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REPLICAS OF SOCIAL CHANGE: EXAMINING REFLECTIONS OF RELIGIOUS SHIFTS
IN JAPANESE SOCIETY THROUGH LITERARY DEPICTIONS OF KITSUNE
CHARACTERS

SOPHIA PRESSLER

80 Pages

This study examines the roles of female *kitsune* (fox) characters in Japanese literature in different historical eras: the Heian period (794-1185), the Edo period (1603-1868), the Meiji period in addition to the period before the end of World War II (1868-1945), and the modern day (late twentieth to early twenty-first centuries). The goal of this analysis of kitsune folk tales, legends, and stories is to reunite the ‘folk’ with their folklore - providing evidence of how the content of folk tales, legends, and other stories are shaped by their contexts and thus serve as valuable historical records of the lives and minds of the people who created them. The construction and portrayal of female kitsune characters has been especially influenced by the historical, political, and religious environments of their respective periods in Japanese history. The social status and gendered expectations placed upon women at different times in Japan had a significant effect upon the narrative functions of kitsune women. From their use as tools in teaching and proselytizing Buddhist values in the Heian period, to serving as an agent for the subversion of gender norms and covert political/social criticisms in the Edo period, to becoming living memories and holdouts of “traditional” Japanese society born of a desire to preserve the past in the face of the drastic changes of the Meiji period, and finally to their current position as

pop culture icons heralded for their cute or overtly sexualized characteristics both within Japan and abroad, the kitsune woman is undoubtedly able to retain her popularity as a result of her ambivalent and adaptable nature. The kitsune is uniquely intertwined and tied up with perceptions and expressions of the feminine in Japan.

KEYWORDS: Kitsune, Japan, Society, Gender, Religion, Literature, Folk Tales, Legends

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SOPHIA PRESSLER

A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

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ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2022

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CHARACTERS

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S.P.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The Japanese folk tradition contains an impressive array of supernatural creatures like the *yōkai*, *mononoke*, *ayakashi*, *yūrei*, *kami*, and *bakemono* (respectively: demons, spirits, supernatural creatures, ghosts, gods/goddesses and shapeshifters). Some of these beings date back to the oral folklore traditions of ancient Japan, while others have been “discovered” or created by various authors and artists from the ancient period to the modern day. There are several well-known types of *yōkai* like the *tengu* (crow demon) and *oni* (ogre), as well as subcategories of *yōkai* like *bakemono* (shapeshifters, also known as *obake*) who have maintained their popularity within the folk tales and legends of Japan throughout its history. Of the *bakemono*, the *tanuki* (raccoon dog) and the *kitsune* (fox) - both of which are supernatural shapeshifters named after their real-life counterparts - have remained at the forefront of Japanese story-telling and literary traditions.

The *kitsune* is arguably the most popular animal character featured in Japanese folklore and superstitions according to Nozaki (1961). Stories of *kitsune* are found throughout the country, and the *kitsune* is often loved but also feared by the Japanese people. The first *kitsune* stories existed in the oral tradition predating the Heian period (794-1185) in Japan and their evolutions and retellings have continued until the present day. The fascination with *kitsune* stories can lend insight into the Japanese perspective, as other folk tales and legends have lent insight into their respective origins. Stories such as the *kitsune*’s often serve as reflections of supernatural beliefs, historical events, religious observances, household customs, and economic practices (Dorson 1961b, 406; Miller 1987). In order to understand the persevering and relatable nature of the *kitsune* in Japanese culture, it is necessary to examine a variety of accounts of the

tricksters as they appear in ancient to modern Japan. Aside from their popularity, the kitsune differ from tanuki and other bakemono in that the majority of the stories of kitsune transforming into humans specifically feature their transformation into human women, rather than men¹. Kitsune tales from various historical periods, with an emphasis on the narratives of kitsune transforming into human women, were chosen as their analysis provides strong evidence of the ways in which Japanese attitudes, with particular regards to gender and sexuality, have evolved in response to major changes in the social, political, and religious contexts of Japanese history.

Legends and Religious Concepts and Practices

A culture's religious conceptions are one of the primary determiners of the construction of legends and folk tales. Richard M. Dorson (1961b) argued that the *densetsu* (local legend) was the primary expression of the Japanese *minkan shinkō* (folk belief) and as such, it reflected "supernatural belief, historical event, religious observance, household custom, [and] economic practice" (406-407) as well as the religious systems of Animism, Shintoism, and Buddhism. Fanny Hagin Mayer's (1974, 73-74) "Religious Concepts in the Japanese Folk Tale" mirrored the sentiment that folk tales contain a variety of religious concepts, but with an added emphasis on the different ways religion is portrayed to the narrator, listener, and the protagonist. For Mayer, this includes considering the social position and motivations of the narrator or storyteller, how the narrator relates his or herself to the protagonist, and how the listener is meant to interpret the story. Mayer (1974, 75) further states that, "life in the folk tale concerns more than man," as the primary function of the tale is to help humans navigate and explain the mysteries of life. Thus, religious beliefs can be seen to influence both the author's depiction of characters'

genders, behaviors, and actions, and the ways in which the audience perceives those same factors.

It can be assumed that those early folk tales and stories such as those in the *Nihon Ryōiki* and the *Konjaku Monogatari* which were compiled during the Nara period (710-794) and the Heian period (794-1185) by a monk at the Yakushiji Temple, Kyōkai (birth and death years unknown) and a chief councilor of the Uji area, Minamoto no Takakuni (b. 1004-d.1077), which will be examined in the next chapter, were influenced by oral folk tale traditions. While kitsune narratives in literature may not have the fluidity of oral tales, these stories are still reflective of the social practices and beliefs of the Japanese people at a specific moment in time in a similar way to their oral predecessors. This is supported by the fact that many of the recorded kitsune stories from various time periods were transcriptions of oral stories that the author had heard from someone else. Even after the advent of writing, and resulting collections like the *Konjaku Monogatari*, the oral tales of kitsune persisted among the Japanese citizens in their everyday lives. The twentieth century specifically experienced a dramatic rekindling of interest in the folk tale within Japan and the collection of oral stories from the folk in rural communities due to the work of Yanagita Kunio (b. 1875-d. 1962) which will be further discussed in chapter 4.

The images of kitsune are abundant in the Japanese cultural landscape, from historical depictions in legends to modern sources such as anime and manga. However, even with the abundance of material to draw on, the study of the kitsune by English scholars is lacking - due in part to the lack of sources translated into English (Goff 2007, 243). Though the last few decades of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have seen a greater interest by scholars in the kitsune and other yōkai as Japanese popular culture has become popular not just in Japan, but also in Western countries like the United States. Nozaki Kiyoshi's (1961, vii) *Kitsune: Japan's Fox of*

Mystery, Romance, and Humor asserts that the kitsune is “closely related to the life of the Japanese people from olden times.” Nozaki also argues that the fox can be seen as a reflection of the national character: mysterious, fascinating, mischievous, grateful, affectionate, and romantic. This depiction of the fox occurred after the fox’s introduction from China and Korea, when the Japanese took the character and adapted it to fit with their ideals (Nozaki 1961, viii). The fox often can be taken as a mysterious, but benevolent character who gives signs of good fortune. And while the fox is almost always taken as mischievous and prank-loving, they are shown to virtuously honor their debts and promises. This is likely why the fox is loved and worshiped by the Japanese.

The earliest mention of the kitsune is found in the *Nihon Shoki* (720) where it was respected as a good omen in the story of an emperor who sees a white nine-tailed fox and says that white is his color, and that nine tails are the “sign of a good wife” (Johnson 1974, 39; Nozaki 1961, 4). Nozaki (1961, 4) describes a turn in the attitudes of writers during the 10th and 11th centuries when the kitsune received no affection and instead was “associated in literature in general with such a thing as an apparition or a wraith.”

And yet Nozaki contradicts himself when he attributes the first treatment of kitsune as hero or heroine to the *Konjaku Monogatari* - written in the 11th century. According to Nozaki, Takakuni wrote² the *Konjaku Monogatari* to enlighten the people about Buddhism and the superior practices of *Tenjiku* (India) and *Shintan* (China): “the two great nations to which Japan owed a debt of gratitude” (1961, 20). Thus, the *Konjaku Monogatari* serves as not only a depiction of religious thought, but it is also useful for discovering the manners, customs, thoughts, morality, and superstitions of the Japanese during the Heian period (Nozaki 1961, 22). This is also characteristic of the stories recounted herein from the Edo period to the modern day.

While Nozaki excels at providing evidence of the fox's popularity throughout Japan's history, he provides no discussion of the ways the fox implicitly models Japanese behavior or reflects aspects of Japanese society.

The discussion of the kitsune's social aspects can be found elsewhere, for example, in Miyamoto Yuki's (2010) examination of the folklore of the kitsune to assess the ethical implications of fox images in Tomiyama Taeko's paintings. Miyamoto found the fox image to be "ubiquitous in Japanese literature and folklore," but the origins of the image and its associated meanings are often compound and uncertain (2010, 73-74).

Gender and Sexuality

Like most of the studies on kitsune, Miyamoto focuses some of her analysis on the transformation ability of the fox, specifically, the ability of the kitsune to transform into a human woman. This association of foxes and women has a long history in East Asia, and Yoshino Hiroko (2001) argues this association is due to Chinese Yin-Yang philosophy. Yoshino believes that a fox transforms into a human woman because a female fox belongs to the yin category and seeks masculine yang energy, while a male fox who belongs to the yang category transforms into a woman to complement its energy with feminine yin attributes (Yoshino 2001, 49; Miyamoto 2010, 76-77). The foxes of the following stories either transform into women, are described as women, or were born with the appearance of a human woman (sometimes with fox ears and a tail as their only noticeable indication of their kitsune identity) but none of these foxes give the consumption of male or yang energy as a motive for their human interactions so no comment can be made as to the validity of Yoshino's theory.

The portrayal of women in Heian era literature is explored more generally by Raechel Dumas' (2013) article that analyzes the constructions of women's bodies in the *Nihon Ryōiki*. The *Nihon Ryōiki* can be used to gather insights into not only religious ideologies, but perceptions of gender in early Japan (Dumas 2013, 250). Dumas states that the female body has always "occupied an axiomatic role in the literary transmission and subversion of normative culture values, frequently being ambivalently figured as an object of simultaneous desire and disgust" within Japan's literary tradition (2013, 247). This ambivalent characterization of women in Japanese literature closely resembles that of the kitsune's flexible benevolent or malevolent nature within stories. Women's bodies communicated ideas about piety and religious devotion within the *Nihon Ryōiki* through Kyōkai's use of female sexuality and purity or lack thereof as will be seen in chapter 2 (Dumas 2013). Additionally, the various iterations of the famous evil fox-woman, Tamamo no Mae's story from approximately the fifteenth to nineteenth century that are explored in chapter 3 serve as an excellent example of the ever-changing and moldable nature of the kitsune (and kitsune as woman) character to suit their environment and time.

Miyamoto also cites Steven Heine's (1999) interpretation of the common fox transformation into not just a woman, but also a bride, as proof that the fox "appears to require male vigor" (2010, 77). The fox-bride stories suggest that this male energy can only be acquired through sexual intercourse, which explains the "seductive fox-women" motif found in "Japanese folklore, Onmyōdō legend, and Buddhist fables" (Miyamoto 2010, 77). It is important to note that not only Buddhism, but Japanese traditional natural science like Onmyōdō, was based on the Chinese Yin and Yang philosophy. As a result, the images of kitsune have been heavily influenced by Chinese views in those periods. There are several fox bride stories examined in this paper, and while the kitsune brides do not necessarily appear to have overtly sexual motives

there is a tendency to describe kitsune women as promiscuous and desirous of romantic relationships with human men.

T.W. Johnson (1974) expands on the concept of the seductive fox in Chinese folklore and legends. The majority of “vixen” in these tales are good-natured while the male fox who has relations with women is “always vicious” – this can be seen as a reflection of the “patriarchal nature of Chinese society” (Johnson 1974, 40). It is probable that the ancient Japanese fox tales exhibit a similar tendency to reflect the patriarchal nature of Japanese society in the Heian period. And by looking at the fox tales from different historical periods while aware of the various social, political, and religious conditions from which they emerged, we can see how the changes in the gendered organization and hierarchies of Japanese society are affecting the kitsune’s portrayal and uses.

The dichotomy between portrayals of kitsune women versus kitsune men is much harder to judge within the body of Japanese folklore as the kitsune-turned-male is difficult to come by in terms of the available translated literature. Modern stories, especially in manga and anime, featuring male kitsune as both main and supporting characters are relatively popular. The seeming increase in male kitsune characters is outside of the scope of this analysis but could lend complementary insight into the contrasting portrayals and underlying significance of male kitsune as compared to their female counterparts.

Theory and Method

This study follows in the tradition of the Dorson (1961b), Mayer (1974), and Miller (1987) studies that assume the religious and cultural significance of Japanese folklore and legends as well as their use in better understanding historical perspectives. Alan Dundes (1965)

points out that there has historically been a divide between anthropologists and literary critics' study of folklore and folklorists' study of folklore. Anthropologists and literary critics have been criticized by folklorists for "failing to properly identify folkloristic materials before commenting upon their use," which from the folklorists' perspective usually results in "naive" analyses due to their incorrect or inadequate identification (Dundes 1965, 136). Folklorists, on the other hand, have been criticized for focusing too heavily on identification and stopping short of any deeper analysis.

Dundes argues that folklore studies have become too sterile: often it consists of recording text and identifying these texts and the motifs or proverbs therein without moving on to interpretation. Folklorists have instead developed a preference for collection, classification, storage, and comparison, and as Dundes has pointed out,

[t]he history of folklore scholarship is by and large a series of attempts to dehumanize folklore... Considering "folklore" without reference to "folk" is commonplace among folkloristics. Whether one assigns motif or tale type numbers, or attempts to structurally dissect a given folklore text, one can effectively forget about the fact that folklore is used as a means of traditional communication between humans (1976, 1502).

In this sense, folklore has adopted a "text-without-context orientation" (Dundes 1965, 136).

Dorson (1961a, 12-13) agrees that folklorists "are not especially history minded, and prefer to examine folk materials by category, such as folktale and folksong, proverb and riddle, rather than by historical period... reconstruct[ing] the historical migration of a single tale or ballad text, and does not attempt any larger synthesis with events of history." By concerning themselves with following a single tale's evolution (usually using the historical-geographical model in the style of Stith Thompson or Archer Taylor) without regard to its place within its own historical context, folklorists are missing

... a central value of folk materials for the historian, namely their placing on record attitudes, beliefs, values, and ethnocentric visions of the anonymous, inarticulate folk

who leave no documentary archives and lengthy autobiographies for the historian to consult... The purpose of the historian using such sources now shifts from verifying the facts and the dates of specific chronological events to establishing the social ideas, traditions, customs and behavior of segments of society during certain broad periods (Dorson 1961a, 14).

