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MEDIATISED IMAGES OF JAPAN IN EUROPE:
THROUGH THE MEDIA KALEIDOSCOPE

MUTUAL IMAGES

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EDITED BY

MARCO PELLITTERI & CHRISTOPHER J. HAYES

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MUTUAL IMAGES

A TRANSCULTURAL RESEARCH JOURNAL

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CONTACT: mutualimages@gmail.com

MUTUAL IMAGES RESEARCH ASSOCIATION – Headquarters
3 allée de l'avenir, Les chênes entrée 3
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The re-creation of yōkai character images in the context of contemporary Japanese popular culture: An example of *Yo-Kai Watch* anime series

Nargiz BALGIMBAYEVA | University of Tsukuba, Japan

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ABSTRACT

Supernatural creatures have always been an irreplaceable element of Japanese culture. Starting from the oldest collection of myths such as Kojiki to manga, anime and video games – they have always attracted the attention of people of all ages. However, modern yōkai have changed in terms of both visual representation and their role in the context of the work that contains these monsters. The images of yōkai used in popular culture are re-created in various ways in order to appeal to the taste of different kinds of audience. Undoubtedly, today's yōkai are not what they used to look like before: in anime targeting children, for instance, the element of fear may remain, but yōkai would most likely be referred to as kawaii ("cute") instead of kowai ("scary"). To explain these changes, I will present how yōkai images are re-created in Japanese animation on the example of the Yo-kai Watch anime TV series (the original Japanese TV series that ran from 2014 to 2018).

KEYWORDS

Yōkai; Supernatural; Japan; Anime; Monsters; Kawaii.

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Introduction to the phenomenon of yōkai

There is probably no culture in the world that would ignore the notion of the supernatural and unexplainable events or phenomena. Japanese culture is not an exception – the motifs of fear and reverence towards certain powers, which were a part of the universe together with human beings, have always been present in all forms of creation, be it oral traditions or written sources. Some of these powers were called deities: each of them had its specific role and meaning; people would worship them and connect essential events in their lives with a blessing or curse “from above”. Another category of supernatural phenomena was referred to as *yōkai*, which can vaguely be translated as a “monster”, “spirit”, “goblin”, “ghost”, “demon” (Foster, 2009: 2). It would be probably right to note that the modern understanding of the term “*yōkai*” has absorbed so many

categories that it instead serves as an umbrella term for a great number of supernatural events and phenomena.

Scholars such as Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962) and Inoue Enryō (1858-1919) – have proposed various ways of *yōkai* classification: Yanagita emphasized that *yōkai* must be differentiated from *yūrei* (ghosts of passed away people) – the first ones tend to attach to certain places (e.g., mountains, roads, ponds, etc.), whereas *yūrei* are attached to a concrete person (2016: 15); Inoue divided all *yōkai* into “false” (*kyokai*) – the phenomena misinterpreted as *yōkai* (*gokai*) as well as artificially created by people (*gikai*); and “true” (*jitsukai*) *yōkai* – the metaphysical phenomena and *yōkai* connected with natural phenomena which are to be examined with further scientific progress (2001: 101-104).

Another prominent scholar, who dedicated many of his works to the explanation of the *yōkai* phenomenon, is Komatsu Kazuhiko (born in 1947). He mainly defines *yōkai* as three ‘domains’: *yōkai* as ‘incidents or phenomena’, *yōkai* as ‘supernatural entities or presences’, and *yōkai* as ‘depictions’ (2017: 12).

When it comes to the meaning of “*yōkai*”, it would be a misconception to claim that supernatural creatures, demons, and other Japanese bestiary representatives are only united under this term: there are other concepts as *bakemono*, *mononoke*, and *ayakashi*. However, each of these words has its technicalities connected with a certain period of Japanese history, semantics, and the iconography of monsters. The word *bakemono*, for instance, is comprised of two Japanese words: *bakeru* (“to disguise, to take the shape of something”) and *mono* (“a thing”). As Komatsu stated, ‘in the past, *bakemono* referred only to living creatures with the mysterious ability to change their form, such as foxes that transformed into humans’ (2017: 66). The distinction between *bakemono* and animals was so vague, that such creatures as the *kappa* (a green creature dwelling in rivers), foxes and badgers were believed to belong to both animals and “monsters” (Hirota, 2014: 126).

The acceptance of *yōkai* existence by the Japanese people may derive from the animistic beliefs of Shintō (“way of the gods”), the Japanese indigenous religion based on the notion that ‘mountains, trees, even rocks are worshiped for their *kami*, or indwelling “spirit”, and samurai swords and carpenter’s tools have ‘souls’ (Schodt, 1990: 196). However, this seemingly perfect unity had two incarnations: as nature could provide people with food and shelter, at the same time, it could bring death. The legend of Yamata no Orochi, or a giant snake, represents fear and helplessness towards a destructive side of nature: floods and storms could cause loss of crops, and it meant that people’s lives would be in danger (Okuno, 1982: 6). In

this regard, it is crucial to point out that Shintō is not the only religious system existing in Japan and supporting the notion of various entities and spirits – Buddhism too admits the presence of such powers. That way, mysterious transformations and phenomena became a repeatable element of the *setsuwa* genre (narrations based on folktales, myths, and legends), and very often these stories were intertwined with the Buddhist ethics. As Foster also explained, ‘the concept of transmutation and transmigration lie at the core of Buddhist theology’ (2009: 6).

Moreover, both Buddhist and Shintō traditions include numerous rituals and ceremonies for spirits, because they could easily harm the living when someone treated them inadequately. Miyata gave some examples of such rituals as feasts and meals together with the representatives of “the other side” – usually with spirits of recently passed away relatives called *aramitama*, and also malicious spirits from hell, to whom people prepared special treats (this ritual is called *segaki*) (1996:123). As can be seen from the examples mentioned above, these elusive creatures could easily comply with the religious and philosophical beliefs or ideas widely spread in the society, which is one of the reasons why *yōkai* have become an irreplaceable part of Japanese folklore.

Contemporary *yōkai*-based content has become a successful commodity associated with fun and curiosity toward the world of the unexplainable. As a result, many characters of the Japanese bestiary can be found in manga, anime, and video games.

Nowadays the term “*yōkai*” is a category that has absorbed many meanings and ideas – *yōkai* are vivid and entertaining characters found in products of popular culture; they can also be spooky stories and local legends giving you goosebumps; and, of course, *yōkai* is a cultural phenomenon reflecting on people’s perception of the world. Similar to a fox taking up various forms, the notion of *yōkai* never stops changing and evolving into a new concept. For example, Toriyama Sekien (1712-1788), a famous Japanese scholar, poet and artist of the eighteenth century, liked to play with meanings, words, and images and was able to come up with new ideas for his famous *yōkai* characters (Foster, 2009: 62-63). Moreover, Foster represents Sekien’s creations as of a great importance when it comes to ‘how we envision and understand *yōkai* to this day’ (2015: 48) and that thanks to his works, ‘creatures from China became Japanese *yōkai*, and local *yōkai* from all over Japan were presented to a mass readership’ (2015:49). Taking these premises into consideration, I will constantly refer to his iconic *yōkai* depictions. I will also regularly mention other *yōkai* depictions of the Edo period (1603-1868) as they already exemplify Japanese monsters as a part of popular culture and entertainment for the first time in the history of *yōkai* (Foster, 2009: 48; Howard,

2011: 22). Some of these depictions imply portraying yōkai as encyclopedic units in attempts to understand and rationalize the very existence of yōkai – Foster calls this the ‘encyclopedic mode’ (2009: 31).

