

***Yōkai* Monsters at Large: Mizuki Shigeru’s Manga, Transmedia Practices, and (Lack of) Cultural Politics**

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This study engages in a discussion of *yōkai* (preternatural monsters in Japanese folklore) characters in Mizuki Shigeru’s manga and their transmedia expansion not as an expression of Japanese cultural tradition, but as an outcome of transmedia adaptation practices (known as “media mix” in Japan) in the modern period by creators, media companies, and other social agents. This study argues that recent Japanese transmedia practices are principally propelled by the specific style of character drawing found in the manga medium and the character-centric multimedia production scheme, which makes manga(-originated) characters—including *yōkai* characters—versatile for moving across different media platforms. Although transmedia practices can enhance the potential for producing synergies among previously discrete cultural industries and media companies to attain more profits, such a close relationship undermines the autonomy of each media industry, company, and other actors, which can attenuate social critique or cultural politics previously exercised through storytelling in manga, including Mizuki’s *yōkai* works. By analyzing the transmedia practices that have used Mizuki’s *yōkai* manga as “original” sources, this article addresses what has been gained and lost when *yōkai* are migrated into different media platforms.

Keywords: Mizuki Shigeru, manga, *yōkai*, media mix, contents tourism, transmedia storytelling

The Specters of *Yōkai* Are Haunting Japan

This article investigates the ubiquity of *yōkai* in postwar and present-day Japanese mediascapes. In Japan, *yōkai* are largely understood as preternatural creatures found in ancient folklore and legends,

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often translated in English as “monsters,” “spirits,” “goblins,” “specters,” “shape-shifters,” and the like.² They are routinely compared with spirits of the natural world, similar to the fairies of England and the *kachina* of the Pueblo, but not ghosts (Alt, 2015). In contemporary Japan, one encounters *yōkai* as characters not only in popular manga, anime, or video game titles but also in other media forms such as toys, magazines, TV commercials, advertisement posters, and other character-themed merchandise. They are also embodied as statues on streets in cities all over Japan.³ Although the Japanese public seems to embrace *yōkai* characters, it would be reductionistic to ascribe this to Japan’s Shinto-inspired animistic beliefs. Such a view would invite an Orientalist frame from outside and cultural nationalism from within, both of which we want to avoid. Instead, the proliferation of *yōkai* in present Japan is rather, I would argue, a product of previous and ongoing practices of the cross-media adaptations and transmedia storytelling called “media mix,” or something analogous to what Henry Jenkins (2006) has called “media convergence.”

Jenkins’ (2006) concept of “media convergence” has multiple meanings, but one of its more focused ideas is that it encompasses, according to him, “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who would go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 2). In this statement, Jenkins refers to two major actors who play an important role in forming this new media culture: corporations and fans. At variance with this, the Japanese-coined term “media mix” originally referred more to a type of corporate market strategy, for the term itself has been informed and popularized by the Japanese media company Kadokawa and other media corporations since the late 1970s, although similar media franchises and market strategies existed much earlier. The term “media mix” has been also used in English language academia when discussing contemporary Japanese media culture or popular material culture (Allison, 2006; M. Itō, 2005; Steinberg, 2012) in more nuanced ways. In this article, I will use “media mix” in a way almost equivalent to Jenkins’ concept of “media convergence,” primarily because the article’s focus is on *yōkai* and Japanese media contexts; however, I offer further clarification of the term whenever necessary to address certain aspects of Japan’s media mix, or to compare it with an English-language concept of media convergence.

Perhaps one of the most utilized *yōkai* “source materials” in Japan’s media mix is the array of *yōkai* characters depicted in manga by Mizuki Shigeru (1922–2015). Mizuki is one of the most well-known manga creators in the modern history of manga. From the 1950s, he produced several manga titles featuring *yōkai* characters, most famously *GeGeGe no Kitarō*, which was recently translated into English as the *Kitarō* series (2013–16). Since the 1960s, the *Kitarō* series has been repeatedly serialized, reprinted in book format, and

² The term *yōkai* seems to resist a simple translation. Michael Dylan Foster (2009) notes that *yōkai* is “variously translated as monster, spirit, goblin, ghost, demon, phantom, specter, fantastic being, lower-order deity, or more amorphously, as any unexplainable experience or numinous occurrence” (p. 2).

³ Most famously, there is a street called “The Mizuki Shigeru Road” in the city of Sakaiminato, Tottori Prefecture, where more than 100 *yōkai* statues line the street, which will be discussed later in more detail. Also, in the city of Fuchū, in Tokyo Metropolis, has a street featuring *yōkai* characters from Mizuki’s *GeGeGe no Kitarō*. A recent addition was in the city of Fukusaki, Hyogo where *yōkai* statues sit on benches for the entertainment of tourists and pedestrians.

adapted into TV anime series and other media forms, strongly associating the name of Mizuki with *yōkai* monsters.

