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## Japanese Demon Lore

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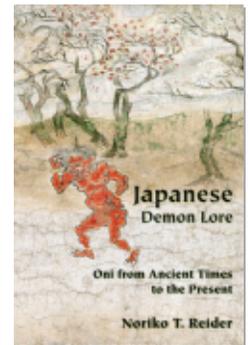
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## Oni in Urban Culture

### *De-demonization of Oni*

ONI IN EARLY MODERN JAPAN (1600–1867) remained relatively static in their representational attributes and their overall impact on social life, particularly when compared with the medieval period. The oni as a dark, enigmatic force threatening the central authority of the court retreated, by this period, into the cultural background. While the oni may have no longer troubled the councils of the imperial court, they thrived nonetheless in the minds of common people and remained visible in their literary and visual arts. In urban culture in particular, the oni flourished in the literary, visual, and performing arts as entertaining creatures. This chapter examines a general trend of de-demonization of oni in the Early Modern period and looks into an increasing tendency in more recent times toward commercialization and commodification of oni in urban cultures as seen in *Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan* (Yotsuya Ghost Stories, 1824), and *Kotō no oni* (Oni of a Solitary Island, 1929–30).

### The Edoites' Belief System

The Edo period is an interesting time and space in Japanese culture in which individuals from all walks of life, on some level or other, seem to unite in their belief in the supernatural. Arai Hakuseki (1657–1725), a Confucian scholar, statesman, and rationalist, enumerates supernatural beings and strange phenomena with erudition in “Kishinron” (Theories of Demons and Deities), so much so that Yamagata Bantō (1748–1821), a townsman scholar, writes that “[Arai Hakuseki] believes in the strange and mysterious just as Buddhist priests do.” Yamagata further comments, “even an erudite like Arai believes in the supernatural, let alone other people. There is

nothing one can do about people's belief in and indulgence with the demons and deities" (516–517).

As late as 1860, at the closing of the Edo period, there is evidence to support the idea that this "supernatural threat" was never too far from the bureaucrats' and governors' minds for they knew the unknown was something they held very little, if any, control over. In preparation for a visit by the fourteenth Tokugawa shogun, Iemochi, officials posted an official warning to supernatural demons at Nikko that read:

To the *tengu* [flying goblin] and the other demons: Whereas our shogun intends to visit the Nikko mausoleums next April: Now therefore, ye Tengu and other demons inhabiting these mountains must remove elsewhere until the shogun's visit is concluded. (qtd. in Figal 78)

While it is unlikely that all government officials believed in the supernatural, the aforementioned document demonstrates state recognition of the supernatural at the highest level. At the same time, this passage suggests that even demons are subject to the shogun's rule. Soon, the shogunal power yielded to the emperor with the Meiji Restoration. Most noteworthy, the formation of the Meiji Restoration was significantly influenced by an intellectual whose beliefs were strongly rooted in the supernatural. Hirata Atsutane (1776–1843) was an influential scholar of *kokugaku* or "nativism," an institution that began in the seventeenth century for the philological and exegetical study of Japanese classical literature. Atsutane's aim of study was to clarify the cultural and spiritual uniqueness of Japan through his belief in the supernatural. This desire is emphasized in many of his works, including *Kishin shinron* (New Theories of Demons and Deities, 1820) and *Kokon yōmikō* (Strange Creatures of Past and Present, 1821). In another work *Senkyō ibun* (Report from a Different Realm, 1822), Atsutane's firm belief in the supernatural seems to solidify as he recounts his interview with a boy who claims to have met *tengu*.<sup>1</sup>

Nakamura Hiroaki writes that edification of the intellectuals based upon Zhu Xi philosophy's yin and yang rationalism became fairly common in the early modern period, though it did not change the general population's fundamental folk beliefs or superstitions (333–34). For example, Yamaoka Genrin (1631–1672) explains in "Kokin hyakumonogatari hyōban" (An Evaluation of One Hundred Strange and Weird Tales of Past and Present, 1686) about the oni as follows:

1 For the texts of *Kishin shinron*, *Kokon yōmikō*, and *Senkyō ibun*, see Hirata 17–60, 71–358, and 361–604 respectively.