Yōkai awareness and anime: a case of the Yo-kai Watch TV series

The *yōkai* culture originated from tales of mysterious creatures and entities invading different parts of Japan. Gradually, stories transformed into visual art – this is the moment when *yōkai* become a source of inspiration for artists and painters, such as Sawaki Sūshi (1707-1772), Toriyama Sekien (1712-1788), and other masters of the Edo period. *Yōkai*-based scrolls and similar visual works are undoubtedly vital in terms of the *yōkai* phenomenon history and its research. However, static depictions of the creatures that were initially connected with certain movements and sounds could not grasp the whole spectrum of meanings the *yōkai* creatures represented. For example, some of the *yōkai* are associated with particular sounds: Azuki arai produces the sound of *azuki* beans being washed (Yanagita, 2016: 101); scary noises and voices that suddenly appear deep in the mountains are attributed to the mountain monster Yamahiko (Yamabiko) (Katsurai, 1942:23). Processes, such as shape-shifting that made the *kitsune* and *tanuki* famous, and other magical transformations of *yōkai* are similarly challenging to express when it comes to static visual depiction. Papp stated that ‘sequential art, animation and computer graphics are more suitable for this task (a visual representation of *yōkai* transformation), as these are the art forms which capture transformation’ and transfiguration (2010: 19). Anime is often believed to have absorbed specific trends and premises of classic Japanese visual arts (Murakami, 2000; Papp, 2010). So, it can be said that through the anime lens *yōkai* save their cultural livelihood, yet some of their characteristics are subject to change. The multi-faceted approach to graphics, music, and sound effects in anime allows re-creating *yōkai* as dynamic and aesthetically developed characters.

In Japan animated *yōkai* are often associated with the name of Mizuki Shigeru (1922-2015), a Japanese writer, manga author, historian, and specialist in *yōkai* studies. *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō* is his legendary manga, later adapted into a TV series. According to Foster, the works of Mizuki have ‘shaped the meaning and function of *yōkai* within the popular imagination of late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century Japan’ (2008: 8-9). Thanks to the extensive research initiated by Mizuki, *yōkai* have been scrupulously categorized to be rediscovered again by various audiences. Moreover, new creatures that

were invented by Mizuki later transformed into authentic members of the *yōkai* family. For many generations of Japanese children, it is the *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō* series that triggered their interest to the mysterious world of *yōkai*.

Nowadays, the anime industry has produced numerous products targeting *yōkai* enthusiasts of all ages. *Yōkai* have invaded the world of anime: *Inuyasha*, *Kamisama Hajimemashita*, *Hōzuki no Reitetsu*, *Natsume Yūjinchō Naruto*, *Nurarihyon no Mago*, *Yōkai Apāto no Yūga na Nichijō*, to name only a few, refer to *yōkai*. This article, however, will mainly focus the anime called *Yo-kai Watch*.

The concept of *Yo-kai Watch* was originally presented in 2012 in the Comic magazine *CoroCoro* – it was a serialized manga targeting children and created by Konishi Noriyuki; “*Yo-kai Watch*” also refers to the name of anime and games based on the manga series (Tajiri, 2005: 97). The franchise is developed by the LEVEL-5 Inc., which is a Japanese company specializing in video games development and publishing (Hino, n.d.). In January 2014 the TV series started being broadcasting in Japan, and eventually in other countries such as USA, Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

Not only did this anime captivate my attention with its popularity, but also with combining ultimately cute characters (that were designed to be liked by children) with contemporary discourses the anime touches. I will try to cover these aspects in the following parts of the article.

The *yōkai* character image re-creation in anime

The practice of reusing already famous and well-known characters from popular culture in art, literature, and music is common. *Yōkai* too, being a motif repeatedly incorporated into the works of various generations of creators, have been re-created in a vast number of anime, manga, and games. However, just a few studies belonging to the Japanese popular culture studies field or the *yōkai* research field are primarily focused on the details of the *yōkai* re-creation. That being said, two of the studies I came across have become starting points inspiring me to pursue the research of *yōkai* re-creation. The first one covers the topic of the character re-creation in Japanese popular culture. It is a study by Uchida that demonstrated the following sequence of character development taking place in media: ‘multilayered character development within one media product’, a media mix or multi-use of characters in various elements of media, and secondary character re-creation happening as a result of active consumption of media products (2008: 85). The second work directly connected with

the *yōkai* phenomenon is a study by Ichikawa (2013) that is dedicated to the revitalization of *yōkai* culture by the residents of towns and villages. Although he differentiated folk culture and mass culture¹, Ichikawa still acknowledges the *yōkai* existing outside folk culture. These *yōkai* phenomena are later transformed into characters of the contemporary popular culture by ‘manga authors and others’ (2013: 187). In this regard, it would be critical to mention that some *yōkai*-based content is also initiated by independent creators such as fans creating art or small companies producing mobile games. In both studies, the act of re-creation is present but not explained to the full extent.

When it comes to the theories directly related to transtextual relationships and repeated motifs in texts, I had an opportunity to familiarize myself with a concept proposed by Gérard Genette (1930-2018), a French literary theorist. His notion of transtextuality is explained as ‘all that sets the text in relationship, whether obvious or concealed with other texts’ (Genette, 1979: 83-84). According to Genette, transtextuality can be divided into five different categories, one of which is intertextuality, or ‘a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts: that is to say, eidetically and typically as the actual presence of one text within another’ (1979: 1-2). He then subdivides intertextuality practices into quoting (‘with quotation marks, with or without specific references’), plagiarism (‘undeclared but still literal borrowing’) and allusion (a reference to another text using ‘inflections that would otherwise remain unintelligible’) (Genette, 1979: 2). Other categories are paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality, and hypertextuality.

In this article, I would like to exemplify the process of *yōkai* character re-creation in anime using the theoretical concept proposed by Genette.