The simple fact that folk tales and other stories - in this case of the kitsune - have managed to stay relevant and withstand the test of time, being told, and retold over and over again, means they must appeal to many of the individual members of society in which they exist (Dundes 1976, 1501). Dundes describes folklore and other types of literature like comics, television, movies, etc. as projective materials which are essentially autobiographical ethnographies or “mirrors of culture” (1976, 1506). However, these stories do not mean much if you do not include the context in which they were created.

In consideration of these factors, the main analytical method of this study attempts to follow the advice of Dorson (1961a) and Dundes (1965, 1976, 1997a, 1997b) and analyze kitsune tales from the medieval to modern period in Japan while aware of the social, political, and religious contexts of their creation to determine how those conditions have shaped the narratives. Folk tales and legends are modeled on social, cultural, and ecological patterns, but they also reproduce said patterns. This concept is crucial to validating the importance of folk tales and legends in determining the historical perspectives of a culture. If a folk tale must be told in a way that follows social and cultural norms, then it follows that the folk tale is an accurate representation of those norms.

Because this study has chosen to focus on the content and context relationship of kitsune stories in the Japanese historical record, the tales in the following chapters have not been classified according to the Thompson Motif-Index or the ATU (Aarne-Thompson-Uther) Tale Type Index. As Dundes (1997b) points out, both of these motif and tale type indices have been

criticized for their Eurocentric nature - the concepts were developed based upon a European body of folklore and may not be as applicable to nonwestern materials. Other criticisms of the indices include their non-mutually exclusive categories and typing methods (it is difficult to determine which index is appropriate for which tale), the censorship imposed within the Thompson Motif-Index which excludes any tales or tale type that had “obscene” elements, and the Thompson Motif-Index’s inclusion of African or Native American tale types even though Thompson claimed to have not included any sources outside of Indo-European folklore (Dundes 1997b, 196-199). Likewise, Japanese folk tale classification systems such as those created by Yanagita Kunio and his follower, Seki Keigo have also not been used to classify these kitsune stories as they have already in many cases been classified by their collectors and other scholars. And as each of these tales have closely related types and motifs (the fox bride, supernatural foxes and humans, supernatural offspring, etc.) their tale type or motif classification seems unnecessary, even redundant, to this analysis.

Bathgate’s (2004) *The Foxes’ Craft in Japanese Religion and Culture: Shapeshifters, Transformations, and Duplicities* likens the difficulty of capturing the kitsune’s manifold cultural and religious significance to capturing a kitsune itself. Bathgate’s methods included identifying the central themes of fox symbolism, namely its status as a “*bakemono* shapeshifter,” and analyzing examples of the fox’s use throughout history, rather than limiting himself to a single time period (2004, xiii). Though as Janet Goff (2007) points out in her review of *The Foxes’ Craft*, this overarching historical view may not have been effective in this case. Bathgate’s work has several organizational and methodological weaknesses, including his mixing of story elements from different time periods (in the case of viewing a single story and its subsequent adaptations, characteristics from later adaptations were attributed to earlier ones) and his

emphasis on the negative aspects of foxes. Goff also cites the lack of bibliographical information to support some of Bathgate's claims, and his tendency to make claims of sources that are inaccurate or simply not present within the sources (2007, 244). In order to avoid the fallacy of a limited historical scope, this study examines kitsune from the Heian period to the modern era as a starting point for consideration of the kitsune's development and adaptation throughout Japanese history.

An analysis of the kitsune balanced between close reading and *longue durée* methods has also been attempted here. For Bathgate, this meant avoiding focusing on the particularities of the many kitsune stories and their variants while also remaining aware of the dangers of reducing the kitsune's various and intertwining meanings into a single interpretation (2004, xi). And though Bathgate chose to avoid this by determining the main symbolic interpretations of the fox and evidencing them with examples from historical periods, this study instead will examine examples of the kitsune within their respective time periods to discover how these kitsune stories fit within the religious, social, and political contexts of their time. The limitations of this study are its small scope of analysis regarding the religious and ideological influences - each chapter focuses on the religion(s) or ideologies that had the greatest assumed influence during the era of examination - and number of stories examined.

The following analyses of kitsune stories will explore several different aspects of each narrative to better understand how they relate to not only the conditions of their creation but to the groups, classes, and genders represented therein. Firstly, by examining the intended purpose of the story being told, an idea of the author's possible social or ideological motivations is gained. The author's motivations then give evidence for the social pressures which may have affected their writing and narrative choices. There should also be discussion of the relationships,

items, individuals, or beings that appear repeatedly in these stories, which in this circumstance includes social structures and references to kitsune or foxes. The relationships and institutions that are seen in the kitsune stories are likely to be representative of the physical world they were created in.

Placing the analysis of a single story within the context of similar stories provides a method of comparison for the thematic content within each. The juxtaposition of similar stories helps to pinpoint the elements and themes that are repeated in different narratives and those that are not. Rather than following a strict structuralist method that analyzes the narrative sequence or structure of tales, a comparative content-context analytical method is employed to aid the discovery of the underlying cultural paradigms, or “folk ideas” as Dundes (1971) terms them. The methods used in this analysis are structural in that they attempt to emulate Lévi-Strauss’s descriptions of not the structure of story, but the structure of the world described in the story (Dundes 1997a, 43).

This part of the analytical process is what allows for the structural methods of Lévi-Strauss to be placed within the context of the story’s creation. The structure of a kitsune legend can be seen as representative of the social and cultural norms that defined its creation only if its analysis actively acknowledges the existence of said norms. The consequent discussions of cultural and social aspects of different periods within Japanese history on the content and structure of kitsune legends attempts to put the “folk” at the forefront of understanding the deeper reflective and reflexive natures of folk tales.

CHAPTER II: HEIAN PERIOD (794-1185): KITSUNE AND BUDDHISM

To understand the continuity of the kitsune in Japanese culture, it is necessary to examine those first accounts of the tricksters as they appear in the historical record. The analysis of kitsune tales from the Heian period provides evidence of Japanese views, with a focus on gender and sexuality, in the social, political, and religious context of ancient Japan. The earliest written kitsune story appears in the *Nihon Ryōiki* - a collection of Buddhist tales compiled and written down by the Buddhist monk, Kyōkai, during the 9th century. By this time, Buddhism was flourishing in Japan, and the ideas and traditions of China and India greatly influenced Japanese people.

This influence is particularly prevalent in Minamoto-no-Takakuni's *Konjaku Monogatari* (Tales, Present and Past) written in the late Heian period. Takakuni showed great reverence toward the religious beliefs and social ideologies employed by *Tenjiku* (India) and *Shinten* (China); and this reverence is reflected in the narratives of the *Konjaku Monogatari*. Many of Takakuni's kitsune tales serve as an example for Buddhist teachings including the importance of gratitude, sympathy, keeping your own confidences, and the dangers of captivating beauty (Nozaki 1961, 21). The stories of both Kyōkai and Takakuni were written during a time when the common people relied on superstitions as relief from the previous tyrannical rule (Nozaki 1961, 5). The early Heian period also saw a decline in the political positions of aristocratic women within the imperial court after the reign of Emperor Kanmu (r. 781-806) (Sanae and Watanabe 2007, 15-16). This chapter argues that it is this social environment that we see reflected in the kitsune tales from the Heian era.

Kitsune in the *Nihon Ryōiki*

As previously mentioned, the 9th century three volume collection of Buddhist tales, the *Nihon Ryōiki*, was written, or rather gathered, by the Buddhist monk Kyōkai (Goff 1997, 67; Mayer 1974, 88-89). The *Nihon Ryōiki* contains the oldest recorded version of a fox wife tale, and unlike the rest of the tales within, this fox wife tale had several versions originating from different regions which existed in the Japanese oral tradition predating the written collection (Mayer 1974, 88). The story, titled “On Taking a Fox as a Wife and Producing a Child,” is featured in the first volume of the *Nihon Ryōiki*. The story takes place during the reign of Emperor Kinmei (r. 539-571). It begins with the following description of events:

A man from Ōno district of Mino province set out on horseback in search of a good wife. In a field he came across a pretty and responsive girl. He winked at her and asked, “Where are you going, Miss?” “I am looking for a good husband,” she answered. So he asked, “Will you be my wife?” and, when she agreed, he took her to his house and married her (Nakamura 1973, 104).

Soon after their marriage she gives birth to a son. The couple’s dog also gives birth to a puppy on the same day. The puppy always barks and seems ready to attack the wife, so she asks her husband to “beat the dog to death” (Nakamura 1973, 104). The husband refrains out of pity for the dog. But one day while visiting the servants,

The dog, seeing her, ran after her barking and almost bit her. Startled and terrified, she suddenly changed into a wild fox and jumped up on top of the hedge. Having seen this, the man said, “Since a child was born between us, I cannot forget you. Please come always and sleep with me.” She acted in accordance with her husband’s words and came and slept with him. For this reason she was named “Kitsune” meaning “come and sleep.” Slender and beautiful in her red skirt (it is called pink), she would rustle away from her husband whereupon he sang of his love for his wife:

Love fills me completely
After a moment of reunion
Alas! She is gone.
(Nakamura 1973, 104-105)

One of the variants of this story which was spread by way of the oral storytelling tradition says that “the son of the fox became a great astrologer with the help of a magic object she left for him, and his line of descendants were astrologers;” though the story contained in the *Nihon Ryōiki* only describes the kitsune’s son as having extraordinary strength and swift feet (Mayer 1974, 88-89). Either way, the son usually receives some form of beneficial inheritance from his supernatural mother – a theme that will be echoed in later versions of this story.

Kitsune in the *Konjaku Monogatari*

There are several stories that feature kitsune within the Japanese section of the 28 extant volumes of the *Konjaku Monogatari*. Two of which, “The Story of a Fox Coming Disguised as a Wife” and “The Story of an Imperial Household Guard Officer Disillusioned by an Act of a Fox,” will be discussed here. The first story concerns a *zoshiki* samurai (low ranking country samurai) whose wife leaves their home to attend to some business. After becoming concerned because of her prolonged absence, the husband is relieved when she returns home. But,

[t]hen, to his surprise, another woman entered the house. She was a woman exactly like his wife: The same face – the same figure – the same voice – the same manner – in the same dress! The *zoshiki samurai* was puzzled, to say the least of it. *One of them must be a fox, or something in the guise of my wife, he thought. How to tell one from another? This was a very difficult thing for me to decide* (Nozaki 1961, 31).

In his confusion, the *zoshiki* draws his sword and attempts to kill the woman who arrived second. She pleads with him, “Are you going to kill me? Have you lost your mind?” (Nozaki 1961, 32). He then turns desperately towards the other woman, raising the sword above her head, ready to swing when she “scream[s] and implore[s] him to spare her, clasping her hands” (Nozaki 1961,

32). The zoshiki found her actions suspicious and he grabs her by the arm when she instantly turns herself into a fox, “makes water” on the man, and disappears barking into the night. The story concludes with the zoshiki reflecting upon the event:

The *zoshiki* samurai was angry with the fox for making a fool of him. But it was now too late. He should have set his mind to work a little earlier. It was his fault. In the first place, he should have caught both women and bound them with ropes. If he had done so, the fox would have revealed its natural shape sooner or later... The animal had evidently seen the wife of the zoshiki and wanted to disguise itself as the wife for fun. In such a case, one should be cautious not to be deceived by such a crafty and mischievous beast as a fox. The *zoshiki* was also lucky not to have killed his own wife (Nozaki 1961, 32).

The apparent moral of the story conveyed by the author here – that a man should be cautious of tricksters – implicates the feminity of both kitsune and wife as a potentially dangerous force to be avoided by wise men. The actions of the kitsune, wife, and husband will be discussed further in the later part of this chapter, as well as how these characters demonstrate and reinforce the social expectations and attitudes towards men and women in Heian period society.

“The Story of an Imperial Household Guard Officer Disillusioned by an Act of a Fox” describes the events of the night when *toneri* (Imperial palace guard) Yasutaka meets a fox in the disguise of a beautiful young woman on his way home from the Imperial palace. It was a bright moonlit night in the middle of September when,

[t]he *tonéri* [*sic*] officer caught sight of a young woman when he was approaching the pine-grove there. She was attired in an aster-colored dress of figured cloth. She had a superb figure, a fact he perceived at a glance. She must be a beautiful thing, Yasutaka imagined. The moonlight seemed to enhance her charm (Nozaki 1961, 51).

Yasutaka follows her until he soon overtakes her attractive figure:

He walked drawing near her. She seemed shy. She walked covering her face with a pictured fan. She looked pretty, with her stray tresses of the side-locks playing on her forehead and cheeks. Yasutaka drew close to her and touched her. She was faintly redolent of ranjatai (a precious incense first imported from Korea in the reign of the Emperor Shomu in the early part of the 8th century) (Nozaki 1961, 51-52).

Yasutaka questions the woman on why she is out so late and where she is going. She replies that she is headed to the house of someone who lives in Nishi-no-Kyo, to which he responds that he also lives in Nishi-no-Kyo. She asks if he knows her, but he only smiles in response.

The pair continue walking together until they reach the Konoyé gate of the palace, when Yasutaka thinks to himself, “They say that there lives a fox in the habit of bewitching people here in this premises. Is this charming girl a fox? And she is still covering her face with the fan. Very strange, this. Well, I will put the matter to the proof” (Nozaki 1961, 52). Yasutaka attempts to confirm his suspicions by grabbing the girl by one of her sleeves and telling her that he will disrobe her. He threatens her further by drawing his short sword, declaring that he will cut her throat and demanding she take her clothes off.

The *tonéri* [*sic*] officer now seized the girl by the hair. He pinned her against a pillar of the gate. He was on the point of plunging the sword into her throat when, unexpectedly, his nostrils were assailed with a pungent and offensive smell, so pungent and offensive, in fact, that, tough and daring as he was, Yasutaka loosed his grip on the girl, sneezing. In an instant, the fascinating girl changed herself into a fox and took to flight... Yasutaka felt chagrined at his unsuccessful attempt. Later, it is said, he went out nightly to see the fox assuming the shape of the charming girl (Nozaki 1961, 53).

Yasutaka still wanted to see the girl again, even after the events of that night, though he did not get another opportunity. This tale, like the last, comes with an explicit warning to the reader: “One should not try to become friendly with a charming girl walking alone of a night. In the case of Yasutaka, however, he was clever and cautious enough not to be cheated by a fox, they said” (Nozaki 1961, 53). This statement, and this story as a whole, provide some significant evidence of the status of women as sexual objects and of the perceptions of men’s responses to the threat – or temptation – of a woman’s sexual nature.

