



2014

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

Kate Duggan

Virginia Commonwealth University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/uressposters>

© The Author(s)

Downloaded from

Duggan, Kate, "Yoshitoshi Tsuikoka's New Forms of Thirty Six-Ghosts—Visual Tradition in Art as a Cultural Critique on Japan's Modernization" (2014). *Undergraduate Research Posters*. Poster 101.

<https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/uressposters/101>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Research Posters by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.

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

Kate Duggan, Professor Mary C. Boyes

Abstract

Yoshitoshi Tsukioka's 1888-1892 *ukiyo-e*, traditional woodblock prints, in the series *New Forms of Thirty Six-Ghosts* use *yōkai*, supernatural spirits, as a political critique about the loss of the Japanese tradition due to the Meiji State's homogenizing modern ideology, which emphasized Western scientific and rational thought over traditional Japanese beliefs about the supernatural. *New Forms of Thirty Six-Ghosts* expresses a subtle cultural critique on the Meiji State's scientific ideology through a use of traditional folklore. This series displays a connection between *yōkai*, supernatural spirits, and the identity of rural Japanese populations. The Meiji State's attempts at cultural homogenization were a threat to traditional Japanese folk beliefs. Although the Meiji State was interested in preserving visual Japanese tradition, the government worked to remove beliefs that contradicted Western science and rationality.

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 create a unified national identity, which involved replacing local traditions with new state-approved "tradition." The supernatural and folkloric was important to the identity of rural-populations and also worked as a subtle critique because it was already part of tradition. Unlike other artists of the time, Yoshitoshi Tsukioka carried on the traditional woodblock printing methods of *ukiyo-e* as well as focusing on traditional subject matter.

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 tradition of art as a political critique. The examination of prints of Yoshitoshi Tsukioka's woodblock prints also contributed to the connection between folklore, art, and times of cultural and political change.



Yoshitoshi, Tsukioka. *The Fox Woman Kuzumoha Leaving Her Child*. n.d. Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis. *Artstor*. Web. 14 April 2014.



Yoshitoshi, Tsukioka. *Kiyohime Changing into a Serpent at the Hidaka River*. 1890. Scripps College, Claremont. *Artstor*. Web. 14 April 2014.

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

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

- Eiji, Oguma. "Human Sciences and National Identity in Modern Japan: Who Defined the 'Japanese Tradition'?" *China Report* 36.2 (2000): 240-251. *Sage Publications*. Web. 4 April 2014.
- Eubanks, Charlotte. "On the Wings of a Bird: Folklore, Nativism, and Nostalgia in Meiji Letters." *Asian Folklore Studies* 65 (2006): 1-20. *EBSCOhost Academic Search Complete*. Web. 6 Feb. 2014.
- Figal, Gerald. *Civilization and Monsters: Spirits of Modernity in Meiji Japan*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999. Print.
- Foster, Michael Dylan. "Haunting Modernity: *Tanuki*, Trains, and Transformation in Japan." *Asian Ethnology* 71.1 (2012): 3-29. *EBSCOhost Academic Search Complete*. Web. 6 Feb. 2014.
- Foxwell, Chelsea. "New Art and the Display of Antiquities in Mid-Meiji Tokyo." *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 24 (2012): 137-154. *Project Muse*. Web. 6 Feb. 2014.
- Iyer, Aarti and Jolanda Jetten. "What's Left Behind: Identity Continuity Moderates the Effect of Nostalgia on Well-Being and Life Choices." *The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 101.1 (2011): 94-108. *American Psychological Association*. Web. 17 March 2014.
- Lincome, Mark E. "Nationalism, Imperialism, and the International Education Movement in Early Twentieth-Century Japan." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 58.2 (1999): 338-360. *JSTOR Arts and Sciences I*. Web. 6 Feb. 2014.
- Payne, Rachel. "Earl Meiji kabuki censorship." *Japan Forum* 19.3 (2007): 317-339. *EBSCOhost Academic Search Complete*. Web. 8 Feb. 2014.
- Reider, Noriko T. "The Appeal of *Kaidan* Tales of the Strange." *Asian Folklore Studies* 59 (2000): 265-283. *EBSCOhost Academic Search Complete*. Web. 8 Feb. 2014.
- Smits, Gregory. "Shaking up Japan: Edo Society and the 1855 Catfish Picture Prints." *Journal of Social History* 39.4 (2006): 1045-1078. *EBSCOhost Academic Search Complete*. Web. 9 Feb. 2014.
- Suzuki, Keiko. "The Making of *Tojin*: Construction of the Other in Early Modern Japan." *Asian Folklore Studies* 66 (2007): 83-105. *EBSCOhost Academic Search Complete*. Web. 6 Feb. 2014.
- Tanaka, Stefan. "Imaging History: Inscribing Belief in the Nation." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 53.1 (1994): 24-44. *JSTOR Arts and Sciences I*. Web. 7 Feb. 2014.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank UROP for financial assistance in the creation of this poster and Professor Mary C. Boyes for providing assistance throughout the research process in HONR 200.