The first way *yōkai* characters may be re-created relates to what is called a “remake” or “adaptation”. Eberwein describes a remake as ‘a kind of reading or rereading of the original’ (1998: 15). Loock and Verevis differentiate between the two, noting that adaptation is mainly ‘concerned with the movement between different semiotic registers, most often between literature and film’ (2012: 6). In other words, *yōkai* characters are revitalized in a newer text with some references to the previous work. One of the examples is already mentioned *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō* anime series that launched in the 1960’s. The series tells a story of a *yōkai* boy named Kitarō, who was born in a graveyard; despite of

¹ For Ichikawa, modern *yōkai* culture cannot fully grasp the “creativity” created and nurtured by folk/local culture (2013: 187).

being a real *yōkai*, he also likes humans and continuously tries to protect them from the negative *yōkai* influence, and help others when they are in trouble.

Being a manga adaptation itself, the series has been remade a few times throughout its history, and the main differences in *yōkai* re-creation featured in a newer version are reflected in the visual stylistics of the characters. The original series in black and white is now transformed into a full-colour animated series, and the characters look “polished” compared to the originals – here I mainly refer to the *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō* characters’ design, typical for contemporary anime projects. For instance, Neko-musume (one of the characters) is depicted in colours, and she looks quite different from the original character (See Figure 1). In the 2018 version, she is depicted as a mature version of herself. In general, the character is fully redesigned in such a manner that corresponds to a “generic” anime style. Anime fans tend to grasp these changes fast; some of them even address the changes in fan art (an “internet meme” from Figure 1).



Figure 1. Neko-musume in the 1968 series and her modern version. The caption is entitled as “be careful who you call ugly”. Retrieved from <https://knowyourmeme.com/photos/1358339-anime-manga>
© 水木プロ・フジテレビ・東映アニメーション

A case of the *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō* series re-creation exemplifies one of the transtextuality aspects called hypertextuality, or ‘any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call hypertext) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the hypotext), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary’ (Genette, 1982: 5). According to Stam, the process of a hypotext transformation into a new form includes ‘selection, amplification, concretization, actualization, critique, extrapolation, analogization, popularization, and reculturalization’ (2000:68). In the case of *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō*, we can see the impact of

these processes on the characters design in the first place: in order to create appealing to modern viewers characters, the creators have made Kitarō taller, and Neko-musume “prettier”, etc. – these are only a few examples of such changes. In general, it can be said that the practice of remaking provides a better understanding of old narratives through “adjusting” the characters into a certain mold or frame existing in the current period.



Figure 2. *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō*: then and now.
© 水木プロ・フジテレビ・東映アニメーション

Another common way of *yōkai* re-creation in anime implies drastic changes on characters and their key features is through gender-swapping (reimagining male characters as female and vice versa), changing a time frame (introducing characters into a time frame unusual for them) or humanization of animal characters, among other strategies. A compelling case of such modifications is the *Rosario + Vampire* anime series, where a Japanese *yōkai* Yuki-onna (the “Snow Maiden”) (Figure 3) coexists with vampires, werewolves and other monsters raised and popularized in various cultures. These allusions to other texts dedicated to monsters exemplify transtextual relationships between the series and other discourses on monsters without explicitly citing them, but only referring to some monster names.

According to Eder, Jannidis and Schneider, the appearance of a character depends on the genre: ‘the occurrence of one typical element of a genre will then trigger a complex set of expectations concerning the kind of characters to appear, the situations they encounter, the themes they are likely to be confronted with, their conception as flat or round, or static or dynamic, and typical constellations with other characters’ (2010: 43).

This idea leads us to the assumption that a genre or any other characteristics existing to categorize anime will be reflected in the design and the conceptual parts of the product. It can be explained from the point of *architextuality*: we expect to see cute and simply drawn characters in anime for children (*kodomomuke*). On the other hand, we understand that

romanticized or highly sexualized characters will appear in anime targeting young females (*shōjo*), youth-oriented titles (*seishun*), or related to the romantic comedy genre (*rabukome*).



Figure 3. Mizore from *Rosario + Vampire* as a reimagined and sexualized version of Yuki-onna. ©池田晃久／集英社・陽海学園新聞部

It is not rare when *yōkai* images are re-created with a humorous undertone. In this case, *yōkai* may only represent a quick reference to folklore and visual clichés of certain *yōkai* rather than a complete character. The example in Figure 4 is meant to imitate a kappa comically, in other words, its main function is to amuse the audience, and it does not imply any ‘aggressive or mocking intention’ (Genette, 1982: 27). The relation to a *hypotext* (former concepts of kappa) illustrated in Figure 4 is based on wordplay: “kappa” means both the green *yōkai* and the “raincoat” in the Japanese language.

To conclude, *yōkai* re-creation in anime varies from minor to drastic changes in the character design and *yōkai* conceptualization. Due to the word limit of the journal article, I am not able to elaborate furthermore on the re-creation patterns. However, it is necessary to point out that all these changes and modifications can be understood as the transtextuality mechanisms successfully explained and categorized by Gerard Genette. In the next part of the article, I would like to demonstrate concrete examples of *yōkai* re-creation in the *Yo-kai Watch* series.



Figure 4. A humorous representation of kappa in the *School Rumble* series, episode 4.
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The *yōkai* character image re-creation in the *Yo-kai Watch* series

The *Yo-kai Watch* franchise first started in Japan as a project targeting children. The cute appearance of *yōkai* characters and a simple structure of each episode of the anime series are to be well understood by young viewers. The series is comprised of 214 episodes divided into three seasons. It began airing in Japan in 2014 (January 8) and ended in 2018 (March 30). *Yo-kai Watch* has also been adapted into three full-length movies.

Keita, an 11 years old, is a cheerful junior schoolboy. One day he and his friends go to the woods to collect bugs, where Keita finds a mysterious capsule machine. When Keita opens a capsule, he enters a mystical world of *yōkai* – weird creatures which live next to humans, yet remain unseen. They like to cause mischief and usually tend to cause troubles to the human world. The journey of Keita is mainly about understanding the *yōkai* realm and its influence on the regular world. He is also granted a magic watch, which allows Keita to be able to see and communicate with *yōkai*.

As the franchise contains a large *yōkai* collection both based on familiar *yōkai* images and these created by the authors of the series, only a few of them will be analyzed. These *yōkai* are known as the *neko-mata* (his name is *Jibanyan* in the series), *kyūbi no kitsune* (*Kyūbi*), *kappa* (two characters called *Kappa* and *Nogappa*) and *Yuki-onna* (*Fubuki-hime*). I find these particular creatures one of the most common and well-recognized *yōkai* characters also featured in such anime series as *Nurarihyon no Mago*, *Naruto*, *Rosario + Vampire*, *Inuyasha*, *Inukami!*, etc.

It also must be pointed out that there is a clear *transtextual* connection between *Yo-kai Watch* and another popular franchise – *Pokémon*. Monsters in both universes are colourful characters, passionately collected by children; each of the creatures possesses a unique magical power, and in order to summon one, a special device is necessary – a watch in the

case of *Yo-kai Watch* and a poké ball in the case of *Pokémon*. In fact, funky monsters of the *Pokémon* franchise resemble *yōkai* in many ways. For example, the double tail of Espeon and his cute ears are typical features of the *nekomata*, whereas a monster called Drowzee is a visual and conceptual reference to the *baku*, a *yōkai* that eats dreams and nightmares. On the one hand, *Pokémon* creatures are only distant, well-concealed allusions to the *yōkai* realm. *Yo-kai Watch*, however, explicitly uses the *yōkai* term to shape its discourse.

