

# Facing One's Villains: Aesthetic Commonalities in the Depiction of Japanese Evils

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**Abstract:** This paper discusses the ways in which qualia deriving from color, shape, and other features are used to indicate evil and social ills in Japan, often through anthropomorphized characterizations as villains. Contemporary depictions of such villains echo themes of religious and folkloric historical narratives. Some of these characterizations perpetuate moral panic regarding women. Examples of evil agents range from the biological, disease agents and radiation, to human perpetrators of scams and other illegal or dangerous activities. Depictions of all of these share features of iconic representation, particularly of the eyes, and often include the colors black, purple, and/or red. Other features bear similarity to those found in historical characters associated with evil, based on various aspects of Japanese common religion and folklore, including monsters. Qualia derived from the early examples influence the ongoing creation of new villain characters.

**Keywords:** good, evil, Japan, villains, gender, anthropomorphism, animism, iconicity, cross-modality, qualia, kyara

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Cuteness is a typical trait of the Japanese characters (*kyara*) which are a common presence in the Japanese mediascape: whether in manga, as brand mascots, or as product decorations (see for example Allison (2006), Tobin (2004), and Yano (2013)).<sup>1</sup> Though most *kyara* are morally “good”, the Japanese cast of characters has its villains too. This paper will focus on animate or anthropomorphized representations of evil in the Japanese mediascape. These bad guys and gals (*akudama*) have a distinct aesthetic

when appearing in cartoonlike form, and this distinct aesthetic is specifically localized in the facial features, the eyes in particular.<sup>2</sup> In several cases the face may be assymmetrical or the eyes may tilt or turn up at the corners. They provide contrast to more innocent looking characters, who have eyes that are more round or set in faces that are symmetrical, with horizontal eyelid lines. This focus on eyes reflects their salience “as expressive of character and of emotion” in the cultural linguistics of Japanese (Occhi 2011:190). Evil is sometimes cutesified by rounded edges, but the facial features remain spiky. As I will show, evil is represented by parallel qualia across different sensory modalities, for example, spiky shapes are associated with spicy flavor, the antithesis of rounded sweet loveability. After all, Japanese food often contains sweeteners, but spicy elements are minimal. This shared multimodal aesthetic for social evils presents attenuated versions of those features found in comic bad-guy or bad-girl representations. All of these *akudama* villains and monsters echo historic religious and folkloric texts associated with entrenched moral sentiments. These derive from the common religion of Japan, a mixture of Shinto, Confucian, Buddhist and other elements of belief and practice underlying everyday philosophies and behaviors (Reader and Tanabe 1998).

*Akudama* “villains”--recognizable by their distinctive faces and especially eyes-- are everywhere. In researching this paper I easily came across several cases of the villain aesthetic in my existing collection of image files, collected serendipitously as examples of animism and anthropomorphism. They are easy to spot in the everyday mediascape, indeed, the broader sense of the term ‘linguistic landscape’. For example, ATMs and police use typified evil traits of *akudama* ‘bad guy’ imagery to warn users not to use cell phones while banking in order to forestall the scammers that prey on elderly people (Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1. ATM scam "it's me, but the money, soon..."

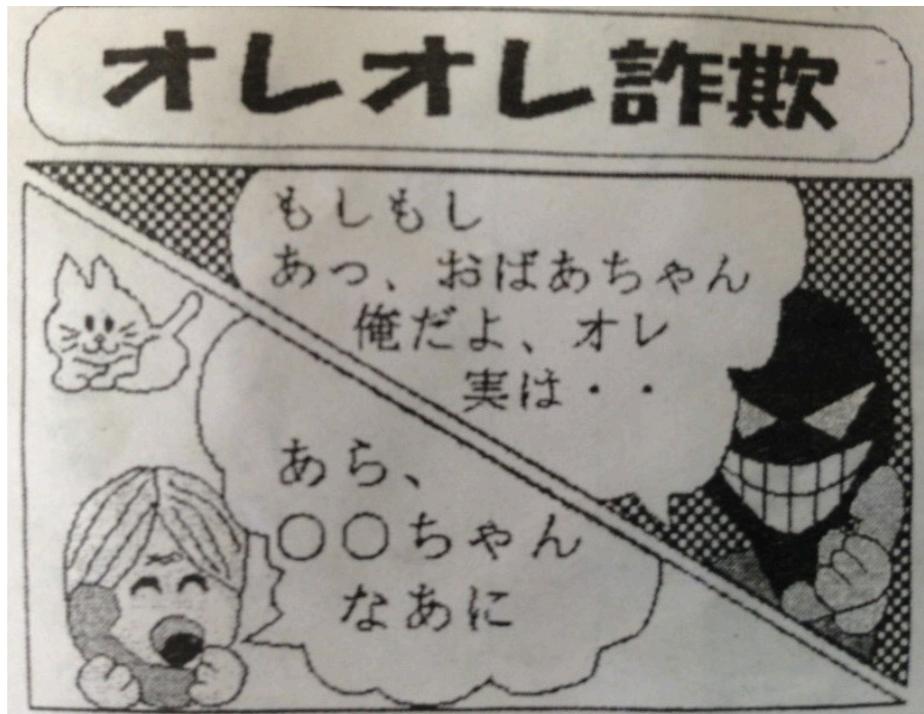


Figure 2. ATM scam "hello? Oh, sweet grandma, it's me, me, actually..." "Oh, (name) sweetie, what is it?"

As can be seen from these examples, *akudama* have easily recognizable faces, and what marks these faces in particular as being “evil” is their eyes. These *akudama* eyes are ubiquitous stereotypes markers of evil across the Japanese mediascape, including popular infotainment TV programs, which are filled with such villains. Thanks to a pair of cat-eye glasses I happened to wear in a photo for our university brochure (Figure 3), one of these villains was me. Because my glasses in this photo made me resemble an *akudama* villain, the Westerner-as-bad-girl trope was foisted upon me in its “scary teacher” variation, as a ruse in constructing a televised segment with a local comedy duo.



**Figure 3. The author, in her cat-eye glasses and brochure face.**

### **Ano megane no sensei “the professor in those glasses”, that is, me as a bad girl**

In 2012, local cable television show undertook a series of visits to area universities in Miyazaki (including the university where I work), filming sequences of expository reporting about school life as well as humorous skits starring a local male *manzai* “comic dialogue” duo called Chicken Nanban (named for a local dish of battered fried chicken dipped in sweet/sour marinade and covered in tartar sauce). It so happened that the three of us had

chatted amiably some months before during a random encounter at the beach, though at the time I had no idea they were local comedians.

