

Article

Good People Do Not Eat Others?! Moral Ambiguity in Japanese Fairytales from the Late Nineteenth Century

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Abstract: In 2015, the Japanese public broadcaster NHK aired an educational series that re-examined traditional fairy tales by putting their characters on trial for their immoral behavior, such as revenge, violence, and dishonesty. These tales, rooted in premodern Japanese folklore, were widely available in various book formats by the late nineteenth century and, unlike modern adaptations, they did not sanitize violence or evil. This study analyzes four miniature picture books from the late nineteenth century that recount the story, *Kachikachi yama* (*The Crackling Mountain*). This analysis focuses on both verbal and visual representations of good and evil, with attention to themes of loyalty, filial piety, and virtuous revenge. The findings reveal that these picture books presented young readers with complex moral lessons, where the boundaries between good and evil were blurred. Additionally, they illuminate the prevailing image of children during that era, depicting them as “little adults” expected to be educated and prepared for the practical realities of the adult world.

Keywords: Japanese fairytales; moral ambiguity; nineteenth century picture books; the late Edo and early Meiji period; the image of the child

1. *Kachikachi yama*: Then and Now

This article is a revised and expanded version of a paper entitled “Who was and who is the villain? The complex morality in Japanese fairy tales in the late nineteenth century and contemporary Japan”, which was presented at CHLA annual conference (Children’s Literature Association), Madison, WI, USA, 30 May–1 June 2024. See [Gao 2024](#).

A long time ago, a hardworking old man, captured a mischievous *tanuki* (Japanese raccoon dog) who had been ruining his farmland and stealing his carefully cultivated vegetables (Figure 1).¹ Planning to cook the *tanuki* for dinner, the old man hung it from the ceiling and left the farmhouse. While the old man was out, the *tanuki* tricked the old man’s wife into setting it free. The *tanuki* then proceeded to beat the old woman senseless before making its escape. Later, a certain rabbit, who was a good friend of this old couple, helped them punish the *tanuki* by tricking it three times. First, the rabbit secretly set fire to the bundle of firewood the *tanuki* was carrying, burning its back. Then, the rabbit convinced the *tanuki* to put spicy miso sauce onto its burns, effectively rubbing salt—and in this case, spices—into the wounds. Finally, the rabbit tricked the *tanuki* into rowing a boat made of mud out to sea. Soon, the *tanuki*’s boat became water-logged and started to fall apart, causing the *tanuki* to fall in the water. It cried out for help, but far from saving the *tanuki*, the rabbit began to hack at the boat and the *tanuki* with its oar. In the end, the *tanuki* realized its wrongdoing and was saved by the rabbit. The story ends with the *tanuki* being forgiven and everyone living happily ever after.²



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Figure 1. The opening scene of *Kachikachi yama* 1993, 4.

This is the plot of the contemporary version of a well-known Japanese traditional fairy-tale (*mukashi banashi* 昔話, “tale of long ago”), titled *Kachikachi yama* (*The Cracking Mountain*).³ It would be no exaggeration to say that, nowadays, almost every child in Japan is familiar with some version of this tale, be it from textbooks, picture books or anime adaptations. The rabbit is portrayed as the selfless hero, while the *tanuki* is depicted as a mean and malicious character, who steals food from the hard-working old couple and injures the kind-hearted old woman. The rabbit’s punishment of the *tanuki* makes it realize its wrongdoing and guides it into seeking forgiveness. The moral lesson appears straightforward: it condemns the *tanuki* for taking advantage of others’ hard work and for its violent actions, while promoting the idea that mischief leads to bad consequences. However, forgiveness should be extended to those who acknowledge their mistakes and seek to change.

In 2015, the Japanese public broadcaster NHK challenged this tale’s morality by scrutinizing it under a modern court of law in an episode of the educational TV series, *The Fairytale Court* (*Mukashi banashi hōtei* 昔話法廷).⁴ This time, the rabbit is put in the role of the accused with the prosecuting lawyer alleging that the rabbit tried to kill the *tanuki*—a charge of attempted murder (Figure 2). The audience is prompted to question whether the rabbit is truly as virtuous as it appears. Reflecting on its actions, we realize that the rabbit did trick the *tanuki* three times as pretext to conduct acts of extreme violence. First, it burned the *tanuki*, then it deliberately aggravated the wound with spices, and, finally, the boat incident was an attempted drowning. Arguably, the rabbit did more harm than the *tanuki* ever did, and yet its violence and dishonesty are deemed appropriate, forgivable and even praiseworthy purely because they are the actions of the “hero” against the villain. All of a sudden, NHK’s reimagining subverts the idea of any clear demarcation between good and evil and the moral ambiguity of this tale is brought into full view.



Figure 2. The rabbit is in the role of the accused. *Kachikachi yama* in *The Fairytale Court*.

What is of interest here is that this type of reimagining in *The Fairytale Court* is only possible because the contemporary renditions of *Kachikachi yama* are the product of decades of sanitization and adaptation that have resulted in seemingly transparent heroes, villains and morals. Earlier versions of the story, which circulated until the 1930s, lacked any attempts to filter evil and violence (Inada and Inada 2003, p. 68; Sō no kai 叢の会 2019, p. 4; Koyama 2015, pp. 9–18).

Kachikachi yama can be traced back to orally transmitted tales from the late Muromachi period 室町時代 (1392–1573) and was recorded in writing and in picture book format from the eighteenth century, the master plot remaining consistent until the early twentieth century.⁵ Examining the story’s plot before the changes made in the 1930s, we can identify three key differences. Firstly, the motive behind the *tanuki*’s capture varies. In the contemporary version, the *tanuki* was caught due to the mischief it caused in the village. However, in most earlier versions, the *tanuki* was captured for no specific reason. Secondly, the fate of the old woman differs. In the contemporary story, the *tanuki* only injured the old woman, while in earlier versions, it killed her. Additionally, the *tanuki* made the old woman into soup and shapeshifted into her form to serve the soup to the old man. After the old man finished the soup, the *tanuki* revealed its true identity, mocked the old man for eating human flesh, and escaped. Finally, the *tanuki*’s fate also changes. In the contemporary version, the *tanuki* was rescued and forgiven, whereas in previous embodiments, it was killed by the rabbit.

These versions, featuring murder and cannibalism, were far more gruesome. But nothing suggests that children at the time were shielded away from the tale in its earlier form. On the contrary, regardless of the high degree of violence, *Kachikachi yama* was a staple element of a child’s “library” in the second half of the nineteenth century. It, in fact, appears in other mass-produced contemporaneous forms of printings for child readers, including play-prints such as board games (*sugoroku* 双六), which were viewed as mainstream materials for entertaining or educating child readers (Figures 3 and 4) (Satō 2016, p. 83; McGowan 2013, pp. 326–36; Williams 2012, pp. 47, 84–87).



Figure 3. Snake and ladders: on old folk tales in red-cover format (*Mukashi banashi akahon sugoroku* 昔咄赤本壽語禄), published by Izumiya Ichibei and 泉屋市兵衛, 1860. Retrieved from *Bakumatsu Meiji mamehon shūsei* 幕末明治豆本集成, edited by Katō Yasuko, 378, 2004. *Kachikachi yama* highlighted in red.



Figure 4. New edition of children's play (*Shinban kodomo asobi* 新板子どもあそび), created by Kobayashi Ikuhide 小林幾英, published by Akiyama Bu-emon 秋山武右衛門, 1884. *Kachikachi yama* highlighted in blue.

Well-known Western fairytales like *Little Red Riding Hood* and *Snow White* also had more violent older forms. The versions that contemporary children are familiar with have been sanitized over time (Tatar 2003; Zipes 2021; Paradiz 2005). In the nineteenth century, Romanticism and the Victorian cult of childhood innocence led to the removal or toning down of content like violence and sexual scenes in European fairytales (Van Ewijk 2021, pp. 3–5; Satō 2016, p. 77). However, such sanitization in Japanese fairy tales took place much later. It was not until the Meiji period (1868–1912) and the introduction of “childhood” as a Western philosophical construct that “children’s literature” became a concept in Japan (Karatani 1993, p. 119; Kami 1994, 2003; Ericson 2000, pp. 4–7; Herring 2019, pp. 159, 189). Traditional Japanese fairytales, which had been aimed at both adults and children since the eighteenth century, were not adapted specifically for younger readers along moral lines until the early twentieth century (Wakabayashi 2008, p. 227; Kōsokabe and Suzuki 2012, p. 510; Williams 2012, pp. 33–36).

