

ANIMATING INARI: VISIONS OF CONTEMPORARY SHINTŌ IN

*INARI, KONKON, KOI IROHA* いなり、こんこん、恋いろは

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By

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## Abstract

As the deities known as Inari, foxes are vital to the religious and cultural landscape of Japan. Inari are given little consideration in the academic study of Japanese religions in English, despite their overwhelming presence and popularity in Japan. This is, in large part, due to the privileging of a Protestant definition of religion in the academic study of religion. *Animating Inari* addresses this lack of consideration by seeking to better understand Inari in Japan, particularly through the contexts of contemporary Shintō and popular worship (which are also severely underrepresented in scholarship). In order to explore Inari on the ground, this project is situated in the context of Fushimi Inari Taisha, the headquarters of Inari worship located in Kyoto. This project investigates the anime (animated television series), *Inari, Konkon, Koi Iroha* (or *Inakon*), which depicts Fushimi Inari Taisha through the life of a young girl, named Inari, and her relationship with the deity, known as Uka. In conjunction with my own experience at this shrine, I use *Inakon* as a tool with which to consider the popular aspects of Shintō, particularly as visible through Inari worship.

By examining Inari worship, the characters and themes of *Inakon*, and the presence of fox characters in other Japanese popular media, it is apparent that Inari's popularity is in large part due to the warm relationships they have with Japanese people and how they respond to their everyday concerns. This is in direct contrast to the more nationalistic leanings of the *Jinja Honchō* (National Association of Shintō Shrines), which is too often privileged in the academic study of Shintō at the expense of popular worship. Inari reflect the more popular concerns of contemporary Shintō: the connections and intimate bonds that exist between people, as well as the deities. By highlighting the functions of and attitudes towards Inari, especially in contrast to *Jinja Honchō*, it becomes clear that Inari resonate with Japanese on a profound level.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Thelma and Dale, who have shown me unwavering support throughout this project. Thank you, mom. Thank you, dad. It means so much.

### Author's Note

For Japanese terms, I provide Romanization in italics, followed by kanji for all relevant terms.

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## Introduction

Foxes are everywhere in Japan. Beyond those of flesh and blood, foxes inhabit the religious and cultural landscape of Japan as popular characters and deities. These foxes, or *kitsune* 狐, are represented in a wide variety of popular media, ranging from paintings and statuary to animated television shows and video games. *Kitsune* are especially significant as rice deities, known as Inari 稲荷. Worshipped since at least 711 CE, Inari have developed into the most beloved of Japan's deities. Inari shrines number into the tens of thousands and *kitsune* are some of the most popular characters in modern Japanese visual media. In spite of their tremendous popularity, Inari and the portrayal of *kitsune* in visual media have received little consideration in English language scholarship. This thesis addresses this gap in English language research on Japanese religions and culture by examining the contemporary anime (animation), *Inari, Konkon, Koi Iroha* いなり、こんこん、恋いろは (hereafter, *Inakon*) and situates it within Japanese religious media.

*Inakon* is set in and around Fushimi Inari Taisha 伏見稲荷大社, the headquarters of Inari worship, located in Fushimi Ward in Kyoto, Japan. Following the story of a young girl named Inari Fushimi, *Inakon* devotes a significant amount of attention to the interaction between laypeople and deities of this shrine. *Inakon* tells a modern narrative of Fushimi Inari Taisha, both reflecting and shaping the attributes of this pervasive cult. This narrative conveys the message that Japanese care deeply about Inari and Fushimi Inari Taisha. This shrine matters to the people who live around it, such as young Inari. Because of its over 40,000 affiliated shrines found throughout Japan, Fushimi Inari Taisha is also significant to everyone in Japan. By emphasizing the concerns of a young girl, *Inakon* presents Fushimi Inari Taisha in a modern and relevant way. *Inakon* does not refer to the origin of the shrine or the origin of Inari. Instead, it shows what Inari are like and how they function in people's everyday lives. *Inakon*'s message concerns the importance of connections to others and the intimacy that can be found with Inari. This is an especially meaningful narrative, when considering the general tendency for deities to lack form

and hide or to be hidden (if they have a physical manifestation, i.e. *hibutsu* 秘仏), let alone possessing an explicitly human range of emotions. *Inakon* tells a story that is deeply concerned with everyday life concerns and by virtue of doing so it represents something that most Japanese can identify with.

*Inakon* is a fascinating resource because it presents an accurate picture of contemporary Shintō through a medium with which Japanese are intensely engaged. In Japan, anime and manga 漫画 (comics) are part of everyday life, enjoyed on an extremely broad level by people of all ages, gender, and interests. Anime and manga are so pervasive within Japan that they are readily associated with the nation's global image as "Cool Japan," a concept that has been used by the government recently to promote interest in Japan's traditional and modern forms of cultural arts. Considering Japan's strong connection to popular media - both on domestic and international levels – as well as the interplay between religion and entertainment in Japan, it is staggering that few studies have sought to use these media as tools to examine Japanese religions. Popular media, such as *Inakon*, tend to fall outside the typical boundaries of the field of Religious Studies and often get pushed aside in favour of more "traditional" sources. This tendency to neglect and even trivialize alternative sources might seem like a matter of preference, but it is more indicative of a significant lacuna within the field of Religious Studies.

### **Shintō and the Academic Study of Religion**

In the academic study of religion, there is a tendency for some scholars to refer back to certain theorists and frameworks, which, while familiar, have been subjected to criticism and scrutiny. One example is Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), a Romanian historian of religion (who transformed the field from the University of Chicago), whose widely-referenced work centered heavily on myths, particularly sacred origins, and how religious beliefs and practices are organized around them.<sup>1</sup> While Eliade's work remains influential to some still today, it largely ignores religious diversity by privileging teleological fallacies (an obsession with origins) and their symbolic regeneration above all else, ultimately highlighting the problems inherent with trying to apply sweeping models to the study of religion. Another frequently-referenced scholar of religion is Ninian Smart (1927-2001), whose concept of the seven dimensions of religion has

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Lincoln, *Gods and Demons, Priests and Scholars: Critical Explorations in the History of Religions* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 53; Eliade, Mircea, *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*. Edited by Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (New York, NY Crossroad Publishing Company, 1988).

had a strong impact on the study of religion. Smart's seven dimensions of religion are recurring themes which appear in a variety World Religions course textbooks: 1) Doctrine Philosophy, 2) Ritual, 3) Mythic or Narrative, 4) Experiential Emotional, 5) Ethical Logical, 6) Social, and 7) Material.<sup>2</sup> While the universal lens applied to his comparative study is problematical in the same vein as Eliade's work, Smart goes beyond Eliade's emphasis on myth and insists that practice is just as significant to religious traditions (demonstrating his enduring emphasis on traditions, writ large) as belief. Based on these examples of Eliade and Smart, it seems apparent that applying universal categories in the study of religion is problematical and by choosing to emphasize certain categories (such as Eliade's preoccupation with myth), significant elements can be rendered invisible. Ian Reader and George Tanabe Jr., both scholars of Japanese religions, speak further to this issue:

A major problem is that academic studies of religion have tended, especially from the nineteenth century onward, to emanate from a number of different sources. There is a particularly problematic split between anthropological and sociological studies on the one hand (which tend to focus on phenomena such as ritual, practice, and custom that are often visible apart from scriptural sources) and theological studies on the other with their focus on issues of creed, text, and doctrine.<sup>3</sup>

Theological studies tend to be dominated by Christian models with an emphasis on truth claims, typically in opposition to "superstition." "While academic studies of religion have in many ways moved beyond the narrow theological parameters of the nineteenth century and now recognize the importance of practice and ritual, they have not always managed to resolve the problems created by early conceptualizations of "religion" within a basically Christian theological framework," state Reader and Tanabe.<sup>4</sup> This framework is made most apparent in Gregory Schopen's widely-cited article, "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism."<sup>5</sup> Schopen's article examines the ways in which the Protestant tradition has come to serve as a commonly-used framework for the academic study of religion. This Protestant bias locates "true religion" within scripture, as opposed to archaeological material and, by

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<sup>2</sup> Smart, Ninian, *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998. In *Dimensions of the Sacred*, each chapter is dedicated to a different dimension.

<sup>3</sup> Ian Reader and George J. Tanabe Jr. *Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1991), 4.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> This article is extremely well-known to scholars of the "Eastern" religious traditions, including Reader and Tanabe, as well as Steven Heine, whose work I emphasize later on.

extension, lived practices.<sup>6</sup> In the case of Japan, the dominance of the Western, Protestant model is particularly visible in a debate that took place from the mid-1980s to the 1990s, in which Japanese scholars argued over the location of “true religion,” particularly how “folk religion appears to stand in direct opposition to the Jōdo Shin (also referred to as Shinshū) and Sōtō doctrinal systems, especially as forged in the Edo, Meiji, and modern periods.”<sup>7</sup> This debate highlights the dominance of the Christian model not only due to the way in which “true religion” is pursued, but even in the terminology used to frame the matters at hand: *shinshū* P (Puritanism) reflects “a sectarian puritanism intolerant of anything but the official doctrines of truth” whereas *shinshū* C (Catholicism) is “a model based on Catholicism and its willingness to accommodate local beliefs.”<sup>8</sup>

The Protestant framework extends to other features common to the study of Christianity, which include, but are not limited to: sacred texts, charismatic founders, official places of worship, and religious clergy. By assuming the importance of such categories and insisting on universal definitions, scholars eschew local contexts, worldviews, and histories that shape their subjects.<sup>9</sup> Schopen emphasizes that such an “assumption concerning the location of religion has dictated and determined the value assigned to various sources.”<sup>10</sup> The Protestant framework also tends to locate the sacred within certain parameters that render the materials and practices of everyday life inappropriate for studying “real” religion. Anything outside of territories deemed “sacred” are often given little consideration. By neglecting religion as it appears on the ground in the form of material culture and physical practices, scholars shift from the position of historian to that of mythmaker, skewing what they see to fit the categories they are already comfortable with.<sup>11</sup>

In the context of Shintō studies, the prominence of this Protestant model has had several drastic effects. The most significant impact is the way in which the *Jinja Honchō* 神社本庁 or National Association of Shintō Shrines (or NAS, hereafter, *Jinja Honchō*) has been presented as

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<sup>6</sup> Gregory Schopen, “Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism,” *History of Religions*, 31.1 (Aug. 1991): 1-3.

<sup>7</sup> Reader and Tanabe, *Practically Religious*, 94.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 95-96.

<sup>9</sup> Talal Asad, “The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category,” in *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, ed. Michael Lambek (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 128-129; Catherine Bell, *Ritual Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 265.

<sup>10</sup> Schopen, “Protestant Presuppositions,” 22.

<sup>11</sup> Lincoln, *Gods and Demons*, 62.

authoritative. The *Jinja Honchō* variety of Shintō is privileged, because it rather readily fits a Protestant model of religion. The *Kojiki* 古事記 (712 CE), an account of the creation of Japan and Japan's gods, is treated as the most authoritative text. Ise Jingū 伊勢神宮 functions as the main shrine, which centers on Amaterasu 天照, the sun goddess. Priests or *kannushi* 神主 and, to a lesser extent, *miko* 巫女 (shrine maidens) perform rituals to the deities and take care of shrine affairs. While the structure of *Jinja Honchō* Shintō appears to possess most of the attributes of the Protestant model, this is far from reflective of Shintō and Japanese religiosity as a whole. However, many Japanese scholars of religion tend to be associated with the *Jinja Honchō*-affiliated Kokugakuin University 國學院大學, one of two universities that offer training for contemporary Shintō priests.<sup>12</sup> These scholars tend to affirm a Protestant model of religion typified by Western scholars, as this model supports the notion of *Jinja Honchō* as authoritative. Many Western scholars of Japanese religion have tended to reaffirm this model by privileging the *Jinja Honchō* model of Shintō, thus neglecting more popular and perhaps relevant forms of religiosity.

While the more popular form of Shintō does have sacred texts, places of worship, and religious authorities, they function much differently from a Protestant setting. Several scholars of Japan have cited the texts of the *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki* 日本書紀 (720 CE) as somehow representative of indigenous Japanese religion, while most Japanese have never engaged with these texts. The notion of a central shrine holds little resonance. Most Japanese hold no allegiance to one shrine over another. Instead, shrines are approached on an as-needed basis. While Ise Jingū is well-known, most Japanese would not consider it their primary place of worship or central to their religiosity. Although priests are typically knowledgeable about ritual practices and deities, this knowledge is not predominantly used to teach particular beliefs to laypeople. Instead, priests function as facilitators, ensuring successful engagement between laypeople and deities. While these are but a few examples of the ways in which popular Shintō does not fit a Protestant framework, it is readily apparent that the locations of religion are not universal, but context-specific. It is crucial to be vigilant when locating religion and how we define particular locations, because by doing so, we erect possibly misleading boundaries. When these boundaries are taken for granted, crucial elements can be erased. Overall, Schopen's

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<sup>12</sup> Kokugakuin University is located in the Shibuya district of Tokyo. The other university is Kōgakkan University 国学院大学, which is located in Ise, Mie, home of Ise Jingū.

approach points to a sincere need to give greater attention to the material matters and practices that shape and are shaped by religious life.

### Expressing “Religion” in Japan

After considering Schopen’s work, it is apparent that the appearances and functions of religion are not universal. Because of this, the Protestant approach fails the study of Shintō in many ways, particularly the ways in which Shintō can not only be considered religious, but also cultural. In Japan, the most common term for “religion” is *shūkyō* 宗教 and tends to entail allegiance, particularly to specific sects and doctrines. As such, *shūkyō* is evocative of *Jinja Honchō* Shintō, which has a rather strict institutional framework. Because many Japanese do not relate to the formality of the *Jinja Honchō*, very few Japanese self-identify as religious, even though their actions and interests might suggest otherwise. As suggested above, popular Shintō is not about particular allegiance to one specific body of thought and does not require participants to have a firm grasp of what we might call faith. In place of identifying with the concept of “religion,” Japanese are more likely to agree that spirituality is important. Jolyon Baraka Thomas examines this notion of “spirituality (*shūkyōshin* 宗教心, literally, a religious mind/heart)” in the following passage:

This spirituality manifests itself in practices centered primarily on the acquisition of worldly benefits (*genze riyaku* 現世利益), in fascination with the occult and the supernatural, and in various divination practices. While practitioners use all of these things precisely because they do not require allegiance or even clearly articulated faith, scholars of religion recognize that they comprise an important part of contemporary Japanese religious practice.<sup>13</sup>

In order to acquire a better sense of this, “there is a general trend to replace the noun “religion” with the adjective “religious,” removing the emphasis from possessive allegiance and refocusing it upon individual perception and practice, dismissing strict piety in favor of a personalized and often informal belief.”<sup>14</sup> Religious activities are, therefore, often seen as cultural, not segregated from the mundane, but a vital component of everyday life. Furthermore, it may well be that Thomas misunderstood the correct term in Japanese for “spirituality” in the first place: *reishō* 霊

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<sup>13</sup> Jolyon Baraka Thomas, “Shūkyō Asobi and Miyazaki Hayao’s Anime,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 10.3 (February 2007): 75. Thomas references the work of Yumiyama Tatsuya, who claims that roughly 30% of Japanese claim to have religious belief, whereas roughly 70% consider spirituality to be important (“Shūkyō Asobi,” 75).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

性 (literally ‘divine’ or ‘potent nature’) is probably more appropriate. As such, my use of the term “religion,” for the purposes of this thesis, aligns with that of Reader and Tanabe, which uses parameters “similar to those found in much of contemporary Japanese scholarship”:

We use “religion” as an inclusive term that has elastic frontiers readily intermingled with cultural and social themes in which belief and doctrine can place a part but are not essential. Under the rubric of “religion” we include such things as visits to shrines and temples (locations that cannot be classified other than as religious institutions), participation in festivals that are focused on shrines, temples, and deities, the acquisition of amulets and talismans, and the seeking, through petitioning of deities, of worldly benefits. (5) We treat religion as a matter not only of doctrine and belief but of participation, custom, ritual, action, practice, and belonging. It is as much a matter of social and cultural influences and behavioral patterns located in day-to-day concerns and the ordinary processes of life – as concerned with ameliorating problems in the present, in producing explanations of why things have gone wrong, and in proposing mechanisms that offer the hope of improvement – as it is with ultimate concerns, theological explanations of the universe, or the destination of the soul. Rather than reject the term “religion” defined in narrow theological terms, we employ the word with expansive meanings drawn from a broad spectrum ranging from theological abstractions to mundane practicalities.<sup>15</sup>

What is clear at this point is that a new approach is needed to examine contemporary Shintō. In the study of religion in Japan, particularly as it relates to Inari, Protestant presuppositions have rendered the practices related to these immensely popular deities invisible, as they are typically rooted in practice and material matters. As made clear in the above discussion of framing religion in Japan, material culture and this-worldly benefits are vital to understanding religion in Japan, because they constitute an incredibly large element of religious life for many, if not most, Japanese. *Jinja Honchō* Shintō is too often presented as the dominant model of Shintō, even though many Japanese do not identify with it. In addition to its structure, *Jinja Honchō* Shintō may very well be particularly unappealing to Japanese, owing to its strong connections with nationalism. Most Japanese are anti-war and want nothing to do with right-wing sentiments. Instead, there is a longing for a strong sense of community and connection to one’s local space. Inari worship is particularly reflective of this popular variety of Shintō, which has little, if anything to do with academic narratives (such as *Jinja Honchō* Shintō and the *Kojiki*).

### Encountering Japan: A New Approach

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<sup>15</sup> Reader and Tanabe, *Practically Religious*, 6.

From May 2012-January 2013, I lived in Kyoto and visited Fushimi Inari Taisha several dozen times. What I saw there did not match up with a Protestant framework that often dominates studies of religion. I first tried using a textual approach to the shrine, which is common to the field of Religious Studies. I found texts available for sale at Fushimi Inari Taisha, particularly Buddhist sutras written in a style unfamiliar to most Japanese.<sup>16</sup> Few Japanese were actually engaging with these texts and I was interested in what people were engaging with at a broader, more inclusive level. I then considered an anthropological approach, which would have involved interviewing people at the shrine about the kinds of activities they were engaging in. This, too, proved unfeasible, because most Japanese do not seem to identify as “religious” and often see shrine activities and engagement with deities as something more spiritual or cultural than anything else. It would be extremely complicated, if not impossible, to decide how and what to ask Japanese people about “religion.” The most common scholarly approaches did not help me to understand what I was seeing on the ground at this shrine. It was only when I came across *Inakon* that I was able to make sense of what I saw at Fushimi Inari Taisha. This animation represents something that speaks to modern Shintō practice, which caused me to become further interested in storytelling and visual media.<sup>17</sup>

At its most basic level, storytelling is the act of conveying events. Storytelling is often used for the purpose of entertainment, but also can educate by conveying moral values (ethics) and preserving culture. As a type of cultural storyteller, visual media have a great deal to offer the study of Japanese religions. It is my view that *Inakon* is a compelling lens through which to examine Inari and modern Shintō, because it depicts practices that one would see at Fushimi Inari Taisha. This animation offers insight into the reasons why Inari and Fushimi Inari Taisha matter so much to Japan and many Japanese people. While *Inakon* provides numerous themes of interest to me, here I emphasize those I find to be the most meaningful, based on the time I spent at the shrine. *Inakon* is fascinating because it seems to accurately represent the kinds of motivations people have for engaging with deities like Inari. While the characters of *Inakon* are fictional, their worldviews and concerns are most certainly not. *Inakon* is set in a real location and accurately represents the kinds of people who seek divine help and the manner in which this

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<sup>16</sup> These were ritual texts that were available for sale at some of the shops in and around Fushimi Inari Taisha. Few were available for sale and were easy to overlook, as the local shops were brimming with fox-themed souvenirs and ritual items.

<sup>17</sup> I have had an interest in Japanese popular culture for over 10 years. I initially became interested in Inari, due to the popularity of fox characters in Japanese animations and video games.



help is sought. As a text that reflects and shapes the beliefs and attitudes surrounding Inari, *Inakon* demonstrates that contemporary visual media have much to offer the study of religion.

This project contributes to the study of Inari and fills an overall scholarly lacunae in terms of attention given to Shintō. Shintō studies seem to be a somewhat taboo topic, undoubtedly stemming, at least in part, from relatively recent nationalism.<sup>18</sup> Modern Shintō studies are, therefore, notably rare, which is perhaps why few Japanese scholars have examined the relationship between animations such as *Inakon* and religiosity in Japan. *Inakon* offers a particularly meaningful perspective of what matters to the religious lives of Japanese. By emphasizing the popular concerns that dominate its narrative, *Inakon* also highlights the rift between formal and popular religion, imperial and non-imperial shrines. Due to the Protestant framework, this tension has been given little attention. *Jinja Honchō* Shintō has instead been privileged and presented as normative. Through its representations of Amaterasu, for example, the sun goddess who is central to *Jinja Honchō* Shintō and Ukanomitama 宇迦之御魂大神, the rice goddess who is primary among nine deities enshrined at Fushimi Inari Taisha, *Inakon* takes this tension to task. I will also show that Ukanomitama (referred to as Uka, in the show) is portrayed as an emotionally warm deity who has a close relationship with a young girl, while Amaterasu is emotionally cold, unattractive, and distant from human affairs. *Inakon* is, therefore, a reflection of the fact that Inari are immensely appealing to people from all walks of life. Inari are everywhere and many Japanese engage with shrines devoted to them. Nationalism continues to be a significant issue in postwar Japan and many Japanese want nothing to do with it. However, it is difficult to ignore the strong presence of right-wing nationalists in Japan's government, including the current prime minister, Abe Shinzō 安倍 晋三. Among others, Prime Minister Abe supports the nationalistic agenda of the *Jinja Honchō* and has paid controversial visits to Yasukuni Shrine 靖国神社, which was established in 1869 by Emperor Meiji for the purpose of commemorating anyone who died in service to the Empire of Japan (including several Class A war criminals).<sup>19</sup> The narrative that the *Jinja Honchō* and Prime Minister Abe support is not reflective of the majority of Japanese. It is, therefore, important to consider the narratives that are being privileged by politicians and Japanese religious institutions like *Jinja Honchō* and

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<sup>18</sup> Helen Hardacre, *Shintō and the State, 1868-1988*, Studies in Church and State (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 5-7.

<sup>19</sup> For more information on Yasukuni Shrine, please refer to the work of John Breen, particularly *Yasukuni, the War Dead and the Struggle for Japan's Past* (2008).

whether or not they reflect what may actually be going on at the popular level. As the most obvious form of popular Shintō, Inari worship is immensely important and is being neglected at the expense of something that many Japanese may not even identify with.

### Chapter Outline

Chapter One provides a concise overview of Shintō, Inari, and Fushimi Inari Taisha. First, I give a brief overview of Shintō, particularly what this term means in an historical context and what modern Shintō practices look like. I pay particular attention to the concept of *genze riyaku*, or “this-worldly benefits,” which reflects common religious concerns with luck and fortune. Next, I introduce Inari, discussing the meanings and manifestations of *kitsune* in Japanese culture, the types of benefits provided by Inari, and the expansion of Inari worship within Japan. Third, I describe and discuss the historical development of Fushimi Inari Taisha. Finally, I briefly review English scholarship related to Inari, including work by Karen Smyers, Michael Bathgate, Kang Xiaofei, and Steven Heine. By examining their approaches, I identify some of the gaps surrounding Inari scholarship and introduce *Inakon* as a tool with which to address these gaps. The goal of this chapter is, therefore, to familiarize the reader with the necessary background for understanding *Inakon*.

Chapter Two describes and interprets *Inakon* with particular emphasis on the show’s content. By doing so I am able to explore a variety of themes relevant to the study of modern Shintō - especially the prominence of *genze riyaku*, particularly as it points to the significance of family and one’s community, and the contention between formal and popular expressions of religion. I will also examine the ways in which the *kami* 神 (deities) of *Inakon*, Ukanomitama and Amaterasu, and Fushimi Inari Taisha are represented.<sup>20</sup> *Inakon* highlights the contention between popular and formal forms of Shintō in contemporary Japan, a significant theme which will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Four.

Chapter Three frames *Inakon* in the context of Japanese culture, particularly through the ways in which foxes are represented in media. First, I review *kitsune* in literature of the Meiji (1868-1912) period, which was developed by folklorists in the wake of Japan’s rapid modernization. This period had a significant impact upon the religious landscape of Japan, Inari worship, and therefore presages themes in *Inakon*. Next, I conduct a brief survey of foxes in Japanese media of the postwar period and highlight the ways in which foxes have evolved in

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<sup>20</sup> These *kami* will also be discussed in Chapter Four.

popular culture. Finally, I consider the study of popular culture and religion in Japan. Religion and culture are inextricably linked in Japan and religious media, such as *Inakon*, point to what is extremely meaningful to everyday Japanese.

The fourth and final chapter delves more deeply into *Inakon*'s depiction of the popular vs. formal variations of contemporary Shintō, represented, respectively, through the deities Uka and Amaterasu. I will discuss its origins in order to better understand *Jinja Honchō* Shintō, during the period of the Empire of Japan, which is when nationalism reached its zenith (ca. 1870-1945, excluding the Taishō democracy, 1912-1926). While State Shintō, the system behind deifying the emperor, was effectively dissolved following the war, *Jinja Honchō* arose to take its place, presenting a softer image, but retaining a nationalistic agenda. Today, *Jinja Honchō* struggles to support itself financially, which contrasts with the immense appeal of Inari worship. With its right-wing agenda and politically sensitive connections, such as with Yasukuni Shrine, the *Jinja Honchō* is generally viewed with disfavour. Although the *Jinja Honchō* is frequently treated as somewhat authoritative in scholarship, *Inakon* points to the massive popularity and wealth of Inari shrines, suggesting that Japanese most readily identify with Inari.

## Chapter One

### Introducing Inari and Fushimi Inari Taisha

Worshipped for over 1300 years, Inari are the most popular deities in contemporary Japan.<sup>1</sup> This is no small feat in a country in which there are considered to be innumerable gods. With tens of thousands of shrines across the country, these fox deities are found almost everywhere, from parking lots and department stores, to private home shrines, and massive shrine-temple complexes. In the tradition of *sandai Inari* 三大稲荷, or the “three great Inari (shrines/temples),” Fushimi Inari Taisha is undoubtedly the most significant: it is considered the official site and headquarters of Inari worship.<sup>2</sup> As the shrine that “named and framed all the other Inari shrines of the country,” everyone knows what and where Fushimi Inari Taisha is.<sup>3</sup> This chapter presents a concise overview of the characteristics and development of Fushimi Inari Taisha, with a particular emphasis on its place within the Shintō religion.