This article engages in a discussion of *yōkai* manga characters in Mizuki Shigeru's manga and their transmedia expansion, not as an expression of Japanese cultural tradition, but as an outcome of previous and ongoing transmedia practices by media companies and other social agents. Whereas media scholars and cultural critics such as Marc Steinberg and Ōtsuka Eiji have discussed and conceptualized Japan's "media mix" as business and marketing strategies (Ōtsuka, 2014; Steinberg, 2012), this study focuses on another aspect of transmedia adaptations and/or storytelling that is not fully addressed in previous scholarship; that is, the transmedia migratory potential of the media-specific form of manga—especially the specific style of character design employed in mainstream manga that is well-suited to transmedia versatility—and the problems that result from current corporate-led media mix practices. This article argues that recent Japanese transmedia practices are propelled by the iconic drawing style used for manga characters and the character-centric multimedia production scheme, which makes manga(-originated) characters—including Mizuki's *yōkai* characters—versatile with regard to moving across different media platforms. Although transmedia practices can enhance the potential for generating synergies among previously discrete cultural industries and, in the case of media companies, for attaining more profits, such a close relationship undermines the autonomy of each media industry and/or company, which can in turn attenuate any social critique or cultural politics previously exercised through storytelling in manga, including Mizuki's works. By analyzing the transmedia practices that have used Mizuki's *yōkai* manga as "original" sources, this article addresses what has been gained as well as what has been lost when *yōkai* are migrated into different media platforms.

The Media Mix of *Yōkai*

The proliferation of *yōkai* characters from Mizuki's manga titles in the Japanese mediascape has reached an extent that, for many Japanese, it is difficult to recall images of *yōkai* without visualizing Mizuki's *yōkai* drawings.⁴ Such a strong visual connection has been shaped not only by his serialized *yōkai* manga published and republished in magazines and book formats over the past several decades, but also by continual adaptations of his manga into anime series. The first anime series based on Mizuki's *yōkai* manga was broadcast in 1968. Historically speaking, the swift economic recovery and subsequent rise of a middle class led to exponential growth in homes with black-and-white TV sets after the technology's introduction in 1953, and by the time this anime appeared in the late 1960s, there was an explosion in color set ownership. Along with Mizuki's *yōkai* manga, this anime series brought about the first so-called "*yōkai* boom" in postwar popular culture.⁵ Since then, anime series based on *GeGeGe no Kitarō* have been produced and broadcast in every decade to date. The newest iteration, *GeGeGe no Kitarō* (sixth series), was broadcast in 2018. Constant transmedia adaptations over the past five decades from manga to anime have prompted

⁴ Folklore Studies scholar Michael Dylan Foster (2009) confirms this by saying that "for almost anybody who grew up in postwar Japan, the word *yōkai* conjures up an image created by Mizuki Shigeru" (p. 164).

⁵ Along with Mizuki, Tezuka Osamu and other manga creators have published *yōkai* manga in the late 1960s. Some Japanese critics claim that Tezuka decided to create a manga series *Dororo*, featuring *yōkai* characters from a sense of rivalry of Mizuki's increasing popularity in the manga scene (Kurosawa, 2013).

republications of Mizuki's manga, with new episodes and stories added. Mizuki himself has become sort of a media celebrity; *GeGeGe no Nyōbō*, the TV dramatization of Mizuki's wife's life with him (including fantasy moments with his characters) that aired over six months in 2010 and became one of the highest rated programs of that year, contributed to the revival and a new generation of interest in his *yōkai* manga. These reiterations have generated readers and audiences for Mizuki's *yōkai* stories and characters across different generations while creating a shared world in which consumers and audiences—both parents and children—can interact and converse through popular cultural media iterations of Mizuki's *yōkai*.

The transmedia migration of Mizuki's *yōkai* characters has expanded beyond typical media platforms as well. Mizuki's *yōkai* characters have also been used in the character merchandizing business, turning them into toys, plastic dolls, cellphone cases, advertisement posters, collectables, video-game characters, designs for other everyday objects like beverage and food product packaging, and even statues lining streets. The physical manifestation of Mizuki's *yōkai* characters—what media scholars Scott Lash and Celia Lury (2007) call the "thingification of media"—in these physical objects, no longer limited to manga pages or TV screens, has transformed everyday objects and their mundane environments into multiple points of entry into the transmedia(ted) world of Mizuki's *yōkai* manga and his *yōkai* world. This in turn gives fans and consumers a sense of intimacy with his *yōkai* characters. The affective nature of *yōkai* has been intensified by these and similar media mix practices, which have simultaneously created a synergy that serves increased financial gains for media corporations.

There's no doubt that Mizuki's *yōkai* manga function as urtexts for the contemporary derivative transmedia works and products, but it should be noted that Mizuki's *yōkai* manga characters are, in fact, a result of recurrent, historical *yōkai* transmedia adaptation practices. Although *yōkai* can be traced back to ancient folkloric beliefs and oral stories that existed in different parts of Japan, Mizuki's *yōkai* manga are "influenced by *yōkai* imagery created in the Edo to Meiji periods" (Papp, 2010, p. 2). Among them, Toriyama Sekien (born Sano Toyofusa, 1712–88), an Edo period painter and illustrator, in particular has had a considerable impact on depictions of *yōkai* by postwar war manga creators, including Mizuki.⁶ Sekien was one of the first artists to popularize *yōkai* monsters by visually rendering the imaginative world of *yōkai* in illustrations and publishing them in a bound book format. Unlike prior (often colorful) *yōkai* paintings (*yōkai-ga*), Sekien's visual rendering of *yōkai* focuses on the visual figuration of individual *yōkai*, drawn in simplified black-and-white illustrations with no or minimal explanatory text. Sekien's first book, *The Illustrated Demon Horde's Night Parade (Gazu Hyakki Yagyō, 1776)*, became popular and spawned three sequels, in which he even added his own *yōkai* and spirit creations. It was in the late Edo period—also called the "early modern" (*kinsei*) period in Japanese periodization—when society witnessed the rise of commercial culture with the advent of mass production and mass distribution, including book publication through woodcut print technology. Sekien's books were mass produced and circulated (sometimes through book-lender shops) among middle-class urban residents with varying degrees of literacy—the books were mainly illustrations. In this regard, Sekien's *yōkai* books emerged at a historical juncture in which local, folkloric tradition and (early) modern, urban technology encountered each other. It is important to note here that Sekien's illustrated *yōkai* books contributed much to the discursive shift in the status of *yōkai*. Previously, *yōkai*