Contemporary research in children’s literature often explores how violence and morality affect children cognitively and emotionally. While some scholars believe that children can discern virtue and vice in ambiguous situations, most argue that young readers, with their undeveloped value systems, require clear moral guidance.⁶ The portrayal of unpunished violence by heroes in fairytales is particularly concerning, as it may confuse children and inadvertently encourage violence.⁷ However, there is little research on the impact of unsanitized Japanese fairytales on children before the twentieth century.

This invites us to consider an important set of questions: How was morality portrayed in unfiltered Japanese fairytales before the “invention of childhood”? What was considered good and evil in these versions? What kind of moral challenges did these tales offer to children? The answers, I suggest, can be found in the pages of *Kachikachi yama*, produced in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The second half of the nineteenth century was a pivotal time in Japan’s history. While traditional historiography often draws a distinct line between early modern (the Edo period, 1603–1868) and modern Japan (the Meiji period), this research will approach the era from 1850s–1900s as a transitional period that heralded the end of the Edo period and laid the groundwork for Japan’s modernization. Additionally, these fifty years saw the introduction and gradual adoption of Western concepts, including the notion of “the child”, which began to reshape Japanese society’s understanding of childhood.⁸

Research to date has focused exclusively on either Japanese fairytales of the pre-modern or modern periods. Scholars indicate that explicit violence and sexual references in pre-modern Japanese could educate children about various aspects of adult life (Nakano and Hida 1985; Moretti 2016, p. 22; Williams 2022, p. 258; Kimbrough 2015). These tales allow us to see that the boundaries between childhood and adulthood were

less clear-cut in early modern Japan, when children were considered to be “little adults” that needed to be prepared for the adult world (Williams 2012, p. 5; Moretti 2016, p. 22; Kimbrough 2015, pp. 113–14; Nakano 1985, pp. 497–98). The modern renditions, too, have been thoroughly investigated to show how “unsuitable” content was tailored for a more protective and innocent concept of childhood (Ericson 2000, pp. 9–11; Van Ewijk 2021, pp. 3–8). However, there have been very little studies of the transition between these two states.

This article examines this transition by exploring four renditions published in the book format known as *mamehon* 豆本 (with *mame* often used in Japanese to describe small or tiny objects), which are miniature picture books. More about *mamehon* see (Katō 2004; Suzuki 2006). Two of these preceded the fall of the Edo period—henceforth referred to as Late-Edo 1 and Late-Edo 2—and two from the Meiji period—henceforth referred to as Meiji 1 and Meiji 2 (Table 1). Through close analysis of these sources, this article will argue that the moral ambiguity in *Kachikachi yama* can be best seen through three major aspects of the story: revenge, violence and the complex representation of good and evil. It will demonstrate that the extreme violence and complex moral situations in these *mamehon* renderings, while shocking, encouraged child readers to engage with difficult ethical dilemmas and human complexity. Ultimately, this article will show that the very concept of a child at this moment in time shows a great deal of continuity from eighteenth century Japan, despite the impact of modernization and Westernization.

Table 1. Information about the four transitional periods *mamehon* that tell the story of *Kachikachi yama*.

	Title	Time	Creator	Publisher
Late-Edo 1	<i>Kachi kachi yama</i>	in the late Edo period	Author unknown Illustrator: Akishige 明重	Moriya Jihee 森屋治兵衛
Late-Edo 2	<i>Kachi kachi yama</i>	in the late Edo period	Author unknown Illustrator: Utagawa Yoshitora 歌川芳虎	Unknown
Meiji 1	<i>Kachi kachi yama</i>	Meiji 1885	Unknown	Satō Shintarō 佐藤新太郎
Meiji 2	<i>Kachi kachi yama</i>	Meiji 1888	Tsutsumi Kichibee 堤吉兵衛	Tsutsumi Kichibee 堤吉兵衛

2. Revenge in Two Acts

Murder dominates the narrative in the *mamehon* versions of *Kachikachi yama* and is connected to the prime theme of the story: revenge in two acts (Chart 1). First, the old couple who plans to cook the *tanuki* becomes the target of its extreme revenge, which is complete when it kills and cooks the old woman and then deceives the old man into a cannibalistic feast of his own wife. The second part consists of the rabbit avenging the old woman’s death. The rabbit’s revenge is successful once the *tanuki* is dead. Revenge is a core component of contemporary versions of the story as well: the *tanuki* beats up the old woman because it was caught and about to be cooked, then the rabbit gets revenge on the *tanuki* on behalf of the old couple (Chart 2). However, revenge is not the focus of the contemporary *Kachikachi yama*. First, the *tanuki* only takes revenge on the old woman, not the old man. Second, the happy ending foregrounds forgiveness over the eye-for-an-eye style of mortal retribution.

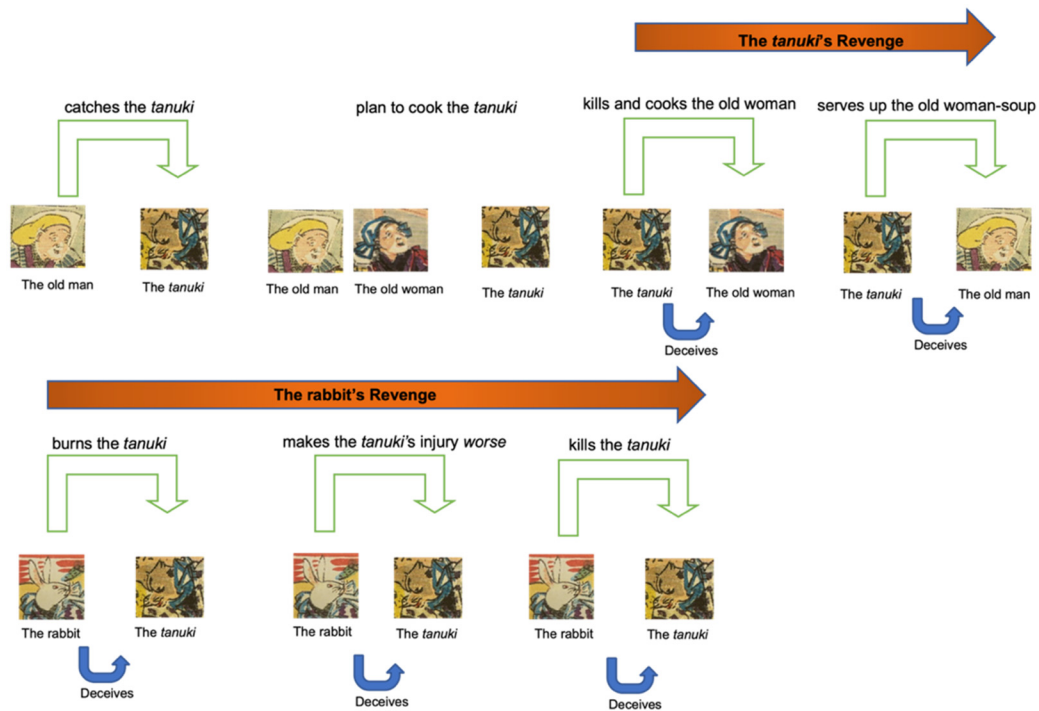


Chart 1. The twofold revenge in *mamehon* versions *Kachikachi yama*.