The skits included a class visit and interview with its professor (a tall white American male) and students. The skit involving me, however, **begins** with Chicken Nanban showing the university brochure photo of me (the one with cat-eye glasses) to the main office and then searching for me while I waited with colleagues on a bench upstairs. The criteria they stated repeatedly for discriminating me among the other foreign faculty was *those glasses*, the black cat-eye shaped frames. After they found me, we talked about my research into Japanese popular culture. They reacted (as I have heard remarked many times before) that they found it eerie to hear me discuss findings of my academic research on *enka* music, dialect, cartoons and mascot characters, all plebian topics very close at hand and yet unexamined and taken for granted by many locals. The climax of our interaction took place in the next segment, where Chicken Nanban were to take the stage. They professed, half in jest, a desire to perform comedy abroad and asked my assessment of a short comedy sketch they then performed for me. My role, as the director had previously instructed me, was to engage in a stereotypical pedagogical speech genre of *damedashi* “find fault and urge improvement” and then help them reframe it into a potentially more successful version. I put on a stern face as the camera zoomed in on my reaction to their skit: “When was I supposed to laugh?” They reacted in feigned shock. Through these coached performances I was framed for the viewing public as frightening and aggressive and critical of Japanese males. Apparently the performance was memorable enough; a year later when I called to get cable TV installed and gave my name the employee laughed, saying, “You’re kind of famous with us”.

Part of what made this comedy skit work was the employment of a Japanese cultural sense of typicality, or rather stereotypicality, known as *rashisa*. *Rashisa* is a term used for the general tendency for similar things to be depicted similarly, or for predetermined traits to be assigned, especially when assigned to women (Jûgaku 1983, trans. Occhi 2008). *Rashisa* can be treated, in semiotic terms, as an indigenous Japanese term for a kind of “cross-modal iconism”, an iconism (a cultural system of stereotyped resemblances) across different entities and also modalities which is founded on bundles of shared qualia or qualities, in this case a group of typified qualities that are construed together as signs of evil and foundational for what I will call a “cross-modal iconism of evil” (the villain or *akudama* aesthetic). Mogi and Tamori (1997) argue that qualia underlie the human creative process as a “necessary externality”, along with information input and stochasticity. Qualia are often hard to translate, as Harkness explains:

Conventional qualisigns are types of qualitative experiences that are widespread, recognizable, and socially effective. They have cover terms, like

‘softness’ or ‘gagaabala’, which trace a pathway of linkages across multiple sensory realms. It is via semiotic regimentation and conventionalization in this sense that cultural value is manifest qualitatively. (Harkness 2013: 15)

The example Harkness gives is shared quality of “softness” in cross-modal iconism in the marketing of low alcohol content soju in contemporary Korea, where “The lowered alcohol content is understood to produce a softer taste, a softer sensation on the throat, softer sonic reactions to consumption, a softer feeling of inebriation, a softer mood among friends and colleagues, and softer embodiments of both masculine and feminine personhood” (2013:13). It is this analogic transitivity of quality from the substance itself to different related sensory, social, and embodied dimensions that Harkness draws attention to with the phrase “cross-modal iconism” (2013:ibid.). In the case of Japanese *akudama*, the cross-modal iconism of evil extending even to flavors is found here as well: the qualia for Japanese evil includes spicy flavor, in contrast to the sweet dependency (*amae*) often co-occurring with cuteness. Unpacking the Japanese multimodal, sensual system of evil and badness provides a valuable counterpoint to Japan’s more broadly popularized cute and loveable (*kawaii*) aesthetic.

The indigenous aesthetic/semiotic category of *Rashisa* is important both for establishing commonalities among characters grouped together as “evil”, but also for establishing a specific type of quasi-monstrous alterity, that of foreigners, and in my case of bilingual, educated professional foreign women, and assigning it to the semi-villainous category of *akudama*, further indexed by the cat-eye glasses, as discussed below. Miller (1995) has analyzed the category of *gaijin tarento* “foreign stars” whose typicality includes the weird “incongruity of their ethnicity and the language they are speaking” (1995:197). Kelsky (2001) additionally shows how contemporary Japanese media representations echo historical depictions of white women as frightening, even castrating creatures. In my case, *rashisa* operated in that a foreign woman speaking Japanese while wearing cat-eye glasses was stereotyped as a threat, as an *akudama*.

In assigning me to the category of *akudama*, the glasses and their rendering of my eyes themselves are salient. Eyes are an essential element of the original *akudama* motif, for in Japan eyes reflect the soul, forming a focus for attention in reading another’s mood, intentions, or personality (Yuki et al. 2007, Occhi 2011). The Chinese characters used to write the terms for good and evil themselves are subject to interpretation as faces. As I was told by a longtime student of Buddhism I encountered serendipitously during fieldwork in Asakusa, the Chinese *kanji* character for evil, *aku* (悪) was originally written with the top half like this (亞), showing an empty space shaped like a cross. This represents an empty crypt, which indicates that there is no Buddha nature inside the heart (心, *kokoro*) depicted in the lower half of the *kanji* representing evil. The character itself can

also be seen as a face, with eyes that are hard to see (as if sunglasses are worn) and a crooked smile. The character for *zen* (善) not only has a cross in the upper part, but the square component below that (口) is the character meaning “mouth”. For my consultant, the inclusion of the mouth indicated the notion that enlightenment further accrues from verbally sharing the teachings of Buddha. (I couldn’t help feeling that he was representing that remark during our time together.) This kind of visual wordplay and allusion is rampant in Japanese traditional and contemporary culture (Occhi 2009). A peek into the past will reinforce this claim with specific import to our understanding of the semiotic of social evils presently under discussion.

The origin of the *akudama* motif is found in popular writing of the Edo period (1603 - 1867). *Akudama* first emerged in 1790 in early manga, i.e. *kibyôshi* “didactic Edo picture books” in which the visual and verbal texts are inseparable, (Kern 2006:256) in texts by Santô Kyôden (1761-1816).

Anthropomorphism and animism of objects as well as *mitate*, “visual analogy/perspective taking”, are tactics common to *kibyôshi* writers, and are clearly employed in the representations of social ills discussed here. Both strategies hearken all the way back to the Japanese inculcation (and use, for political ends) of Chinese poetic aesthetics along with the adoption and adaptation of Chinese writing in the Heian period (794-1185) that remains rife in popular representation (Occhi 2009). These tactics enjoyed another era of prominence during Tokugawa rule, along with the revival of Confucian thought. The Japanese National Diet Library claims that this style influenced early Western picture book artists as well during the art movement of *Japonisme*; perhaps this history may accrue to the philosophical-religious differences that explain the tendency of Western viewers of these kinds of multimodal discourses may dismiss them as childish, given the strong Western association of picture books with children’s lore. Nonetheless, this visual/verbal aesthetic survives not only in the Japanese communicative norms of manga but also in factual discussions within contemporary multimodal discourses (Maynard 2007), and as we already have seen. Consumer response to the anthropomorphism of products in Japanese advertising shows that the inclusion of anthropomorphism enhances information flow and consumer affinity (Occhi 2010). And since *kibyôshi*, especially after the Kantei censorship reforms, were arguably put forth as didactic texts, a look at the original *akudama* representations is called for.

