, etc.—in which Shutendō Jirō travels through time and space.

The story starts with the sudden appearance of a gigantic oni handing out a baby to a couple, Mr. and Mrs. Shiba, who are visiting Mr. Shiba’s ancestral grave to report their marriage. The oni leaves the baby with the couple, saying that he will come back to retrieve him after 15 years. The baby is named Shutendō Jirō after the famous oni, *Shuten Dōji*. Fifteen years later, Jirō notices his supernatural powers, and two horns grow on his head. Then, strange creatures start to attack him, and Jirō realizes that he must be an oni, but he does not know where he came from or why he exists.

In order to find out who he is and also to follow his destiny, he sets off to the *ongokukai*, the oni's realm. Shutendō Jirō is accompanied by Goki (literally protector of the oni),⁹ an oni who exists solely to protect him. The manga sequences span the tenth century to the future world of 2100.

Like *Devilman*, the oni in *Shuten Dōji* are endowed with the ability to copy the shapes, characters, and memories of any sentient beings (Nagai, *Shuten Dōji* 1: 382). Nagai's oni—both the demons in *Devilman* and the oni in *Shuten Dōji* portrayed in the mode of Science Fiction—are more sophisticated and multi-talented than the traditional oni representations. As in *Devilman*, an apocalyptic thought rises up ominously in *Shuten Dōji* as a delinquent says, “the future of humankind is limited. Only gods or demons survive in the end. Weak humans are destined to perish. . . . we saw an *akuma* (devil), a being of the evil realm. Its appearance terribly resembled a legendary oni!” (Nagai, *Shuten Dōji* 1: 370–72). This is a tangent point of *Devilman* and *Shuten Dōji*. Further, an army of oni that attacks Shutendō Jirō when he is about to enter the realm of oni is in fact composed of demons similar to those that appear in *Devilman*.¹⁰ As *Devilman* cries out to the humans, “the devils are within you,” their mental state then creates the oni within their minds. Indeed, the basic premise of *Shuten Dōji* is that negative human emotions such as anger and spite, which essentially do not hold mass, create an oni that has physical mass in this world.

It turns out that the *ongokukai* was within Mrs. Shiba's mind. Mrs. Shiba subconsciously created *ongokukai* out of her anger and grudge against the oni who took Shutendō Jirō away from her. Mr. Shiba explains, “*Ongokukai*, the realm of oni, is the realm of grudge (the same pronunciation of *ongokukai*, but the first character is now replaced by a character meaning “grudge”). The mind bearing “grudge” phenomenolized the shape of oni. *Ongokukai* is the world of grudge that Kyoko [Mrs. Shiba] created when the oni took Jirō away from her” (Nagai, *Shuten Dōji* 6: 238–39). Mrs. Shiba also created Goki, and Senki, another super-strong oni who protects Shutendō Jirō from vicious oni. As we saw in chapters two and four, it is usually an oni that slays other oni.

9 Like many other manga artists, Nagai creates interesting names for the characters. This Goki, for example, is pronounced the same as En no gyōja's Goki (literally posterior demon. Regarding En no gyōja's Goki, see the section of chapter one “The Other: The Oppressed, Alienated, and Isolated”), but written in a different character that makes the name mean, a “protector of the oni.”

10 See Nagai, *Shuten Dōji* 3: 332–348.

Mrs. Shiba had always known that Jirō would be taken away from her, but when Jirō was physically removed after 15 years, she was so shocked that she was diagnosed with typical *yūkaku kannen* or Over Valued Ideation. According to Mrs. Shiba's psychiatrist, Over Valued Ideation happens to ordinary people when they receive an enormous mental shock. The shock is so traumatizing that a patient does not respond to any outside stimuli. Thus, Mrs. Shiba's mind stopped at the time of Jirō's disappearance and she can only think of her grudge against the oni who has taken her boy away (Nagai, *Shuten Dōji* 3: 293–94). This traumatic experience created Daiankoku shiyajarai (Great Evil Deity of Darkness and Death) who exists to draw the universe into the world of darkness (Nagai, *Shuten Dōji* 2: 167–68) and that is worshipped by an evil religious cult. Mrs. Shiba is the Daiankoku shiyajarai. As the time moves back and forth rather casually in *Shuten Dōji*, what happens in the present affects the past, i.e., the causal relationship is reversed. Goki explains that the oni's world was created suddenly in meta-dimensional space from nothingness (Nagai, *Shuten Dōji* 4: 167–68). This is because the oni world was created in Mrs. Shiba's mind when Jirō was taken, and her state of mind has affected what had happened before: that is, the creation of Daiankoku shiyajarai, fighting against strange creatures, etc. Nagai Gō writes:

I started to write the story as an adventure fantasy with a motif of oni, ... but a structure changed in the middle... I think the oni's accumulated grudges over the millennia made the story change. Originally an oni was something that the authorities considered non-human and punished arbitrarily. ... *Shuten Dōji* eventually made me think what an oni is, how an oni affects human mind, and the violence of love and hate. (Nagai, *Nagai Gō SAGA* 206)

According to Nagai, a person with a grudge becomes an oni. He believes that the oni really existed—not as a different species of beings, but that a human being is the oni's true identity (Nagai, *Debiruman wa dare nano ka* 103).