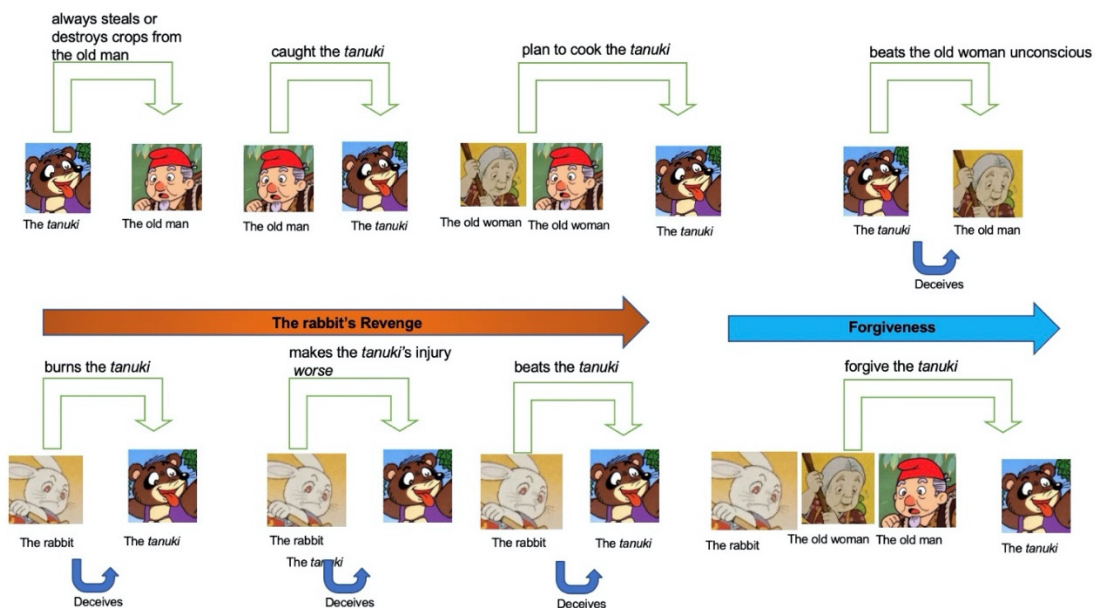


Chart 2. The acts of revenge in the contemporary *Kachikachi yama* story.

Not only is revenge emphasized in the four *mamehon*, but it is also celebrated as something laudable. The conclusions of the *mamehon* are indicative of how the rabbit's violent actions are celebrated as positive. In all four cases, once the *tanuki* is dead and the old couple is avenged the narrator concludes with the customary happy ending: "all is happy, all is good" (*medetashi medetashi* めでたしめでたし), which can be seen as the Japanese equivalent of the English stock phrase "and they all lived happily ever after".⁹ So, why is the rabbit's revenge viewed as good, but not the *tanuki*'s? To answer this question, it is essential to look at the ideological background of the early-modern lethal vendetta, or *katakiuchi* 敵討ち, in Japan.¹⁰

“Lethal vendetta” normally refers to revenge for the murder of a senior family member, but at some point in its history, the ideology expanded to include revenge on behalf of one’s lord or master, as well (Atherton 2013, p. 11). Under the rule of the Tokugawa shogunate, following certain bureaucratic protocols, it was legal to pursue a lethal vendetta against the murderer of a senior family member, master or lord (Mills 1976, pp. 520–36; Atherton 2013, p. 11). Pursuing lethal vendettas was not only permitted by law, but it was also considered to be a matter of moral obligation and a virtuous act of filial piety and loyalty.¹¹ This is crucial context when tackling the theme of revenge in *Kachikachi yama*. Filial piety and loyalty were fundamental virtues of the Confucian ideology that informed the Tokugawa vision of society and were viewed as important components of an ideal human community (Atherton 2013, pp. 39, 207). For child readers, filial piety and loyalty were familiar virtues. The themes were popular in the books for children (such as primers and picture books) that circulated in the Edo and early Meiji periods (Van Ewijk 2021, pp. 3–8). Moreover, in the Meiji period, both filial piety and loyalty were stressed as part of the shared ethos and Confucian morality that the government tried to formulate in the Imperial Rescript on Education released in 1890.¹² Therefore, proper revenge on behalf of a family member or a master would have been considered largely unproblematic, virtuous, and auspicious.¹³

How does this apply to the vendetta theme as developed in *Kachikachi yama*? When you compare the two acts of revenge within the Japanese moral context, it becomes clear why the rabbit is lauded, while the *tanuki* is derided. It is because the *tanuki* takes revenge for an offence against itself, whereas the rabbit avenges someone else.¹⁴ In the *tanuki*’s case, the violence is selfish, in the rabbit’s case, it is selfless. Of the four *mamehon* introduced in Table 1, Late-Edo 2 clarifies at the outset that the rabbit is well-loved by the old couple, which in turns reveals a type of familial bond.¹⁵ Fueled by the desire to avenge his father figure, the rabbit’s drive to fulfil its filial duty by means of *katakiuchi* is emphasized throughout the narration. For instance, we read: “Desiring to slay the *tanuki*, the rabbit feigned ignorance of the fate that had befallen the old couple and lured the *tanuki* to the mountains under the pretense of gathering firewood”.¹⁶ When he finds out that the burning wood did not kill the *tanuki*, the rabbit comes up with its second plan (spicy miso). Its goal is evident: “This time I will hurt it badly and kill it!” (Figure 5)¹⁷ Once the rabbit succeeds in its vendetta, the father-like old man rewards it with “tender love”.¹⁸



Figure 5. The rabbit comes up with the plan of using spicy miso and determines it will kill the *tanuki*, Late-Edo 2.

In the other three *mamehon*, the readers are left without much guidance as to the connection between the old couple and the rabbit. Yet, in some of the early modern materials that predate the *mamehon*, the rabbit is described as endowed with “strong loyalty” (*chūgi tsuyoki* ちうぎつよき; Figure 6). For a reader familiar with such texts, the rabbit’s revenge would have been viewed as an act of loyalty in line with a *katakiuchi*. It is also possible to

surmise that if the *mamehon* were read with parents, the parents would have filled in the gaps and stressed a family-type relationship between the old man and the rabbit.¹⁹



Figure 6. The beginning of an early modern *Kachikachi yama* work. The text highlighted in blue indicates that “here, we can see the rabbit’s strong loyalty” (此ところうさぎのちうぎつよきところをゑかくなり). *Kachikachi yama*, Edo 1, 1v.

Furthermore, there are versions of the story where the rabbit is not directly connected to the old couple, but is still portrayed as wanting to fight on behalf of someone else, willing to sacrifice its own life to help another being. For example, in one of the forerunners (Figure 7) and some other *mamehon* (Figure 8), the rabbit is portrayed as a samurai who always carries a sword and is ready to step in to help the old man, as he has no weapon to kill the *tanuki* (See Katō 2004, p. 30). Moreover, the portrayal of the rabbit as a selfless character ready to fight for others echoes courageous, selfless, and heroic characters in tales that belonged to the reading and listening experience of children from early modern times up to the 1880s, such as Minamoto Yoshitsune 源義経.²⁰ Even if the rabbit in some *mamehon* is not avenging a senior family member or its master, the rabbit is there to conduct an act of self-sacrifice to help others. Therefore, it is likely that the readers would have understood that the rabbit’s revenge was a selfless heroic act. This is very different from the *tanuki*’s action, determined only by its selfish desire for retaliation.

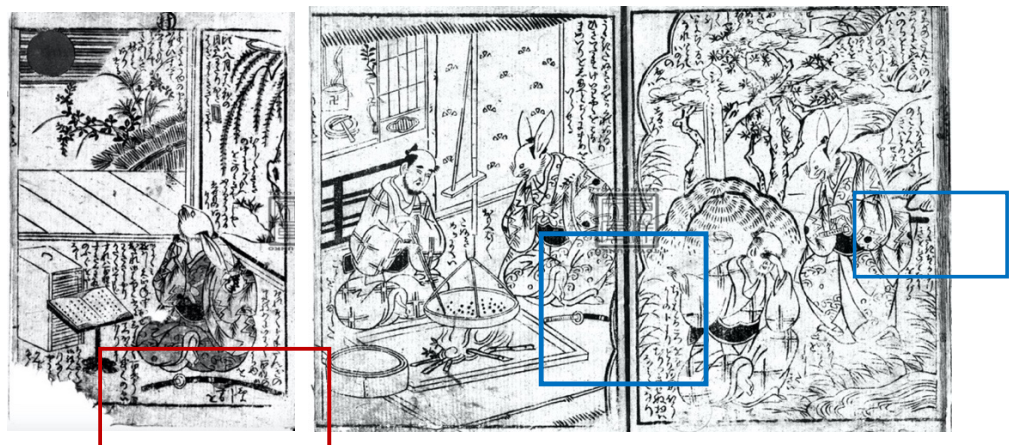


Figure 7. The rabbit is portrayed as a samurai carrying a sword (highlighted in red and blue) in most of the scenes in *Kachikachi yama*, Edo 2, 1v. 4v–5r.