## The birth of bad guy imagery in the “Fast-dyeing Mind Study”<sup>3</sup>

We can thank Santô Kyôden (1761 - 1816) not only for creating the early depictions of *akudama* but also for the first known use of the word *manga* in print, in 1798 (Yamamoto 2007:6). The son of a pawnbroker, Santô was a prolific and popular author in several literary genres as well a creator of *ukiyo-e* (“Edo period woodblocks” paintings Shirane

2002: 655). The *akudama* and its opponent *zendama* “good soul” appeared in his 1790 *kibyôshi* entitled *Shingaku hayasomegusa* (usually translated as “Fast-dyeing Mind Study”, leaving off *kusa*, “grass”). The story (abridged here from Drake’s translation in Shirane 2002:711-729) revolves around the conflict between spirits of “evil” *akudama* and “good” *zendama* for possession of a lad named Ritarô (理太郎, “man of truth”), the son of a merchant named Rihei (利瓶, “profit warrior”) whose store was called “The Quick and Easy Shop”. The *akudama* and *zendama* spirits are embodied, anthropomorphized as barefoot men clad in *fundoshi* “loincloth” with circular faces bearing their respective Chinese character as the only feature (the sole female spirit in this text is a *zendama* clothed in kimono). The human actors are identified by a Chinese name character written on one shoulder of their kimono (Figure 4).



**Figure 4. Santo Kyoden’s depiction of a *zendama*, the Heavenly Emperor, and an *akudama*.**

The *akudama/zendama* motif became wildly popular, and traces of this story and its playful, allusive imagery remain. A kabuki dance of two players wearing headgear bearing the *akudama* or *zendama* Chinese characters called “Sanja Matsuri” was composed in 1832 (Shirane 2002:712) and is still performed today (Oshima, pc) (Figure 5).

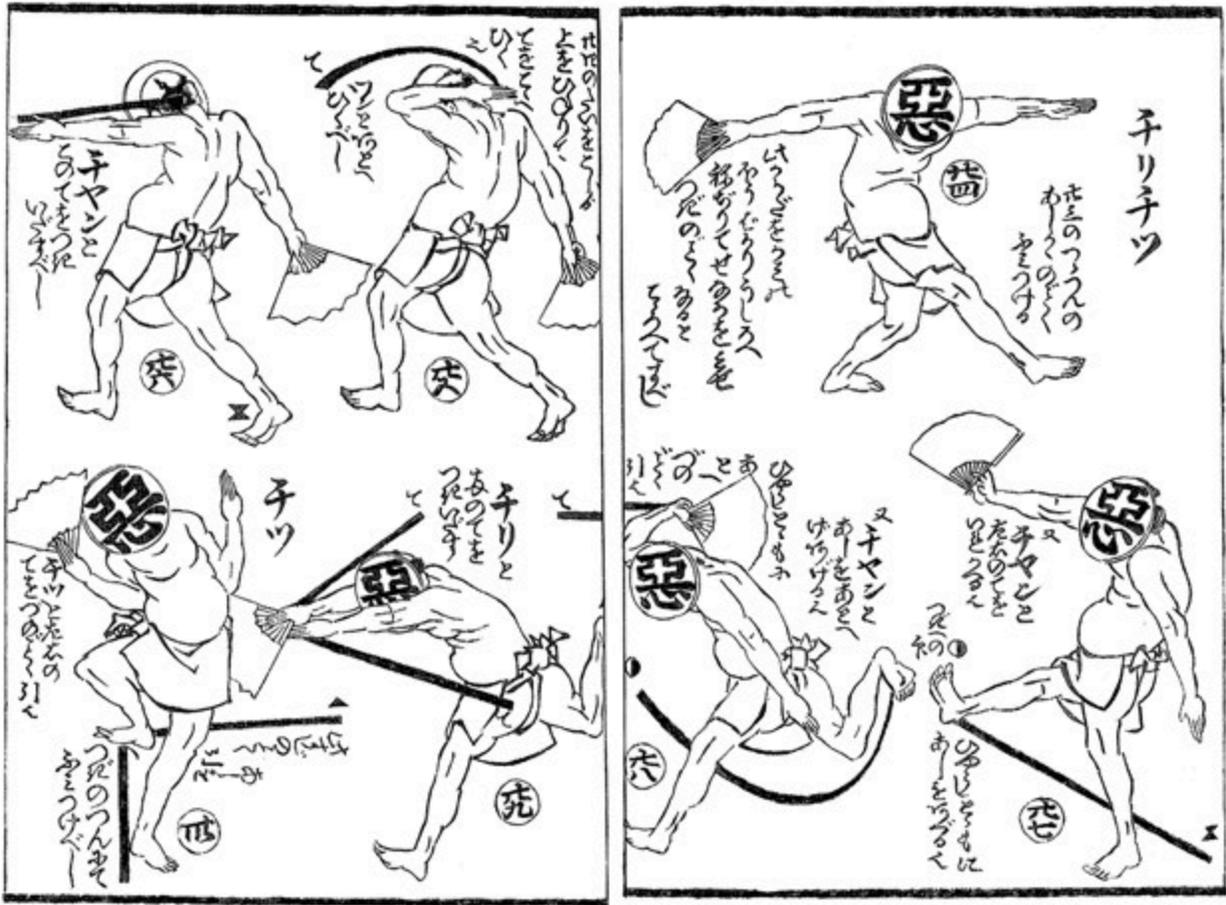


Figure 5. The Sanja Matsuri dance.

The dance honors the eponymous festival at Asakusa Shrine where the Kannon statue Ritarô visited in the story stands (and where Santô's writing desk is enshrined). The *akudama/Zendama* iconography is contagious and spreads even to foodstuffs: At a nearby ramen shop, on Kannon's festival day, the eighteenth of the month, one may consume a pair of steamed pork-filled buns on whose tops the *zen* or *aku* characters are burned, having been created to resemble faces. The *akudama* buns are spicy, echoing the metaphoric association of spiciness with rough circumstances. They are sold for take-out in packages of six, with good outnumbering and surrounding evil (Figure 6).



**Figure 6. *Zendama* and *akudama* meat buns.**

This rampant multimodality, intertextuality, and synaesthesia of the *akudama/zendama* motif both in the time of its creation and into the current moment provides another example of what I have termed “sloppy selfhood” phenomena (Occhi 2014). The ability to fluidly exemplify categories of good and evil, first embodied by humanlike figures with such iconographs for heads, then into a dance, and furthermore into flavors of plain or spicy meat buns is a prime example of this synaesthetic, multimodal discourse property. The legacy of Santo’s *akudama/zendama* story entails that current social evils are represented in a semiotic that, hundreds of years on, playfully reworks the visual trope originally based on the animated embodiment of written Chinese characters.