Heaven and earth, mountains and rivers, trees and grasses, water and fire, stones and dirt, all sentient beings are yin-yang. The work of *yang* is called kami, and the work of *yin* is named oni. ... Since all the bad and evil belong to *yin*, the souls of wicked people are called oni. ... their [wicked] souls have nowhere to go and nobody worships them. So they linger in the air and cause various problems [to humans]... Shuten Dōji did not necessarily eat humans, but he is called oni because he overestimates his own prowess, goes against imperial authority and Buddhist teachings, and does evil-doings. ... The oni that ate the lady near the Akuta River was said to have been the Chief Councilor of State, Kunitsune. (13–14)

Genrin attempts to provide an operational definition of what a so-called oni is. To the modern reader, this explanation does not seem to rationalize the existence of the oni because *yin* alone does not explain why oni should linger in the air. Yet, Genrin's students who asked the question seemed to find his answer quite acceptable. With this increasing trend toward intellectualization and rationalism, the awe and fear previously associated with oni seem to have significantly lessened. Not surprisingly, making the supernatural comical, parodying them, and even sexualizing them became fashionable in some circles, especially in urban areas.

### De-demonized Oni

By the middle of the seventeenth century, Yamaoka Genrin had already expressed that Shuten Dōji was an evil human rather than a supernatural creature called oni. For the general population, however, perhaps Chikamatsu Monzaemon contributed more significantly to the de-demonization of the awesome chieftain of oni, Shuten Dōji, just as in the case of yamauba. Shuten Dōji had already spoken of his personal life and showed a naïve side in the previous era, as we have seen. But Chikamatsu Monzaemon's Shuten Dōji is quite like a human and becomes a pathetic creature. In the play titled *Shuten Dōji makurakotoba* (Shuten Dōji Pillow Words, 1708), Shuten Dōji confesses:

My mom's affection was so deep that she nursed me till I was ten years old. As I was sucking her bosom all day long, I couldn't forget the taste of my mom's milk...even after I went into the mountains, I sneaked into the bedroom of the priests' pages to suck their bosoms... eventually I was sucking lifeblood, forgetting the taste of milk... before I knew, my heart turned into the real oni. ...Even a heavenly being's pleasure will be run out once, let alone the oni's. What kind

of suffering will I receive? ...When you return home, please hold memorial services for the thousands of those I murdered. (*Chikamatsu zenshū* 6: 78–80)

Although murdering thousands of people as the legend goes, Shuten Dōji regrets his evil deeds, asking for the salvation of his victims. More remarkably, he misses his mother's milk. As we saw in later yamauba tales, the themes of motherhood and maternity are invoked to make the demon more sympathetic, and arguably, human. It is also interesting to note how this tale, just like the earlier Shuten Dōji tales, bears the stamp of carnival as mother's milk and lifeblood appear in carnivalesque flux. This is a far cry from Shuten Dōji as the great enemy of imperial authority.

*Kusa zōshi's Shuten Dōji kuruwa hinagata* (Shuten Dōji's Model for the Pleasure Quarters) goes further and presents Shuten Dōji and other oni as comical fools (see Saitō Mikihiro 58–69). In this story, Shuten Dōji orders his cohorts to abduct courtesans from the pleasure quarters of Yoshiwara, Shimabara, and Shinmachi<sup>2</sup> to create his own pleasure quarter. In the older *otogi zōshi's Shuten Dōji*, the residence of Shuten Dōji was called the Iron Palace—an imposing azure palace with rows of roofs and bejeweled screens within which the abducted young women served the oni. For the Edo people a gorgeous dwelling with many beautiful women ready to serve men was easily associated with the pleasure quarter, a major fixture in urban culture. Thus, the Iron Palace was smoothly replaced (or *mitateru* alluded) by the pleasure quarter (Saitō Mikihiro 70–71). Shuten Dōji in the pleasure quarter does not consume human flesh and blood; he just becomes intoxicated with real sake. Instead of Raikō rescuing the abducted ladies, the kidnapped cunning beauties escape by themselves. The oni are completely duped by the women, one even places his tiger-skin loincloth in a pawnshop to pay the courtesan for her service; the oni are a laughing stock.