The Effect of Buddhism on Conceptions of Gender and Sexuality

To discuss the significance of these kitsune tales as reflections of Japanese society, it is necessary to first understand the forces at work during Heian era Japan. Buddhist doctrine flourished and spread throughout Japan during the Heian era, and as such it had a profound effect on Japanese ideologies. Dumas (2013, 251) asserts that the introduction of Buddhism to Japan, and its subsequent assimilation of pre-existing local belief systems, transformed “native spiritual beliefs and practices,” as well as “Japanese perceptions of gender.” Within Dumas’ analysis of the portrayal of women’s bodies in the *Nihon Ryōiki*, the most important influence that Buddhism had on the construction of gender was the “fundamental assumption... that the condition of the human body may be understood as an attestation to one’s spirituality, or lack thereof” (2013, 251). This assumption of Buddhist thought meant that women’s perceived bodily purity could be taken as a direct indication of their piety. Buddhism’s influence found traction within the literary tradition of Japan, which had historically functioned as one of the fundamental points of transmission for spiritual and cultural values (Dumas 2013, 252). This function of literature coincides with Dorson (1961b) and Mayer’s (1974) descriptions of stories as containing religious thought and social practices. The following analysis provides insight into the author’s depictions of characters’ genders, behaviors, and actions, and the audience’s perception of those factors. Each kitsune story is placed within the context of two similar kitsune stories to provide a method of comparison for the thematic content within each.

The *Nihon Ryōiki* is particularly important as a record of religious thought in Heian era Japan because its “compilation marks a pivotal moment in the proliferation of Buddhist doctrine within Japan” (Dumas 2013, 247). Kyōkai’s position as both Buddhist monk and author of the

Nihon Ryōiki, gives further authenticity to the theory that the *Nihon Ryōiki* is largely reflective of Buddhist doctrine and practices. The *Nihon Ryōiki* also belongs to the Buddhist *setsuwa* genre, which is “comprised of historical myths and legends, religious and folk narratives, and didactic anecdotes” (Dumas 2013, 252). This aspect of the *Nihon Ryōiki* as *setsuwa* literature makes its analysis particularly poignant for gaining cultural perspectives on everyday Heian era thoughts and practices.

The *Konjaku Monogatari* has similar religious affiliations to the *Nihon Ryōiki* as both were heavily influenced by Buddhist ideologies. As aforementioned, the author of the *Konjaku Monogatari* is said to have written the collection as a way to enlighten the Japanese people on the superiority of the Buddhist practices already adopted by Tenjiku (India) and Shintan (China). The numerous kitsune stories within the *Konjaku Monogatari* serve as evidence for the kitsune’s popularity among the Japanese, in addition to other social and cultural perceptions and practices which pervaded Heian era society.

Lessons of the Kitsune

Determining the culturally established motivations for recording these folk tales has been made simple because of the anecdotal nature of the kitsune stories in both the *Nihon Ryōiki* and the *Konjaku Monogatari*. The *Konjaku Monogatari* in particular offers readily identifiable morals at the conclusion of each tale. In the case of the “The Story of a Fox Coming Disguised as a Wife” the narrator concludes that, “In such a case, one should be cautious not to be deceived by such a crafty and mischievous beast as a fox. The *zoshiki* was also lucky not to have killed his own wife” (Nozaki 1961, 32). Though no overt sexual motivations are mentioned within this

story, the choice of the kitsune to transform into the wife of the zoshiki may imply some less obvious sexual undertones to the kitsune's character. In a similar fashion, "The Story of an Imperial Household Guard Officer Disillusioned by an Act of a Fox," wraps up with the following statement: "One should not try to become friendly with a charming girl walking alone of a night. In the case of Yasutaka, however, he was clever and cautious enough not to be cheated by a fox, they said" (Nozaki 1961, 53). Both conclusions provide morals for the audience that are alike in their purpose – beware of falling prey to the illusion of appearances. The women in these stories are literally foxes in disguise, but the overall message can be seen to apply more generally to women as the potential downfall of men because of their cunning nature. This idea of the impure women leading to the subsequent tainting of men's actions provides evidence of the Buddhist assumption of purity equals piety.

Further examples of Buddhism's effects on thematic elements of these stories are seen within the authors' portrayal of female and male bodies and actions, and the different ways in which female and male behaviors are perceived by the audience. This analysis argues that kitsune stories are particularly well-suited to representing conceptions of gender within the Heian era (and other periods as will be evidenced in the next chapters) because of the twin nature of Japanese literary portrayals of women and foxes as ambivalent characters. Kitsune are often pictured in the same way Dumas (2013, 247) describes the female body's presentation as an object of simultaneous desire and disgust. Therefore, the tendency of the Japanese literary tradition to portray kitsune as transforming into human women could be said to be a result of the similar ways in which kitsune and women are viewed by society. Likewise, the depiction of women as kitsune could be suggestive of the ways that women are viewed within Heian era society.

The kitsune women within the above three stories are all described in similar ways. The fox wife from the *Nihon Ryōiki* is said to be a “pretty and responsive girl” who is “slender and beautiful” (Nakamura 1973, 104-105). This kitsune is portrayed as a docile woman who becomes easily scared at the thought of the family’s dog attacking her. Even after her husband discovers her identity as a fox, she readily obeys him and acts “in accordance with her husband’s words” as he requests that she comes and sleeps with him every night (Nakamura 1973, 105). This obedience or subservient nature of the kitsune wife may be more indicative of the Japanese feminine ideal rather than the influence of Buddhism. It may also be evidence of the fact that “women were perceived as sexually owned objects in this period” since the husband specifically requests that his fox bride visit him nightly (Wakita 1993, 94).

The second story features both a human woman and a kitsune disguised as that woman. They are said to be the exact same in terms of appearance and the only way they differ is in their reaction to the zoshiki threatening them. The first woman, when threatened with the zoshiki’s sword, says while crying, “Are you going to kill me? Have you lost your mind?” (Nozaki 1961, 32). The second woman is said to have “screamed and implored him to spare her, clasping her hands,” which raises suspicion in the zoshiki (Nozaki 1961, 32). The difference in the reactions indicates the line between acceptable and unacceptable behavior for the wife in this situation. The first woman, the actual wife, responds with tears but her actions are far from over-the-top. She very clearly is upset that her husband would threaten her, but she asks after his mental state rather than begging for her own life. The second woman, the kitsune, responds more dramatically and fearfully (much like the fox wife from the first story) and begs for her life as a stranger would. The wife is spared because she reacted in a way that the author deemed the

audience would perceive as more “human” and fitting for a woman over the kitsune’s more animalistic and strange reaction.

The kitsune from the third story receives the most detailed treatment as she is described through the toneri officer’s eyes. The toneri uses several descriptors to give the audience a full picture of her beauty including: “superb figure”, “a beautiful thing,” “attractive figure,” “a sweet voice,” “a sweet smile,” “clear eyes,” “fascinating girl,” and “a woman endowed with personal charms” (Nozaki 1961, 51-53). Apart from her beauty, the toneri also emphasizes upon the age of the kitsune’s appearance as he refers to her twice as a “girl” and his use of the word “playing” when he says that she “looked pretty, with her stray tresses of the side-locks playing on her forehead and cheeks” further emphasizes her youth (Nozaki 1961, 51-53). She is also said to be shy and bashful in her interaction with the toneri. The fact that all of these descriptions are meant to emphasize the beauty of this woman to the audience, shows the predilection of Japanese beauty standards for young, docile women. Equating youth with desirability could also be evidence of the Buddhist assumption that purity equals piety, as a younger woman is more likely to have maintained her “bodily purity.” And to a male devotee of Buddhism, a woman who fits the Buddhist ideal of bodily purity would likely be more desirable.

In contrast to the descriptions of the female and kitsune characters within these stories, the portrayal of male bodies receives almost no attention. Rather, the stories focus on the male character’s thoughts, actions, and behaviors. The first major action of the husband’s character that shows a Buddhist influence in “On Taking a Fox as a Wife and Producing a Child” occurs when the husband refuses his wife’s request as “he felt sorry for the dog and could not bear to kill it” (Nakamura 1973, 104). This would seem to emulate the Buddhist precept of abstaining from taking life. After his wife is discovered to be a kitsune and she leaves the household, he

composes a love song that expresses his feelings. He also names his son Kitsune after his wife (Nakamura 1973, 104-105). Both of these actions portray the man as a devoted and sincere husband. The child from their union is said to have been “famous for his enormous strength,” and he “could run as fast as a bird flies” (Nakamura 1973, 105). Both male characters within this story seem to only benefit from their interactions with the kitsune, as the husband receives a strong heir to continue his family’s legacy and the son receives supernatural prowess from his mother.

The blame of the second story is placed upon the zoshiki samurai’s lack of quick response to the entire situation: “The zoshiki samurai was angry with the fox for making a fool of him... it was his fault. In the first place, he should have caught both women and bound them with ropes” (Nozaki 1961, 32). This placement of blame appears to demonstrate the desirability for men to exhibit more intellectual qualities. The third story describes the main character Yasutaka in the same fashion. He is lauded for being “clever and cautious” in his interaction with the kitsune as well as “tough and daring” (Nozaki 1961, 53). These stories show that an ideal Japanese man should be strong in both body and mind.

Another way in which the male and female characters within these stories are differentiated is in how the author intends the audience to perceive their actions. The interaction that is the most indicative of the male bias within the stories presented here is that of Yasutaka and the kitsune woman. In order to confirm his suspicions,

Yasutaka seized the girl abruptly by one of her sleeves... Said Yasutaka still seizing her by the sleeve: ‘Now I am going to disrobe you. Do you hear me?’ So declaring, the tonéri [*sic*] officer unsheathed his short sword... Continued Yasutaka: ‘I am going to cut your throat. Take off your clothes!’ The tonéri [*sic*] officer now seized the girl by the hair. He pinned her against a pillar of the gate (Nozaki 1961, 52-53).

Yasutaka's attempted confrontation of the woman is thwarted as she is able to flee from his grasp. Yasutaka is described at the beginning of this story as a man of "romantic disposition" and his interest in the disguised kitsune woman is seen as a result of his nature. Yet somehow, the kitsune is still viewed as the antagonist of this story despite Yasutaka's assault and threats. His actions appear completely justified in the author's mind, based upon Yasutaka's suspicion that the girl may be a fox. Likewise, the so-called "male promiscuity" evident in several medieval texts, as exhibited by Yasutaka's story, may be an embodiment of the encouraged polygyny practices among middle- and upper-class men. It paid (quite literally) for men to seek out multiple wives - this will be discussed further shortly. In fact, rather than guilt, Yasutaka merely "felt chagrined at his unsuccessful attempt" and he even continued to seek out the fox who assumed the shape of "the charming girl" (Nozaki 1961, 53). Though Yasutaka's interest continued, the author states that Yasutaka was wise in practicing restraint and caution in order to not be tricked by the cunning fox. There is no discussion of what Yasutaka's actions would have meant had the woman not turned out to be a fox, or the active role he played in initiating and continuing the interaction with the kitsune.

Gender and Sexuality in the Social and Political Environment

The next part of this analysis concerns the relations referred to within the stories – in this case those relations between men and women, including marriage. And secondly, a comparison of the structure within these stories to the social, cultural, and environmental structures of its creation – which herein concerns the political, social, and domestic organizations of Heian era

Japan. The *Nihon Ryōiki* and the *Konjaku Monogatari* function not only as reflections of the religious but also the social and political environments of Heian era Japan.

The *Nihon Ryōiki* is considered “a valuable artifact representing a historical moment marked by the emergence of a ‘new literature’ that developed in accordance with the state of affairs in the city sphere” which is evidenced in the belief that “the tales contained in the collection are thought to have been transmitted outside of religious sites and among listeners residing within both trade cities and peripheral communities” (Ikegami 2003, 53; Dumas 2013, 249). Works like the *Nihon Ryōiki* and the *Konjaku Monogatari* would have been popular at the time of their authorship among men and women of the aristocracy as valuable educational resources, and they were likely the intended audience as they were both literate and would have had the means to acquire written manuscripts of the texts. However, because both authors of the *Nihon Ryōiki* and the *Konjaku Monogatari* were heavily influenced by Buddhism, these works may have also been used as teaching materials recited to illiterate audiences comprised of commoners or peasants.

A point could be made that the stories focus overwhelmingly on men as out of the one hundred and sixteen stories within the *Nihon Ryōiki*, only forty feature women and thirty of those have female heroines. And out of those stories with women, only one features a kitsune woman. Which is why placing “On Taking a Fox as a Wife and Producing a Child” in comparison with two of the kitsune stories from the *Konjaku Monogatari* is necessary to allow a broader comparison of the social aspects that are reflected within kitsune stories.

The patriarchal family and social organization of Heian society is evidenced within “On Taking a Fox as a Wife and Producing a Child.” Nakamura (1973) states that even though the legal system of the Heian period was patrilineal, there were social conventions that “betrayed the

persistence of the matrilineal tradition” (69). The husband naming his child Kitsune after his wife suggests his deference to the child’s position as the son of his wife and as a member of her bloodline. The name actually becomes the child’s surname, Kitsune-no-atae, and is carried by the child’s descendants.

Another aspect of the social conventions of the Heian period that points towards a matrilocal tradition is the absence of virilocal (*yometori*) marriage practices, in which the wife moves into the husband’s home. During the Heian period, polygyny was allowed and especially encouraged among the aristocracy and upper class as a method for men to gain political and economic support. McCullough (1967) identifies “three principal types of marital residence” in the Heian period, the first being duolocal (*tsumadoi*) where the husband and wife live separately and the husband visits the wife. This was most common among secondary or non-official wives/concubines (Sprague 2011, 67). The second was neolocal where the husband and wife would move in together and start a new home apart from their parents’ residences, though this was not as common at the time. Neolocal marriages most often took place among commoners who had no assets, and they were very informal (referred to as *yoriai* marriages); the husband and wife simply took up joint residence and shared equal status within their household (Wakita 1993, 87). The third, most common form of marriage was uxorilocal (*mukotori*) where the husband moved into his wife’s parents’ home. In these instances, the wife’s parents were expected to provide support for their son-in-law. The differences in the frequency of marriage types between the lower, middle, and upper classes point to the differences in the levels of gendered inequality experienced by women in each class. Daughters of the upper classes were used as political pawns to be given out for (uxorilocal/mukotori) marriages to gain political power and influence for their fathers as one of the many wives of an emperor or prince (Sprague

2011, 73). Daughters of families of more modest means might have been the official or secondary wife of a well-off man, either taking up residence with him in her parents' home or enjoying some degree of independence while living separately from him. And the yoriai marriages among commoners with no remarkable assets allowed the wife to share a similar status as that of her husband as heads of the household.

The kitsune wife of "On Taking a Fox as a Wife and Producing a Child" was taken to the man's house where he married her upon her agreement to being his wife (Nakamura 1973, 1040). While we see the woman essentially marrying into her husband's household, there is no mention of him living with his family, most likely meaning their marriage was neolocal or a yoriai marriage. Despite the evidence of a matrilineal tradition, the wife within this story is still portrayed as a subservient to her husband in a way which points to an overall patriarchal family organization. The kitsune wife follows her husband's request of "Since a child was born between us, I cannot forget you. Please come always and sleep with me," even after they are no longer "married" (Nakamura 1973, 105).