The ending of *Shuten Dōji* is literally full of lights, with a happy reunion scene of Jirō and Mr. and Mrs. Shiba. It is seemingly a happy ending. But is it? What about those who died for Shutendō Jirō, or to be more precise, those who were physically killed in the world that Mrs. Shiba created? Mrs. Shiba's angst and spite triggered the killing spree, which is tantamount to the indiscriminate violence we saw Uji no hashihime in chapter three. Yet, Mrs. Shiba's case seems more frightening because the grudge stems from “motherhood”—a supposedly nurturing nature. As we saw in chapter four,

the Great Mother has two aspects, and Mrs. Shiba's Daiankoku shiyajarai personifies the destructive aspect. The relationship between mother and son is said to be strong in Japan. While Nagai does not mention anything about the destructive power of motherhood, the *Shuten Dōji* story can be interpreted as a sharp criticism of the mother-son relationship. If motherly love turns vicious, for any reason, it creates an oni. While the mother's instinct to protect her child is strong, if it becomes excessive "motherhood" can destroy its surroundings, taking the many characters involved with it. Whether it is intended or not, this is a message that may touch one's heartstrings.

Akira Kurosawa's "The Weeping Demon"

It has been quite a while since Japan experienced the atomic bombs on its land, but its memories of the almost end-of-the-world devastation still continue. When it comes to apocalyptic thought, probably the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are the most obvious cataclysms for Japanese. "The Weeping Demon," the seventh episode of a recent film entitled *Dreams* (1990) by Akira Kurosawa, deals with the danger of nuclear technology. Kurosawa heavily relies on conventional images to gain the desired cinematic effects: the oni gather at a bleak place with blood-colored ponds—the landscape resembles Japanese scrolls of Buddhist Hell in the medieval period. "The Weeping Demon" begins with ominous white clouds drifting on the bleak ground, representing the results of the nuclear disaster. The earth is devastated: a hellish place where the purple nuclear clouds caused mutations and monstrosities—giant dandelions and human survivors with horns on their heads.¹¹ These oni wail over the pain coming from their horn(s), which makes this place all the more infernal.

Though the landscape of "The Weeping Demon" resembles the painting scrolls of the medieval period, there is a great difference between the two portrayals: in the hell scroll of the medieval painting, oni punish humans—they are the inflictors; in the film, however, the oni are both the inflictors and the recipients of suffering. Kurosawa's oni were humans who turn into oni as a result of a nuclear weapon's blast. The oni are used as an expedient to criticize nuclear technology. Furthermore, the horns, a feature of oni, symbolize the hierarchical order of Japan in the film. Japan is a vertical society (Nakane). Where vertical relations such as senior-junior rankings

11 Goodwin notes that "[d]andelions have grown taller than a human being and they appear as a grotesque distortion of the passionate intensity of the sunflowers in the famous van Gogh canvas, seen in episode five" (136).

are strong and strictly prescribed, people in the lower social ranks work for (and obey the orders of) those in the higher echelons. In return, the senior members advise and take care of the junior members. A main character of “The Weeping Demon” is a one-horned oni. He laments that even after becoming an oni, the hierarchy exists: the more horns an oni has, the stronger it is. In a realm where the oni eat each other, the weak, one-horned oni serve the stronger oni as a food source. Here, oni are being used as a social criticism—the underlying message being that the well-off of society should help the lesser advantaged, not eat them as was common practice in the oni underworld. Stephen Prince considers “The Weeping Demon” the weakest segment in the film (314). With a perspective on the film’s Japanese elements, however, this segment is very interesting in that the episode is replete with Japanese societal phenomena and folk tradition.

Modern Female Oni: Powerful, yet Compromised

Urusei Yatsura: The Cute Sexy Oni

We saw above one devastatingly evil female oni called Daiankoku shiyajarai living in the mind of Mrs. Shiba, a mother. The evilness of Daiankoku shiyajarai may be compared to a black hole of the universe in its darkness. On the other hand, a completely lovable oni, a sexy ogress named Lum, appears in the manga series entitled *Urusei Yatsura* (Those Obnoxious Aliens). When Takahashi Rumiko, the author, created *Urusei Yatsura*, she combined the aliens of science fiction with the traditional Japanese oni. Her protagonist is Lum, a modern, non-terrestrial version of Japanese oni. The series first appeared in 1978 in a boy’s weekly manga magazine called *Shōnen Sunday* (Boys’ Sunday), *Urusei Yatsura* was such a phenomenal success that it ran over nine years and was also turned into a TV series from 1981 to 1987. After the TV series had ended, six feature-length movies and eleven OVA (Original Video Animations) were made. Just as any other successful manga, the *Urusei Yatsura* was also released in book form, counting thirty-four volumes altogether, and later the series was also published in the *bunkobon* (pocket edition) format. Abroad, *Urusei Yatsura* was published in North America from 1989 through 1998, and has been translated into Italian, Spanish, and Cantonese (Cavallaro, *The Cinema of Mamoru Oshii* 48-49, 51, 55).

Both manga and anime series of *Urusei Yatsura* open with a fleet of technologically super-advanced oni-invaders arriving on Earth. The invaders

challenge earthlings to fight a one-on-one battle of *oni-gokko* (a game of tag) for the destiny of humankind. For humans to be saved, the randomly selected challenger Moroboshi Ataru, a lecherous teenage Japanese boy, enters the battle. If Ataru can hold the ogress Lum's horns in his hands, he wins the game. Lum turns out to be cute and overflowing with sex appeal, but after a series of mishaps, Ataru wins the game, and Lum declares that she is his loving and devoted wife.