The next part of the article will explain how Japanese monsters *yōkai* were reimagined in the *Yo-kai Watch* series.

Nekomata / Jibanyan

In Japanese folklore, there is a notion of cats as dangerous animals, which can change their appearance and transform into humans. Especially careful one must be with the *nekomata yōkai* – a cat with a double tail. As Casal pointed out, ‘people are firmly convinced that no cat can be trusted, especially if it is born with a long tail, which must immediately be clipped so that the beast does not develop into a *nekomata*, which actually refers to a cat with a forked tail’ (1959:59-60). In the series *Jibanyan* does not represent a terrifying monster – he is rather a hyperactive *cat-yōkai* occasionally causing much trouble to people. Similar to the *nekomata* image created by Toriyama Sekien in *Gazu Hyakki Yagyō* (1776) (Figure 5), *Jibanyan* also represents a cat with a typical forked-tale who uses back paws for walking.

On the other hand, the *nekomata* of Toriyama Sekien does not wear any clothes, whereas *Jibanyan* has a *haramaki* (a band of fabric covering the stomach area) and a blue pet collar reminding him of a previous owner. As Episode 1 shows, before becoming a *yōkai*, *Jibanyan* was a regular pet belonging to a schoolgirl. After he had been hit by a truck while crossing the street, *Jibanyan* later transformed into a *yōkai*. The clothes and accessories serve to remind viewers of a tight connection between the *yōkai* and human worlds. These two worlds are also intertwined in the work by Sawaki Sūshi (1737) (Figure 5): here we can see a *nekomata* as an anthropomorphic female cat wearing a kimono and playing a *shamisen* (a Japanese music instrument).



Figure 5. Nekomata and Jibanyan. From left to right: A work by Toriyama Sekien from “Gazu Hyakki Yakō” (1776) (Kawasaki Shi Shimin Myūjiamu); a work by Sawaki Sūshi from “Hyakkai Zukan” (1737) (Fukuoka Shi Hakubutsukan); Jibanyan from *Yo-kai Watch* ©L5/YWP-TX

When it comes to the body proportions of Jibanyan, there is a clear disproportion between the head and the body ratio. The head takes up more space than the body; moreover, big round eyes and a tiny nose looking like a dot construct additional imbalance as well. Here it is necessary to point out that anime for children would usually incorporate similar features into their character design. For instance, famous series such as *Chibi Maruko-chan* and *Hello Kitty* follow the “big head-small body” rule for their characters design. One of the explanations for choosing this particular character look is hidden within the notion of “cuteness” or “*kawaisa*”. An interesting study on this topic was conducted by Lorenz (1943), who proposed an idea of the “baby-schema” or juvenile features that make people want to protect and take care of the creatures with big heads and eyes, but small noses and mouths. Other contemporary authors, such as Allison, connected cute characters with ‘big head, small body, huge eyes, tiny nose’ (2004: 43); similarly, Avella acknowledged ‘the visual language of cute’ and pointed out that the heads of cute characters ‘will be huge and their eyes simple dots or slits to make them look either shocked or peaceful, sleeping, sleepy, or blind’ (2004: 217). Although cuteness of characters chiefly depends on physical features, as the previous examples show, some studies suggest that typically a cute character is a combination of many factors (Oosawa and Yamada, 2017).

As opposed to Jibanyan, the earlier nekomata depictions on Figure 5 do not state any disproportion as such: the stylistics of these paintings follows a more naturalistic approach. This fact highlights huge differences in *yōkai* portraying of various periods: for instance, Papp described post-war *yōkai* as ‘harmless’, ‘childlike’ and elaborately explains these changes, including political reasons (2010: 129).

Another element of the Jibanyan design is the usage of *onibi* (“demon fires”). These elements have been a long-established motif of the supernatural and ghostly: ‘On dark nights, thousands of ghostly fires hover about the beach, or flit above the waves – pale lights which the fisherman call Oni-bi, or demon-fires...’ (Hearn, 2004: 4).

Onibi are often associated with various *yōkai*: for instance, one of the types is related to foxes and called *kitsunebi* (“fox fires”) (Opler and Hashima, 1946:47). Cats, however, are similarly believed to be in charge of creating *onibi* due to their supernatural powers. *Yamato Kaiiki*, an eighteenth-century collection of *kaidan* (tales of weird and mysterious), contains a story of *nekomatabi* (“*nekomata* fires”), approximately the size of a *temari* (a Japanese toy ball); they were floating in the air, causing panic in the house of a samurai (Kanda, 1992: 2). In the case of the Jibanyan character image, two *nekomatabi* of blue colour are used to signalize that the character belongs to the world of *yōkai*. Similar blue lights can be seen in many anime about the supernatural. This effect emphasizes ghost / *yōkai* presence: in *Naruto*, a character called Matatabi (who is inspired by the *nekomata*) is rendered in blue flames.

Undoubtedly, such aspects as the character voice and speech play a vital role in the formation of *yōkai* characters in anime. A study by Teshigawara (2003) is focused on voice characteristics of heroes and villains of anime. Studies by Kinsui (2000 and 2003) discuss the phenomenon of *yakuwarigo* (a role language) – a specific speech peculiarities existing in anime (and other genres) which can construct a specific character. The works of Toriyama Sekien and Sawaki Sūshi mentioned earlier have formed a perfect example of how visual art of the eighteenth century perceived *yōkai*, yet still, these images lacked additional details which would elaborate more on these characters. Modern technologies have granted the possibility to incorporate sound effects into a visual content, which is one of the distinct qualities anime industry possesses. It follows that modern *yōkai* re-creations, such as Jibanyan, are a complex set of characteristics, including visual, audio, behavioural, and psychological features. The voice of Jibanyan is performed by a Japanese *seiyū* Kozakura Etsuko, who also took part in voice acting for famous anime series such as *Pokémon* and *Crayon Shin-chan*. Her approach to Jibanyan was based on childish and emotional acting, which could help to build an image of a cute and active *yōkai*. The characters voiced by Kozakura, however, seem to have a lot of common qualities – therefore, one may start recognizing some parallels between Jibanyan and Piplup, for instance. This aspect

emphasizes the existence of *paratextual* (relating to footnotes, subtitles, and everything outside the text) relationships between *Yo-Kai Watch* and *Pokémon*.