Women's positions within the public and private spheres of Heian era society and politics changed drastically after the reign of Emperor Kanmu (r. 781-806) when "women were excluded not just from rule, but also from the bureaucracy, and were driven from the center of politics to the peripheries" (Sanae and Watanabe 2007, 15-16). This is supported by the fact that after the death of the last female sovereign, Empress Shotoku, in 770 at the end of the Nara period, there would be no more female rulers until the puppet empresses of the Edo period appeared³. This led to a decline in the political positions of women even in the Heian period. Female officials in the imperial court had their governmental responsibilities lessened, and their statuses in public declined though the "participation of noblewomen in the private sphere continued to be

prominent, if not increased” (Sanae and Watanabe 2007, 19). Court responsibilities that had formerly belonged to both men and women, “were now divided: the political authority rested with men, while the private, including the sexual, rested with women” (Sanae and Watanabe 2007, 22). This division of positions is seen not only within the imperial court, but also (if not to a somewhat lesser degree) within the social interactions and institutions outside of the palace.

The social status of the women within the kitsune stories is not always referred to directly. One line that stands out as important for this analysis within “The Story of an Imperial Household Guard Officer Disillusioned by an Act of a Fox,” describes the kitsune character as “faintly redolent of ranjantai (a precious incense first imported from Korea in the reign of the Emperor Shomu in the early part of the 8th century)” (Nakamura 1973, 51-52). This description places the story within a particular historical context, and it shows the perceived status of the kitsune woman as a wealthy or upper-class citizen, since she is assumed to be in possession of the “precious incense” ranjantai. Another line from “On Taking a Fox as a Wife and Producing a Child” – “In the second or third month, when the annual quota of rice was hulled, she went to the place where the female servants were pounding rice in a mortar to give them some refreshments” – gives the audience a sense of the tasks relegated to lower class women (Nakamura 1973, 104). The kitsune mistress going to give the female servants refreshments gives the impression that it is the mistress of the household’s duty to interact with female servants. The pounding of rice by female servants also shows some of the labor that was performed by female servants during the Heian era. Finally, the male zoshiki samurai and toneri officer both have jobs which occupy the public sphere of Japanese society while their encounters with the women in their respective stories always occur in private, whether in the home or in a one-on-one environment. This

provides further evidence of the division between men and women's positions within the public and private spheres in Heian era society.

The end of the Heian period saw some significant changes among educational trends and the proliferation of literary works among the common folk. Literature saw a gaining rise in popularity from the end of the Heian period through the end of the medieval period (twelfth to sixteenth centuries) spreading among "men and women, aristocrats and warriors, and sometimes even commoners in urban and rural areas" due to the influence of *Noh* drama and *renga* (linked verse) (Wakita 1993, 91). As Wakita (1993) explains:

Like performers of *Noh* drama, writers of linked verse were from both high and low backgrounds. These diverse social origins aided in the establishment of popular culture, and in the spread of these art forms to the city and countryside, to old and young, to men and women, and to members of rich and poor classes... Elements of urban and rural culture were exchanged through the widespread appeal of these media. Thus widespread popularity of these forms of literature helped to spread the culture of the aristocrats to the commoners. Conversely, commoner culture was taken up in aristocratic circles (91-92).

This intermingling of high- and low-class culture resulted in a new creative environment which flourished during the Edo period and changed how stories and information traveled between and among the citizens of Japanese society as will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III: EDO PERIOD (1603-1868): KITSUNE AND CONFUCIANISM IN THE FLOATING WORLD

After some 150 years political chaos, Tokugawa Ieyasu finally solidified the unification of the nation which had begun under Oda Nobunaga and a feudal regime was established – the Tokugawa government – in 1603 (Kitagawa 1990, 155). With the advent of the Tokugawa, or Edo, period we see the rise and spread of Confucianism as the leading ideology of the state and a pervasive teaching in Japanese society (Watt 2003, 2). Several Confucian schools were set up by and throughout the feudal domains under Tokugawa control. Some of these schools taught a special code of ethics for the warrior class, the *bushido* (way of the warrior), which combined Zen Buddhism’s discipline and frugality, Shinto nationalism, and Confucian values of filial piety, loyalty, and learning (Watt 2003, 2). Popular scholars, authors, and artists were crucial to the spread of these values and attitudes throughout Japanese society.

During the Edo period, a decline in stories featuring animals turning into humans and vice versa through a physical rebirth⁴ is seen within popular literature. Instead, ghost stories became popular, many of which depicted animal to human transformations of kitsune, tanuki (raccoon dogs), and cats. Ambros (2012, 19) attributes this shift to the “growing influence of neo-Confucianism rather than Buddhism on the popular imagination and to widespread belief in ghosts rather than reincarnation.” As part of the three exclusion degrees in the 1630s enacting a ban on Christianity and Christian missionaries, the Tokugawa shogunate officially adopted a policy of national seclusion. This meant that from 1633 until the end of the Tokugawa rule, Japanese citizens were forbidden to travel abroad or return from overseas. Foreign contact was limited to a small number of Chinese and Dutch merchants still allowed to trade through the

southern port of Nagasaki (Britannica 2021b). Accordingly, rather than taking in outside cultural influences, Japanese culture prioritized inner growth and expansion. The Tokugawa-controlled Japan saw significant political stability, internal peace, and rapid economic growth. With the national economy flourishing and a newly emerged well-to-do merchant class, the Edo period also experienced a variety of rich artistic innovations through wood-block prints, *kabuki* drama, *bunraku* puppet theater, and numerous forms of graphic literature which contained more lighthearted, satirical stories alongside detailed illustrations (Britannica 2021b). Through these new art forms, folklore – like that of the tanuki and other yōkai – mingled with popular cultural concerns, veiled political sentiments, and commercial and artistic interests (Foster 2012, 7-8).

A Courtly Mirror of Ashiya Dōman

One of the most popular pieces of literature and drama that permeated Japanese popular culture during the Edo period was the kabuki play, *A Courtly Mirror of Ashiya Dōman*. This story bears many similarities with the Heian era story, “On Taking a Fox as a Wife and Producing a Child,” but a few changes in the narrative distinctly signal social changes which will be addressed in the latter portion of this chapter. The play depicts the story of a master astrologer’s two disciples, their conflicts, and the involvement of the white fox Kusunoha. After the death of a master astrologer with no direct heir to his knowledge, two of his primary disciples – Abe no Yasuna and Ashiya Dōman – fight to obtain a scroll containing the master’s knowledge. The struggle ends with Dōman stealing the scroll for himself, while the lady betrothed to Yasuna commits suicide as proof of her innocence in the plot. A grief-stricken

Yasuna then wanders into Shinoda forest where he happens upon the younger sister of his deceased betrothed, Lady Kuzunoha as she is paying tribute to Shinoda shrine (Jefts 2012, 8-9).

At the same time, Dōman having obtained a position as court astrologer needs to secure his position with an heir. Dōman sets out to hunt for a white fox to place beneath his wife's bed to ensure his wife's fertility and the birth of a son. Dōman's chase of the white fox leads him directly to the Shinoda shrine where he too becomes interested in Lady Kuzunoha's beauty which allows the fox to escape his clutches. Dōman promptly challenges Yasuna for the lady, and the battle ends with Yasuna on the verge of death when Kuzunoha (actually the aforementioned white fox disguised as the real Lady Kuzunoha) approaches him and tends to his wounds. Meanwhile Dōman has left with the real Lady Kuzunoha. In the fourth, and most popular act of the story,

Yasuna and fox-Kuzunoha are married and have a son, Abe no Seimei. One day, after their family lived happily for many years, the real Lady Kuzunoha visits Yasuna and discovers her imposter. She confronts Yasuna with this discovery, and he is unsure which woman is truly his wife. Before Yasuna can decipher this inexplicable duality, fox-Kuzunoha decides to leave her husband and son in an act honoring her filial virtue...Before departing Kuzunoha regrettably scrawls a parting poem (Jefts 2012, 10).

The poem reads: "If you long for me, come seek me in Izumi, where, in the forest of Shinoda, you'll find your Kuzu of the clinging vine" (Brandon and Leiter 2002, 143). The story comes to a close as Yasuna and Seimei go to Shinoda forest to bring fox-Kuzunoha home, but

When they meet she refuses their plea, and instead bestows a gift of magical knowledge to Seimei before transforming back into a white fox and running away. Seimei uses this supernatural gift to defeat the corrupt Dōman, restoring the rightful family lineage that was once robbed from his father (Jefts 2012, 10).

Unlike the Kuzunoha of the Heian period, the Edo period Kuzunoha disregards both the requests of her husband and son – possibly mirroring the increased independence of mothers and wives or

an increased desire for the independence and autonomy demonstrated by Kuzunoha's actions. The new Kuzunoha character displays a more contradictory nature than her predecessor by both honoring filial values and disobeying them in a way that does not follow the prescribed social expectations or behaviors of women at the time.

Tamamo no Mae

The next two Edo period stories Nishida Shōhei's *Tamamo no sōshi* (The Tale of Tamamo, 1653) and Santō Kyōden's⁵ *Itoguruma kyūbi no kitsune* (The Spinning Wheel and the Nine-Tailed Fox, 1808) feature arguably the "most infamous and prominent evil kitsune in Japanese literature," Tamamo no Mae or Lady Tamamo (Boss 2020, 59). As Bathgate attests, versions of Tamamo no Mae's story appeared "in virtually every genre and medium from the fifteenth century to the nineteenth," and she is still prominent in literature today (2004, 5). Tamamo no Mae first appeared during the Kamakura period (1185-1333) in *otogizōshi* (companion tales) and the Muromachi period (1336-1603) saw the greatest expansion and subsequent variations of her story (Boss 2020, 59-60). *Tamamo no sōshi* will serve as an example of kitsune's literary treatment during the beginning of the Edo period, while *Itoguruma kyūbi no kitsune* will do the same for the late Edo period.

Tamamo no sōshi

Tamamo no sōshi takes place when the palace of retired Emperor Toba saw the introduction of a new and beautiful lady (Nüffer 2018, 348).

To describe her appearance: her jade hairpins were splendid, and her dazzling robes were exquisitely woven, A single flutter of her lotus-petal eyelids cast a hundred enchantments, and the half-moon arch of her blue-black eyebrows won her ten thousand hearts. Although she did not powder her face, her complexion was perfectly white, and

although she used no rouge, her cheeks were naturally red. Her glistening lips were like a scarlet blossom, and her flawless skin was the same as white snow. Her arms resembled jewels, and her teeth seemed to be made of mother-of-pearl (Nüffer 2018, 348-349).

The lady - she was simply referred to as “the lady” at this point - was not only effortlessly beautiful but also well-spoken and knowledgeable in all things spiritual and secular. Her capability earned her the opportunity to approach retired Emperor Toba who quickly became enamored with her after he questioned her about all sorts of things, and she always had an eloquent answer. She was often compared to the great patriarchs and ancient sages in terms of her responses and knowledge (Nüffer 2018, 350). After questioning her many times about many topics such as the Buddhist Middle Way, the retired Emperor Toba began to think of Lady Keshō, as she was now called, as his empress (Nüffer 2018, 351). One day, while at the palace concert hall for a recital of poetry and music

A fierce storm arose in the courtyard and blew out the torches. At that moment, Lady Keshō, who was standing near His Majesty’s seat, began to give off a bright glow, illuminating the interior of the palace. Wondering at this bizarre phenomenon, the courtiers cast their eyes about in all directions and saw the light coming from within the pearl-embroidered blinds like the morning sun. Hastily laying aside their instruments, they attempted to make the cloistered emperor understand how uncanny all this was. But His Majesty merely said, “How wondrous that the body of Lady Keshō should give off light!” and issued an imperial order that henceforth she should be known as Lady Tamamo (Nüffer 2018, 352).

Days continued to pass in the same manner, and as the Lady Tamamo gave more and more poignant and impassioned answers to the Emperor and courtiers’ questions, Emperor Toba grew more and more deeply infatuated with her. As he fell deeper, his health lessened and he was soon very ill. The court physician was unable to diagnose what ailed the Emperor, and so the head of the Bureau of Geomancy, Abe no Yasunari was called. Abe no Yasunari was a master of the magical techniques (*onmyodo*) of Abe no Seimei⁶ and he was thus able to divine that the cause of Emperor Toba’s illness was none other than Lady Tamamo who was actually a fox in disguise

(Nüffer 2018, 355-359). Emperor Toba refused to believe that Lady Tamamo could be the cause of his illness, so the courtiers and Yasunari devised a plan to reveal her true nature.

During a purification ceremony to invoke the Lord of Mount Tai for the sake of Emperor Toba's health, Lady Tamamo was required to participate but midway through after showing increasing discomfort she vanished into thin air (in some variants she turns into a fox and flees). A council is held on how to get rid of the evil fox, and eventually two talented archers, Kazusa-no-suke and Miura-no-suke, are summoned by imperial edict to go to Nasu Moor in Shimotsuke Province where the fox is said to reside, and hunt it down (Nüffer 2018, 363). Kazusa-no-suke and Miura-no-suke rush to Nasu Moor and find the two-tailed fox "measuring seven arm-spans in length" exactly as Yasunari had told them they would. But due to the incredible agility and cunning of the fox, their first attempt at hunting it down is a failure.

After returning to their homes, Kazusa-no-suke and Miura-no-suke both resolve to train themselves for 100 days before returning to Nasu Moor. Upon their return, they struggle for seven days and seven nights with no luck. Meeting up to decide their next move in light of the shame that would come with failing to catch the fox, they call upon the deities Amaterasu, Hachiman, and Nikkō. After their sincere prayers, both men sleep briefly before starting the hunt again.

Miura-no-suke dreamed of a woman, no older than twenty and extremely beautiful, who turned to him with tears streaming down her face. "My wishes shall surely be fulfilled, and the longings of the masses shall likewise be satisfied," she said. "Are you wondering who I am? It is my life you seek. Please spare me if you can. If you do, I will watch over your children, your grandchildren, and all their descendants" (Nüffer 2018, 368).

Lady Tamamo's pleas fall on deaf ears, and the moment he awakes, Miura-no-suke sets off on the hunt again. This time, as he sees the fox and draws his bow, Miura-no-suke is able to bring

the fox down with a single arrow. Victorious, Miura-no-suke returns to the palace and presents the body of the fox to the cloistered emperor.

This is where the earlier versions of Tamamo no Mae's story and the 1653 *Tamamo no sōshi* diverge: in the pre-Edo period the story ends with Tamamo no Mae's body being stored in the Uji Treasure House. Her belly was said to have contained a "golden jar that housed a relic of the Buddha," her forehead a "white jewel that shone day and night," and on the tips of her two tails "two needles - one white, one red" (Nüffer 2018, 370). *Tamamo no sōshi* however has an addendum to the story, which features "an account of Tamamo no mae's spirit embedding itself into a rock on the plains of Nasu after her death. This stone is said to have become dangerous, emitting poisonous gas to kill every living thing that came near. It was thus that the legend of the *Sesshōseki*, or the 'killing stone,' came into being" (Ferguson 2012, 3). Approximately 90 years after the initial events of the story "a famous Sōtō Zen priest named Gennō encounters the stone in his travels" and he is approached by the spirit of Tamamo no Mae (Ferguson 2012, 4). She tells him her story, including her role in the downfall of Prince Hanzoku of India, King Yū in China, and most recently of Emperor Toba and his son Konoe. Gennō is moved by Tamamo no Mae's plight, and so he exorcizes her spirit from the *sesshōseki* and helps her spirit finally obtain peace with a Buddhist memorial service (Ferguson 2012, 4; Bathgate 2004, 2).