In Santo’s story of *zendama* and *akudama*, the courtesan was key in leading Ritaro astray, after which a man restored his propriety. Bad girls are notorious in Japan (Bardsley and Miller 2005), both historically and in recent media. Not surprisingly, they have also been called *akudama*. One enduring set of bad-girl images comes from a long-running anime franchise, the fifty-year-old Tatsunoko Productions’ series of cartoons. These include popular series such as *Gatchaman* and *Yatterman* along with several others, whose villains were also called *akudama* and consist of a trio (Figures 7-8).

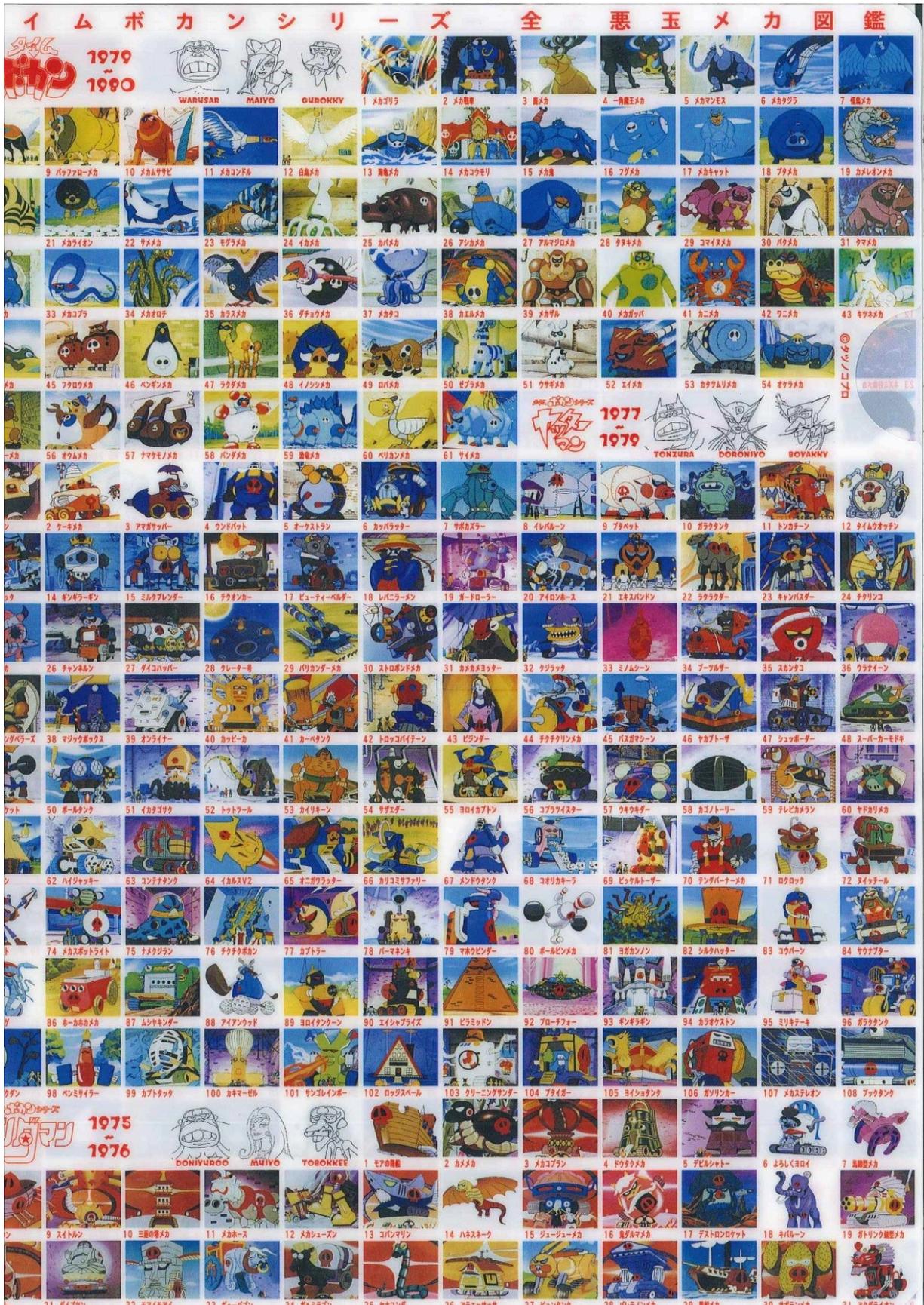


Figure 7. Tatsunoko Production's cartoon *Yatterman* bad guys, on a clear plastic folder, side one.