⁶ Other writers and critics who have influenced Mizuki's *yōkai* imagination include writer/educator Inoue Enryō (1858–1919) and folklorist Yamagita Kunio (1875–1962).

existed mostly in oral narratives; therefore, they were largely invisible, mysterious, and unknown, save for in medieval paintings or illustrated scrolls, where *yōkai* were often drawn as a group without names. In contrast to these precursors, Sekien's focus was not on narratives, but on pictorial images of individual *yōkai* compiled through a process of collecting, sorting, and labeling each *yōkai* being. In Sekien's books, *yōkai* became constantly visible, divorced from local storytelling traditions and contexts. Michael Dylan Foster describes Sekien's renderings as an "encyclopedic mode" which transformed *yōkai* into more accessible catalogues for readers. Foster (2009) states that Sekien "extract(ed) *yōkai* from a narrative context, transforming them into iconographic entities" (p. 169).

In her discussion of *yōkai* characters in contemporary anime and manga, Deborah Shamon (2013) claims that Mizuki's *yōkai* manga are part of the tradition of *yōkai* visualization, produced in the "continuation of the encyclopedic mode since the Edo period" (p. 281). Using Japanese critic Azuma Hiroki's postmodern theory that understands *otaku* as "database animals," Shamon (2013) argues that *yōkai* characters, presented in the encyclopedic mode, are structurally similar to the *otaku*'s postmodern consumption of information (pp. 277–278) in that they are not concerned with "grand narratives," a typical postmodern condition, à la Jean-François Lyotard. Individual *yōkai* compiled into encyclopedic compendia (or "databases," in the contemporary vernacular) have been available for modern authors, audiences, and other users for either their own transmedia(ted) storytelling and/or pleasurable consumption. Indeed, popular culture scholar Zília Papp traces the genealogy of *yōkai* figurations in contemporary anime and manga and identifies the visual and formal similarities between them with those of the Edo period or earlier visual culture. Papp (2010) points out that several *yōkai* characters and drawings in Mizuki's manga titles are visually similar to—and almost direct copies of—the ones in Sekien's books.⁷ Given the status of the discursive formation of *yōkai* in the modern and postwar periods—in the encyclopedic or database mode—Mizuki's manga can be considered a transmedia adaptation from preexisting databases of *yōkai* figures from the Edo period into manga, a popular medium that is viable as a commercial force as well as a vehicle for narrative expression in the postwar period. After all, *yōkai* in the encyclopedic mode from the Edo period existed before the idea of copyright and are available to modern authors without restrictions for use in their creations. Yet it should be noted that Mizuki's contributions to the *yōkai* discourse served to renarrativize *yōkai* figures by placing them in modern, postwar settings in his story manga (narrative comics), and even by adding his own invented *yōkai* characters (just as Sekien did). In short, Mizuki's *yōkai* manga can be seen as transmedia storytelling in the longer tradition of transmedia adaptations and intertextuality.⁸

Character-Centric Media Mix

In his book *Anime's Media Mix*, Marc Steinberg (2015) contrasts American transmedia practices with Japanese media mix by highlighting this distinctive difference: Whereas the American transmedia strategy has gravitated toward sustaining a unified worldview across different media platforms, Japanese media mix is centered around characters, allowing them to exist in different, transmedia(ted) worlds, even those containing narrative contradictions among derivate narratives or worlds (Steinberg, 2015, p. 334).

⁷ This calls into question the authorship of Mizuki and is, therefore, related to another thread of postmodern discussion on the death of the author à la Roland Barthes.

⁸ I will discuss what kind of narratives Mizuki's *yōkai* manga convey in the Absence of Narrative section.

Although this view might be a sweeping generalization, it has been observed that recent Japanese media mix franchises are centered on characters, not storytelling (Condry, 2018, para. 5). Based on his ethnographic research on the contemporary anime industry, cultural anthropologist Ian Condry (2013) argues that in the current anime production system, character building is far more important than storytelling or world building (p. 56). Previously, animated film production began with a script or overall planning, but Condry documents and analyzes the present anime industry, especially the “production committee” (*seisaku iinkai*) system, a joint venture by multiple different companies and stakeholders (such as music companies, TV broadcast companies, publishers, toy companies, and advertisement agencies), that often begins with character building.⁹ Since the decline of the studio system in the Japanese film industry, many cinematic and TV anime have been planned, backed, and made through the production committee system to share costs and reduce the financial risk of any single agent. This is also due in large part to the fact that a single anime studio company often cannot expect full compensation for a work’s production costs merely by selling broadcast rights; instead, a studio works with other companies. Thereby, they rely on and resort to character merchandizing and other transmedia-derivative products in different industries—Jenkins’ (2006) sense of convergence. Although this kind of marketing scheme is not specifically unique to Japan, it is important, in recent anime production, for the production committee to carefully craft the appeal of characters first—assigning a sort of brand image to them—while narrative elements and the fictional world are scripted and developed afterward. This character-centric mode of production enables more potential for cross-media adaptations because each character has its own autonomous status (*jiritsu-sei*) that can be easily divorced from a narrative world and moved to other media platforms. In regard to the Japanese media mix, Condry (2013) argues that “rather than transmedia storytelling, we witness a kind of transmedia *character* telling” (p. 57).