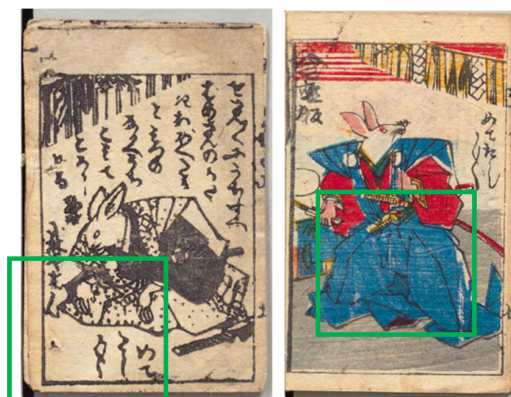


Figure 8. Left: the rabbit is portrayed as a samurai carrying a sword (highlighted in green) in *Kachikachi yama* 1881. 5v. Right: the rabbit is portrayed as a samurai carrying a sword (highlighted in green) in *Kachikachi yama* 1886. 6v.

The unifying factor across all the four *mamehon* is that revenge as a selfless act of helping others is praised. The rabbit's revenge is framed as an ethical lesson about filial piety, loyalty, or selfless heroism, despite the extreme violence involved. This complex portrayal of the rabbit's morality presents child readers with a nuanced evaluation, inviting them to consider the ethical dimensions of revenge. Such narratives challenge young readers to grapple with the complexities of morality, thereby influencing their moral reasoning and understanding of justice within the social background.

3. Shades of Violence

The vengeance of both the *tanuki* and the rabbit are performed with extreme violence in all four *mamehon*. These books contain three violent scenes: two murders and an act of cannibalism. Here, I will analyze them to discuss the modulations that these books create within the treatment of violence.

The first murder is when the *tanuki* kills the old woman. All four books visually show the power contrast between the weak old woman in the lower part of the page and the young and aggressive *tanuki*, who dominates the upper part of the page (Figures 9–14). In the second murder, the rabbit takes revenge on the *tanuki* by hitting it with an oar and drowning it. It is noteworthy that in two of the *mamehon* works, Late-Edo 1 and Meiji 1, the *tanuki* beats the old woman to the ground (the first murder) in a way that shares a strong visual connection with how it is, in turn, murdered by the rabbit (the second murder) (Figures 9, 10, 12 and 13). Such visual similarities emphasize that the eye-for-an-eye revenge of the rabbit is complete once the *tanuki* is killed in the same manner as it killed the old woman. What goes around comes around.



Figure 9. The *tanuki* (7v-8r) is killed in the same manner as he killed the old woman (Figure 10, 1v-2r), Late-Edo 1.



Figure 10. The *tanuki* (Figure 9, 7v-8r) is killed in the same manner as he killed the old woman (1v-2r), Late-Edo 1.

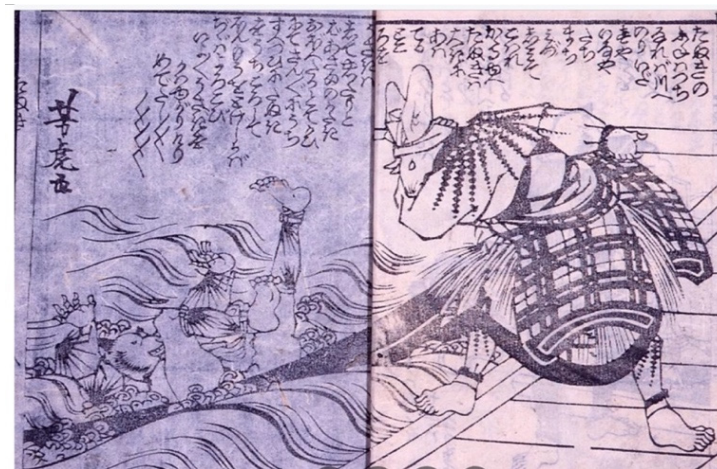


Figure 11. The rabbit beats the *tanuki* with the oar, Late-Edo 2, 7v-8r.

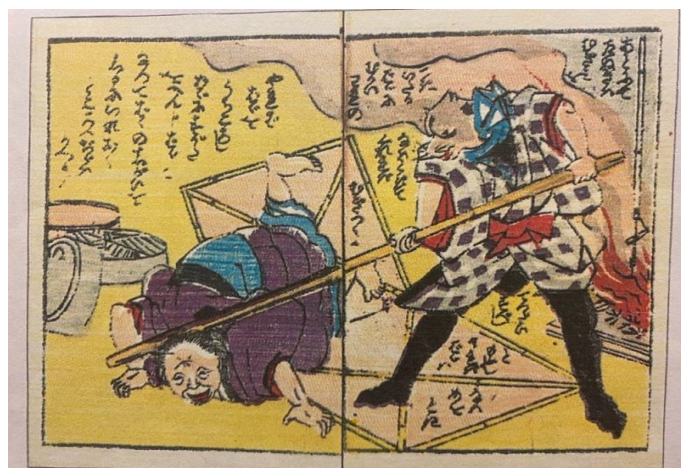


Figure 12. The *tanuki* (1v-2r) is killed in the same manner as he killed the old woman (Figure 13, 6v-7r), Meiji 1.



Figure 13. The *tanuki* (Figure 12, 1v-2r) is killed in the same manner as he killed the old woman (6v-7r), Meiji 1.

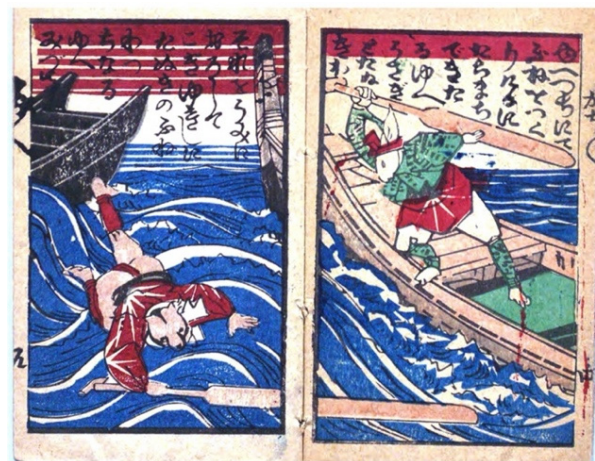


Figure 14. The rabbit beats the *tanuki* with the oar, Meiji 2, 4v-5r.

Two other *mamehon* books, Late-Edo 2 and Meiji 2, offer interesting twists on how the *tanuki* kills the old woman. The verbal and visual text in Late-Edo 2 confront us with particularly gruesome details. After the *tanuki* is set free, it “bites the old woman to death”.²¹ The image shows the *tanuki* transforming from a small tied up animal (Figure 15) into a tall and mighty anthropomorphized figure (Figure 16). The *tanuki* dominates the old woman while she is dying, kneeling on the floor, no longer able to fight back. The text relates that the *tanuki* rips out the flesh around the old woman’s jaw and then chops it up to make it into a soup.²² However, its anthropomorphic form does not make it more human-like; on the contrary, the biting and flesh-ripping by the *tanuki* emphasizes the creature’s animalistic, beast-like nature, in stark contrast to its appearance. This contrast between its human-like form and brutal, savage actions makes the *tanuki* even more frightening. The detailed graphic depiction of how the *tanuki* kills the old woman and makes the soup adds to the inherent cruelty of the killing. Altogether, this rendering elicits fear in the readers, and possibly even anger towards the *tanuki*.

Where violence in the above examples was used to teach moral lessons or inspire fear and anger, Meiji 2 directs its violent murder in a direction that borders on the absurd: the *tanuki* uses its testicles to smother the old woman (Figure 17). Occupying a large portion of the visual field is the *tanuki*’s gigantic testicles. The mention of genitalia in a fairytale might come across as inappropriate to non-Japanese twenty-first century readers.²³ Yet, this scene has nothing to do with sex and is merely a humorous take on the killing of the old woman.