#### 1.1 An Orientation to Shintō

##### 1.1.1 *Kami* Worship

As it is generally understood today, Shintō revolves around the worship of deities known as *kami*. *Kami* can be worshipped at a variety of locations, but primarily at shrines (*jinja* 神社) and in one’s home (often, though not necessarily, with the use of a *kamidana* 神棚). The “Shintō mentality,” writes Yusa, “generally affirms the world and considers health, wealth, and happiness as signs of the protection of the *kami*.”<sup>4</sup> Typically worshipped on an as-needed basis, *kami* are able to provide shrine visitors with a variety of benefits, including passing school exams,

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<sup>1</sup> Fushimi Inari Taisha was established in 711 CE. Karen A. Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel: Shared and Private Meanings in Contemporary Japanese Inari Worship* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1999), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Reader and Tanabe, *Practically Religious*, 153-154. Fushimi Inari is the only Shintō shrine of the primary lineup of the *sandai inari*: Fushimi Inari Taisha, Toyokawa Inari, and Saijō Inari. The notion of *sandai inari* varies regionally and might also include: Yūtoku Inari, Sasuke Inari, and Toyama Inari).

<sup>3</sup> Jacques H. Kamstra, “Who Was First: The Fox or The Lady? The God of Fushimi in Kyōto,” in *Effigies Dei: Essays on the History of Religions*, edited by Dirk Van der Plas (The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, The Netherlands, 1987), 98.

<sup>4</sup> Michiko Yusa, *Japanese Religious Traditions* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2002), 17.

conceiving children, curing illness, and acquiring wealth.<sup>5</sup> Carrying many layers of meaning, “*kami*” can refer to “spirits of nature – mountains, rivers, trees, rocks, and ocean – all conceived to be alive and sacred,” as well as animals, deities dwelling in various natural objects, supernatural powers, ancestors, and “brave, unusual, or gifted” individuals who are deified.<sup>6</sup> As such, there are believed to be a myriad of *kami*. The belief in *kami* was established by at least the Yayoi 弥生 period (300 BCE-200 CE).<sup>7</sup> Rather than possessing morally good or destructive character, *kami* are generally considered to be “ethically ambivalent” and whether their actions are “gentle” or “coarse” depends on human perception and experience.<sup>8</sup> When *kami* are worshipped in accepted ritual ways, they respond in a benevolent manner. When they are improperly worshipped or orthopraxis is ignored, the possibility of personal calamity and natural disaster arises. In addition to the worship of *kami*, other aspects of Shintō practice include the celebration of *matsuri* 祭り (festivals) and the observation of calendrical events (*nenjū gyōji* 年中行事), especially those relating to harvest, and the celebration of various rites of passage, such as marriage, the birth of a child, and old age. Japanese religious beliefs and practices are found in everyday life, including popular culture, although they might not always be recognized as such. Because these beliefs and practices are not confined to shrine precincts and [Buddhist] temples, locating religious or sacred matters and beliefs are more difficult to navigate in Japan than perhaps in the west.<sup>9</sup>

### 1.1.2 Unpacking Shintō

While it is often defined as “the native religion of Japan,” Shintō as we know it today is neither ancient nor has it always been an independent religion. In his ground-breaking article, “Shinto in the History of Japanese Religion,” Japanese historian Kuroda Toshio 黒田 俊雄 (1926-1993) argued against prevailing scholarly views concerning Shintō that all too often present “a

<sup>5</sup> Michael Roemer, “Religious Affiliation in Contemporary Japan: Untangling the Enigma,” *Review of Religious Research* 50.3 (March 2009): 303.

<sup>6</sup> Yusa, *Japanese Religious Traditions*, 20.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>8</sup> Steven Heine, *Sacred High City Sacred Low City: A Tale of Religious Sites in Two Tokyo Neighborhoods* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 103.

<sup>9</sup> Although most Japanese do not readily identify as “religious,” most participate in religious activities, such as visiting shrines and temples. When Japanese say they are not “religious,” this has to do with the term *shūkyō* 宗教, which entails a high level of devotion, such as to a particular shrine or temple, text, or doctrine, much like the Christian sense of religion. Instead, Japanese tend to visit a variety of shrines and temples on an as-needed basis, engaging much less frequently with sacred texts and religious leaders, such as priests and monks. For more information on the nature of religiosity in contemporary Japan, please refer to Ian Reader’s book, *Religion in Contemporary Japan* (1991) and Reader and Tanabe’s book, *Practically Religious* (1998).

sort of surgical separation of Shinto from Buddhism and thus from Japanese religion as a whole.”<sup>10</sup> “Shintō” is properly viewed as a modern term, since the religion only truly became organized and independent in the Meiji 明治 era (1868-1912 CE).<sup>11</sup> According to Kuroda, Shintō was the invention of nationalist ideologues:

With them Shinto achieved for the first time the status of an independent religion, distorted though it was. During this period the “historical consciousness” of an indigenous religion called Shinto, existing in Japan since ancient times, clearly took shape for the first time. This has remained the basis for defining the word Shinto down to the present. Scholars have yielded to this use of the word, and the population at large has been educated in this vein.<sup>12</sup>

The religious and cultural practices of pre-Meiji Japan hardly contain the Shintō we see today. Instead, what existed was an ever-evolving mixture of at least thought and rituals that included Japanese folk beliefs and practices, a particular institutional blend of exoteric and esoteric Buddhist ritual techniques (*kenmitsu taisei* 顕密体制), typically associated with either the Tendai 天台宗 (Taimitsu 台みつ) and Shingon 真言宗 (Tōmitsu 東密) traditions, and yin-yang divination (*onmyōdō* 陰陽道).<sup>13</sup> By calling Shintō a Japanized version of Buddhism, Kuroda challenges those who use the term to denote a wholly indigenous and ancient form of religious practice. While Shintō continues to be used as a term denoting “indigenous” religious practices, it is crucial to bear in mind that the development of these practices was deeply impacted by continental culture.

Buddhism entered Japan in the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE and has had an extremely close relationship with the autochthonous practices of Japan. Between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, “Shinto and Buddhism gradually coalesced with one another (*shinbutsu shūgō* 神仏習合) – or, more precisely, veneration of the *kami* was absorbed into Buddhism through a variety of doctrinal innovations and new religious forms.”<sup>14</sup> Rather than striving to eliminate native practices and beliefs, Buddhism incorporated Shintō *kami* through the process of *honji suijaku* 本

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<sup>10</sup> Toshio Kuroda, “Shinto in the History of Japanese Religion,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 7.1 (Winter 1981): 20.

<sup>11</sup> Kuroda, “Shinto in the History,” 3.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>13</sup> Roemer, “Religious Affiliation in Contemporary Japan,” 300.

<sup>14</sup> Kuroda, “Shinto in the History,” 9.

地垂迹 (“original ground-trace manifestation”).<sup>15</sup> In the case of *honji suijaku*, it is believed that Buddhist deities appear in the form of local gods (*kami*) in order to more easily convert Japanese people. Buddhist deities are considered the *honji*, or “original ground,” while the *kami* are the *suijaku*, or “dropped footprint (or trace),” which are the particular forms in which they manifest.<sup>16</sup> Because *kami* are considered to be guardians of Japanese soil, they were incorporated into nearly all Buddhist temples as their protectors. In several Buddhist temples of Japan, for example, foxes appear as *gon’gen* 権現 (or avatars), which are considered to be localized manifestations of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and Indian, Chinese, or Korean gods. These *gon’gen* appear in *chinjusha* 鎮守社, which are “small shrines set up either inside temples or in the temple precincts” and are generally connected to the state and major clans.<sup>17</sup> Just as *kami* became part of Buddhist ritual spaces, so too did Buddhism have its effects on the shrines of the *kami*. The ideology of *honji suijaku* led to the creation of *jingūji* 神宮寺 (shrine-temple complexes) during the late Nara 奈良 (710-794 CE) and early Heian 平安 (794-1185 CE) periods, which were Buddhist temples built on shrine grounds in order to direct the *kami* towards enlightenment.<sup>18</sup> *Jingūji* served as “hot-houses” for the amalgamation process of *kami* cults and Buddhism and symbolized “early trends of non-exclusive attitudes toward autochthonous and imported creeds and practices.”<sup>19</sup> Additionally, “*kami* could be rendered more beneficent and more powerful when served a menu of Buddhist services.”<sup>20</sup> By the 9<sup>th</sup> century, *kami* shifted in character from “potentially dangerous spirits” to “local emanations of buddhas and bodhisattvas.”<sup>21</sup> This was achieved through the combined veneration of foreign Buddhist deities

<sup>15</sup> Heine, *Sacred High City*, 102. The term “*Honji suijaku*” comes from the *Lotus Sutra*, which is the primary text of Tendai Buddhism. Please refer to Klaus Antoni, “The ‘Separation of Gods and Buddhas’ at Ōmiwa Jinja in Meiji Japan,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 22.1/2 (Spring 1995): 144.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Bowring, *The Religious Traditions of Japan, 500-1600* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 185.

<sup>17</sup> Bowring, *Religious Traditions of Japan*, 184.

<sup>18</sup> Allan Grapard, “Institution, Ritual, and Ideology: The Twenty-Two Shrine-Temple Multiplexes of Heian Japan,” *History of Religions* 27.3 (February 1988): 252-253; Allan Grapard, “The economics of ritual power,” in *Shinto in History*, edited by John Breen and Mark Teeuwen (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000), 74. According to Buddhist belief, the *kami* were this-worldly and therefore were caught in the cycle of suffering. Erecting temples for the purpose of saving the *kami* clearly implies that Buddhist thought considered the *kami* to be inferior in both position and importance compared to the Buddhist deities (Antoni, “Separation of Gods and Buddhas,” 144).

<sup>19</sup> Grapard, “The economics of ritual power,” 74; Mark Teeuwen, “The *kami* in esoteric Buddhist thought and practice,” in *Shinto in History*, edited by John Breen and Mark Teeuwen (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000), 95. “*Jingūji*” was added to the shrine names, including Fushimi Inari.

<sup>20</sup> Teeuwen, “The *kami* in esoteric Buddhist thought and practice,” 95.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

and local *kami* through Buddhist ritual systems, which is known as *shinbutsu shūgō* (“syncretism of kami and buddhas”). When incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon, “their [kami] disruptive power and destructive status are radically reclaimed and reoriented to reflect the purity of genuine spirituality and compassion.”<sup>22</sup> This syncretism, along with a period of relatively high religious tolerance, existed for nearly 1000 years.<sup>23</sup>

By the mid-Edo 江戸 period (1603-1868 CE), *kokugaku* 国学 (national or “patriotic” learning) philosophers sought to filter Japan’s native religious practices and beliefs from foreign ones. This revolt achieved its greatest success with the inception of the new constitutional Meiji government, which sought to deify the emperor and unite the Japanese under religious nationalism. On March 28, 1868, the government began a campaign to forcefully separate native gods from Buddhist ones (*shinbutsu bunri* 神仏分離), in order to “reveal” Japan’s true religion and identity: Shintō. There was an extreme amount of violence towards Buddhist institutions and many changes occurred in order to weaken the economic and political power previously held by Buddhist temples. The Buddhist structures of the *jingūji* were removed, many treasures, such as statuary, were lost, and monks had to practice as *kannushi* (Shintō priests) or leave the newly-reformed shrines.<sup>24</sup> It was from this perspective that Kuroda claims Shintō became known as the “indigenous religion of Japan” and an independent religion for the first time.<sup>25</sup> The government’s nationalist campaign for religious and cultural purity lasted for nearly 80 years and concluded with Japan’s defeat in WWII (1939-1945). Although the project to separate Shintō and Buddhism was only partially completed, Shintō has retained a certain degree of newfound independence. Distinctions between temples and shrines, buddhas and *kami*, priests and monks still appear mostly clear-cut, although they remain fundamentally interwoven in many contexts. While many shrines and temples identify as either Shintō or Buddhist, elements from both traditions trickle across sacred boundaries. Regardless of whether religious beliefs and practices in Japan are native or of foreign origin, they are *indigenous* in the sense that they are “assimilated or formulated or fabricated *by the people* [emphasis mine].”<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately,

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<sup>22</sup> Heine, *Sacred High City*, 103.

<sup>23</sup> Antoni, “Separation of Gods and Buddhas,” 143.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 143-146. The *yamabushi* 山伏, who are mountain priests, faced similar hardship, as their tradition of *shugendō* 修験道 is a tradition of Japanese mountain asceticism, that combines Miidera 三尾寺 Tendai 天台 *mikkyō* 密教, Daoism, and folk beliefs of Japan (Antoni, “Separation of Gods and Buddhas,” 153).

<sup>25</sup> Kuroda, “Shinto in the History,” 19.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 20.



“Shintō” implies homogeneity across the board and has led many to dismiss the incredible variety of practices and beliefs specific to numerous local groups in Japan.<sup>27</sup>

### 1.1.3 The Matters of Modern Shintō: *Genze Riyaku*

While scholars including Kuroda have done a great deal to rework conceptions of the history and development of Shintō, few have engaged with the field of contemporary Shintō on the ground. However, through the work in their ground-breaking text, *Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan* (1998), George Tanabe Jr. and Ian Reader offer one of the most popular and alluring approaches towards Japanese religions, including, but not exclusive to Shintō. In this text, Reader and Tanabe situate religious practice in Japan with the intention of receiving *genze riyaku* or “this-worldly benefits.”<sup>28</sup> “*Genze riyaku*,” they state, “is a normative and central theme in the structure and framework of religion in Japan.”<sup>29</sup> *Genze riyaku* generally refers to good luck, but its common usage refers to material benefits, such as safe childbirth, protection from car accidents, and passing school examinations. While such benefits tend to be physical in nature, they also extend to concerns that are emotional and spiritual, such as peace of mind (*anshin* 安心).<sup>30</sup> Religious action, Reader asserts, provides symbolic and psychological comfort in the face of everyday concerns, “making it safe and reassuring those who pray that they have done everything possible to bring it within the sphere of human control.”<sup>31</sup>

Reflecting the host-guest relationship prominent in South and East Asian culture and religion, which is a significant element of Japanese society as well, Japanese often visit shrines hoping to enter into reciprocal relationships with *kami* and other deities. One important component of the *kami*-human relationship is proper ritual to the *kami*. If these rituals are performed correctly, *kami* will reward their devotees with benefits they are skilled in providing, such as conceiving children, healing a particular type of illness, or even winning a sports match. If approached by an incorrect ritual in practice, *kami* will either create undesirable results or

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<sup>27</sup> As we will see in the remaining chapters, Inari worship reflects the variation between “official” and popular forms of Shintō.

<sup>28</sup> Reader and Tanabe also translate *genze riyaku* as “practical benefits in this lifetime” or, more simply, “practical benefits (*Practically Religious*, 2).”

<sup>29</sup> Reader and Tanabe, *Practically Religious*, 14.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, 16-17.

<sup>31</sup> Ian Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 1991), 186.

simply do nothing. While it is possible to attain this-worldly benefits through prayer or visiting a religious site, Reader and Tanabe highlight the most common method of all:

The culture of practical benefits, both in its means and its ends, is decidedly material. A wide array of objects is used, some bizarre, others mundane. Amulets, talismans, bumper stickers, trinkets, food, and more are part of the currency used to purchase benefits. Amulets alone can be found as pieces of paper, carvings, brocade, bells, pencils, dried reeds, porcelain, and a wide variety of other materials and forms.<sup>32</sup>

Shrines (and temples) tend to specialize in different types of *riyaku*, such as winning sports matches, and provide themed wares to accompany such appeals.<sup>33</sup> Before the widespread use of the internet there existed a vast array of guidebooks for shrines and temples, focused specifically on the types of benefits they are known for, with examples of miracles to back them up.<sup>34</sup> Some books are still published, but guidebooks have moved online.<sup>35</sup> Due to Shintō's life-affirming nature, religious centers are highly pragmatic and deal with a wide variety of concerns. Patrons are eager to receive this-worldly benefits and religious centres are eager to provide them, particularly because the material objects surrounding *genze riyaku* contribute a great deal towards their financial stability. In this competitive setting, where a multitude of deities are available for petition, Inari are the obvious favourites.

## 1.2 Inari – Japan's Most Beloved *Kami*

### 1.2.1 *Kitsune*

Inari worship is generally centered on spiritually powerful foxes. In Japan, foxes are commonly referred to by the term *kitsune*. *Kitsune* not only refers to foxes of the flesh, but also to those foxes capable of expressing spiritual or supernatural powers and forms. These supernatural foxes have a rich history in Japanese religious and cultural beliefs and practices. In the world of Japanese religious practice, foxes stand out because although animals are commonly associated with *kami*, nowhere else can we find animals worshipped in Japan to the same degree that foxes are. Inari foxes typically have white fur and are primarily represented in the form of

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<sup>32</sup> Reader and Tanabe, *Practically Religious*, 34-35.

<sup>33</sup> Here, I am referencing Shiramine Jingū □□□□ in Kyoto, a shrine which is well-known for success in soccer.

<sup>34</sup> Reader and Tanabe, *Practically Religious*, 242-245.

<sup>35</sup> This is particularly the case in the Kansai region, which includes Kyoto and Osaka.

*kitsune zō* 狐像 or “fox statues.” These statues are often found in abundance at Shintō shrines and Buddhist temples which enshrine Inari.<sup>36</sup>



Figure 1.1 Fox statue at Fushimi Inari Taisha (Photo by author)

According to Chinese geomancy (*feng shui* 風水), the northeastern direction is considered the most inauspicious of all directions and is referred to as the *kimon* 鬼門, or “demon gate,” in Japan. Because they are able to guard against the *kimon*’s daemonic influences, fox statues are often found on temple and shrine grounds serving this purpose.<sup>37</sup>

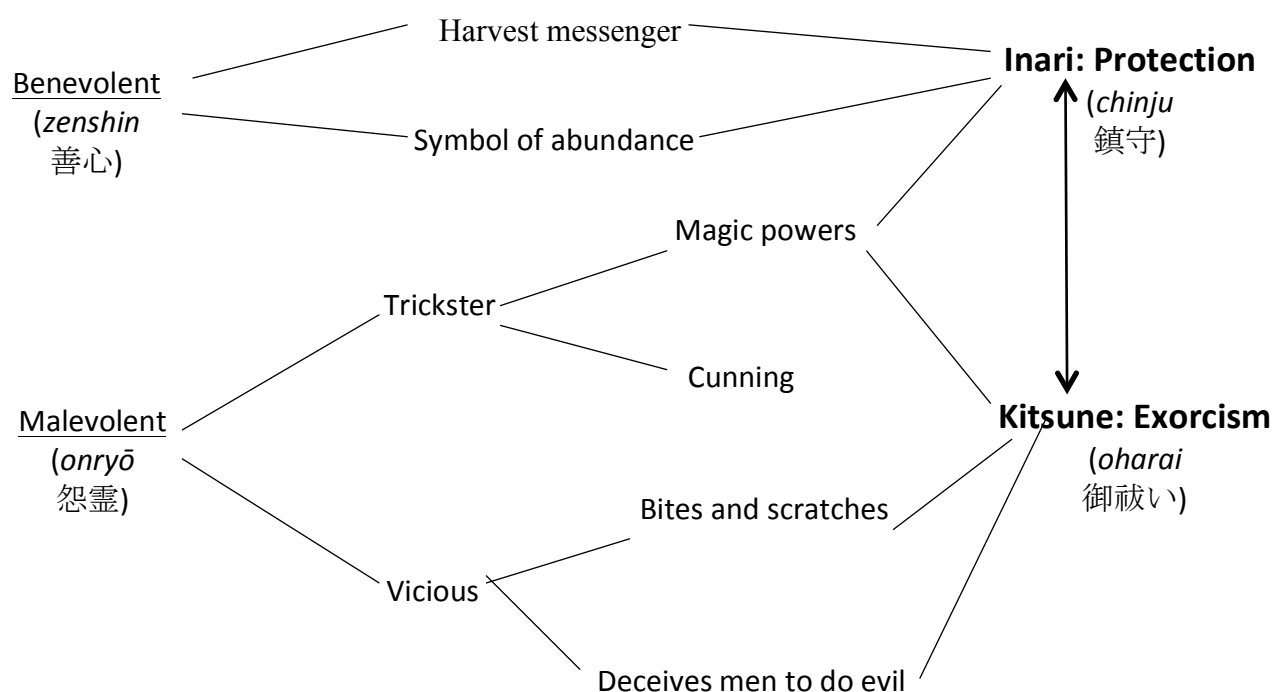
Foxes have a deep history in Japanese narratives. They are often regarded as trickster-like figures, which have many abilities related to transformation: shape-shifting, usually into women,

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<sup>36</sup> Fox statues are also present at temples enshrining Dakini-shinten, which is an esoteric Buddhist fox deity. Steven Heine, *Shifting Shape, Shaping Text: Philosophy and Folklore in Fox Koan* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 2000), 26.

<sup>37</sup> Ian Reader, “Folk Religion,” in *Japanese Religions Past and Present*, eds. Ian Reader, Esben Andreasen, and Finn Stefnsson (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), 50. The beliefs and narratives surrounding foxes in China had an enormous impact on *kitsune* in Japan. Although continental culture has greatly shaped the characteristics attributed to *kitsune*, Inari are unique to Japan. For more information on foxes in Chinese religion and culture, please refer to Kang Xiaofei’s excellent text, *The Cult of the Fox: Power, Gender, and Popular Religion in Late Imperial and Modern China* (2006). While Kang focuses on foxes in China, she does briefly discuss their representations in Japan.

creating illusions to trick humans, possessing humans, and controlling fox fire, which is typically believed to emanate from their tails. These characteristics frequently appear in narratives about foxes, including *monogatari* 物語 (fictional “tales” or “narratives”). These tales usually take one of two directions: a human wrongs a fox and the fox seeks retribution, or a human helps a fox and the fox rewards them greatly. In order to highlight the multifaceted nature of *kitsune*, Steven Heine created the following chart.<sup>38</sup>



While this chart might be interpreted as indicative of a dualistic nature, *kitsune* might be better viewed as on a spectrum, each possessing the ability to behave in any manner. As creatures capable of shape-shifting, *kitsune* fall into a category of supernatural beings called *yōkai* 妖怪. While *yōkai* tend to be mischievous and even malicious, when they are treated properly, they can use their abilities to benefit humans. In the case of Inari, these foxes still maintain their mischievous nature, but are generally regarded as benevolent, due to their aptitude for granting humans this-worldly benefits. While foxes in need of exorcism tend to be more of a Buddhist

<sup>38</sup> Heine, *Zen Skin*, 109. Kanji added.

concern (i.e. “native” deities needing to be “tamed”), establishments which identify as Shintō also engage with such matters.<sup>39</sup>

Although there has been a fair amount of speculation, it appears that foxes have come to represent Inari due to their proliferation in the area of Fushimi Inari Taisha, as well as their penchant for eating rodents. The general theory of Japanese folklorists is that “the fox is a messenger of, or the field deity itself (ta no kami 田の神), because the fox promises, in part, the good harvest by eating rodents.”<sup>40</sup> As such, foxes seen running through rice paddies were considered good luck and even thought to be “inspecting the crops.”<sup>41</sup> There is also the folk belief that “one could foretell an impending bad harvest by listening to the cry of a fox or by observing its manner of eating special offerings of food,” writes Nakagawa.<sup>42</sup> As thanks for a successful harvest, or petitioning for future success, farmers began to leave offerings, such as red rice and fried tofu for the foxes.<sup>43</sup> Foxes have been particularly abundant in and around Inari Mountain, which suggested that they were associated with the mountain *kami*.<sup>44</sup> As the carrier of the harvest god, foxes would transport them up the mountain in the autumn after the season’s harvest and back down in the spring.<sup>45</sup> The *kami* are considered to rule the natural domain and mountains are traditionally considered to be the abode of the *kami* and the souls of the deceased.<sup>46</sup> As liminal creatures, foxes are in the perfect position to cross between the human and the spirit worlds. Closer to the human realm than most other gods, foxes are more approachable and easy to work with. Although it is officially denied that Inari are foxes, they are popularly worshipped as such.<sup>47</sup> Inari and *kitsune* are generally considered to be synonymous and the characteristics of foxes are readily connected to the benefits provided by Inari.

### 1.2.2 The Benefits of Inari

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<sup>39</sup> For example, Fushimi Inari Taisha is historically linked with fox exorcisms. However, it is important to note that Fushimi Inari Taisha used to function as a shrine-temple complex, which had Buddhist monks. This will be discussed further on in this chapter.

<sup>40</sup> Yuki Miyamoto, “Possessed and Possessing: Fox-possession and discrimination against the wealthy in the modern period in Japan,” *Culture and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 7.2 (2006): 153. Kanji added to quotation.

<sup>41</sup> Heine, *Sacred High City*, 7; Stuart D. B. Picken, *Essentials of Shinto: An Analytical Guide to Principal Teachings* (Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press, 1994), 111.

<sup>42</sup> Sugane Nakagawa, trans. by Andrea C. Damon, “Inari Worship in Early Modern Osaka,” in *Osaka: The Merchants’ Capital of Early Modern Japan*, edited by James L. McClain and Wakita Osamu (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 199.

<sup>43</sup> Picken, *Essentials of Shinto*, 111.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>45</sup> William P. Fairchild, “Shamanism in Japan,” *Folklore Studies* 21 (1962): 37.

<sup>46</sup> Kamstra, “Who Was First?” 100.

<sup>47</sup> Fushimi Inari’s website maintains that Inari are not foxes. Please refer to (<http://inari.jp/about/faq/>)

As the most popular deities in Japan, Inari are known for providing a wide variety of this-worldly benefits. From successful rice harvest and fertility to business prosperity, the benefits provided by Inari have grown to “embrace different trades, professions, and social classes.”<sup>48</sup> Inari are first and foremost associated with the successful cultivation, growth, and harvest of grains, particularly rice.<sup>49</sup> “Rice rites are the oldest surviving religious practices going back two thousand years to the Yayoi period when rice was first introduced into Japanese society,” notes Heine.<sup>50</sup> Since the establishment of Inari worship in 711 CE and into the Heian period (794-1185), Inari were especially popular with rice farmers, given that rice was the staple food and form of exchange at the time. As the guardians of grain cultivation, “Inari represented a supernatural force charged with defending the rice crop against natural disasters, such as flood, drought, and noxious pests.”<sup>51</sup> Fushimi Inari Taisha’s main festivals are associated with the sowing and harvesting of rice, such as *Taue-sai* 田植祭, an event where rice seedlings are transplanted to the shrine’s paddies and prayers are made.<sup>52</sup> “As the spirit of rice-as-foodstuff, Inari was implicated in the ideal, hearth-and-home values of village society, of peasants working together to feed themselves.”<sup>53</sup> Owing to their association with successful rice harvest, Inari are also prayed to for wealth in its widest sense of meaning, whether it relates to business success, the birth of children, healing, and the prosperity and safety of the home.<sup>54</sup> Inari are also skilled in more specific needs, such as preventing fires, stopping coughs, and helping those who fish and hunt.<sup>55</sup> As the previous form of currency, rice functions as a symbol of wealth, therefore Inari are

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<sup>48</sup> Stuart D. B. Picken, *Historical Dictionary of Shinto*, (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2002), 85.