The speech of Jibanyan can be characterized as the *nekogo* (cat language) – that is an imaginary language expressing how cats would talk if they could. The *nekogo* is not a rare phenomenon in anime, manga, and games; it implies occasional usage of the word “*nyan*” or “*nya*” (a word similar to “meow” in Japanese) so that viewers would perceive Jibanyan as an ordinary house cat rather than a monster. The name of Jibanyan itself contains the “*nyan*” part, which instantly allows identifying him with cats, and allows viewers to feel closeness between him and themselves. Some Japanese studies specifically focus on the animal character language specificities in anime and manga. One of them is a research project by Akizuki (2012) that elaborates on the *nekogo* phenomenon and demonstrates various mechanisms of creating a specific language for animal characters.

A substantial study of cats in the Japanese history by Marinus Willem De Visser (1876-1930) contains the information revealing that as soon as a cat possesses a supernatural power, they start speaking and behaving like human beings (Opler, 1945: 269). The Jibanyan case approves this notion: he is addicted to chocolate sticks, and he is also a big fan of the group called “NyaKB”, which is a parody of AKB48 – an idol group incredibly popular in Japan. Figure 6 portrays Jibanyan as a typical *otaku* (usually, a hardcore fan of popular culture and products referring to it). He is looking at the posters and merchandise depicting the NyaKB members – these are cute girls wearing cat costumes. The images of highly sexualized female idols are popular commodities on the Japanese market: there are special shops in the Akihabara area (Tokyo) specializing in this kind of items. Not only does the scene on Figure 6 illustrate and emphasize typical elements of an “*otaku house*”, but it also creates a surrealistic dimension, where a cat dreams about humans cosplaying cats. This scene is not only a fascinating example of *transtextual* relationships in anime; it also expresses the situations where *yōkai* are adjusted into the contemporary time frame, and the authors try to predict their behaviour and reactions in this case. By doing this they push *yōkai* beyond the borders of “otherworldliness” reinventing the world as the place where *yōkai* and people coexist and share similar experiences.



Figure 6. Jibanyan as a devoted fan of an idol group ©L5/YWP-TX

When it comes to other elements pointing to *transtextual* relations between *Yo-kai Watch* and the “iconic” *yōkai* of Sekien, for instance, I would like to emphasize the way each *yōkai* of the series is presented. In the case of Jibanyan, the screen is divided into a visual image and text in order to get acquainted with this *yōkai* better (Figure 7). The name of the *yōkai* appears on a stylized piece of paper reminding viewers of an *ofuda* – a type of talismans commonly used by the Shinto followers for protection purposes; it is usually hung in houses to prevent evil spirits from coming inside. Sekien used a similar way of *yōkai* presentation in his early works (Foster, 2009: 62).



Figure 7. Similar ways of *yōkai* representation in traditional art and anime. On the left: a piece of art by Toriyama Sekien from “Gazu Hyakki Yagyō” (1776) (Kawasaki Shi Shimin Myūjiamu). On the right: a picture presenting Jibanyan to viewers from *Yo-kai Watch* ©L5/YWP-TX

Kyūbi



Figure 8. Kyūbi. From left to right: A work by Utagawa Kuniyoshi “Hanzoku Taishi to Kyūbi no Kitsune” (1855) (Kokuritsu Kokkai Toshokan); Kyūbi from *Yo-kai Watch* ©L5/YWP-TX; a work by Katsushika Hokusai “Sengoku Yōkoden” (1807) (Tōkyō Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan)

Kyūbi is a Nine-Tailed Demon Fox – in folklore, it is a powerful demonic fox. In the *Yo-kai Watch* series, Kyūbi is portrayed as a mysterious creature, who regularly visits the human world in order to achieve a certain goal. He wants to conquer the hearts of females by making them fall in love with him. In other words, Kyūbi is a typical “heartbreaker” whose actions would lead him to a higher rank in the *yōkai* world he originates from. The visual design of the character consists of vibrant colours mixed with a warm colour scheme used for “classical” kitsune depictions. The main feature of Kyūbi is, of course, the presence of the nine tails of golden and violet undertones; a fur “hood” around the neck, long sharp claws and a white head are also his most outstanding features. The body is significantly bigger compared to that of Jibanyan, for instance. Overall, the body parts are well-balanced and create an image of a gracious grown-up fox. The face of the character may well be inspired by masks used for the Nō theatre performances or Shinto religious ceremonies (such as the *kagura* dance): a white face with a long, strict jawline, and narrow eyes. It is known that Nō massively engaged folklore motives for its plays, and plays based on supernatural motives implied the appearance of such characters as ghosts, demons and other creatures (Matsuo, 2014: 38). Popular plays such as *Sesshōseki* (*The Killing Stone*) and *Kokaji* (*The Swordsmith*) feature the characters connected with foxes. This fact can stand for the importance of the *kitsune* in Japanese culture. The images of foxes in anime have absorbed both old and new elements of culture, which means that at times foxes are given new meaning and roles.

Initially, foxes were an essential element of Chinese folklore, where they were believed to be animals of a magical power (Huntington, 2003: 10). Japan, on the other hand, had been following animistic beliefs from ancient times, and could easily fit the Chinese outlook on foxes into its indigenous culture (Casal, 1959: 1). Later, the fox becomes the symbol attributed to the goddess Inari. In fact, her image and functions are identical to a Buddhist deity called Dakini – she is portrayed riding a white fox (Heine, 1999: 27). White foxes are also said to possess ultimate wisdom and become extremely powerful when they turn a hundred years old (Opler and Hashima 1946: 45). Kyūbi, however, is a superior type among all; they have nine tails, and regarded as “celestial” creatures, whose fur is of a golden colour (Kang, 2006: 23); this fact explains why Kyūbi from *Yo-kai Watch* has fur of golden colours. The works by Sawaki Sūshi and Katsushika Hokusai on Figure 8 follow the same pattern: their depictions of foxes are based on this “classic” colour of fur.

When it comes to supernatural powers, foxes were among the most powerful animals of Japanese folklore. In folktales, they were portrayed as creatures that ‘can travel through different spaces and realms’ (Dupuy, 2012: 138). Nine-tail foxes, in particular, were believed to possess a great power; they were believed to ‘serve in the halls of Sun and Moon’, and to be ‘versed in all the secrets of Nature’ (Casal, 1959: 8). An old legend incorporating a nine-tailed fox tells a story of Tamamo no Mae², a beautiful court lady serving at the court of the emperor Toba; this lady later turns out to be a demonic fox. Because of her immaculate beauty, wisdom and impressive knowledge, no woman of the court could transcend her supremacy. After the mysterious events of one night that had proved Tamamo no Mae to be of a supernatural pedigree, Abe no Yasunari (an exorcist), decided to catch a sly fox and punish her. Although she was able to escape from the emperor guardians after transforming into a fox of nine tails, the warriors of the emperor were fast enough to catch and kill the runaway. At the end of the story, Tamamo no Mae turned into a rock also known as Sesshōseki, which is believed to be a cursed object and bring death to anyone who passes by. The legend of Tamamo no Mae reveals a shadow aspect of foxes mainly associated with female energies detrimental for human males (Bathgate, 2004: 40). In the *Yo-kai Watch* series, Kyūbi represents a gender-swapped version of the nine-tailed demon fox portrayed in the Tamamo no Mae legend.

