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ENCHANTING MODERNITY: RELIGION AND THE SUPERNATURAL IN CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE POPULAR CULTURE

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ENCHANTING MODERNITY: RELIGION AND THE SUPERNATURAL IN

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by

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ABSTRACT

ENCHANTING MODERNITY: RELIGION AND THE SUPERNATURAL IN CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE POPULAR CULTURE

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This thesis examines the ways in which popular culture reveals, and shapes, religious thinking in contemporary Japan. Through an investigation of popular culture including animated films (*anime*) and graphic novels (*manga*), and the cultural processes related to their production and consumption, it explores how and why popular culture in Japan is acting as a repository for ideas and images relating to religion, the supernatural, and the human and non-human agents who mediate them.

Popular culture is important not only for the ways it discloses contemporaneous cultural trends, but because it acts in dialogic tension with them. In Japan, where society has grown increasingly secularized since at least the middle of the twentieth century, an overwhelming majority of citizens consider themselves non-religious. Surveys have consistently indicated that only a small percentage of respondents identify as actively Shintō, Buddhist, Christian or some other religious affiliation. At the same time,

depictions of religious images and themes have grown exponentially in popular culture such that a recent internet search on "anime" plus "*kami*" (a Shintō deity) produced an astounding 20,100,000 hits. Clearly, religion continues to play a crucial role in the popular imagination.

This juncture of popular culture and personal religious identity in contemporary Japan raises a number of questions discussed in the following chapters. What benefits do consumers derive from the treatment of religious themes in anime and manga? What do depictions of religion in popular media indicate about the construction of religious identity in Japan? Why the disparity between religious identification survey results and cultural consumption of religious themes and images? In short, what are the ways in which popular culture in Japan reveals ideas about religion and the supernatural, and in what ways does popular culture actively shape those conceptions?

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INTRODUCTION

I began this project out of a desire to explore the junction between two of my primary interests. One is my enjoyment of Japanese popular culture, specifically *anime* and *manga*. The other is a fascination with the ways that human beings conceive of religion and the supernatural. I wanted to investigate the ways in which religion, magic, and supernatural agents—gods, demons, and nature spirits, shamans and exorcists, priestesses and monks—were portrayed in popular culture. More importantly, I wanted to learn how and why spiritual themes were employed. What roles did these ideas, images, and character play? What did these depictions of the supernatural say about the ways in which people in a modern, industrialized, and secular society like contemporary Japan construct their religious and cultural identities? What benefits did today's Japanese derive from those depictions? What are the ways in which popular culture in Japan reveals ideas about religion and the supernatural, and in what ways does popular culture actively shape those conceptions?

As my research progressed, other questions emerged and began to shape the actual parameters of this thesis. Why has popular culture turned the ancient shamaness into a sexy prepubescent shrine maiden? How does the figure of the lecherous, money-grubbing Buddhist monk reflect the ways today's Japanese think about religion? How do contemporary Japanese deal with the tensions between spiritual traditions and post-modern secularized society, and why has anime and manga become the preferred media for dealing with those tensions? Most of all, what role does popular culture and its consumers and creators play in all this?

As a subject of academic interest, Japanese popular culture is still relatively unexplored, and even popular writing on the subject is in its infancy. In the first decade of

the 2000s, the popular press began publishing a flood of books of variable quality, from anime "encyclopedias" (a questionable endeavor in a field that sees dozens if not hundreds of new entries every year) to titles such as *Anime Explosion! The What? Why? & Wow! Of Japanese Animation* (Patrick Drazen, 2003) and *Japanese Schoolgirl Confidential: How Teenage Girls Made a Nation Cool!* (Ashcraft and Ueda, 2010). Other works like *Japan Pop!* (Timothy J. Craig, 2000) and *Anime and Philosophy* (Steiff and Tamplin, 2010) strove to present popular audiences with accessible academic approaches to popular culture. All of these works contributed to an increase of interest in Japanese popular culture.

Meanwhile, the academic press was gradually seeing a rise in the number of studies of popular culture, with such works as Susan J. Napier's *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (2001). In this far-ranging work, the author introduced academia and the wider readership, including myself, to the ways anime has impacted popular culture and how it reflects and manifests contemporary concerns over the body, globalization of culture, gender issues, and recent history.[1]

In Japan, psychologist Saitō Tamaki published *Beautiful Fighting Girl* (*Sentō bishōjo no seishin bunseki*, 2000),[2] and cultural studies scholar Azuma Hiroki released *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* (*Dobutsuka suru posutomodan: otaku kara mita nihon shakai*, 2001).[3] These two works were among the first to discuss the consumers, rather than the content, of popular culture, and had a direct impact upon my understanding of

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[1] Napier has since published a revised edition of her book (*Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*, 2005). Napier's body of work includes numerous articles and chapters for edited volumes, as well as a follow-up monograph, *From Impressionism to Anime: Japan as Fantasy and Fan Cult in the Mind of the West* (2007).

[2] Published in translation 2011.

[3] Published in translation 2009.

how the consumers and creators of popular culture are instrumental in keeping Japanese traditions about the supernatural alive today.[4]

2006 saw the launching of *Mechademia*, a journal that is significant for its presentation of cutting-edge scholarship within a popular culture format, blending articles with artwork, manga segments, and other work by established authors like Napier and Azuma, as well as new voices in the field. *Mechademia* has thus far produced five volumes dealing with topics from the "Emerging Worlds of Anime and Manga," to "Networks of Desire," "Limits of the Human," "War/Time" and "Fanthropologies." The quality of the articles, and the breadth of their range, has been truly impressive. Several pieces, especially the work of Kotani Mari ("Metamorphosis of the Japanese Girl: The Girl, the Hyper-Girl, and the Battling Beauty," in *Mechademia Volume 1: Emerging Worlds of Anime and Manga*), and Rebecca Suter's response to it ("From Jusuheru to Jannu: Girl Knights and Christian Witches in the Work of Miuchi Suzue," in *Mechademia Volume 4: War/Time*), were key to helping me grasp the concept of the "battling beauty" to which Saitō's book, above, refers.

In 2008, Mark MacWilliams published *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime*, an edited volume dealing with such subjects as manga in Japanese history, the use of manga and anime by the Aum Shinrikyō "doomsday cult," and the work of Miyazaki Hayao. A year later, Thomas Lamarre's benchmark work, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* appeared. Weighing in at a little under 400 pages, Lamarre's book explores, in great depth and breadth, the creation of anime from both a technological and philosophical standpoint. Both of these books were key to my understanding of the historical context out of which today's anime and manga have

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[4] See Chapter 3.

grown. In addition, Lamarre's work was crucial to my grasp of the implications of the technical side of these media, which helped me develop my theories as to why anime and manga are so well-suited for the presentation of supernatural themes. (See Ch. 3)

Turning to the study of religion in Japan, scholars like Carmen Blacker (*The Catalpa Bow: A Study of Shamanistic Practices in Japan*, 1975), Michael Como (*Weaving and Binding: Immigrant Gods and Female Immortals in Ancient Japan*, 2009), and Ellen Schattschneider (*Immortal Wishes: Labor and Transcendence on a Japanese Sacred Mountain*, 2003), afforded me additional insight into the influence of the ancient shamanic traditions in Japan. Writers on the history of Japanese religion including Hori Ichirō (*Folk Religion in Japan: Continuity and Change*, 1968), James Ketelaar (*Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan: Buddhism and Its Persecution*, 1990), and Sarah Thal (*Rearranging the Landscape of the Gods*, 2005), among others, provided me a much-needed background on the native expressions of spirituality, from folk religion to the minglings and separations of Shintō and Japanese Buddhism.

To learn in greater depth about the supernatural creatures that were once believed to populate the Japanese landscape and that, as I will show, live on in popular culture, I next turned to the field of "monsterology."[5] In particular, the work of Gerald Figal (*Civilization and Monsters: Spirits of Modernity in Meiji Japan*, 1999), Michael Dylan Foster (*Pandemonium and Parade: Japanese Monsters and the Culture of Yōkai*, 2009), Noriko Reider (*Japanese Demon Lore: Oni from Ancient Times to the Present*, 2010), and Marilyn Ivy (*Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan*, 1995) provided a wealth of information coupled with a penetrating analysis on the various ogres, shape-shifting animal spirits, and other eerie figures of Japanese folklore.

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[5] *Yōkaigaku* (溶解学), a term created by Inoue Enryō (1859-1919) for the study of legendary supernatural creatures. See, especially, Figal; Foster.

All of these works have been valuable. Some, like Napier or MacWilliams, made for fascinating overviews on anime and manga but did not delve into the relationship between religion and popular culture. Others, like Azuma and Saitō, were insightful analyses of the consumers and creators of popular culture, but held to their own particular projects, different from my own. The material on historical and contemporary trends in religious thought and folklore was equally beneficial; however, none of it was concerned with addressing the role of contemporary popular culture in regard to their subjects. If I was to see the intersection of popular culture and spirituality treated as an object of academic study, it was up to me to write it.

This, then, is my intent in this thesis: to explain the ways in which Japanese popular culture has become a means of preserving and passing on religion in Japan today by bringing together tradition and modernity, spirituality and materiality, religious inspiration and post-industrial life. It is an investigation that seeks to unravel the ways in which the consumers and creators of popular culture view the products of that culture—the anime, manga, computer games, online fiction, and such—as well as their own roles in the dissemination of religious ideas through those products.

There is room for much more exploration of the themes with which this thesis deals, and I have deliberately chosen to exclude certain topics in order to concentrate upon my area of focus. One conspicuous absence is the work of Miyazaki Hayao.[6] I decided not to address Miyazaki's work as it has been dealt with extensively already in academic journals, edited volumes, and monographs, not to mention a plethora of online

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[6] Co-founder of Studio Ghibli and creator of such classics of the animated film as *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (*Kaze no Tani no Naushika*, 1984), *My Neighbor Totoro* (*Tonari no Totoro*, 1988), *Kiki's Delivery Service* (*Majo no Takkyūbin*, 1989), *Princess Mononoke* (*Mononoke-hime*, 1997), *Spirited Away* (*Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi*, 2001), *Howl's Moving Castle* (*Hauru no Ugoku Shiro*, 2004), and *Ponyo* (*Gake no Ue no Ponyo*, 2008), among others.

blogs, student essays, and mass-market books.[7] Instead, it seemed to me more important, and more interesting, to discuss some of the newer anime and manga series with which the non-Japanese reader might be less familiar.

One other subject I had to pass over in the interests of space is the important question of the role of the female consumer-creator of popular culture in today's Japan. Anime and manga aimed at and created by women has an immense impact on contemporary popular culture and the omission of that influence in this thesis is a lacuna much to be regretted – one I hope to rectify in my future work. While many of my remarks in the following chapters will be applicable to both male and female patterns of consumption and production of popular culture, some of what follows will focus specifically on the male *otaku*—diehard fans of anime and manga—who still make up the majority of the target audience for these products. Despite this emphasis, however, the reader is urged to remember that this focus is but a partial picture of those cultural patterns.[8]

An Outline of This Thesis

Chapter 1, "Domination and Diminution: The Shrinking of the Shamaness into the Anime *Miko*," traces the history of the shamaness in Japan, beginning with her earliest appearances in the written records, through successive reductions to the largely ornamental function of the actual miko in contemporary society. I then discuss the rise of the cute *miko* or shrine maiden as a ubiquitous trope in popular culture, drawing upon examples from recent anime to explicate the widespread demand for this figure among

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[7] Cf. Cavallaro 2006; McCarthy; Odell & Le Blanc; etc.

[8] Some works dealing specifically with women's stories in anime and manga include Craig; Levi 1996; Levi et al 2008; Lunning 2006; 2007; 2008; 2009; Martinez; Napier 2001; 2007; Saitō; US-Japan Women's Journal #38 (2010).

Japanese audiences. Finally, I show how by reducing the potentially unsettling figure of a mature, empowered, even commanding shamaness into the unthreatening character of the *moe* or cute miko, the otaku are able to retain a link to tradition and to the gods, without giving up their own agency to her.

Chapter 2, "Demonizing Other Deities: Essentializing 'Japaneseness' in Contemporary Popular Culture," analyzes how contemporary views of religion drive anime and manga depictions of "foreign" religions like Buddhism and Christianity as dangerous, while casting traditional Shintō beliefs and actions as a "native" cultural heritage. In this chapter, I examine how these depictions illustrate an attempt to grapple with the issue of (non-)religious identity and cultural identity in contemporary Japan. By retaining the spirit of traditional religious values while also embracing modernity, the protagonists of these stories resolve the perceived gap between "native" and "foreign" religions, and between secularization and spirituality, in order to fully embrace the post-industrial present without letting go of the spiritual and ethical core of "Japaneseness."

Chapter 3, "Storehouse of the Spirit: How Popular Culture Conserves Religious Knowledge," builds on the preceding material to present the core argument of this thesis: the role of popular culture in conserving religious and supernatural ideas and images in an increasingly secularized, modern society. I begin by examining the ways in which popular culture not only addresses the divisions between religious and secular, traditional and modern, but also how anime and manga are ideally suited for that discussion – and for communicating the means by which to transcend it. I then discuss the ways that popular culture is used by the consumers and creators of anime and manga to educate succeeding generations on religious and spiritual ideas and characters, employing anime and manga as a storehouse from which those consumers in turn draw in order to create new stories. The chapter concludes by showing how all three of these elements—

consumers, religious imagery, and popular culture—come together to present and preserve an ongoing call for integrating traditional spirituality and materialistic modernity.

A Note on Terminology

There are some terms employed in this thesis which it will help to explain here. The first is "otaku," generally used in Japan in a pejorative sense similar to "geek" or "nerd" in the U. S. and "anorak" in the U. K., but with a stronger sense of condemnation. Like many such terms of insult,[9] the word has been claimed as a badge of identity by many otaku, and it has become more common to hear of "otaku culture."[10]

In the introduction to Azuma Hiroki's *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, translators Abel and Kono explain:

> Otaku are those Japanese, usually males and generally between the ages of 18 and 40, who fanatically consume, produce, and collect comic books (manga), animated films (anime), and other products related to these forms of popular visual culture and who participate in the production and sales of derivative fan merchandise. Although this subculture began as an underground network of nerdy social outcasts on the fringe of mainstream commerce, it has become a major economic force: in 2007, the "otaku market" in Japan is estimated to be a 186.7 billion yen (about 1.7 billion dollar) market. Globally, otaku culture has spawned a large following and strongly influenced popular culture not only in Japan but also throughout Asia, the United States, and Europe."[11]

As I have used the term in this thesis, however, "otaku" means more than just these obsessive boys (and boy-men). The lines between an otaku and a loyal reader of manga

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[9] Examples from racial and sexual awareness movements are apropos here; e.g., the use of "queer" as a positive term by members of the homosexual/bisexual/transgender communities.

[10] See for example Azuma 2001; 2007; Galbraith 2010; Lamarre; MacWilliams 2008; Saitō; etc.

[11] Azuma xv.

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are not always clear-cut, and I will at times use "otaku" in a way that is inclusive of a wider group of consumers of anime, manga, computer games, and so on. In this sense I employ it in a manner more akin to its usage in the U. S., where it tends to lose its negative associations and simply mean "people who are major fans of Japanese popular culture."

Another term that bears clarification at the outset is "animanga," a colloquialism in both Japanese and English that is a portmanteau of "anime" plus "manga," but has come to stand for a wide assortment of the products of otaku culture. As one writer put it:

> Animanga is [a shorthand for] the Japanese illustrated-story publishing/ production industries, including manga (graphic novels), illustrated 'light' novels, four-panel comics, animated television shows, animated miniseries/OVA (Original Animation Videos), and animated theatrical releases. Because there's often a great deal of cross-pollination between the two types (printed vs. moving), many fans tend to use "animanga" to refer to the entire ball of wax in one easy word.[12]

Lastly, the term *yōkai* (妖怪) has been variously translated as monster, demon, goblin, ogre, ghost, specter, spirit, and so on, but it can refer to all of these and more, just as there is no one word in English that covers trolls, vampires, Bigfoot, and the nameless horror that grips you when you wake in the night and do not recognize the shadow upon the wall. I prefer the rather unwieldy translation "spiritual creature" in recognition of the varied and ambiguous nature of the yōkai: it may be a will o' the wisp, a shape-shifting fox-spirit that takes on human form at will, or the "God of Poverty," *Binbogami-sama*, who is in fact a minor deity and not a demon at all.

While on the subject of language, a comment on Japanese transliteration. Japanese words are italicized the first time they appear (e.g., *otaku*), and in normal font

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[12] K. L. Hamilton, personal communication, 2011.

thereafter. I employ the modified Hepburn orthography in common usage, with macrons indicating long vowels (Ōkami for Ookami, bishōjo for bishoujo, etc.). The exception is to words in common English usage: thus Tokyo, rather than Tōkyō.

Names of Japanese persons are given in the Asian manner, with surname first and personal name(s) second, even when in conjunction with Western names (thus James Frazer, but Miyazaki Hayao).

- Two high school students, priestesses of the Sun and the Moon, perform an evocation ritual to summon the power of Susano-ō's sword to fight an ancient evil;

- A middle-school girl travels in spirit form to the land of the Gods to bring an errant tutelary deity back to his home in the village shrine;

- A young girl is suddenly possessed by the spirit of an ancient deity and delivers a message to an astonished schoolmate.

These vignettes, from the anime series *Destiny of the Shrine Maiden*, *Kamichu!* and *Ghost Hound*, illustrate the *moe* or "cute" *miko* (shrine maiden), a popular trope in *otaku* culture that casts young schoolgirls as inheritors of the shamanic role.[13] Dressed in their traditional red and white outfits, miko are usually depicted as virginal, often prepubescent or adolescent, and endowed with powers of prophecy, clairvoyance, and the ability to speak with—and for—the *kami*.[14] They appear in manga and anime genres as widely disparate as historical fiction, contemporary cyberculture, and *hentai* pornography, and particularly appeal to male consumers of otaku culture.[15]

Many examples of the moe miko exist in Japanese popular culture, from the childlike to the polymorphous perverse. Wikipe-tan (Fig. 1), the mascot for the Japanese version of the online encyclopedia Wikipedia, appears as a young and cute girl-child in a

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[13] The term *moe*, literally 'budding' like in a young plant, is used in otaku culture to mean an object of desire. A *miko* refers to the shrine maiden or female assistant at a Shintō shrine. As will be shown in this thesis, it once referred to a wider range of duties associated with the figures of priestess and shamaness.