<sup>49</sup> Steven Heine, *Zen Skin, Zen Marrow: Will the Real Zen Buddhism Please Stand Up?* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 99. Please note that *ta no kami* 田の神 ought to be written *inaka no kami* 田舎の神.

<sup>50</sup> Steven Heine, “From Rice Cultivation to Mind Contemplation: The Meaning of Impermanence in Japanese Religion,” *History of Religions* 30.3 (May 1991): 389.

<sup>51</sup> Heine, *Sacred High City*, 7.

<sup>52</sup> Fushimi Inari Taisha, *Kannabi*, 63.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Bathgate, *The Fox’s Craft in Japanese Religion and Culture: Shapeshifters, Transformations, and Duplicities (Religion in History, Society and Culture)* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004): 135.

<sup>54</sup> Jacques Kamstra, “The Religion of Japan: Syncretism or Religious Phenomenalism?” in *Dialogue and Syncretism: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, edited by Jerald Gort, Hendrik Vroom, Rein Fernhout, and Anton Wessels (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 142; Xiaofei Kang, *The Cult of the Fox: Power Gender and Popular Religion in Late Imperial and Modern China* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006), 199.

<sup>55</sup> Kang, *The Cult of the Fox*, 199; Yuki Miyamoto, “Possessed and Possessing,” 148. In his study of rooftop Inari shrines in Osaka, Ishii highlights the following reasons for enshrining Inari: business success, domestic harmony, warding off evil, protection from fire, education of children, marriage ties, and proficiency in entertainment arts. Kenji Ishii, “The Secularization of Religion in the City,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 13.2/3 (June – September 1986): 206-208.

able to produce cash and other property.<sup>56</sup> As *kitsune*, Inari also have “the power to protect against and exorcise demonic spirits, including the fox spirit which possesses souls.”<sup>57</sup>

Because of their association with fertility, Inari were also worshipped as deities of “love methods” (*aihō no kami* 愛法神). During the pre-modern period, Lori Meeks notes that “the *miko* employed at shrines to Inari...appear to have specialized in rites aimed at helping women receive the love of men they desired.”<sup>58</sup> Fushimi Inari Taisha’s website notes that during the Heian period, Inari were especially popular regarding maternal health and matchmaking.<sup>59</sup> Inari remained popular throughout the medieval period (1185 – 1600 CE) and took on new attributes as Japanese society adopted new needs and desires, particularly relating to commercial and artisanal groups. By the end of the medieval period, Inari were worshipped in thousands of village shrines and many major religious institutions.<sup>60</sup>

The Edo period (1603-1868) saw Japan transfer from its agrarian roots to urban settings and new economic pursuits.<sup>61</sup> Inari remained significant to farmers, but they also drew in the merchant class, who were eager for commercial success. By the middle of the early modern period, foxes were fully sanctified as sacred creatures and had such a popular reputation that “most ordinary people commonly spoke of Inari as the Fox Deity.”<sup>62</sup> As the protector and promoter of modern business, Inari shrines experienced an unprecedented boom.<sup>63</sup> During this period, the role of Inari as healers who could provide this-worldly benefits to those suffering from illness was also especially pronounced.<sup>64</sup> A popular saying of the time went, “In Edo, shops

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<sup>56</sup> Casal, “The Goblin Fox,” 47.

<sup>57</sup> Heine, *Shifting Shape, Shaping Text*, 26-27.

<sup>58</sup> Lori Meeks, “The Disappearing Medium: Reassessing the Place of *Miko* in the Religious Landscape of Premodern Japan,” *History of Religions* 50.3 (February 2011): 244. *Miko* 巫女 or “shrine maidens” are young, virginal women who perform a variety of roles at shrines. In the context of Meeks’ work, *miko* acted more like mediums who had direct connections to the *kami*. In contemporary Japan, *miko* somewhat retain this function, such as their performance of sacred dances to the *kami* (*kagura* 神楽), but have come to take on more modern and material-based roles, such as greeting visitors and selling religious objects.

<sup>59</sup> Fushimi Inari Taisha. “Yoku aru goshitsumon [FAQ].” *Fushimi Inari Taisha to wa...* [Fushimi Inari Taisha is...]. <http://inari.jp/about/faq> (accessed November 21, 2014).

<sup>60</sup> Nakagawa, “Inari Worship,” 181.

<sup>61</sup> The Edo period is also referred to as the Tokugawa period and, less frequently, the beginning of the early modern period.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>63</sup> Heine, *Sacred High City*, 7.

<sup>64</sup> Ōmori, Keiko 大森恵子. (1994). *Inari shinkō to shūkyōminzoku* 稻荷信仰と宗教民俗 (*Religion, Popular Beliefs, and the Inari Cult*) (Tokyo, Iwata shoin. Rpt. 2000), 259-298.

called “Iseya” and Inari shrines, are as numerous as dog droppings.”<sup>65</sup> Several shrines were established in Edo (Tokyo) and its vicinity, several of which were erected as house protectors of samurai and merchants.<sup>66</sup> These house-protecting Inari are referred to as “mansion *kami*” or *yashikigami* 屋敷神 and comprise the categories of water, land, and tutelary deities for peasants, landowners, and aristocrats – rural and urban.<sup>67</sup> The spread of Inari shrines was in part due to samurai bringing them with them to Edo and the Inari spiritualists, such as *miko* (female spirit mediums), healers, and itinerant monks, who travelled and preached.<sup>68</sup> The spread of Inari worship during the Edo period was also due to the proliferation of popular cultural forms, including ghost stories, wood-block prints, and kabuki theatre. These forms of media served to increase urban dwellers’ knowledge of and familiarity with foxes. No longer limited to legends of rural folklore, foxes and tales of their unearthly powers were “retold and embellished in urban popular culture.”<sup>69</sup> The belief in foxes’ mastery over fire also contributed to the Edo boom of Inari shrines. Edo was the largest city in the world in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and most people lived in houses made of wood and paper, which made fire a great threat.<sup>70</sup> Since urban residents envisioned Inari as fox deities, “they attributed to [them] the supernatural, occult powers that ancient folk beliefs bestowed upon that animal.”<sup>71</sup> The popularity of Inari during this period was also strongly connected to the roles of Inari as [Buddhist] *dākinī* (*dakini* 荼吉尼), several of which are enshrined in sites created during the Edo period. Ōmori Keiko lists 19 different benefits (*goriyaku* 御利益) connected to *dakini*, which include 5 grains (harvests), business prosperity, curing illnesses, and protecting the home.<sup>72</sup>

In contemporary Japan, Inari have come to be associated with a wide variety of benefits, such as business prosperity, industry prosperity, family and traffic safety, and helping entertainers master their respective arts.<sup>73</sup> Although their relationship with rice remains well-

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<sup>65</sup> Yuki Miyamoto, “Fire and Femininity: Fox Imagery and Ethical Responsibility,” in *Imagination without Borders: Feminist Artist Tomiyama Taeko and Social Responsibility*, edited by Laura Hein and Rebecca Jennison (MI: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2010), 84; Bathgate, *The Fox’s Craft*, 113. “*Chōnai ni iseya Inari ni inu no kuso*”

<sup>66</sup> Hiromi Maeda, “Court Rank for Village Shrines: The Yoshida House’s Interactions with Local Shrines during the Mid-Tokugawa Period,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 29.3/4 (Fall 2002): 336.

<sup>67</sup> Ōmori, *Inari shinkō to shūkyōminzoku*, 61-137.

<sup>68</sup> Nakagawa, “Inari Worship,” 193, 211.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>70</sup> Miyamoto, “Fire and Femininity,” 85.

<sup>71</sup> Nakagawa, “Inari Worship,” 181.

<sup>72</sup> Ōmori, *Inari shinkō to shūkyōminzoku*, 391-392.

<sup>73</sup> Fushimi Inari Taisha, <http://inari.jp/about/faq>.



known, Inari are especially famous today for their ability to support business prosperity, especially in new business ventures.<sup>74</sup> As such, it is common for company employees to visit Fushimi Inari Taisha, especially on Inari's festival day, which is the first Horse day of the second month. Companies will often have Inari shrines on their premises and will invite Fushimi Inari Taisha priests to visit and perform rituals.<sup>75</sup> Business cards (*meishi* 名刺) are often found affixed to doors and railings of Inari shrines to attract their attention. Inari shrines receive patronage from a wide variety of companies, from small, local businesses, to internationally-known ones, including the video game company, Nintendo, and the cosmetics company, Shiseido. Whether it concerns matters of business or prosperity of the home, such as passing school exams and winning lawsuits, "the Japanese have systematically expanded the attributes of Inari-sama."<sup>76</sup>

### 1.2.3 The Prevalence of Inari

With such a wide range of benefits, Inari are appealing to people of all life situations. Inari's connection to agriculture continues to draw many farmers to their shrines. Because of their association with economic success, Inari are petitioned by a broad-based merchant class, which includes shopkeepers, salespeople, managers, executives, entrepreneurs, politicians, and performers.<sup>77</sup> By enabling livelihoods of all kinds, people of all classes are drawn towards Inari. With such a high degree of accessibility and popularity, Inari shrines of all sizes are found throughout Japan today: Shintō shrines, Buddhist temples, department store rooftops, parking lots, offices, parks, hotels, and geisha quarters.<sup>78</sup> With over 40,000 official shrines in Japan, Inari preside over 1/3 of all registered shrines.<sup>79</sup> When Inari's unofficial shrines are included, Inari have anywhere from 10-100 times this number.<sup>80</sup> This fact is staggering, considering that there are several other popular *kami*, including *Hachiman* 八幡, *Tenjin* 天神, and thousands of lesser-known *kami*. With these figures in mind, Inari are arguably the most popular and accessible deities of Japan. The shrines of Inari range from the massive Fushimi Inari Taisha, which is the headquarters of Inari worship, all the way to tiny Inari shrines found on rural roadways. With so many shrines and purposes accommodating a wide variety of needs and desires, Inari clearly

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<sup>74</sup> Reader and Tanabe, *Practically Religious*, 14.

<sup>75</sup> Ishii, "Secularization of Religion in the City," 203; Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, 75.

<sup>76</sup> Kamstra, "Who Was First?" 97-98.

<sup>77</sup> Heine, *Sacred High City*, 8.

<sup>78</sup> Heine, "From Rice Cultivation," 390; Kamstra, "Religion of Japan," 142.

<sup>79</sup> Heine, *Sacred High City*, 132.

<sup>80</sup> These 40,000 official shrines comprise over 1/3 of all Shintō shrines in Japan. Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel*, 1.

matter a lot to Japan. Enshrined and worshipped for more than a millenium, Inari have evolved alongside the needs and desires of the Japanese. While the tremendous appeal of Inari is visible through its tens of thousands of shrines, nowhere is it more apparent than Fushimi Inari Taisha.

### 1.3 Fushimi Inari Taisha

#### 1.3.1 Situating Fushimi Inari Taisha

Fushimi Inari Taisha is the founding location of Inari worship and is one of Japan's most prominent religious sites. Established in 711 CE, Fushimi Inari Taisha has played an integral role in Japan's political and religious history.<sup>81</sup> Fushimi Inari Taisha is located in the Fushimi ward of Kyoto at the southern tip of the *Higashiyama* 東山 (eastern mountain) mountain range. Under the name, *Heian-kyō* 平安京 (or *Miyako* 都), which means “capital of peace and tranquility,” Kyoto was the imperial capital of Japan from 794-1868 CE.<sup>82</sup> Kyoto is located in a valley with mountain ranges found on the north, east, and west sides of the city. The layout of Kyoto is a grid, which was based on the model of a Chinese capital. Although Kyoto has expanded beyond its ancient borders, this grid layout remains a key feature of the city. Kyoto is considered to be the religious “hot spot” of Japan and hub of traditional Japanese culture. With this being the case, Fushimi Inari Taisha is prestigious amongst thousands of religious and cultural sites.

Fushimi Inari Taisha is one of the most visually stunning shrines of Japan, which is largely due to its tens of thousands of vermillion *torii* 鳥居 (Shintō archway, literally “bird gate”) that form a tunnel-like effect on the main mountain path, which is roughly 4.2 kilometers long. Fushimi Inari Taisha is easily accessible by bus, car, and especially by train.<sup>83</sup> Considering Inari's ties to rice, it is no surprise that the Fushimi area is one of Japan's most famous sake-producing regions. Fushimi Inari Taisha spans over 1.4 square kilometers of shrine-owned land and is located on and around Inari Mountain, which is 700 feet above sea level.<sup>84</sup> Fushimi Inari Taisha's size is quite staggering when considering that most Inari shrines occupy only a few square meters.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Fushimi Inari Taisha, 神奈備 稲荷山、祈りの山 *Kannabi Inari yama, inori no yama* [Residence of the deity: Mount Inari, Mountain of Prayer] (Kyoto: Zaidanhōjin Fushimi Inari Taisha Kōmuhonchō, 2011), 57.

<sup>82</sup> During the Kamakura period (1185-1333), the functional capital of Japan was located in Kamakura, while the emperor remained in Kyoto.

<sup>83</sup> Fushimi Inari Taisha is accessible by the Keihan line's “Fushimi Inari” station and the JR (Japan Rail) line's “Inari” station.

<sup>84</sup> Kamstra, “Who Was First,” 98.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

At first glance, it is easy to see that this shrine is one of prestige. Fushimi Inari Taisha even boasts a quarterly publication, “O-Inari,” which has articles on the shrine’s history, testimonials, and lists of upcoming events and rituals.<sup>86</sup> From government bodies to everyday people, Fushimi Inari Taisha is overwhelmingly supported by Japanese society. Given its enormous size and status, it might be surprising to know that admission to Fushimi Inari Taisha is free and one can visit at any time. Such accessibility comes at a high price and Fushimi Inari Taisha generates an enormous amount of wealth by appealing to virtually everyone.

### 1.3.2 The Development of Fushimi Inari Taisha

Fushimi Inari Taisha was established on the first day of the horse of the second month of 711 CE. In the early 8<sup>th</sup> century text, *Yamashiro no Kuni Fudoki* 山城国風土記, the Hata 秦 clan are described as the founders of Inari worship.<sup>87</sup> Widely accepted as Korean in origin, the Hata “achieved considerable political and economic prominence after settling in the Kyoto region.”<sup>88</sup> First arriving in Japan during the Kofun 古墳 period (250-538 CE), the Hata settled in the Kyoto basin, where they became prominent figures during the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. In addition to establishing Fushimi Inari Taisha, the Hata founded Kōryūji 広隆寺 (603 CE), which is believed to be the oldest temple in Kyoto, as well as Matsunō Taisha 松尾大社 (701 CE).<sup>89</sup> According to a principal Shintō origin tale, Fushimi Inari Taisha was founded by Hata no Irogu 秦公伊呂具 (or Iroko) after he attempted to use *mochi* 餅 (pounded rice cake) as a target for archery practice. As he was about to shoot an arrow, the *mochi* transformed into a white bird, which flew to Mount Inari peak, transforming a second time into rice plants. Realizing he had angered the *kami*, Hata no Iroko built Fushimi Inari shrine to the *kami* of rice.<sup>90</sup> While this is the origin tale presented by the shrine, the legends of pre-Heian Inari activities are generally unreliable.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel*, 52.

<sup>87</sup> Miyamoto, “Fire and Femininity,” 75; Gerald Groemer, “The Arts of the Gannin,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 58.2 (1999): 290.

<sup>88</sup> Nakagawa, “Inari Worship,” 180; John K. Nelson, *Enduring Identities: The Guise of Shinto in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 2000), 96.

<sup>89</sup> Nelson, John K. *Enduring Identities: The Guise of Shinto in Contemporary Japan*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 2000), 96; Kiyoshi Nozaki, *Kitsune: Japan’s Fox of Mystery, Romance & Humor* (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1961), 10; Kazuhiko Yoshida, “Revisioning Religion in Ancient Japan,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 30.1/2 (2003): 4.

<sup>90</sup> Heine, *Zen Skin*, 99; Picken, *Essentials of Shinto*, 111. The Hata had considerable connections to the imperial family during the Heian period with their deities playing a major role in the development of the royal cult. For more information on the influence of the Hata and the influence of continental culture on Japanese religious identity, please refer to Michael Como, “Immigrant Gods on the Road to *Jindō*,” in *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie: Repenser le*

After Kyoto became the capital of Japan in 794 CE, Fushimi Inari Taisha was sponsored by Kūkai 空海 (alt. Kōbō Daishi 弘法大師, 774-835), the founder of Shingon 真言宗 Buddhism. In 823 CE, Kūkai became the abbot of Tōji 東寺 (796 CE), the Shingon temple which held pride of place to serve to protect the nation during the Heian period. Accordingly, Kūkai designated Inari as the protector deities of Tōji and enshrined them.<sup>92</sup> Owing to this association with Shingon esoteric Buddhism, Inari “came to be regarded as a particularly powerful *kami* with heightened powers of *riyaku* [benefits].”<sup>93</sup> This connection between Fushimi Inari Taisha and Tōji is referenced in the Buddhist account of Fushimi Inari Taisha’s founding. In this version, Inari appears to Kūkai in the form of an old man carrying rice sheaves. Inari promises to protect Tōji and assist in propagating his teachings if Kūkai dedicates a shrine to him.<sup>94</sup> Even though Kūkai was born 64 years after Fushimi Inari Taisha was founded, there is no doubt that the shrine greatly benefitted from his influence and his disciples. However, Tōji also benefitted from its connection to Fushimi Inari Taisha and, therefore, the Hata clan, whose religious centres were incredibly influential before and during the Heian period.<sup>95</sup>

Fushimi Inari Taisha was moved to the foot of Inari Mountain in 816 CE, where it became a prime spot for local farmers to worship.<sup>96</sup> During the Heian Period, Fushimi Inari Taisha quickly became the subject of imperial patronage. Due to the enormous wealth of the imperial clan and aristocrats of Kyoto, more money was available to support local religious sites. In the *Engishiki* 延喜式 (927 CE) or “Laws and Regulations of the Engi Era”, Fushimi Inari Taisha was recognized as “a Myojin Taisha [明神大社] an important shrine dedicated to a specific god.”<sup>97</sup> Fushimi Inari Taisha was one of the most heavily-sponsored sites, particularly as it was granted the top grade (*shōichii* 正一位) of government ranked shrines in 942. An even bigger accomplishment occurred in 965 when Emperor Murakami 村上天皇 listed 16 shrines to be given imperial support. By 1039, six more shrines were added and became known as the “22

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*shintō medieval (Rethinking Medieval Shintō) 16* (2006-2007), edited by Bernard Faure, Michael Como, and Iyanaga Nobumi. Paris, France; Kyoto, Japan: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 2009. Pp. 19-47.

<sup>91</sup> Heine, *Zen Skin*, 99. Fushimi Inari’s website has a short animation describing the shrine’s origin story at <http://inari.jp/about/story/>

<sup>92</sup> Heine, *Zen Skin*, 99; Picken, *Essentials of Shinto*, 111.

<sup>93</sup> Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, 38.

<sup>94</sup> Picken, *Essentials of Shinto*, 111.

<sup>95</sup> Como, “Immigrant Gods on the Road to *Jindō*,” 19-47.

<sup>96</sup> Nakagawa, “Inari Worship,” 180.

<sup>97</sup> Fushimi Inari Taisha, *Kannabi*, 59. The *Engishiki*

shrines” of Heian Japan.<sup>98</sup> These 22 shrines fall into three ranks and Fushimi Inari Taisha was listed among the upper seven, a great testament to its influence. In addition to being popular with the elites of Kyoto, Fushimi Inari Taisha was also gaining favour with men, women, and children of all classes.

Inari’s popularity among elite and commoner alike began to spread across Japan. With this spread began the process of *kanjō* 勧請 during the medieval period. *Kanjō* is the ceremonial transfer of a *kami*’s divided spirit to a new location. This divided spirit, or *bunrei* 分霊, is considered to be both permanent and alive. *Kanjō* is often likened to using a burning candle to light a new one, as the *bunrei* is not considered to be lesser in power. “Inari has been divided and re-enshrined with far greater ease and frequency than other Shintō *kami*,” Karen Smyers points out.<sup>99</sup> Through a process of ritual re-enshrinement, Fushimi Inari Taisha retained a certain level of control over how Inari worship spread and would be practiced. During the Ōnin War 応仁の乱 (1467-1477), Fushimi Inari Taisha suffered its largest setback when its shrine complex was burned down. This caused the loss of Fushimi Inari Taisha’s historical data, therefore the shrine’s complete history is difficult to determine.<sup>100</sup> However, 30 years later, the shrine was rebuilt and Fushimi Inari Taisha managed to retain its popularity and role as the most important site of Inari worship.<sup>101</sup> In 1589, the famous warlord and pious Inari devotee, Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣 秀吉 (1536/37-1598), made an enormous donation to the shrine, which resulted in the construction of Fushimi Inari Taisha’s *rōmon* 楼門, a two-storied front gate.<sup>102</sup>

Fushimi Inari Taisha witnessed some of its greatest growth during the Edo period (1603-1868), as Inari worship became especially prominent in the Edo (Tokyo) region. Inari travelled with the movement of the *daimyō* 大名 (feudal lords), “who often took their protective *kami* with them when they relocated.”<sup>103</sup> The stability of the Tokugawa 徳川 period caused the warrior class of samurai to be idle for over two centuries. During this era, the merchant class rose and adopted Inari along the way.<sup>104</sup> Increasingly associated with luck and removed from the context of Fushimi Inari Taisha, Inari were given a new and wide variety of attributes, such as protecting

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<sup>98</sup> Grapard, “Institution, Ritual, and Ideology,” 249-250; Fushimi Inari Taisha, *Kannabi*, 59.

<sup>99</sup> Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel*, 156.

<sup>100</sup> Heine, *Zen Skin*, 100.

<sup>101</sup> Fushimi Inari Taisha, *Kannabi*, 59.

<sup>102</sup> Picken, *Essentials of Shinto*, 116; Fushimi Inari Taisha, *Kannabi*, 59.

<sup>103</sup> Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel*, 20.

<sup>104</sup> Picken, *Essentials of Shinto*, 116.

warriors, preventing fires, and providing success in fishing. A popular saying in Osaka went, “*Byō Kōbō, yoku Inari* [病弘法、欲稲荷],” which means “For sickness pray to Kōbō [Daishi], for desires pray to Inari.”<sup>105</sup> More than agricultural deities, “Inari began to find a new identity and entered a phase of development associated with commerce and popular concerns rather than Imperial matters.”<sup>106</sup> Several of the attributes given to Inari in other parts of Japan found their way back to Fushimi Inari Taisha. During the Edo period, rank certificates proving affiliation with “brand name” shrines, including Fushimi Inari Taisha were in vogue.<sup>107</sup> The expansion of Inari across Japan only served to increase interest in Fushimi Inari Taisha, with many commoners making pilgrimages to the shrine.<sup>108</sup> It was during this time that Inari worship became inextricably linked with business prosperity, which is a major characteristic of Fushimi Inari Taisha today.

The nationalism of the Meiji period had a powerful effect on Fushimi Inari Taisha, as it caused the shrine’s records of worship to be eliminated, re-written, and distorted. Due to its Shingon Buddhist connections, Fushimi Inari Taisha functioned as a shrine-temple complex prior to the Meiji period. The Shingon temple known as Aizen-ji 愛染寺, located at the foot of Fushimi, was forcibly removed during the campaign of *shinbutsu bunri*, thus shifting the status of the institution to a strictly “Shintō” shrine.<sup>109</sup> In the midst of these huge changes, the shrine of Fushimi Inari Taisha’s three main deities was raised to the title of *kampei taisha* 官幣大社 in 1871, which is the highest rank given to national shrines.<sup>110</sup> From its inception in 711 to the present day, Fushimi Inari Taisha remains the hub of Inari worship in spite of the vast number of Inari shrines established within Japan. One marker of Fushimi Inari Taisha’s continued centrality is the *Motomiya Sai* 本宮祭, or the “original shrine festival.” This festival came into being in 1951 and takes place every July 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>. For this event, the shrine mails postcards, inviting those who have divided spirits of Inari to attend. Fushimi Inari Taisha’s mailing list has over

<sup>105</sup> Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel*, 22.

<sup>106</sup> Picken, *Essentials of Shinto*, 116.

<sup>107</sup> Maeda, “Court Rank,” 328. Affiliation with Fushimi Inari is achieved through the process of *kanjō*, which is the ritual re-enfranchisement of Inari’s spirit into new shrines. This has been a major source of income for Fushimi Inari. There are nine ranks in total, which range between \$120-\$4000 (Reader and Tanabe, *Practically Religious*, 146).

<sup>108</sup> Groemer, “The Arts of the Gannin,” 290.

<sup>109</sup> Heine, *Zen Skin*, 100. Although Aizen-ji is no longer in existence and Fushimi Inari Taisha is officially designated a “Shintō” shrine, several Buddhist elements remain present on the shrine grounds, particularly Buddhist statuary. For more on Aizen-ji, please refer to Ōmori, *Inari shinkō to shūkyōminzoku*, 576-610.

<sup>110</sup> Kamstra, “Who Was First?” 100; Picken, *Essentials of Shinto*, 117; Fushimi Inari Taisha, *Kannabi*, 59.

80,000 names and around 60,000 people donate lanterns for the event or request a prayer service.<sup>111</sup> Revolving around a return to the birthplace of Inari worship, this festival reinforces the centrality of Fushimi Inari Taisha.