Both Steinberg and Condry discuss the Japanese media mix by focusing on the medium of anime and anime production (Condry & Steinberg, 2013). Yet I would like to pay attention to manga and its media specificity: the hand-drawn nature of manga and characters drawn in a cartoony way. This is partly because manga as a medium seems to still play a central role in the current form of media mix more than anime.¹⁰ In his discussion on manga characters, Japanese manga critic Itō Gō proposes the concept of *kyara*, separating it from a typical sense of character or “round character,” in E. M. Forster’s classification on characters in novels (Forster 1985). According to Itō, *kyara* is something ontologically prior to character—a sort of “proto-character”—which gives a “sense of existence” and a “sense of life.” For Itō (2006), *kyara* (i.e., proto-characters) are shaped by visual images, whereas characters are “shaped by narrative action” (p. 107). Media studies scholar Thomas LaMarre (2011) comments on Itō’s theory of *kyara* by saying that “the pared-down design of *kyara* allows it not only to move across different narrative worlds, but also to generate new worlds wherever its users see fit” (p. 129). Though manga as a media form can have diverse styles and forms, both Itō and LaMarre seem to identify the power of manga characters for transmedia

⁹ See more on this in Condry and Steinberg’s (2013) conversation, “Media Mix Is Anime’s Life Support System.”

¹⁰ In her book review, sociologist Casey Brienza (2013) critically comments on Steinberg’s *Anime’s Media Mix* by stating that it misses the central role of manga. She notes, “Categories of print, particularly manga and increasingly light novels, are where so many media mixes originate and they, not their animated adaptations, remain, from a Japanese perspective, at the center” (para. 6).

migrations in manga's cartoony character design. Japanese critic Odagiri Hiroshi more carefully interprets the discussion of Itō, and devises a triad scheme of analyzing character in visual media (manga, anime, and video games, etc.). According to him, a character has a combination of three elements: meaning, interiority (*naimen*), and icon/image (Odagiri, 2010, p. 119). If a character is dominantly defined by meaning, it is a flat character; if a character is defined by interiority (or the conscious self), it can be a round character.¹¹ If character is defined by image, it is what Itō calls *kyara*. To put it plainly, *kyara* is an iconic image drawn in a simplified form, whereas a character is defined by narrative and a sense of selfhood (interiority of a character). Itō's concept of *kyara* points to the force of iconic character design that appeals to those who can identify it without any context or narrative background. In other words, the transmedia migratory capability and versatility of manga-originated characters—including Mizuki's *yōkai* characters—derive from their cartoony iconicity.¹² Unlike a photo-realistic character with distinctive visual details, an iconic, often caricature-derived, cartoony style of character allows itself to be identified as the "same" character, regardless of each individual (nuanced) visual difference—insofar as it carries specific identifiable iconic resemblance—even when adapted into different media platforms.¹³ Although not limited to Japanese manga character design,¹⁴ this iconic, cartoony drawing style can be most readily observed in postwar mainstream story manga, possibly due to the intense labor typically required in producing the same main characters repeatedly in manga pages while completing each serial installment within a relatively short period of time. While drawing manga, a cartoonist has to draw, by hand, the same protagonist repeatedly in different panels and pages throughout the story, and each image may have slight differences (i.e., postures, angles, facial expressions, etc.), but the visual resemblance of each drawn image—the iconic elements of the character drawing—guarantees the recognition of the character's identity. Also, American comics artist/critic Scott McCloud (1994) argues that, in contrast to naturalistic drawing, greater abstraction in character drawing invites cognitive and affective investment from readers (p. 36). Iconic, hand-drawn character design in the form of manga is the key—or at least, one of the keys—to understanding the character-centric media mix. In short, the autonomy of *kyara* with its cross-media, expansive capabilities emerge from the cartoony

¹¹ The term "interiority" (*naimen*), used by Japanese critics, is inherited from Japanese literary scholar Karatani Kōjin's sense of the conscious self as a modern discovery. See "The Discovery of Interiority" in Karatani's *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* (1993).

¹² By "cartoony," I am following the distinction used in comics scholar Joseph Witek's (2012) essay. Although acknowledging a wide array of diverse styles in comics, Witek separates two modes: the cartoon and the naturalistic mode. Witek sets up a binary in drawing styles: iconic, minimalist, and cartoony vs. realistic, literal, and representational (p. 42). In postwar mainstream story manga, Tezuka-inspired cartoony drawing has been influential in defining mainstream cartooning style—for example, a clear-lined, abstract drawing style for character design, exemplified by Astro Boy (Tetsuwan Atomu) or Doraemon.

¹³ In Japan, one can also find merchandise and products based on real-life figures, such as celebrities and tarento (media personalities), as well. Yet this kind of character, merchandise based on real-life figures has less transmedia migratory capabilities compared with fictional manga/anime characters.