[14] The term *kami* may mean god/goddess, or spirit, as in the tutelary spirit of a location or a natural feature such as a rock, tree, or river. The word has cognates in the Ainu "*kamui*" which has the same meaning, and the Mongolian "*kam*" or "*kami*" which means "shaman." See Hori 202; Munro.

[15] *Hentai* (and its abbreviation "H," transliterated as "*etchi*" or "*ecchi*") literally means "abnormal" but more often simply refers to what we would call adult, i.e., sexual, themes.

number of guises including in the traditional outfit of a miko. The star of the popular X-rated tentacle-rape manga/anime series La Blue Girl (Fig. 2) is a hereditary "sex ninja" named Miko, the daughter of a demon father and a human mother.
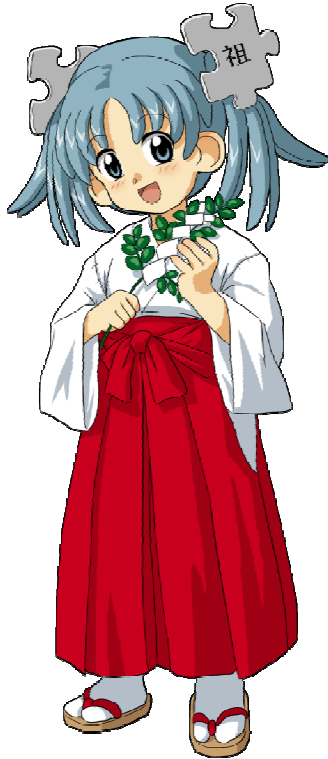
Figure 1. Wikipe-tan (*Wikipedia*)
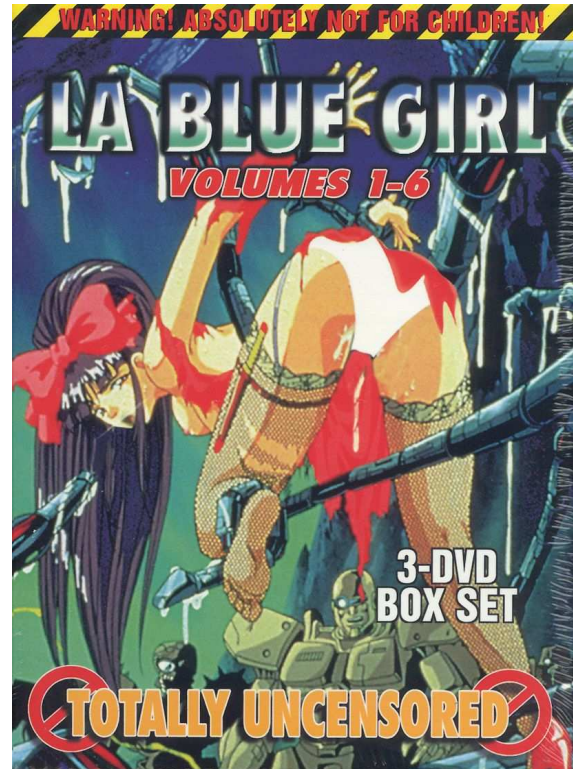
Figure 2. Mido Miko (*La Blue Girl*)

While these depictions of the moe miko are widely encountered in contemporary Japanese popular culture, the once-prevalent figure of the empowered shamaness is almost nowhere found. In this chapter, I hope to explore the relationship between the miko and the vanishing shamaness, whose talents as intermediatrix between human and supernatural are now ones that the miko now wields. I theorize here that through a

process of diminution, the shamaness has been shrunk, '*chibified*,' into the moe miko.[16] In this way, the intimidating image of a mature, empowered woman who speaks with the voice of the gods has been tamed, reducing her into the cute and unthreatening girl with the vacant eyes so popular with male otaku culture.

In order to understand what the shamaness has become in the contemporary times, however, we must first examine the breadth and depth of her historical role in Japan's past.

The Shamaness in Japanese History

> The oldest shamanic figure of which we have any record is the Shintō miko. This powerful sacral woman—the term 'female shaman' conveys only feebly the probable majesty of her presence—served in shrines throughout the land in the late prehistoric period as the mouthpiece for the numina of certain kinds. She was to be found in the Emperor's court, transmitting the admonitions and instructions of deities to the Emperor himself, as well as in villages remote from the central Yamato plain where she acted as the link between the local tutelary kami and the villagers under his care. (Blacker 104)

In this passage from *The Catalpa Bow*, her milestone examination of shamanism in Japan, Carmen Blacker describes the ubiquity with which the powerful figure of the shamaness once exercised her skills on behalf of both ruler and ruled throughout the land. In the past, shamanesses were strong women, empowered, revered but feared like most uncanny, liminal, figures. They spoke to and for the gods, bringing their blessings, and

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[16] *Chibi* means "short person" or "small child," and may be either a term of endearment or of insult, like calling someone "shorty" or "shrimp." Chibification is a popular otaku term that means to shrink someone into a harmless childlike caricature of her former self. Cf. "Superdeformed."

occasionally their curses, upon the people and the fields. They danced and performed fertility rites, propitiated angry spirits, and foretold what was to come. They carried the people's prayers to the ancestors, and conveyed messages from the dead to their living descendants. Based on shamanic practices in other regions of East Asia, they may have also employed a varied list of powers including battling with evil spirits and banishing supernatural creatures, traveling in spirit form to the lands of the gods or of the dead, retrieving the wandering souls of humans, or applying healing techniques that employed magical words, gestures, or drawings.

The image of the spirit-inspired shamaness has its roots in the *Kojiki* (*Record of Ancient Matters,* 712 CE), Japan's oldest extant collection of myths. The legends of the founding gods and goddesses, from whom Japan's very land and emperor are said to be descended, tell of a time when the Sun Goddess Amaterasu hid herself away, plunging the world into darkness. Fearing that all creation might perish, the deities gathered outside the cave in which she had shut herself. The goddess Ame-no-Uzume (Fig. 3) climbed onto an overturned bucket and began a ritual of possession: she wreathed herself in sacred vines and started to dance. Becoming "divinely possessed" (Philippi 84), she bared her breasts and lowered her skirt until her genitals were exposed. The assembled deities laughed until the entire plain shook. Curious, Amaterasu opened the cave door to see the spectacle and light was restored to the world.

"The Kojiki text," declares Alan L. Miller in a 1993 article, "explicitly states that Uzume became 'kami-possessed' (*kami-gakaru*); hence she became officially the first shaman. Her exposure of her genitals, her essential and unmistakable femaleness in her ecstatic dance, seems also to give archetypal legitimation to the historical fact that Japanese practice powerfully asserts the primacy of the female to the shamanic office." (344)

Figure 3. Ame-no-Uzume

In this earliest representation of the shamaness we see one of her important roles described, that of intercessor. In fact, her responsibility was generally to act as intermediary between the people and all kinds of spirits, whether divine, human, or malevolent. In his 1968 monograph, *Folk Religion in Japan*, Hori Ichirō noted that she "would announce the names and declare the will of the spirits of the dead in time of famine, epidemic, drought, flood, the falling of a thunderbolt, personal illness, evil dreams, and difficult childbirth." (112) In addition, the shamaness utilized her talents for possession in order to effect the displacement of malevolent spirits, such as when a shamaness offered herself for possession by the angry spirit of the late deposed Crown

Prince Sugawara no Michizane, in order to determine the nature of his complaint and the remedy by which his anger might be appeased.[17]

Figure 4. *The Lady Aoi*

The ability of taking on the dangerous role of acting as mouthpiece for an angry spirit of the dead or living is attested to in *The Lady Aoi* (*Aoi no Ue*, c. 1400), a well-known Noh play (Fig. 4) adapted from the famous eleventh century *Tale of Genji* (*Genji Monogatari*, c. 1000).[18] The text of the *Genji* describes a number of shamanesses

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[17] See Hori 115.

[18] For a transcription of the Noh play *The Lady Aoi*, see the translation by Janet Goff in *Noh Drama and the Tale of Genji* (1991). The best-known English editions of Lady Murasaki Shikibu's *Tale of Genji* are probably the 1977 edition by Edward Seidensticker, and the 1990 abridgement. The story of Aoi's death at the hands of Prince Genji's discarded lover, the Lady Rokujō, has been adapted into many versions including a modern Noh play by Mishima Yukio and even a manga edition (Yamato 1989-93) that sold some 14 million copies.

whose role is to act as vehicles for the malicious spirits swarming around the immanent birth of Aoi and Genji's son, so that the priests can exorcise them. In the Noh adaptation the shamaness Teruhi, into whom a spirit has been invoked, reveals that she is possessed by the specter of jealousy sent by the Lady Rokujō to kill Genji's wife, the Lady Aoi. The animated spirit of Rokujō's spite proves to be so strong that the shamaness is unable to overcome it, and a *yamabushi* or mountain ascetic priest must be called upon to effect the exorcism.[19] Although Teruhi is depicted as needing the intervention of a male priest, these texts attest to the prevalence of a practice of employing shamanesses for their abilities in receiving spiritual entities into themselves in the Heian-era court.

Figure 5. Nichiren Séance, by Percival Lowell

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[19] See pp. 18-20 for more on the *yamabushi's* female counterpart, the *yamababa*.

This function of acting as intermediary with supernatural beings, by offering them a vehicle through which to interact with a male ritual director, may be seen as representing a stage in the reduction of the shamaness' agency, a move towards reducing her to a more ceremonial role. Almost a hundred years ago, Percival Lowell described two Nichiren séances he attended (Fig. 5) in which women took on the task of channeling the gods' responses to the questions posed by the congregants. Lowell describes the shamaness as being a "maiden," i.e., young but unmarried. He goes on to note that "the most interesting feature of the case, psychologically, was the great ease of possession, due, as I am convinced, to the sex of the subject" (162). Leaving aside the paternalizing tone of Lowell's "conviction," there is clearly a connection here made between the shamanic historical function and the fact that, while it is the priest who is in control, it is solely the female participant who can speak for the kami.

With the passing of time, then, the shamaness not only became less numerous, but her role began to be more and more restricted. By the late medieval period, the function of spiritual intermediary came to be found only in the *itako* (Fig. 6), blind seeresses who traveled to villages in order to afford the people an opportunity to speak with the kami, and with their departed relatives.[20] In order to become an itako, the candidate often underwent a period of training as a *yamababa*[21] or female mountain ascetic. Blacker, Hori, Lowell, and others [22] have described the severities these seekers subjected themselves to. This included months and years spent in such activities as reciting sutras under a waterfall in the dead of winter and wandering the mountains with only the leaves

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[20] See Hori 181 *ff*.

[21] Also *yamamba*.

[22] Many sources exist for information on the *yamabushi* or mountain ascetics in Japan, and on *shugyo* or *shugendō*, their practices involving austerity training. In addition to the authors mentioned above, see for example Earhardt; Kornicki & McMullen; Schattschneider; Swanson & Chilson, Tyler; and others.

for bedding and the creatures—both natural and supernatural—for company, until they might one day be afforded the divine possession they sought.

Figure 6. Blind Itako Performing Ceremony

Despite being a fixture in Japanese society since at least the thirteenth century, as witnessed by her appearance in early Noh drama (Fig. 7), the yamababa has faded from existence, recalled only in travelers' tales and folklore.[23] In 1910, late-Meiji folklorist Yanagita Kunio recorded rural village dwellers' tales of weird women, with wild manes

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[23] "Legends about a mysterious old woman living in the mountains have circulated in Japan since early times . . . she is, simultaneously, a benevolent demon, a supernatural human, and an enlightened being tormented by delusive attachments." (Brazell 207)

of hair and mysterious powers, suddenly being encountered on out-of-the-way mountain paths.

Figure 7. Yamababa (Noh Play)   Figure 8. Contemporary Itako

Hori also notes that the medium is represented in the modern period, and into the twentieth century, by a few wandering itako (Fig. 8) whose dwindling numbers[24] were to be seen in a few parts of the far northeastern area of the island of Honshū (present-day Tōhoku region), and the remnants of the traditional kaminchu of Okinawa and the

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[24] A recent New York Times article (Fackler, "As Japan's Mediums Die, Ancient Tradition Fades." 20 Aug. 2009) discusses the shrinking numbers of itako, noting that of the seven women who attended a gathering of itako in 2008, only four remained in 2009, of whom only one was under 65 years of age – and she was too ill to make this year's journey.

Ryūkyū Islands (203-5).[25] The handful of remaining itako, then, may be viewed as one remnant of the once-powerful shamanesses that were once a crucial aspect of Japanese society.[26]

The various roles of the shamaness enumerated above, while fading to but a pale shadow of their former importance, did not entirely vanish with the coming of modernity in Japan; however, that diversity of roles available to her has severely diminished. Once found in courts and villages, in mountains and temples, only a few opportunities remain for the shamaness in Japan today.

A few shamanesses still speak with and for the kami, but now in a somewhat different form. In the wake of the 1868 Meiji Restoration, a number of new religious sects (*shinshūkyō*) arose, the majority of them founded by women who reported receiving visions from various divine sources, including Ame-no-Uzume, the kami discussed above as the archetypal Japanese shamaness. Deguchi Nao, for example (Fig. 9), an impoverished peasant woman from a rural area near Kyoto who began to receive divine visions in 1892, became the founder of Ōmoto (大本, *Ōmoto*, also written *Oomoto*, literally "foundation"), a sect that reached a membership of some hundreds of thousands of followers at its peak and whose organizational descendants still exist today. (Stalker *passim*)

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[25] For more on Shamanism in Okinawa, see Lebra; also Chilson & Knecht. Blacker devotes an entire chapter to the itako; see 1975: 140-63 and Plates 7 & 8 in *The Catalpa Bow*. Sered has additional information on the shamaness in contemporary Okinawa; her ethnographic methodology seems somewhat shaky, but the book is still interesting reading.

[26] The yamababa has not entirely disappeared from the popular consciousness, however. A fashion style of a decade or so ago was called "*yamamba sutairu*" or "mountain witch style" ("yamamba" is a contraction of "yamababa"). In the 1990s girls in Tokyo began appearing with deep tans, dyed blonde hair, and a combination of white or extremely pale lipstick and eyeshadow, combined with the use of black eyeliner. This *ganguro* ("black face") style was later replaced by the even more extreme yamamba fashion, with the makeup being applied in an even more grotesque manner, and extremes of colored and artificial hair being added. See "Ganguro Style."

Figure 9. Deguchi Nao, Founder of Ōmoto

These seeresses perform healing ceremonies for both individuals and for the nation or even the world at large. Based on information received in their séances, they convey messages from the gods and goddesses, showing their followers the way to purification and regeneration. [27]

[27] Blacker (1975: 128) also links the shamaness of old to the *kyōso*, female founders of the various new religious sects that have arisen in the last hundred years.

Helen Hardacre, in her 1986 work on Kurozumikyō (黒住教, literally "the Teachings of Kurozumi"), a new religious movement that grew in the mid nineteenth century, also notes that "[m]any scholars have pointed out that new religions typically include shamanic elements . . ." (7)

It should be stressed that Hardacre's purpose in mentioning this is not to signify her agreement with these scholars, but rather her opinion that in attempting to draw a parallel between these new religious movements and older shamanic traditions, and in creating a "trait list" of shared phenomena, the (unnamed) scholars she mentions "fail to articulate the internal coherence of the separate items [of such lists]" (7). Regardless of whether Hardacre is interested in examining any such correspondences between the traits associated with new religions in Japan and older forms of shamanism, such correspondences have nonetheless indeed been noted by a number of writers on the subject.

Figure 10. Contemporary Miko

Importantly, the traditional miko herself is still found at Shintō ritual performances (Fig. 10), but that role nowadays reflects the mixture of cultural heritage and often unacknowledged spiritual function that characterizes most religious ceremonies in today's Japan. Miko are most often seen at festivals and traditional Shintō weddings acting as assistants to male priests, or performing *kagura* dances which were once sacred

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Hori devotes an entire chapter of his book to "The New Religions and the Survival of Shamanic Tendencies," in which he discusses social and historical pressures that give rise to these movements, their general organization, and the types of activities associated with their meetings. (217-251) He mentions in particular the "survivals of shamanic tendencies" found in Japanese new religions, and notes that "[a]mong ten major founders seven were chosen or possessed by a kami, and all had experiences of mystical inspiration and religious initiation. . . For example, Sayo Kitamura calls herself the Ō-gami-sama (Great August Kami) and believes that the Tenshō-kōtai-jingū (Divine Palace of the Heavenly Shining Great Kami) actually exists within her body." (228)

rituals but are now viewed primarily as folk entertainment for the spectators.[28] Their shamanic role as intermediaries between the kami and the people, however, is nowhere found overtly expressed in these performances.

The shamaness was once interwoven into the fabric of everyday life in Japan; she has since gradually disappeared from it. To find the shamaness who still performs that multiplicity of spiritual functions in contemporary Japan, we must turn to popular culture.

The Miko in Contemporary Popular Culture

In *Destiny of the Shrine Maiden* (神無月の巫女, *Kannazuki no Miko*, 2004), Chikane and Himeko (Fig. 11) are avatars or reincarnations of the eternal priestesses of the Moon and the Sun, respectively. The priestesses follow the conventions of the animanga miko stereotype. They dress in matching traditional outfits (though Chikane, the priestess of the moon, wears purple while Himeko wears the customary red), and wave rattan representations of swords, and *gohei*, sacred wands decorated with zigzag paper streamers used in Shintō rituals. They are young, beautiful, and embody both innocence (in Himeko) and a certain transcendent knowledge (in Chikane).

Himeko—the name means 'princess' and may also here be a reference to the legendary Empress Himiko, who has been described as both a shamaness and ruler[29]—

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[28] For more on the traditional kagura as possession performance, see Averbuch; Hoff; Honda; Inmoos; Kirby 1973, 1974; Ortolani 1984; 1990.