### 1.3.3 Locating Inari Worship in Modern Shintō

Although they are immensely popular, Inari occupy an unusual position within Japanese religions. Writes Heine:

Despite its size, endurance, and pervasive cultural resonances, Inari/fox worship is generally classified as an example of *shinkō* 信仰, a cult based on folk beliefs and practices, as opposed to a *shūkyō* 宗教, a sect officially affiliated and registered with one of the major traditions, Shinto or Buddhism. Whereas a *shūkyō* has one main temple or shrine that oversees numerous branch institutions, while often allowing for tremendous regional diversity and flexibility of interpretation or application of doctrine, a *shinkō* refers to a loose-knit, diffused network of associations and amalgamations without a clear, official center of authority. Although it played such a key role early on, the Fushimi Inari shrines have remained at least quasi-independent.<sup>112</sup>

With over 40,000 shrines, Inari have significantly more shrines than any other type of *shinkō*.<sup>113</sup> Although Fushimi Inari Taisha does not manage every Inari shrine in Japan, it is nonetheless the primary center of Inari worship. While Fushimi Inari Taisha is a Shintō shrine, it operates differently than the “official” organized form of this religion, which centres on Ise Jingū and texts, such as the *Kojiki*.<sup>114</sup> Although the Inari cult “depends on official Shinto mythology for its symbols and rituals, the Inari deity is neither included in *Kojiki* nor fully sanctioned by Shrine Shinto.”<sup>115</sup> Owing to its position as Shintō, but not *shūkyō* (i.e. part of “official” Shintō), the Inari cult is unique. Considering how popular Inari are, they point to a variation of Shintō that more Japanese identify with. In order to better understand the unique roles of Inari and Fushimi Inari Taisha within Shintō, the previously discussed Protestant categories of “religion” would serve little purpose.<sup>116</sup> For example, the Hata are considered to be the founders of Inari worship, yet are not venerated like famous Buddhist monks, such as Kūkai or Dōgen 道元 (1200-1253). While sacred texts are most certainly used in the context of rituals performed to Inari, there is no

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<sup>111</sup> Fushimi Inari Taisha, *Kannabi*, 63; Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel*, 48.

<sup>112</sup> Heine, *Zen Skin*, 99-100. Fushimi Inari Taisha is a Shintō shrine, but does not recognize the official organizing body, *Jinja Honchō*.

<sup>113</sup> Heine, *Sacred High City*, 132.

<sup>114</sup> These will be discussed in greater detail in chapters two and three.

<sup>115</sup> Heine, “From Rice Cultivation,” 392. While Inari are not named in the *Kojiki*, some of the deities enshrined as Inari at Fushimi Inari Taisha are, such as Uka no Mitama no ōkami.

<sup>116</sup> These categories are found in the Introduction of this project.

officially designated scripture of the cult. And while Fushimi Inari Taisha distributes the divided spirits of Inari to various branch shrines, it has remained “quasi-independent” and does not act as a governing body, strictly enforcing how Inari might be worshipped.<sup>117</sup> How then, can these *kami* and this sacred space be examined in a fruitful way?

#### **1.4 Approaches to Inari in English Scholarship**

In spite of their overwhelming prominence within Japan, Inari are terribly underrepresented in English scholarship of Japanese religions. Before the 1990s, most scholarship related to Inari tended to center around folklore studies and classifying *kitsune* as a type of character found in Japanese folk stories and folk religious practices.<sup>118</sup> These studies are more or less descriptions of the variety of powers attributed to *kitsune* and tend to take a rather condescending tone towards the “superstitions” of the Japanese. Where Inari are mentioned in such texts, they are usually described in little detail, usually just as “the rice god.” All of this is in spite of Inari being the most widely worshipped *kami* in Japan. Since the 1990s, there has been slightly more recognition of Inari’s importance in English literature, but is still lacking overall. I will now briefly examine three scholars who are of particular interest to contemporary Inari studies and identify what some of the gaps are in this research.

##### **1.4.1 Karen A. Smyers – “Shamans,” Priests, and Locating Authority**

One of the most frequently cited English texts on the subject of Inari is *The Fox and the Jewel: Shared and Private Meanings in Contemporary Japanese Inari Worship* (1999), by Karen A. Smyers. This book is based on fieldwork and research Smyers conducted for her Ph.D. in Anthropology, which compares Fushimi Inari Taisha with Toyokawa Inari 豊川稲荷 of Toyokawa in Aichi prefecture. While this book provides some much needed information regarding the development of Fushimi Inari Taisha and Inari worship as a whole, Smyers emphasizes two points: 1) that “shamanic” practitioners are vital to Inari worship, and 2) that Inari worship fosters individualization in a manner that is uncommon in Japan and goes largely unrecognized by the Japanese. I take issue with both of these claims.

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<sup>117</sup> Heine, *Zen Skin*, 100.

<sup>118</sup> Examples include U.A. Casal, “The Goblin Fox and Badger and Other Witch Animals of Japan,” *Folklore Studies* 18 (1959): 1-93 and Alexander H. Krappe, “Far Eastern Fox Lore,” *California Folklore Quarterly* 3.2 (April 1944): 124-147.



Regarding the first argument, Smyers dedicates a large amount of attention and authority to a group of religious practitioners she identifies as “shamans.”<sup>119</sup> Smyers contrasts these “shamans,” who are usually female religious specialists who operate outside of the official boundaries of Inari worship, with the priests of Fushimi Inari Taisha. For Smyers, the priests are the stabilizers of the cult, dogmatic, obsessed with order, and not interested in popular practices, while the “shamans” revitalize Inari worship, are “mystical,” emotional, and in personal relationships with practitioners.<sup>120</sup> She argues that the Inari cult owes its form and continuing evolution to the opposition between priests and “shamans.” “Because of the considerable shamanic component within Inari worship,” writes Smyers, “new traditions easily come into being as direct commands of Inari. This fact alone undercuts much of the authority the priests try to claim.”<sup>121</sup> Smyers even goes as far as to attribute Inari shrine’s wealth to the activities of the “shamans,” neglecting the massive number of devotees who make donations, having never come into contact with these practitioners:

The highly personalized style of the shamans adds a warm human dimension to a sacred center that can be cold and bureaucratic or perhaps, hospitable but not particularly enthusiastic about Inari worship. The enormous revenues the centers receive from these popular energies allow the priests to conduct splendid rituals with all the proper robes and implements of the highest quality. They can afford to maintain the buildings, grounds, and gardens and upgrade the facilities.<sup>122</sup>

Clearly romanticizing the “shamans,” Smyers leaves readers with the idea that “shamans” are a normative and vital feature of Inari worship, while passing over the tremendous influence of the laity and denigrating the priests.<sup>123</sup>

Smyers’ second major argument is in regards to how Inari are personalized, which involves their being given specific names and functions for different people.<sup>124</sup> Smyers suggests

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<sup>119</sup> I am using quotation marks around “shaman,” due to this term’s highly problematic nature. Smyers does not provide an adequate discussion of what this term means to her and how it applies to the Japanese language. For readers who do not know any better, “shaman” is in the same category of terms, such as “witchcraft,” “animism,” and “magic,” all of which are terribly easy to misconstrue out of context. Treading in the realm of “mystical” terminology is dangerous. Smyers defines a shaman as “someone who has direct access to spirits and deities, the source of important information not usually available to human beings about healing, the otherworld, the fate of the dead, and the future. (39)”

<sup>120</sup> Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel*, 44, 71, and 175.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-71.

<sup>123</sup> Instead, it would be more accurate to view priests as facilitating practitioners’ needs through caretaking, whether it is looking after shrine grounds and statues or performing rituals to the deities. As such, they act as “mediators and interlocutors between worshipers and deities, opening up channels between them to promote the transmission of benefits (Reader and Tanabe, *Practically Religious*, 191).”

that this is a unique and significant aspect of Inari worship. Reader and Tanabe challenge this idea, stating that although “Inari is the most personalized in terms of having the largest number of personalized (“my own Inari”) forms, the characteristics she describes so well can also be seen in Kannon, Kōbō Daishi, Fudō, the Seven Gods of Good Fortune, and any number of other deities with whom people become intimate.”<sup>125</sup> Smyers also claims that Inari’s individualization reveals the diversity of Japanese religious practices, which the Japanese do not readily recognize. This is a bold assumption that the Japanese are unaware of individuality in religious practice and, overall, distracts from more important matters at hand regarding Inari worship.

Ultimately, Smyers’ focus on the “shamanic” practitioners of Fushimi Inari Taisha and the individualization found in Inari worship is distracting and misrepresentative. Not only does it take attention away from the millions of people who visit Fushimi Inari Taisha, it locates authority with a small group of people who actually have little influence on Inari worship. Smyers’ work would have been more fruitful if she had approached it from a religious studies point of view, particularly from the standpoint of *genze riyaku*. While Smyers does look a bit at popular practices, such as statue rubbing and the placement of bibs on fox statues, she does not linger there for very long.<sup>126</sup> She locates authority where it cannot exist and all the while misses out on the importance of the people who visit the shrine and do “religious” things, but do not identify as “religious.”

#### 1.4.2 Kang Xiaofei and Michael Bathgate – *Kitsune* in Continental and Literary Contexts

Kang Xiaofei is a professor and scholar of Chinese history, whose book *The Cult of the Fox: Power, Gender, and Popular Religion in Late Imperial and Modern China* (2006) presents the history of fox worship in Chinese popular religion. Continental culture has had an enormous effect on the ways in which Japanese have interpreted *kitsune*, particularly through texts and practices received from China. Kang explores the attributes of the *huli jing* 狐狸精 (“fox spirit”), such as shape-shifting (especially into women), possession, and bewitchment, all of which are associated with *kitsune* in Japan. Kang briefly discusses Inari worship towards the conclusion,

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<sup>124</sup> Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel*, 235.

<sup>125</sup> Reader and Tanabe, *Practically Religious*, 144.

<sup>126</sup> Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel*, 94.

stating “As Japanese scholars have long acknowledged, Chinese influence may have shaped the development of Inari worship.”<sup>127</sup> Nonetheless, she affirms that these influences have been modified and Inari worship is uniquely Japanese.<sup>128</sup> While Kang provides the necessary background of *kitsune*’s continental origins, Michael Bathgate explores the evolution of *kitsune*’s representation in Japanese literature. Bathgate is a religious studies scholar and professor, whose main area of research is Japanese religious literature. In his book, *The Fox’s Craft in Japanese Religion and Culture: Signification, Transformation and Duplicity* (2004), Bathgate examines *kitsune* from a literary point of view, highlighting their roles as shape-shifters “in a number of different social, historical and sectarian contexts, providing a perspective from which to understand the place of the fox in a larger religious and cultural world.”<sup>129</sup> Examples of some of these roles include *kitsune* as fox-wife, deity, giver of wealth, and malicious killer. While Bathgate does a convincing job conveying the multifaceted nature of *kitsune*, this wide scope leaves him with limited space to examine Inari. Where he does, he focuses on the Edo period, during which Inari’s meaning expanded from rice and family values, to also being identified with monetary wealth.<sup>130</sup> He also points out that at the end of the Edo period, Inari worship “became what was perhaps the single most widely-recognized focal point of fox imagery in Japan.”<sup>131</sup> Unfortunately, the discussion of Inari is rather brief and does not examine contemporary Inari worship. Additionally, by approaching foxes from a literary angle, Bathgate does not look at Japanese religious practices in any great depth. Nonetheless, Bathgate’s work provides an extensive examination of how the narratives of *kitsune* have evolved.

#### 1.4.3 Steven Heine – *Kitsune* in a Buddhist Context

Steven Heine is a Religious Studies scholar and professor who specializes in East Asian religions and cultures, particularly Japanese Zen Buddhism. Heine has written extensively on the thought of Dōgen, founder of the Sōtō 曹洞宗 Zen sect in Japan. In his work, Heine has used foxes as a tool to demonstrate the lived practices of Zen Buddhism, particularly how popular

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<sup>127</sup> Kang, *The Cult of the Fox*, 199. For more information on Chinese who think Japanese culture is derivative of China, please refer to Gifford, Rob, *China Road: A Journey into the Future of a Rising Power* (New York: Random House, 2007), 45-50.

<sup>128</sup> For example, Inari shrines are widespread in Japan and give foxes physical expression, through statues. In China, fox worship mostly occurs in the north and fox spirits are usually “in human form or simply have their names written on wooden tablets (*The Cult of the Fox*, 200).”

<sup>129</sup> Bathgate, *The Fox’s Craft*, xiv.

<sup>130</sup> This discussion takes place throughout chapter four of *The Fox’s Craft*, pages 101-136.

<sup>131</sup> Bathgate, *The Fox’s Craft*, 108.

worship affects traditional practices. As we saw through his chart on page 20, Heine identifies foxes as ambiguous creatures, both respected and feared, worshipped and exorcized.<sup>132</sup> Heine problematizes the Traditional Zen Narrative (TZN), which insists on the primacy of the Buddha and the “big tradition.” According to the TZN, *kitsune* are “bad,” at least in theory, but Heine demonstrates that they are “good” in practice, since they are skilled in providing this-worldly benefits. In some instances, such as the Sōtō Zen temple of Toyokawa, Myōgonji 妙厳寺, foxes eclipse the power and prominence of Buddhist deities. Inari worship is such a significant component of Myōgonji, that the temple is popularly referred to as Toyokawa Inari, even though it is an officially Buddhist institution.<sup>133</sup> The presence of *kitsune* at this institution is particularly visible through the *reikozuka* 霊狐塚 (spirit fox grove), where several dozen fox statues “are offered as memorials in honor of the deceased by replacing the traditional Buddhist stupa in commemorating death.”<sup>134</sup> Through examining cases such as Toyokawa Inari and the *reikozuka*, Heine aptly demonstrates the ways in which Shintō and Buddhism continue to overlap in contemporary Japan, all the while demonstrating *kitsune*’s remarkable ability to transcend boundaries. Heine’s work on *kitsune* is, by far, the most valuable English material on the subject. While he takes things in the right direction by looking at religious practices on the ground, Inari are used as a tool to discuss Buddhism, rather than looked at in their own right. Heine provides a necessary look at *kitsune* within the Buddhist tradition, but there remains a lack of information regarding foxes in an exclusively Shintō context.

#### 1.4.4 Framing Inari and Fushimi Inari Taisha

By investigating the approaches of Smyers, Bathgate, and Heine, it seems clear that there are many avenues which can be explored in the study of Inari. Smyers locates authority primarily within religious authorities and the institution, Kang provides a wealth of knowledge with regard to *kitsune*’s continental connections, Bathgate tackles the enormous range of pre-modern literature related to *kitsune*, and Heine approaches foxes as a tool with which to understand Buddhist practices. Initially, I had a difficult time deciding which way to go about framing Inari. One method was conducting a historiography of Fushimi Inari Taisha and contrasting it with

<sup>132</sup> Heine, “Putting the Fox Back,” 279; Heine, *Zen Skin*, 101.

<sup>133</sup> Myōgonji is a Buddhist temple, located in Toyokawa City, Aichi prefecture. Owing to the popularity of its enshrined Inari (referred to as Dakini-shinten), this temple is frequently called Toyokawa Inari.

<sup>134</sup> Heine, *Sacred High City*, 124.

other shrines, in order to emphasize how unique Inari worship is. I also considered approaching the shrine from the perspective of religious tourism. Yet another method was examining English scholarship on *kitsune* as a broad category and how such scholarship employed problematic frameworks of reference, such as “animism” and “shamanism.” While each of these angles have considerable value, I felt that none of them quite matched up to what I experienced at Fushimi Inari Taisha and what I wanted to explore about Japanese religions. By evaluating the works of scholars such as Smyers, Bathgate, and Heine, it is apparent that there is a need to investigate Inari from a perspective that focuses specifically on contemporary Shintō, how Inari are represented, and how everyday people engage with them inside *and* outside of officially designated sacred spaces.

In order to touch upon these areas of interest, I have decided to use a contemporary animated TV series (*anime*) called *Inari, Konkon, Koi Iroha* いなり、こんこん、恋いろは (hereafter, *Inakon*) as my primary source, which is based in and around Fushimi Inari Taisha. I have found this series to be extremely useful, as it provides the means through which to examine Inari in a new way and identify what is meaningful to the Japanese. While studies of Japanese religions, especially Buddhism, have tended to emphasize founders, religious texts, and doctrines, it is that much more important to examine *who* is behaving religiously, what they are doing, and what they find significant. *Inakon* is valuable for a number of reasons: it was created by a Japanese woman who grew up in the Fushimi ward, was produced for consumption by a general audience in Japan, and it was promoted by the shrine itself, as well as by the Kyoto tourism industry. While the story is fictional, the setting and the motivations exhibited are grounded in concerns that matter to the everyday lives of many Japanese. Examining this show will also help to address the lack of scholarship regarding contemporary Shintō. As cultural storytellers, media such as *Inakon* can reveal beliefs and values of the culture in which they are created. It seems undeniable that Inari and Fushimi Inari Taisha are significantly meaningful to the Japanese. *Inakon* highlights the significance of this sacred space and these clearly beloved deities.

## Chapter Two

### Navigating Japanese Religiosity in *Inari, Konkon, Koi Iroha*

(2014: Kansai Broadcasting System (KBS) Kyoto)

This chapter examines the animated television series, *Inari, Konkon, Koi Iroha*, which is set in and around Fushimi Inari Taisha. This animation points to several significant themes in Shintō that are given considerably little attention in Western scholarship on Japan and Japanese religions. As a comparably accurate depiction of contemporary Shintō worldview, *Inakon* highlights the importance of relationships, particularly romantic ones, friendships, family, and human connections with divinities. This animation provides a glimpse into the lives of a few people, particularly middle school girls, and how religiosity functions in their everyday lives, even if they are not overtly aware of it. Centered on this-worldly benefits, Shintō today provides a worldview and means by which to affect one's daily life and aspirations. This religious response to everyday matters challenges the notion that sacred and secular space are separate.

#### 2.1 *Inakon* Synopsis

*Inakon* is the original creation of Yoshida Morohe 吉田もろへ, a Kyoto artist who grew up in the Fushimi ward. First serialized in 2010 in manga (comic) format in the popular *Young Ace* magazine, *Inakon* was soon adapted as a televised animation, consisting of 10 episodes, which were first broadcasted by KBS from January 15, 2014 until March 19, 2014.<sup>1</sup> *Inakon* was also broadcasted by several television stations in other regions in Japan, as well as by two international companies.<sup>2</sup> Overall, this series has been widely-circulated throughout Japan with particularly strong emphasis in the Kyoto region.<sup>3</sup> Labelled a “love comedy,” *Inakon* has features typical of the *shōjo* 少女 (“little girls”) genre: a middle school setting, a young female

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<sup>1</sup> The animation was directed by Takahashi Toru □□□ and written by Machida Tōko□□□□. These 10 episodes are available to watch streaming on Funimation's website: <http://www.funimation.com/shows/inari-kon-kon/home>

<sup>2</sup> Funimation Entertainment (North America) and Madman Entertainment (Australia and New Zealand).

<sup>3</sup> There has been a great deal of fan response to this animation, particularly visible in fan art, as well as *Inakon*-themed *ema* (votive tablets hung at shrines).

protagonist, and a strong emphasis on love and friendships.<sup>4</sup> Most of this animation's characters fit the very common appearance of *shōjo* school girl characters, with large, expressive eyes and sailor style school uniforms.<sup>5</sup> While most of *Inakon*'s characters are the creation of Yoshida, Inari are represented through the *kami*, Uka 宇迦, who is represented as a beautiful, young woman. Uka is in fact one of the nine manifestations of Inari enshrined at Fushimi Inari Taisha, known as Ukanomitama (or Uka no mitama no mikoto). As the *kami* of grains and foodstuffs, Ukanomitama is considered to be the spirit of rice and, by extension, farming and sake – themes already popular by the mid- to late-Edo era. When Japanese refer to Inari, it is this manifestation that is most commonly being evoked: Inari, goddess of rice.<sup>6</sup> As recalled in Chapter One, many of Fushimi Inari Taisha's festivals and rituals are centered around the growth and harvesting of rice.<sup>7</sup> As the embodiment of fertility and rice, Uka is connected to abundance and the physical world.

*Inakon* follows the story of Fushimi Inari, a middle-school student who lives in Kyoto.<sup>8</sup> Inari is a shy, but generally cheerful girl, who has been struggling with her feelings for a boy named Tambabashi Kōji 丹波橋紅司 (Tambabashi is the name of a well-known station in the Keihan train line).<sup>9</sup> In Episode One, Inari is too shy to approach him and feels especially upset

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<sup>4</sup> *Inakon*'s official website declares it a ラブコメディ (“love comedy”). Please refer to Inari Konkon, “Sakuhin Shōkai - Hōsō Jōhō [Works – Broadcast Information],” *Sakuhin Shōkai*. <http://inarikonkon.jp/about/> (accessed November 20, 2014). It should be mentioned that the *shōjo* genre owes a great deal to Miyazaki Hayao 宮崎駿, the lead animator of Studio Ghibli and creator of blockbuster animated films, such as *Princess Mononoke* (1997) (*Mononoke Hime* もののけ姫) and *Spirited Away* (2001) (*Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi* 千と千尋の神隠し). Miyazaki's films typically feature young girls as the protagonists and have had tremendous influence on the ways in which young girls are perceived in Japanese popular media, thus popularizing themes apparent in *Inakon*.

Miyazaki's work has undoubtedly paved the way for digital animation, especially those of the *shōjo* genre.

<sup>5</sup> Protagonist, Inari Fushimi has long, dark hair, light skin, and reddish-brown eyes.

<sup>6</sup> Kadoya, Atsushi, “Ukanomitama,” *Encyclopedia of Shinto*, Kokugakuin University, May 12, 2005. Accessed August 20, 2015. <http://eos.kokugakuin.ac.jp/modules/xwords/entry.php?entryID=163>

<sup>7</sup> Ukanomitama is connected to other deities, particularly those related to foodstuffs. For example, since the 12<sup>th</sup> century, she has been connected to the *kami* Ugajin 鵜飼 and Buddhist deity Uka Benzaiten 鵜飼大明神 (Kadoya, “Ukanomitama”).

<sup>8</sup> The first references of names will be presented in the order of family name, first name. Aside from Inari, other characters will be called by their last names, as this is the way they are commonly referred to in the show.

<sup>9</sup> Many of the characters in *Inakon* are named after train stations of the Keihan line that goes through Kyoto city. This is particularly interesting considering that Keihan Electric Railway was involved in promoting *Inakon*. Keihan Railway is one of two major railways with a stop near Fushimi Inari Taisha. Keihan's “Fushimi Inari” station is depicted in *Inakon*, as well as the inside of its cars. Artwork from *Inakon* was featured on Keihan railway's train cars as part of a project between the Kyoto International Manga Anime Fair and Kyoto's municipal government. Train cars were decorated with characters and mounted *Inakon*-themed “head marks” on the front of the trains. *Inakon torafika* 鵜飼ふりか (store-fared cards) were also sold, which can be used for Kyoto's subways and buses. Both Keihan's “Fushimi Inari” station and Fushimi Inari Taisha displayed life-sized cardboard cut-outs of *Inakon* characters. In addition to Keihan, *Inakon* was sponsored by Kyoto's tourism industry and Fushimi Inari Taisha. This

when she sees him talking to the prettiest girl in class, Sumizome Akemi 墨染朱美. Assuming she does not stand a chance with Tambabashi, Inari visits a place where she has found comfort in since she was very young: Fushimi Inari Taisha. One day, while visiting the shrine, one of the local *kami*, Uka, senses the anguish in Inari's heart and responds.<sup>10</sup> Earlier that day, Inari had rescued a fox, named Kon コン, from falling into a stream at the shrine. Showing her gratitude, Uka offers to grant Inari any wish she desires. Since she is still dwelling on her feelings for Tambabashi, Inari wishes to become Sumizome. In her new form, Inari soon realizes that her wish was made in vain; Tambabashi does not have a crush on Sumizome. In fact, everyone is worried that Inari has gone missing. Distraught about her wish, she returns to the shrine to see Uka. Two *kitsune* overhear her crying and she asks them for her wish to be un-granted. Uka explains to Inari that she cannot grant another wish so suddenly, since it is not fair to other people who pray to the *kami*, including herself. Seeing how upset Inari is now, Uka gives Inari a portion of her divine power, thus allowing Inari to transform into any human form. After becoming much like a *kami* herself, Inari explores her newfound powers, while navigating relationships with her friends, family, and various *kami*, especially Uka.<sup>11</sup>

## 2.2 Everyday Matters - Relationships and Love

The story of *Inakon* is ultimately concerned with love and relationships. Each episode focuses on specific types of relationships, which range from romantic love to the close bonds between family, friends, as well as humans and *kami*. *Inakon* depicts the struggles and misunderstandings that frequently occur within such relationships and ultimately stresses that the best way to deal with such problems is through honesty and kindness (ethical messages typically proffered by religious groups). *Inakon* highlights the types of relationships and concerns that are at the heart of many religious practices in Japan.

### 2.2.1 Romantic Love

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is most likely due to opportunism and to encourage tourism, particularly domestic tourism. Considered the center of traditional arts in Japan, Kyoto has a thriving animation industry. There is a clear desire for Kyoto to be viewed as a hub for popular culture, both in new and old forms. Kyoto is known for Kabuki and Noh plays, performances by geisha, and the production of many traditional crafts, such as textiles. Kyoto is also the headquarters of the video game giant, Nintendo, is home to the Kyoto International Manga Museum, and hosts the Kyoto International Manga Anime Fair, which advertises upcoming professional productions and showcases student work from local university art programs.

<sup>10</sup> Fushimi Inari Taisha lists Uka's full name as Ukanomitama (no *kami*) □□□□□□. Please refer to their website at <http://inari.jp/about/saijin/>.

<sup>11</sup> A human acquiring *kami*-like power is a fairly common theme in anime. Examples include, *Sailor Moon* (□□□□□□□□□□, *Bishōjo Senshi Sērā Mūn*), *Kamisama Kiss* (□□□□□□□□, *Kamisama Hajimemashita*), *Death Note* (□□□□□, *Desu nōto*), and *Noragami* (□□□□, *Noragami*).



The primary romantic relationship of *Inakon* is that between Inari and Tambabashi. Episode One revolves around Inari's feelings for Tambabashi and how Uka is able to respond to Inari's desire to be with him. Inari and Tambabashi's relationship develops gradually and, by the end of the series, they are finally able to admit their feelings for one another. Episode Four does a particularly good job of showing this slow development. In this episode, Inari attends *Motomiya-sai*, a summer festival at Fushimi Inari Taisha, with Sumizome, Sanjō Keiko 三条京子, and Marutamachi Chika 丸太町ちか. Inari eventually meets up with Tambabashi and they walk around the shrine grounds, both unbearably nervous, but happy. This innocent love is much more along the lines of the term *suki* 好き, which can mean not only "love," but also "liking" or "fondness."<sup>12</sup>

In the show, Inari's relationship with Tambabashi is significantly strained in two contexts. The first situation is when Inari makes the assumption that he and Sumizome have feelings for one another. This eventually proves to be unfounded, but Inari is paralyzed by the thought of confronting Sumizome, let alone confessing her feelings to Tambabashi. The second situation occurs when Inari's classmate, Momoyama Minami 桃山南 asks Inari to deliver a love letter to Tambabashi.<sup>13</sup> Again, Inari feels unable to take charge of the situation. In an unfortunate turn of events, Inari loses the love letter and shape-shifts into Momoyama to confess her feelings. Tambabashi turns her down, but the real Momoyama is unaware of this and comes to believe that Inari threw the letter away. Due to misunderstandings, Momoyama's friends harass Inari and her group of friends in Episode Nine. Both situations are ultimately resolved through explanations and apologies, but ultimately reflect that love can be a complicated ordeal for those involved. Uka is able to provide Inari with her divine power and support, but it is also necessary for Inari to do her part in pursuing Tambabashi. With Uka as her friend and guide, Inari is able to summon the courage to meet her challenges, whether it is standing up for her friends or pursuing Tambabashi's love.