The ogress Lum is replete with the traditional oni's attributes discussed in chapter one. She wears a traditional oni outfit of tiger-skin. She has two horns on her head. Instead of a big mouth to eat humans in one gulp, she has cute canine teeth, indicating a sexual appetite. Her mouth becomes conspicuously large when she finds out about Ataru's lecherous actions. She acts as if she is going to devour Ataru—demonstrating a trace of cannibalistic background. Lum can fly, just like the oni at Modoribashi Bridge is reported to do. Although Lum herself does not transform into any non-recognisable creature, her former fiancé, Rei, who is still so enamoured of her that he comes after her from his home planet, transforms himself into a huge tiger- or ox-like monster when excited. Ordinarily, Rei is an oni with an incredibly good-looking human appearance (with two horns and a tiger-skin outfit). Hailing from a different planet and intent on invading the earth, Lum's oni cohorts are obviously beyond the reach of the emperor's control. The alien oni also have many different customs from the human Earth dwellers. Electricity like lightning that Lum's body emits—a traditional oni power—is her weapon. When she becomes jealous or angry, she uses her electric power most effectively to injure her target. As oni can also bring wealth, Lum brought wealth to her creator (the author and the companies who published her manga, made the TV shows and films in which her popular character was featured).

Born in 1957 and one of Japan's most popular manga artists, the author, Takahashi Rumiko, has rendered an oni that is entirely modern. Lum is an alien-oni, who is capable of piloting an advanced spaceship. She is also a sexy oni, cute and coquettish with a curvaceous figure and huge eyes. Lum often wears a tiger-skin *bikini*, showing her attractive figure most effectively. Lum's image is not unlike a teen-age version of ukiyo-e's *yam- auba*, although she does not exactly look like a Japanese or for that matter, any specific race.¹²

12 Susan Napier's comment is insightful about the anime figure. She notes that "a number

Lum is portrayed as a lovable and devoted (self-claimed) wife. Timothy J. Craig writes that one of the features of “Japan’s popular culture is its closeness to the ordinary, everyday lives of its audience” (13). Lum-oni’s likeability increases all the more because she behaves just like ordinary human women—in spite of her supernatural electric powers and flying ability—she becomes jealous, cries, laughs, and gets mad, so the mainstream audience can automatically relate to her. Interestingly, her likeability partially comes from conforming to societal norms while she simultaneously creates social tension. Susan Napier writes that *Urusei Yatsura* reflects an aspect of contemporary Japanese society in that increasingly empowered Japanese women in the 70s and 80s are contained through comfort contrivances. Napier notes:

The chaotic world that Lum often unwittingly creates is an amusing one when confined to the theatre of fantasy, but the subtext has a threatening quality to it, suggesting that in the real world women are increasingly uncontrollable as well. The inherent threat of Lum’s powers... is ultimately mitigated by the essentially traditional relationship she has with Ataru. Lum’s (women’s) destabilizing power is contained through her total commitment to her man, suggesting that, no matter how independent and aggressive she may become, she is still profoundly tied to a traditional male-female dynamic. ... her emotional subordination to him ultimately guarantees that she will occupy the traditional (i.e., comforting) female subject position. (Napier, *Anime* 147)

The reader of this book may feel that Napier’s statement above can be applied to Yaegiri-yamauba of Chikamatsu Monzaemon’s *Komochi yamauba* that we discussed in chapter four. In the case of Hercurian Yaegiri-yamauba, she was totally committed to realizing her late husband’s wish and to motherhood. Perhaps to be appealing to the masses or to be widely accepted in

of Japanese commentators have chosen to describe anime with the word ‘*mukokuseki*,’ meaning ‘stateless’ or essentially without a national identity. Anime is indeed ‘exotic’ to the West in that it is made in Japan, but the world of anime itself occupies its own space that is not necessarily coincident with that of Japan. ... another aspect of anime’s *mukokuseki* quality in many eyes is the extremely ‘non-Japanese’ depiction of human characters in virtually all anime texts. This is an issue among American audiences new to anime as well, who want to know why the characters look ‘Western.’ In fact, while many anime texts do include figures with blond hair, it is perhaps more correct to say that rather than a ‘Western’ style of figuration, the characters are drawn in what might be called ‘anime’ style. ... This style ranges from the broadly grotesque drawings of characters with shrunken torsos and oversize heads of some anime comedy to the elongated figures with huge eyes and endless flowing hair that populate many romance and adventure stories. While many of them are blond or light brunette, many have more bizarre hair colorings such as pink, green, or blue” (*Anime* 24–25).

the mainstream society, female oni have to become slightly compromised. As *Urusei Yatsura* is quite popular with female audiences as well, one may also say that the expectation for the traditional role for women is strongly supported by women as well. Lum, though modern in appearance, seems to be a tamed oni.

With a popular following in various media, Lum is a tribute to the modern-cosmopolitan age. With the show's catchy theme song, and copious spin-off marketing efforts, the oni Lum has proven to be a true economic commodity to Japan. She is a veritable entertainment franchise that ultimately celebrates the capitalistic and commercial accomplishments of the modern era.

Bigheaded Yamauba in *Spirited Away*

Released in 2001, Miyazaki Hayao's (born 1941) animated film entitled *Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi* (*Spirited Away*) became the highest-grossing film of all time in Japan. It won a number of awards, including a 2003 Academy Award for Best Animated Feature Film and a Golden Bear at the Berlin International Festival in 2002. With the success of this work "Japanese animation finally began to receive the support of the mass audience" in the U.S. market.¹³ Derek Elley, a reviewer, writes, "It's almost impossible to do justice in words either to the visual richness of the movie, which m langes traditional Japanese clothes and architecture with both Victorian and modern-day artefacts, or to the character-filled storyline with human figures, harpies and grotesque creatures" (72). Miyazaki considers *Spirited Away* to be a fairy tale, a direct descendant of Japanese fairy tales such as "Suzume no oyado" (The Sparrow's Inn) or "Nezumi no goten" (The Mouse's Palace).¹⁴

13 "Are Made-in-Japan Manga and Animation About to Be Blindsided?" 17. "The Japanese animated film market reached 233.9 billion yen in 2005, 1.2 times the size of non-animated Japanese films" (Ibid., 16).