Oni's de-demonized image eventually became popular as a souvenir, too, as seen in Ōtsu-e (Ōtsu pictures)—folk paintings produced in and around Ōtsu town in the Edo period. Philosopher and the founder of Japan Folk Crafts Museum Yanagi Sōetsu (1889–1961) writes that Ōtsu paintings “represent folk art in its purest form” (qtd. in McArthur 12). The most well-loved figure in the entire Ōtsu-e repertoire is called *oni no nenbutsu* (oni intoning the name of the Buddha), which depicts a praying oni dressed

2 Yoshiwara in Edo, Shimabara in Kyoto, and Shinmachi in Osaka were the pleasure quarters designated by the Tokugawa shogunate.

in the Buddhist priest's garb with a gong around his neck, a striker in one hand and a Buddhist subscription list on the other. As McArthur comments, an oni as a Buddhist priest seems contradictory, for the oni who is considered to be evil strives for Buddhahood itself. Some of the "inscription to the paintings warns against superficial appearance of goodness, while others suggest that even the most evil beings can be saved by Buddhism" (30). The depicted image of an oni in Buddhist garb is quite humorous and friendly. Ōtsu town is one of the fifty-three stations of Tōkaidō (Eastern Sea Route) connecting Edo and Kyoto. Undoubtedly, the praying oni were popular souvenirs for the traveler who journeyed on to Tōkaidō. As Juliann Wolfgram notes,

At a time when the image of *oni no nenbutsu* became an invitation for prospective buyers of Ōtsu-e, it is clear that the original spiritual nature of the demon had been thoroughly transformed by the secular wit and humor of the age. Whereas the belief in oni has never been completely lost in Japan, its fearsome supernatural powers have been superseded by its parody of human frailties. (101)

Some oni receive both eerie and artistic treatment in the fictional world. For example, Ueda Akinari (1734–1809), a poet, scholar, physician, and fiction writer, published the renowned tales of the supernatural entitled *Ugetsu monogatari* (Tales of Moonlight and Rain, 1776). Among the nine short stories, two tales in particular, "Kibitsu no kama" (Cauldron of Kibitsu) and "Aozukin" (Blue Hood) describe oni vividly and frighteningly more in line with a traditional oni image. In "Cauldron of Kibitsu," excessive jealousy transforms an exemplary wife into an oni, causing her to brutally terminate her husband's life and that of his mistress as well. Akinari wove the scenes and diction from the *Tale of Genji* into the "Cauldron of Kibitsu," evoking courtly elegance in the middle of gruesome fate.<sup>3</sup> In "Blue Hood," a revered Buddhist monk falls from grace because he has become a pederast, obsessed with his young catamite. When his catamite dies prematurely, he takes to cannibalism to satiate his terrible loss, and turns into a barbaric oni. Only upon encountering a revered mendicant priest are the pederast's previous carnal obsessions re-directed toward his own salvation. While frightening to the villagers, Akinari's narrative reveals the oni's pathos; Akinari's oni behave as the traditional image of oni would,

3 For the analysis of the "Cauldron of Kibitsu," see chapter four of Reider, *Tales of the Supernatural in Early Modern Japan*.

and one should not forget that Akinari was well aware his literary products would be read mostly by urbanites.

Chikamatsu's humanized Shuten Dōji and *oni no nenbutsu* exemplify de-demonized oni, and they both also represent the image of oni as commodities. Indeed, the supernatural becomes increasingly commodified in urban Edo culture, as we have already seen in the portraits of voluptuous yamauba in chapter four.