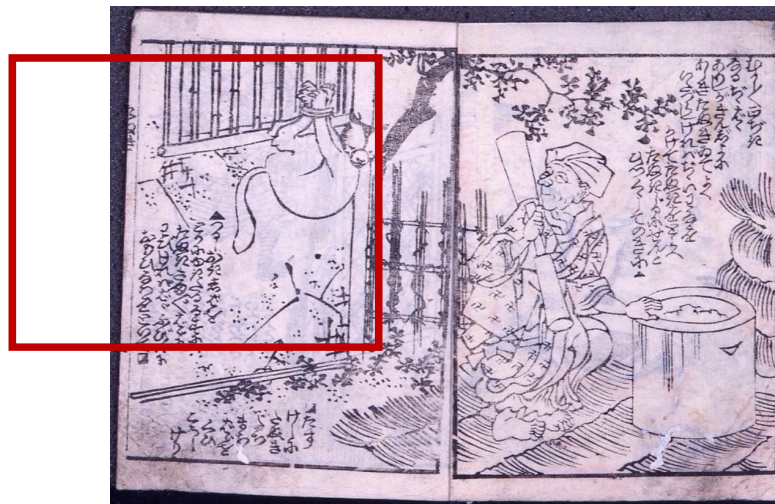


Figure 15. The *tanuki* is tied up (highlighted in red), Late-Edo 2, 1v-2r.

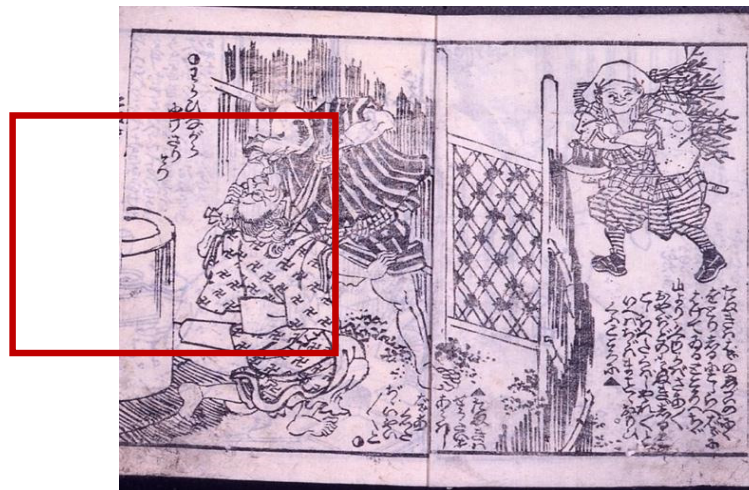


Figure 16. The *tanuki* rips out the flesh around the old woman's jaw (highlighted in red), Late-Edo 2, 2v-3r.



Figure 17. The *tanuki* is using its testicles to smother the old lady, Meiji 2, 1v.

The reason why this scene is entertaining is that, first, it plays on a popular belief in Japanese folklore that one of the key features of *tanuki* is their ability to enlarge their testicles and transform them into many things (Foster 2012, pp. 150, 227, 283, 295–98). The second reason is that this killing scene in Meiji 2 can be seen as connected to a number of humorous materials that were printed, featuring the *tanuki*'s transformed testicles, such as

a well-known series of ukiyo-e prints *Namazu hyōtan kindama* 鯰瓢箪金玉, (Figure 18) and *Tanuki no geki sumidagawa hanami* 狸の戯角田川花見 (Figure 19) in the Edo period, as well as the single-sheet print titled “The latest tanuki entertainments” (志ん板狸あそび *Shinpan tanuki asobi*) released in the Meiji period (Figure 20).²⁴ Contemporary with *mamehon Meiji 2*, this last print mimics the visual features of play-prints, thus suggesting that they could be geared towards children. Rooted in Japanese folklore and visual arts, the *tanuki*’s enlarged testicles remain present in twenty-first century materials for children, despite a general trend toward sanitizing contents.²⁵ Moreover, the specific posture of the *tanuki* killing the old woman in Meiji 2 is reminiscent of a *tanuki* holding down a catfish with its transformed gigantic scrotum, which can be seen in two of the prints mentioned above (Figures 18 and 20). These prints are themselves a humorous take on the catfish paintings (鯰絵 *namazu-e*) which visually focus on Ebisu 恵比寿, the deity of fishing, who restrains the catfish with a gourd (or other tools). (Figure 21).²⁶ Thus, the killing scene in Meiji 2 can be seen to reveal a double playful twist: it evokes pre-existing and contemporary humorous prints that use the *tanuki* to parody famous catfish paintings.



Figure 18. *Namazu hyōtan kindama* 鯰瓢箪金玉, created by Utagawa Kuniyoshi 歌川国芳, 1843–44. Museum of Fine Arts Boston (Asia, Prints and Drawing 11.36714), Boston.



Figure 19. *Tanuki no geki sumidagawa hanami* 狸の戯角田川花見, created by Kawanabe Kyōsai 河鍋暁斎, 1864. Osaka art museum 大阪市立美術館, Osaka.



Figure 20. “The latest *tanuki* entertainments” (志ん板狸あそび *Shinpan tanuki asobi*), created by Kobayashi Eijirō 小林英次郎, published by Higuchi Ginjiro 樋口銀太郎, 1884. Cotsen Children’s Library Princeton University Library (Special Collections 45036), Princeton.



Figure 21. Ebisu who suppresses a catfish (鯰をおさえる恵比寿 *Namazu o osaeru ebisu*) from the picture album *Ansei ōjishin-e* 安政大地震絵. National Diet Library Digital Collection 国立国会図書館デジタルコレクション, Tokyo.

By using the visual representation of the *tanuki*’s testicles, Meiji 2 softens the cruelty of the murder and renders it into a multi-layered comical tableau. Unlike Late-Edo 2, which sets the tone of the cruel *tanuki* and arouses fear and possibly anger among the audience, Meiji 2 presents readers with a type of violence that entertains. That violence was part of children’s books in their early modern manifestations and that violence could be seen as attracting and even exciting child readers (mostly boys) is something that has been already acknowledged (Kimbrough 2015, pp. 113–14). However, by exploring how the violence against the old woman in the *mamehon* Meiji 2 has been effected, we see that there are different modulations. This humorous take on violence would have elicited laughter. This, however, does not alter the reality that the old lady is killed. Therefore, ultimately, the reader would still feel empathy for the victim.

The third act of violence revolves around cannibalism. In all four *mamehon*, the old man is tricked by the *tanuki* into an act of cannibalism. The inherently violent nature of cannibalism cannot be denied.²⁷ After all, by eating the flesh of his wife, the old man does “incorporate and entomb” his wife into his stomach.²⁸ The illustrations of these *mamehon*

emphasize two aspects of cannibalistic imagery: Meiji 1 and 2 show the process of cannibalism itself, while the two others focus on the feelings of the old man after he discovers the truth.

In the cannibalism scene in Meiji 1 and 2, the tale is constructed around a clever interplay between the intradiegetic characters and the extradiegetic readers. To start with, there is a gap between the verbal text and the visual text. The verbal narrative tells the readers that the *tanuki* has shape-shifted into the old woman, which means the *tanuki* should look exactly like a human-being. But, the visual narrative allows the extradiegetic readers to see the true form of the “old woman”: clearly she has a *tanuki* face (Figures 22 and 23)! Yet, the intradiegetic character of the old man is fooled by the *tanuki*'s transformation, so he just sees his wife. Moreover, while the old man is enjoying the soup, he is ignorant of the fact that the soup contains his wife's flesh. The readers can be expected to appreciate that their awareness of the situation surpasses that of the character, because they know what the soup is made of, and that the old man's act is a tragic mistake long before he recognizes his own error. At the same time, they might also experience fear and tension because there is nothing they can do but witness the inevitable tragedy.



Figure 22. The old man reaching out for the “*tanuki* soup”, Meiji 1, 2r-3v.

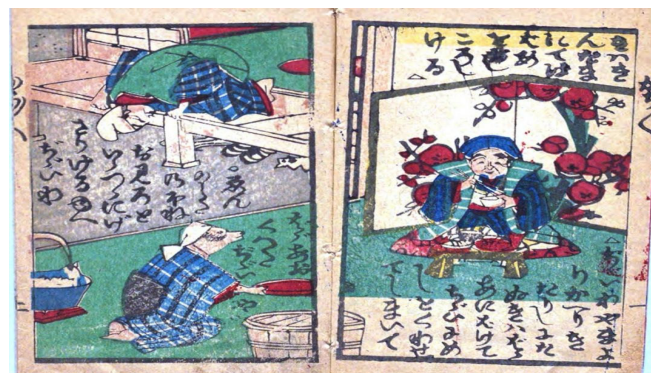


Figure 23. The old man is “innocently” enjoying his wife's flesh with great relish (right) and the old man checks the bones under the veranda (left top). Meiji 2, 2v-1r.