14 See Sait  Ry ichi et al. 74. In "Suzume no oyado," a sparrow that a kind old man has cared for disappears after his wicked wife cut its tongue. With much trouble and hardship, the grandpa finds the sparrow's house. There he is entertained with good food and dance by many sparrows. They give him a souvenir box, which contains great treasures. His wife follows suit and visits the sparrow's house too. She picks a large souvenir box which turns out to be full of snakes, bugs, and monsters. "Nezumi no goten," popularly known as "Nezumi j do" (The Mouse's Paradise) or "Omusubi kororin" (The Rolling Rice-ball) is a similar story to "Suzume no oyado." One day a good old man goes to the mountains to cut wood. When he eats his lunch, one of his rice-balls (or dumplings) falls and rolls into a hole in the ground. The old man tries to reach it, but the earth gives way and he tumbles down the hole. Following the rice-ball,

As a domain of Japanese tradition and folktale, it contains oni or oni-like characters. The most remarkable oni figure—and one of the most memorable characters to me—is Yubaba, the owner of the bathhouse in the world of spirits.

Spirited Away is an adventure and coming-of-age film in which the main character, a young girl by the name of Chihiro, embarks on a quest to save her family from a supernatural spell. The film opens with Chihiro's family moving to a new town, making Chihiro uneasy and sulky. On their way to their new house, the family unwittingly enters into a supernatural realm, where Chihiro's parents are turned into pigs. While Chihiro is in a panic, a mysterious boy named Haku appears and offers his help. Chihiro learns that the only way to break the spell and re-enter the "human world" is to find work at the bathhouse (of the supernatural). There, through various challenges and pitfalls, Chihiro finds friendship, she finds a way to help her family, and most importantly, she finds herself.

Miyazaki's portrayals of the spirit-characters are rich, multi-faceted entities replete with cultural memories and histories. Among them, the unforgettable Yubaba is the old witch who owns the bathhouse. She is avaricious and quite strict with her workers. Many critics have pointed out the similarity between Yubaba and the Queen of Hearts in *Alice in Wonderland*. Indeed, Andō Masashi, the art director of *Spirited Away*, states, "In our previous project, ... Yubaba... was drawn as a grotesque character, the kind that might appear in the illustrations of *Alice in Wonderland*" (qtd. in Yu 104). Yubaba's appearance and demeanor, and the very way she commands her workers, may indeed be reminiscent of Lewis Carroll's Queen of Hearts character. But Yubaba, who is also seen excessively pampering her gigantic spoiled baby boy named Bō, strikes me most as a descendant of a yamauba (discussed in detail in chapter four). Indeed, Yubaba is an old woman with white hair who controls her employees through the power of language and magic. She can freely transform humans into animals and eat them, which is entirely in accord with yamauba's cannibalism.

As seen in chapter four, an example of the yamauba's motherhood appears in legends of yamauba being the mother of Kintarō. The legend goes that

he reaches the mouse's mansion. There he is entertained with good food and songs. In appreciation of the old man's rice-ball, the mice give him treasures. A neighboring wicked old man hears the good old man's story and attempts to do the same. But the neighbor makes a mistake in the process, and instead of getting treasures, he is punished by the mice.

a mountain yamauba gave birth to and raised a son possessing Herculean strength, named Kintarō. Kintarō was then discovered by a great warrior, Minamoto no Raikō, changed his name to Sakata no Kintoki, and became one of Raikō's *shitennō*. Kintarō is portrayed as full of energy and currently often identified with his red *harakake* (bib or apron) on which the character 金 (*kin* from *Kintarō*) is printed. Yamauba's motherly attitude toward her son is further emphasized through a series of *yamauba-buyō* or yamauba dances in Kabuki, which appear in the late eighteenth-early nineteenth century. In the dance pieces, yamauba's doting motherhood is amplified as she speaks of him, "it's been seven years since... Day and night, my pleasure is my only son, Kaidōmaru [i.e., Kintarō]" (Tsuruya, "Hakone ashigarayama no ba" 61).

In *Spirited Away*, Yubaba is the mother of super-baby, Bō. Just like Kintarō, Bō wears a red *harakake* on which a big character 坊 *Bō* is written. Similar to Kintarō, Bō has prowess in accordance with his gigantic size—he can easily break Chihiro's arm if he wishes. In contrast to her strictness with her employees, Yubaba dotes on Bō and protects him almost to excess, confining him in a germ-free playroom full of germ-free toys. In this detail, the director may be hinting at an aspect of present-day Japanese parenting; the tendency to spoil or shelter children while depriving them of negative experiences, some feel, prevents children from developing their full potential. Perhaps most strikingly, this same image of over-protecting one's offspring is portrayed by yamauba in Kabuki's dance pieces as discussed.

The visual juxtaposition of a white-haired elderly mother bearing a baby boy has precedents, too. As mentioned in chapter four, one notable example is a votive painting of *Yamauba and Kintarō* created by Nagasawa Rosetsu (1754–1799), a treasure of Itsukushima Shrine in Miyajima. In Rosetsu's painting, yamauba looks like a distrustful old woman—what Robert Moes calls "a caricature of geriatric non-beauty." Moes, however, also comments, "there is a sympathetic humor in the way the mythical old hag stares out suspiciously at the beholder" (28).¹⁵ Yubaba does, on occasion, have a humorous look embedded into her suspicious character. Indeed, Yubaba and Bō may be looked at as a pumped-up, well-fed version of Nagasawa Rosetsu's *Yamauba and Kintarō*. Further similarity is found in the absence of Yubaba's male partner. When yamauba first appeared as the mother of Kintarō in the seventeenth century text, her partner was never mentioned. Likewise, Yubaba's husband is non-existent in the film.