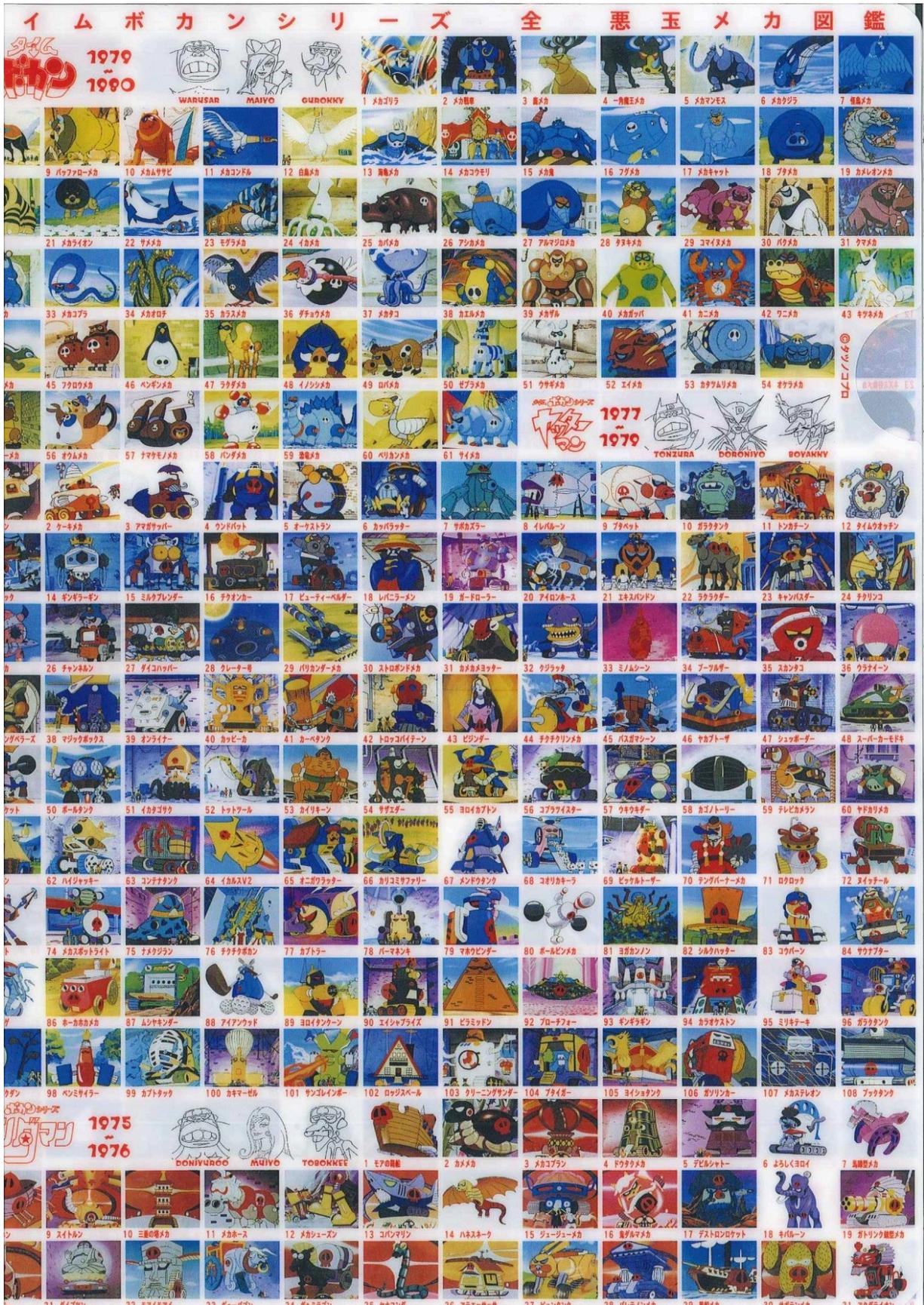


Figure 8. Tatsunoko Production's cartoon *Yatterman* bad guys, on a clear plastic folder, side two.

The leader is an attractive woman with tightfitting clothes and cat-eye makeup or glasses, perhaps even sunglasses, that lend her resemblance to the female *akudama* aesthetic. She is accompanied by two bumbling males, one stocky and one slender (Figure 9).



**Figure 9. The Yatterman *akudama* trio.**

This kind of trio is not uncommon and may even be interpretable through a Buddhist lens. Ôgoshi (1993) discusses the Pure Land (*Jôdô Shinshu*) Buddhist belief that women had to be reborn in male bodies in order to receive enlightenment (1993:20). This tenet conflicted with Shinto matrilineality and sexuality; as Ôgoshi (1993) explains, “Over the course of time, women came to be regarded as defiled beings and censured as temptresses by Buddhist leaders” (Ôgoshi 1993:59). Under this conflicted framework for women’s sexuality we may begin to see why they have put the “sexy bad girl” among minions who represent Buddhist realms of existence lower than human, the stocky *chikushô* “beast” and slender *gaki* “hungry ghoul”. The villainous female’s upturned eyes may even resemble the *hannya* mask of Buddhist-influenced Noh theater used in portraying jealous females who become vindictive ghosts after death.

One can find this malevolent trio trope in several other franchises including the contemporary kiddie cartoon *An-Pan Man*’s set of baddies: the cutesy red alien girl Dokinchan “Little Heartbeat” (Figure 10), with her tilted green eyes and her capacity for increasing one’s heart rate, the gemy Baikin Man (Bacteria Man) (Figure 11), and the recent addition of Horror Man, a skeletal figure (Figure 12).



Figure 10. Dokin-chan.



Figure 11. Baikin Man.

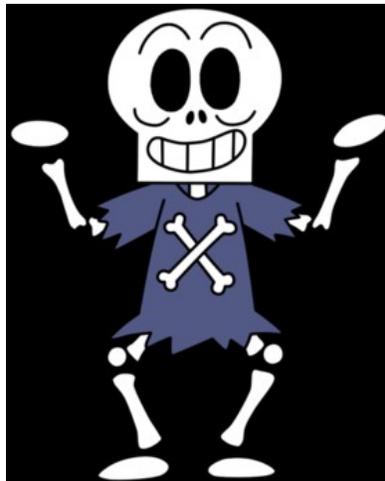


Figure 12. Horror Man.

The Pokémon franchise also relies on this trope for their villain trio Rocket Dan, composed of the attractive female Musashi, her partner Kojiro, and the cat Nyaasu, who have crossed the Milky Way in conquest.

Contemporary drawing conventions continue the trope for the two evil sidekick males. The two unsavory characters described in a book on *nigao-e* “portrait, likeness” instruction resemble them. *Nigao-e* range from sparsely lined forms (especially when drawing likenesses of children) into detailed caricature. In a section showing how to represent various *fun’iki*, *inshô* “mood, impressions”, one text (Ogawara 2011) includes photos and sketches of two men whose physiognomy and expressions unfortunately suggest that they could easily play villain roles given their similarities to the villain imagery found in media. These traits are exaggerated in drawing their likenesses. One is thin with an angular face and described as *kurai* “gloomy, shadowy”. Ogawara instructs us to draw him with many shadow lines, to skew the left-right balance of features, and give almost no sign of expression. The man’s eyes are drawn exaggerating their upward tilt at the corners, and his thin-lipped mouth is askew; one might say he is rendered as “sneaky looking”. The other poor fellow is roundfaced and stocky, labeled as *ayashii* “suspicious, dubious, dodgy”. He should be drawn with the light reversed, striking his face, and with small pupils (2011:39). Both these villainous depictions contrast strikingly with those of other faces in this section, which examples include child, adult, male, female, elderly, pleasant, angry, sad, and lively (2011: 36-9). Clearly, learning this trope is an inherent part of learning to draw likenesses, and along with that, identifying traits associated with bad guys via *rashisa*. Many villain depictions resemble one of these three types, and children learn them early.

## The fox and the badger, Barbie and Licca-chan

Though I have readily referred to the eye shape of the female villain --or her glasses--as catlike, perhaps foxlike is a more fitting attribution. Foxes (*kitsune*), after all, along with badgers (*tanuki*, properly “raccoon dogs”) are natural animals who are also supernatural tricksters, strongly associated in Japanese folklore with supernatural abilities of shapeshifting and disguise and a propensity to trick and deceive humans. Though the *kitsune* and *tanuki* have in common that they are everyday animals which are also supernatural tricksters, they differ in at least one important respect, that the *kitsune* has a particular set of associations with femininity. As Foster points out, there is a close association between these two characters, but of the two, the *kitsune* is more strongly associated with the feminine:

Historically, the image of the *tanuki* is often combined with that of the fox, or *kitsune* 狐, and sometimes legends associated with the two creatures are interchangeable. Indeed, a common term for the two together was *kori* (狐狸;

Ch. *huli*), a combination of the two Chinese characters that came to refer to all manner of supernatural or mysterious occurrences. While it is difficult to generalize, *kitsune*-related narratives and belief—often directly influenced from Chinese folk and literary motifs—tend to portray a seductive, sly, and dangerous creature. Often a *kitsune* will take the shape of a woman, seducing a man away from his wife and dangerously disrupting family or village life. (Foster 2012: 6-7)

Both *kitsune* and *tanuki* are categorized among *yokai* “goblins” for folkloric accusations of shapeshifting and trickery. They have in common, for example, the desire to fool others and to steal food. The key difference between the *kitsune* and *tanuki* involves gender: in forty-eight folktales I have studied emerge in the majority of stories involving women (Occhi 1996).