¹⁴ Certainly, the iconic designing of characters is not unique or limited to Japanese comics. Some notable examples in American comics include comic-strip-originated Snoopy and Popeye. Still, compared with other realistically drawn characters, these characters share the cartoony drawing style with that employed by Japanese mainstream manga.

iconicity that has been practiced by mainstream manga authors, which escapes from being bound to narratives or specific media platforms.¹⁵

Contents Tourism and Cultural Politics

A recent development of the Japanese media mix surrounding *yōkai* involves local governments and communities as important actors—no longer limited to the private sector. As many villages and towns in rural Japan have suffered declines in their economies and populations since around the 1970s, several municipalities, in cooperation with local chambers of commerce, have initiated “village-revival” or “town-revival” movements, known as *mura okoshi* and *machi okoshi*. These local revitalization movements were initially developed to support local businesses, industries, and communities to maintain or increase population through the promotion of local products, traditional festivals, and performances to domestic and international tourists. Since the 1990s, however, several local governments have begun to use anime and manga characters and settings to promote local tourism. In 1993, the municipal office in the small town of Sakaiminato, Tottori Prefecture, created a tourist attraction called “Mizuki Shigeru Road,” where more than 100 bronze statues of Mizuki’s *yōkai* characters stand, lining the sidewalk of the main street from the train station through to the township center. Using the fame of Mizuki Shigeru—who spent his childhood there—the municipality has attempted to promote tourism in the town, even targeting foreign tourists by creating a tourist website in English, Chinese (both Traditional and Simplified), Korean, and Russian. In 2003, the Mizuki Shigeru Memorial Museum was built, followed by the construction of a *Yōkai Shrine*, along with a constant stream of planned *yōkai*-themed festivals, exhibits, and other events. Large images of Mizuki’s *yōkai* were used to decorate local trains and busses, and *yōkai*-themed souvenirs and products are sold at vendors and shops on the main streets of the town. Sakaiminato’s campaign was recognized as a “successful case” of town-revival movement through its leveraging of Mizuki’s *yōkai* characters to steadily increase local tourism while regentrifying and populating previously deserted streets and local stores in the town (Sawada, 2009). In 2005, the national government reported that Sakaiminato’s case was an ideal model for what they called “contents tourism,”¹⁶ and encouraged other municipalities and local governments also facing socioeconomic decline to follow suit.

Since then, the term “contents tourism” has attracted considerable attention from Japanese mass media outlets, local officials, media companies, and even academics. Similar to the English-language counterpart of film-induced tourism or media-induced tourism, Japanese contents tourism is driven by popular media, especially manga, anime, TV dramas, and games (Seaton & Yamamura, 2015). In this type

¹⁵ The historical fact that anime used to be called manga eiga (manga movie or manga film) before the 1970s suggests the centrality of the manga medium in transmedia adaptations—called “media mix” after the late 1970s—since Japanese animators tried to “animate” static manga image/icons initially.

¹⁶ Yamamura (2014) notes that the first public use of the term “contents tourism” (was in this report, which was written by three governmental organizations, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT); the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI); and the Agency for Cultural Affairs (p. 61). I use the term “contents tourism,” instead of “content tourism” following the usage argued for by Seaton and Yamamura (2015) in that it better reflects not only the dynamic plurality of the industry, but also Japanese pronunciation.

of tourism, manga/anime fans visit the locales depicted in their favorite manga or anime. One well-known example is the Washimiya district of Kuki City in Saitama Prefecture. The town was used as the setting for the anime series *Lucky Star*, broadcast in 2007. The anime's opening sequence features a shrine based on the real-life WashNomiya Shrine. Fans of *Lucky Star* suddenly flocked to Washimiya to visit the shrine, take photos, and explore. The activity of visiting a place modeled or featured in anime or manga is now called *seichi junrei*, meaning "pilgrimage to a sacred site."¹⁷ This media-hyped fandom activity has become prominent since the case of *Lucky Star*, and similar "pilgrimages to sacred sites" (para. 6) have taken places all over Japan. In 2017, the Japan Anime Tourism Association, supported by the Kadokawa Corporation and others, announced a list of 88 sacred anime sites located all over Japan (Nagata, 2017). Local communities have responded to fans' expectations by media mixing local products with images and characters from manga and anime. The main streets of the Washimiya district, for instance, are full of manga/anime-themed products, cafés, souvenirs, flags, and posters. Tourism studies scholar Takayoshi Yamamura (2014) describes Washimiya as a successful example of contents tourism due to the "collaboration between the local community, the fans, and the copyright holders" (p. 64). Contents tourism is viewed as another expression of media mix, involving the public sector and local communities.