### Commercialization and Urban Culture: Oni as an Example of *Yōkai*

As mentioned in chapter one, oni are the *yōkai* with the most negative associations. Oni in earlier times occupied special, dominant topos of their own. Yet in the Early Modern period oni are just one of many *bakemono* (phantom/shape-shifter/monsters) or in more modern terms, *yōkai* (hobgoblins/monsters).<sup>4</sup> Concerning the bifurcation of the *yōkai* phenomena at the end of the Edo period Adam Kabat observes:

[T]he major difference between *yōkai* in folk beliefs and those of urban culture is that the latter is purposefully created and sold as a commodity.... The publisher who sold *bakemono* came up with various strategies.... For example, at the time of the carnival side-show if a publisher would print books of related subjects, the book would become an advertisement for the carnival side-show and vice versa.... Those who came to Edo took *bakemono* books back to their hometowns as souvenirs. There certainly would have been a re-importation of *yōkai*, that is, *yōkai* born of a local legend were recreated through urban culture and went back to the countryside as a new form of *yōkai*. The *yōkai* of these media were disseminated widely from urban areas to the countryside. (“‘Sōsaku’ to shite no *yōkai*” 146)

Similarly, Melinda Takeuchi notes:

[A]s the Edo townsmen became more sophisticated and cynical, they became less credulous. Records of supernatural hoaxes perpetrated on the public indicated that in the tough-minded atmosphere of

4 Inoue Enryō (1858–1919), a thinker and educator of the modern period, disseminated the term *yōkai* in his attempt to enlighten the Japanese masses about the identities of *yōkai*. The term *bakemono* was used in the early modern period. Komatsu Kazuhiko, “Yomigaeru Kusazōshi no bakemonotachi” 232. For the study of *yōkai*, see Foster, *Pandemonium and Parade*.

nineteenth-century urban life, as opposed to the rural environment... The carnival side-show atmosphere that often accompanied the Edo-period experience of the supernatural no doubt brought about a certain degree of de-mystification. (12)

Indeed the Edoites' proud saying goes, "Buffoons and *bakemono* live beyond Hakone," (*yabo to bakemono wa Hakone kara saki*) meaning that there is no room for buffoons and *bakemono* in the city of Edo.

In the environment of urban culture, especially in a literary genre called *kibyōshi* (yellow covers),<sup>5</sup> parody becomes full-fledged to entertain its audience. Adam Kabat writes that no writer can surpass Jippensha Ikku (1765–1831) in terms of depicting *bakemono* as entertaining creatures, and adds that his secret is to portray *bakemono* in the "reverse world." For example, in the "reverse world," a groom aims high and wants to marry an ugly woman (*Edo bakemono sōshi* 18). Similarly in "Kaidan mikoshi no matsu" (Ghost Stories of the Long-neck, 1797), a human baby born to a ghost mother and a monster father suffers because of his anomalous appearance from the viewpoint of monsters. His mother wants him to be monstrous both in looks and behavior so that he will be accepted in her world.<sup>6</sup> In another *kibyōshi* by an anonymous author titled "Bakemono chakutō chō" (Record of Various Monsters, 1788), an oni becomes just one of many *bakemono/yōkai*. In this short booklet, a number of *bakemono* appear one after another, and a red oni shows up at the end of all *bakemono* with a caption that reads "red oni, eating a baby." This page is followed by the final page in which the red oni is subdued by Asahina Saburō, a powerful warrior of the early thirteenth century. The caption on the final page states, "there Asahina Saburō jumps in and subjugated various demons, so demons are all eliminated. In this present world, there is no frightening thing. Honorable children, stand firm and please go to tinkle without fear" (48). It has long been a given that oni are certain to be defeated by strong warriors. In *Shuten Dōji makurakotoba*, Chikamatsu Monzaemon even has Hōshō declare:

5 Sumie Jones writes that *kibyōshi* is "the most conspicuous case of narrative subversion.... Edoesque subversiveness surfaces in the juxtaposition of word and image. Parodies of an earlier genre of children's books, pictorial and verbal texts in *kibyōshi* interact with each other, mixing classics with contemporary fashion and the blurring of established categories such as the public and the private or the high and low of theme and diction, as well as the collapsing of words into images" (Jones 56).