Badgers almost always work alone; they spoil crops, haunt temples, impersonate Buddha, and engage in battles of wits with other creatures who often fool them. When badgers use their shape-shifting powers to impersonate women, they tend to be associated with old women; in several tales they kill, cook, and impersonate old women, although in one story a badger appeared as an old *shamisen* “three-string banjo” player. When *tanuki* appear as young women, they do so by putting their heads between their legs. But when these genitals are exposed to a man, the mouth yawns, revealing a vagina dentata “toothed vagina” and ruining the disguise. This doesn’t make for good drag: in short, the badger can impersonate women, but not in the same sexualized way a *kitsune* does.<sup>4</sup>

Folkloric foxes as shape-shifters can take on many roles, but the main thing that separates them from the *tanuki* as shapeshifters is that they often impersonate women, and when they do they are beautiful seducers who often become second wives. They are revealed as *kitsune* when their fox tails are seen by their husbands or children. When this happens they abandon the household and their children, blessing the rice fields as they go. Lafcadio Hearn (in Allen & Wilson eds. 1992:5) summarized these tales and added: “The favourite shape assumed by the goblin fox for the purpose of deluding mankind is that of a beautiful woman; much less frequently the form of a young man is taken in order to deceive someone of the other sex. Innumerable are the stories told or written about the wiles of fox-women. And a dangerous woman of that class whose art is to enslave men, and strip them of all they possess, is popularly named by a word of deadly insult – *kitsune*.”

For my purposes, this difference in shapeshifting behavior parallels a key difference in the iconography of these two tricksters and aligns these two *yokai* with the general conventions of the depiction of villains. Recall the two unfortunate fellows caricatured as gloomy and dodgy in the *nigao-e* examples above. Simply put, the thin faced fellow fits the *kitsune* “fox” trope associated with the creature *Vulpes vulpes* (Figure 13), while the

roundfaced one resembles *Nyctereutes procyonoides*, the so-called “badger” *tanuki* (Figure 14).



Figure 13. *Kitsune*.



Figure 14. *Tanuki*.

Similarly, in the Studio Ghibli film *Pom Poko* (1994), the *tanuki* of the film appear in several different animated forms, from fully naturalistic animals to anthropomorphic raccoon dogs to actual humans, and in all these cases they have rounded eyes, while the effeminate male *kitsune* character (as well as the actual female *kitsune* characters) have fox-like *akudama* eyes (Figures 15-16).



Figure 15. The *Tanuki* and the *Kitsune* in human form in *Pom Poko*.



Figure 16. The clever *Kitsune* in human and animal form in *Pom Poko*.

The same fox/badger contrast has furthermore been applied to the dolls Barbie (from the US) and Licca (Japan), appearing in my Japanese consultants' comments about play motifs. These emerge from the dolls' physiognomy; sexy fox-faced Barbie is an oldest child and a career girl with a boyfriend, while round-faced Licca is ten years old, plays piano and sings (Figure 17).



Figure 17. Licca

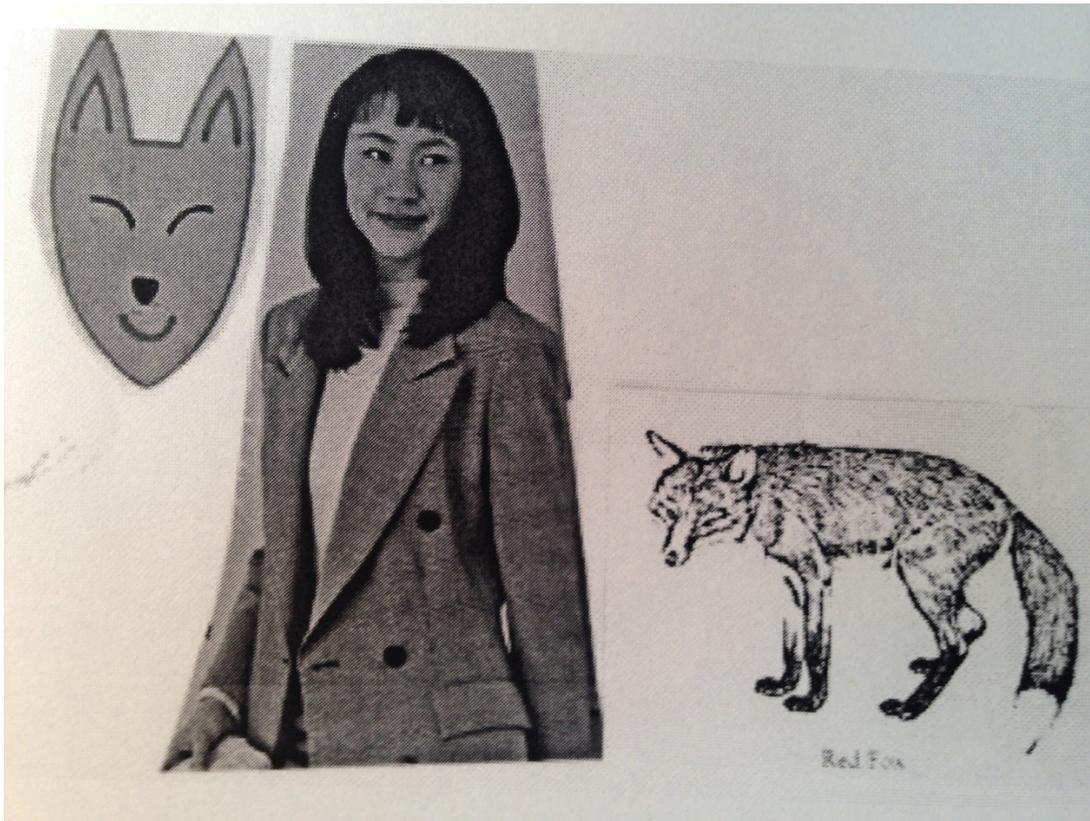
Her imagined future career was to be a housewife. The standard play theme involving both dolls I was told is that Licca is a cute princess in need of protection, who is cruelly teased by mean Barbie. This echoes the general semiotic association of round babylike faces with *amasa* “sweetness” linked to the verb *amaeru* “dependency” and of the circle itself as correct, as when student papers are marked. The fox face is associated with *karasa*, “spiciness”, a strong, assertive personality, and the triangle indicating the dubious answer (the wrong answer is marked X).<sup>5</sup> These traits also appear in visual depictions (e.g., cat eyes, pointy ears and popped collars) as well as personality characterizations of the bad girls mentioned so far, including me. In 1993 and 1994, the twentysomethings’ *With: Culture Magazine for your Life* went so far as to dispense beauty advice addressed to women who embody either of these facial shapes, portraying models next to cartoon versions of the animals (Figures 18 – 19).