When the old man is depicted as cheerfully reaching out for the bowl of soup (Figure 22) or eating with gusto (Figure 23), the extradiegetic reader is taken aback by the cruelty of the act that the old man is unknowingly perpetrating with great pleasure. In other words, the *tanuki*'s devious plan of revenge is revealed to the reader while the act of eating is taking place. Yet, from the point of view of the *tanuki*, the revenge is complete only after the act of eating, once the old man realizes what he has done. In Meiji 2, for example, the *tanuki* makes a point to the old man by saying “The old man eats his wife! Check the bones under the veranda!”²⁹ Together, with the old man, the readers are shown

the evidence of his cannibalistic act: the chopped-up bones of the old woman (Figure 23). Compared to the straightforward violence perpetrated by the *tanuki* on the old woman, the violence evoked in these passages is more subtle. The old man is not beaten or killed. He is, however, tricked into turning himself into a man who consumes his own wife. Although more subtle, the emotional impact that this kind of horrifying violence has on the reader is possibly greater.

The images in Late-Edo 1 and 2, unlike Meiji 1 and 2, do not describe how the cannibalistic act happens. Instead, they only portray the old man weeping bitterly after he has eaten the content of the now empty bowls. The rabbit stands next to him in indignation. (Figures 24 and 25). In both cases, the verbal text explains, in very similar terms, that the *tanuki* has revealed what has actually happened. In Late-Edo 1, for instance, the *tanuki* shouts: “The old man ate the old woman! See the bones under the kitchen sink!”³⁰, hence the old man’s tears. The decision to focus, at the visual level, on the feelings of despair and guilt elicited in the old man might help a novice reader to recognize and empathize with the protagonist’s emotions, thus fully grasping the emotional dimension of the psychological violence effected by the *tanuki*.³¹



Figure 24. The old man is weeping bitterly and the rabbit is aflame with indignation, surrounded by empty bowls and plates (highlighted in blue), Late-Edo 1, 2v-3r.



Figure 25. The old man is weeping bitterly and the rabbit is aflame with indignation, Late-Edo 2, 3v-4r. Empty bowls and plates are highlighted in blue.

In all the four *mamehon* books, cannibalism takes place, but the way in which it is depicted is different. In the first two, the focus is on the man eating, and only afterwards it is revealed to him what he has done. In the other two, the focus is on the emotional impact of the understanding of what he has done.

Previous research has already shown that reading materials for children prior to the invention of modern children’s literature were replete with violence, without any attempt

at sanitization. The *mamehon* examined here show that once we engage closely with the way in which violence is portrayed, the purpose of the violence and the effect it creates varies greatly, from evoking fear and anger, to provoking laughter and empathy. This diverse treatment of violence encourages child readers to engage with the emotional and cognitive aspects of violence, which would be part of the adult life that awaits them.

4. Who Is the Villain?

As mentioned above, these four *mamehon* celebrate the death of the *tanuki* and the revenge of the rabbit through their narration. Does this mean that the *tanuki* is the villain, the old couple are the innocent victims and the rabbit is the hero? To answer this question, we need to look at the nature of the *tanuki*, the old couple and the rabbit as portrayed in the primary sources.

How do we account for the *tanuki*? Is it just an evil monster who cruelly kills and cooks an old woman? Can its actions be justified? Let us return to the beginning of the story. The contemporary story casts the *tanuki* as an evil and lazy character, in stark contrast to the old man, who is portrayed as hardworking and kind.³² By portraying the *tanuki* as stealing food from such a virtuous character, the modern *Kachikachi yama* solicits the readers' indignation. In contrast, the *mamehon* do not explain why the *tanuki* was caught.³³ Only Late-Edo 2 gives an explanation: the *tanuki* carries out mischievous acts in the old couple's neighborhood.³⁴ But in most of these works we do not know what happened. Did the *tanuki* offend the old man? Did it steal from him? It is anyone's guess. This means that the reader, who was probably a child, was left to wonder whether the *tanuki* was guilty of any wrongdoing. If the *tanuki* was innocent, then killing the old woman can be viewed as an act of self-defense: a fearful animal facing a life-or-death situation and simply trying to save its own life. This, in turn, could potentially elicit a certain degree of empathy in the reader.³⁵

Now let us move on to the old couple. On the surface, they might appear innocent, but they are depicted as planning to kill and eat an animal. This desire to consume meat might be interpreted as problematic for this time period. While meat consumption was officially forbidden in early modern Japan and widely discouraged by both Buddhist and Shinto beliefs, the reality was more nuanced.³⁶ Not all types of meat were forbidden; fish, for instance, were often exempt from these restrictions, and wild birds were sometimes not prohibited (Ishige 2001, pp. 38–39, 54; Cwierotka 2007, pp. 26–27). Meat consumption was occasionally permitted under specific circumstances, particularly for medicinal purposes (*kusurigu* 薬食い, “medicinal consumption”) (Ishige 2001, pp. 52–58; Yamakawa 2002, pp. 7–8, 56). Additionally, secret meat-eating practices existed, and euphemisms were often employed to bypass these restrictions and avoid punishment, allowing individuals to ease their guilt for consuming meat.³⁷ However, despite these nuances, the general aversion to meat, especially from four-legged animals, remained deeply rooted in religious beliefs and had persisted since the sixth century (Ishige 2001, pp. 56–58). By the early Meiji period, although eating meat was not forbidden, it was still considered by many as a taboo, especially when killing an animal for the meat.³⁸ The *mamehon* under question here do not explicitly state that the actions of the couple were sinful, but their desire to consume meat would have been viewed as morally objectionable at the time.

Moreover, because the *tanuki* is not depicted at the outset as a wicked creature that needs punishment, the desire of the couple to kill it just to eat it, is all the more questionable. When the old man is portrayed enjoying the soup made of human flesh—the ultimate frontier of meat consumption, it can be argued—his apparently innocent nature is compromised. All this complicates the good and evil in this story, as it highlights the immorality of the old couple, putting them on a similar level to the *tanuki*. Thus, the line between villain and victim is somewhat blurred.

Finally, let us consider the rabbit. Having established that the old couple was like a family to the rabbit, its vindication at the death of the old lady on behalf of the old man appears virtuous, even heroic. However, Late-Edo 1 complicates this seemingly simple

picture. Unlike the other *mamehon*, this work depicts the pain experienced by the *tanuki* in a particularly vivid manner. This, in turn, has the potential to elicit an emotional response in the reader, who might even start to side more with the *tanuki*. For example, when the rabbit lights the firewood, the *tanuki* starts screaming: “It hurts! So hot! Rabbit are you there? Ouch, ouch!”³⁹ Here, the overtly pained speech of the *tanuki*, paired with its suffering in the image (Figure 26) can start to evoke feelings of pity in the reader. This would be particularly true for a child reader, whose system of values are still developing: they would prioritize emotion over reason.⁴⁰ If a child has emotional knowledge of pain, they would be in a position to empathize with the *tanuki*.⁴¹ On the next page, after the *tanuki* is injured, the story tells us that the *tanuki* comes to the rabbit’s house holding a grudge. Not only is the *tanuki*’s appearance anthropomorphized, but its thought process is much more akin to a human, questioning the rabbit: “Why did that happen to me yesterday?”⁴² This is an experience even children can relate to when they question why something bad happened to them.



Figure 26. The *tanuki*’s back is engulfed in flames, Late-Edo 1, 4v-5r.

By contrast, in the same book, the rabbit does not express any of its feelings. The reader does not even know what the rabbit thinks in terms of planning, because everything seems to happen at the right time and at the right place for the rabbit to take revenge effortlessly. For example, in these three other *mamehon* versions, the rabbit chases after the *tanuki* up a mountain. In Late-Edo 1, the rabbit is carrying firewood on the road and the *tanuki* just “happens” to be walking towards it from the other direction. Furthermore, in other versions, after the firewood incident, the rabbit brings spicy miso paste to the *tanuki*’s house, tricking it into using the paste by pretending it will heal its burns, but intending to cause more harm. But, in Late-Edo 1, the rabbit just runs back home and prepares the spicy miso sauce while waiting for the *tanuki* to visit. It is the interiority of the character as discerned from details in the story, such as thoughts, feelings, and opinions, that strongly invites young readers’ empathy and leads to the development of some kind of attachment to the characters.⁴³ As the rabbit’s mind is closed and its thought process is inaccessible to the reader, little to no attachment of any kind can be formed with it (favourable or not). Therefore, readers’ potential cognitive and affective response to the story might be detached from the rabbit, resulting in them feeling empathy for the “villain”, the *tanuki*, instead. Though the rabbit is presented as the virtuous hero, if the reader is emotionally disconnected from it, the moral lesson regarding the rabbit’s revenge could be less clear.