6 See Kabat, "Bakemono zukushi no kibyōshi no kōsatsu."

It's a business of *yamabushi* to subjugate shape-shifting demons. It is not rare for the Buddhist monks to pray to do the same. The warriors' fame is to destroy the imperial court's enemy, which are more frightening than oni, and to achieve the distinguished service to capture them alive and leave the honor to the posterity. (12–13)

To the warriors then, oni were no longer so frightening because humans—specifically samurai with various regulations, rituals, and privileges—became ever more terrifying to the lives of common people. The rigid class system created by the Tokugawa shogunate limited people's opportunities and places for most activities. Outcasts and performers were confined in certain areas and people's movements and behavior were constantly supervised. Under these circumstances, belief in the existence of oni became increasingly difficult (Aramata and Komatsu 85). For urban residents, oni were the creatures of literature and art, not an immediate threat to their day-to-day existence, whereas samurai with two swords and various political and social benefits could actually endanger their lives and livelihood.

The appeal of “Bakemono chakutō chō” is mirrored in artwork that explores the variety of *yōkai*. Edo artists produced various types of *yōkai hyakutai zu* (pictures of one hundred forms of *yōkai*) and *Hyakki yagyō zu* (pictures of night processions of one hundred demons). The most famous of these is Toriyama Sekien's (1712–1788) *Gazu hyakki yagyō* (1776).<sup>7</sup> Sekien's *Gazu hyakki yagyō* presents various *yōkai* of folk belief as in an encyclopedia. Hence, he portrayed a yamauba in line with a traditional, aged yamauba. Similarly, the caption of oni in *Gazu hyakki yagyō* states “the direction of

7 Nakazawa Shin'ichi connects these *yōkai* portrayals to the theme of urban consciousness, specifically, that of natural history. Natural history was born at the time of Europe's Age of Discovery, the era marked by an enormous influx in awareness of new species of plants and animals. People's desire to better understand the natural world was inspired and natural history provided a system of classification for all these new specimens. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, Japanese intellectuals' natural curiosity about the world around them was intensely aroused, in spite of (or perhaps because of) the shogunate's isolationist policies. The Western scientific procedures for collecting, classifying, naming, and exhibiting specimens were soon applied and directed toward the supernatural, and thus, Sekien's *Gazu hyakki yagyō* was born. Nakazawa, “Yōkaiga to hakubutsugaku” 79–81. *Gazu hyakki yagyō* greatly influenced later prints and illustrations of *yōkai*. Kagawa contends that the significance of Sekien's *Gazu hyakki yagyō* as *yōkai* painting is two-fold: first, its encyclopedia-style format introduces each *yōkai* one by one; second, the *yōkai* pictures, which formerly only a select few had been able to see through manual copying, were made available to ordinary people by way of the woodblock prints' mass production (Kagawa 44). For a detailed explanation of Toriyama Sekien's *Gazu hyakki yagyō*, also see Foster, *Pandemonium and Parade* 55–71.

*ushitora* [northeast] is called *kimon* [oni's gate]. In portraying the oni now, [I put] the ox's horns on its head and [had it] wear tiger-skin loincloth. It is said that the shape was made by combining an ox and a tiger" (110). The picture portrays the oni as a hairy monster devouring an animal in a cave. The oni has two horns on its head and long claws. A human skull is laid on its side. Somehow, Sekien's oni gives an impression of primitiveness—a creature that can be hunted without much difficulty. It is given the same small space—one page—as any other strange creature. Indeed, an oni becomes just one of the *yōkai* to be gazed at leisurely. It may be inevitable that when something mysterious is given a shape and classified, thus coming under the control of human hands, the enigmatic aura of the supernatural is inevitably deflated. Yet, earlier oni images, as we have seen, present much more imposing and impressive creatures, perhaps reflecting the earlier awe in which the oni were held.