Itoguruma kyūbi no kitsune

Itoguruma kyūbi no kitsune is a *gōkan* ('bound book' which contains detailed illustrations accompanied by text) by Santō Kyōden in the late Edo period. Kyōden describes his work as a "non-official history novel" that details the events of a story which takes place in the ninety-year period between the creation of the *sesshōseki* and its exorcism by priest Gennō. In

this tale, Kyōden combines the story and Tamamo no Mae character with that of another malevolent female character, the “Viper Hag” from the ghost story *Adachi ga Hara* (Ferguson 2012).

As the tale begins, the ‘Viper Hag,’ a homeless outcast who lives on the Nasuno plains with her pet snakes, having grown tired of begging for money, sits down atop a wooden grave marker near the sesshōseki. Dozing off, the hag dreams of the sesshōseki splitting in two and a beautiful noblewoman emerging from it. The woman begins to speak:

I am the ghost of the nine-tailed fox of golden fur who has traveled the three countries of China, India, and Japan... Unable to fulfill my desires, I died on this plain during the former era of Kyūju. Although my body perished, my spirit lodged in this stone. Even now my resentment continues to fester. Because Miura no Zenji Yasumura of present-day Kamakura is the descendant of Miura no suke Yoshiakira--the man who shot and killed me with a single arrow--I intend to destroy the Yasumura family and dispel my long-standing grudge. Having observed your unmatched boldness, I will enter into your chest. Lend me your body for a while! (Ferguson 2012, 26)

The hag agrees to Tamamo no Mae’s request and the noblewoman suddenly turns into a nine-tailed fox and appears to ready itself to jump into the hag’s chest when the hag is abruptly started awake.

Miura no Zenji Yasumura, a son of a mistress, at this time is searching for his birth mother, Akigiri, in order to find her and fulfill his filial duty by “comforting her in her old age” (Ferguson 2012, 28). Yasumura tasks his faithful vassal, Tamanawa Gunki to search for his mother and tells him that the evidence of her identity is a short sword given to her by Yasumura’s father. Gunki sets out and does eventually find Akigiri, but as she has been living in relative squalor and she is already eighty years old, she is only able to listen to Gunki’s story about Yasumura and she gives him the aforementioned short sword before succumbing to her illness and passing away. The hag, having been nearby and eavesdropping on their conversation, follows Gunki and kills him before stealing the short sword.

On another day, the wife of Yasumura, Lady Shikitaē, is approached by the hag while making a trip to a shrine. Convinced by the evidentiary short sword, Lady Shikitaē brings the hag home with her where Yasumura is overjoyed, believing he is reunited with his mother. Hoping to provide her with some comfort in her remaining time, Yasumura lavished her with “a separate living space and assigned many female servants to tend to her needs. He entertained her with delicacies of the land and sea, with music of the *biwa*, *koto*, and *tsuzumi*, and with games of incense and shell matching” (Ferguson 2012, 36). The old woman however was not satisfied with any of these things and constantly criticized his efforts. Instead, she requests her trusty spinning wheel and when it is delivered, she sits down, working away continuously. Time passes and the hag has Yasumura treating her as his own mother just as she wanted. Yasumura and his son-in-law Mitsumura are away on a trip to the capital when

The Viper Hag, unafraid of anyone, did many evil deeds. For even the slightest fault, she took her young servant girls and would split open their chests, torture them with snakes, drown, or torment them with water and fire. She reveled in hearing their cries of pain. Indeed, this was no different than the evil acts of Yin Dakki in China—it was entirely the work of the nine-tailed fox. When Lord Yasumura and his son returned, the Viper Hag restrained herself and ceased the atrocities. Thus, Yasumura and his son had no idea of her evildoing (Ferguson 2012, 39).

Soon the hag devises another plot. She informs Yasumura that she is capable in the art of divination and having divined the future she claims to know the cause of and cure for Lord Yoritsugu’s (the Kamakura military commander and Yasumura’s Lord) illness. The hag implores her son to send her to Yoritsugu’s palace and he and the rest of the family agree.

The hag arrives at the palace and is being led to Yoritsugu’s chambers when the wind from an evening thunderstorm blows out the torches of the palace hallway and the hag is seen to illuminate the passage with her own light - just as Lady Tamamo had once done. The court ladies are ordered to draw their short swords, and as the hag is surrounded by the ladies, she confesses

that she is there to assassinate the lord Yoritsugu at the behest of her son, Yasumura. Having laid her trap and framing Yasumura for a political assassination plot, she flies over the walls of the castle, disappearing for the remainder of the story.

Her words caused enough suspicion that the Miura clan was accused of treason and ordered to be captured. Yasumura allows himself to be taken away while Lady Shikita, their daughter Yaehatahime, her wet nurse Kashiwagi, and Yaehatahime's son Yatsuwaka flee. Mitsumura had been away at the time of Yasumura's capture, but upon hearing of his father-in-law's predicament, resolves to die with him. Mitsumura briefly reunites with Yaehatahime - his wife, Kashiwagi, and his son Yatsuwaka who try to persuade him not to go. Though full of remorse for his family, Mitsumura continues on to meet Yasumura. Yasumura, his family members, and all of his retainers are lined up at the Lotus Hall when Mitsumura finally arrives. Mitsumura declares his intention to die by his father's side, but Yasumura convinces him to live and restore the family by capturing the hag. The story concludes with Mitsumura leaving the Lotus Hall alone while weeping, and Yasumura and all of his family and retainers committing suicide (Ferguson 2012, 52-55).

Social Critiques

As compared to the Heian period, the Muromachi period (1336-1573) and as a result, the Edo period (1603-1868), was a time when more stories were being made for the broader public rather than the just members of the aristocracy and upper class. Praised for its artistic environment, the culture of the Edo period "was constantly changing and instilling new beliefs, customs, and practices into its popular fiction. Many of these changes came as a result of

political influence, social reorganization, higher levels of literate non-elite, popular theater, and fears for the future,” all of which in turn influenced the characterization of kitsune like Tamamo no Mae and Kuzunoha (Ferguson 2012, 9). Due to the enactment of the *sankin kōtai* (alternate attendance) policy in 1634 by the third shogun Yoshimune, Edo became a rapid center of population growth (Roberts 1998, 17). *Sankin kōtai* was intended to strengthen the shogunate’s central control over the feudal lords (*daimyo*) by requiring them (and their large retinues) to alternate living in the capital, Edo, and living in their domains every other year. And “it was during this period of growth, particularly influenced by the merchant and artisan influx, that Edo experienced a significant infusion of regional cultures in the form of dialects, fashion, and ideas,” and Edo began to open up to “opportunities for the exchange of ideas and commerce between people from different locales” becoming a crossroads of Japan (Ferguson 2012, 10).

Keeping with Buddhist and Confucian values, up until the end of the first half of the Edo period moralistic tales had been the most prominent, but with the death of the eighth shogun Tokugawa Yoshimune in 1751, Edo residents began having more creative freedom (Ferguson 2012, 11). Consequently, we see “the flowering of kabuki, prosperity in the pleasure quarters, the return of *yoruri* singing... and the emergence of new comic genres like *senryū* and *kyōka* in poetry; *dangibon*, *sharebon*, and *kibyōshi* in prose fiction; and *rakugo* in storytelling” (Shirane 2002, 451). Of the *kibyōshi* (‘yellow cover’ comic books) prose, *gesaku* (frivolous works) were a genre of popular literature which gave satirical treatment to any aspect of society, including politics. Initially, the government saw no problem with the increasing literacy of the lower classes. But at the height of *kibyōshi* and *gesaku* popularity, the government realized how influential the mass publishing of popular political satire could be, and so decided to implement the Kansei Reforms (1787-1793) (Ferguson 2012, 13). As part of the reforms, the Shogunate

decreed that gorgeous and extravagant works were to be avoided, no unorthodox theories published, and the publication of erotica should gradually stop (Sarah and Harootunian 1991, 59). As Ferguson (2012, 14) attests, “the Floating World of frivolous and satirical writing was turned upside down,” and authors and artists now needed to find a way to express their ideas in forms permissible within the bounds of the reforms.

Jefts (2012, 10) argues that the plot of *A Courty Mirror of Ashiya Dōman* is fraught with “sweeping themes of corruption and greed, justice and redemption, all of which surely reflect contemporary frustrations with the Tokugawa regime.” Artists and authors of the Edo period were inventive and clever when it came to avoiding the watchful eyes of the Tokugawa’s strict censorship policies. The kabuki plays which were so popular within the pleasure district were already viewed as vulgar by the Tokugawa regime. Early kabuki narratives were linked to subversive political or licentious themes and were closely monitored by the Tokugawa. However, the “playwrights were skilled in building double-entendre roles that conformed to Confucian values and Tokugawa regulations, while satisfying the Edo audience’s desire for the sensational through veiled constructs including emphasis on the supernatural” (Jefts 2012, 24). It is noteworthy that women were a very prominent audience for kabuki and kabuki-like literature during this period, and authors began to incorporate more female characters into their works (Ferguson 2012, 16; Shirane 2002).

Supernatural elements were less scrutinized because they were symbolically “removed” from reality and supernatural creatures like the kitsune - often aligned with women and femininity - were not subject to the rules and regulations of human life. The Tokugawa regime especially emphasized their rule as an ideal “tightly knit, hierarchical religious/cultural/social/political synthesis... based on the Neo-Confucian principles of natural

laws and norms implicit in human, social, and political order, all of which are grounded in the will of Heaven” (Kitagawa 1990, 155-56). As Kuzunoha’s character falls into the supernatural category, she has been purposefully aligned by the playwright to be free from the scrutiny of Tokugawa censorship (Jefts 2012, 49-50). Jefts (2012) posits that Kuzunoha is a subversive character intended to symbolize the influential power of women in Edo Japan by portraying the female “other” - one that is set aside from the restrictions the Tokugawa regime and Confucian ideals sought to place upon women. Likewise, Tamamo no Mae is lauded for “her subversion of the social and gender norms of the time, possessing unparalleled eloquence and an uncanny degree of knowledge in all matters of philosophy and theology” (Boss 2020, 60).

Another method explored by authors and artists in light of the censorship, was to focus on bringing back depictions of historically popular heroes and heroines and to write more serious vendetta stories (*katakiuchi-mono*) and revenge pieces (*adauchi-mono*) (Ferguson 2012, 14). One genre that saw many vendetta pieces was the *gōkan* (bound books). Ferguson explains that the “*Gōkan* novels were heavily influenced by Chinese literature and strongly linked to Confucian ideals taken from Chinese stories, giving the books a unique blend of China and Japan for the reader to enjoy” (2012, 14). *Gōkan* vendetta tales often “showcased prominent historical and folkloric figures as protagonists who symbolically fought against social injustice,” possibly giving their authors another way to “indirectly vent their frustrations toward the government without being sanctioned for it” (Ferguson 2012, 15). Thus, the *gōkan* provided a perfect vehicle for the return of the popular evil kitsune Tamamo no Mae character (*Tamamo no sōshi*) to star in a new tale of vengeance (*Itoguruma kyūbi no kitsune*) and reenter the world of popular fiction.

Two tails versus Nine Tails

Tamamo no Mae's character is particularly important as she is seen moving from evil kitsune to repentant kitsune and back to an evil kitsune with an added appetite for revenge, just within the confines of the Edo period. The changes in Tamamo no Mae can be directly linked to social, political, and religious changes from the early Edo period to the late Edo period. The Tamamo no Mae of the otogizōshi genre serves a purpose closer to that of the kitsune women from chapter one - she serves as a warning to beware of “beguiling and overly knowledgeable women” (Boss 2020, 65; Nüffer 2018, 348). This similarity is no surprise as the influence of Buddhism on Japanese literature remained strong up until the early Edo period. And though Tamamo no Mae describes herself as an “enemy of Buddhism” in *Tamamo no sōshi* (1653) and the closely related Noh play, *Sesshōseki* from around the same time, the *sesshōseki* addendum to the medieval period story portrays her as “repentant, submissive, and desiring Buddhahood” (Ferguson 2012, 3-4). Both the evil Tamamo no Mae who is killed at the plains of Nasu and the remorseful Tamamo no Mae who is exorcized from the *sesshōseki* and obtains peace are used to “re-enforce a sense of Japanese nationalism and superiority over other East Asian nations” (Boss 2020, 60). The *sangoku* concept (the cultural ties between India, China, and Japan) was prominent and the Tamamo no Mae ordeal proposed that Japan had been able to do what India and China had failed to do, by exorcizing the “deific monster” that terrorized the reigns of multiple sovereigns (Boss 2020, 60; Nüffer 2018, 348 – 349).

Santō Kyōden (1808) chooses to essentially ignore the Buddhist ending of *Tamamo no sōshi* and returns Tamamo no Mae to her originally evil character, putting her on a path of revenge in *Itoguruma kyūbi no kitsune*. Boss (2020) claims that this reversion of Tamamo no

Mae's character is not meant as "a rebuttal against Buddhism, but to make the character fit into the *akuba* (evil woman) archetype of the popular *katakiuchi* (revenge) genre, a development that ensured her continued popularity into the modern era" (66). The *katakiuchi* narratives were a relatively safe choice to avoid the shogunate's censorship at the time, and they were certainly popular enough as the subject of many *gōkan* and kabuki theater productions to ensure a good chance of literary success. Main characters that were femme fatales, *akuba*, or *dokufu* (poisonous wife) were also more popular at this time due to the growing female audience for kabuki plays and literature (Boss 2020, 65). Kyōden's main concerns seem to be with the popularity and reach of his work rather than spreading a moralistic tale or religious allegory. With that said, the Confucian influences on Kyōden's work and conceptions of Miura no Zenji Yasumura's family dynamics in *Itoguruma kyūbi no kitsune* will be made obvious in the following sections.