While contents tourism has the potential to boost the economic well-being of local businesses and communities, problems and concerns have emerged when a local community faces a sudden influx of fans roaming through their township. Also known as "otaku tourism" (Alexander, 2017), local governments and commerce associations have become aware of the need to appeal to young (or adult) male *otaku* fans of anime and manga, sometimes opting for risqué images and designs of anime/manga characters in their media mix collaborations. In 2014, the city of Shima, in Mie Prefecture, announced the anime *moe* (adorable/cutie) character Aoshima Megu as the official mascot for the city.¹⁸ The idea for this character was taken from the local traditional seafood industry, which uses "sea women" (*ama*) who dive, in time-honored fashion, without the aid of modern scuba gear, and for whom the region is well known. Yet the character they announced was a 17-year-old, long-haired, anime-like diver with overemphasized, large breasts. The sexually suggestive character swiftly caused controversy, and more than 100 professional female divers criticized the character design, demanding the withdrawal of the character (Osaki, 2015b).¹⁹ In 2013, the popular anime series *Silver Spoon* (based on the serialized manga of the same title) was broadcast. The series depicted a real-world agricultural facility in Hokkaido. Fearing an intrusion of fans into the facility that could potentially spread diseases among livestock animals, the production company inserted a message in the closing credits requesting that viewers refrain from visiting the facility and the vicinity.

¹⁷ Since the 1980s, more manga and anime have begun depicting ordinary people in real-world settings, often based on a local town or village, in contrast to previous depictions of heroes and heroines set in fantasy worlds. This change has contributed to a rise of contents tourism behind the scenes.

¹⁸ The term "moe," initially derived from otaku culture, referring to a fan's strong affection toward a female manga/anime character. See Azuma (2009) for details.

¹⁹ In the same year, the city of Minokamo, in Gifu Prefecture, adopted another buxom anime character as its city mascot, tied in with the anime series *Nō-Rin*, which is set in an agricultural high school based on a light novel. A wave of protest followed the official selection of the sexually suggestive character (Osaki, 2015a).

These cases reveal some of the unexpected and—at times—unwanted results, as well as the chasm between what some local communities originally intended and what the media mix actually brought to them.

All in all, contents tourism as a tool of the media-mixed local revitalization movement has delivered varied results. It is, moreover, important to also consider what kinds of power relationships are at work in this media-mixed cultural activity called contents tourism. It is apparent that local communities attempt to capitalize on the enthusiasm of manga and anime fans, but in doing so, they fashion themselves after images mediated through manga or anime. Anime and manga fans, on the other hand, driven by the narrative of anime or manga, come to these “sacred sites” with preconceived notions about the local towns or places. Encounters and interactions between local residents and visiting fans are structurally similar to those that take place in the “contact zone.” Scholar Mary Louise Pratt (1992) uses the term “contact zone” to refer to “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (p. 4). Although contents tourism does not take place in colonial spaces (which is Pratt’s concern), similarly uneven power relationships are at work between localities and the media industry with its accompanying consumers. In the case of contents tourism, power is assigned and owned more on the side of media companies and industries—after all, it is a media event—not on the side of the locality. In other words, a local community transforms itself into satisfying images for tourists from outside, not the other way around. The encounters in this “contact zone” seem to share a common problem with modern tourism. Yet the level of simulation is intensified by the media mix, as it generates a novel type of “virtual reality” or “augmented reality” tourism. Although visitors can explore and enjoy a series of simulacra, with media-mixed images superimposed onto local places, residents live dual lives: a self-exoticized, simulated life and a quotidian one. This kind of consumption, exemplified in contents tourism, is what Japanese critic Azuma Hiroki (2009) calls “database consumption” (p. 54), a mode of consumption in which *otaku*—as postmodern animals—are concerned with small narratives or appealing details. Fans have little interest in local history or reality—and if they are at all, it is of secondary importance to them—and come to a local town or place solely to confirm what they are already familiar with through anime or manga, or to look for *moe* characters deployed in the media mix of local scenery and products. In the case of contents tourism based on Mizuki’s *yōkai* in Sakaiminato, the local government and business owners have retroactively exploited the popularity of Mizuki’s *yōkai* and local ties for the propagation of the simulated image of locality, rather than locality as it is.²⁰ In such a simulated space, *yōkai* are commodified, standing by the roadside only to entertain visitors without unsettling or intervening in their preconceived ideas of the locality or *yōkai*.

Absence of Narrative

Although the abundance of transmedia-derivative products of manga-originated characters testifies to their adaptability across different media platforms, it should be noted that there are a few of more problems and even dangers in the current form of Japanese media mix. First, the convergence of different media platforms ensures a closer relationship or even interdependency among different media industries, as the “production committee” system exemplifies. In the Japanese media mix, such a convergence of

²⁰ It should be noted that Mizuki is strongly associated with this local town through his autobiographical titles both in prose and manga. He was born in Osaka, but spent his childhood there in Sakaiminato.

different media industries can undermine the autonomy of each different company, industry, or other social agents, resulting in the conscious avoidance of controversial issues. More specifically, whereas print publishers, including manga publishers, have traditionally functioned as an outlet for diverse and even alternative voices in contrast to mainstream media or those who are in power, large media corporations such as TV broadcast stations and radio, both of which have to be licensed by the state, often hesitate to deal with certain controversial issues—for instance, the post-Fukushima disaster situation (Suzuki, 2016). Second, as discussed above, current corporate-led media-mix strategies tend to reduce or disregard narrativity by prioritizing characters, instead producing their characters as nonnarrative media forms (i.e., illustrations or designs) or commodities (i.e., character merchandise). Such an orientation in the current media-mix approach (to manga-originated characters) can undercut or attenuate social critique or political edge that would previously have been exercised in the narratives of manga, not characters.