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<sup>12</sup> This is opposed to *ai* 愛, which is more along the lines of romantic love. While Inari and Tambabashi's feelings for one another might develop into this kind of love, *ai* is a much stronger term than *suki* and is not used casually. Admissions of "love," especially between younger people tends to be proclaimed through expressions like, "□□□□ (*daisuki desu*)," which means something along the lines of, "I like you very, very much." The prevalence of *suki* is particularly obvious in Japanese popular music, such as in song titles (e.g. *Suki na hito* □□□□ ["favourite person"] by Kiroro □□□ and *Kimi no Suki na Hito* □□□□□□ ["your favourite person"] by Sakamoto Maaya).

<sup>13</sup> This occurs in Episode Seven at 11:25.

Paralleling Inari and her very human feelings, Uka is depicted as someone struggling with her own love life. Like Inari, Uka is rather awkward, though good-natured and kind-hearted. Uka's aunt, Amaterasu and Uka's mother, Kamu Oichi Hime 神大市比売 are desperate for her to marry, but Uka does not share their enthusiasm. Uka's potential suitors are all after her for one reason: she is a first-rank *kami*.<sup>14</sup> Uka longs to be loved for who she is, rather than what she can provide. In Episode Three, Miya 宮 (meaning shrine), a kami associated with *shōbai* 商売 (“business prosperity”), describes to Inari how Uka has been sought after for her rank, as opposed to genuine love.<sup>15</sup> “We don’t know how to have fun anymore,” Miya recalls Uka telling her. Seeing how unhappy she was, Miya introduced Uka to dating simulation video games (*otome* 乙女), which she quickly became addicted to.<sup>16</sup> As a bit of an otaku or “geek” herself, Uka has an endearing nature that makes her easy to sympathize with.<sup>17</sup> Since she felt genuinely appreciated by the men in the dating simulations, Uka began to wonder if there were men in the human world who could similarly appreciate her. Uka's curiosity about human men translates into her interest in Inari's older brother, Touka 燈日. While nothing explicit happens between them, they play video games together and have some mild flirtations, although they are both bashful about it. By presenting Uka in such a human way, *Inakon* encourages viewers to carry such meanings into how they conceptualize Inari in real life. *Kami* have needs, desires, and flaws, just like humans do. They can care deeply about humans and their problems or concerns, especially in the case of Uka. *Kami* such as Uka can experience or at least desire love themselves, which makes them that much easier to approach.

### 2.2.2 Friendship

Inari's main group of friends are Marutamachi, Sanjō, and Sumizome, although Sumizome is newest to the group. As mentioned in the earlier synopsis, Inari is initially jealous of Sumizome, because she assumes that Sumizome likes Tambabashi and fears that he likes her in return. Inari soon learns that such is not the case and gets to know Sumizome better,

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<sup>14</sup> In Episode Two (at the 8:30 mark), Amaterasu challenges Inari to not shape-shift for one day. If she fails, Uka will be forced to marry. Episode Eight follows Uka's marriage interviews, forced upon her by her mother.

<sup>15</sup> Miya's full name is Ōmiya no me no ōkami 大宮の御方. She is one of nine manifestations of Inari enshrined at Fushimi Inari Taisha. Please refer to Fushimi Inari Taisha's website at <http://inari.jp/about/saijin/> for more details.

<sup>16</sup> Uka is seen playing video games in six of *Inakon*'s ten episodes. *Otome* means “little girl” and is the term used for a class of dating simulation video games marketed towards women.

<sup>17</sup> *Otaku* is a somewhat derogatory term commonly used to refer to people who are obsessed with different interests, especially anime, manga, and video games. *Otaku* are often viewed as people who are socially awkward and not in touch with reality.

discovering that she is a lot different from how she imagined. As the “prettiest” girl in school, Inari assumed that Sumizome was very popular and confident. Contrary to this, Inari discovers that Sumizome has few friends, is actually quite self-conscious, and even enjoys *shōjō manga* 少女, which is something stereotypically associated with the socially awkward.<sup>18</sup> Episodes Five and Six follow Inari and her three friends on their trip to the beach. Inari, Sanjō, and Marutamachi have been friends for a long time, but Marutamachi has difficulty opening up to Sumizome, making the assumption that they have nothing in common and worrying that Sumizome thinks she is too popular or pretty to be friends with her. At the same time, Sumizome senses Marutamachi’s coldness and does not know how to be friends, even though she would like to. With Inari’s help and the aid of Uka’s divine power, the two girls realize that they can get along and even have some things in common, such as enjoying *manga*. The message of these two episodes is that we should not judge others before we try to know them. Misunderstandings between people happen all the time. While issues such as these are seemingly mundane, matters of the heart are taken very seriously in stricter religious contexts.

Although Uka is a *kami* and has certain powers over Inari, their relationship generally functions like a friendship between sisters (rather than goddess and human), as they assist one another throughout the series. As described in the synopsis, Inari rescues Kon from falling into a stream. Out of gratitude, Uka grants Inari the ability to shape-shift. In Episode Eight, Uka’s mother forces her to meet potential suitors. Inari stands up for Uka’s modern desire to marry who she wants, even if it means challenging Uka’s family and other very powerful *kami*. “Don’t you ever think about Mistress Uka’s feelings? Idiots!” Inari yells at them. Deeply grateful, Uka tells Inari, “Our life has been nothing but happy ever since we became friends.” Throughout the series, Uka gradually weakens, due to having given Inari a portion of her divine power. In spite of this, Uka allows Inari to keep her own power, so long as it can assist her. In the tenth and final episode, Uka is trapped in a cave by Amaterasu (the infamous Sun Goddess) and is fading away because she gave some of it to Inari. Inari does whatever it takes to rescue her, rushing to the cave and refusing to give up on her, even when it seems impossible to help. While Inari might not see it as such, her actions reflect deep devotion on a religious level. Uka and Inari are frequently shown getting together to visit. Uka is overjoyed to hear about Inari’s life, especially her growing relationship with Tambabashi. Uka and Inari support each other to the greatest

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<sup>18</sup> *Shōjo manga* is a genre of comics/graphic novels geared towards “young girls” (*shōjo*).

extent and can feel this support. “The warmth I feel every time I stop by [the shrine], that’s mistress Uka,” Inari states in Episode Two. Because Inari still has a portion of Uka’s divine power, Uka and Inari are able to sense each other’s emotions. For example, when Inari is enjoying herself with Tambabashi at the *Motomiya-sai* festival, Uka feels her joy and is extremely happy for it. Inari is similarly grateful for her connection to Uka and vows, “Now it’s my turn to help her find happiness, too...”<sup>19</sup> Although Uka’s divine power allows Inari to shape-shift, it is also the reason that Inari is able to physically see Uka (whereas most other humans cannot). Not wanting their close friendship to end, Uka’s power dwindles until it is up to Inari to save her. Because it is so intimate and informal, the relationship between Uka and Inari is powerful. Uka does not treat Inari like an inferior, but instead as a cherished companion. Inari and Uka’s strong bond entails that humans and *kami*, especially Inari, are mutually dependent upon one another. By possessing the name, Inari Fushimi, as well as acquiring Uka’s power to shape-shift, Inari demonstrates a remarkable intersection between human and *kami*.

While *Inakon*’s emphasis on romance and relationships is partly due to its *shōjō* manga style, this emphasis is nonetheless explicitly tied to the significance placed upon these matters in Shintō, today. As explained in Chapter One, Shintō beliefs and practices often revolve around calendrical and life events, such as marriage and having children. Shintō also provides a ritual apparatus with which to influence daily life, particularly through the tools and practices related to *genze riyaku*. Connections to other people and to the *kami* are important and generally require effort and care to maintain. *Inakon* stresses that relationships are fragile, yet precious things, whether they are between humans or humans and *kami*.

### 2.3 Depicting the *Kami*

The *kami* of *Inakon* can be located in two rather distinct groups: 1) the *kami* of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* and 2) those *kami* associated with Inari worship. Composed in the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE, the *Kojiki* or “Record of Ancient Matters,” and *Nihon Shoki* 日本書紀 or “Chronicles of Japan,” cover the events from the creation of Japan by the male and female deities, Izanagi 伊邪那岐 and Izanami 伊邪冉尊, to the creation of Japan’s “myriad” deities, the most important of which is Amaterasu, the sun goddess, and how this divine lineage eventually passed down to the human realm with the current imperial line.<sup>20</sup> These narratives tend to be regarded as Shintō’s

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<sup>19</sup> Inari says this in Episode Four at the 22:20 mark.

<sup>20</sup> Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, 23-24.

most significant texts, as they are often referred to as the “primal” tales of the *kami* and humankind. *Inakon* acknowledges this by including some of these deities from the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* tales, most importantly, Amaterasu.<sup>21</sup>

*Inakon* presents Amaterasu as Uka’s “crusty” aunt, who is well on in years. Amaterasu of *Inakon* is portrayed with short black hair, deep frown creases on her forehead, as well as very long earlobes (typically associated with Buddhist iconography), which hang below her shoulders. Amaterasu is of the opinion that humans and *kami* should not become too deeply involved, lest they both get hurt. Towards the end of the series, she locks Uka away in a cave to keep her away from Inari, to whom she feels Uka has become too involved.<sup>22</sup> Along with most of the other *kami*, Amaterasu resides in *Takamagahara* 高天原, the celestial plains, where she deals with human affairs remotely.<sup>23</sup> Also appearing in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* is Uka, the daughter of Susano-o 須佐之男, Amaterasu’s brother, and Kamu Ōichi Hime.<sup>24</sup> Uka’s parents, as well as her brother Toshi and a young female *kami*, Miya also appear in the show.<sup>25</sup> Although the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* are often regarded as the main influencing texts of Shintō by *Jinja Honchō*, most Japanese have not ever read them.<sup>26</sup> This lack of identification with sacred texts, such as the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, is reflected in Amaterasu’s portrayal in *Inakon* and seems to signal a deeper tension between formal and popular religion.

Uka is the primary face of Inari in *Inakon*. As quite the opposite of Amaterasu, *Inakon* depicts Uka as a young, blonde woman with golden eyes and a voluptuous body.<sup>27</sup> She is dressed in clothing like a *miko* with red *hakama* 袴 (long, divided skirt) and a white *haori* 羽織 (kimono

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<sup>21</sup> The National Association of Shintō Shrines or *Jinja Honchō* are the organizing body that emphasize texts, such as the *Kojiki* and assert the centrality of Amaterasu. While it is the largest organizing body, it is not the only major manifestation of Shintō. This theme will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Four.

<sup>22</sup> The “heavenly cave” is referencing the cave Amaterasu is said to have shut herself away in when her brother, Susano-o, was causing trouble for her (found in the *Kojiki*).

<sup>23</sup> In *Inakon*, the plains appear in an idealized style of old Japan with high-rising pagodas and regal, traditional architecture.

<sup>24</sup> These texts “identify Inari as a manifestation of Uka no Mitama no Kami, Toyouke Ōkami, Ukemochi no Kami, and several other exalted Shinto gods whose names...refer in some fashion to the production of grains.” Nakagawa, “Inari Worship in Early Modern Osaka,” 180.

<sup>25</sup> Toshi is short for Ōtoshi no kami, while Miya is short for Ōmiya no me no kami. Both are associated with grain and are also two of the aspects of Inari enshrined at Fushimi Inari Taisha. More specifically, Ōtoshi no kami is considered a guardian of fields and the annual harvest (Heine, “From Rice Cultivation to Mind Contemplation,” 392). In Episode Three of *Inakon*, Miya introduces herself as the *kami* of *shōbai*, which is “business prosperity,” one of Inari’s most popular attributes today.

<sup>26</sup> The *Kojiki* is written in an especially difficult to understand hybrid script of Chinese and 8<sup>th</sup> century Japanese.

<sup>27</sup> Her hair and eyes are likely that colour, because foxes can have a golden sheen to their fur. This golden colour is also the same colour as rice sheaves when they are ready for harvest.

jacket).<sup>28</sup> At Fushimi Inari Taisha, Uka no mitama no ōkami is the primary form of Inari, enshrined along with eight other deities. Most worshippers are typically unfamiliar with the names of these *kami* and simply refer to them as Inari.<sup>29</sup> Although the Inari cult “depends on official Shinto mythology for its symbols and rituals, the Inari deity is neither included in *Kojiki* nor fully sanctioned by Shrine Shinto.”<sup>30</sup> As such, Uka is part of both worlds: *Jinja Honchō* Shintō and local Inari worship. In spite of being part of both, *Inakon* emphasizes Uka’s presence within Fushimi Inari Taisha.

Uka’s attitude towards humans is significant because it is one that is both motherly and friendly. She longs to be a part of their world and share in their experiences. By giving Inari part of her divine power, Uka risks her own well-being and position as a *kami*. Amaterasu sees that Uka has become too involved with Inari and acknowledges that this is dangerous: human lives are finite, while the *kami* are more or less eternal. *Kami* and humans cannot become too involved, lest anyone get hurt. *Kami* are allowed to care for humans, but should not get pulled into the mundane realm of human needs. If they did, they would not be able to fulfill their duties.

Amaterasu and Uka appear to be placed in contrast on purpose. Amaterasu is rather cool when it comes to relationships with humans, while Uka is thrilled to be so close to Inari. While Amaterasu is physically removed from human affairs, operating instead from the heavens, Uka is present at Fushimi Inari Taisha, actively engaged with those who visit. This opposition between Amaterasu and Uka can also be viewed as opposition between Ise Jingū and Fushimi Inari Taisha, *Jinja Honchō* Shintō opposed to the more independent worship of Inari. The Ise tradition is the most commonly represented form of Shintō, with over 80,000 official shrines. After the Second World War, *Jinja Honchō* was formed and considers Ise Jingū to be the most significant shrine in Japan. Inari shrines do not endorse this format and instead, operate independently.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> In Episode Eight, Amaterasu and Uka’s mother force her to meet prospective mates. In this episode, Uka is dressed more provocatively, with her large bosom on display. Her youthful and voluptuous body perhaps reflects her role as a deity associated with fertility.

<sup>29</sup> Initially, there were three deities comprising Inari: Uka no mitama no ōkami, Satahiko no ōkami, and Ōmiya no me no ōkami. Each of these aspects of Inari are enshrined on one of Inari Mountain’s three peaks, which are known as *mitsugamine*.<sup>29</sup> Uka no mitama no ōkami is the primary form of Inari. In 1266 CE, six other major deities were added, two as Tanaka no ōkami 田中大神 and four as Shi no ōkami 四大神. For more details, please refer to Kamstra, “Who Was First,” 100.

<sup>30</sup> Heine, “From Rice Cultivation,” 392. What Heine refers to as “Shrine Shinto,” I will refer to as *Jinja Honchō* (National Association of Shinto Shrines) Shintō. The contrast between *Jinja Honchō* Shintō and Inari worship will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

<sup>31</sup> *Jinja Honchō*, “Jinja Honcho,” *Jinja Honcho – Association of Shinto Shrines*.  
<http://www.jinjahoncho.or.jp/en/honcho/index.html> (accessed November 24, 2014).

Despite the more formal perspective of *Jinja Honchō* Shintō, Inari worship is massively popular. Based on its depictions of Amaterasu and Uka, it appears that *Inakon* is trying to assert Inari and Fushimi Inari Taisha over Amaterasu and Ise Jingū, popular religion over formal religion, even if it appears to be making a playful jab.

While Uka is the primary form of Inari represented in *Inakon*, the shape-shifting foxes she is portrayed with are more than just her companions. Since we know that Inari are fox deities, and foxes are synonymous with Inari, Inari are ubiquitous in Japan. In *Inakon*, the *kitsune* might appear to be Uka's messengers. While the priests of Fushimi Inari Taisha take the position that Inari are not actually foxes, laypeople tend to visualize them as such.<sup>32</sup> Regardless of this position, Fushimi Inari Taisha and all other Inari shrines present *kitsune* as their primary icons (*honzon* 本尊). At Fushimi Inari Taisha, there are thousands of fox statues placed throughout the shrine grounds, whether they are flanking *torii* or small sub-shrines. In *Inakon*, *kitsune* are portrayed physically coming out of these statues, when the need arises. In actual practice, these statues are considered to be the dwelling-places of the *kami*. These statues are considered to be inhabited, which is why people make offerings to them, such as food placed in front of them and red bibs tied around their necks.<sup>33</sup> Through these offerings, humans seek to enter a relationship of reciprocity – host and guest – forming close bonds with the *kami*.

Depicting *kitsune* as alive and abundant at Fushimi Inari Taisha reinforces the common belief by many Japanese that foxes are integral to Inari worship. Fushimi Inari Taisha is an icon-driven site, which is particularly interesting considering its status as a Shintō shrine. Most shrines do not have *kami* statues, although animal statues are common.<sup>34</sup> However, in the case of *kitsune*, their statues function differently than, for example, the seated bull and cow statues of Kitano Tenmangū 北野天満宮 (supporting *kami* animals). *Kitsune* represent Inari, whereas the bulls

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<sup>32</sup> Fushimi Inari Taisha. “Yoku aru goshitsumon [FAQ].” *Fushimi Inari Taisha to wa...* [Fushimi Inari Taisha is...]. <http://inari.jp/about/faq/> (accessed November 21, 2014).

<sup>33</sup> While various types of offerings are made, *kitsune* statues are often given *inari zushi*, which are fried tofu pouches filled with sushi rice. Foxes are commonly believed to have a fondness for fried tofu (*abura age* 油揚げ). The bibs or *yodarekake* 涎掛け are tied around the statues' necks, usually as petition for help or as thanks. While Heine says that the bibs are given to keep the foxes' coats clean, while they eat their fried tofu, red bibs are also associated with the bodhisattva, Jizō 地藏 (Heine, *Sacred High City*, 7). One of Jizō's primary associations is as a guardian of children, especially those who have passed away before their parents.

<sup>34</sup> The *shintai* □□ or “*kami* body” are physical objects worshipped at Shintō shrines, most commonly found in the form of the three sacred objects of Japan: the mirror, sword, and curved jewel.

and cows do not represent Tenman-Tenjin 天満天神 (god of learning).<sup>35</sup> While it is common for animal statues to be given offerings, such as bibs and food, *kitsune* are easily the most popular recipients. They are Inari, after all.

Ultimately, *Inakon* carries the message that *kami*, especially Inari, return love when it is shown to them, just like a human relationship.<sup>36</sup> As a female *kami*, Uka embodies Inari's essence as a class of deities that are both emotional and close in proximity to humans. In the final episode of *Inakon*, Uka and Inari can no longer see one another after Inari returns Uka's divine power. In spite of this, Uka wishes to continue watching over Inari and other humans. As they part, Uka tells Inari, "We'll still be watching over you, just like always." In one of her last lines of the show, Inari says to Uka, "Even if I can't see you, I know you're there." Although Uka and Inari cannot be together forever, they can be grateful for knowing each other, at least for a short time. Inari's case demonstrates that reciprocity between humans and *kami* is real. Laypeople are rewarded by the *kami* not only by praying, but by how they conduct themselves in their everyday lives. The *kami* are always watching over, especially at shrines. By giving a face to one of Inari's many bodies (i.e. Uka), *Inakon* gives laypeople a new focal point. Instead of just seeing *torii*, laypeople might imagine Uka sitting on top of them, protecting and guiding them. *Inakon* reinforces the idea that the shrine is intimately inhabited. There is just cause for leaving offerings of food, money, and prayers. These offerings are warmly received by Inari. This is perhaps a reflection of how laypeople already view the shrine. However, it might also encourage those who are uncertain, who have felt that perhaps the *kami* were not around.

## 2.4 Fushimi Inari Taisha – Representing Sacred Space

It is common for Japanese animations to feature religious themes and locations, but few come close to *Inakon*'s treatment of Fushimi Inari Taisha. *Inakon* is unique in that the show is set in and around a shrine located in real time and space and devotes a great deal of time to

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<sup>35</sup> This is the name given to the famous bureaucrat and scholar, Sugawara no Michizane 菅原 道真 when he was deified.

<sup>36</sup> This kind of loving and spiritual relationship that is common with Inari is not necessarily so with other *kami*. Aside from Inari, the most popular *kami* are those found in Shrine Shintō (aka NAS [National Association of Shintō Shrines] Shintō), which centers on Amaterasu. Although Amaterasu is well-known and Ise is a popular shrine, they are rather difficult to be close to in the same way as Inari. One major instance of this is the layout of Ise Jingū, where the shrine of Amaterasu is mostly hidden by large fences and photographs are prohibited. Amaterasu is literally untouchable. While the inner sanctum of Inari is only accessible by priests, it is visible to laypeople and Fushimi Inari Taisha is covered in donations of the laity (e.g. *torii*, fox statues).



exploring this shrine, rather than simply using it as a set piece. Aside from Uka's main dwelling, *Inakon* takes special care to represent Fushimi Inari Taisha accurately.<sup>37</sup> There is little that is fictional about the shrine's physical depiction. For example, there are over 10,000 *torii* covering the shrine's mountain pathway, thousands of fox statues, and the regal architecture of the main worship halls is as exquisite as it seems in animated form.<sup>38</sup> *Inakon* lingers on the shrine setting, inviting viewers to participate in a virtual sort of pilgrimage. For many Japanese who visit the shrine, *Inakon* also provides the ability to enliven the experience of visiting the shrine. The attention given to the shrine's detail, as well as the emphasis on rich, bright colours (particularly red/vermillion, a colour strongly connected to Inari) highlights the significance attached to warmth, life, and a general sense of happiness throughout the show.

In direct contrast to scholars, such as Smyers, *Inakon* presents sacred space from the perspective of laypeople, particularly young teenagers.<sup>39</sup> While there are certainly some people who visit the shrine for exclusively religious or touristic purposes, *Inakon*'s emphasis is on those who visit the shrine for a mix of recreational and religious purposes. The show does not emphasize religious specialists, such as priests, nor does it focus on a "proper" way to behave at the shrine. There is a place for formal ceremonies and scriptural readings, but instead, *Inakon* highlights some of the ways in which laypeople might view and engage with sacred space. Fushimi Inari Taisha is a place for fun. Inari is frequently shown socializing with her friends at the shrine. In Episode Four, Inari and her friends attend one of Fushimi Inari Taisha's festivals, *Motomiya-sai*. At the festival, thousands of red paper lanterns illuminate the shrine grounds. Typical of shrine festivals, there are games to play, food vendors, and an overall atmosphere of having fun. It also provides Inari with an opportunity to wear a pretty *yukata* 浴衣, a summer kimono, in front of Tambabashi. It is a setting for love to blossom in. Fushimi Inari Taisha is a place to find solace. When Inari is upset about Tambabashi in Episode One, she goes to the shrine to calm down. The *kami* are there to comfort in times of need. Fushimi Inari Taisha is a

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<sup>37</sup> I state this based on my many visits to the shrine. The representation of Fushimi Inari Taisha is not only physically accurate, but also captures the atmosphere of the shrine very well, such as the sense of wonder travelling through the mountain path.

<sup>38</sup> The *torii* of Fushimi Inari Taisha are mostly painted vermillion, a colour associated with not only love, but also warding off evil.

<sup>39</sup> This is also in contrast to John K. Nelson, who is one of few scholars who has written extensively on contemporary Shintō, focusing particularly on the activities of priests and shrine caretakers. Two of his most influential works are *Enduring Identities: The Guise of Shinto in Contemporary Japan* (2000) and *A Year in the Life of a Shinto Shrine* (1996).

place where the *kami* are present. Throughout the series, Uka and her foxes are depicted as physically present (though invisible to most), watching over the shrine's visitors. Fox statues, which are commonly found flanking the *torii* gates and shrines, are considered to be inhabited by actual *kitsune*. In the tenth and final episode of the series, *kitsune* rise up out of the shrine's thousands of statues, readying themselves to help Inari save Uka.<sup>40</sup> The *kami*, whether they be Uka or *kitsune*, are present within the shrine and ready to assist the laypeople with their concerns. By virtue of depicting Fushimi Inari Taisha as a place of enjoyment, spiritual revitalization, and dreams coming true, *Inakon* encourages viewers to attach these meanings to the shrine if they do not already. In addition to Fushimi Inari Taisha, *Inakon* depicts the community that thrives around this shrine: the Fushimi Ward of Kyoto. As highlighted in Chapter One, Fushimi Inari Taisha is a vital component of the Fushimi ward, providing a multipurpose space of religious activity, commerce, recreation, and much more. Through its depiction of the shrine and lives connected to the localized shrine, *Inakon* captures the degree to which religious activity exists not only in officially designated sacred spaces, but in everyday life as well.

## 2.5 Japanese Religiosity in *Inakon*

### 2.5.1 Representing Shintō in *Inakon*

Although Fushimi Inari Taisha is officially considered to be a Shintō shrine, *Inakon* does not offer much in the way of religious dogma. The context of the shrine and its activities are knowledge that viewers, including children, are expected to already possess. As pointed out earlier, many Japanese do not engage with religious texts and no set of texts holds authority within Shintō practice, surely not the *Kojiki* or *Nihon Shoki*. Instead, people participating in activity that would be considered “religious,” approach sacred spaces, such as shrines, with particular desires or concerns in mind. These practices are not necessarily considered to be “religious” by their performers, but instead reflect a normal part of everyday life. John Breen and Mark Teeuwen speak more to this matter:

... ‘Shinto’ – as opposed to say, *jinja* or *kami* – has no meaning at all for the vast majority of Japanese, regardless of generation. Japanese attend shrines and beseech *kami* at festivals and on other occasions, too, but they have no awareness that their practice constitutes something called ‘Shinto,’ or that they themselves are ‘Shintoist.’ They certainly do not, themselves, profess affiliation to the Shinto religion.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> At this point in the series, Uka is losing her powers as a *kami*, since she had earlier given a portion of them to Inari. The *kitsune* help Inari reach Uka in time to save her. Also considered to be Inari, these *kitsune* are responding to Uka not only as friends, but as relatives.

<sup>41</sup> Breen and Teeuwen, *Shinto in History*, 3.