Independent Women

Lower- and middle-class women of the late Tokugawa period experienced more opportunities for education and participation in cultural pursuits like membership in literary circles, however the expectations for women, in the same manner as the Tokugawa political order, were based upon their position within the social hierarchy. The shogunate enforced strict social organization, and the existing classes were maintained for easier control of the masses and tax collection. The expectations of men were affected in the same way: men of high status could freely take concubines and peasants were allowed to sell their lower-class daughters to the pleasure district. Women from successful farmer and merchant families were allowed more freedom with regards to their educational and cultural pursuits while women from the samurai

class were under more restrictions. The women of samurai families “were educated, but it was an education specifically for women. Their lives centered on the home and subservience to their fathers, their husbands, and their mothers-in-law” (Ballhatchet 2007, 178). One of the most influential concepts of women’s teachings in the Edo period (that would continue to permeate the ideas of expectations placed upon women in Japan society) was that of *Ryōsai Kenbo* (Good Wife, Wise Mother). Being a Good Wife and a Wise Mother meant devoting yourself fully to your husband and family over all else. The “Good Wife, Wise Mother” tagline was intended to promote women’s nationalism by stressing the importance of women’s roles in raising children who would become the future of the nation and to stress the feminine ideal of a conservative woman who put her husband first. *Ryōsai Kenbo* was also meant as a conservative response to combat Western feminist movements. The notion of male-female equality certainly existed at the time, but the burgeoning influence of Confucian teachings that stated women were inferior in status to their male counterparts was spread in Japan through the distribution of reading primers used in the education of women of all classes (Ballhatchet 2007, 178).

Popular Confucian works for women’s education were responsible for spreading Confucian ideals from *The Greater Learning for Women*. The Confucian concepts therein focused on obedience and Tokugawa women were expected to conform to the strictly patriarchal concepts known as the “Three Obediences” (Jefts 2012, 44; Leiter 2000, 213). Japanese women were expected to follow certain rules: “obedience while unmarried to a father; obedience when married to a husband and husband’s family; and obedience when widowed to a son” (Jefts 2012, 44; Yamakawa 1992, 105). In *A Courtly Mirror of Ashiya Dōman*, Kuzunoha could be described as an ideal wife, as her loyalty to her husband is obvious. She repays what she perceives as a life debt to Yasuna for her salvation from Dōman’s foxhunt by birthing a son, Abe no Seimei, so that

Yasuna's lineage may continue. Jefts' (2012) analysis of Kuzunoha's character takes the description of the fox wife's loyalty even further by asserting that "Kuzunoha's supernatural attributes re-establish Yasuna's official lineage in court at the close of the play," while simultaneously noting that, "while she [Kuzunoha] exemplifies the filial role a Confucian woman should hold in an Edo household, she also demonstrates a powerful influence over her family" (44). This duality of Kuzunoha's character as both obedient and independent manifests in other ways as well.

During the Tokugawa period, divorce was strictly frowned upon and treated as a disgrace to the family. Only a few acceptable reasons for divorce were permitted – but in Kuzunoha's case, her separation from Yasuna and Seimei results from her position as a supernatural figure, a position which allows her to cleverly evade the standards for divorce set by Tokugawa society as she exists "outside" of human society (Jefts 2012, 45). Jefts (2012) points out that the conscious decision of the playwright to depict the separation of Kuzunoha from her husband and son using supernatural themes allowed for a situation which normally would have garnered negative reactions from the Tokugawa officials. Kuzunoha's position as "other" - in this case, that which exists outside the realm of human influence - allowed "for a critical view of the female as independent, free from strictly bound filial roles" (Jefts 2012, 45). As a result, Kuzunoha acts independently from societal expectations, and she freely chooses to leave her husband and son in order for the family to restore their lineage (this is achieved when she bestows the gift of supernatural abilities upon Abe no Seimei) rather than choosing to reunite with them. The choice of separation is where we see the contrast between Kuzunoha's story and the fox wife in the Heian era "On Taking a Fox as a Wife and Producing a Child." The fox wife from the earlier story obediently comes back to sleep with her husband every night as he requested, but

Kuzunoha adamantly refuses to return when her husband and son go to Shinoda forest to plead for her return. Kuzunoha directly disobeys her husband - and consequently the Confucian values of filial obedience - and instead chooses the self-sacrificing option she believes will be more beneficial to her husband and son (Jefts 2012, 46). This is indicative of the aforementioned “powerful influence” Kuzunoha, and by extension the women of the Tokugawa period, hold over their families.

On the other hand, the evil Tamamo no Mae in *Tamamo no sōshi* and *Itoguruma kyūbi no kitsune* is overtly independent and resistant to any ethics, Confucian or otherwise. But Tamamo no Mae’s independence is contrasted by the other female roles within *Itoguruma kyūbi no kitsune*: Akigiri, Yasumura’s elderly mother, who refuses to reveal herself to her son for fear of embarrassing him. Lady Shikitaē and Yaehatahime who on separate occasions, both beg their husbands - Yasumura and Mitsumura - to allow them to die together as a family but are ultimately forced to succumb to their husbands’ orders and live on for the sake of the renewal of the family line. Even the men in this story submit themselves to the obligations of Confucian ethics; Yasumura only takes in the hag possessed by Tamamo no Mae as he believes her to be his estranged mother, Akigiri, and because he feels he must “fulfill his filial duty by comforting her in her old age” (Ferguson 2012, 28). Though Yasumura is tricked as a result of his unwavering devotion to the “woman” he believes to be his mother.

While the “good” characters of *Itoguruma kyūbi no kitsune* are the humans who adhere to the expectations of their social classes (Yasumura’s family is a samurai family and would have been subject to relatively rigid and strict gendered roles and rules) and abide by Confucian teachings, this story is not meant to showcase morality, but rather to demonstrate the (perhaps subconscious) desire to see a woman break out of the established social order. Tamamo no Mae

as the villain is given the freedom to “demolish the stereotype of women as the victims of a suffocating patriarchy” (Ferguson 2012, 226; Leiter 2002). This is supported by the fact that even though many akuba characters in Edo period works were from lower classes or fallen nobility, they were able to discard the shackles of their low statuses by becoming villains. Hence, whether they are benevolent but firm wives like Kuzunoha or malicious and ambitious like Tamamo no Mae, these kitsune of the Edo period offered an outlet for the women under the Tokugawa regime to imagine and experience a vicarious freedom from the patriarchal structure they were subject to, even if only while within the thrall of a kabuki play or gōkan drama.

CHAPTER IV: MEIJI PERIOD AND BEYOND (1868-1945): KITSUNE AND WESTERN INFLUENCES

Directly after the collapse of the Tokugawa regime, the Meiji period (1868-1914) returned to imperial control, and a dramatic increase in outside influences on Japanese culture occurred as the Meiji regime decided to end the self-imposed isolation of the Tokugawa and open Japan's borders to the world. The Meiji leaders both admired the unseen Western powers as possessors of what they believed to be universal norms, while they also intended to utilize the practical aspects of Western knowledge and technology they felt would benefit Japan. This led to a vigorous promotion of Westernism at the beginning of the Meiji restoration (Kitagawa 1990, 162). After initially upholding the anti-Catholic policy of the Tokugawa, the Meiji leaders realized they would have to amend their stance and allow Christianity - and its adherents - into Japan if they hoped to gain a better position for treaty negotiations with Western powers (Kitagawa 1990, 161). Christianity had first entered Japan in 1549 with the introduction of Catholicism, though it was not until the Meiji period when Christianity alongside Westernism had an effect on the educational system of Japan.

During the Meiji period, Christian missionaries brought with them Western knowledge, and as they built schools and hospitals they were also serving as a gateway to the outside world for the Japanese. Christianity did not particularly exert a great amount of influence on Japanese culture, but the deference of some Japanese leaders to the supposed claim of Western "superiority and universality" allowed a more general Western influence to disseminate within Japanese society. Kitagawa (1990, 162) attests that "it was during the era of Westernism that numerous new words, concepts, idioms, and symbols penetrated Japan through a Japanese-

Western linguistic mix.” And while Westernization was well on its way for the first half of the Meiji period, in the 1880s “a renewed appreciation of traditional Japanese values emerged” and brought with it a more selective blend of Japanese and Western concepts (Britannica 2021a). These concepts are evidenced in the changes to kitsune stories from the period between the end of the Meiji to the beginning of WWII.

“The Fox Wife”

Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962) was an influential figure in folklore studies - credited with the title of Father of *Minzokugaku* (folklore studies or folkloristics), he was key in initiating an academic interest in the folk tales of Japan. Yanagita firmly believed Japanese folklore to be an important resource and source of pride for Japan. A strong nationalist, he decided the folk tales of Japan were unique because of Japan’s late industrialization and that the tales needed to be recorded before the ‘folk’ they came from disappeared in the wake of modernization⁷.

One of Yanagita’s published folklore collections *Nihon no mukashibanashi-Jō* (1930) [English version by Fanny Hagin Mayer (1985): *Ancient Tales in Modern Japan*] contains a record of “The Fox Wife.” “The Fox Wife” is a variant of the earlier story of fox Kuzunoha and is very similar to *A Courtly Mirror of Ashiya Dōman*. Yet there is no Ashiya Dōman, and instead of dying, Abe no Yasuna’s wife returns to her parents’ home for three years because of an illness. In his wife’s absence, Yasuna discovers a bundle of reeds floating in a river and after fishing it out, finds a white fox within. After the grateful fox vows to repay him,

a woman came to Yasuna's door and asked to stay as his servant. He let her stay and presently a little boy was born to them. They called him Dojimarū. One day Dojimarū said, "Look, Father, my mother is sweeping the yard with her tail." He looked but could not see it. Only the child saw it. Then Yasuna climbed up

into the rafters to look, and, sure enough, he was astonished to see that the woman had a tail. He drove her away saying, "Your disguise has been discovered." Then the woman who had been away because she was ill came back. When the fox left, she wrote a poem: If you long for me, come to Shinoda Forest in Izumi and inquire for regretful Kuzunoha. Then she went into the hills and was seen no more (Mayer 1985, 31-32).

A continuation of the story stated that as in the previous versions, Dojimarū (Abe no Seimei) used the powers bestowed upon him by his kitsune mother to commit miraculous deeds. In this version, Dojimarū saves the life of a feudal lord by curing his illness thanks to "a magic rod into which his fox mother had entered" (Mayer 1985, 31-32). The magic rod gave him the ability to understand the speech of animals. He saves the lord by overhearing some crows discussing his illness.

"The Foxes' Wedding"

Algernon Bertram Freeman-Mitford (1837-1916) worked in Japan from 1866 to 1870 as part of the British Legation. While he was there, he observed and recorded many interesting things he witnessed during the Meiji Restoration. Mitford's publications following his Japanese excursions provide a useful, though admittedly biased, Western perspective on Japan. One of Mitford's well-known works, originally published in 1871, *Tales of Old Japan* (1908), was a collection of Japanese folk tales gathered to act as an introductory course on the folklore of Japan for Westerners. *Tales of Old Japan* contains a few stories of kitsune.

One such story, "The Foxes' Wedding," describes the marriage and life of a young white fox. After coming of age, the white fox decides to take it upon himself to find a bride. His father, the old fox, has left his inheritance to his son and in gratitude his son resolutely works to increase its value. At the same time,

[i]t happened that in a famous old family of foxes there was a beautiful young lady-fox, with such lovely fur that the fame of her jewel-like charms was spread far and wide. The young white fox, who had heard of this, was bent on making her his wife, and a meeting was arranged between them. There was not a fault to be found on either side; so the preliminaries were settled, and the wedding presents sent from the bridegroom to the bride's house, with congratulatory speeches from the messenger, which were duly acknowledged by the person deputed to receive the gifts; the bearers, of course, received the customary fee in copper cash. When the ceremonies had been concluded, an auspicious day was chosen for the bride to go to her husband's house, and she was carried off in solemn procession during a shower of rain, the sun shining all the while (Freeman-Mitford 1908, 187-88).

After the successful conclusion of their wedding, which included much merry-making and no hindrances to be found, the married life of the couple commenced:

The bride and bridegroom lived lovingly together, and a litter of little foxes were born to them, to the great joy of the old grandsire, who treated the little cubs as tenderly as if they had been butterflies or flowers...As soon as they were old enough, they were carried off to the temple of Inari Sama, the patron saint of foxes, and the old grandparents prayed that they might be delivered from dogs and all the other ills to which fox flesh is heir (Freeman-Mitford 1908, 188).

And so the life of the white fox continued on as he grew old and successful in both his business and his family. He had many children and to his joy they increased every year with the coming of spring.

Lafcadio Hearn's Kitsune

Lafcadio Hearn's *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* (1907) contains an entire chapter on kitsune as they appeared during the time of his writing in Japan. Hearn was a Greek author and translator who became well known in the West as another of the first authors to offer a glimpse into Japan. His translated works also became popular within Japan and they were regarded as valuable historical records of folk tales and legends which may have otherwise been lost with the introduction of Westernization and industrialization in Japan. Within *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* Hearn recounts some stories about kitsune, one of which closely resembles the fox wife

tales of both the Heian and Tokugawa era - “The fox does not always appear in the guise of a woman for evil purposes. There are several stories, and one really pretty play, about a fox who took the shape of a beautiful woman, and married a man, and bore him children--all out of gratitude for some favor received--the happiness of the family being only disturbed by some odd carnivorous propensities on the part of the offspring” (1907, 264). He notes that the shapeshifting fox usually takes the form of a beautiful woman to trick unsuspecting men, however it is not limited to disguising itself as a woman as it “can assume more forms than Proteus” (Hearn 1907, 264).

Hearn also lists and describes several types of foxes that exist within Japanese folklore, one of the bad types being the wild fox.

The wild fox (Nogitsune) is also bad. It also sometimes takes possession of people; but it is especially a wizard, and prefers to deceive by enchantment. It has the power of assuming any shape and of making itself invisible; but the dog can always see it, so that it is extremely afraid of the dog. Moreover, while assuming another shape, if its shadow fall[s] upon water, the water will only reflect the shadow of a fox. The peasantry kill [sic] it; but he who kills a fox incurs the risk of being bewitched by that fox’s kindred, or even by the *ki*, of ghost of the fox. Still if one eat[s] the flesh of a fox, he cannot be enchanted afterwards (1907, 258).

According to Hearn, the fox’s powers are near unlimited: a kitsune can cause one to hear, see or imagine anything it would like - past, present, or future, whether real or fake. The kitsune’s “power has not been destroyed by the introduction of Western ideas; for did he not, only a few years ago, cause phantom trains to run upon the Tokkaido [sic] railway, thereby greatly confounding, and terrifying the engineers of the company?” (Hearn 1907, 264). This account of train illusions caused by the kitsune are an example of kitsune characters directly encountering new technological innovations and in turn being shaped to fit into the newly forming image of an industrialized Japan.

In contradiction to what Hearn says about the kitsune's unwaning power, he was of the opinion that the overall belief in kitsune and other supernatural beings was declining. This was not caused by the fallibility of the older religions within Japan, or by the presence of new faiths brought by missionaries (as the Christian missionaries themselves admitted to believing in the existence of devils). Hearn says education is the main culprit and that "the omnipotent enemy of superstition is the public school, where the teaching of modern science is unclogged by sectarianism or prejudice; where the children of the poorest may learn the wisdom of the Occident; where there is not a boy or a girl of fourteen ignorant of the great names of Tyndall, of Darwin, of Huxley, of Herbert Spencer" (1907, 277). He concludes that "there is no place for ghostly foxes in the beautiful nature-world revealed by new studies to the new generation" (Hearn 1907, 277). Hearn also observed that at the time, popular superstitions still existed among the common people, but the upper circles of society composed of those who viewed themselves as more cultivated – and who in turn had access to more Western influences – often disregarded superstition entirely in favor of the new Western ideals.