As previously mentioned, *yōkai* originated from ancient, folkloric beliefs that were shared within a community through oral storytelling. This oral and communal nature of *yōkai* storytelling possessed social functions that conveyed collective wisdom, social order, or cultural values, including morality, life lessons, and forewarnings about possible individual and social dangers, with strong psychological appeals and impacts.²¹ Mizuki's story manga retains—or, more correctly, reactivates—this rich narrative potential in the popular medium of manga in the postwar context. Mizuki's (2012) autobiographical manga *NonNonBā*, for instance, narrates Mizuki's upbringing in a rural town in Tottori and his interaction with an elderly woman named "NonNonBa" who tells *yōkai* stories to a young Mizuki. The manga highlights the emotional impact of *yōkai*, emphasized by *NonNonBā*'s storytelling, showing that *yōkai* appear only when the young protagonist Mizuki (as a character) believe their existence—often guided by NonNonBa, an elderly *yōkai* storyteller. In the manga, *yōkai* are not always visible, as they appear only at specific times and places, unlike contemporary *yōkai* characters in the media mix. The manga depicts a *yōkai* named *Betobeto*, who only appears when a person is walking through dark mountains to warn of danger, and another named *Akaname*, who appears in the bathroom to offer life lessons to children about cleaning the places they use. Both of these also suggest a larger relationship among humans, nature, community, and the (otherworldly) world in Mizuki's deanthropocentric world (see Suzuki, 2011). Though taking *yōkai* images from Sekien's *yōkai* catalogue books, Mizuki never fails to assign social, cultural, and moral functions to his *yōkai* through storytelling in his manga.

Furthermore, in Mizuki's manga, *yōkai* often demonstrate a critique of industrial capitalism, human greed, and anthropocentrism as exemplified in otherworldly *yōkai* monsters. Mizuki's *Mammoth Flowers* (*Manmosu furawā*; 1968), for instance, depicts the titular, enormous *yōkai* monster as emerging from Tokyo's infamous landfill island, causing destruction to Tokyo. Set in a Japan in the midst of the postwar economic boom, this reflects the reality of when the manga was published, since the rapid economic rise also brought about enormous industrial and commercial waste that filled up landfills, polluting air and water. Japan experienced unprecedented levels of pollution and other environmental problems, causing health

²¹ Etymologically, the term *yōkai* can also mean "eerie phenomena, feelings, or sound." As a psychological response to a mysterious occurrence or feeling, ancient people gave shapes with specified names—as Papp (2010) writes, *yōkai* are "the form given to change and the anxiety, uncertainty, fear and awe associated with it" (p. 12).

issues and becoming a major social concern. At the end of the story, the *yōkai* flower only disappears, undefeated, when the government decides to change the goal of the country from achieving economic success to guaranteeing the “right to maintain the minimum standards of wholesome and cultured living,” a phrase taken from Article 25 of the postwar democratic Japanese Constitution. The inserted narration at the end of the story explains the nature of this *yōkai*: “For the poor, it was a flower for salvation; for the rich, it was a curse” (Mizuki, 1968, p. 62). In his edited book *Monster Theory*, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (1997) states that the “monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place” (p. 4). Mizuki’s *yōkai* takes on this kind of monstrosity and “reveals” and “warns”—as the etymology of monster (*monstrum*) suggests—a possible danger or crisis of human society or civilization.

To be fair, Mizuki is also partially responsible for the current, information-centric, consumptive mode of media mix. Along with *yōkai* story manga, Mizuki has published several “encyclopedic books” about *yōkai*. In Mizuki’s career, the shift from *yōkai* narratives to *yōkai* characters (or character merchandizing) can be observed when Mizuki’s character Kitarō became visually attractive (*kawaii*) in the first TV series (1968–69). However, in Mizuki’s earlier Kitarō manga—titled *Hakaba Kitarō (Graveyard Kitarō)*, Kitarō was depicted as a ghostly figure associated with ugliness, grotesqueness, and liminality.²² In the first episode of the manga *Hakaba Kitarō*, he was born from the grave of the last surviving member of a tribe (called *yūrei-zoku*) that was marginalized and driven away by humans. Kitarō’s birth scene depicts him as a baby with one eye missing. Adopted by a human couple, he is marginalized in the human world. The narration says about his condition as a child: “NOT HUMAN. UGLY FACE. OTHER CHILDREN ARE REPULSED BY HIS APPEARANCE. THEY REFUSED TO PLAY WITH HIM, AND HE IS ALWAYS ALONE” (Mizuki, 2016, p. 49). The story ends when Kitarō, who feels no liberty in the human world, embarks on a journey in search for a better place. In this first episode, Kitarō is presented as a marginalized figure in an anthropocentric society, possibly influenced by Mizuki’s own experience of the war and postwar marginalization (disabled soldiers were marginalized as they were unwanted visible reminders of the past war in the midst of the country’s recovery). It is not difficult to see a reflection of Mizuki himself (who had lost one arm in the war) in the figuration of one-eyed, marginalized Kitarō. Yet, when adapted for the TV series, Kitarō on the TV screen appears as a cool hero who fights with good *yōkai* members against evil *yōkai* monsters. This shift of Kitarō from a ghostly *yōkai* to a TV hero was not only aesthetic but also political, as Mizuki’s manga—in particular, the ones from his earlier period (from the 1950s to 1960s)—demonstrate the monstrosity and liminality of *yōkai* that “warn” of the hubris of human civilization and critique the darker side of industrial capitalism in the middle of Japan’s economic advance.