15 For the Rosetsu's paintings, see Nagasawa Rosetsu.

Moreover, while Yubaba is avaricious and strict toward her workforce, she also has the ability to observe diligence in her workers. When Stink Spirit (*okusare-sama*) visits the bathhouse, for example, Yubaba notes how hard Chihiro works, and decides to give her a helping hand. Similarly, yamauba also help humans that are helpful to them. The yamauba in “Hanayo no hime,” for instance, brings wealth to the princess who helped kill coiling worms in her hair.¹⁶

From the spatial point of view, too, there is a parallel between the yamauba and Yubaba. Komatsu Kazuhiko writes that “[t]he concept of mountains, as a mountainous realm where oni and *yōkai* reside, is better understood as the ‘spatial other world.’”¹⁷ Indeed, the mountains are often the entry-point to the realm where the oni and *yōkai* live along with other mountain deities and deceased ancestors. Yamauba is also a resident of the mountains. Likewise, the environment where Yubaba’s bathhouse is situated is a locus of the other world where all the supernatural beings come to relax and unwind. Pertinent to the spatial aspect, a further parallel is seen in the altitude where yamauba and Yubaba live. The mountain where yamauba lives is higher than ordinary flatland. Likewise, Yubaba lives on the top floor of the bathhouse—higher than anyone else, a command center from which she controls her operation and gives orders to her employees. Yubaba-yamauba is the authority of the supernatural world, powerful and rich. She is literally and figuratively bigheaded; also she does not conform to social norms. Within the film, however, social equilibrium destabilized by Yubaba is somewhat returned with the appearance of her twin-sister, Zeniba who is a comforting, self-assured, good, old grandma figure. Yubaba, who

16 See note 17 of chapter four. One of the works that influenced Miyazaki in creating the film is Kashiwaba Sachiko’s *Kiri no mukō no fushigina machi* (A Mysterious Town beyond the Mist). Aunt Picot, a major character of *Kiri no mukō no fushigina machi*, is an elderly owner of an apartment house. Her motto is “those who don’t work should not eat,” and like Yubaba, she appreciates and rewards a good worker.

17 According to Komatsu Kazuhiko, the term “the other world” can be understood from two levels: one is to look at the world from a temporal point of view, or time axis; and the other is the spatial viewpoint, or space axis. The temporal view considers the world of time from birth to death as “this world,” and the time before birth and after death as “the other world.” From the spatial viewpoint, the space where everyday life exists is regarded as “this world” and the space outside of everyday life (the meta-everyday life realm) is regarded as “the other world.” Heaven, oceans, rivers, underground, and strange land are understood as “the other world” from the spatial point of view. The “spatial other world” cannot be visited easily, but unlike the “temporal other world,” if the conditions are met, one can enter without undergoing death (*Shinpen oni no tamatebako* 57–58).

appears transcendent to the expectation of gender role, in spite of her excessive motherhood, is thus contained within the world of *Spirited Away*. The portrayal of modern female oni is still as “other” yet tamed by the expectation of the mainstream consciousness.

Yōkai and Oni Variants

In chapter five, the tendency of oni to become simply one of many *yōkai* was discussed. The *Tale of the Imperial Capital* has raised the oni's status and popularity greatly in modern times, but the general perception of oni as one of the *yōkai* is undeniable. In cyberspace, one may say oni variants of *yōkai* such as *tsuchigumo* (earth spiders) and *yasha* (yaksa) are probably more active than the traditional iconography of oni. Indeed, there has been a steadfast “*yōkai* boom” in contemporary Japan.¹⁸ The vanishing darkness from night due to modern lighting technology probably contributed to the disappearance of *yōkai* from this physical world. The bright light of urban areas deprived *yōkai* of their traditional living space (Komatsu Kazuhiko, *Yōkaigaku shinkō* 284). Kagawa Masanobu comments on this *yōkai* boom, “[f]ormerly, *yōkai* certainly existed as a real entity. In contemporary Japan, especially in urban areas, *yōkai* do not exist in daily-life. *Yōkai* are creatures in the world of fiction. We mustn't forget that the present ‘*yōkai* boom’ is a phenomenon in that environment” (32). *Yōkai* live in the world of imagination mainly as an entertainment, but they speak to us of what we have forgotten or ignored.

Although touched upon in chapters one and five, the term *yōkai*, given its politico-literary connotations, requires a little more explanation.¹⁹ According to the dictionary, *Keitai shin kanwa jiten*, a *yōkai* is “*bakemono, mononoke*” (shape-shifter, vengeful spirit) (Nagasawa 340). In the early twentieth century, Ema Tsutomu, a folklorist and Kyoto scholar, defined *yōkai* as “mysterious, strange creatures” (*etai no shirenai fushigina mono*) (2). Yanagita Kunio distinguished *yōkai* from ghosts by stating that the former appear only at certain places whereas the latter appear anywhere without spatial limitation. On the other hand, while *yōkai* appear at anytime during the day or night, ghosts appear exclusively at night, especially around midnight.

18 As Michael Foster notes, one of the important writers/artists who triggered the recent *yōkai* boom is Mizuki Shigeru's (born 1924). For the study of Mizuki Shigeru and his work, see Foster, *Pandemonium and Parade* 164–82.