² Here I am quickly referring to Bathgate’s retelling of the legend (2004: 2-3).

Similarly to this character, he tries to hide his true shape by disguising himself as a good-looking boy, when he first meets Fumi-chan, a close friend of Keita. Kyūbi plans to make Fumi-chan fall in love with him and steal her heart as the last element needed for his ambitious goal. Just like Tamamo-no-mae revealed her true form when she got caught, Kyūbi in the series faces problems while trying to attract Fumi-chan: he becomes nervous and has to get away. Some details of his human shape might be especially engaging. For example, Kyūbi wears elegant clothes – possibly a uniform of an elite private school. The hair colour is light brown, and his eyes are green. Other funny details are connected with “fox” elements even when he is disguised as a boy: his hair combed up in the shape of fox ears; curly lashes and eyebrows also give a small hint of his true form. Kyūbi imitates an image of a foreign *ōjisama* (prince) to make Fumi-chan get interested. To me, this seems like a funny interpretation of the opinion that foreigners are very popular among Japanese people, which is not always true. The specific shape Kyūbi decided to take may reveal a new context of *yōkai* re-creation in the series. In *Yo-kai Watch*, *yōkai* do not necessarily represent Japanese elements alone – they can be mixed with foreign elements of design in order to create a new, fresh dimension of the *yōkai* culture, which could easily comply with a modern world agenda when cultures converge but remain well-recognized.

The last thing to point out is that this type of appearance vaguely manifests both feminine and masculine aspects of Kyūbi; the character voice also justifies this idea because it sounds more feminine compared to that of Keita, for example. Together with other *yōkai* who are often portrayed as antagonists, Kyūbi later becomes one of the friends of Keita.

A magical aspect of foxes is present in the series. Kyūbi can control fire and calls rain whenever he wants. The lore tells stories about foxes and their power over rain – people say strange or irregular rains are a sign of a fox wedding (Nakajima, 1960: 101). Apart from natural phenomena, foxes are connected with love magic (seduction) (Piven, 2003: 61), which also exists in the *Yo-kai Watch* series. To conclude, it can be said the authors were able to both construct an image of a fox-trickster typical for Japanese folklore and to modify it in order to add a new dimension to this character. Although Kyūbi may be cruel and selfish at times, he is adorably cute at his desperate attempts to make Fumi-chan like him.



Figure 9. Kyūbi in his human form ©L5/YWP-TX

Kappa and Nogappa

The kappa is undoubtedly one of the most well recognizable *yōkai* in the Japanese bestiary. This representative of the *yōkai* world regularly shows up in Japanese folklore, especially in *mukashibanashi* (folktales); it is also a popular mascot for places³ and brands. In the series, the kappa is presented to viewers as a “celebrity” of the *yōkai* world. He lives in the city river and silently watches the human world while Keita is trying to solve the mystery of strange events happening next to the river.

A typical kappa is often described as a short (approximately the size of a three or four-year-old child, at times slightly taller) creature with skin covered with scales, a beak-mouth, and a carapace on the back (Foster, 1998: 4). The plate-like spot on the top of the head is filled with water, and this liquid makes the creature practically invulnerable. The word “kappa” has similar variants in the Japanese language: *mizuchi*, *kawaranbe*, *kawauso*, etc. Each of them is different depending on the region: the “standard” name, for instance, belongs to the Kanto and Tohoku regions and can be translated as “a child of the river” (Komatsu, 2017: 78-79). In the *Yo-kai Watch* series, the character is called Nogappa, which is a combination of two words: “wild duck” (*nogamo*) and “kappa”. It must be pointed out, however, that there is a second kappa character in the series called Kappa. I will intentionally elaborate on the two kappa images of the series in order to show how transtextuality creates new dimensions and understandings of the *yōkai* culture.

The two versions of the kappa may be an attempt of authors to provide their outlook on the water monster in a “traditional” and “modern” way. Compared to the seventeenth-century depiction portraying the kappa (Figure 10) it is clear that Nogappa is a result of major transformations of this *yōkai*: the general impression is that Nogappa represents

³ For example, Ushiku city (Ibaraki prefecture), Sumida city (Tokyo), Shiki city (Saitama prefecture).

something new and drastically different from the “original” kappa. His name is written in *katakana* (whereas *kappa* is usually written in *kanji*), as well as the proportions of his body (as in the case of Jibanyan) are hyperbolized and uneven. Nogappa has blue skin, whereas the kappa is typically depicted as a creature of emerald green undertones. Apart from the visual features, the behaviour of Nogappa is different from his predecessors. Although the kappa is not the most dangerous and bloodthirsty monster of all the *yōkai*, there are rumours and local legends blaming it of dragging people and livestock underwater or trying to steal the so-called *shirikodama* (a mysterious object situated in the human fundament) from a human’s body. Nogappa, on the contrary, is not aggressive at all: he is rather as curious as a child silently observing the world around him. A distinct feature not emblematic of the kappa is to leave its natural habitat for too long: the liquid inside the dish on the head may accidentally evaporate or spill out, which could make the kappa lose its power and become vulnerable. Nogappa seems like an exception among the other relatives: the red bottle hanging from his neck illustrates that he is a traveller exploring the world outside of his dwelling, but he still can be safe thanks to the water bottle.

On the other hand, the second kappa character is represented as a rival to Nogappa: especially from the viewpoint of his appearance that possibly was inspired by the classical iconography of the kappa. A small detail standing out from the typical kappa image is a skirt made of straws, as well as a big bottle made of gourd – in contrast to the features and design of Nogappa. As Figure 10 shows, the name of Kappa is spelled in kanji – this spelling is identical to the *yōkai* name depicted on two Edo period scrolls – *Gazu Hyakki Yakou* (1776) and *Bakemono Tsukushi Emaki* (exact date unknown). Although in this case a more thorough semantic analysis of the word “kappa” may be needed, I would suggest that the usage of *katakana* in the case of Nogappa’s name stands for the changes in the contemporary Japanese language: slang words, as well as other neologisms, are usually written in *katakana*. Moreover, *katakana* is an easy system for children’s perception – thus, Nogappa can be associated with the new generation. The spelling of Kappa’s name, on the other hand, is more impacted by history and traditions, yet more complicated; this is what kanji represent. The rivalry between the two kappa characters is emphasized even more with the help of different spelling of their names.

Both kappas meet each other in the series and start competing in sports such as swimming and sumo (kappa are skillful sumo-wrestlers according to *mukashibanashi* and other folklore texts) in order to decide who is “the real kappa”. The voice of the

“classic” kappa (as he is addressed in the series) sounds sophisticated and mature; in general, he looks and behaves assertively and aggressively, whereas Nogappa is competitive yet more friendly.