Mending the Separation of Two Worlds

When Japanese society transitioned from Tokugawa rule to Meiji rule, the opening of the borders and the entrance of foreign ideas caused societal changes on many different levels. The Meiji Restoration allowed for a much greater degree of religious and ideological freedom for the Japanese people. Christianity did not impact the religious beliefs of Japan insomuch as it did the social relations and hierarchy of Japanese society. Compared to the Tokugawa period, the influx of Christian belief's transcendental aspects were "adopted as a means through which citizens

could develop a transcendental view of self. This transcendent self could then objectively criticize social values and especially the authority of the state” (Isomae 2005, 237). This divergence from the strict censorship of the Tokugawa permitted open critique of the current norms within Japanese society. Critique that would have had to be veiled by layers of symbolism in the past - as was seen in the case of Kuzunoha in the last chapter - could now occur in the open. This eliminated the need for stories with elements that cleverly subverted the ruling authority, perhaps pointing to the lessened presence of new stories from this time period that featured the romantic or sexual interactions between kitsune and humans.

Several other factors occurring simultaneously could be held responsible for the lack of new kitsune stories. Unlike the Tokugawa regime that supported the Japanese concept of a stratified society, the Meiji restoration abolished the hierarchy of social classes. The abolition of the class system consisting of warriors, peasants, craftsmen, and merchants--in which the main distinction was between warriors and commoners, meant not “the ‘commoner-ization’ of the samurai class but the ‘samurai-ization’ of the commoners” (Ueno 1987, S78-S79). And so, the commoners began to adopt the ideologies and cultural practices of the social elite. By the beginning of the Meiji period, the wealthy and upper class had set aside superstition and the animistic beliefs of Shintoism in favor of the Western ideas that were rapidly permeating Japanese society (Hearn 1907, 7-8). With the class system gone, commoners now sought out the Westernization of ideas, clothing, and cultural practices emulating the trends of the previously distinct upper class.

The supernatural world and the human world were no longer tightly entwined as they had been in the past. Rather than co-existing as a part of the daily lives of humans, otherworldly creatures were now just that - creatures belonging to another world entirely. Humans and the

supernatural did not mingle in the same way as they did before. The Kuzunoha of Yanagita's "Fox Wife" provides evidence of this change. The fox Kuzunoha is not Yasunaga's legal wife in this version of the story, she is just a servant in his house and one that he kicks out after finding out her true nature. Yasunaga does not beg her to stay, and he does not long for her after she is gone. It is presented as a matter of fact that their relationship is over once their opposing identities are exposed. Likewise, the kitsune mentioned by Hearn who pretended themselves to be incoming trains, often end up dead - crushed by the oncoming trains - a dire consequence of the kitsune choosing to come face-to-face with modern humanity. Not to mention Hearn's account of wild foxes being directly at odds with the commoners who would hunt them down and kill them, sometimes even consuming their flesh to prevent fox possession in retaliation. When kitsune are involved with humans, even in the cases of repaying gratitude or mischievous trickery, the encounters end badly.

Desiring a revitalization of the belief system that would cement the divinity of the emperor and his right to rule, The Meiji restoration government institutionalized Shintō and declared it the national religion. And though the 1889 constitution proposed by the Meiji restoration allowed religious freedom (in name but not necessarily in practice), "obeisance at Shintō shrines was considered the patriotic duty of all Japanese" (Britannica 2009). The Meiji government also introduced a school system to replace the age-group system common among villagers. The new schools were intended to be institutions for the "socialization and education" of boys and girls (separately) (Ueno 1987, S79). These schools taught children Western ideologies alongside compulsory Shintō moral teachings (*shūshin*). Consequently, Japanese society attempted to balance and reconcile the Western and Japanese, traditional and modern,

and the supernatural and mundane to create something new and sustainable in the modern environment.

Of course, with progress and change comes fear and nostalgia for times past. The significant political and social changes initiated by modernization and Westernization of Japan in the first half of the Meiji period led to an unexpected consequence: a renewed appreciation of tradition. The new educational system was heavily influenced by Western theory and practice, but it also stressed the traditional values of the samurai (Britannica 2021a). Literature and art also changed from simple imitation of Western styles and started to selectively blend together Western and Japanese styles.

Yanagita and Hearn both expressed their motivations for collecting Japanese folk tales as being caused by a fear of the decline of traditional and agricultural Japanese society. Both believed that the industrialization of Japan would mean an eventual complete disappearance of the ‘folk’ and their cultural legacies. Because of their efforts, two valuable records of folk tales from the Meiji era exist today – one written for a Japanese audience and the other written by and for a Western audience. Hearn wrote that

[t]he rare charm of Japanese life, so different from that of all other lands, is not to be found in its Europeanised circles. It is to be found among the great common people, who represent in Japan, as in all countries, the national virtues, and who still cling to their delightful old customs... How much the lighter and kindlier superstitions of the people add to the charm of Japanese life can, indeed, be understood only by one who has long resided in the interior. A few of their beliefs are sinister,—such as that in demon-foxes, which public education is rapidly dissipating; but a large number are comparable for beauty of fancy to even those Greek myths in which our noblest poets of to-day [*sic*] still find inspiration; while many others, which encourage kindness to the unfortunate, and kindness to animals, can never have produced any but the happiest moral results (1907, 9-10).

Hearn saw the folk tales and superstitions he was collecting as having the “rarest value as fragments of the unwritten literature of its hopes, its fears, its experience with right and wrong, —

its primitive efforts to find solutions for the riddle of the Unseen” (1907, 9). He believed that collections of stories like his own and Mitford’s were the key necessary for Westerners to have any hope of understanding the mind and traditions of the Japanese people.

Yanagita, Hearn, and Mitford’s works may not reveal as much about the kitsune within the stories themselves, but these three collections do reveal what position and purpose the authors believed the kitsune occupied when the stories were recorded. Each collection contains a few kitsune stories, or in Hearn’s case a chapter on kitsune, meaning each author had heard of the kitsune and was aware of its position as a popular figure in Japanese folklore. For these authors the kitsune embodied the unusual, strange, and unique characteristics of Japan’s immensely vibrant and elaborate supernatural realm. And so the kitsune became a tool; a nostalgic tool to connect the past to the present and keep alive an aspect of Japanese society that was believed to be dying.

Love and Marriage

The stories featured in chapter 2 and chapter 3 contained many thematic elements that were indicative of the gendered expectations placed upon Japanese citizens, however the Meiji era stories almost entirely exclude these. That is not to say that there were no changes to the gendered social order or conceptions of love and sexuality. In fact, the Meiji period saw much discussion on such topics and “the status of women, the relationship between husbands and wives, prostitution and concubinage were among the topics raised by the early ‘enlightenment intellectuals’” (Ballhatchet 2007, 178). Many of the policies introduced by the Meiji government were intended to change the position of women within Japanese society, but some of these

policies drastically influenced women in a negative rather than positive way. As per the new constitution, women were denied the right to vote and they were to be obedient to their husband under the now official legal unit of the *ie* - the family system consisting of “a patriarchal unit with one husband and one wife in which the wife comes to live with her husband and all children born of the marriage live with them” (Wakita 1993, 83). Most men were now able to establish their own households due to industrialization, as “the old middle class made up of self-employed small-commodity producers and landowning peasants” was being replaced by “the rising middle class of wage earners” (Ueno 1987, S79).

Marriage values experienced a shift that was caused by the introduction of the Victorian concept of love. Previously “*iro*” (love) in the Tokugawa era prioritized sexual activity and viewed it as a sacred act that existed outside the confines of marriage. The Meiji period turned away from *iro* as it was seen as uncivilized and instead replaced it with “*ai*”(love). *Ai* mirrored the Victorian “romantic but chaste love which made sexual activity a conjugal duty rather than the goal” (Ballhatchet 2007, 178). The mission schools built by Christian missionaries enhanced this conception of love as the missionaries aimed to educate girls “about Christian home life, including the ideal of marriage as a love match between equal partners” (Ballhatchet 2007, 180). “The Foxes’ Wedding” may be indicative of this change in marriage values. The white fox marries a beautiful lady fox, a relationship of equals rather than the human-fox relationships featured in older stories, and the match appeared to be amenable to both parties - there was certainly love between the couple after marriage. This marriage of kitsune to kitsune also exemplifies the previously mentioned divide between the supernatural and human realms that now existed. The foxes’ married life was happy and successful because like ended up with like

(note the two other fox women in this chapter - presumably two variants of the fox Kuzunoha - whose relationships with their human husbands ended in the separation of the couple).

Confucian superstition had prevented two children of opposite sexes that were older than seven from sitting together in the same room and Buddhism had required modesty and purity of women throughout their lives. Now women and men were allowed to mingle in public and the unequal marriages of Confucian societies were openly criticized. Developed societies were viewed as presenting men and women as equals “and each newly married couple set up a new family rather than continuing the parental line. This was the result of the influence of Christianity, which was responsible for the high status of women in Western culture and its practice of monogamy” (Ballhatchet 2007, 187). “The Foxes’ Wedding” does describe the bride’s procession to her “husband’s” home, but no evidence of it being his family home or his own home is given - so it can be assumed that the family took up a neolocal residence together. The fox couple remains monogamous to each other as far as the audience knows. The neolocal, monogamous couple would have been typical of the newly reformed Japanese married life under the ie system, but in reality the wife would have been required to submit to her husband rather than being his equal. It may be argued that the decline in new or revised kitsune stories from the Meiji period as compared to the vibrancy and wealth of the previous Edo period known for its flourishing arts, points to an inclusive conclusion on whether the kitsune at the time accurately reflected the gendered norms of Japanese society. Yet this analysis suggests that the few human-fox marriage stories and additional recorded attitudes towards the kitsune, are a sign that the social relationships between men and women and humans and the supernatural was changing.

CHAPTER V: POST WAR JAPAN AND THE PRESENT DAY (1945 - PRESENT):
CONTEMPORARY AND GLOBAL KITSUNE

After WWII, Japan again saw major changes to the religious and social environments within the country. The American Occupation in particular was responsible for many of the changes to fundamental Japanese religious policies. The Occupation introduced policies that were intended to (almost immediately) drastically alter the previous religious, social, cultural, and political principles of the ancient, feudal, and modern regimes. Kitagawa (1990) elucidates the effects of those changes the Occupation sought to enforce:

First and foremost, the newly-declared principle of religious liberty was diametrically opposed to the historic principle, operative until 1945, that every Japanese person must pledge his or her supreme loyalty to the throne and the nation. Second, State Shinto... was completely dismantled. Third, the important principle of separation of religion and state, which had been hammered out by American experience, nullified the historical Japanese principle of the unity of religion and government (166).

The abolition of State Shinto and the newly applied concept of religious freedom - as compared to the nominal religious freedom under the Meiji constitution - alongside a desire to globalize Japanese culture has led to a secularization of Japanese society. Many new religions were introduced into or founded in Japan, however most Japanese consider themselves to be secular with minimal religious interactions outside of weddings, funerals, and holidays. Though the Japanese claim of a secular society is contested by the many values taken from traditional religions which “have become part of the fabric of everyday life” (Watt 2003, 2).

Post WWII, the effects of globalization are clearly evident within Japan. Robertson (1987) asserts the subsequent interdependence of nations at the global level and the “colonization” of indigenous culture by global culture has facilitated “massive processes of relativization of cultures, doctrines, ideologies and cognitive frames of reference and raise[d] profound problems as to the ways in and degrees to which individuals and sociocultural entities

of various kinds and sizes can adapt to the world as a whole” (35). Japanese society is particularly talented at selectively choosing specific elements from other societies to adapt or import which has allowed them to become a global society but “in a uniquely Japanese way” (Robertson 1987, 37).

Even so, the adoption of global ideas did not necessarily encourage the devaluation or replacement of historical Japanese traditions, religion, or thought. Japan has become a major center of international technological innovation that boasts a distinctive amalgamation of the capability for adaptation of global culture and reverence for traditional Japanese culture. Fortunately, Lafcadio Hearn’s (1907) supposition that the supernatural realm would fade from existence in favor of Western ideologies did not come to fruition. Instead, the nationalistic views of the Japanese have caused an embrace of tradition, including the existence of supernatural characters such as the kitsune. Stories featuring kitsune have not only remained popular within Japan but have also received global attention - especially within the United States where the appreciation of Japanese pop culture has become its own subculture among younger generations.

The Helpful Fox Senko-san

The Helpful Fox Senko-san (*Sewayaki Kitsune no Senko-san*) is a web manga series written and illustrated by Rimukoro. The ongoing series began in 2017 and is currently at eleven volumes (the eleventh volume was released on June 10, 2022). An anime by the same name aired from April to June 2019 on AT-X and Tokyo MX in Japan, and an English subtitled version began releasing a month after (May 2019) on *Crunchyroll*, a popular anime streaming website that offers subtitled and dubbed versions of anime in multiple languages to a global audience.

The plot of *The Helpful Fox Senko-san* centers around Nakano Kuroto, a young white collar office worker who is constantly overworked and stressed by the demands of his job. Senko-san is an 800-year-old kitsune who came to Earth from the spirit world because she wants to help relieve some of Nakano's stress by taking care of and "pampering him."

The Helpful Fox Senko-san shows Nakano's and Senko's life together as Senko does her best to help make Nakano's life easier; cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, and even scrubbing his back while in the bath. The relationship between Nakano and Senko is intimate - Senko even describes herself as Nakano's "wife and mother" when their relationship is questioned by the next door neighbor, Koenji Yasuko - but not explicitly romantic or sexual. Though Senko is an 800-year-old fox spirit, she has the appearance of a young girl with golden fox ears and tail. Senko's looks often lead Nakano to question the appropriateness of their interactions, but both he and Senko rationalize the relationship based upon Senko's actual age and lived experience.

Koenji, Nakano's neighbor, describes her thoughts on Senko:

Senko is a mysterious person. She looks like a cute young cosplayer girl, but every now and then, she comes by to help me... She looks young, but at the same time, she's very motherly. If what she says is to be trusted, she's an adult, and she and the other neighbor [Nakano] are a couple. It's like Lolita, but legal! I'm jealous! ("You just want to fluff more" 2019)

Koenji directly references the highly controversial "lolita" character type often found in anime and manga. Lolita characters may be defined by their style of dress, that is, they wear lolita-style clothing: a type of Japanese fashion that takes inspiration from Victorian and Rococo clothing styles with lots of lace and frills. Or in the case of Senko-san, a lolita or "loli" may be a cute, usually appearing to be underage, type of character who is often used as a fanservice tool placed in sexually suggestive situations or scenes (fanservice refers to material added in manga or anime to please or entice the audience, often of a sexual nature).