While most Japanese do not readily identify as “Shintoist,” they engage with a system that is identified as such. Without the intent of acting religiously, Japanese approach shrines and *kami* as a popular means by which to seek help with matters, especially those dealing with close relationships. In the case of *Inakon*, Inari has the desire to be loved by Tambabashi. While she does not necessarily expect anything to come of this desire, Uka responds, nonetheless. When Inari saves Kon in the first episode, she does something beneficial for Uka, thus entering into a relationship with her, which quickly becomes a close friendship. What *Inakon* does best is highlight the significance of everyday matters, such as love and the manner in which Shintō practices respond to such desires. Rather than presenting Shintō as a cohesive body, *Inakon* challenges the centrality of *Jinja Honchō* Shintō. What people are engaging with is more significant than hierarchy and doctrines. While *Jinja Honchō* orthodoxy strives to maintain a certain level of control over Shintō across Japan, laypeople are actively shaping what is popular (particularly through their economic power), based on what is meaningful to them on their own terms.

### **2.5.2 Genze Riyaku - This-Worldly Benefits and Ritual Exchange**

As discussed in Chapter One, *genze riyaku* is a vital component of Japanese religiosity, which is entirely influenced by the needs and desires of laypeople. *Inakon* takes the concept of *genze riyaku* and presents it in an easily comprehensible manner. As mentioned in Chapter One, Inari are skilled in providing a wide variety of benefits, such as business prosperity, protection from fire, and successful harvest. In the case of *Inakon*, Inari’s long history assisting with romantic love is the main focus.<sup>42</sup> While Uka does not have the ability to make Tambabashi love Inari, per se, she provides Inari with the tools and support to actualize this desire. While something like romantic love might in some traditions be considered a trivial or frivolous matter to involve a deity with, such matters are at the heart of Shintō practices and beliefs. Uka takes Inari’s wish so seriously that she gives Inari a portion of her divine power at great personal risk.

*Genze riyaku* reflects a reciprocal relationship between humans and *kami*. Offerings of many kinds are typically made at shrines before letting one’s wish be known to the *kami*. These offerings might include tossing a coin into an offering box, leaving rice or sake in front of an altar, or making a pilgrimage to a particular holy site to perform these tasks. In the case of

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<sup>42</sup> Meeks’ work discusses Inari as having “long been celebrated as a “god of love methods” (*aihō no kami* 愛法神).” Please refer to Meeks, “The Disappearing Medium,” 244.

Fushimi Inari Taisha, there are some offerings that are especially common and are portrayed in *Inakon*. The *torii* that form the tunnel-like scenery at Fushimi Inari Taisha are actually donated by companies seeking to attract the attention of Inari. These *torii* range anywhere from hundreds of thousands to millions of yen.<sup>43</sup> In *Inakon*, these *torii* are one of the primary features of the shrine. Another type of offering portrayed in the show is *inari zushi* 稲荷鮓, which are fried tofu pockets filled with sushi rice. Since fried tofu is commonly believed to be a favourite food of *kitsune*, this food is often offered at Inari shrines, hence its name. In Episode Three, Inari's brother is asked by their mother to take some *inari zushi* to the shrine, to "give the gods a little thank-you for taking care of Inari." In Episode Ten, Inari drops some *inari zushi* off at the shrine on her way to school, "for everyone to share," she says. Offerings such as *inari zushi* and *torii* are given to the *kami* either to petition for help or to express gratitude for help given. When the *kami* bestow blessings, it is expected that one will show reciprocity or *hō-on* 報恩 (gratitude, repaying a kindness, typically to a relative or someone with whom one has a close relationship). It is through this ritual act of offering that the powers of the *kami* are substantiated.

This-worldly benefits can also appear in the form of religious paraphernalia purchased at shrines. In the first episode, Inari purchases an *omamori* お守り ("protection" charm) at the shrine to give to Tambabashi. While holding the *omamori*, she makes a wish that he will play well at his next basketball game. Such kinds of wishes are extremely common for laypeople to make. Again, such desires might be seen by some as frivolous, especially when compared to matters such as protection from physical harm (disasters). However, *Inakon* demonstrates that all desires matter and all wishes can be taken seriously by the *kami*. The purchase of items, such as *omamori*, is extremely common at Shintō shrines, as laypeople seek to have not only their own desires realized, but also the desires of those whom they care about.

*Genze riyaku* is closely linked to the Japanese custom of gift-giving. Gift-giving in Japan is typically linked to a variety of occasions, such as holidays (New Year's, Mid-Year), visiting someone's house, or travelling somewhere.<sup>44</sup> Gifts purchased during travel are called *omiyage* お土産. Usually when one travels it is customary to purchase small gifts, usually consumables, for family, friends, and co-workers who were not able to accompany the traveler. While gift-giving

<sup>43</sup> Some of the more well-known companies include Nintendo, the video game company, and Shiseido, the makeup company. In CDN, this is several hundreds to several thousands of dollars.

<sup>44</sup> Gifts given for New Year's are called *oseibo* お歳暮, while Mid-Year gifts are called *ochūgen* お中元. When visiting someone's house, it is expected to bring gifts, which are referred to as *temiyage* てみやげ.

can sometimes be more out of obligation than genuine desire, the act reinforces one's relationships with other people. In Episode Six, Inari and her friends are at a shop, picking out *omiyage* to bring back with them from their trip to the beach. Inari decides to buy Uka a bottle of sake. Inari's gift to Uka is especially meaningful, since sake is a common offering made to *kami*. "I figured gods always like sake, right?" Inari asks Uka, after giving it to her. "What an awful stereotype..." Uka says, as she smiles and caresses the bottle.<sup>45</sup> *Omiyage* can explicitly refer back to *genze riyaku* and religious paraphernalia, such as *omamori*, can be given as gifts. In Episode Nine, Tambabashi gives Inari an *omamori* from Yasaka Jinja 八坂神社 (a shrine in central Kyoto) in return for the one she gave him from Fushimi Inari Taisha.<sup>46</sup> Whether through offerings to the *kami* or gifts to family and friends, the ritual exchange of material objects is a significant matter to maintaining relationships. By reflecting concern for others, gift-giving is part of a larger image of Japan as a group-oriented society. This is not to say that individualism is not a central part of Japanese social fabric, but rather that relations between both humans and *kami* are given special consideration, particularly in ritual terms.

## 2.6 Reflections on *Inakon*

*Inakon* points to several themes significant to Shintō and, more specifically, Inari worship. First, the show emphasizes Shintō as the vehicle through which sacrality can be considered "everyday" or even "mundane." By depicting the lives of a few individuals in [great] detail, *Inakon* provides a lens through which to view Shintō as a lived practice grounded in matters of this life. Everyday concerns, such as love and relationships, become primary points of religious acts of devotion. Second, *Inakon*'s emphasis on love and relationships establishes Inari as a group of deities deeply tied to human emotions and desires. The intimate nature of Inari is a large part of why they are the most popular deities in Japan. People can more readily identify with *kami* that are closer to themselves. Finally, *Inakon* highlights the limitations of locating religion within traditionally Western frameworks, at least in the case of traditional Japanese religions. While places such as Fushimi Inari Taisha are considered to be sacred, religious activity and thought can take place outside of these institutions, whether they occur at home, at school, or in the workplace. Even the activities taking place at religious sites, such as shrines are called into question, as their multi-purpose nature renders them as spaces for sacred *and* secular activities.

<sup>45</sup> While sake is relevant due to the fact that Inari are the *kami* of rice, sake is a symbol of Shintō more generally, particularly in the modern period.

<sup>46</sup> Yasaka Jinja is a famous shrine in Kyoto, which hosts the famous festival, Gion matsuri □□□.

Ultimately, *Inakon* highlights Shintō, especially Inari worship, as a system of religious activity used to achieve human desires and address mundane concerns. In direct contrast to the *Jinja Honchō* and more formal variations of religiosity, *Inakon* more accurately represents the intimate nature of Inari and the profound resonance they have with many Japanese.

## Chapter Three

### *Kitsune* in Japanese Media

Foxes flourish in the religious and cultural landscapes of Japan. Inari are the most prevalent deities in Japan and are depicted in a compelling way in the contemporary animation, *Inakon*. It should come as no surprise, then, that foxes are represented extensively in Japanese media. The depiction of foxes in Japanese media is neither a new nor uncommon phenomenon: *kitsune* have been depicted in Japanese literature since as early as the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE with great frequency.<sup>1</sup> This chapter situates *Inakon* in the context of Japanese culture by examining *kitsune* in relevant literary and popular culture sources.

This chapter will begin by briefly locating *kitsune* within Japanese literature of the Meiji period, because the religious and political climates of this time had the greatest effect on how *kitsune* are represented today, particularly in *Inakon*. Next, *kitsune* are situated in contemporary (post 1990s) popular media, considering the ways in which their representations have evolved. Finally, I conclude by considering popular culture as a subject for inquiry in the academic study of religion. I seek to answer the question what significance do *kitsune* hold in Japanese culture today and how does popular culture speak to this? More than “just entertainment,” *Inakon* speaks to a set of normative beliefs and values that encompass Inari worship.

### 3.1 *Kitsune*, Literature, and National Identity

#### 3.1.1 *Kitsune* and the Meiji Period

At the beginning of the Meiji period, *kitsune* already enjoyed a significant place in Japanese literary and artistic narratives.<sup>2</sup> During this time, the study of folklore or *minzokugaku* 民俗学 became a major source of interest to Japanese scholars. Yanagita Kunio 柳田 国男 (1875-1962) is considered to be the father of Japanese folklore studies and, in addition to several

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<sup>1</sup> The oldest-recorded fox legend appears in *Nihon Ryōiki* (*Record of Miraculous Events in Japan*, 787-824CE). Bathgate, *The Fox's Craft*, 35-36. Until the Meiji period, the majority of narratives related to *kitsune* were produced by Buddhist clergy.

<sup>2</sup> Considering the example of the *Nihon Ryōiki* in footnote 1, *kitsune* had been prominent in Japanese narratives for over 1000 years by the Meiji period. Up until the Meiji period, the majority of these narratives were produced by Buddhist clergy.

other scholars, collected over 15,000 oral narratives from across Japan.<sup>3</sup> This interest in folklore was greatly influenced by the rise of folklore studies in the West, as well as an increase in the number of anthropologists seeking stories from other cultures. Japan proved to be an especially fertile ground for this data and many Japanese narratives have been translated into English (among other languages). Due to the prevalence of a scientific, yet often Protestant-biased set of perspectives, the early response to these narratives by scholars writing in English has tended to dismiss these tales as “superstitious,” albeit highly charming.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, many of the tales translated into English by early folklore scholars tend to neglect source information and the localized contexts in which they were produced.

I have examined fourteen narratives from the Meiji era, which consist primarily of oral tales collected by Japanese folklore scholars, including Yanagita Kunio, Sasaki Kizen 佐々木喜善 (1886-1933), and Seki Keigo 関敬吾 (1899-1990).<sup>5</sup> I have opted to examine these narratives from the perspective of three themes traditionally associated with *kitsune*: gender, boundary-crossing, and religion. Gender is an especially popular theme, because *kitsune* are frequently depicted as transforming into beautiful young women.<sup>6</sup> While these transformations are occasionally for the purpose of amusement, it has increasingly come to be for the purpose of repaying human kindness.<sup>7</sup> In two tales collected by Seki Keigo and Hasegawa Tamae, an old man purchases a fox cub from some children who have captured it and are either torturing it or planning to sell it as food. The old man releases the fox and is rewarded for his kindness. In the version known as “The Good Fortune Kettle,” the fox thanks the old man by transforming into a kettle, a horse, and a prostitute, all for the purpose of procuring money for the man. In “The Fox Harlot,” the rescued fox’s mother becomes a beautiful woman for the man to sell to a brothel. In

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<sup>3</sup> Robert J. Adams, “Foreword,” in *Folktales of Japan*, ed. Keigo Seki (IL: University of Chicago Press, 1963), xvi.

<sup>4</sup> Examples include Frank Rinder’s *Old-World Japan: Legends of the Land of the Gods* (1895), which gives no source for its selected narratives. Rinder admits in the introduction that he selected the tales based on their charm. Another example is A.B. Mitford’s *Tales of Old Japan* (1903), which includes three *kitsune* stories, but no mention of their sources.

<sup>5</sup> These three scholars are the most well-known. Others include Oto Kenzō, Hasegawa Tamae, Nakata Senpō, Moriguchi Tari, Isogai Isamu, Yamaguchi Asatarō, and Noda Tayoko. The fourteen narratives I have selected appear in Seki’s *Folktales of Japan* and Mayer’s *Ancient Tales in Modern Japan*. Please refer to Seki, pp. 3-4, 107-111 and Mayer pp. 31-32, 133-136, 140-141, and 164-170.

<sup>6</sup> Foxes are considered to be *yin* creatures, which is associated with the feminine. *Yin* is a Chinese concept and is one of many examples of the significance of continental culture in Japan.

<sup>7</sup> The tale of “amusement” appears in “Destroying the Fox” (Mayer, 164-165), in which a fox pranks both men and women by appearing as the opposite sex and asking to be escorted home. In tales before the Meiji period, “fox women” were more frequently represented as malevolent.



both cases, the foxes escape from their buyers and the old men live rich and happy lives.<sup>8</sup> Fox wives are another popular type of character foxes play, which continue to be seen in the Meiji period.<sup>9</sup> While transforming into women is one of the most popular abilities of *kitsune*, their power to shape-shift relates more widely to their capacity for boundary-crossing. Twelve of the fourteen stories involve shape-shifting. While shape-shifting is performed as a means to trick humans – usually for the purpose of acquiring food or teaching a moral lesson – it is also a means for assisting humans or entering into mutually beneficial relationships with them. “The Good Fortune Kettle” and “The Fox Harlot” both depict *kitsune* shape-shifting in order to reward humans for helping them. In “The Fox Wife,” a *kitsune* shape-shifts into a woman and marries the man who saves her life.<sup>10</sup> While there is one tale in which a fox pranks a badger during a shape-shifting contest (which leads to the badger’s demise), there are a substantial number of narratives that depict shape-shifting *kitsune* pranked by humans. In five of the tales *kitsune* are recognized in their disguises – as a beautiful woman, the father of two men, the husband of an old woman, a grandmother, a statue of Amida, and a samurai.<sup>11</sup> In the best cases, they run away or, in the case of “Admitting Defeat,” the fox jokes and laughs with the human about its poor disguise.<sup>12</sup> In the worst instances, the *kitsune* are fooled, beaten to death, or made into soup, illustrating a time when food shortages were still common in Japan.<sup>13</sup> While Meiji period narratives seem to contain fewer instances of fox possession than in earlier periods (particularly the Heian period), foxes continue to bewitch humans. In “Failing to Destroy the Fox,” a man sees a fox transforming into a young woman. It approaches a house and is welcomed as “sister!” The man attempts to intervene and even though he thinks he has pulled up the blinds in the house to warn the family, he is actually holding a mare’s tail, shouting into its rear end. Meanwhile, the fox makes away with the bundle of food the man had set down.<sup>14</sup> Finally, it is worth noting that

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<sup>8</sup> Keigo Seki, ed., *Folktales of Japan*, trans. Robert J. Adams (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 107-111.; Fanny Hagin Mayer, translator. *Ancient Tales in Modern Japan: An Anthology of Japanese Folk Tales* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 140-141.

<sup>9</sup> Mayer, *Ancient Tales*, 31-32. Mayer includes the tale “The Fox Wife,” in which a *kitsune* woman takes a man for her husband and they have a child together.

<sup>10</sup> Mayer, *Ancient Tales*, 31-32.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 164-167. Amida buddha (or Amitābha) is the principle buddha of Pure Land Buddhism (*Jōdo bukkō* □□□) in Japan. Amida’s compassion is believed to lead his followers to rebirth in the Pure Land, following their death. The principle practice of this tradition is chanting the *nembutsu* □□, an invocation that praises Amida (Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, 9).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

Meiji period fox narratives tend to have illicit religious readings. Some portray *kitsune* as powerful deities, which can be petitioned by humans. In “The Good Fortune Kettle,” an old man is greatly rewarded for saving a fox. After becoming a wealthy man, he builds a shrine to the fox and every 19<sup>th</sup> day of the month, he and his wife pray for the fox’s rebirth in paradise.<sup>15</sup> In “The Listening Hood,” an old man prays to Inari and suggests himself as an offering, as he has no money to buy fresh fish. Inari consoles him and offers him good fortune in the form of a listening hood. This hood allows him to understand the language of animals. By listening to the conversations of crows, the man is able to determine the reason why two people became ill. Disguising himself as a fortune-teller, the man cures their ailments and becomes wealthy.<sup>16</sup> Finally, in “The Magic Hood with Eight Disguises,” a fox named Osami loses its treasured magical disguise, which is referred to as a “skin.” Osami lives near an Inari shrine and a *yamabushi*, pretending to be Inari, offers to restore the magic of Osami’s disguise. The *yamabushi* makes away with Osami’s skin disguise and Osami lives in shame.<sup>17</sup> The narratives of this time reflect the connection between foxes and Inari, the worship of foxes, and the abilities of Inari to provide this-worldly benefits.

Although *kitsune* in these stories maintain several traditional characteristics, such as shape-shifting into women and crossing the boundaries between the human and supernatural realms, their behaviour has already begun to shift in marked ways during the later Meiji period. Whereas foxes were once viewed as malevolent mischief-makers in the pre-Meiji period, particularly due to influence from Chinese narratives, they increasingly became benevolent in nature, frequently represented as the deities known today as Inari. Rather than primarily using their abilities for mischief, foxes had increasingly become associated with good fortune and helping humans. In instances of foxes shape-shifting into women, it is never to cause a man harm. Instead, these fox-women either bring men good fortune or fall in love with them. This shift in terms of the depiction of *kitsune*, as well as the representation of “folklore” as a whole, was due to two tectonic shifts typically attributed to the *kokugaku* movement, which served to remove foreign elements from Japanese culture, which included the influence of Chinese fox narratives on those of Japan: the establishment of a narrative of a mythical past and the separation of Shintō

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<sup>15</sup> Seki, *Folktales of Japan*, 111. It is not specified in the text, but this “paradise” is presumably that of Amida (of Pure Land Buddhism).

<sup>16</sup> Mayer, *Ancient Tales*, 133-136.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 169-170.

and Buddhism. These changes are necessary for understanding *kitsune* in contemporary Japanese media and are especially pertinent to apparent themes in *Inakon*.

### 3.1.2 The Empire of Japan and Beyond

As I discussed in Chapter One, the *kokugaku* movement emerged during the Edo period. This movement sought “to define the “Japaneseness” of Japan, and its methodology was primarily literary” analysis.<sup>18</sup> As such, the most notable assertion of this movement was that Japanese culture does not stem from China or the East Asian continent. Instead, it was asserted that Japan had a “mythical past,” a true or “pure essence,” exclusive to Japan, which could be recovered. The most prominent scholar of the *kokugaku* tradition was Motoori Norinaga 本居 宣長 (1730-1801 CE), whose *Kojiki-den* 古事記伝 (*Commentary on the Kojiki*, 1798) highlighted the ways in which he considered the *Kojiki* to be indicative of ancient Japanese culture. Along with the *Nihon Shoki*, the tales of the *Kojiki*, which center on the origins of Japan and primarily the imperial lineage and the *kami*, were used to establish the emperor as deity and Japan as a “unique” country. Norinaga’s obsession with the *Kojiki* heavily influenced the creation of Shintō, as we saw in Chapter One, and it is for this reason that both Japanese and English scholars view him as the “founder” of Shintō. Through the works of Norinaga, among others, the mythical past of Japan was rediscovered to reconstitute a divine emperor and loyal subjects.

The development of the *kokugaku* tradition during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries occurred in contradistinction to Japan’s *sakoku* 鎖国 (“closed country”) foreign relations policy, which lasted from 1633-1853 CE. Foreigners were forbidden from entering and Japanese were prevented from leaving Japan. This policy is seen to have drastically reduced access to trade with other nations and very likely contributed to the interest in *kokugaku* ideology (although modern scholars question how much trade was lost). This period of isolation lasted just over 200 years until 1853, when Commodore Matthew Perry and his black ships forced Japan to [re]open its borders for trade. By the Meiji period, Japan was in a seemingly contradictory position: facing immense pressure to modernize according to Western standards, yet forging the identity of a “pure Japan,” superior to any other nation.

The Meiji period was a time of enormous political and religious change. The imperial restoration marked the end of the Tokugawa shogunate and supporters sought to implement a

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<sup>18</sup> Stuart D. B. Picken, *Sourcebook in Shinto: Selected Documents* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 190.

Shintō-oriented state.<sup>19</sup> This desire for a more “authentic” style of government and religious ideology fit perfectly with the *kokugaku* tradition, which reached its fullest development during this period. The education system was swiftly reorganized into a tool to produce subjects obedient to the deified emperor, “Ise was placed at the top of a state-sponsored Shinto hierarchy,” and the literature of Japan was being reshaped to reflect the nationalistic ideals of the time.<sup>20</sup> This was the setting in which folklorists collected tales, including those featuring *kitsune*. Since most universities of the era were imperially-funded, folklorists were under intense pressure to collect and modify these stories in a way that removed continental themes, particularly Buddhist ones. Before the Meiji period, however, no one had been compelled to differentiate between Shintō and Buddhism. These folklorists, along with other scholars of the *kokugaku* movement era, had a difficult task ahead of them: separating Buddhism from “native” religious practices, which had been intertwined between traditions for over one thousand years.

In order to assert the so-called unique identity of Japan, it was necessary for a clear demarcation between Japanese and continental culture. During the Edo period, *kokugaku* scholars had argued for “the supremacy of Shinto ideals, which reflected the essence of Japan as a national polity, as opposed to corrupt imported ideologies like Buddhism and Confucianism.”<sup>21</sup> This desire for Shintō supremacy was fully-realized during the Meiji period, “largely due to political agendas that advocated the nationalism and militarism that led up to WWII.”<sup>22</sup> As discussed in Chapter One, *shinbutsu bunri* had drastic consequences: Buddhist elements were removed from shrine grounds, priests were forced to identify as either Shintō or Buddhist practitioners, and Buddhism was faced with intense persecution.<sup>23</sup> Newly-formed Shintō shrines and priests became vehicles for disseminating state ideology. While some of the effects of *shinbutsu bunri* have lingered until today, distinctions between Buddhism and Shintō remain ambiguous for many Japanese on the ground.

When *kitsune* are taken into this account, however, the notions of Japan’s mythical past and *shinbutsu bunri* are easily contested. *Kitsune* are fundamental to the religious and cultural landscape of Japan, yet they are Chinese in origin and explicitly, though not exclusively,

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<sup>19</sup> John Breen and Mark Teeuwen, *A New History of Shintō* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 8-9.

<sup>20</sup> Ben-Ami Shillony, “Introduction,” in *The Emperors of Modern Japan*, ed. Ben-Ami Shillony (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2008), 5.

<sup>21</sup> Heine, *Sacred High City*, 104.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 104-105.

associated with Indian and East Asian continental Buddhism. Despite their Chinese origins and connections to Buddhism, *kitsune* worship endured during the Meiji period and continue to thrive as the most popular deities in Japan. This might be surprising, considering that Inari have no connection to nationalism, whatsoever. As we have seen through Japanese literature, *kitsune* are popular because they are malleable and can be shown to transcend boundaries. Their transformative powers, it appears, extend from physical shape-shifting to traversing and retaining relevancy in a wide variety of contexts. Meiji period narratives sought to remove continental influences from “indigenous” Japanese culture, which included attempts to remove foxes and Inari from Buddhism. While these narratives reflect an increase in *kitsune*’s benevolence and worship as “indigenous” deities, their connections to continental culture were never totally severed. Nonetheless, Inari are generally considered to be Shintō deities today.

After Japan was defeated in WWII, Japanese people were once again confronted with questions of identity. How could the emperor be divinely-ordained and how could Japan be superior to other nations when they lost the war? State Shintō was disbanded by the Allies, a new constitution was implemented, religion was separated from politics, and the nation was demilitarized. As a newly-democratized nation, it was necessary not only for Japan’s image to be reconfigured for a new age, but also for the nation to become a competitor in the global economy.<sup>24</sup> While rebuilding after a tremendous loss was difficult, Japan recovered with unimaginable speed. Japan modernized faster than any other nation has to date (including China, in recent years) and became one of the world’s greatest economic forces. 1964 was perhaps the most significant year in Japan’s post-war recovery: Japan introduced the first *shinkansen* 新幹線 high-speed railway and Tokyo hosted the summer Olympic Games. Japan was regarded more favourably by the rest of the world and its technology was competitive with the most developed of nations. By the 1980s, Japan’s economy was booming to a degree that its economy was second only to the United States. While nationalistic sentiment still smoldered in dark corners, such convictions rapidly lost popularity. It soon became acceptable to admit that the war and *kokugaku* movement were erroneous endeavours. Academics began to distance themselves from nationalist orientations and the study of folklore greatly declined in popularity. Japan’s cultural landscape rapidly evolved, and so did *kitsune*.

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<sup>24</sup> John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1999), 75.

### 3.2.2 Kitsune in Contemporary Japanese Manga and Anime

Manga and anime are two of the most popular types of media in Japan today. Anime are typically adapted from manga and, while the exact origins of manga are disputed, it is commonly accepted that this sequential art style was popularized by Buddhist monks in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>25</sup> The Edo period marked the next major shift in illustration with the rise in popularity of woodblock printing, known as *ukiyo-e* 浮世絵 (“pictures of the floating world”), which allowed for mass production.<sup>26</sup> As a term, *manga* “came into popular use around the mid-1700s, with the print artist Katsushika Hokusai’s 葛飾 北斎 (1760-1849) work – *Hokusai* manga. Western influences on manga can be traced back to when Japan opened up to the Western world in the Meiji period.”<sup>27</sup> During the 1980s, however, manga developed the aesthetic forms we are familiar with today in the west and anime were broadcast for the first time on television, prompting a manga “boom.”<sup>28</sup> Today, manga is wildly popular at home and abroad, generating hundreds of billions of yen every year, domestically and internationally. In 2011, 503.61 million copies of manga were sold in Japan, generating ¥271.71 billion.<sup>29</sup> From 1999 - 2009, anime generated over ¥200 billion per year in Japan, peaking in 2006. As forms of “popular culture” in every aspect, manga and anime are highly accessible and are enjoyed by Japanese of every age, gender, and interest.