## Drawings of *kitsune* and *tanuki*

The gist of these articles involved the necessity to minimize these resemblances with suitable wardrobes and makeup, since imagined negative results may obtain from stereotypical associations with either case in romance or in the workplace. *Kitsune* and *tanuki* metaphors appear to work similarly to Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney's description of monkeys' various metaphorical entailments: as others through which selves can be defined (Ohnuki-Tierney 1987:23). The trope works partly because foxes and badgers exhibit the same constructed nature that Ohnuki-Tierney ascribes to monkeys; most people have never seen the real animals live but feel that they know them through culturally constructed imagery (ibid). This sense of "typicality" (*rashisa*) may actually be an assignment of predetermined traits (especially when assigned to women) as Jûgaku concluded (1983, trans. Occhi 2008). It seems so when appearance is the primary method for judging personality.



Figure 18. *Tanuki* image and *tanuki*-faced girl from MORE; badger and *tanuki*.



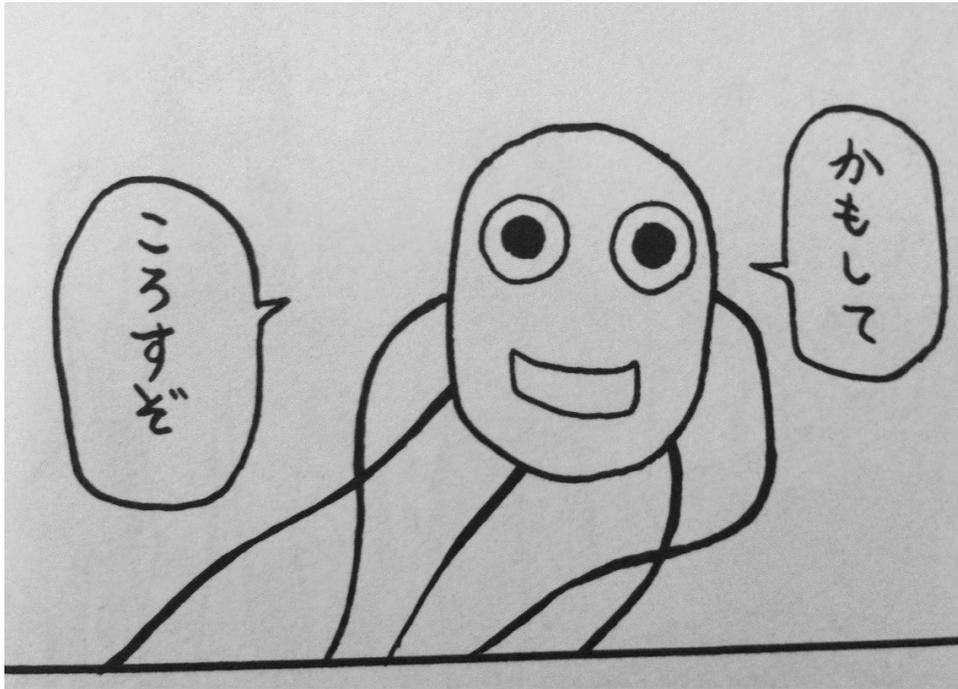
**Figure 19. Kitsune image and kitsune-faced girl from MORE; fox.**

Magazine writers need not always take up revision of folklore characters to impress Japanese women with the need to escape undesirable typecasting as a villain through beauty work and consumption. Twenty years on, the April 2014 issue of the *arafo* “fortysomething” style guide *Glow Magazine* headlines the “necessity of being kind” and asks whether women readers aren’t being called scary at work or home. The feature article urges a diagnosis via a binary-choice driven flowchart with cartoon examples of one’s type: black-clad scary, career scary (with her collar popped), plain scary, showy scary (in bubble-era colorful garb), and cutesy scary laden with ribbons. The first three of these are reminiscent of *kitsune* (Figure 18) and the latter two of *tanuki* style women (Figure 19). Remedies necessitate seeking middle ground via consumption and display of currently trendy pastel low gauge sweaters. Plain scary women are especially warned not to embody the “strict schoolteacher” look – too late for me! Showy gals must avoid baring too much skin, becoming *erokowa* “erotic scary”, a particularly villainous type which points right back to issues in Japanese common religion. The conventional qualia associated with for these types are summarized in Miller and Bardsley’s analysis of “What Makes a Bad Girl”, along with their conclusion that “girlhood itself is a dangerous time”. Bad Girls are also “scandalously visible, make too much money, push girlish behavior to extremes, [their] bodies are out-of-control, [they] do what they want to do, and have influence on Good Girls” (2005).

## Evil lurking under the microscope

It is easy to see continuity in the tendencies of animism and anthropomorphism that allow renderings of good and evil spirits, chemicals and bacteria as entities depicted in the same way as scary women, telephone scam artists and subway perverts. In *An-Pan Man*, the longrunning children's anime referred to by an NHK director as having a prototypical *akudama* villain, the stocky *Baikin Man* has round eyes with smallish, centrally placed pupils, somewhat like the thuggish *ayashii* example above. In this anime's original theme song, we are told that *Baikin Man's* eyes are *ran ran*, "bright and glaring". His red, selfish girlfriend *Dokin-chan* "Little Heartbeat" is another moody coquette; her green eyes tilt up at their outer corners.

In the contemporary manga/anime *Moyashimon*, harmful germs like *E. coli* may also have round eyes like *Baikin Man*. Here *E. coli* tells us, "*kamoshite korosu zo*" "[I'll] multiply and kill you!" -- clearly showing their villainous intentions (Figure 20).



**Figure 20. *E. coli* says "[I'll] multiply and kill you!"**

While *E. coli* as villainous *akudama* is black with glaring eyes, the benign bacteria in *Moyashimon* (Figure 21) are typically done up in pastel colors with dots for eyes, somewhat like the *kabi run run* characters of *AnPan Man*, a pastel group of "rampant mold" that occasionally spread and wreak havoc (but don't kill anyone).



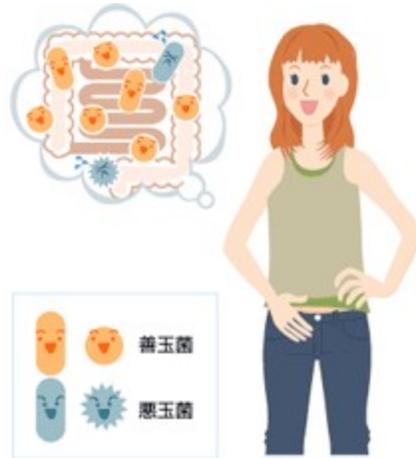
Figure 21. Benign bacteria “clap, clap, clap”.