19 For the study of *yōkai*, see Foster, *Pandemonium and Parade*.

Furthermore, whereas *yōkai* encounter anyone without distinction, ghosts have some specific person or people to meet (“Yōkai dangi” 292–93). These distinctions are, however, refuted by Komatsu Kazuhiko, an anthropologist, who defines *yōkai* as follows: “People in an ethnic society, who desire to understand and systematize all the phenomena and beings in the world, have their explanation system. When phenomena or beings which cannot be fully explained by that system of thought appear, those incomprehensible or disorderly things are termed *yōkai*” (“Ma to yōkai” 346). Thus, Komatsu employs a broader definition for *yōkai*, one that encompasses anything labelled “strange” or “bizarre” (*Nihon yōkai taizen* 10). Thus, oni are *yōkai* with mostly negative associations.

Yasha and Dog in *InuYasha*

While traditional oni with horns on their scalps are visible, *yamauba* and such oni variants as *yasha* (*yaksha*) and *tsuchigumo* (earth spiders) appear to be taking active roles in cyberspace. As mentioned in chapter one, *yasha* is an Indian-originated Buddhist oni. A good example of *yasha* in pop culture is *InuYasha* (dog-demon), an extremely popular Japanese manga for teens of various countries including the U.S. Appearing first in Japan in 1997, the manga was so successful that it was made into a television anime series and it inspired three feature length films. The author is none other than Takahashi Rumiko, the creator of *Urusei Yatsura*. *InuYasha*, which literally means “dog-*yasha*,” is the male protagonist of the series, and a half-*yōkai*. *InuYasha* was born of a human mother, and sired by a full-fledged *yōkai*. He yearns to be a full-fledged *yōkai*. At the beginning of the *InuYasha* series, a heroine, Kagome, a fifteen-year-old girl living in present-day Tokyo, is sent to the past by a *yōkai* through an ancient well in her family’s compound. There in the sixteenth-century Warring States of Japan Kagome discovers that she is the reincarnation of Kikyo, a deceased priestess who guarded the miraculous Shikon jewel. The Shikon jewel has the power to fulfill any ambition of man or *yōkai*. Fifty years before, *InuYasha* tried to steal the jewel to become a thoroughbred *yōkai*, but Kikyo prevented it and put *InuYasha* into a deep sleep by shooting him with a sacred arrow. Now the Shikon jewel is reborn into Kagome’s body, and *InuYasha* has awakened. *Yōkai* of various kinds also start to fight for the jewel, and during the clash the jewel is shattered and its shards scattered across Japan. Kagome and *InuYasha* team up to retrieve the shards before they fall into the hands of their archenemy Naraku, who manipulates various *yōkai* to try to obtain the shards.

Abe Masamichi comments in his study of *yōkai* that “all *yōkai* are the ruins of humans. *Yōkai* continue to exist both inside and outside humans. They wish to return to a human form, but are unable to do so. They live in fields, mountains, seas, grasses and trees, full of sadness at not being able to return to a human form” (7). Ironically, both InuYasha and Naraku (half-*yōkai*) desire to be full-fledged *yōkai*, knowing that this will increase their powers and strength. Likewise, all the *yōkai* characters in *InuYasha* look down on humans as weaklings. This may simply be a contemporary story element, or it could be a social satire or commentary on humankind’s preoccupation with the acquisition of strength and power. These are contemporary *yōkai*.

InuYasha’s name reveals the characteristics of his *yōkai* side. He has a keen sense of smell, dog-like ears, claws, and a white mane. Kuroda Hideo notes that during the medieval period, a dog was kept as a pet or a hunting animal. At the same time, dogs were also looked upon as a form of public hygiene because they ate food scraps and corpses or carrion. Consequently, the dog became a symbol of the graveyard and the cities. He further points out that a dog plays a role as a guide to the other world. In *Kōbō daishi gyōjō ekotoba* (Pictorial History of Priest Kōbō, the 14th century) for example, a white dog and a black one are depicted beside a deity who guides Priest Kōbō Daishi into sacred Mt. Kōya.²⁰ Also, the story from *Uji shūi monogatari* (A Collection of Tales from Uji) entitled “About an uncanny incident involving Seimei and a dog belonging to the Chancellor of the Buddha Hall” reveals how a white dog saved his master’s life with its supernatural power.²¹ Thus Kuroda concludes that a dog was considered to have supernatural power and was like a trans-boundary animal, between this world and the other world (*Zōho sugata to shigusa no chūsei-shi* 236). InuYasha’s father was a powerful *yōkai* of a huge white dog. After his demise, his carcass—a gigantic white skull and bones—served as a demarcation realm between this world and the nether land, which is his graveyard. InuYasha also goes to his father’s burial ground on two occasions: once, on a mission to find a

20 See Kuroda Hideo, *Zōho sugata to shigusa no chūsei-shi* 210–35.

21 “[Fujiwara Michinaga] had a particular pet, a white dog, which would go along with him and never leave his side. One day it was with him as usual, and just as he was about to go through the gate it ran round and round in front of his carriage, blocking his path and refusing to allow him in.... Michinaga asked Abe Seimei what the dog’s behavior meant. Seimei replied, ‘If you pass over it, you will suffer harm. The dog possesses supernatural powers and was warning you.’” Translation by Mills (411–12). For the original Japanese text, see Kobayashi and Masuko 450–51.

special sword made from his father's fangs; and next, in search of a Shikon shard. On the first occasion, the key leading to the boundary realm where his father's corpse resides was hidden in InuYasha's body. In this sense, one may say that InuYasha, a white dog, led a team to the different realm, just like the white dog did for Priest Kōbō.