#### 3.2.1 Religious Themes

By featuring a wide variety of genres, manga and anime address an extensive array of themes – ranging from fictional narratives to genuine questions regarding identity. Popular themes in these media include reflections on WWII (including antiwar sentiment), the relationship between humans and technology, and the threat of an apocalypse.<sup>30</sup> Another important question following the war is that of religious identity. Religious and supernatural

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<sup>25</sup> Robin E. Brenner, *Understanding Manga and Anime* (Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2007), 1. Brenner specifically references the *Chōju Giga* (“animal scrolls”) as the most famous example of this style of art. Brenner credits a monk known as Toba as the artist, but this is disputed, as there is believed to be at least one more artist involved with the piece.

<sup>26</sup> Brenner, *Understanding Manga and Anime*, 1-2.

<sup>27</sup> Wendy Siuyi Wong, “Globalizing Manga: From Japan to Hong Kong and Beyond,” in *Mechademia*, Vol. 1 Emerging Worlds of Anime and Manga (2006): 27.

<sup>28</sup> Brenner, *Understanding Manga and Anime*, 12.

<sup>29</sup> This amount was determined by Japanese market research group, Oricon. Anime News Network. “Japan’s Comic Sales Totaled 271.71 Billion Yen in 2011.” Posted January 23, 2012.

<http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2012-01-23/2011-comic-sales-totaled-271.71-billion-yen-in-japan>

<sup>30</sup> Brenner, *Understanding Manga and Anime*, 5.

themes and characters are incredibly popular in manga and anime. Religious settings and deities are used in varying degrees, from the brief appearance of a temple or *kami*, to an entire series based around a specific shrine.<sup>31</sup> *Kami* and *yōkai* are popular characters, both being featured and reimagined in modern settings. While reimagining religious characters in these settings might be cause for blasphemy in certain traditions, such is not the case in Japan. Since emperor worship ended with the war and nationalist sentiments are rather rare today, most Japanese are comfortable with new interpretations of religion.

### 3.2.2 *Kitsune* in Contemporary Japanese Popular Culture

The omnipresence of Inari is directly reflected through the proliferation of foxes within contemporary Japanese popular culture. Although literary sources remain significant, new types of media, particularly manga and anime, are increasingly relevant. While scholars, including Bathgate and Nozaki, have looked at depictions of *kitsune* in Japanese literature, there is not much research on *kitsune* in contemporary Japanese media. To amend this, I have compiled a chronological list of 21 popular media sources, including films, video games, anime, and manga, which feature *kitsune* as either protagonists or notable characters.<sup>32</sup> I am familiar with most of these sources, due to my own interest in Japanese popular culture for many years. These sources are all available with English subtitles and/or dubbing, and most have achieved considerable success both within Japan and abroad. With this in mind, it is important to note that due to their success, these franchises have been adapted into other formats, such as video and card games, feature-length films, and an astounding amount of merchandise.

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<sup>31</sup> For example, *The Eccentric Family* (*Uchōten Kazoku* □□□□□) (2013) is based in and around Shimogamo Jinja □□□□, a shrine in Kyoto and the family of shape-shifting *tanuki* □ (raccoon-dogs) who live there. This animation also features the *Shichifukujin* □□□ (“seven gods of good luck”), who are reimagined in a modern context. In addition to manga and anime featuring Japanese religious elements, themes from other religious traditions are also popular, such as the Judeo-Christian elements found in *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (*Shin Seiki Evangerion* □□□□□□□□□□) (1995).

<sup>32</sup> These media are often interconnected, usually with manga as the initial format. When a manga series is successful enough, it is usually adapted into an anime series, then perhaps into other media, such as feature-length films, video games, and a wide variety of merchandise.

Title <sup>33</sup>	Creator	Type	Date
<i>The Foxes of Chironuppu</i> ( <i>Chironuppu no Kitsune</i> チロヌップのきつね)	Imazawa Tetsuo  Based on the book by Takahashi Hiroyuki	Film	1987
<i>Dreams</i> ( <i>Yume</i> 夢)	Kurosawa Akira	Film	1990
<i>Yu Yu Hakushō</i> ( <i>YūYū Hakusho</i> 幽遊白書,)	Togashi Yoshihiro/Abe Noriyuki (Director)	Manga/Anime	1990-1994, 19 volumes/1992-1995, 112 episodes
<i>Sonic the Hedgehog</i> series ( <i>Sonikku za Hejjihoggu</i> ソニック・ザ・ヘッジホッグ)	Naka Yuji	Video Game	1991-2013, 30 main games, dozens of spin-offs
<i>Hyper Police</i> ( <i>Haipā Porisu</i> はいぱーぽりす)	Tachikawa Minoru/Omori Takahiro	Manga/Anime	1993-2004, 10 volumes/1997, 25 episodes
<i>Star Fox</i> series ( <i>Sutā Fokkusu</i> スターフォックス)	Kamiya Hideki	Video Game	1993-2011, 6 games
<i>Inuyasha</i> ( <i>Inuyasha</i> 犬夜叉)	Takahashi Rumiko/Ikeda Masashi, Aoki Yasunao (Directors)	Manga/Anime	1996-2008, 56 volumes/2000-2004, 167 episodes
<i>Pokémon</i> series ( <i>Pokemon</i> ポケモン)	Tajiri Satoshi/Yuyama Kunihiko (Director)	Video Game/Anime	1996- Ongoing, 14 games/1997-2002, 870+ episodes
<i>The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time</i> ( <i>Zeruda no Densetsu: Toki no Okarina</i> ゼルダの伝説 時のオカリナ)	Miyamoto Shigeru	Video Game	1998
<i>Naruto</i> ( <i>Naruto</i> ナルト,)	Kishimoto Masashi/Date Hayato (Director)	Manga/Anime	1999-2014, 72 volumes/2002-2007, 220 episodes
<i>The Legend of Zelda:</i>	Miyamoto Shigeru	Video Game	2000

<sup>33</sup> In some instances, titles available to English audiences are referred to by their Japanese name (e.g. *Inuyasha*, *Ōkami*).



<i>Majora's Mask</i> ( <i>Zeruda no Densetsu: Mujura no Kamen</i> ゼルダの伝説 ムジュラの仮面)			
<i>XxxHolic</i> ( <i>x x x ホリック Horikku</i> )	CLAMP/Mizushima Tsutomu (Director)	Manga/Anime	2003-2011, 19 volumes/2006, 24 episodes
<i>Our Home's Fox Deity</i> ( <i>Wagaya no o-inari sama</i> 我が家のお稲荷様)	Shibamura Jin	Light Novel/Manga	2004-Present, 7 volumes/2007-2013, 11 volumes
<i>Kanokon</i> ( <i>Kanokon</i> かのこん,)	Nishino Katsumi	Light Novel	2005-2010 (on hiatus), 15 volumes
<i>Ōkami</i> ( <i>Ōkami</i> 大神)	Inaba Atsushi	Video Game	2006
<i>Gingitsune</i> ( <i>Gingitsune</i> ぎんぎつね)	Ochiai Sayori/Misawa Shin (Director)	Manga/Anime	2008-Ongoing, 10 volumes/2013, 12 episodes
<i>Kamisama Kiss</i> ( <i>Kamisama hajimemashita</i> 神様はじめました) <sup>34</sup>	Suzuki Julietta/Daichi Akitaro (Director)	Manga/Anime	2008-ongoing, 19 volumes/2012, 13 episodes
<i>Kitsune no yomeiri</i> ( <i>Kitsune no yomeiri</i> 狐の嫁入り)	Takagi Satoshi	Manga	2008-Ongoing, 4 volumes
<i>Persona 4</i> ( <i>Perusona Fō</i> ペルソナ4)	Hashino Katsura	Video Game	2008
<i>Inari, Konkon, ABCs of Love</i> ( <i>Inari konkon koi iroha</i> いなりこんこん恋いろは)	Yoshida Morohe/Takahashi Toru (Director)	Manga/Anime	2010-ongoing, 6 volumes/2014, 10 episodes
<i>Yō-Kai Watch</i> ( <i>Yōkai wocchi</i> 妖怪ウォッチ)	Konishi Noriyuki/Ushiro Shinji (Director)	Manga/Anime	2012-ongoing, 1 volume/2014-ongoing, 73 episodes

By briefly reviewing this list, it is apparent that *kitsune* are an integral feature of Japanese popular culture. Supernatural themes are incredibly popular in contemporary Japanese media and

<sup>34</sup> The English title differs from the Japanese title, which is most commonly translated as “I Became a God.”

foxes are the most-commonly represented type of supernatural being in these narratives.<sup>35</sup> *Kitsune* are more than just a trendy character-type within contemporary Japanese media. In sources available to English-speakers alone, foxes appear in dozens of video games and hundreds of volumes and episodes of manga and anime. If we consider additional sources available in Japan in Japanese alone, these numbers increase dramatically. Foxes are, therefore, a normative feature of Japanese popular culture and extend well beyond the media of this list. As such, *Inakon* is part of an extensive array of popular media, in which foxes are hugely popular.

As I have done with the Meiji period narratives, I will briefly examine *kitsune* in contemporary media through the themes of gender, boundary-crossing, and religion. Beginning with gender, *Kanokon* and *Kitsune no Yomeiri* both tie into the common theme of the “fox-wife,” as both stories’ protagonists have relationships with fox girls. In *Kanokon*, high school freshman, Kōta is the love interest of a fox spirit, named Chizuru, from whom he gains the ability to transform into a fox spirit. In *Kitsune no Yomeiri*, a high school student, Ousuke, finds himself accidentally engaged to the fox spirit, Kyōka.<sup>36</sup> *Ōkami* 大神 presents another common gendered theme through its character Ninetails, a golden fox responsible for murdering Queen Himiko. Ninetails disguises itself as the voluptuous Buddhist nun, Rao, who manipulates the game’s protagonist in order to gain a powerful weapon. Shape-shifting, as we have just seen with fox-women, is one of the most prominent boundary-crossing abilities of *kitsune*, which also includes bewitchment (or creating illusions) and controlling fire. One of many examples is found in *Inuyasha* through Shippo, a fox boy who can control fox fire, create illusory copies of himself, and shape-shift into a variety of forms, including a large, pink floating balloon. In these narratives, foxes primarily use these abilities as a means to protect humans or at least benefit them in some manner. This protective nature of foxes undoubtedly relates to their religious context as Inari. *Gingitsune*, *Kamisama Kiss*, *Inakon*, *Our Home’s Fox Deity*, and *Persona 4* all feature Inari, whose main roles are securing the well-being of their human companions. In the video game *Persona 4*, the character known as “Fox” is always found at Tatsuhide Shrine 辰姫神社 and, for a fee, heals the player’s characters. In *Our Home’s Fox Deity*, fox deity Kūgen is the guardian of the Mizuchi family, who protects brothers Tōru and Noburo from evil *yōkai*.

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<sup>35</sup> I would estimate that foxes appear in at least half of supernatural-themed manga and anime or are, at the very least, the most well-represented supernatural creatures.

<sup>36</sup> The reason for this accidental engagement is due to Ousuke having picked up a fallen fox statue at an Inari shrine and tying the string that was around its neck. This act constituted a marriage proposal, causing Kyōka to appear.

Overall, the foxes depicted in these sources are benevolent. Out of the 21 examples listed above, only four of them feature malevolent *kitsune*.<sup>37</sup> *Kitsune* retain many of their classical traits, such as being mysterious in nature, powerful, occasionally dangerous, cute, charming, and primarily protective of their human companions.

One feature that stands out in particular is the tendency for foxes to play the role of “superhero” by using their powers for helping humans, which includes protecting them from evil spirits, healing, divining the future, and generally helping their companions with their concerns. In *XxxHolic*, protagonist Watanuki Kimihiro is a high school student plagued by *yōkai*. In Episode Nine, he gains a companion named Mugetsu, a pipe fox who looks much like a snake covered in golden fur. Mugetsu is extremely protective of Watanuki and, in his true form, shapeshifts into a golden nine-tailed fox, who can fight evil spirits with fire. Mugetsu and Watanuki’s close relationship is not only demonstrated through physical protection, but also when Mugetsu affectionately jumps on Watanuki or pecks him on the cheek. In addition to the representations of Inari, such as those found in *Gingitsune* and *Inakon*, *Pokemon* and *Yō-Kai Watch* feature superhero-like *kitsune*. In both of these series, protagonists Ash Ketchum and Nathan Adams encounter creatures, which they can capture, train, and summon, for the purpose of battle.<sup>38</sup> Both series feature fox characters, such as *Pokemon*’s Vulpix and Ninetails, as well as *Yō-Kai Watch*’s Kyūbi (“Nine-tailed fox”). As protectors of humans, it should go without saying that *kitsune* are part of both the human and supernatural realms. While there are many *kami* and supernatural creatures in Japan, most are not closely bonded to humans in the way that foxes are. Foxes share an intimate relationship with humans, whereas other deities and creatures often manifest in abstract ways or are significantly more distant from human concerns. One additional noteworthy point regarding the aforementioned media is the connection foxes have to young Japanese people. Several of the narratives feature young protagonists, who are in middle and high school, or are young adults. While media, including anime and manga, are not exclusively consumed by young Japanese, youthful characters are commonly emphasized in them. This is largely due to the importance placed upon youth and “cuteness” or *kawaii* culture in Japan. While it is unlikely that the connection between young characters and *kitsune* in Japanese media

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<sup>37</sup> These four include: *Dreams*, *Yu Yu Hakushō*, *Naruto*, and *Ōkami*.

<sup>38</sup> In Japan, *Pokemon*’s protagonist is called Satoshi and *Yō-Kai Watch*’s protagonist is Amano Keita. The creatures of *Pokemon* are called pokemon (“pocket monsters”), while those of *Yō-Kai Watch* are *yōkai*.

is part of an agenda to popularize Inari, it very well may instead suggest that young Japanese already find Inari to be extremely appealing.

It appears that *kitsune* are just as popular, if not more popular, than they were before the Meiji period. When taking *kitsune*'s vast history into account, it is clear that they have remained significant for so long because of their malleability, whether it is through their representations in media or their presence as Inari at shrines. While these changes are apparent in modern popular culture, few have explored what modern representations of *kitsune* point to. What must first be considered, however, is how to approach popular culture as a subject of serious inquiry.

### **3.3 Studying Religion and Popular Culture**

#### **3.3.1 Defining Popular Culture**

What is popular culture and what roles can it play in understanding society, particularly within the religious realm? Culture is considered to be “the whole range of human products and thoughts that surround our lives, providing the context in which we live.”<sup>39</sup> Like high (elite) and folk (“low”) culture, popular culture is understood to be determined by its audience. To differentiate between the three, Bruce David Forbes uses food as an example: “high culture is a gourmet meal, folk culture is grandma’s casserole, and popular culture is a McDonald’s hamburger.”<sup>40</sup> While popular culture is not necessarily assigned the status of low quality, as with fast food, it is typically marked by accessibility and the interest of a large audience. As such, “popular culture refers to “that which is (or has been) accepted or approved of by large groups of people.”<sup>41</sup> Mass media, including television, movies, and books, are one of the most powerful means for exchanging popular culture, thus contributing to its pervasiveness in modern society. Since popular culture both shapes and reflects the values and beliefs of the society in which it is produced, the study of mass media can be remarkably fruitful.

#### **3.3.2 Querying Popular Culture**

Popular culture is often treated with suspicion as an academic source. This is especially the case in the academic study of religion, where traditional sources of knowledge typically

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<sup>39</sup> Bruce David Forbes, “Introduction: Finding Religion in Unexpected Places,” in *Religion and Popular Culture in America*, ed.’s Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>41</sup> Forbes, “Introduction,” 4.

include only institutions, scriptures, and religious leaders. Religion is constantly changing. Therefore, while boundaries are often helpful to approach a topic of inquiry, it is crucial to constantly question and negotiate these boundaries. Religious expressions and the process of creating meaning are not strictly bound to traditional categories and are most certainly connected to popular culture, including music, books, television series, comics, and so forth. While some dismiss popular culture and consider it to be “trivial, faddish, or “just entertainment,”” an increasing number of scholars find popular culture “to be a significant focus for reflection and analysis.”<sup>42</sup> These scholars include historians, who traditionally rely on written texts, but are increasingly turning to films and other visual texts as important historical sources.<sup>43</sup> States Forbes, “Approaching the study of religion through popular culture can help us learn more about widespread perceptions of religion, and the role religion plays in the everyday lives of people. The analysis of popular culture can also provide insights about how religions change and are changed by the cultures that surround them.”<sup>44</sup> These are all important points that relate to *Inakon*: the series sheds light on how religion – particularly Shintō – is perceived in Japan, it shows how religion affects everyday life through Inari and her friends, and it also takes into consideration the ways in which the Inari cult has evolved, simultaneously being shaped by participants. Media and religion intersect in a number of ways and the relationship between the two is especially pronounced in Japan.

### 3.3.3 Entertainment and Religion in Japan

Japan is “a society that generally does not place high importance on distinguishing religion from other aspects of cultural life.”<sup>45</sup> As such, religious identity and knowledge are inspired and instructed not only through religious institutions and doctrines, but also through the matters of everyday life, including media. In *Drawing on Tradition: Manga, Anime, and Religion in Contemporary Japan* (2012), Jolyon Baraka Thomas explores the ways in which producers and audiences of popular culture receive and reimagine religion. Thomas is best-known for his term *shūkyō asobi* 宗教遊び, which can be read as “playful religion” or “religious

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<sup>42</sup> Forbes, “Introduction,” 2. For more on the study of religion and popular culture, see *Understanding Religion and Popular Culture*, edited by Terry Ray Clark and Dan W. Clanton, Jr.

<sup>43</sup> Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition (Boston, New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2010), 28.

<sup>44</sup> Forbes, *Religion and Popular Culture in America*, 2.

<sup>45</sup> Jolyon Baraka Thomas, *Drawing on Tradition: Manga, Anime, and Religion in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2012), 9.

entertainment,” and uses this term to point to the long history of religion connected with entertainment in Japan. *Shūkyō asobi* points “to instances where modifications of religious behavior and outlook occur within spaces equally devoted to entertainment or, alternatively, where religious practice and pedagogy simultaneously behave as entertaining experiences.”<sup>46</sup> This term might also “indicate the process of drawing on existing religious schemata while modifying them, emphasizing the plastic nature of religious doctrines and ideas (authors, artists, and directors playing with religious content.”<sup>47</sup> Examples of entertainment in Shintō religious settings include *kagura* 神楽 (literally “god music”), festivals, and musical performances, which have been used to draw crowds to shrines.<sup>48</sup> These entertainment-based events are integral to maintaining religious centers. Similarly, religious and supernatural themes are extremely popular in contemporary Japanese media and are also used to garner attention. In both cases, religion and entertainment are combined for the purpose of turning a (mass) profit, which requires mass consumption. Consumers, whether they are patrons of a shrine or the audience of an animated series, spend their time and money engaging with sacred spaces and media because they have found something that resonates with them, rather than denominational affiliations or social pressure to frequent festivals or visit shrines. Through their beliefs and spending power, these consumers shape and are shaped through their interactions with these spaces and media.

The nature of religious entertainment is also made clear through Thomas’ use of “recreating religion,” in which “recreation” refers to both entertainment and reconstitution. Thomas notes that “unless commissioned by a specific religious group, creators of vernacular religious media are not required to follow any specific doctrine, and they may liberally pick and mix images, concepts, and vocabulary from a variety of religions.”<sup>49</sup> Without such boundaries, media can alter religious themes, while not necessarily being considered controversial. Thomas refers to these media as “iconoplastic,” as they use existing religious themes, such as characters, settings, and narratives, to fit their needs.<sup>50</sup> The resulting media range from pious to playful and can either reaffirm or negotiate existing religious beliefs and practices. Audiences also

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<sup>46</sup> Thomas, *Drawing on Tradition*, 17.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> *Kagura* is typically performed by *miko*, who dance for the purpose of appeasing the *kami* and facilitating their relationship with laypeople.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas, *Drawing on Tradition*, 14-15.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas, *Drawing on Tradition*, 15.

participate in re-creating religion through their interpretation of these visual narratives.<sup>51</sup> Thomas further explains the power of the audience:

In some cases, the verisimilitude of fictive worlds – regardless of their fidelity to formal religious cosmologies – is so entirely convincing that figments become facts and chimera incarnate. In their religious frames of mind, audiences imaginatively animate the characters that populate fictional universes, granting them vitality beyond the frames on the page and outside the layered cels that make up a scene.<sup>52</sup>

Not only can media represent the real world, therefore, they can also influence how people perceive and behave within it.

Through examining *kitsune* in Japanese literature, anime, and manga, it is clear that popular media are laden with religious ideologies – that is, religious ideas, themes, and values. While many of these media depict fictional stories and characters, they can also reflect real beliefs and values. For example, many attributes of *kitsune* depicted in media are based on beliefs that people have held at different times, such as fox possession and fox-owning families.<sup>53</sup> When considering *Inakon*, the story is fictional in the sense that the character's stories are made up, including Uka and the other *kami*. However, the show is set in and around a real shrine, depicting real deities, and shows the kinds of concerns that real Japanese possess. This show is certainly designed to pull at the heartstrings of the audience by giving them something to identify with. If this show is reflective of how people might view Inari and Shintō, as well as the image directly promoted by Fushimi Inari Taisha, what does it convey?

### 3.4 The Significance of Foxes and Popular Culture

This chapter has investigated the kinds of literature and popular media that influence and frame *Inakon*. Although foxes already had a well-developed history in Japanese literature by the Meiji period, the influence of folklore scholars and the *kokugaku* movement acted to shift the narratives towards a more “indigenous” angle, promoting foxes as beneficent Shintō *kami*. Although nationalist sentiments hold little authority in contemporary Japan, save Abe Shinzō, the current Prime Minister, *kitsune* grew in popularity as beneficent beings, protecting and fighting alongside humans in new environments. Through their ability to transcend boundaries, foxes

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>52</sup> Thomas, *Drawing on Tradition*, 155.

<sup>53</sup> Fox-owning families are traced back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century and are believed to possess foxes in their households, which are either physical or invisible. These families are believed to gain wealth through their fox companions and have been ostracized by their communities, usually through refusal of doing business with them or refusing to marry into their families. For more information, please refer to chapter four of Bathgate's *The Fox's Craft* and Miyamoto's article, “Possessed and Possessing.”

have evolved with Japan's shifting political and religious climates, demonstrating just how vital they are to Japan. While the changes of the Meiji period shaped Fushimi Inari Taisha, and thus *Inakon*, into an institution representing Shintō, this shrine and series stand for a Shintō that is markedly different from what was officially sanctioned both in the Meiji period and today.

After examining the presence of *kitsune* in literature and popular culture, it is clear that *Inakon* is part of a pervasive trend. The prevalence of *kitsune* in media is absolutely due to the prominence of Inari worship throughout Japan, of media reflecting real life. *Inakon* is an especially valuable text, since it represents a real shrine, community, and group of deities. Few popular media come close to depicting a religious space and concerns with such accuracy. When considering the work of scholars, particularly Heine, Smyers, and Reader and Tanabe, *Inakon* offers an alternative viewpoint with which to engage Inari from the level of an everyday Japanese person – likely a young girl. Before the Meiji period, most narratives featuring *kitsune* were produced by Buddhist clergy. During the Meiji period, this power shifted to folklore scholars and nationalist ideologues. With the power of production open to the masses today, *Inakon* provides a new way to examine Inari worship: through the lives of those who sustain it.



## Chapter Four

### Shintō in the Context of *Inakon*: State Shintō and Beyond

*Inakon* directly engages with one of the most unclear and problematical subjects in Japanese religious studies: contemporary Shintō. Largely misunderstood and seemingly taboo, contemporary Shintō is exceedingly underrepresented in English language scholarship. This is without a doubt due to Shintō's complex practices and organization, as well as its continued connections to nationalism. For these reasons, most scholars have tended to simplify Shintō as “nature worship” or an ancient and ahistorical religion that represents the “essence” of the Japanese. Although more critical scholars have engaged with Shintō's troublesome development as an instrument of the propaganda to prop up the Empire of Japan, contemporary Shintō is given little consideration, particularly where it concerns nationalism. In *A New History of Shinto* (2010), John Breen and Mark Teeuwen take the development of Shintō to task and conclude with a brief discussion of the need to examine nationalism in contemporary Shintō, as well as what exists beyond its parameters.<sup>1</sup> While religion and the state were officially separated in 1946, Shintō is still very much tied to its nationalist past. *Inakon* approaches this issue head-on through its depiction of two kinds of Shintō that are relevant today: *Jinja Honchō* Shintō (which might also be called “formal Shintō”) and what I call “popular Shintō.” These two types of Shintō are presented in *Inakon*, primarily through its depictions of Amaterasu, who is representative of *Jinja Honchō* Shintō, and Uka, who seems indicative of a popular Shintō, as Inari. The opposition between Amaterasu and Uka is central to the story's development. Inari are presented as deities with which Japanese have intimate connections, while Amaterasu is presented as a disgusting hag, implying the overall distaste many Japanese have for anything to do with nationalistic or imperial themes. In order to better understand these two types of Shintō and how they are represented in *Inakon*, it is necessary to reflect upon the development of Shintō, particularly State Shintō (*Kokka Shintō* 国家神道). After doing so, the significance of *Jinja*

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<sup>1</sup> Breen and Teeuwen, *A New History of Shinto*, 199.

*Honchō* and popular Shintō becomes even more apparent, with *Inakon* offering valuable commentary on their relationship.

#### 4.1 Indigenous and Continental Religion in Pre-1868 Japan: A Summary

Despite what some might claim, Shintō is neither ancient nor unchanging. As recalled in Chapter One, it was not until the Meiji period that “Shintō” was used to designate an organized and independent religion. Before the Meiji period, Japan had a considerably developed religious landscape. During the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Buddhism was imported to Japan through China and Korea, and rapidly syncretized with indigenous deities, beliefs, and practices, which were neither systematically organized nor designated by any particular name(s).<sup>2</sup> With the exception of the period of the Empire of Japan (1868-1945), Buddhism and indigenous Japanese religious practices were integrated for nearly 1400 years. With this in mind, the indigenous practices preceding the arrival of Buddhism in Japan are difficult to understand today, let alone equate with contemporary Shintō.

While Buddhism was developing as a state religion of sorts in Nara, the capital of Japan from 710-794, Inari worship was established with the founding of Fushimi Inari Taisha in 711 CE. The shrine was founded by Hata no Irogu, a prominent son from an immigrant family whose roots can be traced back to Silla 新羅, Korea, which had considerable influence in the Kyoto [Yamashiro Province 山城国] region. Predating the establishment of Kyoto as capital of Japan by over 80 years, Fushimi Inari Taisha is one of the oldest shrines in the nation. What are considered to be early Shintō deities, such as Inari, are in fact immigrant deities.<sup>3</sup> When Kyoto was established as capital in 794 CE, Fushimi Inari Taisha was quickly elevated in status. The shrine was sponsored by Kūkai, founder of the highly influential Shingon school of Buddhism, and was granted several ranks by the imperial family.<sup>4</sup> When the royal cult of the Heian period was re-organized, 22 shrines were ranked in three tiers of importance, several of them being Hata and Fujiwara institutions. As one of the seven upper tier shrines, Fushimi Inari Taisha had a significant role in state matters.<sup>5</sup> In spite of its imperial patronage, Fushimi Inari Taisha (and Inari in general) never became explicitly associated with imperial themes. By the medieval period, *shinbutsu shūgō* (“syncretism of *kami* and buddhas”) was the normative institutional

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<sup>2</sup> See *shinbutsu shūgō* in Chapter One, pages 14-16.

