Yoshitoshi Tsuikoka’s New Forms of Thirty Six-Ghosts—Visual Tradition in Art as a Cultural Critique on Japan’s Modernization

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Visual Tradition in Art as a Cultural Critique on Japan’s Modernization

Kate Duggan, Professor Mary C. Boyes

Abstract

Yoshitoshi Tsukioka’s use of folklore as visual tradition in his ukiyo-e, woodblock prints, in the 1888-1892 series New Forms of Thirty-Six-Ghosts is a cultural critique on the loss of Japanese traditional beliefs resulting from the Meiji State’s homogenizing modern ideology, which emphasized Western scientific and rational thought over supernatural folklore beliefs.

Methodology

This research was conducted through the examination of peer-reviewed scholarly journals and academic books focusing on the politics of the Meiji state during the Meiji Restoration, traditional Japanese folklore, and the relationship between folk art and political change. The examination of prints of Yoshitoshi Tsukioka’s woodblock prints also contributed to the understanding of the connection between folklore, art, and times of cultural and political change.

Introduction

During the Meiji period, 1869-1912, Japan underwent rapid political and cultural changes as a result of modernization. The Meiji state feared that the West would perceive Japan as uncivilized. As a result, the government campaigned against rural lower-class supernatural beliefs. The state worked to replace tradition with Western scientific thought, while simultaneously attempting to replace local traditions with new state-approved beliefs. Although the Meiji State was interested in preserving visually Japanese tradition, the government worked to remove beliefs that contradicted Western science and rationality.

Results/Discussion

The goal of this research was to understand if folklore becomes more prevalent among rural lower-class populations in times of political strife as a representation of cultural identity. The hypothesis can be made that folklore is more prevalent among rural lower-class populations in times of political strife and cultural change because folklore offers a platform for anonymous social and political critique and represents unique cultural identities.

Conclusion

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Conclusion

Yoshitoshi Tsukioka’s use of folklore as visual tradition in his ukiyo-e, woodblock prints, in the 1888-1892 series New Forms of Thirty-Six-Ghosts is a cultural critique on the loss of Japanese traditional beliefs resulting from the Meiji State’s homogenizing modern ideology, which emphasized Western scientific and rational thought over supernatural folklore beliefs.

Works Cited


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