The term *yasha*, conjures up something violent and ferocious, and this is what InuYasha becomes when his *yōkai* side dominates; he acts like a wild animal without knowing what is good or bad. As mentioned in chapter two, in Buddhist mythology, *yasha* was subdued by Bishamonten (*Vaisravans*), one of the Buddhist Guardians of the four cardinal directions, and became Bishamonten's kin to protect the true law of Buddha (Aramata and Komatsu 40). Interestingly, in InuYasha this side, as a protector of the good, is becoming increasingly visible, particularly when he protects Kagome, who purifies the Shikon shards on behalf of good. He feels for Kagome, but he cannot forget Kikyo who urged him to become a human being with the power of the Shikon jewel, and who died fifty years before, protecting it. InuYasha's character develops from a loner to a team player, and he has a hidden desire for companions. The theme that he is no longer a lonely individual appears in one of his theme songs as well. As we saw in chapter seven, modern fiction reflects the present-day societal phenomenon of individuals' desire for connections or relationships. Manga and anime also capitalize on this longing to identify the audience with the characters. While yearning for power, people long for some lasting relationship, and this holds true in the world of *yōkai* or *yasha*, perhaps all the more so because an oni and its variants are marginalized to begin with.

Tsuchigumo (Earth Spider) in *InuYasha*

InuYasha's archenemy is called Naraku, and he too is after the Shikon shards to garner greater demonic power. The name Naraku (*naraka*) is a Japanese term for hell. As the name suggests, Naraku is an entirely hellish character and the central force of malevolence in the story. Like InuYasha, he is a half-*yōkai* who wants to become the most powerful thoroughbred *yōkai*, a fate achievable only through the power of the shards. Naraku was formerly a human being named Onigumo (oni spider). In the manga version, Onigumo appears in the story as a horribly disfigured man with terrible burns. It is explained in the anime version that Onigumo was a wicked bandit with a large spider mark on his back. He had attempted to obtain the Shikon jewel under Kikyo's protection by manipulating his boss, the

bandit leader. But his plan failed and the infuriated boss threw a bomb at him, disfiguring his whole body. Onigumo was left to die of his burns, but ironically Kikyo found him and saved his life. While Kikyo was tending Onigumo's wounds, his base desire for Kikyo consumed him and he gave up his body to *yōkai* to realize his lustful wish. *Yōkai* devoured Onigumo's body and soul, but Onigumo's wish was never realized. He was later reborn as Naraku with a latent lust for Kikyo. Onigumo in Naraku is represented by the spider's mark on Naraku's back. Naraku despises Onigumo's weakness, specifically his feelings for Kikyo, and attempts to get rid of him in various ways. Yet, the mark always reappears or re-surfaces on Naraku's back. The oni in Onigumo certainly represents his demonic character, and the symbolic spider reveals cultural memories.

Those cultural memories are *tsuchigumo*, earth spiders. It is commonly accepted among scholars that an earth spider refers to less cultivated indigenous people who lived before the Heavenly descendants claimed their authority. *Tsuchigumo*, an earth spider, is an appellation used derogatorily in ancient Japanese literature for those who defied imperial (central) authority.²² For example, in *Kojiki* on Emperor Jimmu's eastward expedition to claim his Heavenly authority, he and his men smite a great number of resisting indigenous pit-dwelling tribe-men described as earth spiders.²³ An overwhelming majority of earth spiders had fought and been eliminated in bloody battles; only a few survived by apologizing profusely and escaping capital punishment.²⁴ An earth spider defies central authority, has different customs and manners, and different physiological features from the mainstream body culture. In that sense, the earth spider is considered to be one of the most ancient types of oni (Baba 170).²⁵ As for the origin of

22 See, for example, Tsuda 188–95.

23 See Kurano and Takeda 157. For an English translation, see Philippi 174–75. Also see Sakamoto et al. 1: 210. Its English translation is found in Aston 129–130.

24 For example, one *tsuchigumo* named Ōmimi in the district of Matsuura of Hizen Province promised to give food to the emperor as a tribute (Uegaki 335–336). Another *tsuchigumo* called Utsuhimaro in the Sonoki district of the same province even saved an imperial ship (Uegaki 345).

25 In the picture scroll entitled *Tsuchigumo sōshi* (Story of the Earth Spiders, early 14th century), a gigantic oni, sixty feet tall with many legs, which lives in a cave, turns out to be the enormous spider. I should add that the accompanying painting to the *Story of the Earth Spiders*, however, portrays two gigantic oni with only two legs. For the narrative of *Story of the Earth Spiders*, see Komatsu Shigemi, Ueno, Sakakibara, and Shimatani 162, and for the painting, see *ibid.* 7. Further, in Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (1839–1892)'s picture entitled *Minamoto no Yorimitsu tsuchigumo wo kiru-zu* (Minamoto Yorimitsu

the term, *Itsubun Settsu Fudoki* (a missing writing from the *Topography of Settsu Province*, known from other literary sources) notes that, “In the reign of Emperor Jimmu, there was a villain called *tsuchigumo*—he was given the disdainful name of earth spider because this person always dwelled in a pit” (Uegaki 437). Pit dwelling is strongly associated with *tsuchigumo*.

This also applies to the aforementioned *InuYasha*'s Onigumo who lived in a dark cave below the cliff—a form of pit dwelling. As an abandoned outlaw, terribly disfigured from burns, Onigumo was already socially, culturally, and even physically marginalized when he was in the cave. As the manga series continues, the image of an earth spider as a marginalized being persists in the minds of young readers, and without reading Japanese classical literature or related research materials, cultural memory surrounding earth spiders is thus carried on to new generations.