To reiterate what we observed earlier, people of the Edo period were ruled by samurai who, if not stronger than the oni, were at least more realistically present in day-to-day life. Indeed, the samurai-bureaucrats' strict control over people's conduct appears to have been more terrifying than the oni's. Ichiyūsai Kuniyoshi's (1797–1861) portrayal of the well-known theme of Raikō and his four lieutenants conquering the earth spider in *Minamoto no Raikō yakata tsuchigumo yōkai o nasu zu* (Picture of the Earth Spider Doing Mysterious Things at Raikō's Residence, 1841) attests to the fact. In this satirical picture, Raikō represents the ineffectual Shogun Ieyoshi, who is taking a nap in the corner, while his four warriors represent unsympathetic ministers. One of them is assumed, from the family crest he is wearing, to be Mizuno Tadakuni, main mover behind the Tempo Reform. The earth spider and *yōkai* symbolize popular culture repressed during the Reform. Tzvetan Todorov, speculating on the reason for such fantastic stories writes, "For many authors, the supernatural was merely a pretext to describe things they would never have dared mention in realistic terms" (158). *Yōkai* was a good outlet for expression without censorship. As the end of the Edo period approached and the shogunate's control over the people slackened, *yōkai* who were also under the strict supervision began to strike back and flood the storefront. It should be noted, however, that no oni appears in the *Picture of the Earth Spider Doing Mysterious Things at Raikō's Residence*.

#### Demonic People in Popular Culture of the Early Modern Period

Iconographic oni may not be used as actively as other *yōkai*, but the name is often used to refer to demonic people. As Yamaoka Genrin explained above,

“the souls of wicked people are called oni.” This motif frequently appears in the Kabuki plays of Tsuruya Nanboku IV (1755–1829). For example, his *Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan* (Yotsuya Ghost Stories, 1824) depicts the retaliation of a once-beautiful woman, Oiwa, against her cruel husband, Iemon, a masterless samurai. After killing Oiwa’s father who was against Oiwa’s marriage to Iemon, Iemon lies to her. Wishing to be with her, he promises that he will avenge Oiwa’s father’s murder. Being unemployed, Iemon is in dire poverty, but with the prospect of marrying a rich young woman who is madly in love with him, and being employed again through her grandfather’s connection, Iemon soon discards Oiwa in a most humiliating way. To speed up his marriage with the young girl and save face at the same time, Iemon kills an innocent man and mentally tortures Oiwa, his wife, to death. Iemon is the personification of evil, yet he is a human being. Again, a human can be more frightening than an oni.

It should be noted the Kabuki play of *Yotsuya Ghost Stories* was a child of the urban culture of the day. The Bunka-Bunsei eras (1804-1830) were times of relative political stability and economic prosperity. This was at the same time a period of decadence. A book of gossip entitled *Seji kenbun-roku* (1816) comments on the decline in the morals of the people as reflected in dramatic productions:

Up to seventy or eighty years ago the amorous play of men and women was suggested by an exchange of glances; if the man ever took the woman’s hand, she would cover her face with her sleeve in embarrassment. That was all there was to it, but even so, old people of the time are said to have been shocked by what they deemed to be an unsightly exhibition. Women in the audience were also very modest, and would blush even at the famous scene in *Chūshingura* [The Treasury of Loyal Retainers, 1748] in which Yuranosuke takes Okaru in his arms as he helps her down the ladder. Nowadays sexual intercourse is plainly shown on the stage, and women in the audience watch on, unblushing, taking it in their stride. It is most immoral. (in Keene, *World within Walls* 458)<sup>8</sup>

The inclination of Edoites toward the sensual pleasures was growing fast. Their favorite pastime, Kabuki, was as popular as ever, but theatergoers were not content with ordinary Kabuki plays. Instead, they looked for something more titillating. *Kaidan-mono*, or ghost plays were written in response to

8 When *Yotsuya Ghost Stories* was first produced at the Nakamura Theater in Edo in the summer of 1825, it was part of a two-day double bill with *Chūshingura* (Brazell, 456).

such demands. Among the numerous *kaidan-mono* plays, the most famous ghost story is unquestionably *Yotsuya Ghost Stories*. Katō Shūichi comments, “*The Ghost of Yotsuya* [i.e., *Yotsuya Ghost Stories*] takes the bloodlust present in the completely personal sphere of the secular townsmen society to the limits of possibility” (2: 206).