[29] Himiko or Pimiko is mentioned in third century Chinese annals as a queen of "Yamatai" in what is now Japan. The name appears in the *Wo-jen-chuan*, or *History and Topography of Third Century Japan* in the Wei dynastic records (233 CE – 297 CE) by Chên-shou. (Hori 1968: 187). There has been much speculation as to whether or not this figure was an actual ruler of the Yamato kingdom in early Japan, as well as whether the name might in fact be a corruption of "Himeko" ("princess"), or of "hi" (either sun or fire) + "miko," thus "Priestess of the Sun Deity." Hori translates the name as "August Child of the Sun."

Some scholars point to the passage in the *Wo-jen-chuan* stating that she "occupied herself with magic and sorcery, bewitching the people," as indicative of Himiko's status as both ruler and shamaness. See, for example, Swanson & Chilson 136-7.

must struggle with her human feelings of inadequacy in order to free the powers of an ancient divine sword to fight against the eight-headed demon Orochi.

Figure 11. Chikane & Himeko (*Destiny of the Shrine Maiden*)

Both Chikane and Himeko (and to some extent another character, Sōma) exercise powers traditionally associated with shamanism. In addition to working to awaken the power of the divine spirit of order to do battle against the forces of chaos, they travel interdimensionally, access sacred spaces of power, and employ magical words and gestures of power. Chikane and Himeko's running battle with the madness and pandemonium that Orochi brings has its source in the *Kojiki*.

The *Kojiki* relates how Susano-ō, brother of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu from whom the Japanese Imperial line is said to have descended, must defeat a terrible serpent or dragon with eight heads and eight tails named Orochi.[30] In *Destiny of the Shrine Maiden*, Orochi is depicted as a group of eight malefactors symbolized, rather than embodied, as an eight-headed serpent, whose 'heads' are manifested in such popular animanga tropes as a schoolboy with a mysterious injury that will not heal, a dark angel, a manga creator, a cat-girl, a nun, a failed pop idol, and others, against whom the priestesses and their allies must fight.

Susano-ō's sword is here transformed from a literal, material sword into a supernatural force: an ancient divine power that the two girls must release from within a hidden shrine. The sword thus becomes symbolic both of Himeko's quest to release her own potential, and of the pair's need to reawaken an essentially Japanese religious spirit as symbolized by its dormancy within a disused Shintō shrine.

Throughout the story, Chikane and Himeko are young and pretty, and embody a number of moe tropes popular with otaku culture, from their clothing—they are almost always seen dressed either in their school uniforms or their miko outfits—to their personalities. Chikane as the Priestess of the Moon is the more mature, darker, complicated, and empowered character, while Himeko as the Solar Priestess is shown as possessed of a sunnier disposition, innocent and trusting, and slightly helpless. This depiction of Himeko plays upon a number of moe images: her innocence and helplessness are viewed by otaku as endearing traits, and the story's focus upon her progress as she works to realize her power is a popular plotline in anime, manga, and

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[30] *Orochi* means "giant snake." The number eight here may be taken as standing for "many." In the scene where Ame-no-Uzume lures Amaterasu out of hiding (see p 4), the plain is said to have resounded with the laughter of "the eight hundred thousand deities." (Philippi 84)

computer games. Himeko is thus the focus of attraction for most viewers. Yet despite her innocence, and in her struggle to overcome her helplessness—yet not her dependency on Chikane, who may be seen as standing in for the male viewer himself—Himeko is able to win against the forces of darkness and chaos.[31]

In the end, Himeko's love for Chikane gives her the strength to defeat Orochi, and, now fully realized as sexually mature women, they return to full knowledge of themselves as incarnations of the eternal solar and lunar priestesses. At this point, their spirits are able to begin a new incarnation: the series ends with a new pair of girls, resembling the young versions of Chikane and Himeko with which the series opened, meeting by chance on a Tokyo street. In this way the viewer is left with the possibility that he too may one day meet his own eternally young Himeko in a chance encounter.

The main protagonist of *Kamichu!* (かみちゅ!, *Kamichu!, 2005*) is Yurie-chan (Fig. 12), affectionately known as "Kamichu," which is not only a portmanteau of kami, or god/goddess, and *chūgakusei*, middle-schooler, but also a near homonym for the Okinawan "*kaminchu*" or "*kaminshu*" meaning shamaness. Yurie is a typical middle-school girl: she would rather laze around eating ice cream than do her homework, and is shy to the point of being tongue-tied in the presence of Kenji, the boy she likes. One day she awakens to find that she has become a kami, and sets out to discover what kind of god she might be. In Yurie, and to a lesser extent her friends, we see the figure of the cute girl on the edge of adolescence who exercises the powers once reserved to the shamaness.

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[31] Himeko's character also represents another popular anime trope, the *sentō bishōjo or* "battling beauty" who fights for right but—in contrast to male characters who are generally depicted in armor or as robot pilots—is depicted in a form that emphasizes her feminine beauty, most often a revealing outfit that shows off her body, or a moe outfit such as a school uniform or miko's costume. See Kotani 2006; Saitō 2011; Suter 2009.

Figure 12. *Kamichu!*

Yurie herself fulfills a number of shamanic functions. One of these is the ability to travel in spirit-form to the land of the kami, which is depicted as a traditional Japanese town in the Edo style (1600-1868), albeit with a number of otherworldly features such as a river that flows uphill (as well as some contemporary touches: the Goddess Benten[32] performs a rock concert). Yurie performs other shamanic actions through the series, including banishing spirits, performing healings, exercising her oracular powers, employing *mantra* and *mudra* (words and gestures of power), and communicating with various kami and other spiritual creatures.

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[32] Benten, or Benzaiten, is a Japanese adaptation of Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of knowledge, arts, and music. In Japan she is considered one of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune.

Yurie's classmate Matsuri has a younger sister named Miko, who cares for the family shrine and converses with its resident kami, Yashima-sama. Yashima, who wants to be a rock star, occasionally possesses Yurie and Matsuri's friend Mitsue in order to converse with the girls, or to perform onstage (badly, as Mitsue complains). Although Miko rarely wears the traditional white *haori* jacket and red *hakama* trousers of a shrine maiden, she nevertheless fulfils the stereotype of the young but serious-beyond-her-years girl who can see and converse with the spirits. Notably, Matsuri and their father, the hereditary priest of the town's Shintō shrine, cannot see the kami living amongst the town's inhabitants. Miko is the only one who can see and speak with Yashima.

Through his ability to identify with Yashima, the male viewer can imagine himself as an underappreciated god/star whose value can only be perceived by the miko. Conversely, by identifying himself with Kenji, Yurie's object of affection, he is able to see himself as the boy who is loved by a goddess. In both cases the viewer's connection with divinity comes through imagining himself as the subject of female focus. It is only through these young girls that this connection is made, but in turn it is their connection with him that gives them a purpose to use their powers. Thus, in the viewer's perception at least, these powers exist to serve him. At the end of the series, Yurie and Kenji have confided their feelings for each other and are dating, and the viewer "gets the girl" by proxy.

Ghost Hound (神霊狩/GHOST HOUND, *Shinreigari/Gōsuto Haundo*, 2007) [33] is a complex anime series originally conceptualized by Shirow [34] Masamune of *Ghost in the*

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[33] Titled both as "Shinreigari" (lit. "Spirit Hunting") and "Gōsuto Haundo" (Japanese transliteration of the English "Ghost Hound"). In addition to Shirow, author of *Ghost in the Shell* (攻殻機動隊, *Kōkaku Kidōtai*, literally "Mobile Armored Riot Police"), other collaborators on the project include artists, directors, or producers involved in a number of other famous anime including *Serial Experiments Lain*, *Kino's Journey*, *Texhnolize*, *Hell Girl*, and *Jin-Roh*: truly an all-star team.

[34] Masamune prefers this spelling over the more usual "Shirō."

Shell fame. The series, which involves a mixture of scientific and magical-religious explanations of out of body experiences, bio-spiritual experimentation, spirit possession, and traditional Shintō mythology contrasted with modern new religious movements, also depicts a middle-school student who is the daughter of a Shintō priest. Miyako (Fig. 13) is also young, serious beyond her years, and gifted with the ability to see spiritual entities, including the main character Tarō and his friends when they travel by astral projection. Miyako also has the faculty of being possessed by the kami.

Figure 13. Miyako (*Ghost Hound*)

Tarō and two of his friends, each of whom is dealing with the aftermath of childhood traumas, are high school classmates. Through astral projection, Tarō and the

others encounter spiritual creatures, ghosts of the dead, and the "Unseen World," a supernatural plane that overlaps with ordinary reality.[35] Unlike the three boys, Miyako's ability to perceive the Unseen World and its inhabitants is not a result of the intrusion of traumatic rupture in her past, but rather comes from her position as a miko and daughter of the town's hereditary Shintō priest. Her powers are therefore innate, hereditary, hers alone.

While she does not travel in spirit form as do the three boys, Miyako can see and converse with supernatural creatures, help in spiritual healing, and act as a mouthpiece for the kami. As the story approaches its climax she is kidnapped specifically for her mediumistic abilities, and installed as the head of a small religious cult led by women.[36] Miyako's rescue from this female exclusionary enclave is only effected through the efforts of Tarō and his friends, aided by a number of spirits called up by a character who may himself be a *tengu* or mountain spirit disguised in human form. True, Tarō and his friends are able to travel by astral projection without Miyako's aid, but as that is the extent of their ability, the story de-emphasizes it as a spiritual skill and turns it into some-thing anyone may do – as shown by the fact that they teach the skill to one of their classmates. Only Miyako, however, is able to perform the shamanic function as inter-mediary of the gods.

It is clear that Tarō, as the main protagonist of the story, is attracted to Miyako. Thus we again see a scenario in which the male viewer is provided the means to imagine himself involved in an emotional relationship that places him in a position of power vis-

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[35] Popularized in the twentieth century, the "astral projection" refers to the purported ability to separate the consciousness from the physical body and travel through the material world and/or variously conceived spiritual realms. I return to the subject of reality as composed of overlapping spiritual and physical worlds in Chapter 3.

[36] For more on the perseverance of shamanic tradition in new religious movements, see p 20, above.

à-vis the girl who offers access to the spiritual realm. By making Tarō the agent of Miyako's delivery from a cloistered world ruled by women, the viewer is given the opportunity to see himself as both savior of, and potential mate for, this young priestess of the kami.

It is interesting to note how choice of names in these anime stresses the connection between these attractive girls and their supernatural function. In addition to the proximity of "miko" and "Miyako" (a term for a capital city, this word dates back to ancient times – when of course shamanesses were found in the imperial courts), among the Orochi in *Destiny of the Shrine Maiden* the nun is also named Miyako. Three of the four girls in *Kamichu!* are also known by names with religious overtones: Kamichu, Miko, and Matsuri ("festival"). The potential play on names in *Destiny of the Shrine Maiden* between Himeko and Himiko has already been mentioned (see note 29, above).[37] With these connections to religion institutions of the past, the viewer is invited to identify the young girls as part of a rapidly-fading spiritual tradition.

The Miko as Shamaness

Like Conan Doyle's famous dog, the shamaness in contemporary Japanese daily culture is marked by her absence. In earliest times, the shamaness was encountered from the imperial court to the remote mountain village. A century ago, she was still a part of the Japanese cultural and religious landscape (Fig. 14), albeit one whose role and numbers were already dwindling. By the time the "bubble economy" had burst and the twenty-first century was dawning, she had all but disappeared from the popular arena.

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[37] In fact, in a random sampling of anime depicting girls with shamanic characteristics I found that fully half were named "Miko" or some variation on it, or some other name with religious or magical significance.

Figure 14. Meiji-era Miko[38]

Over the last century, meanwhile, otaku culture has grown exponentially. From the first boys' manga of the early years of modern Japanese Imperialism, to the rise of post-war comics like *Shōnen Magajin* ("*Boys' Magazine*," begun in 1959), and into recent explosion of otaku culture as expressed in manga, anime, plastic model kits, stuffed animals, cellphone dongles, and the like, the market for otaku consumerism has grown to astronomic proportions (Fig. 15).[39]

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[38] "Mikos (shrine maiden) at Kasuga Taisha Shrine photographed inside. . . . The hair decoration like wisteria flowers and eight layered red and white collars are the characteristic of miko attire of Kasuga Taisha. The miko in the centre holds bells whereas other six hold fans called '*hiougi*.'" (Nagasaki University Database of Japanese Old Photographs In Bakumatsu-Meiji Period.)

[39] For more on the history of Manga and Anime, see Lunning 2006; MacWilliams 2008.

Figure 15. Hello Kitty Exhaust

During that period, at the same time that the shamaness has to all intents and purposes vanished from contemporary public life in Japan, the popularity of the moe miko has grown such that a recent internet search on "miko" + "anime" resulted in almost 900,000 hits. While it is not my intention here to explore the intersection of neoliberal consumerism and popular culture, the important point for this discussion is the massive scale of the consumption of products, images, and tropes related to otaku culture. When a particular image becomes a popular object of otaku focus, the economic and cultural forces set in motion easily become an avalanche of demand.

It is in the otaku culture's conceptualization of the miko that we find the surviving images of the Japanese shamaness (Figs. 16, 17). In contrast to historical representations

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of both shamanesses and temple priestesses, where the figures encountered are overwhelmingly those of mature women, the moe miko is seldom post-adolescent, and almost never mature or married. Although this process of diminution, of shrinking the shamaness into the moe miko, is a part of the larger emphasis on youth and the soft power of the *kawaii*, or 'cute,' in otaku culture, it should be clear that there are emotional benefits to the otaku himself as well.[40]

Figure 16. Traditional Miko

Figure 17. Himeko, Plastic Model

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[40] For more on "Soft Power" see, for instance, Nye, "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics" (2004) For its application in the context of Japanese popular culture, see Douglas McGray, "Japan's Gross National Cool" (2002). Another article exploring the latter in terms of global trends is Christine R. Yano, "Wink on Pink: Interpreting Japanese Cute as It Grabs the Global Headlines" (2009).

Just as the "Gundams" and "Evas" of *shōnen* giant-robot stories[41] offer the viewer an opportunity to see himself as a powerful force to fight against oppression and defend the weak, so too the moe miko likewise offers him an opportunity to fantasize about a deep emotional connection to the spiritual. In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (Mulvey 1975) and its sequel,[42] Laura Mulvey applies Freudian and Lacanian analysis of "phallocentrism" and "scopophilia" (pleasure derived from looking at something) to expose the biases in Hollywood films that turn women into objects to be looked at, rather than subjects with their own agency. To use Mulvey's phrasing, the "male gaze" of the overwhelmingly male consumer-creators of otaku cultural products prefers the object of desire to be young, cute, and an embodiment of a connection between the viewer and something transcendent (Fig. 18).[43]

While the shamaness as originally seen in ancient times was a mature, sexual woman—it is interesting to note that all of the depictions of Ame-no-Uzume show her as middle aged and full-figured—the miko in otaku culture is perpetually on the cusp of adulthood. She incites the male viewer's desire, but is herself devoid of sexual awareness. She is, as moe implies (see Note 1), a bud that has yet to be opened.

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[41] Gundams (*gandamu*) are giant robots, also referred to as 'mecha,' featured in a series of political/action-adventure stories and anime of the same name, first appearing in the 1979 anime series, "Mobile Suit Gundam" (機動戦士ガンダム, *Kidō Senshi Gandamu*). Since then an enormous amount of Gundam manga, anime, films, games, and other products have been produced, and the franchise has become worth over 50 billion yen (over $600M). See Nikkei Entertainment, "*Otona no Gundam Perfect.*"

Evas refers to the giant robots of the even more influential "Neon Genesis Evangelion" (新世紀エヴァンゲリオン, *Shin Seiki Evangerion*) franchise, which has grossed some 150 billion yen ($1.85B) since its inception in 1995. See " 'Eva' General Manager's 'Urgent Statement.' "

Shōnen (also written *shounen*) refers to stories and shows aimed at young boys from middle school through high school age.

[42] "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by King Vidor's Duel in the Sun (1946)" (Mulvey 1999)

[43] It should be noted that women, too, have their own 'gaze,' as evidenced by the popularity of *yaoi*, stories depicting male homosexual relationships that are written by and for women—among other examples. See Levi, McHarry & Pagliassotti.

Figure 18. *Girls Bravo*

The miko's combination of innocence and otherworldliness makes her a perennially popular character in manga, *dōjinshi*,[44] anime, fan art, games, and other products of otaku production and consumption. Through his imagining of the miko as young, beautiful, virginal, and offering access to the font of supernatural benefices that she alone controls, the otaku consumer is afforded a connection with an archetype of the eternally pure gateway to the divine. At the same time, however, the fact that the girls are encoded as traditional Shintō shrine maidens means that he is granted a bond with a

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[44] Dōjinshi (often written "*doujinshi*") are self-published manga written and illustrated by fans (and sometimes by published authors) about their favorite characters from manga and anime. Reliable sales figures are nearly impossible to determine; however, to give some idea of the scale of the market, Comiket, an annual Tokyo dōjinshi convention, currently runs to some 20 acres – almost nine hundred thousand square feet. See Comic Market Preparations Committee; Ichikawa; Lam.

quintessentially Japanese spiritual tradition that has been all but erased from daily life in contemporary industrialized society.

Figure 19. *Inakoi*

The miko, always a liminal figure dwelling on the threshold between the material and spiritual worlds, has now also become the doorway between history and modernity. By reducing that historical shamaness into the moe miko, while likewise reducing her to an object of desire, the male otaku is able to retain power over her, and avoid the potentially unsettling figure of a mature shamaness who would threaten the viewer's fantasy of possession and control. In her stead, he has retained his connection to, and domination of, an embodiment of Japan's spiritual past by way of the pliant, desirable, and eternally young—that is, *moe*—miko.

DEMONIZING OTHER DEITIES
ESSENTIALIZING "JAPANESENESS" IN CONTEMPORARY POPULAR CULTURE

According to surveys by the NHK[45] and others, a majority of Japanese people do not consider themselves religious, yet they engage in behaviors and ascribe to viewpoints that might strike outside observers as religiously motivated. To the Japanese, these actions and attitudes stem from cultural, not religious, motivations. This tension around the construction of religious and cultural identity is clearly revealed in contemporary Japanese popular culture.