In the end, Nogappa becomes a winner of the competition because of his idea of using sunscreen and moisturizer applied on his head to prevent liquid evaporation. When the competition is over, self-confident and arrogant Kappa finally becomes a friend of Keita and admits that Nogappa is “the real Kappa.”



Figure 10. Kappa. From left to right: A picture drawn by the witness of Kappa in Oita (1624-1644) (Kawasaki Shi Shimin Myūjiamu); Nogappa from *Yo-kai Watch* ©L5/YWP-TX; Kappa from *Yo-kai Watch* ©L5/YWP-TX

In further episodes, Nogappa and Kappa decide to start a rap band, although from the beginning conservative Kappa claims to dislike this kind of music (he prefers classic *enka* or Japanese ballads); eventually, he admits enjoying rap too, saying how important it is to appreciate and try new things. These words of him may become an argument for Kappa and Nogappa representing two dichotomies (traditions and modernity) united together. In my opinion, this is a significant moment when it comes to the demonstration of the transtextuality mechanism in the series. Not only are some texts portraying the “classical” kappa tangible and decently represented (most notable features and habits of the kappa were acknowledged), they are also united to show that it is important to remember and respect both traditions and novelty – a certain lesson for children to be learned. Moreover, the example of two kappas representing different dichotomies makes us question the very notion of the authenticity of one *yōkai*, and artificiality of another. In other words, I believe that transtextuality encourages the *yōkai* culture to find inspiration in the past, but still be able to add new meanings and enlarge the understanding of the *yōkai* culture corresponding to a concrete time frame.



Figure 11. Nogappa and Kappa as rappers ©L5/YWP-TX

Yuki-onna / Fubuki-hime

Yuki-onna is a female *yōkai* representing an entity related to winter, snow, and ice. In the *Yo-kai Watch* series she is re-created as Fubuki-hime (Princess Snowstorm), a cheerful princess of the Cold clan, who is constantly freezing everybody, not because of her malicious nature, but because her powers seem to activate when she becomes too emotional.

Yuki-onna is said to appear in snowy regions of Japan such as Aomori, Akita, Iwate, etc. Similar to the kappa, her name varies from region to region: she is called Yuki-Nyōbō in the Yamagata and Tochigi prefectures, Yuki-Musume in Saitama and Niigata, Yuki-Hime in Okayama and Yuki-Jorō in Fukushima and Nagano respectively (Ine, 2011: 19). In most folktales, she is portrayed as an adult female, nightmarishly beautiful and mysterious. Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904), a writer and collector of Japanese folk stories, including the stories of mysterious and unexplainable, described Yuki-onna in the following manner:

She is the White One that makes the Faces in the snow. She does not any harm, only makes afraid. By day she lifts only her head, and frightens those who journey alone. But at night she rises up sometimes, taller than the trees, and looks about a little while, and then falls back in a shower of snow (1894: 638).



Figure 12. Yuki-onna. From left to right: A work by Toriyama Sekien from “Gazu Hyakki Yakō” (1776) (Kawasaki Shi Shimin Myūjiamu); Yuki-onna from *Yo-kai Watch* ©L5/YWP-TX; a work by Sawaki Sūshi from “Hyakkai Zukan” (1737) (Fukuoka Shi Hakubutsukan); Fubuki-hime from *Yo-kai Watch* ©L5/YWP-TX

Toriyama Sekien and Sawaki Sūshi conveniently illustrated an iconographic representation of Yuki-onna: it was a Japanese woman with long jet-black hair, skin white as snow, and dressed in white clothes (Figure 12). Fubuki-hime of the *Yo-kai Watch* series is reimagined as a little girl (possibly of the same age as Keita), with a blue-haired ponytail. She has pale skin, light-blue eyes, and wears a light blue kimono with a snow pattern on it. A small yet important detail of the character is a blue-coloured ice comb crowning her head. The comb (*kamidome* in the series) is a magical item transforming a shy creature called Yuki-onna into her “alter ego” – active Fubuki-Hime. The comb here may be understood as a symbol of magical transformations; this symbol is already present in the Japanese myths of *Kojiki*, as Vasić pointed out (2010: 7). Fubuki-hime wears a blue hooded cape; she lives in a tiny house made of snow. Regardless of her “cold” nature, Yuki-onna sleeps under a warm *kotatsu* and enjoys drinking hot tea. When transformed into Yuki-onna, Fubuki-hime is a very calm character that does not freeze everything next to her; therefore, in some episodes, her friends of were trying to hide the comb to prevent Fubuki-Hime from freezing anybody. Unlike the Yuki-onna portrayed in lore as an extremely dangerous *yōkai* who freezes people to death with her breath, Fubuki-hime does not lurk in the dark for preys. On the contrary, she soon becomes friends with Keita. Being a princess and the member of the Cold clan, she always tries to be in good terms with the *yōkai* of the Hot clan. She also promotes friendship and mutual understanding between these seemingly rival clans.

As was mentioned in the previous paragraph, Yuki-onna follows the rituals and lifestyle of a regular human because of her past. According to the story, Yuki-onna was

once an ordinary girl who got lost in the mountains (episode 125). Trying to find a shelter, she hid in the cave but froze to death in the end. There is a drastic difference in the depictions of Fubuki-hime as a *yōkai* and as a human. The “human version” of Yuki-onna looks “normal”: her hair and eyes are brown, and there is no obvious disproportion between her head and body size. On the other hand, Yuki-onna is a “big head-small body” character; there are mainly bright blue colours in her design. I find these contrasts especially interesting and possibly important for understanding the differences between the world of the supernatural and “natural” portrayed in the *Yōkai Watch* series where *yōkai* look cute, funny, and bizarre.



Figure 13. Yuki-onna (Fubuki-hime) as a human being. Episode 125. ©L5/YWP-TX

Conclusions

Yōkai characters have witnessed various transformations varying from otherworldly creepy creatures in the form of picture scrolls and to *yōkai* as vivid and fancy-looking characters of popular culture. These transformations indicate the process where traditions transforming into something more related to modernity and better perceived by the current generation. In this context, preserving traditions and elements now regarded as “classical” does not imply rejecting modern trends and neglect newer approaches. In other words, I believe that the strict differentiation between “high culture” and “mass culture” or “popular culture” hinders the perception of the latter as a culture that also stimulates a ‘moral and aesthetic response’ by the audience and represents an ‘individual act of creation’ – the premises often attributed to “high culture” (Storey, 2009: 6). Although popular culture may often refer to “high culture” and tends to re-create its contents in one way or another, it still expresses an

act of creation – especially when it comes to the creation of new meanings and perspectives on a particular subject.

Yōkai monsters seem like a perfect example of the re-creation process – more and more Japanese monsters are invading the world of anime, manga, video games, and other products.

It has been proposed that anime plays a significant role in raising peoples' awareness of *yōkai*. Major components of anime are graphics and audio effects; these premises allow portraying Japanese monsters in motion – as dynamically rendered creatures producing specific sounds or using supernatural powers such as transformation.