Tsuchigumo in Spirited Away

A reminiscent of *tsuchigumo* also appears in *Spirited Away* in the form of Kamaji who lives in the basement of the bathhouse—a form of pit dwelling. Unlike Onigumo of *InuYasha*, however, Kamaji is a much more likable figure. Kamaji is one of Yubaba's employees, and from the viewpoint of the architectural structure, his dwelling is reflective of vertical, hierarchical Japanese society. As mentioned earlier, Japan is a vertical society where vertical relations such as senior-junior rankings are strong and strictly prescribed. Junior-ranking members may be assigned monotonous and basic work, but the work is vital to the promotion of teamwork. The relationship between bosses and junior members is not without tension. Kamaji lives on the lower end of this vertical relationship—steadfastly resisting Yubaba, but still providing vital work to the bathhouse.

Kamaji is an old man who controls a boiler room. He has six long arms and two ordinary length legs. At first sight he looks scary, but in reality he is a kind and understanding man (Uekusa 10). From all angles including the way he sits and manipulates his unusually long limbs Kamaji resembles a spider or the spirit of a spider.²⁶ On the symbolic significance of the spider, Merrily Baird writes, “...with the importation of Chinese traditions, the Japanese adopted the view of the spider as an emblem of industry and

Striking the Earth Spider, 1892), the earth spider has three claws, which is reminiscent of oni.

26 Sugii Gisaburō, an animation director, writes, “I wonder whether a spider is Kamaji's model. Miyazaki likes (a creature with) many hands” (qtd. in Uekusa, 51).

ability” (Baird 120). As evident in the film, Kamaji is a diligent worker who makes full use of all his extra limbs and his helpers, sootballs (*susuwatari*). Yet as we saw above, as *tsuchigumo*, spiders have a cultural baggage. While Kamaji does not openly battle with Yubaba, he does not always go along with her either; sometimes, he outright resists Yubaba’s wishes. The most evident example of this occurs when Kamaji protects not only Chihiro but also Haku, abandoned and left for dead by Yubaba. And yet, Kamaji works for Yubaba, as some ancient earth spiders obeyed the central authority.

Kamaji is a warm being that understands human feelings. However, as we saw earlier, the descriptions in the ancient chronicles hardly express anything that encourages the readers to empathize with earth spiders. After all, from a viewpoint of the editors of *Nihongi*, an earth spider is an enemy of the central government. Interestingly, though, the sympathetic descriptions of earth spiders appear in later texts, specifically in the Noh text entitled *Tsuchigumo* (Earth Spider, ca. late Muromachi Period).²⁷ According to the Noh’s *Tsuchigumo*, the mighty imperial warrior, Minamoto no Raikō is attacked by an unknown illness. One night, a strange priest appears at Raikō’s bedside and begins casting silken threads across Raikō. Surprised, Raikō strikes that creature with his renowned sword and the being disappears, dripping its blood behind. It turns out that Raikō’s illness was caused by this strange creature, whose real identity is the spirit of the spider who had been killed by the emperor’s army at Mt. Katsuragi. Raikō’s vassal follows the blood trail and kills the spirit of the spider. The earth spider cries at the moment of his death, “[F]or here the spider’s spirit stands Who in the mountain many years did dwell. To trouble the sooreign’s reign I hoped, And so I approached Raiko. Alas! Is this to be my end?”²⁸ This statement does shed a sympathetic light on the earth spider as a victim of the central government. Perhaps he had lived peacefully before the advance of the heavenly imperial army to his district. From the earth spiders’ point of view, the imperial army not only disturbed their way of living, it eliminated their tribe without legitimate reason. The earth spider’s statement is just a few lines, but it reveals his pent-up emotions.

Likewise, in *Spirited Away* Kamaji is a man of few words and he helps those who no longer interest Yubaba. In this sense, Kamaji is reminiscent of

27 For the Noh text of *Tsuchigumo*, see Sanari 3: 2055–67. For an English translation, see Suzuki, Beatrice 87–92. The Noh text of *Tsuchigumo* is based on the *tsuchigumo* narrative of *Nihongi*, the “Swords Chapter” of *Heike monogatari*, and *Tsuchigumo sōshi*.

28 Suzuki, Beatrice 91. For the Japanese text, see Sanari 3: 2065.

the earth spiders' narratives of the past. Kamaji has cherished train tickets for forty years, implying that he has a desire to be away from the bathhouse someday. Yet, he gives them up to help Chihiro save Haku. Kamaji is a spirit that understands the meaning of "love" and an important pillar of the film. One may say that Kamaji may represent an ancient earth spider portrayed from *tsuchigumo's* point of view—the perspective of the "other."

As we survey the fertile terrain of cyberspace and manga in search of oni and oni variants, indeed quite a number of them pop up on the radar screen, among which only a select few are discussed. As an entity of pure imagination, the oni's habitat is often of a different realm both temporally and spatially. Many characters such as Devilman, Shutendō Jirō, and InuYasha, go freely between different times and spaces; some exist in a completely different realm such as Yubaba and Kamaji in *Spirited Away*. Others' imaginary reality is set here and now but the creatures are from a different planet, as in *Urusei Yatsura*. One noticeable phenomenon is that of the Judeo-Christian devil-like character advancing to what used to be Japanese oni territory. Terms such as Satan and Armageddon are not Japanese-born. While the apocalyptic mode is deeply affected by societal phenomena such as Aum's incident, one may say that the modern Japanese creators of anime, manga or film who are familiar with western thought feel comfortable with non-Japanese elements, and aggressively utilize non-Japanese entities such as devils in the Judeo-Christian tradition in order to create something novel and artistic. Still, the devils or the world of devils become somewhat Japanized or *onificated* as we have seen. Whether it is a representation of the spiteful anger of the human mind or an idealized teenage figure, the oni concept remains strong in the mind of Japanese artists and readers alike.