Japanese popular culture does not treat all forms of religion alike, however. In anime, manga, and computer games, Shintō is portrayed positively, as an integral part of Japanese identity. Buddhism, despite its long history in Japan, is depicted as a distrusted Other, as is Christianity, which was introduced into Japan by Europeans some five hundred years ago. Both are characterized in popular culture as examples of the loss of traditional cultural identity, of "Japaneseness," that accompanies modernization. Religions beyond those two—Taoism, Judaism, Islam, and others—are generally ignored or are caricatured as exoticized examples of the Other. When influences from other Asian religions are shown in a positive light, they are commonly divorced from their religious context and instead cast as native Japanese practices.

Why is Shintō valorized and all other religions, whether familiar or not, denigrated or erased? How do the Japanese resolve the contradiction between these portrayals, and the rejection of the notion of religious self-identification? How do they reconcile this distrust of religion as a whole with the adoption of practices from Chinese and Indian religions? These are some of the questions I will explore in this chapter.

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[45] The *Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai* (日本放送協会, "Japan Broadcasting Corporation"), or NHK for short, is the public broadcasting service in Japan, equivalent to the BBC in the UK.

Religious Identity in Japan

When questioned, many Japanese who describe themselves as nonreligious yet who engage in apparent religious behavior respond that they perform these actions due to their cultural worldview, not any religious affiliation.[46] To them, being religious means belonging to a particular religious organization, something most Japanese do not practice. The performance of spiritually-informed actions, on the other hand, are perceived as culturally-bound, rather than religious in nature. In short, their attitude may be summarized as: we do these things because it is part of who we are.[47]

"Who we are," then, is a blend of religious and cultural identity. This is perhaps nowhere more clearly evidenced than in contemporary Japanese popular culture. Religion, magic, and the supernatural appear in an overwhelming majority of anime, manga, and computer games, from magical schoolgirls who save the planet from demons, to gun-wielding nuns in revealing outfits, and from Shintō exorcists to corrupt Buddhist monks.

This blend of religious identity and national identity results in certain religious symbols becoming part of "who we are" while others are excluded or demonized. In practice, this generally means that popular culture creates an essential connection between "Japaneseness" and Shintō, while depicting Christianity, Buddhism, and other religions, as pernicious foreign intrusions.

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[46] "[R]eligion in Japan has come to mean the founded religions of Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and the New Religions, while the practices of folk religion that the vast majority of the population engage in—New Year's visits to shrines and temples, funeral rites, visits to ancestral graves—are viewed as social customs, devoid of 'religious' meaning." (Kisala 9)

See also Fujiwara: "They call those who voluntarily belong to certain religious organizations 'religious,' *shūkyō*, while describing themselves as 'non-religious,' *mushūkyō*, even if they visit shrines on New Years day every year." (Fujiwara 192)

[47] See, for instance, Fujiwara 192-3; Ivy *passim*; Nelson 3*ff*.

For one and a half millennia, Buddhism and Shintō coexisted: occasionally in tension, sometimes in separate-but-equal amity, and often through a syncretism or creolization that allowed for the creation of uniquely Japanese forms. Shintō kami were viewed as bodhisattvas, and mountain ascetics melded recitation of sutras with reverence for nature spirits; other similar fusions provide evidence that Shintō and Buddhism were not perceived as discrete systems.

During the nineteenth century, however, in the interests of internal social reform and a need to be accepted on the world stage, ultra-nationalism impelled a government mandated reformulation of political and religious identity for the Japanese people. This politically-motivated agenda was pursued through an aggressive campaign of self- and other-essentialization that cast Shintō as the original, native, and natural religious identity of the Japanese nation, people, and emperor, and Buddhism as an illegitimate, foreign, and debased import.

Despite the disavowal of imperialism in the post-war era, that essentialization of Shintō as the heart of Japaneseness has carried forward to contemporary portrayals of religions and religious agents in Japanese popular culture. Shintō, as depicted in ani-manga, represents the preservation of the very heart and soul of all that is good in Japan. This *Nihon-damashii*, "Japanese Spirit," is the divinely-imparted spirit that forms the core of what makes Japanese and Japan itself unique.[48] In contrast, Christianity, Buddhism, and other religions are depicted as a religious and cultural Other. Even Buddhism's millennium and a half in Japan has not enabled it to avoid being cast as a

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[48] Nihon-damashii (日本魂, "Japanese spirit"), originally written as *Yamato-damashii* (大和魂), has been used to describe an essentialized Japanese identity since the Heian Era (794-1185), to distinguish Japanese cultural values from those imported from the continent. (cf. Murasaki 1:362) The term Yamato-damashii acquired a negative connotation in the twentieth century due to its use in Japan's imperialist propaganda.

Johnny-come-lately, lacking a moral core, and embodying all that is wrong with foreign-inspired modernity: greed, corruption, materialism, and immorality.

Figure 20. Kamidana, or Shintō altar

There is a cliché that Japanese are born Shintō, marry as Christians, and die Buddhists, yet surveys commonly show that the number of people professing religious affiliation consists of only thirty percent of the population, if not less. (Kisala 3; Swyngedouw 1993: 51)

Nevertheless, these same respondents clearly engage in a variety of beliefs and activities that fall at least partially into a category many outsiders would consider religious. Japanese people visit Shintō shrines on New Year's Day to obtain good fortune

for the coming year, and hang votive plaques on other occasions for help with relationships or to pass school entrance examinations. They participate in *matsuri*, festivals, at local Shintō shrines or Buddhist temples and go annually to the family gravesite on Obon[49] to ceremonially wash the marker stones and burn incense for the dead. They even maintain expensive altars (*kamidana*, Fig. 20, or *butsudan*, Fig. 21) in their homes, where offerings of food, drink, flowers, and prayers are made to the deceased ancestors and the kami themselves.[50]

Indeed, the same NHK surveys cited above reveal that despite widespread lack of religious self-identification, 76% of respondents maintained altars in their homes, a figure that rises significantly among the elderly. Likewise, the use of charms (76%) and oracles (56%), and of selecting "lucky" days for wedding dates (63%) was noted. (Swyngedouw 1993: 52-55) Furthermore, the percentage of respondents who visited family gravesites ranged from 50% among grade school-age children, to nearly 100% for those seventy or older. Indeed, the survey shows no lack of belief in the kami or the buddhas, with nearly 43% professing a conviction that they "probably" or "certainly" exist, and an average of 54% who believed in the persistence of the soul after death.

Despite such widespread practices, many Japanese express skepticism toward the idea of religion. Nearly two-thirds of university students who responded to another survey expressed little-to-no interest in religion or religious groups. The reasons given

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[49] Obon, or Bon, is an annual holiday, originally based upon Buddhist custom, when Japanese people visit family gravesites, and when the spirits of the dead are said to return to receive the prayers and offerings of their living descendants. The starting date for this three-day festival varies based on locality, but is generally celebrated in mid-July, mid-August, or mid-September.

[50] Literally a "god-shelf," the kamidana is a miniature shrine or altar placed in the home for making offerings of water, sake, food, or twigs of the sacred *sasaki* tree to the kami. Like the kamidana, the butsudan ("Buddha-shelf") is a shrine or altar set up in the home for offerings; unlike the kamidana, however, the butsudan may be extremely ornate and costs may run to the tens of thousands of dollars. Offerings of rice (often prepared daily), fruit, tea, beer or other beverages are made at the butsudan for deceased family members. See, for example, Kawano; Traphagan.

included that they "just don't see any need" for it, that religions are "just out to make money" or "prey upon people's fears," and that religious groups are "too involved in politics."[51]

Figure 21. Butsudan, Buddhist altar

It should be clear from these survey results that there is a marked divide between the ways in which contemporary Japanese self-identify vis-à-vis religious affiliation, and how they act. The figures quoted above indicate that religions—all religions—are viewed with suspicion, regardless of whether the viewers themselves participate in ritualized

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[51] Japanese Association for the Study of Religion and Society, survey. Quoted in Kisala, *Japanese Religions*. (Kisala 5)

behaviors that are (or were once) spiritually motivated: actions which, often as not, spring from Shintō practices of the past.

Shintō and Christianity in Japanese Popular Culture

What are the portrayals of Shintō in popular culture, and why is it not perceived in the same critical light as the other religions against which it is contrasted? My first example draws upon the anime *Kannagi: Crazy Shrine Maidens (*かんなぎ, *Kannagi*, literally "shrine maiden," 2008), a tale about two sisters: one a Shintō deity, the other a grasping and divisive spirit who appears in the guise of a Christian nun.

Despite its name, the characters in *Kannagi: Crazy Shrine Maidens* are neither shrine maidens in the usual sense, nor crazy.[52] The leading female character, Nagi (Fig. 22), is in fact a Shintō kami, in this case a guardian spirit over the land.[53] As the series opens, a schoolboy has just finished carving a sculpture he worked on all night: a female figure with flowing hair, her hands in the prayerful gesture known as *gassho*. But as he is about to take the sculpture to exhibit at his school, there is an explosive sound, and the wood suddenly bursts apart revealing a beautiful teenage girl standing on a tree stump. She is, she says, a heavenly kami whose function is to protect the land, "a guardian from which all living things grow."

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[52] "Kannagi" and "miko" (see Ch. 1) are cognates. The words "crazy shrine maidens" appear only on the English-version release. I have not been able to determine why they were added, nor by whom (i.e., whether it was done by the original author or grafted on by the American distribution company).

[53] In an interesting synchronicity, Kannagi (also Kannagi Amman) is the name of a legendary Tamil woman worshipped as a deity for her devotion. She is also sometimes syncretized with Pattini, a goddess (Hindu) or bodhisattva (Buddhist) who is also a guardian spirit of protection against impurity. (See Obeyesekere.)

Figure 22. Nagi with anime-inspired purification wand (*Kannagi: Crazy Shrine Maidens*)

The young kami asks about the shape or "vessel" in which she has appeared. The boy explains it was carved from the wood of a sacred "guardian tree" that once stood at the local Shintō shrine. The tree was cut down some time previously, and the land where the shrine formerly stood is undergoing urban development. The kami is shocked: the sacred tree represented the Land Deity (*tochigami*), and was a focus for, and repository of, the people's religious faith. When the tree was alive and still storing the people's prayers, the powers of the kami were strengthened. Cutting down the tree, she says, severely impairs her ability to protect the land, and disorder and disaster will spread. Underscoring her warning, an impure spirit creature resembling a centipede suddenly appears. It crawls onto her leg, turning into a scar. Such impurities will spread, she tells

the boy, a result of the loss of the guardian spirit. Undaunted, he picks off the bug and it fades away.

At the boy's house, the young kami turns on the television and is fascinated by a *sentō bishōjo* ("battling beauty") anime, a children's cartoon about a magical girl who fights against evil with a charmed baton.[54] Inspired by the show, she devises a weapon for exorcism that mixes an anime-style wand with *gohei*, the zigzag streamers used in Shintō purification rituals. Back at the former shrine's grounds, she tries her magical weapon on some spiders that he catches, and like the centipede they too are destroyed. Encouraged by the success, her mood changes to one of hope. The young kami informs the boy, Jin, that she will move in with him so that together they can exorcise the impurities that beset the land. He gives her his room, taking the living room for himself. In the middle of the night he hears footsteps coming down the hall. "I guess even gods have to use the toilet," he muses.

As this last illustration demonstrates, *Kannagi: Crazy Shrine Maidens* presents an updated version of the gods, one in which an ancient protectress of the land manifests in the form of an all-too-human teenage girl. Nagi's manifestation as a moe "battling beauty," brought about through the intervention of a young boy's imagination, demonstrates in a somewhat self-referential way the power of popular culture to preserve and shape ideas about religion. As seen in Chapter 1, we clearly see once again in Nagi that "shrinking" of the powerful divine female into a cute and somewhat airheaded[55] object of desire.

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[54] See Chapter 1. For "battling beauty," see especially the work of Kotani, Saitō, or Suter.

[55] Consider, for example, an episode in which Nagi's wand breaks, and in trying to repair it she accidentally glues it to the dining table.

As the story progresses, Nagi and Jin continue to fight against the impurities that beset the land, while trying to find ways to boost Nagi's strength. Many of these involve tropes from animanga: a self-referential move whereby anime underscores its own role as the key medium for keeping traditional religion alive. There are a number of gags involving Nagi's inspirations from watching anime, she maintains a blog that becomes extremely popular among the schoolboys, and there is a battle-of-the-bands style competition between pop idols Nagi and her sister Zange. All of these are portrayed as an updated form of religiosity for the contemporary era, a means of gaining a following and thereby increasing her power to protect the land and its natives.

It might at first glimpse seem contradictory to theorize that popular culture presents a valorization of Shintō *qua* tradition based on an example in which Shintō is re-imagined in internet terms; however, these are not difficult to reconcile. I explore in greater detail the role of popular culture in both preserving and shaping ideas around religion and the supernatural in Chapter 3, but will here briefly note that what are being preserved are less the outward appearances of tradition than the underlying values which inform them. It is this underscoring of the importance of the heart of Japaneseness, in contradistinction to the surface appearance, that drives all of the narratives here discussed. Thus we see that Nagi's purity of heart—her desire to protect her community as its guardian spirit—is preserved regardless of her outward shape, whether embodied as a sacred tree, a ditzy teen, or a sexy singing star.

Against Nagi's purity and selflessness, we see her twin sister Zange ("Penitence"). As shown in Figure 23, Zange is, like her sister, young, attractive, and nubile. Unlike Nagi, however, Zange is cast not as a native Shintō protectress, but as a miniskirted nun who constantly demands others' attention and is not above using mercenary means to get it. She appears at busy downtown intersections holding a sign

advertising indulgences, which she sells for ¥100 each. Her sign literally reads "penance," thus it is also a play on her name: is she selling indulgences, or herself?

Figure 23. Zange (*Kannagi: Crazy Shrine Maidens*)

Zange is clearly the antagonist in the story, and seeks every opportunity to compete with Nagi. She and Hakua, the human girl whose body Zange has taken over in order to physically manifest, do their best to lure Jin's allegiance away from Nagi and over to Zange. The anime thus employs the competition between the sisters as a metaphor for the viewer's struggle to choice between a native Shintō spirituality that truly cares for the land and the people, and an outside religion with selfish motivations, a desire for material gain, and few moral compunctions.

Nagi, on the other hand, is the heroine of the story, and represents the Shintō worldview. She is a nature goddess, "the mother of the land" (Ep. 1), and linked to the specific geographic region and environment. She exists to protect her people and locale from impurity, a key concept in Shintō.[56] Because of modern urbanization, the humans in her domain have dismantled the sacred shrine, dug up the consecrated ground on which it once sat, and cut down the guardian tree, symbol of her power. The guardian spirit of the land has been quite literally lost to modern urbanization.

There are in fact two semi-distinct personalities in the young kami: Nagi is the schoolgirl embodying the kami whose tree has been cut down thereby weakening her ability to protect the land and to cleanse impurities; there is also another personality dwelling in the same body: Kannagi, a higher or purer form of the same deity. The latter is more powerful, but saps the vital energy of Nagi's body more rapidly and therefore cannot manifest for long.

With the sacred tree cut down, the protective strength of this local goddess begins to wane, and she herself will become a "nameless god" (Ep. 1) and completely disappear if her powers are not repaired in some way. Indeed, the process has already begun: when Jin goes to the local government office to inquire about the name of the kami once worshipped at the shrine, he finds that no one can remember it. We see in this an echo of the shrinking of her name: from Kannagi, the fully-empowered but short-lived manifestation of the strength this kami once had, to Nagi, the schoolgirl-idol struggling to retain the vestiges of that power. Should the trend continue, she will disappear altogether.

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[56] The issue of purity vs. impurity is one of the core conceptions in Shintō, and purification rites are noted as early as the *Kojiki* (712) and *Nihongi* (or *Nihon Shoki*) (720), two of the oldest extant collections of Japanese history and scripture. See Ashton; Philippi.

To prevent Nagi's complete erasure, a replacement for the sacred tree must be found, a new repository that will act as a focus for the prayers and faith of the people. This is why Nagi, embodied in the girl who sprang from the lost guardian tree, determines to become a pop idol: if enough people worship her, even in such a secular manner, she will regain the strength needed to protect them.

Zange, on the other hand, has persisted through the happenstance of a Christian church having been built on the land where her sacred tree grows. Taking this as a sign of Christianity's dominance, Zange herself takes on the form of a nun, wears crosses, and works as a street preacher of sorts, soliciting passersby. As Nagi says, Zange is "aiming to be the person today's people believe in, by becoming more Westernized." (Ep. 4) She thus embodies what spirituality has become with foreign-inspired changes to the land.

Zange acts sweet and innocent around humans, but exults in bullying Nagi when alone. She competes with Nagi both for followers and in particular for Jin's affection. She also reinforces the negative image of religion as mercenary, by selling her own form of indulgences on the street. This negative image is underscored in a scene where a child remarks, "My mom says that they [i.e., religions] always want money." (Ep. 1) Like Nagi, Zange resolves to become a pop star, but unlike her sister she does it less to increase her sacred power (since her tree was left unharmed, her own strength remains undiminished) than as an attempt to upstage Nagi. She even mocks Nagi's desire to heal the impurities in the region: "As long as I can remain a kami," Zange exclaims, her arms wide as if forming the sign of the cross, "nothing else matters!" (Ep. 4)

Kannagi: Crazy Shrine Maidens presents the viewer with a clear choice between a native, natural, and nurturing Shintō, and a foreign, mercenary, and selfish Christianity. As the series comes to a close, it is Nagi, and not the scheming Zange, who has won Jin's affections. While temporarily empowered, Christianity loses in the long run, its corrupt

core exposed and rejected. Shintō, on the other hand, although weakened over the years by modernization and loss of cultural tradition, comes to live in the heart of the protagonist. The message is clear: find a way to retain the heart of spiritual tradition, by infusing it into modernity. Even something as seemingly prosaic as popular culture—a pop singer, a TV cartoon of a magical girl, or even a story about a boy whose carving of a kami comes to life—has something to teach us about Japanese spirituality.