To further consider the divorce of *yōkai* from the storytelling tradition, it is useful to consult Frankfurt School Marxist scholar and literary critic Walter Benjamin’s distinction between information and storytelling. In “The Storyteller” (1936), one of his most well-known essays, Benjamin (2002) claims that the importance of storytelling is in its “ability to share experiences” in contrast to the information from new media—the “newspapers” in his age (p. 143). In contrast to the information that does not survive its moment, Benjamin values the importance of storytelling. In opposition to information, he states that “the story form

²² The prototype for the Kitarō character may be traced back to slightly ambiguous *kamishibai* (paper theater on the streets) narratives for which Mizuki drew illustrations. See Kan (2007, pp. 131–142).

is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time" (Benjamin, 2002, p. 148). Benjamin praises the craft of storytellers who are capable of reviving (or retaining the ideal form of) precapitalist "mouth-to-mouth" communication and the collective nature of sharing experiences through storytelling. It is perhaps not coincidental that Benjamin pays attention to the power of storytelling by ascribing it to folkloric collectivism (remember that this is where *yōkai* stories emerged, historically). For Benjamin, storytelling has a power to cogently retain wisdom produced, narrated, and shared by a community, whereas information is transient, individual, and quickly forgotten. Following Benjamin's distinction, Mizuki's story manga, I would argue, retains the collective wisdom and shared experiences of ordinary people through storytelling. On the other hand, the decontextualized and denarrativized *yōkai* "characters" in the current Japanese media mix make *yōkai* monsters into consumable, transient objects.

Conclusion: Media Mix and Neoliberal Society

As discussed above, the abundance of *yōkai* characters in the current Japanese mediascape is an outcome of both historical transmedia practices by modern manga authors and transmedia practices by the alliance of media companies and industries. Along with books about *yōkai*, the existence of *yōkai* compendia compiled in the encyclopedic/database mode have allowed modern authors, producers, and media companies to take advantage of *yōkai* characters as inspirational sources for creating new stories and/or to capitalize on them for transmedia business purposes. In addition, in the current media mix, one can hardly ignore manga's media-specific element: the iconic drawing of characters. This convention, required by the intense labor and economy of drawing, equips characters—including Mizuki's *yōkai* characters—with the versatility of transversal movement across different media platforms and everyday objects through character merchandizing and other transmedia adaptations. Although such media convergence has created a potential for substantial financial gain for corporations, it undermines the traditional nature of *yōkai* stories. The present-day Japanese media mix, which prioritizes character building over storytelling, diminishes the folkloric, collective, and critical nature of *yōkai* that was exercised in their narrative forms. On the other hand, Mizuki's *yōkai* manga—in particular, those from his earlier period (from 1950s to 1960s)—still address the monstrosity and liminality of *yōkai* that retain the potential for conveying shared knowledge and critiques. Yet, just as we have seen in the case of contents tourism, it is hard to identify such a critical potential in *yōkai* in the current media-mix derivative products that are only owned, consumed, and forgotten without any narrative or critical traces in a neoliberal society. Jenkins' concept of "transmedia storytelling" has addressed the flow of content across multiple media platforms in an increasingly media-saturated environment, and also emphasized valuable contributions to our understanding of the world (Jenkins, 2006, pp. 154, 459). In view of the latter, Mizuki's *yōkai* story manga are an example of transmedia storytelling, while corporate-led media mix(ed) *yōkai* are merely a product of transmedia adaptations for consumption

Given this context, it is instructive to think about one of the recent "successes" of the media-mix project, the Yo-kai Watch franchise. This mixed-media franchise, modeled on the success of the Pokémon franchise, revolves around a plot in which the main character/player collects friendship medals with which the character/player can summon *yōkai*. In this plot, the majority of *yōkai* exist only to be collected and owned by the player. From the beginning, this project was planned as a media-mix project, starting with a manga serialization before selling a video game for Nintendo consoles (Pokémon was originally an RPG video

game for a hand-held console). The success of the anime adaptation prompted an upsurge in the production of other media products, such as subsequent video games (Level-5 for Nintendo 3DS game console), toys (Bandai), and animated films (OLM, Inc.). The anime begins with the boy protagonist in a forest stumbling upon a capsule-toy vending machine, like the ones found in Japan's game arcades and shopping malls. Following a mysterious voice, the protagonist throws a 100-yen coin into the vending machine and encounters his first *yōkai* emerging from the capsule. The act of purchasing, depicted in the anime's first episode, simulates consumption and even conditions young audiences to become consumers, modeling how they are supposed to behave when they encounter capsule-toy vending machines in social reality. In a recent essay, Marc Steinberg (2017) discusses the "priming" strategy exemplified in the Yo-Kai Watch franchise that conditions the audience toward total consumption (p. 253). This is a sign of what Michael Sandel (2013) describes as a drift from a market economy to a "market society," where even people's civic lives—and their decisions and behaviors, as well—are penetrated by the logic of the neoliberal market, while social and communal morality declines. The Yo-Kai Watch media-mix disciplines kids in the direction of conforming to such a market society.

Lastly, as Jenkins' (2006) concept of media convergence also points to fans activities, there is still a possibility that new *yōkai* narratives—even socially and politically critical ones—might emerge from fans' derivative narrative works (possibly found in *dōjinshi*/fanzine activities). However, we would need another study to explore this potential.

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