Senko is not the only kitsune that interacts with Nakano. Shiro is another loli-type kitsune who comes to help Nakano as she feels that Senko is not doing an adequate job of relieving the darkness around Nakano that results from his stress. Shiro is a fox girl with long white hair and pure white ears and tail to match. She only appears occasionally to help Senko and Nakano, whereas Senko lives with Nakano full-time. Nakano also meets Sora, a kitsune who describes herself as thousands of years old and something like Senko and Shiro's "boss." Sora has a more mature outward appearance (she has four tails instead of one like Senko and Shiro) and she often teases Nakano with her revealing outfit and attempts to seduce him. After a year of living together, Sora tells Senko that she does not need to continue helping Nakano; the dark, gloomy aura caused by his stress has not been permanently resolved by Senko's efforts therefore Sora believes Senko should stop. Ultimately, despite Sora's warnings of heartbreak due to the difference in human and spirit lifespans, Senko decides to continue living with and taking care of Nakano. This is where the first season of the anime ends, but as the web manga is ongoing, the final ending of the series is unknown.

Fate Franchise - Tamamo no Mae

The Fate series is a "media collective" created by Type-Moon, a prominent Japanese game company, which includes a long list of visual novels, light novels, manga, anime, animated films, video games, and mobile games all relating to the "Fate" universe. The Fate series began with the *eroge* (erotic) visual novel game *Fate/stay night* released in 2004 ("Fate/stay night" 2022). Each installment of the Fate series follows events of "Holy Grail Wars" where magic practitioners known as "magi" or 'Masters' summon 'Servants' in order to compete for

ownership of the 'Holy Grail.' Each Master may summon one Servant to compete alongside them in the Holy Grail War. The Servants are "Heroic Spirits" - "reincarnations of legendary souls from all across time" - who belong to one of seven classes: Saber, Archer, Lancer, Berserker, Rider, Assassin, and Caster ("Fate/stay night" 2022).

One of the well-known and popular Servant characters is Caster Tamamo no Mae. This Tamamo no Mae is meant to be the very same Tamamo, evil nine-tailed fox spirit, who caused the downfall of the court of Emperor Toba. She appears multiple times throughout the Fate series in Fate/EXTRA (2010), Fate/EXTRA CCC (2013), Fate/EXTRA CCC Foxtail (2013-present), Fate/Grand Order (2015), Fate/EXTELLA (2017), and Fate/EXTELLA Link (2019). Fate's Tamamo shares some similarities with historical depictions of Tamamo no Mae's character, but there are some noticeable differences. In the Fate universe, Tamamo no Mae is actually a reincarnated part of the goddess Amaterasu. As Amaterasu, she was a goddess who yearned to experience and understand humanity so she gave up her divinity and memories to be reborn as the human girl Mizukume. 18-year-old Mizukume caught the attention of Emperor Toba and became a court lady. She began calling herself Tamamo-no-Mae and just as in the legends, she was the favorite of Emperor Toba. However, her divine origins caused her to one day sprout a pair of fox ears upon her head. She managed to conceal the ears for a month but she was exposed by Abe no Seimei who was investigating the emperor's illness.

Tamamo flees to Nasu fields where she is greeted by many foxes who speak comforting words to her and tell her that she has done well enduring another "dream" (life). With this encounter Tamamo realizes the truth of her identity and that she has been betrayed and now hunted by the humans she so trusted. Emperor Toba sends an army of eighty thousand men to hunt her down. Tamamo initially tries to reason with the soldiers by apologizing and telling them

to forget her and that she will leave, but as her cries fall on deaf ears, she instead ends up fighting back and killing all eighty-thousand men. She is ultimately killed by an enchanted arrow and becomes the sesshōseki, though she expresses that she has no desire for revenge against humans (“Tamamo-no-Mae” 2022).

In her role as a summoned spirit or Servant, Tamamo no Mae has surrendered most of her divine powers and her current form has a single tail. The Fate universe’s Tamamo has the appearance of an older teenage girl with pink hair, golden eyes, and orange-colored ears and tail of a fox. Some of the games and manga show Tamamo in different outfits including a few very risqué bikinis and a gothic lolita/bondage fusion outfit - though all are provocative or revealing in some way. Tamamo’s personality is light, but she is classified as being aligned with “neutral evil” and she has a “wicked tongue” (“Tamamo-no-Mae 2022). The Fate universe lore also describes Tamamo as quick to fall in love and she will develop feelings for her Master (in-game this is the player) regardless of their gender. Tamamo says she wants to “become a good wife” – she is directly referencing the concept of “Good Wife, Wise Mother” that has been circulating since the Meiji period – and her appearances within the Fate universe often depict her in romantic scenes or scenes of an explicit nature with her Master. There are also several illustrations of Tamamo that have been released by character designer Wada Arco that show her in suggestive or explicit poses, a recurring trend since the Fate franchise began with an eroge visual novel game.

Retaining “Japaneseness” in the Modern Environment

Japan officially reentered the global environment in the 1960s with the 1964 Olympic games hosted in Tokyo signifying Japan’s rebirth as a new peaceful entity. This new Japan would take an active part in consuming and producing cultural products for the global market. Prough (2010) describes one product that would become, and continues to be, a major export: “in Japan, the press, scholars, and even government officials are labeling Japanese popular culture ‘Japan’s new ambassador’” (54). Even in the context of today’s transcultural flows, where popular culture products have the power to cross borders or erase them, “the particular case of Japanese popular culture becomes even more interesting for analysis and debate, as it is considered the new global soft power, which draws its popularity from creating hybrid formats and content, while both reinforcing and blurring its so-called ‘Japaneseness’” (Teodorescu 2018, 90). Soft power is defined as the ability of a nation to obtain preferred outcomes through influencing culture, political values, and foreign policies with attraction and appeal rather than coercive methods.

Today, manga, anime, and video games are some of the most widely circulated Japanese products and evidence of Japan’s soft power in the United States. Manga, anime, and video games are also among the top mediums of entertainment within Japan, and they are a fundamental part of Japanese popular culture. Manga has comprised “twenty to forty percent of all Japanese publications” since the 1960s (Prough 2010, 56). The imports of manga and anime into the U.S. were initially driven by fan interest, meaning the Japanese publishing houses were not the ones to seek out English-translation deals. This meant that up until the 1990s when

corporate entities became interested in large-scale licensing deals for U.S. releases, Japanese creators were writing and marketing their products to a strictly Japanese audience.

After manga and anime began to rise in popularity in the U.S., American publishing companies worried over how to appropriately adapt the content for an American audience. However, they quickly realized that fans of manga and anime were very particular in their preferences for translations to remain as close as possible to the original Japanese source material. Japanese creators also became aware that manga and anime's success was in part due to its unique "Japaneseness" which appealed to both Japanese and global audiences. Creators could then focus on creating products that embodied and represented modern Japanese cultural and social attitudes, ideas, and practices to the global market. *The Helpful Fox Senko-san* and the Fate franchise works should thus be considered as products of a modern Japanese society which balances its unique Japaneseness simultaneously with the influence of Western and global concepts.

The Helpful Fox Senko-san takes place in the current day and is meant to address some of the prevalent concerns and anxieties of its intended audience. As a part of the *seinen* genre of manga, *The Helpful Fox Senko-san*'s target audience is young men aged 18-30 or older. Young salaryman Nakano is meant to appeal to modern male office workers who can relate to feeling stressed, overworked, and without direction in their lives due to the strict and demanding environment in the Japanese workplace. The comfort offered by Senko's particularly domestic and caring character can be perceived as an embodiment of the perfect or most desirable partner for a white-collar worker like Nakano Kuroto. Japanese marriage practices since the 1960s have focused on promotion of the nuclear family unit, where the father is the primary wage earner and the mother is in charge of upkeep of the house, raising the children, and caring for her husband

while he is at home. This type of family organization is the most common and expected for members of Japan's large urban middle class. Though dual income households and married women with part- or full-time jobs have become increasingly common in Japan, Senko-san may serve to represent the holdover of favor for the so-called "traditional" family roles and obligations for women as mothers and wives.

Kawaii Kitsune

While manga and anime have retained a uniquely Japanese identity, part of their success and use in the soft power approach to the global market is due to the inclusion of *mukokuseki* - "literally meaning being without national identity or 'stateless' and 'culturally odorless'" - elements (Teodorescu 2018, 90; Iwabuchi 2002). *The Helpful Fox Senko-san* and the Fate franchise combine the implicitly Japanese figure of the kitsune with the universally appealing traits of *kawaii* (cute) characters. The term *kawaii* encompasses a 'cute' aesthetic associated with *shōjo* (girl) culture that "has over the last few decades achieved tremendous global popularity and commercial success" (Tran 2018, 19). *Kawaii* products can be found in malls, mass media, and the internet world-wide. The export of *kawaii* goods began in the 1960s when Japan aimed to rebrand itself and remove many of the cultural identifiers which may have appeared foreign or threatening to outside markets. Tran (2018) elaborates:

As an aesthetic that invites its own consumption, *kawaii* can be viewed as an exemplary form through which Japan can claim and exert soft power. More than a symptom of an infantilized, feminized postwar Japan, *kawaii* renders salient the complex aesthetic negotiation of the country's compulsory disarmament toward the production of a *disarming aesthetic* that seduces and sells spectacularly well (21).

But while kawaii aesthetics were meant to appeal to a global audience, they now sell a consumer aesthetic that perpetuates structures of global racial capitalism as “the success of *kawaii* goods in the United States and elsewhere hinges on the way *kawaii* packages racial otherness/foreignness in a nonthreatening manner” (Tran 2018, 21).

Kawaii aesthetics target both male and female audiences but are often used to particularly “attract and entice male audiences” as young girls real or fictional become subject to the male gaze through a form of sexualized cuteness (Tran 2018, 19). Kawaii characters depict young girls as the sources of emotional labor; with the “ethics of care” presented as the best cure to “mitigate the pain of neoliberalization” (Tran 2018, 26). This concept is evidenced in *The Helpful Fox Senko-san* by Senko’s “pampering” which is likewise shown to be the cure for Nakano’s suffering under the constraints of modern urban Japanese life. Kawaii female characters also facilitate and reinforce heteronormative caretaking hierarchies - both Senko and Tamamo enjoy taking care of their partners and describe themselves as desiring to be “good wives.”

According to Tran (2018) Japan’s soft power invites erotic consumption of kawaii characters by both global and local audiences. *The Helpful Fox Senko-san* and the Fate franchise’s novels, anime, manga, and games are all targeted toward a male audience. All of the kitsune characters - Senko, Shiro, Sora, and Tamamo - are sexualized characterizations of kawaii girls specifically designed to draw in male viewers, readers, and players both Japanese and foreign. So, these kitsune characters are being used to reinforce the racialized position of young girls in Japanese society as caretakers and emotional laborers who are simultaneously subject to sexualization by local and global audiences.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

This analysis sought to prove the value of kitsune stories as reflections of society and culture within Japan throughout its history. It is the conclusion of this study that the kitsune stories of the Heian, Edo, Meiji, and Modern periods allow us to gain unique understandings of the historical and modern environments in which they were created as well as offering important perspectives that diverge from those found in mainstream historical records. The closely intertwined relationship between kitsune and Japanese women exists because they are placed in similar roles by Japanese society. The kitsune stories show the social positions of women and men within the public and private spheres of Japanese society during their respective periods. These positions are seen to mirror the actual reality of conditions at the time of their collection during different time periods.

Buddhism's proliferation throughout Japan had a radical effect on how the Japanese conceptualized gender and sexuality. The kitsune women within the *Nihon Ryōiki* and the *Konjaku Monogatari* can be taken as examples of the Buddhist assumption that purity is an indicator of piety. The disguised kitsune's perception as a danger to the religious devotion of men, points to a deeper existing prejudice that views women as instigators of misconduct through their seductive appearance or actions. Kitsune were mainly used as a tool for the proselytization of Buddhist values and were depicted as motivated by either malicious intent or grateful repayment for favors received. The enforcement of Confucian values during the Edo period affected women's educations and the subsequent restrictions placed upon them as they were said to be inferior to men and subsequently must defer to their authority with perfect obedience. So in the face of strict political censorship and ethical restrictions under

Confucianism, the kitsune moved from religious to secular topics, becoming an outlet for covert political and social criticisms. Kitsune of the Edo period subverted gender norms, emerging as strong main antagonists or loving but independent wives.

The Meiji period embraced Westernism but also saw a revitalization of interest in traditional Japanese culture aided by the institutionalization of Shintō as the national religion. In the face of industrialization and a growing middle class who had set aside superstition in favor of popular Western ideas, kitsune stories alongside other folklore were carefully collected and recorded for the sake of preservation. Kitsune preserved rural attitudes and traditions from the previous era - embodying the nostalgia of some Japanese for the pre-industrialization Japan that once existed. And finally, the modern period has brought many different global influences into Japan while also carrying Japanese influences into the global environment. Westernization and globalization have pushed Japan into the global consumer market, and Japan has had unique success exerting soft power through cultural products that showcase universal qualities alongside explicitly Japanese qualities. Kitsune today have become a part of the popular culture of Japan that is sought out by foreign audiences. The kawaii kitsune characters represent a racialized image of young girls in Japan as emotional laborers who are sexualized and consumed by male audiences in the name of soft power and global appeal.

Overall, the analysis of these kitsune tales has reinforced the importance of reuniting the folk with their folklore to understand how folk tales and folk literature are modeled on the social, cultural, and ecological patterns of their individual eras in Japan, while also reproducing those same patterns. Future research should continue to consider the kitsune's development and adaptation throughout Japan's history in order to gain a more comprehensive overview of the kitsune as a reflection of Japanese culture and society. Modern Japanese society alone offers an

innumerable amount of kitsune depictions within pop culture that could serve as valuable resources, not to mention the growing popularity of fox-demon and fox women.

NOTES

¹ The stories of kitsune transforming into men exist, but up until the modern period they were much less prolific. The twenty-first century has seen many more male kitsune characters especially in manga and anime.

² Although Nozaki stated the *Konjaku Monogatari* was written by Takakuni, it is not certain whether he wrote it or not.

³ Though there were two empresses during the Edo period, this did not signify women regaining political or social power.

⁴ No examples of these stories were included in chapter 2, but they are nonetheless a common trope in Buddhist tales meant to serve as spiritual exemplary to the people. The physical rebirth of a human into an animal or vice versa usually resulted due to good or bad karma accumulated through the deeds of the human or animal.

⁵ Santō Kyōden was the pen name of Iwase Samuru

⁶ The very same son of fox Kuzunoha from the previous story; Abe no Seimei is the ancestor of Abe no Yasunari, and he is likely responsible for not only the *onmoyodo* techniques, but the supernatural prowess of his descendant.

⁷ Yanagita Kunio's collections focused largely on gathering anecdotes, folk tales, and legends from the rural and agricultural areas of Japan that he viewed as endangered in the face of industrialization and modernization.

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