The *tanuki*’s pain and, therefore, the invitation to empathize with it, can be conveyed in ways other than through words. For example, in the Meiji 1 and 2, the feelings of the *tanuki* are expressed through color (Figures 27 and 28). Color printing of full-length books

became common from around Meiji 10 (1878), including with imported ink that allowed distinctive red and purple colors.⁴⁴ When the rabbit lights the firewood on the *tanuki*'s back, the color printing accentuates the red flames (Figure 28), with brown highlights that clearly indicate smoke (Figure 27). The use of color gives more visual pleasure to the audience, especially children, but also allows the reader to gauge the strength of the fire. This would allow the reader to easily perceive how bad the *tanuki*'s injury is.⁴⁵ The *tanuki*'s pain is readily understandable and sufficient to evoke a certain degree of empathy in the readers.



Figure 27. The *tanuki*'s back is engulfed in flames, Meiji 1, 5v-4r.



Figure 28. The *tanuki*'s back is engulfed in flames, Meiji 2, 3v-2r.

These *mamehon* complicate any easy dichotomy between perpetrators and victims, and between the villain and the hero. On the surface, it might well appear that the rabbit is an uncontested and selfless hero. The old couple may be viewed as the faultless victims of a selfish and violent *tanuki*. The analysis conducted in this section, however, has shown that such a dichotomy is nuanced. The couple has their own vices, planning to kill a living creature just for its meat; the rabbit is cold and calculating, while the *tanuki* is made easier to empathize with. Moreover, this study has shown that the way in which emotions are elicited in the readers plays an important role. The potential emotional bond between the readers and the *tanuki* is essential for the readers to side with the “villain” instead of the “hero”. Therefore, what might be seen as a straightforward *katakiuchi* tale or a tale of

selfless revenge, when examined in all its aspects, is revealed to be much more complex. By presenting such intricate moral scenarios, these books contribute to the development of a sophisticated moral compass in young readers.

5. Moral Ambiguity and the Image of the Child

In this article, I have explored *Kachikachi yama* in four *mamehon* to investigate how good and evil are portrayed verbally and visually in Japanese fairytales released in the second half of the nineteenth century. By examining the themes of revenge and violence, and the dichotomy of good and evil, it is evident that these stories presented a rich, multifaceted moral landscape to young readers.

Firstly, the celebration of lethal vendettas and unselfish acts as morally praiseworthy behavior in these *mamehon* underscores the cultural context of filial piety, loyalty, and selfless heroism. Secondly, the varied portrayals of violence, from gruesome to humorous, serve different narrative purposes, eliciting a range of emotional and cognitive responses from readers. Finally, the blurred lines between good and evil challenge simplistic moral binaries, encouraging children to engage with complex ethical dilemmas and reflect on the consequences of actions.

Overall, the unmoderated violence and the ethical complexity of the behavior of the characters in these works serve to illustrate the multifaceted nature of morality, encouraging child readers to grapple with challenging ethical issues and understand the consequences of actions more deeply. This contrasts sharply with the more sanitized, morally clear-cut versions familiar to modern audiences, where the characters' actions are more explicitly delineated as good or evil. The moral framework in these earlier versions allows us to see that their view of children, in turn, aligns with what has been identified as constitutive of childhood as constructed in picture books in the eighteenth century: a little adult who needed to be educated and prepared for the world that awaited them. This perspective is very different from a more protective and idealized view of the child in later sanitized embodiments.

This transformation of childhood and children's literature was not unique to Japan. Western fairy tales underwent a similar process of sanitization, particularly from the nineteenth century onwards, when societal perceptions of childhood shifted. In early versions of Grimm Brothers' tales, for example, dark, violent, and morally complex themes were prevalent, as these stories were not specifically aimed at child audiences. However, with the rise of Victorian morality and the growing concept of childhood innocence, many of these tales were rewritten or sanitized to align with emerging ideals of childhood as a time of purity and psychological protection. Characters' actions were simplified into clear depictions of good and evil, and gruesome elements were often removed to avoid exposing children to harsh realities.

By juxtaposing the slow adaptation of Japanese fairytales with the sanitization of Western fairy tales, we see a shared global trend of moral simplification as concepts of childhood evolved. However, Japan's transition was slower, as evidenced by the continued presence of moral complexity in *Kachikachi yama* well into the Meiji period. Even though these *mamehon* were produced during a transitional period from pre-modern to modern Japan, and at a time when Western ideas of "childhood" began to take root, it is clear that the modern concept of the angelic "childhood" did not yet permeate these Japanese fairytales. The attitudes toward morals and sanitization for children, along with the image of the child, show more continuity with early modern Japan than the shift prompted by modernization.

This delay in the ideological shift prompts us to reconsider the notion of a clear-cut periodization. It suggests that cultural attitudes toward childhood in Japan were deeply rooted and may even have been resistant to change, even as new ideas began to influence other aspects of society. This opens up new avenues for exploring Japanese children's literature, particularly in understanding why it took so long for this concept of childhood to become fully integrated into traditional Japanese fairytales. Moreover, a comparative analysis of the sanitization processes in both Western and Japanese literature reveals how these

changes reflect broader cultural shifts in the understanding of childhood and morality and the purpose of children's stories.

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Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Notes

- ¹ I am using the edition created by Hirada Jōgo, published by Nagaoka Shoten in 1993. See *Kachikachi-yama* 1993. In her study, Numaga Minako analyses 122 works of *Kachikachi yama* from the eighteenth century to the 1990s. The version I am analysing is not included in Numaga's research, but it represents the main plot that existed in most of the contemporary (post-1980) versions, according to the masterplot in Numaga's study ([Numagka 2001](#), pp. 71–79).
- ² This *Kachikachi yama* is from one of the picture book series published by Nagaoka Shoten during the 1980s to 2000s. These series of picture books are aimed mainly at preschool age children (1–6 years old) and consist of anime-style picture book adaptations of Japanese folktales, world folktales and world classics. Not only are these books (still) popular in Japan, but they have also been translated and published abroad. See *Kachikachi-yama* 1993.
- ³ From 1885 to 1936, a series of retellings of Japanese *mukashi banashi* were translated into European languages and released in the West by the publisher Hasegawa Takejirō. Translators classified them as "Japanese fairytales", capitalising on recognisable narrative elements like anthropomorphic animal characters, direct moral lessons and tasks/quests for the hero(es) ([Guth 2008](#), pp. 268–71). I will therefore use the terms "fairytales" and *mukashi banashi* interchangeably in this article, as well. However, *mukashi banashi* and late-nineteenth century Western fairytales were not exactly the same. The salient difference here is the image of the child. See later in this paper.
- ⁴ This material has been used in classrooms from 4th to 5th grades in primary schools, i.e., 10–11 years old, through to high schools in Japan. See *The Fairytale Court*.
- ⁵ Numaga's study shows that in 79 versions from the 1930s to 2000s, the cannibalism scene had been removed from most of the works: in 28, the old woman is injured; in 34, she is killed, but not eaten; only in 17 she is killed and eaten. Around 1975, there was a boom in retelling folk tales in their original format and that is when the scene of killing the old woman was brought back into the narrative (from 1975–2000, in 35 out of 46 versions, the woman is killed). Within these 35, in 22 of them she is killed, but not eaten. Yet, only 13 show the old lady being killed and eaten. From the 1980s, the trend has been that the story ends with the rabbit saving the *tanuki*. See ([Numagka 2001](#), pp. 74–75, 79); it is worth noting that in some post-1980 versions, the *tanuki* dies. For example, *Kachikachi yama* 1988; *Kachikachi yama* 2010.
- ⁶ [Nussbaum \(1995\)](#). For those who maintain that children need clear moral guidance see ([Nikolajeva 2014](#), pp. 179–83; [Fraustino 2014](#), pp. 145–59; [Hinderer 2014](#), pp. 32–38; [Barker 2014](#), pp. 101–21; [Stiles 2020](#), pp. 77–78; [Sainsbury 2013](#), pp. 8–11, 78–83).
- ⁷ Showing violence to child readers without explaining or condemning it can disturb their ethical inferences; see ([Nikolajeva 2014](#), pp. 197–98).
- ⁸ On new ideas around childhood, see ([Ericson 2000](#), pp. 9–11). On the introduction of Western-style movable-type technology and copperplate printing from the mid-Edo period to the Meiji period, see ([Kornicki 1998](#), pp. 141, 166–68; [Clark 1993](#)). New communications technologies and techniques such as shorthand transcription (*sokki* 速記) also helped structure written expression (vernacular literary style) and reading practices in the Meiji period; see ([Jacobowitz 2015](#), pp. 25–42, 128–38, 190–96, 205–7).
- ⁹ Late-Edo 1,8r. Late-Edo 2; Meiji 1, 7r; Meiji 2 6r.
- ¹⁰ Many scholars of early modern Japan, such as David Atherton, translate *katakiuchi* as "lethal vendettas"; see ([Atherton 2013](#)).
- ¹¹ 江戸時代に敵討が許されていたのは、主として倫道の上から止むを得ないことであるとしたのでしょう。 ([Hirade 1901](#), p. 34; Quoted by [Numagka 2001](#), pp. 62–63; [Atherton 2013](#), pp. 11, 39, 207).
- ¹² [Van Ewijk \(2021\)](#), pp. 3–8). Though these two *mamehon*, Meiji 1 and 2, were released a few years prior to The Rescript, I maintain that the idea of educating children with the values of filial piety and loyalty had been continued from the late Edo to early Meiji.
- ¹³ In real life, "should the vendetta prove successful, the avengers, following confirmation via a formal inquiry by local officials, would not be punished as murderers and disturbers of the peace, but recognized as the legitimate agents of virtuous violence". ([Atherton 2013](#), p. 39).