Figure 24. Father Tres Iqus (*Trinity Blood*)

Even more extreme pictures of Christianity are shown in a number of other animanga. Anime such as *Blue Exorcist* (青の祓魔師, *Ao no Ekusoshisuto*, 2009-

present), *Chrono Crusade* (クロノクルセイド, *Kurono Kuruseido*, 1998-2004),[57] and *Trinity Blood* (トリニティ・ブラッド, *Toriniti Buraddo*, 2001-present), to name but a few, prominently feature the "sexy nuns with guns" trope, or else a Catholic-looking priest, usually wearing an outfit based on a Jesuit cassock and dripping with crosses, who battles demons with a pair of semiautomatic pistols. (Fig. 24)

Figure 25. Goetic Magic, anime style (*Blue Exorcist*)

The other genre in which images based upon Christianity appear is in shows depicting Western-style occultism. (Fig. 25) From science-fiction high school series like *Occult Academy* (世紀末オカルト学院, *Seikimatsu Okaruto Gakuin,* 2010), to the gag comedy *Yondemasuyo, Azazel-san* (よんでますよ、アザゼルさん, *You're Being*

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[57] Also known as *Chrno Crusade* due to a typo in the original logo.

Summoned, Azazel-san, 2007-2011) which features the demons Azazel, Beelzebub, Moloch, and others, these stories draw upon a style of magic-based images and characters drawn from medieval European sorcery. Even in *hentai* (X-rated) anime like the *Bible Black* series (バイブルブラック, *Baiburuburakku*, 2000-2008), the characters are seen calling up demons by means of Faustian magic circles inscribed with pseudo-Hebrew, Greek, or Latin in imitation of works like the *Grimorium Verum* (c. 1517 CE) or *Clavicula Salomonis* (c. 1577 CE).[58]

Figure 26. Sister Rosette Christopher (*Chrono Crusade*)

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[58] See Peterson 2001; 2007.

These tropes are generally employed for the entertainment value they provide to young male viewers. Characters like Sister Rosette Christopher[59] (Fig. 26) present an "Occidentalized" [60] version of the familiar "battling beauty," and the fighting priest offers an opportunity for the viewer to project himself as a modern warrior against the forces of evil. At the same time, they also present a "crossover" character who embodies traditional Japanese values—sincerity, courage, willingness to sacrifice for the greater good—combined with Western trappings (both guns and religious vestments arrived in the early Modern era). And they never compete with, much less defeat, pure-hearted Shintō characters.

Shintō and Buddhism in Japanese Popular Culture

In *Kannagi: Crazy Shrine Maidens* and other stories, the moral choice between Shintō and Christianity is made clear. Similarly, a large number of anime and manga delineate a dichotomy between a valorization of Shintō values and characters, and a deep suspicion of Buddhism. The Buddhist priests in *Nura: Rise of the Yōkai Clan* (ぬらりひょんの孫, *Nurarihyon no Mago*, often referred to as "*NuraMago*" for short, 2008-present) and *Her Majesty's Dog* (女王様の犬, *Joōsama no Inu*, 2001-2006), for example, are not sympathetic characters in the least: they are corrupt, lecherous, and thoroughly malevolent.[61]

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[59] Her name may be a pun on "Rose Cross" and therefore possibly a reference to the Rosicrucians, a secretive organization first referenced in the early seventeenth century. See the *Fama Fraternitatis* and *Confessio Fraternitatis*, (in Rowe 2000) and *Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz* (Godwin 1991).

[60] That is, an exoticized and essentialized caricature of the West, analogous to "Orientalizing." See Said, etc.

[61] There are counterexamples, including several manga and anime presenting the life of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, e.g., the "Buddha" (ブッダ, *Budda*) series by Tezuka Osamu, the "God of Comics"; see also MacWilliams, "Japanese Comic Books and Religion: Osamu Tezuka's Story of the Buddha" in Craig

Figure 27. Rikuo, "night version" (*Nura: Rise of the Yōkai Clan*)

Nura: Rise of the Yōkai Clan, centers on the figure of Nura Rikuo (Fig. 27), the part-human part-yōkai teenaged grandson of Nurarihyon, the leader of the "Night Parade of a Hundred Demons."[62] The yōkai in the story are drawn from popular Japanese mythology, and are well-known figures in Japanese paintings, stories, and films. Those of the Nura clan are depicted as benevolent, though distrustful of humans. Rikuo in particular insists that he wants to be as helpful to others as possible, in order to offset the traditional image of yōkai as frightening or abusive.

109-137. Nevertheless, these stories (which remind one of the *Classics Illustrated* comics in the U. S.), are not as popular with young audiences as the ones discussed here.

[62] The *hyakki yakō* (百鬼夜行, "night parade of one hundred demons") is a Japanese legend dating to at least the fourteenth century. According to the tale, any human encountering the annual parade of these supernatural creatures is in mortal danger unless protected by magical means. There are similarities to the Wild Hunt and Seelie Court of European mythology. For an in-depth examination of the Japanese version, see Figal; Foster; Li 149-51.

The supernatural landscape in Japan is peopled by more than kami and shamans: there are also the yōkai. Usually translated as "monster," this term is most often used to refer to supernatural creatures such as shape-shifters, or to creatures of longstanding mythology such as Yuki-Onna, the "Snow Woman" whose closest Western analog might be Hans Christian Andersen's "Snow Queen." [63] In *Her Majesty's Dog*, *Nura: Rise of the Yōkai Clan*, and *Kannagi: Crazy Shrine Maidens*, the yōkai are shown on the side of good. They are native, familiar, trustworthy. They can be dangerous, but only to malefactors, never the innocent.[64]

In a chapter of the manga version of *NuraMago*, a crooked Buddhist monk victimizes one of Rikuo's classmates. The monk, depicted as an obese exorcist gifted with a convincing voice, has a popular television show in which he is shown dispelling yōkai from afflicted sites around the city. Usami, a girl with a secret crush on Rikuo, discovers that her grandfather is being pressured by the monk to sell his store. The shop is an older single-story structure in a desirable location: surrounded by new high-rise buildings and adjacent to the train station, it is a prime target for land speculation. Like the loss of Nagi's sacred tree to urban development in *Kannagi: Crazy Shrine Maidens*, urbanization is portrayed in *NuraMago* as a destructive force that causes loss of traditional values. Here, however, it is not merely a case of the new overwriting the past, but is moreover linked to corruption, greed, and organized crime.

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[63] See Figal, Foster, Yanagita, etc. For *Snow Queen*, see Andersen.

[64] A later arc in the *NuraMago* series concerns a war between the Nura clan and yōkai invaders from Shikoku. The result is a set-piece showing the 'native' yōkai, led by Rikuo, successfully overcoming, and then reconciling with, the 'foreign' yōkai who have been led by a selfish and modernized son of their traditional chief. Both the heroes and the antagonists are yōkai here, but the native/traditional vs. outsider/modernized model still applies.

Figure 28. Bandain, Usami's grandfather, & Usami (*Nura: Rise of the Yōkai Clan*)

Usami finds the monk, Bandain Daikaku, in her grandfather's store, looming over the old man and attempting to convince him to sell the property rights. (Fig. 28) Evil spirits are besetting the store, Bandain tells her grandfather, and the only way to avoid their curses is to give up the property. As seen in this frame from the manga, the shop is built in a historically familiar style employing old-fashioned wood craftsmanship, and a traditional raised floor and awning. The monk's size and position bring to mind the overwhelming bulk of the statue of the Great Buddha (*Daibutsu*) at Kamakura (1252 CE); here, however, Bandain's presence is oppressive, dwarfing Usami's grandfather who is shown in a position of supplication that also gives the impression of someone being held prisoner. Similarly, in a previous frame (not shown here), the shop itself is

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dwarfed by looming concrete high-rise offices, symbols of modernity and contemporary urbanization.

When Usami steps in to thwart Bandain's coercion of her grandfather, the monk abducts her before the old man's eyes, taking her back to his temple to be "exorcised." Rikuo, hearing of the confrontation, rushes to the store, only to find Usami has been kidnapped and her grandfather is in the midst of being thrown out of his shop by members of the Shūei Corporation, the corrupt land development company with whom the monk Bandain is in cahoots. "We're so strong the cops can't touch us!" one of the thugs brags to Rikuo, throwing him against the wall.

Later at Bandain's temple, executives from Shūei are shown bowing to the priest. "Thank you for your fantastic 'exorcism,'" the CEO exults. "What a valuable piece of real estate that was," replies Bandain. "I'm sure you will make a fine profit." Hearing the conspiracy, Usami speaks up: "I knew it" she exclaims, "you're a phony!" In response, the priest decides that Usami needs a special exorcism. "If I remove these clothes, the evil spirit will come out," he leers.

Just as Bandain is about to rape Usami, the night parade of Nura yōkai show up. Rikuo, who as one-fourth yōkai can transform into his demon form during the nighttime, has led the Nura clan to the temple to rescue her. In the battle, each of the yōkai is shown employing the particular power for which they are known in Japanese legends: Yuki-onna ("Snow Woman") encases a Shūei executive in ice, Kubi-nashi ("No Neck") sends his detached head into the fray, Karasu-tengu ("Crow Demon") tears at the thugs with his claws. The following morning, the priest, badly injured but alive, has confessed to being a phony, and an investigation is underway to look into his connections with the criminal Shūei organization.

From this excerpt, we can clearly discern the normative treatment of religion in animanga: the Shintō-based characters of Rikuo and his group of characters from traditional Japanese mythology, along with Usami and her grandfather, are contrasted in no uncertain tones with the modern corruption and venality of the Buddhist monk Bandain and his gangster cronies.

Figure 29. Amane (*Her Majesty's Dog*)

This contrast is also evident in many other stories. For example, in *Her Majesty's Dog*, the main protagonists are Kamori Amane (Fig. 29), a teen-age girl who is heir to the position of head priestess of the Shintō shrine on her island, and Inugami Hyōe, who is in

fact a spirit of a guardian lion-dog.[65] In one chapter, a Buddhist monk attempts to abduct Amane. The monk represents a huge Buddhist organization, the Ritsumei, one of whose members has been assaulted and Hyōe is suspected as his assailant; by extension, as his controller, Amane is also implicated. Like Bandain and the Shūei Corporation in *NuraMago*, the Ritsumei organization is rich and powerfully connected: "At face value, it looks like a normal organization for esoteric Buddhist teachings, but it carries a huge pipe in the political and economic worlds. There are even rumors they're running a clandestine conspiracy involving curses." (7:108) Clearly the Ritsumei organization has no more qualms about scamming innocent citizens than did *NuraMago's* Shūei.

When Amane and Hyōe go to the Ritsumei headquarters to question their accuser, the monk's story changes: he never actually saw the attacker; nevertheless the heads of the Ritsumei demand that Hyōe take the blame. Their only concern is publicity: it would make the Ritsumei's teachings look ineffective if one of their members was attacked by a yōkai and got away with it. Suddenly, Amane's uncle, an important figure in the Shintō establishment of their island and a master of *kendō*, traditional Japanese swordcraft, appears and handily defeats the monks. Further, Amane's teammate threatens to expose the depths of the Ritsumei's corruption: "Secret account books that smack of tax evasion . . . all kinds of hidden gold bars and jewels… not to mention these photos of Branch Director Tajima at strip clubs." (7:137)

Amane, Rikuo, and even Nagi are all characters that instill a sense that what is best for the world is a connection to native Japanese traditions and spiritual values. Amane and Hyōe's home is constructed in the traditional Japanese manner, as is the Nura

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[65] The *Shisa*, translated as "lion-dogs" or "guardian-dogs," are usually found as pairs of statues at entrances to sacred grounds. The term comes from the Okinawan *siisaa* as well as the Chinese *shishī* (石獅). See also the use of statues of guardian lions in China (sometimes incorrectly called "Fu Dogs" in the West).*Inugami* (犬神) means "dog-kami."

mansion, not a Western-style tract house or condominium. Nagi's home, in perhaps the clearest denunciation of lost tradition, has been torn down to make room for modern urban sprawl.

The Buddhist monks, and the organizations they support, are by contrast the villains in each case. They are rich, greedy, utterly without moral compunction and unabashedly modern: the Ritsumei headquarters is a huge office complex, like the buildings that dwarfed Usami's grandfather's shop in *NuraMago*. Like *NuraMago's* Bandain, they use religion as a kind of protection racket, extorting money and land in exchange for pretending to remove curses. In fact, their spiritual premise is always a lie, covering up their corrupt material motives. Despite their religious trappings, their purity of heart is absent. Thus they are always defeated in the end on both the spiritual and the physical planes.

The matter of superficiality versus sincerity lies at the heart of this rivalry. Amane, Rikuo, Jin, and even Nagi, are all links between tradition and modernity, preserving their spirit of Japaneseness while moving into the future. Indeed, in both the manga and anime versions of *NuraMago*, every time the "night version" of Rikuo appears—that is, when he takes up his yōkai appearance and power—the frame is filled with *sakura*, the cherry blossoms that symbolize the spirit of Japan itself (see Figure 27). Unlike the Buddhists in these illustrations, these protagonists have not abandoned their native Japanese purity to modernity and lust for temporal gain.

These examples could be multiplied considerably. Buddhism and Buddhist monks are depicted in a negative light in story upon story in animanga. Monks are cast as bullies, lechers, crooks, and pedophiles. The monk in *Corpse Princess* (屍姫, *Shikabane Hime*, 2005-present) controls the undead princess of the title, sending her on missions to kill a total of 108 other "living corpses" with her MAC-10 submachine guns, in between

which he plies her with pornographic magazines and posters. The old Buddhist priest in the "Umibōzu" episode of *Mononoke* (モノノ怪, 2007),[66] sleeps with a young acolyte who is always shown with the red circles used to symbolize a blushing girl, underscoring the stereotype of the lustful, pederastic monk. And in perhaps the most blatant illustration of Buddhist-monks-as-lechers, the protagonist of *Ah My Buddha* (あまえないでよっ!!, *Amaenaideyo!!* 2004-2009) is a young monk-in-training who lives with six beautiful young Buddhist nuns, and who transforms into a "super-monk" whenever one of the girls arouses his lust. While stories like *Ah My Buddha* are clearly played for laughs, the sheer volume of these caricatures amounts to an overwhelmingly hostile characterization of Buddhism. [67]

Co-opting Non-Shintō Religious Elements in Popular Culture

Interestingly, when positive portrayals of actions or objects originating in Buddhist practices are presented, they are shown in a way that removes them from their original religious context and instead casts them as natively Japanese. Even when these involve supernatural elements, they are not presented as Buddhist-and-Japanese, but rather as simply a part of Japanese cultural traditions.[68]

One popular trope in animanga is the ninja who uses Buddhist-derived magic to enhance his or her fighting capabilities; however, the Buddhist origins of these magical techniques are almost always erased. In shows like *Naruto* (1997-present), *Kore wa*

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[66] Not to be confused with Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke* (1997).

[67] It should be noted that, unlike most Western moralizing, the objection is not to the character's active sexuality; rather, it is their hypocrisy (unlike Shintō priests, Buddhist monks traditionally swore vows of chastity) and their propensity for preying upon the defenseless through rape and pederasty.

[68] See also Swyngedouw on "… the 'religion of Japaneseness' that has been able to accept religious traditions of foreign origin and adapt them to fit into the pluralistic pattern of mutual tolerance…" (1976: 297)

Zombie Desu Ka? (これはゾンビですか? "Is This a Zombie?" 2009-present), and *Nabari no Ou* (隠の王, "Prince of Nabari," 2004-present), ninja characters use magical talismans, gestures, and spells or words of power to vanquish their opponents. The talisman or *ofuda* (御札, literally "great note"), is made by writing a charm, prayer, or excerpt from scripture, usually onto a piece of paper. Its use originates in Chinese magical practices from Buddhism (and possibly Taoism), and resembles the use of mandalas (images imbued with spiritual significance) throughout South and East Asia. Hand gestures, called *in* (印, "seal" or "sign"), are used in esoteric Buddhism as magical passes. They derive from the symbolic language of representation in Hindu religious iconography, where they are known by the Sanskrit term "mudra." *Kotodama* (言霊, "word spirit/soul") refers to the belief in the power of certain words or phrases, akin to the use of magical spells or "words of power," and of the secret name(s) of God, in Western occultism.[69] They have their roots in the *mantra* (sacred chants) of Buddhism and Hinduism.

All of these practices arrived from the East Asian continent sometime in the first millennium CE. Despite their historical basis in religious contexts other than Shintō, however, these practices are employed in animanga in a manner that strips them of their religious background and their foreignness. Instead, they are most often shown as magically efficacious in their own right, divorced from any religious context. Thus Naruto (Fig. 30), the eponymous hero of a series of anime, manga, and computer games, is seen creating a dozen or more copies of himself by means of a magically-charged scroll and a set of hand gestures. The Buddhist origin of this technique in the widely popular Ming-era (1368-1644 CE) story known as *Journey to the West* (c. 1590) has been

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[69] E.g., the taboo on writing the word "God" in certain forms of Judaism, or the lore around the Ninety-Nine Names of God in Islam.

erased: there are no references to the Buddha or to Buddhism in *Naruto*, and Naruto himself is described as having the spirit of a nine-tailed fox (a popular yōkai in Japanese mythology) dwelling within him.

Figure 30. Naruto (*Naruto*)

Journey to the West is an epic tale describing the travels of a Tang era monk, Xuanzang (c. 602-664), who goes to India to bring back a collection of Buddhist sacred texts. He is accompanied by a shapeshifting monkey-spirit, Sun Wukong, called Son Goku in Japanese, and several other magical companions. Along the way the travelers are

constantly challenged to magical duels by Taoist 'wizards,' whom they defeat by means of the superiority of their Buddhist beliefs and techniques.[70]

Goku is a master of magical dueling, and one of his tricks involves creating a collection of doppelgangers: the same technique referenced in *Naruto*. Despite its obvious roots in a tale of religious conflict, however, by the time this trope appears in *Naruto* and other contemporary animanga, it is presented devoid of any religious context. Instead, it is shown as part of the ninja's arsenal: a purely native, nonreligious, technique.