*Kotō no Oni* (Oni of a Solitary Island): Demonic People in the  
Erotic-Grotesque-Nonsense Culture

Almost one hundred years later, a story entitled *Kotō no oni* (Oni of a Solitary Island, 1929–30) appears in the literature of the urban culture now known as “erotic-grotesque-nonsense (*ero-guro-nansensu*), the prewar, bourgeois cultural phenomenon that devoted itself to explorations of the deviant, the bizarre, and the ridiculous” (Reichert 114).<sup>9</sup> Reaching its peak in 1930 or 1931, the erotic-grotesque-nonsense culture extolled decadent, ephemeral pleasure. This culture—somewhat similar to the Bunka-Bunsei eras—produced representations of oni as demonic, sadistic, and evil people. *Oni of a Solitary Island* was quite a commercial success, appealing primarily to the urban audience. The main consumers of erotic-grotesque-nonsense were “modern girls” and “modern boys” living on the cutting edge of urban life. The novel’s continued success—long after erotic-grotesque-nonsense ceased as a phenomenon—is proven by its repeated publication.

The trend of the oni’s commercialization continued in the modern era perhaps because an oni as a supernatural creature was considered imaginary. We can contrast this to ancient—and somewhat Early Modern—times when evil people and oni were two distinctly different beings: the former being mortal while the latter were supernatural. While we have seen, in earlier chapters, instances in which humans became oni, it is important to remember this distinction and what happens representationally when the distinction collapses. Edogawa Ranpo (1894–1965), a leading figure of erotic-grotesque-nonsense and a pioneer of the Japanese detective story in the early Shōwa period (1926–89), made full use of such images of oni, in which the distinction collapses. Ranpo serialized *Oni of a Solitary Island* in

9 Reichert’s article highlights “the ‘freakish’ nature of the text itself” with the background of erotic-grotesque-nonsense culture and Social Darwinism of that time. Reichert writes that his “use of this term is influenced by recent theoretical discussions of freak discourse, which (according to Elizabeth Grosz) define ‘freakishness’ as the quality that fascinates and horrifies by ‘blurring identities (sexual, corporeal, personal)’ and by ‘travers[ing] the very boundaries that secure the “normal” subject in its given identity and sexuality” (116). Also see Grosz 55–66.

the first and second issues of a popular literature magazine called *Asahi*. It is of interest that Ranpo wrote this story after he came to the conclusion that to live is to compromise; while he did not produce trifling works, he wanted money (by selling what he considered trifling stories), and so he embarked on popular entertainment (Gonda 148).

*Oni of a Solitary Island* is a mystery-detective story told by the narrator, Minoura, in flashback format. It starts out with the murder of a young woman—Minoura's fiancée—followed by the death of his friend, an amateur investigator. Minoura first suspects another of his male friends, Moroto, who is passionately in love with Minoura. He believes at first that Moroto killed his fiancée out of jealousy. Yet, the case is more complex, and Minoura and Moroto follow its twists and turns to solve the mystery. It turns out that the guilty culprit is Moroto's foster father, Takegorō, the personification of an oni who commits murders to obtain hidden treasures while at the same time creating physically abnormal human beings. Takegorō is unusually short, with a hunched back. He makes and sells physically deformed humans as revenge against physically normal humans.

Moroto, alone with Minoura in a dark cave, tells his friend how Takegorō became an oni—a story of revenge. The master of a wealthy family on a remote island had a one-night affair with an ugly hunchback maid. The baby born to the maid, Takegorō, shares his mother's deformity. Disgusted by the sight, the master gives money to the maid and sends her away with her child. The maid goes into the mountains to live and curses the world. The baby is raised with a curse as his lullaby. When his mother dies, Takegorō returns to the home of his wealthy father. His stepbrother, who is his father's legitimate son, has recently died. Takegorō stays on as a kind of a guardian of the house and falls in love with his late stepbrother's beautiful wife. He proposes to her but she rejects him claiming that she would rather die than be married to such a deformed and grotesque man like him. His jealousy and sense of inferiority toward other humans turn to hatred, and Takegorō becomes the personification of revenge—to curse the world and everyone in it who is not similarly deformed.

The fiction is rife with then-contemporary scientific elements such as eugenics and criminology. Reichert explains that eugenics was one measure to respond to societal concerns about the “deviant” individuals in the 1920s and '30s, and it was closely interwoven with nationalism in its attempt to improve the Japanese race and thus enhance Japan's position in the international arena. Similarly, criminology of the time was based upon

the Social Darwinist belief that society is categorized into the “fit”—law-abiding citizens, and the “unfit”—criminals (Reichert 134–41). Countering the eugenics theories of contemporaneous Japanese society, Takegorō in fiction uses imaginary modern medical science to create unhealthy, “unfit” Japanese with an ultimate goal of filling Japan full of deformed Japanese. Takegorō attempts to turn a marginalized group of his kind into the mainstream Japanese.