- 14 One of the best-known roles that the *tanuki* plays in Japanese folklore is “the vengeful transformer”. See more at (Harada 1976, p. 2).
- 15 “The rabbit that he [the old man] loves from before” かねてかはゆがるうさぎ, Late-Edo 2, 2r.
- 16 うさぎはそしらぬかほにてたぬきをだましやきころしてくれんとおもひ山へしばかりにさそひいだし, Late-Edo 2, 3v-4r.
- 17 こんどはいたいめさせてころしてくれんと, Late-Edo 2. 5v-6r.
- 18 うさぎをかはゆがりける, Late-Edo 2, 8v.
- 19 From the eighteenth century, many children read fairytales with their parents. If a book had complicated contents, a child reader could still enjoy the illustration while their parents gave them any further necessary information and explanation. (Kōsokabe and Suzuki 2012, p. 511).
- 20 Van Ewijk (2021, pp. 4–5); see warrior traditions, such as righteous vengeance, filial piety and courage in picture books geared towards children in the Edo period in (Williams 2012, pp. 42–56, 103; Kimbrough 2015, pp. 111–18).
- 21 たぬきたちまちはぶをくひころしける, Late-Edo 2, 1v.
- 22 たぬきはぶのしづいのにくをとりしるにこしらへ, Late-Edo 2, 1r.
- 23 Japanese people are not shy about their love for the *tanuki*'s giant scrotum; images of a well-endowed *tanuki* can be seen all over Japan, such as ubiquitous statues in front of shops and restaurants.
- 24 For more prints and picture books about the *tanuki*'s transformed genitals, see, for example, *Dōza tanuki*; *Amiuchi*; *Hikkaeshi*.
- 25 For more examples of animation films and picture books that present the *tanuki kintama* transformation, see *Ponpoko*; *Yōkai*; *Gasen*.
- 26 A popular belief after the 1855 Edo earthquake (安政江戸地震, Ansei Edo Jishin) was that a giant mythological catfish was the cause for earthquakes, which could only be controlled when a gourd was put on its head to suppress it. (Miura 2019, pp. 86–90, 102–8).
- 27 In folkloric works, cannibalism is always connected with barbarousness or monstrousness (Zipes 2013, p. 8; Heneghan 2018, 195–202; Tatar 2003, pp. 28–46); psychologically, it reveals human's “uncontrolled craving” and oral regression (Bettelheim 1991, pp. 161–62).
- 28 Tatar notes, about cannibalism in Western fairy tales, what the old man does is “a forced incorporation and entombment of their next of kin” (Tatar 2020, p. 202). See more about cannibalism in fairy tales at (Tatar 2020, pp. 190–211).
- 29 ばぶあおくつたちぶいやゑんのしたのほねお見ろ, Meiji 2, 2v.
- 30 婆を食つた爺め、流しの下の骨を見ろ, Late-Edo 1, 3r-2v.
- 31 Empathy involves the ability to understand how other people feel and “can be provoked by witnessing another's emotional state, by hearing about another's condition, or even by reading” (Keen 2007, p. 353). Children may not yet have gained advanced “mind-reading skills” and the ability to empathize fully. However, reading images carries a more powerful potential because viewing characters' states of mind from their actions is a better simulation of real life. (Nikolajeva 2014, p. 81). Reading a person's facial expression or bodily posture sends a stronger signal to the brain than reading a verbal statement (Nikolajeva 2014, p. 96); see more empirical research about how even very young children can understand and respond to the emotion in picture books (Arizpe and Styles 2003).
- 32 This beginning is a trend-setter for the contemporary *Kachikachi yama* story. According to Numaga Minako, from 1940s to 1990s, 61 out of 79 books have this kind of beginning. (Numagka 2001, pp. 73–74).
- 33 According to Tori-i Satoko, who has conducted research on 300 books of *Kachikachi yama* from the Edo period to the Shōwa period. It was not until Meiji year 34 (1901) that the reason why the old man catches the *tanuki* becomes part of the masterplot in the story. See Tori-I, quoted by (Numagka 2001, pp. 57–58).
- 34 Once upon a time, there was a virtuous old couple. In their neighbourhood, a *tanuki* always caused mischief, むかし / \ 正ぢきなるじゝばゝありしがきんじよにあしきたぬきゑてよくいたづらしければ, Late-Edo 2, 2r.
- 35 By causing chaos and engaging in morally questionable acts, the *tanuki* forces both the characters within the story and the readers to grapple with ethical dilemmas, much like the tricksters in Hyde's analysis. For a broader analysis of the trickster archetype, see Hyde 2011. Hyde's exploration of how trickster figures challenge moral binaries and disrupt social norms provides a useful lens through which to view the moral ambiguity present in *Kachikachi yama*. (Hyde 2011, pp. 17–18).
- 36 There were legal and customary prohibitions against meat consumption in early modern Japan. Also, meat consumption fell under the tenet of avoidance of religion. A Buddhism teaching stated that “transmigration implies a compassion for all beings”. Blood and dead bodies were considered impure according to Shintō. (Krämer 2008, p. 36).
- 37 For example, “peony” was used as a code name for wild boar, while “sakura” referred to horse meat. See more at (Cwiertka 2007, pp. 27–28).
- 38 Krämer (2008, p. 36). Some politicians, who were proponents of Westernization in the Meiji period, had to bribe their young daughters to eat meat with the promise of new kimono, (Dalby 2001, pp. 88–89).
- 39 あア、苦しい。熱い / \。兎はいるか。おゝい / \ / \, Late-Edo 1, 4v-5r.
- 40 For a child reader, who has a limited system of values, when it comes to “the tension between emotion and reason, the former is prioritised” (Nikolajeva 2012, p. 19).

- 41 When readers have emotional knowledge of what it means to be happy or sad, they do not necessarily experience the same emotion directly and to the same degree, but are able to understand characters' emotions, projecting the emotion either from life experience or from a previous literary experience, (Nikolajeva 2014, p. 89).
- 42 狸は昨日の恨みを言ひに来たり, 「なぜ昨日あんな目にあはせたのだ」と言へば, Late-Edo 1, 5v-6r.
- 43 Expert readers (mostly adults) are expected to be able to have subjectivity outside the character and to engage with a character without directly identifying or empathizing with them. See more about characters' interiority and how it engages with readers emotionally in (Nikolajeva 2014, pp. 78–83).
- 44 For more about the printing technology of *mamehon*, see (Kōsokabe and Suzuki 2012, pp. 34–35).
- 45 In picture books, colour and texture and line tend to provide pleasure for readers, (Nodelman 1990, p. 13); different uses of colours influence readers' attitude towards the book, such as different emotional implications (Nodelman 1990, pp. 44–48).

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Amiuchi

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