Figure 31. Archer Priestess

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[70] The story of *Journey to the West* has been at least as popular in Japan as in China, and has been adapted many times. Two of the more famous animanga versions include *Saiyuki* (1997-2007) and *DragonBall* (1984-present).

In the anime and manga discussed here we see the reinforcement of the same messages obtained from our examination of the evidence from public surveys: "religion" is an alien concept, but traditional Japanese culture includes certain spiritual themes. Religion, in popular culture, means organizations bringing enforced modernization, corruption, and a loss of community and interpersonal responsibility, replaced by a selfish lust for power—whether political, economic, or sexual. Religions like Christianity and Buddhism are suspect, dangerous, rapacious. They have members who hypocritically manipulate others' spirituality, and are themselves concerned not with spiritual matters but with material gain, temporal power, and self-aggrandizement

Shintō, on the other hand, represents not just a link to tradition, but more importantly a retaining of the spiritual and ethical core of Japaneseness. That spirit carries with it obligations to one's community, to the natural environment, and to the kami. To lose touch with that spirit is to fall into impurity and immorality.[71] It means losing one's true awareness of one's Japaneseness.

But this is not simply a message of nostalgia. The protagonists in these stories are characters who embody a bridging of the traditional and the contemporary. Unlike the villains in these tales, the heroes and heroines are able to move in today's modern society without losing their spiritual heritage. Nura Rikuo in *Nura: Rise of the Yōkai Clan* is himself both human and yōkai, simultaneously a modern schoolboy and the heir to a traditional clan of natively Japanese spiritual creatures. *Her Majesty's Dog* centers upon Amane, who is likewise both a modern Tokyo schoolgirl and the heiress of traditional Shintō priestcraft. And in *Kannagi: Crazy Shrine Maidens*, Nagi blends children's cartoons and ancient Shintō symbols to craft a weapon for protecting the land and the

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[71] Spirit, from the Latin *spiritus*, breath, is indeed apt here: it comes from the conception of a deity breathing life into base matter, as in the Babylonian, Egyptian, Judaic, and many other sacred texts.

people. She becomes that most contemporary of consumer products, a pop idol; not for personal gain or egoism, but in order to act as a focus and a repository for the people's desire and hope, a divine channel for the people's energy toward beneficial ends. So, too, with popular culture itself: these stories in anime, manga, and computer games also represent a storehouse for ideas about how to live in today's industrialized Japan without giving up Japan's past.

Popular culture not only reveals the way that Japanese think about religion and the supernatural, it also performs an important function in conserving those ideas and images. It is to this conservative function that I wish to turn in this chapter. The conjunction of religion and popular culture is a powerful one, bringing together the power of the one to inform and shape the consumer's worldview, and the capacity of the other to impart such life lessons. This nexus also raises questions. Why are the products of otaku culture deemed better suited for the expression of religious, magical, and supernatural themes and characters? What benefits do the consumers of these media derive from the treatment of religious themes in animanga? What is the effect of the conservation of such stories upon society at large?

Integrating Traditional Spirit and Material Modernity

Many of the stories in which the supernatural plays a prominent part depict characters called to heal the split between the worlds of tradition and modernity, and between the material and the spiritual realms. The protagonists of these stories often embody this split in themselves by being half-yōkai and half-human. Against opponents who demand the abandoning of the past in order to move into a fully modern future, the protagonists call for a solution in which this division is healed. By moving forward into the future while retaining the spiritual heart of what it means to be Japanese, they look to bridge the worlds of tradition and modernity. Similarly, the magical worldviews portrayed in many of these stories depict the world as divided into two partially-

overlapping realms, the mundane and the supernatural, which the protagonists also strive to integrate into a cohesive whole.

In *Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit* (精霊の守り人, 1996), the young protagonist Chagum represents the healing of the division between the material and the spiritual, as well as the link between a shamanistic past with an imperial present in the world of the story. The emperor's second son, Chagum has been impregnated with the egg of a water spirit that dies and is reborn every hundred years.[72] In danger of assassination due to palace politics, Chagum is guarded by a female warrior, her male herbalist friend who is also a shaman-in-training, and the herbalist's teacher, an accomplished female shaman. The emperor is persuaded by his court astrologers to proclaim a death sentence upon his own son's head, on the grounds that it would be unbecoming for a potential heir to the throne to be victim to a spirit-possession. Desperate to save the prince's life, Chagum's mother hires the spearwoman Balsa to be Chagum's bodyguard.

The tension between these figures illustrates spiritual divide in the story, particularly the displacement by organized religion of the old shamanistic spiritual tradition. Tanda and the experienced shaman-priestess Torogai, along with the aboriginal people of the land, represent the primeval nature-based spirituality that has been marginalized by the court astrologers. The tensions between the modernized, church-like astrologers, and the older grassroots folk religion, thus repeat the antagonisms outlined in Chapter 2, with shamanism playing the role of Shintō pitted against the astrologers (who seem to represent Chinese Taoism) as the foreign invaders.

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[72] The author employs a number of interesting reversals of the usual gender roles: the boy is pregnant and delivers the new water spirit in a realistic birth scene, Balsa the bodyguard is a mature warrior-woman who wields a spear, and Tanda, the apprentice shaman, is shown waiting at home for Balsa's return much like the stereotype of a soldier's wife (and even refers to himself as such).

In one episode, Tanda, the shaman-in-training, is called upon to perform a "soul-retrieval" for a young girl who has lapsed into a spiritually-induced coma.[73] His spirit is seen slipping out of his body and moving across the room where the girl is lying, then suddenly he is shown in a completely different world. In the logic of the story, he has found himself at a "knot," a place where the physical and spiritual "layers" overlap, and as a shaman he is trained to do like the spirits and freely between these worlds.

Figure 32. Tanda sees both the spirit world and the mundane world
(*Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit*)

As shown in Figure 32 (taken from the anime version), the viewer sees Tanda's spirit in the right foreground looking at Balsa and Chagum, who are watching Tanda's physical body, behind the curtains. At the same time Tanda is able to see the landscape of

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[73] The "soul retrieval" is a common part of the shaman's repertory in many cultures. See Chilson & Knecht, DuBois, Eliade, Frazer, Harner, etc.

the spirit realm (the green hills in the background) overlaid upon the material world – as is the viewer. Tanda straddles the split between these worlds: a step in one direction leads him to a magical realm filled with wonders, a step back leads him to the everyday. At the "knot" or conjunction of these worlds he is able to experience both at once.

Similarly, the climax of the story, when Chagum is about to deliver the egg of the water spirit, finds him under threat from both worlds at once. With the emperor's assassins bearing down on his location in the physical plane, and the mysterious Lalunga, fearsome spirit creatures no physical weapon can touch, closing in on the spiritual plane, Chagum finds himself literally at the nexus between past and future, material and spiritual. Protected at the last moment in the material realm by the spearwoman Balsa and on the spiritual plane by the shaman Tanda, Chagum safely brings about the rebirth of spirit, thereby saving the land from a drought which would have lasted the next hundred years. In this way, Chagum is able to heal the split between spirit and material, past and future, which had threatened the empire's survival.

A comparable split between tradition and modernity is also played out in the rivalry between the characters in *Tactics* (タクティクス, 2001). The protagonist, Kantarō, is a scholar of folklore with the ability to see supernatural creatures. Like Chagum in *Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit*, Kantarō represents the unifying character who moves freely between traditional spirituality and the modern mundane world. In contrast, Kantarō's fellow folklorist Hasumi is a pragmatist, a hyper-rational character who is unable to see, and therefore refuses to believe in the existence of, such creatures. (Fig. 33) Hasumi's stance is that folklore should be understood as a part of history, but that it needs to be left behind if Japan is to take its rightful place on the world stage.[74] As

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[74] There is a further tension between Kantarō and the head of the Imperial Demon Extermination Squad, Minamoto Raikō, who believes in yōkai but only because he wants to use them as the ultimate, and quintessentially Japanese, weapon to further Japan's colonialist aims. (Raikō is presented as the descendant

Hasumi tells Kantarō, "[S]uperstition and folklore are only a hindrance . . . The future of Japan will be dark indeed if we continue to cling to outdated notions and refuse to accept new ways." (5: 10)

Figure 33. Hasumi (*Tactics*)

Although Kantarō is hired by various clients to exterminate yōkai and other spiritual creatures throughout the story, his response is instead to work with these creatures to resolve their problems. He not only believes in the existence of the spirits, he

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of the historical figure of Minamoto no Yasutsuna, who was said to have slain the infamous demon Shūten-Dōji. See Reider 2010.)

The historical tensions to which this series alludes, including the differences of opinion between such figures of late Meiji-era (1868-1926 CE) folklorists as Yanagita Kunio and Inoue Enryō, are a fascinating underpinning to this story, but out of scope for this thesis. See especially Figal, Foster, and Yanagita.

interacts with them on a daily basis. He has two yōkai assistants, the "demon-eater" (*oni-kui*) Haruka, and a young female fox-spirit[75] named Yoko. Far from being one who sees Japan's traditional folklore as something to be left behind, Kantarō believes that becoming a modern Japanese person means moving forward while still retaining the heart of Japanese tradition.

Again, there is an antagonist, Hasumi, whose approach to modernity means abandoning the past and severing the connection between the material and the spiritual. And like the pure-hearted protagonists discussed in Chapter 2 who instead retain their "Japaneseness," Kantarō embodies the call for integration promoted constantly throughout these stories.

Why Animanga?

By heroicizing characters like Kantarō, animanga imparts to its audiences a message of the importance of integration in their own lives. But what is there about animanga that make it the media in which their consumers and creators prefer to see such themes presented?[76] I am inclined to see their appeal as rooted in two components: the plasticity of the media, and the close connection between these media and the otaku and other consumers in this digital age.

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[75] The *kitsune* (狐) or fox-spirit is a traditional character in Japanese (as well as Chinese and Korean) folklore. Almost always young, female, and attractive, these shape-shifting creatures have become a popular moe staple of animanga as well. See Foster; Hansen. For the Chinese version see, for example, Kang. For an amusing update of the Korean folktale, see *My Girlfriend Is a Nine-Tailed Fox* (내 여자친구는 구미호), 2010.

[76] While novels employing magic continue to be popular, particularly in the subgenres of Fantasy (Urban Fantasy, Paranormal Fantasy, etc.), the shift to visual media—computers, TVs, iPods, eReaders, and such—has resulted in falling book sales across all genres. The occasional films like *Lord of the Rings* and the Harry Potter series enjoy commercial success, but statistically they are the exception rather than the rule.

Figure 34. Sequence from *Mysterious Girlfriend X*

Manga have the capability to blur the line between the verbal and the pictorial.
Sounds and even speech are shown in ways that underscore their meanings through the

way they are written (drawn), while images may even be composed of words. At the same time, the artist is able to play with the flow of time in the story, through manipulation of the ways in which the reader follows the flow of images. Panels may be enlarged or diminished, actors and objects may burst through the bounds of the frame, and time may seem to suddenly contract or expand.

In Figure 34, taken from the first volume of *Mysterious Girlfriend X* (謎の彼女X, 2006), we see a number of these techniques. The images are presented from a variety of angles, heightening their cinematic style and visual impact. The uneven frames emphasize the relative importance of their images, and the frames themselves are shown cutting off the characters depicting sound effects (top frame), or being overlaid by them (middle and bottom frames). Speed lines draw the eye to the actors and relegate the background to irrelevance. And although the top frame depicts a frozen moment in time, the middle and bottom right frames employ multiple images akin to a montage effect in order to show actions that last several seconds each, while the page as a whole condenses several minutes of time. In short, the images are presented in a way that mimics and privileges our emotional experiences of events over our intellectual apprehension of them. In this way, the artist takes full advantage of the medium's plasticity to impart to the reader, perhaps subconsciously, something of the protagonist's perception of his scissor-wielding girlfriend's "mysteriousness."

As Jaqueline Berndt puts it, "the fundamental aesthetic ambiguity of comics must be taken seriously, and it should be acknowledged not only as a general affirmation of equivocalness and polyphony, but also as a structural characteristic of the methods used for analyzing this ambiguous medium." (In MacWilliams 298) In short, manga represents a medium which is ideally suited to the presentation of stories that overlay the verbal and the visual, the temporal and the atemporal, the linear and the polysemous.

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This blending of worlds is, of course, what I have been suggesting these stories do on a thematic level by foregrounding the tensions between tradition and modernity, and between the spiritual and the material planes. And just as stories like *Her Majesty's Dog* or *Mysterious Girlfriend X* are able to take full advantage of the characteristics of the manga format, the multiplanar format of anime also lends itself to this treatment of the religious and the magical.

In *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*, Thomas Lamarre discusses the development of animated film, with a focus on contemporary anime. Mixing explanations of the technology of making anime alongside philosophical and anthropological analyses of the medium, he explicates a theory of anime that involves an understanding of how its creators manipulate the multiple layers from which images are built up. Similarly, he says, the otaku's understanding of their world is itself multiplanar: "Otaku knowledge entails a sense of the image as composed of multiple layers, yet there is no preestablished hierarchy among elements or layers." (145) Anime is built up from a series of layers, unlike the editing down process of conventional filmmaking (286), and affords the viewer the opportunity for "opening the image to multiple frames of reference." (306)

We see these multiple layers clearly displayed in Figure 32 (above) from *Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit*. Tanda sees the spirit world superimposed upon the material, and is able to freely move about in both simultaneously. The viewer also sees this superimposition, quite literally, as the layers of animation cels are overlaid one on another. The video frame thus clearly shows, and itself approximates, a magical view of the world as being composed of overlapping layers.

Anime and manga are in many ways more ideally suited to the treatment of the supernatural because they allow for a greater freedom of movement between these frames

of reference. This bridging of multiple realms is, I believe, precisely the message that the creators of these stories wish to impart in regard to retaining a connection with the spiritual heart of Japanese tradition. In other words, the ability of these characters to bridge past and present, spiritual and material, imagination and reality is underscored by the choice of a medium which itself embodies the transcending of its overlapping layers.

Lamarre notes the special relationship between anime and the supernatural: since any object may be animated, that is, animate, "animation is frequently associated with animism, with a world and worldview in which everything is endowed with a vital spirit." (op. cit. 66) In a 1995 article, sociologist Ōsawa Masachi likewise notes the "strong attraction" otaku have for the occult and mysticism.[77] And in his controversial 2001 work, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, Azuma Hiroki notes a particular association for the otaku between popular culture and the supernatural. Azuma remarks upon "the interest in occult thought and New Age science" that arose in the late twentieth century and draws a connection to popular culture: "[T]he rise of otaku culture in Japan, too, of course shares the same social background." (35)

The attraction of the supernatural for the otaku, and the particular suitability of animanga as a medium for its exploration, can be seen as substantiation of the message of integration in these stories. Anime is a medium ideally suited for exploring this message, both because of its ease in visually depicting transformation through 'morphing' of people and objects in the frame, and its facility for softening the boundary between the everyday and the supernatural worlds by visually overlaying the literal and the fantastic.[78]

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[77] Quoted in Azuma 28.

[78] For more on the ways in which magical themes and images are employed in anime as literary tropes through which to encode culturally significant messages, see Cavallaro, *passim*. The purpose of magic, she says, is transformation—of the external world, certainly, but more importantly of the individual.

The Role of Popular Culture in Conserving Religious Knowledge

As religion has faded from daily life in the contemporary period, some have seen a need to prevent it from disappearing altogether. In presenting stories with protagonists who struggle to link tradition and modernity, animanga is itself acting as such a link. These stories act as a storehouse, a "database" as Azuma puts it, from which religious and magical themes are drawn, appearing year after year in new stories. In addition, many of these stories have educated successive generations about traditional Japanese religion and the rituals by which it has been celebrated. Animanga takes advantage of the power of depicting the supernatural to inform their audiences about the stories, beliefs, and practices relating to the gods and spirits, and the humans who interact with them.[79]

One example of the use of manga to pass on historical knowledge is shown in figures 35-36, a two-page spread from the "scanlation" of Tactics' Volume 5.[80] In this scene, Kantarō (with the light-colored hair) discusses the spirit that is haunting Hasumi's bathroom, instructing Hasumi's assistant Ayame on the "kami of the toilet" and offering information on the historical background of the legend. In addition, the translator has provided copious supplementary notes on the folklore surrounding this spirit. (Since these additional notes are added by the translator rather than the author, it would seem that many of the cultural references are assumed to be already familiar to the Japanese reader.) Thus through the mix of information from the author and cultural notes added by the translator, successive generations of readers—both Japanese and non-Japanese—are connected to the traditional mythology.

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[79] Some of these fall under what Hobsbawm calls "invented traditions," the deliberate creation of a sense of historical continuity based on selectively emphasizing certain desirable self-images while de-emphasizing others which might call into question the self-image generated. See Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983, as well as Anderson; Befu; Davis; Oguma; etc.

[80] In scanlations, amateur translators scan each page of the manga, replacing all of the dialog (and often the sound effects as well) with translated versions. The converted pages are recompiled into a file that is shared online.

ZI GU IS A FEMALE GOD! A VERY BEAUTIFUL ONE, IN FACT. ZI GU WAS THE MISTRESS OF SOME GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL, BUT THE GUY'S WAS SO JEALOUS OF ZI GU'S BEAUTY AND GRACE THAT SHE KILLED ZI GU WHILE SHE WAS IN THE BATHROOM. SO ZI GU'S GHOST HAUNTED THE OFFICIAL'S TOILET, MAKING LOTS OF NOISE AND GENERALLY FRIGHTENING VISITORS. IT GOT SO BAD THAT THE EMPRESS HAD TO GRANT ZI GU'S GHOST OFFICIAL GODDESS STATUS SO SHE WOULD GO TO HEAVEN. NO JOKE - ZI GU IS THE GODDESS OF THOSE REALLY DEEP THOUGHTS YOU GET WHILE SITTING ON THE TOILET, AND IS VENERATED BY WRITERS AND PSYCHICS AND PHILOSOPHERS AND OTHER PEOPLE WHO DO A LOT OF THINKING. BUT WATCH OUT IF YOU SPEND A LOT OF TIME IN THERE - ZI GU IS ONE OF THE MOST COMMON SPIRITS TO BE POSSESSED BY!

AND THEN THERE'S THE CHINESE GOD OF THE TOILET, KAKUTOU.