While the text exploits various scientific disciplines of the day, when it comes to Takegorō’s oni himself, the representation appears to be remarkably conventional. Although he does not have horns on his head, he occupies the subject position of the traditional oni as “other.” The oni in *Oni of a Solitary Island* is a human whose evil doings and determination for revenge transform him into an oni. While his cruelty resembles that of Iemon, the personification of evil determination, Takegorō is reminiscent of the holy man of Mt. Katsuragi mentioned in chapter one. Recall that the holy man dies obsessed by carnal craving for the emperor’s beautiful consort—a daughter of the prime minister, Fujiwara Yoshifusa. In the holy man’s case, his extraordinary determination to realize his sexual desire makes him an oni. While the holy man appears with a typical oni appearance in public and behaves monstrously, Takegorō avoids public appearances and his evil doings are carried out in secret. There are many elements of traditional oni that are associated with Takegorō’s otherness. His anomalous appearance as a hunchback, and isolation in the mountains are certainly familiar from those early stories. His ugly appearance, which is disliked by villagers, is similar to oni stories, such as those involving Zenki (literally anterior demon) and Goki (literally posterior demon), En no gyōja’s disciples, discussed in chapter one.<sup>10</sup> Takegorō is not fortunate enough to encounter En no gyōja; instead, his mother, equally hunchbacked, raises him with cursed lullabies.

The situation of Takegorō’s mother appears to be quite conventional as well and is similar to that of a yamauba—especially that of “Hanayo no hime” mentioned in chapter four. “Hanayo no hime” was formerly human, but having survived her own children she came to be disliked by her grandchildren and was consequently expelled from their house. With nowhere to turn, she went to live in the mountains. Likewise, Takegorō’s mother is sent away by a normal-looking father, and she too chooses to lead a solitary life in the mountains with her baby. She does not have any supernatural

10 See the section “*The Other: The Oppressed, Alienated, and Isolated*” in chapter one.

power, but her cursing lullaby has a lasting effect on her equally cursed son. Both Takegorō and his mother are maltreated because of their physical deformities. Their height and hunched backs deviate from the cultural and physical norm making them a target of contempt and disrespect. Needless to say, Takegorō's life on a solitary island makes him a foreigner with different customs living at a distance from society at large, another element of his otherness and his terribly marginalized life. But it is important at this point to remember the distinction we drew earlier between modern and current era representations of oni and their antecedents. The older tales reflect the views of a society where the firm belief in the physical existence of oni and other supernatural beings was an integral part of everyday life. The newer tales, however, reflect a society in which representations of oni are considered a product of commercialized urban cultures, be it "Bunka-Bunsei eras" or "erotic-grotesque-nonsense."

The oni of the Early Modern period are said to survive deep in the mountains, by remote rivers, and are still feared by country folks. While the oni did find a place in art, literature, and folktales, their existence seems to have been dramatically reduced. In the meantime, oni or *yōkai* as a commodity appeared in urban life of Early Modern Japan. Books about *yōkai* would be sold at carnival sideshows to complement the physical "freak shows" trotted out for the entertainment of Edoites. That tendency continued to modern times as we saw in *Oni of a Solitary Island*. The protagonist of *Oni of a Solitary Island*, if he physically existed in the Early Modern period, could have been part of a carnival show of urban life; and Edoites may have thought that Takegorō was born as such because of some sins in his previous life. On the other hand, if he were a real human in the 1920s, he may have become an experiment for a study of medical science. Fortunately he is a fictional character born out of the urban culture. The popularity of *Yotsuya Ghost Stories* and *Oni of a Solitary Island* seem to testify that a Japanese taste for something strange and weird as symbolized in the oni was and is indispensable for urban Japanese entertainment, and this tendency was further escalated in modern Japan.