The re-creation of *yōkai* may be well explained through the mechanism of transtextuality, and the results of this mechanism may vary from small to distinct changes in the character design. The genre and target audience of anime as well may influence on characters' appearance, stylistics and behaviour. For instance, anime titles to be appreciated by young females (*shōjo*) often tend to create good-looking, and attractive humanized *yōkai* characters (usually male characters in this case); other genres and characteristics responding to the interests of certain viewers may as well incorporate sexualization towards *yōkai* characters. Unchanged names of *yōkai* used in anime visibly increase the chance of *yōkai* recognition by viewers – they are usually well aware of certain *yōkai* iconography.

The *yōkai* re-creation in the *Yo-kai Watch* series is chiefly influenced by its target audience – children. The anime segment targeting children (*kodomomuke*) is incredibly popular in Japan and is known by some peculiar features of the characters' depiction. Characters should not be creepy and terrifying; they are expected to be cute and entertaining. Although many of the *Yo-kai Watch* characters may be influenced by the *kawaii* and friendly *yōkai* of earlier anime projects, there are still the details worth appreciation.

Yo-kai Watch introduces a very positive outlook into the *yōkai* discourse. Each of the *yōkai* presented in the paper undergoes positive transformations and realizes the mistakes such as mischieving and “bad” actions. Jibanyan causes trouble for cars and pedestrians because he wants to be loved and remembered by his owner. Kappa is initially mean to other characters but later admits his mistakes and becomes friends with them. Yuki-onna tries hard to make friends with everyone despite their backgrounds. Kyūbi desires to become the strongest of all the *yōkai* – therefore, he is

arrogant and self-centred. However, he is ready to help other characters when they are in trouble. Being friends and supporting each other is one of the main themes of the series; even the ending song of the series called *Yo-kai Exercise No. 1 (Yōkai Taisō Daiichi)* proclaims how ‘significant friends are’ (*tomodachi daiji*).

The majority of monsters here are *kawaii* or funny: this trend is mainly featured in the visual design of characters; the proportions of bodies are often not balanced: a big head is an element of cuteness just as big eyes and small noses; character voices are high-pitched, reminding of that of children.

Interactions with *yōkai* serve as a useful lesson for young viewers – *yōkai* can be perceived as “teachers” of these children. Secondly, key characters are ordinary children, and their explorations of the *yōkai* world are parallel to a journey to the adult world. In the context of *yōkai* narratives targeting children, *yōkai* represent the world of causes and consequences – the examples of the interaction with *yōkai* help children to grasp moral and ethical standards of behaviour, giving precautions for young viewers.

On the other hand, the series is undoubtedly specific as it reveals various layers and aspects of transtextuality by its comic references to other genres and products of popular culture that are hidden in episodes, and these details are to be appreciated and understood by grown-ups rather than children. For example, an AKB48 parody in the series will be most likely appreciated by adults who are familiar with Japanese idols and all-girl bands. Another funny moment is a reference to T-800’s (from the *Terminator* movies) iconic phrase “I’ll be back” – in episode 9, a *yōkai*-robot called Robonyan uses this phrase when leaving Keita’s house. In this regard, I would connect this idea of references and parodies to appeal to both children and their parents. In the end, it is parents who are in charge of their children’s choices when it comes to TV shows and other media targeting children.

When analyzing the series, it is important to mention that Keita has an album where he collects all the friendship medals he got from every monster as a sign of friendship. Each *yōkai*, in particular, represents a unit, a piece of puzzle helping Keita to grasp and explore the world. An identical approach to *yōkai* can be traced back to the *yōkai* catalogues popular in the Edo period – the album of Keita is on a par with a tendency of collecting and displaying the chaotic *yōkai* world into a logical order. Moreover, the monster database on Whisper’s device is a distant reference to the *yōkai* database collected and cherished by *yōkai* enthusiasts and researchers, such as Mizuki Shigeru.

Another point to consider is how the human world and the world of supernatural are interconnected through the perception of Keita. Old stories of *yōkai* and mysterious events, such as *kwaidan*, are often based on accidents when the border of natural and supernatural becomes so thin that beasts and other scary creatures are portrayed as the main antagonists. Characters of these stories accidentally happen to witness frustrating phenomena without being able to control these powers, whereas Keita of *Yo-kai Watch* becomes the “master” of *yōkai* to a certain extent. His magic watch becomes an object connecting the two worlds. Moreover, the very attempt of Keita to control or manipulate the “*yōkai* incidents” may be understood as an allusion to the attempts of humans to cope with the uncertainty and vagueness of the world – and this idea makes the series even more mindful and worth attention. In short, such an approach to *yōkai* represents a modern outlook on the world of mysterious and unexplainable, where people throw their efforts to capture and research something intangible.

Some of the *yōkai* appearing in the series are re-created as victims of tragic events and accidents: Yuki-onna, for instance, was once a little girl died in the mountains, Jibanyan was hit by a track, and Jinmenken (“a dog with a human face”) used to be a *sarariman* (a wageman), who lost his life due to his reckless actions. It can be said that the whole concept of *yōkai* is different in the series: *yōkai* are not only the spirits connected with certain natural objects, as Yanagita once proposed. Animals, former people and otherworldly entities are all intertwined and united by the concept of *yōkai*. At times, completely new characters are introduced into the series. They are a comic or satirical representation of everyday issues, not entities connected with natural powers and places: for example, a *yōkai* causing spending money on unnecessary things, or a *yōkai* not letting people go outside and communicate with the outer world (consumerism and *hikikomori* respectively). The modern monsters of the *Yo-kai Watch* series remind us of the society’s current problems, and this actuality allows *Yo-kai Watch* to be popular around the world.

To conclude, the re-creation of *yōkai* characters in anime can be analyzed through the lens of transtextuality, where relationships between the texts result in minor or major differences in *yōkai* depiction. *Yo-kai Watch* contains allusions to either historical depictions of *yōkai* and modern popular culture (including both Japanese and foreign popular topics and texts). Here *yōkai* are re-created as funny and cute entities helping children to grow up and understand the world around them, be friendly and ready to

help others. The series smartly highlights or parodies actual concerns or situations, familiar to everyone. From the viewpoint of transtextual connections, it is possible to suggest that the series relates to and appreciates the *yōkai* culture while creating its dimension of the supernatural that is relevant nowadays.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nargiz BALGIMBAYEVA is currently a Ph.D. student at the University of Tsukuba. She has been interested in Japanese culture since junior high school and later started studying Japanese Linguistics at the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University. After having an opportunity of one-year studying at the University of Tsukuba as an exchange student and getting a bachelor degree in Kazakhstan, she enters the University of Tsukuba for the Special Program in Japanese and Central Eurasian Studies (1+3 Combined MA and Ph.D. Program). The main areas of her interest are Japanese popular culture (especially anime and games), Japanese folklore and mythology, *yōkai* (supernatural creatures and phenomena).