THIS IS THE JAPANESE READING OF THE CHINESE NAME ZI GU SHEN, OR TSU KU AS IT'S WRITTEN IN ON-YOMI

KAKUTOU?

AND IT'S COMMON SUPERSTITION THAT IF YOU HEAR A BIRD SING WHILE IN THE TOILET, YOU'LL HAVE BAD LUCK. AND THEY SAY THAT THE CUCKOO CAN TRAVEL FREELY BETWEEN THE WORLD OF THE LIVING AND THE WORLD OF THE DEAD.

WELL, THE SIMPLE EXPLANATION IS THAT BECAUSE OF THE CUCKOO'S NESTING HABITS AND THE SAD CRY THAT COMES FROM ITS RED-COLORED MOUTH, IT'S SAID TO BE UNCLEAN, AND THEREFORE ASSOCIATED WITH THINGS LIKE TOILETS.

KANBA THROOM IF YOU THERE

EXACTLY!!

SO THE KANJI LOOKED SO SIMILAR THAT PEOPLE GOT THEM MIXED UP?

"KAKUTOU"

廓登

(NAME OF GOD)

郭公

"KAKKOU"

(NAME OF BIRD)

WELL, LONG AGO THEY STARTED USING THE WORD "HOTOTOGISU" FOR "CUCKOO" IN POETRY, BUT THE ORIGINAL WORD IS "KAKKOU."

OOH, AYAME-CHAN?

YOU'RE RIGHT! AND YOU MAKE IT SOUND SO EASY!

YES?

THE ORIGINS OF THESE OLD SUPERSTITIONS ARE REALLY INTERESTING!

SO A LONG TIME AGO, THE KANBARI NYUUDOU STORY AND THE CUCKOO STORY WERE LINKED.

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Figure 35. *Tactics*, left (p. 137)

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Figure 36. *Tactics*, right (p. 136)

In fact, many of the most familiar spiritual creatures in Japan today have been passed down for years in animanga. An example is *GeGeGe no Kitarō* (ゲゲゲの鬼太郎, 1959), one of the earliest manga featuring yōkai and kami, which has been made into multiple anime, live action series, films, video games, and paraphernalia. As testament to the story's widespread popularity, there is a Japan Railways train dedicated to the hero, Kitarō, and the other human and yōkai characters in the manga, and there is even a town that has an entire street lined with life-sized statues of characters from the story.[81]

When creating these characters and the story, author of the original 1959 manga Mizuki Shigeru drew upon older sources, basing them on *kamishibai* performances from the turn of the twentieth century.[82] In turn, *GeGeGe no Kitarō* and its many adaptations have reused Mizuki's characters, and even his plotlines in thousands of animanga. Among the yōkai depicted in the many *Kitarō* stories are Shisa (see *Her Majesty's Dog* in Ch. 2, especially p. 20 n21), and Nurarihyon (see *Nura: Rise of the Yōkai Clan*, Ch. 2). And as may be seen in Figures 37-39, even Kitarō's white hair covering his lost eye—a manifestation of his ability to see both the material and spiritual worlds—has become an influential trope.

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[81] Sakaiminato, in Tottori Prefecture, has honored native son and author of *GeGeGe no Kitarō*, Mizuki Shigeru, with a street named after his hero. Kitarō Road (*kitarō-dori* is lined with a hundred bronze statues of Kitarō, Rat Man (*Nezumi-otoko*), Cat Girl (*Neko-musume*), and the other characters in Mizuki's stories.

[82] Kamishibai were performances in which itinerant storytellers would entertain and educate street audiences by means of picture scrolls. It originated in twelfth century Buddhist temples in Japan as a means of imparting morality tales to an audience who were often illiterate (with roots going even further back into Buddhist *etoki* lectures using morality scrolls). Kamishibai enjoyed a revival in the early twentieth century, often as a form of children's entertainment – which is how Mizuki first encountered it. The kamishibai version was known as *Hakaba no Kitarō* (墓場鬼太郎), "Kitarō of the Graveyard." See Kaminishi; Lamarre 192-193.
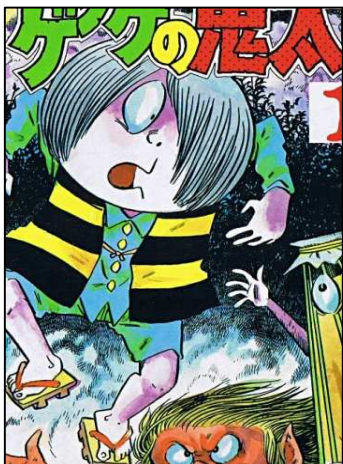
Figure 37. Kitarō
(*GeGeGe no Kitarō*)

Figure 38. Ginko
(*Mushishi*)

Figure 39. Kakashi
(*Naruto*)

Many stories perform a similar pedagogic function, including a number of the titles discussed in this thesis. *Destiny of the Shrine Maiden*, mentioned in Chapter 1, adapts the *Kojiki* (711 CE), the oldest extant Japanese religious text, by incorporating the battle between Susanō-ō's enchanted sword and the eight-headed demon Orochi. Other titles also take the opportunity to educate their audiences on religion and magic. Takahashi Rumiko's long-running *InuYasha* [83] is filled with miko, priests, spells, and demons, and *Natsume's Book of Friends* [84] introduces the audience to an enormous pantheon[85] of kami, yōkai and other nature spirits.

Popular culture, then, performs multiple functions in the conserving, transmitting, and transmuting of supernatural stories. Through the telling and retelling of stories about religion, magic, and the supernatural, popular culture itself acts as the bridge between worlds. It educates its consumers, who in turn invent new ways to pass on religious and

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[83] *InuYasha*, (犬夜叉）: manga 1996-2008; anime 2000-2010.

[84] *Natsume Yūjinchō* (夏目友人帳): manga 2005-present; anime 2008-present.

[85] Or pandemonium, if you prefer.

magical significance by re-imagining it in their own creations. It also acts as a storehouse or "database" for these ideas, images and characters. Just as the protagonists act as the link healing the split between worlds within those tales, the act of telling these stories likewise brings the teachings of the past into the present. The most crucial actor who retells these stories and thereby preserves them is their consumer-creator, the otaku.

Otaku Culture: Database Animals and Reality as (Just Another) Fiction

It is impossible to discuss contemporary Japanese popular culture without an understanding of the consumers of those products: the otaku whose aesthetic shapes this billion-dollar market. Their buying decisions drive the editorial choices by the anime studios and manga publishing houses, but their role goes beyond simply the passive consumption of these products. Otaku also produce thousands of works of art and fiction that are distributed online and sold at huge conventions like Comiket and Anime Expo.[86]

In his 2001 milestone work, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, Azuma Hiroki presents an argument for the otaku as a new "social being" who has evolved in response to postmodern Japanese society.[87] Azuma draws upon the work of postmodernists Baudrillard, Kojève, Lacan, and Lyotard in his analysis, and although several points that

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[86] Comiket (コミット, "*Komiketto*," a portmanteau of Comic + Market), is the world's largest comic fair, held in Tokyo semiannually. Every six months the Comiket hosts more than 35,000 private and corporate vendors, and some half a million attendees. (Comic Market Preparations Committee 3-4) In August 2009 over 9.4 million copies of books were sold over three days. (Ichikawa 3)

Anime Expo, or AX, is an annual convention held in Los Angeles, now in its twentieth year. Attendance in 2010 topped 46,000 attendees over four days, and another 1300+ industry representatives and several dozen actors, musical groups, writers, and other stars of the anime/manga world. See Society for the Promotion of Japanese Animation, *AX Facts*; cf. also Lam.

[87] Originally published as *Dōbsutsuka suru posutomodan otaku kara mita Nihon shakai* (Tokyo: Kōdansha Gendai Shinsho, 2001). Transl. 2009, Jonathan E. Abel & Kono Shion (Minneapolis: Minneapolis UP, 2009).

are key to his overall argument are not germane to this thesis[88] there are three things that have direct bearing on the use of religious themes in popular culture: firstly, that otaku represent both consumers and agents in the production of popular culture, secondly, that otaku culture depends upon a "database" approach to the products of that culture, and finally, that the conjunction of these allows them to become "gods" of the worlds they create.

Azuma rightly points out that otaku are not mere consumers of popular culture but are also agents: shapers and producers of trends in anime, manga, games, and other products. Otaku are "co-producers," as Thomas Lamarre put it (Lamarre 315). In fact, they are responsible for the creation and consumption of a wide variety of derivative works, including dōjinshi, short stories, hand-drawn and computer-generated artwork (including many of the images in this thesis), amateur music videos, and even amateur anime and computer games. There is a circular—or to put it another way, centerless—cultural flow in the production of such products: amateur authors by the thousands sell their self-published manga featuring extensions to, or "alternative universe" retellings of, commercially-produced stories; professionally published authors offer limited-run hand drawn manga alongside school-aged authors at Comiket; and amateurs whose work garners exceptional attention (and sales) may be offered contracts with one of the major publishing houses. (Azuma 26)

This centerless agency is key to Azuma's "database" model. This model is based on the image of a classification system, a storehouse where otaku mentally file the stories and characters from popular culture by their characteristic traits. Subsequent stories and

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[88] E.g., his application of Lyotard and the tension between "narratives," "grand narratives," and "grand non-narratives." Likewise, his lengthy explanation of the "animalistic" nature of otaku (which in turn rests upon his analysis of Kojève's reading of Hegel) need not be explored here.

characters can be assessed (for acquired products) or created (for self-produced products) according to how many of an individual's favorite characteristics they match. Someone who, for instance, is attracted to girls in miko outfits, but also prefers girls with cat-ears (a common moe trope), will look for animanga featuring characters with both traits, and may even create his own. (Fig 40.)

Figure 40. Neko-Miko

While Azuma calls fan art and dōjinshi "simulacra" (following Baudrillard), Saitō Tamaki calls them a "ritual of possession." According to Saitō, these derivative works provide a way for otaku to "possess" the licensed works on which they are based,

allowing them to then "weave a different story out of the same materials, and share it with the community." (20)

Figure 41. Ayanami Rei
(*Neon Genesis Evangelion*)

Figure 42. Tōwa Erio
(*Denpa Onna to Seishun Otoko*)

In addition to the ability to possess, and thereby reshape, these stories, the otaku consumer-creator is also empowered to possess, and thereby control, the characters themselves. To cite but one example, they can turn a conservatively-dressed Ayanami Rei (Fig. 41), whose 1995 appearance in *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (see p. 35 n40) effected a "change in the rules of the moe-elements sustaining otaku culture" with her "quiet personality, blue hair, white skin, [and] mysterious power" (Azuma 51), into a nearly-

naked Tōwa Erio (*Denpa Onna to Seishun Otoko*, 2011), a blue-haired, white-skinned girl who seldom speaks and believes herself to be an alien. (Fig. 42) This is the same power of possession that can transform the shamaness into the miko, as we saw in Chapter 1.

For the otaku, possession and control play key roles in their relationship with the characters in animanga. It is perhaps fitting to use the term "possession" in this context, since it can refer to either the concept of ownership noted above, or to the idea of spirituality taking control of a material substance. That ability to create an imaginary world in which he controls every aspect of the environment, and every action by its inhabitants, gives the otaku a godlike status. In a lengthy interview with a self-professed otaku conducted by Saitō (via email, naturally), the informant discusses his love for an anime character in unmistakably religious phrasing: "At that moment, the owner becomes an 'all-powerful god' and can control the character completely." (Quoted in Saitō, 38)

The couching of the otaku's self-description in clearly religious terms is notable here. It would have been unremarkable, at least to a Western observer, had the informant described his fantasy relationship with a character in the language of husband and wife, or of master and servant (especially given the popularity of the "sexy maid" trope), or even of feudal lord and retainer. Instead, the bond between the respondent and an anime character is described as that between a deity and his creation.

The function of a deity, in this worldview, is the same as that of an author: he is the one who creates a world and controls the lives of the beings who inhabit it.[89] For

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[89] At first glance, this description more resembles a god of a monotheist religion than the Shintō kami. However, given the sense of community shared among otaku, and the need for validation from peers, the kami is in fact an apt metaphor here. Unlike the gods of Western monotheism, the kami have particular spheres of influence, and will work together, seek advice from each other, and even at times disagree with each other. They may, as we saw in the case of Nagi (Ch. 2), be vulnerable to human interference. Nevertheless, they sustain the world and guide the actions of its creatures within the limits of their powers.

Saitō, the derivative works the otaku produce are symptomatic of the blurring of "real" and "fictional." As he puts it, otaku "see reality as a kind of fiction," and see no reason to privilege one over the other. (24) Saitō's description is apropos in this context. One who views the mundane world as simply another level of reality that is no more (or less) real than the world of imagination, sees himself empowered to be a co-creator of his own reality. This magical point of view that sees "reality as a kind of fiction" [90] is the same message presented in these stories: through his "godlike" powers of creation and control, the otaku can become, like the protagonists in their anime and manga, the hero who heals the world. (Fig. 43)

The means by which these co-creators of reality effect that healing is, of course, by keeping Japanese spirituality alive in the contemporary world. The otaku infuse modernity with the kami, yōkai, wizards, and shamanesses of old, in order to impart spiritual lessons to succeeding generations of consumer-creators. They are able to do this because they can draw upon animanga's abundant storehouse of religious ideas and images for their stories. They create characters who transcend the boundaries between the multiple layers of the material and spiritual realms, in a medium that itself is multilayered, with overlapping cels in which the planes of action take place. So, too, the stories in and of themselves also act as the connection between past and present, spiritual and mundane. It is the consumer-creators of animanga, the otaku to whom these messages are imparted, who in turn keep these messages alive by constantly re-imagining the stories through which they are told. By drawing upon that storehouse of spiritual

So, too, the otaku form communities of like-minded individuals with whom they share their creations, debate over the merits of their characters, or work on collaborative projects.

[90] "Magic is the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will." Crowley, et al., 126. See also Frazer, especially vols. 1 & 2, "The Magic Art."

ideas and images, and recombining them into an ever-growing myriad of new stories, they keep religion alive.

Figure 43. Akira (*Eden of the East*)

But these stories are more than simply relics of the past: they constantly underline a message of integration through the struggles and victories of their protagonists. Just as the medium itself accomplishes its goal (that is, to impart a story) through the integration of the layers from which it is composed, the protagonists accomplish their goals (to complete the quest, or defeat the eight-headed dragon, or prevent a kami's diappearance) by integrating within themselves the traditional spiritual heart of the past and the post-industrial material world of the present. Thus popular culture, too, plays its part, by being the bridge between tradition and modernity, and between the spiritual and the material.

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CONCLUSION

It seems to become fashionable soon after the great voyages had begun to
make the world seem too narrow to hold both men and elves . . .
(J. R. R. Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories,* 7)

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, popular culture in Japan plays an integral role in the shaping of religious and cultural identity in contemporary society. It is tied to gender relations, to perceptions of what it means to be religious (or non-religious) in a secular society, and to conceptions around "Japaneseness." It also plays a vital role in conserving religious ideas and images and imparting them to succeeding generations of audiences, thus keeping the spiritual alive in the midst of materialistic modernity.

I began this project by seeking to discover why, in such an adamantly secular society as contemporary Japan, stories of religion, magic and the supernatural commanded so vital a role in popular culture. What I found was that the otaku consumers and creators of these stories deliberately use animanga for the purpose of preserving Japanese spirituality in today's post-industrialized world.

To be sure, there is an emotional benefit to the fans in all this. Young, often disempowered, these are stories in which the otaku can fantasize about power and control, imagining themselves as heroes who defeat evil and win the girl in the end. But there is much more to the picture. After all, sci-fi and action-adventure stories allow audiences to see themselves as heroes just as well as tales of wizards or yōkai, and images of maids and nurses provide attractive girls to dote on the hero just as well as a schoolgirl miko. But the question is not "why depict a miko as a cute schoolgirl," but rather "why depict a cute schoolgirl as a miko?"

The answer is that the otaku use animanga (a medium that is not only familiar to them, but is in fact best suited for the subject—an evolutionary niche, if you will), in order to say: heroes are people who hold on to the traditional Japanese spirit in the face of modern materialism. The creators of these stories infuse thoroughly modern images with nativist spirituality, putting ancient shamans into adorable shrine girls, and once-powerful kami into sexy pop stars. Their protagonists take on bullies and Religion-with-a-capital-R, and win the day by becoming the bridge between traditional and modern, native and foreign, spiritual and material. These stories perform that same function, becoming the conduit through which the accumulated spiritual wisdom of the past flows into the crowded subways and office high-rises of the present.

In short, the otaku see a need to preserve religion and magic, today more than ever, lest the vital link to the spirit that once infused the world, prior to the coming of modernity, be lost. They remind us so that even when the trees are cut down and the shrines turned into shopping malls, the kami will not become nameless and fade away.

In today's secularized and "hyper-rational" Japan, the world appears to many as being too narrow to hold both humans and kami, businessmen and yōkai, schoolgirls and shamans. The goal of Japanese popular culture, like that of its protagonists—Tarō, Nagi, Kantarō and the others—is to bridge that gap and make others realize that the world is, indeed *needs to be*, wide enough. Like Tolkien's elves, the spirits and kami are not gone. We just need to open our eyes and see that they are right here, dwelling in new avatars.

Anime, Films, Games, Novels, and Manga

I have attempted to collapse a large amount of information into its essentials in this section. I have therefore not differentiated between an anime series and a standalone animated movie (OVA, Original Video Animation). Sequels are also subsumed into their respective entries: e.g., the anime listing for *Hell Girl* refers to all three seasons (*Jigoku Shōjo*, *Jigoku Shōjo Futakomori*, & *Jigoku Shōjo Mitsuganae*). I have used "Film" to refer to live-action movies.

Ah My Buddha (あまえないでよっ!! *Amaenaide yo!!*, *"Don't Act So Spoiled!!")*
Anime: Motonaga Keitaro, director (2005-2009).
Manga: Sogabe Toshinori, Bohemian K, authors (2004-2007).