And since bacteria have not been detected to possess eyes such as ours, we may consider the portrayal of glaring ones to be particularly ominous indications of evil intent. Notably, in a promotional video advertising the release of the series' revival called *Moyashimon Returns*, a PR ploy suggested by one of the bacteria to rename the series Moeyasumon (“We’ll get you excited”) and render them more appealing by giving them the enormous eyes and huge pupils of “cute” *moe*-style characterization is roundly rejected by the others (Figure 22). *Moe* is “a word used to describe a euphoric response to fantasy characters or representations of them” (Galbraith 2009) and does not match the aesthetic of the Moyashimon bacteria as they perceive themselves.

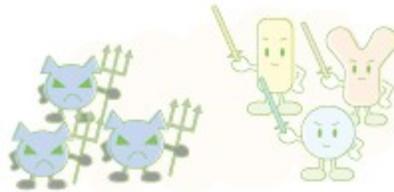


Figure 22. *Moe*-ified *Moyashimon*.

In fact, Japanese people nowadays readily associate the word *akudama* with *akudamakin* “evil bacteria”, germs that interfere with proper digestion, including *E. coli*, or with cholesterol, i.e., *akudama koresuterooru* referring to LDL cholesterol. Both of these terms are implicated in popular scientific descriptions via the aesthetic of contemporary monsterhood described above. Domestic yogurt companies especially rely on this trope in websites that eulogize brands and describe the benefits of their products, e.g., Calpis (Figure 23) and Snow Brand (Figure 24), but not the foreign company Danone.



**Figure 23. *Akudamakin* (blue) and *zendamakin* (orange) in a woman’s digestive system.**



**Figure 24. *Akudamakin* (blue) and *zendamakin*.**

Scientific discussions of disease agents often include similarly animated cells or chemicals; the potential transformation of normal cervical cells to cancerous ones via HPV infection is depicted as a transition from a round and happy shape to the spiky *akudama* type. Mental illness is depicted as another bad guy (Figure 25). Acetylaldehyde, which causes hangovers, takes on evil guises of red and black (Figures 26, 27).



Figure 25. Generalized ataxia. 'What's the treatment?' 'What about the family?'



Figure 26. Acetylaldehyde. "The latest information on alcohol and cancer. Are you okay? The signs of risk for esophageal cancer."



Figure 27. "Acetylaldehyde, the cause of bad drunkenness and hangover. 414 times the risk of cancer from alcohol!?"

## Conclusions

This paper has examined historical and contemporary depictions of Japanese villainry, human or otherwise. These images of evil share features different from those used in imagery of good characters. Color, shape, and symmetry are among the features used to allow characters to be judged immediately by the viewer as good or evil agents. These depictions are not just the stuff of kiddie cartoons, but are effectively used in other media including popular social and scientific texts aimed at adults. They may be human, but are just as likely to be animated non-human agents. The operation of an *indigenous meta-semiotics* of “typicality” (*rashisa*) also creates potential judgments of human character based on externalities that may even accidentally match the villain typology (as I learned by wearing cat-eye glasses). From analyzing these examples of *cross-modal iconism* and their cultural and historic contexts we can see that various folkloric and religiously based motivations underlie the shared features of contemporary Japanese villain depictions. Some of the symbolism derives from the imagery encoded in the originally Chinese ideographs for good and evil themselves, hearkening back to Tokugawa era visual narrative from which the terms *akudama* “villain” and *zendama* “hero” derive. Considering how evil depictions are divided by gender brings up the characterizations of bad guys as Buddhist ghosts and beasts (*gaki* and *chikusho*). Evil women are multiply damned: first by nature of their sexuality from Buddhist perspectives, and secondly from folkloric association with trickster animals, particularly foxes. The evil trio of so many cartoon franchises often contains one of each of these types. Chemicals, disease, and other genderless evil agents share features with human villains, yielding a rich semiotic category. Thanks to the use of visual and other sensory conventions, nonhuman and human social dangers occupy an easily recognizable category among Japanese monster depictions.

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## Endnotes

1 For example, Nozawa (2013) has analyzed the Japanese phenomenon of ‘characterization’ in which people are animated into *kyara*. Similarly, Foster (2015) traces the evolution and cohering (specifically, semantic staining) of ideas about Japanese goblins (*yōkai*), he sees them undergo similar phenomena of characterization as they transform into media mix characters. ↩

2 There are other differences between these characters and the good characters, too, for example *akudama* are also less likely to be rendered into wearable costume suits (*kigurumi*) as good characters often are. ↩

3 The ‘mind study’ refers to *Shingaku*, a moral movement emerging some hundred years prior to Santo’s text that reintroduced Confucianist ideals along with valorizing the merchant class, who had until that point been ranked below samurai and farmers in the Tokugawa class system. ‘Fast-dyeing grass’ refers not only to a textile coloring product, but also to the use of ‘grass’ as a referent for written matter at that time. This itself may harken back to the etymology of the word for words, *kotoba*, as ‘leaves of words’ (Takeuchi 1999:3). Ono describes *Shingaku hayasomegusa* as a transgenre work in that “*Shingaku*’s didactic aspect is unsuitable for *kibyoshi*” (2009:18) in contradiction to Kern’s description; however, there is ample evidence that it is a parody of *Shingaku* written as if it had didactic intent. Though it was Santo’s later works that were deemed indecent enough to warrant punishment, the allusions in the *Shingaku hayasomegusa* may have appeared offensive on their own terms. ↩

4 Most Japanese people recognize the *tanuki* as a chubby ceramic statue placed outside restaurants, dressed in travelers’ guise and standing on its rear legs with large testicles exposed. The expression *tanuki no kin o nobasu* “to stretch a badger’s balls” means “to profit through trickery” (Ono 2009:94), via allusion to the common expression *kintama*, “golden balls” referring to testicles. This expression and others involving *kitsune* and other *yokai* as allegories for human misbehavior appeared in the *Shingaku* text *Kyôkun hyakumonogatari* 教訓百物語 (One Hundred Scary Tales for Moral Instruction) by Murai Yoshikiyo (1752-1813) (Ono 2009:2). Foster (2012) further analyzes some narratives in which the *tanuki*’s disruptive haunting represents lost desires, be they for a samurai’s dead wife or for the peace of premodern life before the coming of railways. ↩

5 Thanks to the reviewer who pointed out the common synaesthesia of spice with evil; here of foxes and spiciness, as well as in the spicy *akudama* buns of Asakusa discussed above. ↩

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