Bible Black (バイブルブラック, *Baiburuburakku*)
Anime: Hanebu Sho & Honda Kazuyuki, directors (2001-2003); Hamuo, director
                (2002-2008); Yoshiten, director (2005-2006).
Game: ActiveSoft, creators (2000).

Blue Exorcist (青の祓魔師, *Ao no Ekusoshisuto)*
Anime: Okamura Tensai, director; Maruyama Hiro, writer (2011-present).
Manga: Kato Kazue, author (2009-present).

Buddha (ブッダ, *Budda*)
Anime: Morishita Kozo, director; Yoshida Reiko, writer (2011).
Manga: Osamu Tezuka, author (2003-2007).

Chrono Crusade (クロノクルセイド, *Kurono Kuruseido*)
Anime: Kō Yū, director (2003-2004).
Manga: Moriyama Daisuke, author (1998-2004).

Corpse Princess (屍姫, *Shikabane Hime*)
Anime: Murata Masahiko, director; Aikawa Shō, writer (2008-2009).
Manga: Akahito Yoshi'ichi, author (2005-present).

Destiny of the Shrine Maiden (神無月の巫女, *Kannazuki no Miko*, *"Priestesses of the Godless Month"*)
Anime: Yanigasawa Tetsuya, director (2004).
Manga: Kaishaku (pseud. of Ōta Hitoshi & Shichinohe Terumasa), author(s) (2004-
                2005).

Denpa Onna to Seishun Otoko (電波女と青春男 [91])
Anime: Shinbō Akiyuki, director (2011).
Manga: Iruma Hitoma, author (2010-present).
Novel: Iruma Hitoma, author (2009-2011).

Dragonball (ドラゴンボール, *Doragon Bōru*)
Anime: Nishio Daisuke, director (1986-1996); Kasai Osamu, director (1996-1997);
            Yamamoto Kenji, director (2009-2010); Kikuchi Shunsuke, director (2011).
Film: Toei Animation 1986-1996).
Game: 1986-present.
Manga: Toriyama Akira, author (1984-1995).

Eden of the East (東のエデン, *Higashi no Eden*)
Anime: Kamiyama Kenji, writer & director (2009)
Novel: Kamiyama Kenji, author (2009-2010).

GeGeGe no Kitarō (ゲゲゲの鬼太郎, *GeGeGe no Kitarō*)
Anime: Takahato Isao, director (1968-1972); Kasai Osamu & Shibata Hiroki,
            directors (1985-1988); Nishio Daisuke, director (1996-1998); Kawazu Yukio,
            director (2007-2009); Motoki Katsuhide, director (2008); Chioki Kimitoshi,
            director (*Hakaba Kitarō*, 2008).
Film: Motoki Katsuhide, writer & director; Habara Daisuke, writer (2007; 2009)
Game: Sony Playstation (2003).
Manga: Mizuki Shigeru, author (1959-1969).

Ghost Hound (神霊狩/GHOST HOUND, *Shinreigari/Gōsuto Haundo*)
Anime: Shirō Masamune (as Shirow Masamune), original concept; Konaka Chiaki,
            screenplay; Nakamura Ryūtarō, director; (2007-2008).
Manga: Shirō Masamune (as Shirow Masamune), original concept, writer; Asahi
            Kanata, illustrator; (2008).

Ghost in the Shell (攻殻機動隊, *Kōkaku Kidōtai*, "*Mobile Armored Riot Police*")
Anime: Shirō Masamune (as Shirow Masamune), author (1995; 2004); Itō Kazunori,
            screenplay (1995); Oshii Mamoru, screenplay (2004), director (1995; 2004);
            Kamiyama Kenji, director (2002-2005).
Manga: Shirō Masamune (as Shirow Masamune), author (1989-1997).

Girls Bravo (GIRLSブラボー, *Girls Burabō*)
Anime: Aoki Ei, director; Watanabe Akira, writer (2004-2005).

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[91] Literally "*Electric Wave Woman and Youthful Man*"; however, "denpa" is often used in a way analogous to "tinfoil hat" in English, and "seishun" means "pubescent" and has the connotation of "horny adolescent."

Game: Kadokawa Shoten, developers (2005).
Manga: Kaneda Mario, author (2000-2005).

Hell Girl (地獄少女, *Jigoku Shōjo*)
Anime: Watanabe Hiroshi, writer (2005-2006); Kanemaki Kenichi, writer (2006-
          2009); Ōmori Takahiro, director (2005-2007); Watanabe Hiroshi, director
          (2008-2009).
Game: Compile Heart, developers (2007; 2009).
Manga: Etō Miyuki, author (2005-2008).
TV Series: Naganuma Makoto, director (2006-2007).

Her Majesty's Dog (女王様の犬, *Joōsama no Inu*)
Manga: Takeuchi Miku (as Mick Takeuchi), author (2001-2006).

Inakoi (いな☆こい, *Inakoi*)
Game: Whirlpool, 2006.

InuYasha (犬夜叉, *Inuyasha*)
Anime: Ikeda Mashashi & Aoki Yasunao, directors (2000-2004); Aoki Yasunao,
          director (2009-2010); Sumisawa Katsuyuki, writer (2000-2004; 2009-2010).
Film: Shinohara Toshiya, director; Takahashi Rumiko, stories; Sumisawa
          Katsuyuki, screenplays (2001-2004).
Game: Game Boy Advance, Nintendo DS, Sony Playstation, WonderSwan.
Manga: Takahashi Rumiko, author (1996-2008).
Novel: Komparu Tomoko, author; Takahashi Rumiko, illustrator (2004).

Jin-Roh (人狼, *Jin Rō*; also known as *Jin-Roh: The Wolf Brigade*)
Anime: Oshii Mamoru, author; Okiura Hiroyuki, director; (1999).

Kamichu! (かみちゅ! *Kamichu!*)
Anime: Masunari Koji, director (2005).
Manga: Naruko Hanaharu, author (2005-2007).

Kannagi: Crazy Shrine Maidens (かんなぎ, *Kannagi*, "*Shrine Maiden*")
Anime: Yamamoto Yutake, director (2008-2009).
Manga: Takenashi Eri, author (2005-2009, currently on hiatus).
Novel: Takei Tōka, author; Takenashi Eri & Kirino Kasumu, illustrators; (2008).

Kore wa Zombie Desu Ka? (これはゾンビですか?, *Kore wa Zombie Desu Ka?* or
Koreha Zombie Desu Ka? – "Is This a Zombie?")
Anime: Kanasaki Takaomi, director; Uezu Makoto, writer (2011).
Manga: Kimura Shinichi, author (2010-present).
Lt. Novel: Kimura Shinichi, writer ; Kobuichi, Muririn, illustrator ; (2009-present).

La Blue Girl (淫獣学園 La☆Blue Girl, *Injū Gakuen La Blue Girl*, "*Lewd Beast Academy: La Blue Girl*")
Anime: Fukumoto Kan, director (1992-1994); Fukumoto Kan & Ogawa Hiroshi, directors ; (2001-2002).
Game: Dez Climax, developers (1996).
Manga: Maeda Toshio, author (1989-1992).

Mobile Suit Gundam (機動戦士ガンダム, *Kidō Senshi Gandamu*)
Anime: *Various writers* (1979-present).
Films: *Various writers* (1979-present).
Manga: *Various writers* (1979-present).
Novels: *Various writers* (1979-present).

Mononoke (モノノ怪, *Mononoke*)
Anime: Nakamura Kenji, director (2007).
Manga: Ninagawa Yaeko, author (2007-2008).

Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit (精霊の守り人, *Seirei no Moribito*)
Anime: Kamiyama Kenji, director (2007).
Manga: Uehashi Nahoko, author (2007-present).
Novel: Uehashi Nahoko, author (1996).
Radioplay: NHK-FM (2006-2007).

Mushishi (蟲師, *Mushishi*, "*Bug Master*")
Anime: Nagahama Hiroshi, director (2005-2006).
Film: Otomo Katsuhiro, director; Murai Sadayuki, writer (2007).
Manga: Urushibara Yuki, author (1999-2008).

My Girlfriend Is a Nine-Tailed Fox (내 여자친구는 구미호, also known as "*My Girlfriend Is a* Gumiho")
TV Series: Boo Sung Chul, director; Hong Sisters, writers (2010).

Mysterious Girlfriend X (謎の彼女X, *Nazo no Kanojo X*)
Manga: Ueshiba Riichi, author (2006-present).

Nabari no Ou (隠の王, *Prince of Nabari*)
Anime: Sugishima Kunihisa, director (2008).
Manga: Kamatani Yūki (as Yuhki Kamatani), author (2004-2010).

Naruto (NARUTO －ナルト－, *Naruto*)
Anime: Date Hayato, director (2002-present).
Manga: Kishimoto Masashi, author (1997-present).
Novel: Kusakabe Masatoshi, author (2002).

Natsume's Book of Friends (夏目友人帳, *Natsume Yūjinchō*)
Anime: Ōmori Takahiro, director (2008-present).
Manga: Midorikawa Yuki, author (2005-present).

Neon Genesis Evangelion (新世紀エヴァンゲリオン, *Shin Seiki Evangerion*)
Anime: Anno Hideaki, writer & director (1995-1997; "Rebuild" Series, 2007-present);
        Tsurumaki Kazuya, director ("Episode 25′," 1997; "Rebuild" Series, 2007-
        present).
Manga: Sadamoto Yoshiuki, author (1995-present).

Occult Academy (世紀末オカルト学院, *Seikimatsu Okaruto Gakuin, "End of Century
Occult Academy"*)
Anime: Itō Tomohiko, director (2010).

Nura: Rise of the Yōkai Clan (ぬらりひょんの孫, *Nurarihyon no Mago, "Nurarihyon's
Grandson"*)
Anime: Nishimura Jinji, director (2010); Fukuda Michio, director (2011-present);
        Takahashi Natsuko, writer (2010-present).
Manga: Shiibashi Hiroshi, author (2008-present).

Saiyuki (幻想魔伝最遊記 *Gensōmaden Saiyūki, "Fantastic Legend of the Monkey
King"*)
Anime: Sogabe Takashi, director (1999); Date Hayato, director (2000-2001); Endō
        Tetsuya, director (2003-2004); Ohata Koichi, director (2007).
Game: Bandai, developers (2004).
Manga: Minekura Kazuya, author (1997-2002).

Serial Experiments Lain (シリアルエクスペリメンツレイン, *Shiriaru
Ekusuperimentsu Rain*)
Anime: Abe Yoshitoshi (as Yoshitoshi ABe), character design; Konaka Chiaki,
        screenplay; Nakamura Ryutaro, director; (1998).
Game: Pioneer LDC, developers (1998).

Shugendō Now
Film: Jean-Marc Abela and Mark Patrick McGuire, writers/directors. Montréal:
        Enpower Pictures, 2010.

Spirited Away (千と千尋の神隠し, *Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi, "Sen and Chihiro
Spirited Away"*)
Film: Miyazaki Hayao, writer & director (2001).

Tactics (タクティクス, *Takutikkusu*)
Anime: Watanabe Hiroshi, director; (2004-2005).
Manga: Kinoshita Sakura & Higashiyama Kazuko, authors (2001-present)

Texhnolyze (テクノライズ, *Tekunoraizu*)
Anime: Abe Yoshitoshi (as Yoshitoshi ABe), character design; Konaka Chiaki,
           screenplay; Hamasaki Hiroshi, director; (2003).

Trinity Blood (トリニティ・ブラッド, *Toriniti Buraddo*)
Anime: Hirata Tomohiro, director; (2005).
Manga: Kujō Kiyo, author (2004-present).
Novel: Yoshida Sunao & Yasui Kentaro, writers (2001-2005).

Yondemasuyo, Azazel-san (よんでますよ、アザゼルさん, *"You're Being Summoned, Azazel-san"*)
Anime: Mizushima Tsutomu, director (2010-present).
Manga: Kubo Yasuhisa, author (2007-present)

Illustrations

Domination and Diminution

Figure 1. Wikipe-tan (*Wikipedia*)
        Kasuga. *Wikipe-tan_Miko*, digital image. Available from: <http://commons.
        wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wikipe-tan_Miko.png> (accessed 19 Aug. 2010).

Figure 2. Mido Miko (*La Blue Girl*)
        Unknown artist. DVD box cover art. Available from: <http://www.images
        hentai.com/imagenes/fc0ewhhic8j07typ9cm0.jpg> (accessed 19 Aug. 2010).

Figure 3. Ame-no-Uzume
        Ruiz, Antonio Campillo. *Ame-no-Uzume*, digital image. Available from: <http://
        elbamboso.blogspot.com/2010_06_01_archive.html> (accessed 19 Aug. 2010).

Figure 4. The Lady Aoi
        Howard, Ken. *The Lady Aoi*, photograph © 2000. Opera Theatre of Saint Louis,
        Minoru Miki's 'The Tale of Genji' June 2000. Set and costume designs by Setsu
        Asakura. Available from <http://www.operajaponica.org/interviews/mikiminoru.
        htm> (accessed 19 Aug. 2010).

Figure 5. Nichiren Séance, by Percival Lowell

Lowell, Percival. "Nichiren Séance," photograph. *Occult Japan*, p 162a.

Figure 6. Blind Itako Performing Ceremony

Wikipedia and UNESCO. *Itako Shaman*, photograph. Available from: <http://factsanddetails.com/japan.php?itemid=595&catid=16&subcatid=183> (accessed 19 Aug. 2010).

Figure 7. Yamababa (Noh Play)

Unknown artist. *1731*, photograph of Noh Play. Global Performing Arts Database, ID 1001731. Available from: <http://www.glopad.org/pi/en/record/digdoc/100173 1> (accessed 19 Aug. 2010).

Figure 8. Contemporary Itako

Johnson, H. *Itako*, photograph © 2005. Available from: <http://www.umbc.edu/eol/9/yamada/itako.html> (accessed 19 Aug. 2010).

Figure 9. Deguchi Nao, Founder of Ōmoto

Ylucas. *Kaiso*, photograph. Available from <http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nao_Deguchi> (accessed 19 Aug. 2010).

Figure 10. Contemporary Miko

Gladis, Chris. *Miko at Ikuta Shrine*, photograph. Available from <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Miko_at_Ikuta_Shrine.jpg> (accessed 19 Aug. 2010).

Figure 11. Chikane & Himeko (*Destiny of the Shrine Maiden*)

Chikane. Untitled digital image. Available from <http://moe.imouto.org/post/show?md5=453fb2a0e8da876562f97fb ff62eec29> (accessed 19 Aug. 2010).

Figure 12. Kamichu!

Radioactive. Untitled digital image. Available from <http://moe.imouto.org/post/show?md5=a0d2e99fa58e17544af0 ab798cb366b7> (accessed 19 Aug. 2010).

Figure 13. Miyako (*Ghost Hound*)

Unknown artist. *Ghost Hound Wallpaper*, digital image. Available from <http://www.wallpapers-manga.com/galerie/ghost-hound-image-ghost-hound-wallpaper> (accessed 19 Aug. 2010).

Figure 14. Meiji-era Miko

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Figure 16. Traditional Miko
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Figure 17. Himeko, Plastic Model
Unknown artist. *Himeko Kurusugawa*, photograph. Available from: <http://www. organic-f.net/new/english/img/june/Himeko%20Kurusugawa.jpg> (accessed 19 Aug. 2010).

Figure 18. Girls Bravo
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Figure 19. Inakoi
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Figure 20. *Kamidana*, or Shintō altar
Unknown artist. *Kamidana*, digital image. Available from: <http://www.jack-donovan.com/mishima/tag/kamidana/> (accessed 01 June 2011).

Figure 21. *Butsudan*, Buddhist altar
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Figure 22. Nagi with anime-inspired purification wand (*Kannagi: Crazy Shrine Maidens*)
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Figure 23. Zange (*Kannagi: Crazy Shrine Maidens*)
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Figure 24. Father Tres Iqus (*Trinity Blood*)
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Figure 25. Goetic Magic, anime style (*Blue Exorcist*)
>
> Screen capture from anime by author (01 June 2011).

Figure 26. Sister Rosette Christopher (*Chrono Crusade*)
>
> Unknown artist. *Img184/8118/cc1ud6*, digital image. Available from: <http://img 184.imageshack.us/img184/8118/cc1ud6.jpg> (accessed 30 May 2011).

Figure 27. Rikuo, "night version" (*Nura: Rise of the Yōkai Clan*)
>
> Unknown artist. *Nurarihyon-no-mago*, digital image. Available from: <http://ipad wallpaper.eu/wallpaper/nurarihyon-no-mago/> (accessed 31 May 2011).

Figure 28. Bandain, Usami's grandfather, & Usami (*Nura: Rise of the Yōkai Clan*)
>
> Scanlation by Binktopia/Shinra Tensei. Screen capture by author (31 May 2011).

Figure 29. Amane (*Her Majesty's Dog*)
>
> Scanlation by Red Madness. Screen capture by author (31 May 2011).

Figure 30. Naruto (*Naruto*)
>
> Unknown artist. *Free-2011-naruto-wallpaper_1024x768_90394*, digital image. Available from: <http://mi9.com/free-2011-naruto-wallpaper_90394.html> (accessed 01 June 2011).

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Figure 32. Tanda sees both the spirit world and the mundane world (*Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit*)
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Figure 33. Hasumi (*Tactics*)
>
> Scanlation by Eternal Blue. Screen capture by author (13 July 2011).

Figure 34. Sequence from *Mysterious Girlfriend X*
>
> Scan from Vol. 1 of *Nazo no Kanojo X* (Ueshiba 2006: 48) by author (07 July 2011).

Figure 35. *Tactics*, left (p. 137)
>Scanlation by Eternal Blue. Screen capture by K. L. Hamilton (13 July 2007).

Figure 36. *Tactics*, right (p. 136)
>Scanlation by Eternal Blue. Screen capture by K. L. Hamilton (13 July 2007).

Figure 37. Kitarō (*GeGeGe no Kitarō*)
>Unknown artist. Cover of manga, N.D. Available from: <http://threestepsover japan.blogspot.com/2010/01/manga-review-kitaro-1-and-1.html> (accessed 14 July 2011).

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>Unknown artist. Untitled digital image, N.D. Available from: <http://www. teamartail.com/anime/images/evangelion/rei002.htm> (accessed 15 July 2011).

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