<sup>3</sup> Como, “Immigrant Gods on the Road to *Jindō*,” 19-43.

<sup>4</sup> Please refer to Chapter One on the Development of Fushimi Inari Taisha.

<sup>5</sup> Como, “Immigrant Gods on the Road to *Jindō*,” 41-40.

framework for religious practices. As recalled in Chapter One, Fushimi Inari Taisha functioned as a shrine-temple complex, sharing space with the Shingon Buddhist temple, Aizen-ji. Foxes functioned as avatars or *gon'gen*, which are manifestations of buddhas in local forms.<sup>6</sup> Japanese did not typically think of these religious spaces and deities in terms of native and non-native. Appeal and effectiveness were what mattered. By the Edo period, however, the cult of Inari was widespread across most of Japan, with most of Japan's currently estimated 40,000 Inari shrines being established during this time.<sup>7</sup> The proliferation of Inari shrines was most likely due to their connection to rice, the rise of agriculture, and the institutional economic changes that took place during this time. While rice was once considered a form of currency, it became a means of generating monetary wealth. Inari were popular for providing both. What began as a shrine originally erected by an immigrant clan and subject to imperial sponsorship, had evolved into a cult both accessible and appealing to most Japanese. Inari were popular in a religious setting in which native and non-native elements had become interwoven for well over 1000 years.

#### 4.2 The Development of State Shintō

Over the course of nearly 80 years, the religious culture of Japan was drastically altered. From 1868-1945, State Shintō was developed and promoted by the Japanese government as an “ethical and educational ideology which effectively united the Japanese people for the Second World War.”<sup>8</sup> As an overarching national ethic, State Shintō was used to construct “a coherent national identity in a modern centralised nation-state.”<sup>9</sup> Reflected by its name, the Meiji period marked the restoration of imperial rule under Emperor Meiji (1852-1912) and the end of the Tokugawa *shogunate*. Accustomed to a shogun, everyday Japanese were only vaguely familiar with the idea of an emperor.<sup>10</sup> In order to educate and create obedient subjects, a number of changes were implemented, three of the most significant being the deification of the emperor, the

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<sup>6</sup> It is disputed as to whether or not the Hata specifically worshipped foxes. Miyamoto asserts that the Hata brought fox worship with them from mainland China, “which was fairly popular in their homeland in fifth and sixth centuries (‘Possessed and Possessing,’ 153).” Heine points out that “the fox known as *kitsune* has since the eighth century been enshrined and worshiped in a pervasive network of sacred associations in connection with Inari,” which implies that the Inari cult has worshipped *kitsune* since Fushimi Inari Taisha's inception (*Shifting Shape*, 26). In opposition, Nakagawa claims that Inari have been associated with foxes since the medieval period and only worshipped since the 18<sup>th</sup> century (“Inari Worship in Early Modern Osaka,” 199).

<sup>7</sup> This estimate is given in Heine, *Sacred High City*, 132. For a list of popular Inari shrines found throughout Japan, please refer to <https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E7%A8%B2%E8%8D%B7%E7%A5%9E%E7%A4%BE>.

<sup>8</sup> Nelson, *A Year in the Life*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, 55.

<sup>10</sup> Yusa, *Japanese Religious Traditions*, 96.

undermining of non-indigenous religious traditions, particularly Buddhism, and the *Imperial Rescript on Education*.

In order to instill the belief that the emperor was a living *kami*, the association between the emperor and the sun goddess, Amaterasu was reconstituted.<sup>11</sup> This concept was taken from the *Kojiki*, a somewhat insignificant text popularized by nationalist scholar, Motoori Norinaga during the Edo period. The notion of the emperor as direct descendant of Amaterasu was a convenient way to “strengthen and unify national consciousness on the basis of a claimed native tradition.”<sup>12</sup> With Amaterasu at the center, Ise Jingū in Mie prefecture became the most significant shrine in all of Japan.<sup>13</sup> The Meiji Constitution of 1889 helped to affirm the emperor’s divinity, with Article One stating: “The Empire of Japan shall be reigned over and governed by a line of Emperors unbroken for ages eternal,” and Article Three stating: “The Emperor is sacred and inviolable.”<sup>14</sup> In 1872, three principles were issued by the government to promote this new vision: 1) “respect the *kami* deities and love the country,” 2) “observe the way of heaven and practice the way of humanity,” and 3) “serve the emperor and respect the will of the imperial court.”<sup>15</sup> Shrines became tools of a state that claimed to be “secular” and separate from other forms of Shintō.

As an organized and independent religion, Shintō was newly-created and held little significance in the minds of everyday Japanese. Under the recently-dismantled Tokugawa shogunate, Buddhism was immensely powerful and “‘Shinto,’ insofar as it existed at all, was understood to be part of Buddhism.”<sup>16</sup> In order to assert its significance, Shintō was projected back into history as the ancient religion of Japan and *shinbutsu bunri* was employed to remove the influence of foreign religious elements. No longer supported by the government, Buddhism was severely persecuted. Temples and icons were destroyed, Buddhist clergy left the priesthood in droves, and shrines were “cleansed” of any elements considered to be Buddhist.<sup>17</sup> In the case of Fushimi Inari Taisha, this meant the removal of Aizen-ji and the change in status from a

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<sup>11</sup> Yusa, *Japanese Religious Traditions*, 96.

<sup>12</sup> Brian Bocking, “Changing Images of Shinto: *Sanja takusen* or the three oracles,” in *Shinto in History: Ways of the Kami*, eds. John Breen and Mark Teeuwen (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000), 182.

<sup>13</sup> The traditional foundation date for Ise Jingū is considered to be 4 BCE, which makes this shrine over 2,000 years old, this shrine did not become a central feature of religion in Japan until the Meiji period.

<sup>14</sup> Yusa, *Japanese Religious Traditions*, 98.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>16</sup> Bocking, “Changing Images of Shinto,” 183.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

shrine-temple complex to a Shintō shrine. The Meiji government also abolished several old festivals, while creating new ones to support the state and new ideology of State Shintō. These state rites included the funerals of the Meiji emperor (1852-1912) and Taishō emperor (1879-1926), the enthronement of the Shōwa emperor (1901-1989), and the ritual rebuilding of the Ise shrines.<sup>18</sup> Religious practices were standardized at the cost of local customs, festivals, rituals, and icons.<sup>19</sup>

The *Imperial Rescript on Education* of 1890 was one of the government's most important tools to instill obedience to the emperor among the populace. The rescript was issued to every school in the country with the purpose of implanting "in the minds of Japanese children the image of the emperor as sacred and as the "father" figure to the Japanese people."<sup>20</sup> Students could pay direct reverence to the rescript, as each school's copy was enshrined in a specially-designed altar.<sup>21</sup> Students were also obligated to worship at Shintō shrines, which faced opposition from Buddhist and Christian authorities. In response to this, the vice-minister of education insisted that such worship was not religious, but instead "is part of the school activities; it is the expression of one's patriotism."<sup>22</sup> There was no acceptable excuse to refuse participation. By the mid-1930s, State Shintō had proven to be immensely effective. Japan had transformed into a totalitarian society, replete with ultra-nationalistic forces. By 1940, Japan was largely controlled by military officers, "who promoted an expansionist policy in Asia," and was already at war with China.<sup>23</sup> While many Japanese fervently supported this regime, many more were opposed, but could not voice their criticism without fear of imprisonment, torture, or death.<sup>24</sup>

While there is little information pertaining to Inari worship during the era of the Empire of Japan, it is notable that the Inari cult survived and continued to thrive during and after this regime. The endurance of Inari shrines might seem remarkable, considering that they originated from an immigrant establishment and center on deities that are native, yet heavily influenced by continental culture. However, this endurance is a testament to the popularity of Inari and the

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<sup>18</sup> Koremaru Sakamoto, "The structure of state Shinto: its creation, development and demise," in *Shinto in History: Ways of the Kami*, eds. John Breen and Mark Teeuwen (Richmond: Curzon Press), 285.

<sup>19</sup> Yusa, *Japanese Religious Traditions*, 97.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

ability of *kitsune* to function in a wide variety of settings, including the artificial borders erected between Shintō and Buddhism.

### 4.3 Contemporary Shintō: Contesting Authority

Following Japan's surrender, State Shintō was rapidly dismantled. On New Year's Day of 1946, Emperor Hirohito 裕仁 (Shōwa 昭和天皇) issued the "Declaration of Humanity," which denied the myth of his divinity.<sup>25</sup> Although religion and state were officially separated and State Shintō no longer held authority, religion in Japan had been altered. On the one hand, the separation of Buddhism from indigenous elements "has largely been overcome through widespread efforts to reunite indigenous and imported gods, as well as the temples and shrines that house them."<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, many religious institutions in Japan perpetuate the separation between Buddhism and Shintō by designating themselves as one or the other. This is not to say that they do not overlap in certain ways. For example, Buddhist temples frequently contain elements typically, sometimes erroneously considered Shintō, such as *torii*, water-purification basins, and *kami* (which are seen as messengers), while Shintō shrines often feature Buddhist symbols, such as statues of buddhas and bodhisattvas, incense, and bells.<sup>27</sup> However, it is now more common for religious institutions to identify as either Buddhist or Shintō, regardless of whether or not Japanese people are actually concerned with the differences between the two. Fushimi Inari Taisha does contain elements from its history as a shrine-temple complex, but these elements are minor, considering its identification and presentation as a Shintō shrine today. *Inakon* demonstrates this, because it deals with specifically Shintō themes. As a religious system only officially designated in the Meiji period, Shintō in post-war Japan is a complex subject. With the "state" removed from Shintō, it is sensible to ask, what remains? Is Shintō about "native" religiosity and, if so, what does this mean? What purposes does Shintō serve in contemporary Japan? *Inakon* demonstrates that there is more than one answer to these questions, as it presents two types of Shintō relevant today: *Jinja Honchō* Shintō and popular Shintō.

#### 4.3.1 *Jinja Honchō* Shintō

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<sup>25</sup> Yusa, *Japanese Religious Traditions*, 106.

<sup>26</sup> Heine, *Sacred High City*, 105.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

Shortly after State Shintō was dismantled, the *Jinja Honchō* or National Association of Shrines was established. The *Jinja Honchō* retains many of the features of State Shintō, particularly its reverence of Amaterasu and Ise Jingū, which are the central *kami* and shrine of this organization. While it considers the emperor to be divine, the *Jinja Honchō* is not as blatantly open about this as State Shintō was. In the postwar period, Fushimi Inari Taisha declined affiliation with *Jinja Honchō* and severed its connections to imperial themes. Although rice rites are performed at both *Jinja Honchō* and Inari shrines, Fushimi Inari Taisha does not interpret these rites in imperial terms.<sup>28</sup> The *Jinja Honchō* is responsible for overseeing over 80,000 shrines and is the largest governing body representing Shintō.<sup>29</sup> As such, the *Jinja Honchō* can be easily mistaken as the normative form of Shintō and would like to be seen as such. This is especially the case outside of Japan, where Shintō studies frequently regard Amaterasu, Ise Jingū, and the *Kojiki* as central to Shintō as a whole, which is simply untrue. What is not often brought to attention is the persistence of nationalistic themes within *Jinja Honchō* Shintō.

The similarities between *Jinja Honchō* Shintō with State Shintō is not a coincidence; nationalism continues to be an issue in contemporary Japan, which is intertwined with both religion and politics. Located in Yoyogi, Shibuya, Tokyo, *Jinja Honchō* headquarters are right next to Meiji Jingū 明治神宮, the shrine erected to honor Emperor Meiji. *Jinja Honchō* Shintō is clearly tied to worship at imperial shrines and to right-wing nationalists. In 1969, the *Jinja Honchō* established a political wing, known as Shintō Seiji Renmei 神道政治連盟, officially “the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership (SAS).” The SAS is affiliated with the right-wing group known as Nippon Kaigi 日本会議 (“Japan Conference”) and counts Prime Minister Abe Shinzō and Minister of Education Shimomura Hakubun 下村 博文 among its members.<sup>30</sup> Together, the SAS, Nippon Kaigi, and a host of politicians (including one-third of the national Diet and over half of Abe’s 19 cabinet members) are working to effectively resurrect State

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<sup>28</sup> Breen and Teeuwen, *A New History of Shinto*, 213.

<sup>29</sup> David McNeill, “Back to the future: Shinto’s growing influence in politics,” *The Japan Times*, November 23, 2013. Accessed June 15, 2015. <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/11/23/national/politics-diplomacy/back-to-the-future-shintos-growing-influence-in-politics/#.VYOzD4fbJox>.

<sup>30</sup> Nippon Kaigi was established in 1997. McNeill, “Back to the future.”

Shintō.<sup>31</sup> In order to do this, these groups have several controversial goals to: 1) eradicate the 1946 constitution, 2) remilitarize, 3) defend disputed territories, including those in China, Russia, and South Korea, 3) promote Shintō and patriotism in education, 4) restore special status to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine 靖国神社, which enshrines the war dead, including war criminals, and 5) restore the divine status of the emperor.<sup>32</sup> These goals are presented under the guise of reinvigorating “Japan’s true, original characteristics” through the promotion of culture, history, and tradition.<sup>33</sup> In 2007, the SAS and Nippon Kaigi successfully implemented a holiday on April 29<sup>th</sup> in honor of Emperor Hirohito, who ruled during the Second World War. Today, these groups are determined to obtain ten million signatures for a national referendum, in order to revise the constitution.<sup>34</sup> Although groups such as the SAS and Nippon Kaigi are incredibly organized and have many members in parliament, they do not reflect the dominant view of the majority of Japanese. These groups would like to believe that they reflect the values that would support and be supported by the Japanese people, but this is simply not the case. As such, the significance of *Jinja Honchō* Shintō only extends so far. While Japanese are generally familiar with Ise Jingū and Amaterasu, there is little enthusiasm for either. Instead, another type of Shintō is more prevalent and relatable to the needs and desires of most Japanese, which is readily apparent in Inari worship.

#### 4.4 Contrasting Popular Shintō with *Jinja Honchō* Shintō

*Inakon* presents and promotes a type of Shintō that is markedly different from the *Jinja Honchō*, which I designate as popular Shintō. I have chosen to use the term “popular Shintō” not necessarily to imply that *Jinja Honchō* Shintō is always “unpopular,” but rather due to the way in which “popular” refers to something that is accepted by most people, usually with approval and even affection. Popular Shintō can be seen as fitting within the wider framework of “folk/popular religion” or *minzoku shūkyō* (and *shinkō*), “a substratum of common ideas, practices, customs, beliefs, and ritual and festive activities that shapes religious consciousness in Japan.”<sup>35</sup> I have chosen to highlight the term “popular” due to the negative associations carried by the term “folk,”

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<sup>31</sup> Prime Minister Abe is considered a “special advisor” to Nippon Kaigi. The Economist, “Right side up.” Published June 6, 2015. Accessed June 15, 2015. <http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21653676-powerful-if-little-reported-group-claims-itcan-restore-pre-war-order-right-side-up>.

<sup>32</sup> Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, 56.

<sup>33</sup> McNeill, “Back to the Future”; The Economist, “Right side up.”

<sup>34</sup> The Economist, “Right side up.”

<sup>35</sup> Reader and Tanabe, *Practically Religious*, 26.



such as superstition and ignorance, particularly regarding traditions of elites.<sup>36</sup> Although popular Shintō can be found in a variety of shrines, Inari are the most prevalent, with official numbers estimated at 40,000 shrines. While these shrines are all affiliated with Fushimi Inari Taisha, it does not function as an organizing body in the way seen in *Jinja Honchō* Shintō. In addition, unlike *Jinja Honchō* Shintō, popular Shintō does not have a clear center of authority, such as Ise Jingū or Amaterasu. Instead, popular Shintō tends to function in independent shrines, which are neither affiliated with the *Jinja Honchō* nor imperial themes. Reader speaks to the matters of religion at a popular level:

In any event at the grassroots level the main functions and importance of both Shinto and Buddhism as they occur in the lives of ordinary Japanese people have for long been far more concerned with issues of social identity and belonging in terms of local community and household, and with the processes of change in individual and community life cycles, than they have with such political issues.<sup>37</sup>

Inari worship “occupies the focus of the religious life of the ordinary Japanese people, who care more for the daily bread than for some abstract religious ideals.”<sup>38</sup> While *Jinja Honchō* Shintō is focused on the authority of Ise Jingū and the nation, Inari worship focuses on the needs and desires of its patrons. These needs and desires are almost always concerned with matters of one’s family and community, such as childbirth, success in school, traffic safety, protecting one’s home from fire, and business prosperity. These examples and many more function to provide the well-being of the family unit, as well as one’s local community. In the case of *Inakon*, protagonist Inari is concerned with matters of love and friendships. What ultimately stands out is that popular Shintō, especially Inari worship, is focused on the desires of its patrons more than it is about promoting any specific political views.

Unlike Fushimi Inari Taisha, Ise Jingū is struggling, both in terms of popularity and its finances. This is readily apparent through the *Jinja Honchō* campaign to get Ise amulets (*jingū taima* 神宮大麻) into the family altars of ten million homes, as part of a “vital strategy in its declared aim of resurrecting in the postwar the sacred land of Japan.”<sup>39</sup> Amulet sales are a matter of life and death for Ise, both in regards to its relevance and the funding of its shrines.<sup>40</sup> This is of

<sup>36</sup> Reader and Tanabe, *Practically Religious*, 27.

<sup>37</sup> Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, 56.

<sup>38</sup> Kamstra, “Who Was First,” 99.

<sup>39</sup> John Breen, “Resurrecting the Sacred Land of Japan: The State of Shinto in the Twenty-First Century,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 37.2 (2010): 295.

<sup>40</sup> Breen, “Sacred Land of Japan,” 312.

particular concern, since the majority of Japanese are seemingly disinterested with *Jinja Honchō* Shintō. In 2005 and 2007, the *Jinja Honchō* conducted surveys asking Japanese, “Does your family have an Ise amulet?” To their dismay, 94% of 20-year-olds and 81% of adults in general answered “no” or “I don’t know.” The older generation did not fare much better, with only 24% of Japanese in their 60s being aware of purchase.<sup>41</sup> Pressured to sell Ise amulets, the 80,000 shrines affiliated with the *Jinja Honchō* face an incredible challenge. In order to increase their sales and popularity, these shrines highlight their connection to family well-being, rather than nationalist causes. The Kyoto shrine office of the *Jinja Honchō* is more successful than its counterparts, due in part to its children’s painting competition, in which children paint Amaterasu. The winner’s image is included on the amulets and presents Amaterasu as “warm, bright, and kindly.”<sup>42</sup> What is particularly notable is that “the Kyoto shrine office makes no connection here between the Sun Goddess and the emperor, the imperial myth or the sacred land of Japan.” When shrines do not sell enough amulets, the priests hoard them out of shame, reporting successful sales while their shrines go into debt for Ise and its grandiose rebuilding of its shrines, a process that happens every 20 years. More concerned with their own shrines, *kami*, and community, these priests disagree with the amulet campaign, but feel powerless to oppose it. States one priest, “NAS does not exist for the benefit of shrines; shrines rather are there to benefit NAS.”<sup>43</sup> Breen suggests that given the *Jinja Honchō*’s obsession with the imperial myth and indifference shown towards local needs, it might not be surprising if some of these shrines ceased their affiliation with Ise:

The question that arises as to the extent to which these and other shrines need NAS. What is abundantly clear, however, is that without shrines NAS has no meaning and no future. NAS sees Shinto’s fortunes depending uniquely on the success or failure of its Ise amulet campaign, but they may well be wrong. The future of Shinto as we know it today is surely more dependent on whether NAS proves capable of adjusting its sights, identifying with the interests of local shrines, and coming to the assistance of their priests and parishioners.<sup>44</sup>

The success of Fushimi Inari Taisha is undoubtedly due to the emphasis it places on the needs and desires of its patrons. Fushimi Inari Taisha is a booming shrine and its wealth is prominently on display, through its elaborate buildings and maintenance of its enormous shrine grounds.

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<sup>41</sup> Breen, “Sacred Land of Japan,” 309-310.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 308.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 308, 310-312.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 313-314.

What is most notable are the tens of thousands of *torii*, thousands of fox statues, and many more ritual objects which have been donated by patrons. Fushimi Inari Taisha is adorned with the gifts of its patrons, which are donated as a means of petition or out of gratitude. Japanese know that Inari worship is effective. While this shrine and Ise Jingū both boast millions of visitors each New Year's, Fushimi Inari Taisha receives a steady stream of visitors on days with no major events. On regular days, Ise Jingū and even the city of Ise seem abandoned by comparison. What is especially significant is the presence of young Japanese. For children, teenagers, and young adults, Fushimi Inari Taisha is a fun and exciting place to visit. In contrast, Ise is considered to be rather dull, a place that one visits out of obligation or as part of a school trip. The importance of young people to Fushimi Inari Taisha is reflected through *Inakon*'s protagonist, Inari. By centering on the experiences of a young girl, *Inakon* shows that religious meaning-making occurs not just at the level of religious specialists, but among shrine patrons as well, even the young. The bestowal of Uka's powers to Inari is especially meaningful, as it demonstrates an extreme closeness between the Inari *kami* and their patrons. Apart from the emperor, it is highly unlikely that Amaterasu would be portrayed as bestowing her powers to humans. *Inakon* highlights that Inari *kami* take very seriously the everyday concerns and emotional lives of the Japanese. This is especially the case for young Japanese, who are the lifeblood of popular Shintō.

#### **4.5 Embodying the *Kami***

Through its depictions of Uka and Amaterasu, it is apparent that *Inakon* represents popular and *Jinja Honchō* Shintō as they have been described here. Uka is a young, beautiful, and emotional woman. Inari develops a close relationship with her, which is reflective of the strong connection Japanese feel with Inari *kami*. In direct contrast, Amaterasu is depicted as an ugly old woman, with short hair, unflattering glasses, and a rude attitude. As Uka and as foxes, Inari are tangible, emotional, and accessible. In contrast, Amaterasu and the *kami* of the *Kojiki* are abstract, cold, and physically distant. This depiction is clearly emphasizing that Inari are attractive to Japanese, whereas Amaterasu is undesirable. While Amaterasu is physically distant, even watching the activities of humans through a celestial mirror in the heavens, Uka appears at Fushimi Inari Taisha, in Inari's home, and is even emotionally linked to this young girl. When Inari feels joy or sadness, Uka experiences this with her. Through these characters, *Inakon* reflects the general attitudes Japanese seem to hold towards these contrasting forms of Shintō, particularly with regard to the popularity of Inari. This contrast between Uka and Amaterasu is

particularly interesting when considering the fact that Uka makes a brief appearance in the *Kojiki*, a text frequently relied upon by nationalists. As the spirit of the rice deity, Uka is a significant representation of Japanese “national” character. However, *Inakon* does not promote imperial themes in any way and, through Uka, demonstrates that the rice goddess is far more concerned with local communities and families, rather than the spiritual and political leadership of Japan.

As we have seen, the importance attached to Inari is also apparent in other examples of popular culture. The proliferation of foxes in popular media speaks to something larger: the dominance of Inari worship in the case of contemporary Shintō. Inari shrines are prominent and popular, therefore media featuring *kitsune* are prominent and popular. On a popular level, the *kami* of the *Kojiki* are given little attention. These deities are rarely represented in popular media. Instead, people flock to foxes, Inari, and the type of Shintō they represent. The fact that Inari and foxes are everywhere in Japan speaks to people’s desire for them.

*Inakon* presents a remarkable image of two types of Shintō: one deeply fixated on the past, the other more focused on the future. While *Inakon* is quite iconoclastic, showing distaste for imperial themes and *Jinja Honchō* Shintō, there are virtually no repercussions. While Japan is certainly no stranger to religious violence, irreverent depictions of nationalist symbols, such as Ise Jingū and Amaterasu cause little, if any controversy. This speaks to Shintō’s malleability, particularly as it lacks religious leaders and canonical texts. Yet it also speaks to the fact that most Japanese simply do not support the ideals of the *Jinja Honchō*. *Jinja Honchō* Shintō speaks to an older generation, who are more politically conservative and concerned with imperial and national matters. Although Amaterasu is symbolically at the center, *Jinja Honchō* Shintō is undoubtedly male-centric. In opposition, popular Shintō can be viewed as youth-centric, feminine, and best-represented through Inari. The matters of Inari worship revolve around one’s home and community. Inari and Fushimi Inari Taisha are overwhelmingly feminine in nature. In contrast to the exclusive and cloistered nature of Ise Jingū, Fushimi Inari Taisha is about physical representation and contact. Most recognizable through Inari, popular Shintō is about one’s existence in the physical world: the health of one’s family, aging, childbirth, marriage, rites of passage. The average Japanese is not generally praying to resurrect either the political dominance or economic clout of Japan. Instead, they are concerned with those close to them. Inari worship is about embodiment, as seen through the shrines, with their *torii*, adorned statues, and other forms of offerings. At Ise Jingū, sacred spaces are often found behind fences. At Fushimi Inari

Taisha, devotees make offerings which shape the divine body (*shintai* 神体, typically represented as “statues” *shinzō* 神像) of Inari, whether embodied in fox statues, the shrine, or Inari Mountain. These offerings go beyond contributing to the functionality and aesthetic of the shrine; devotees participate in adorning and shaping Inari’s body. This, in turn, affects how Inari are worshipped and remain meaningful to so many.

Based on the enormous wealth of Fushimi Inari Taisha and the struggles for Ise Jingū, Inari strongly resonate with contemporary Japanese. Inari worship and *Inakon* reflect that growth and change are highly acceptable and encouraged in popular Shintō, whereas the *Jinja Honchō* is rigid and alienating its desired audience. *Inakon* is one of many examples of how religion is sustained at the popular level. By adapting to the needs and desires of the Japanese, Inari worship remains vibrant as ever. *Inakon* reflects how religious motivation in Japan is thus largely a family and community-oriented endeavour, not a political or nationalistic one. It remains to be seen whether the *Jinja Honchō* will continue its obsession with a mythical past that few identify with and instead, turn towards the concerns of its laity. Meanwhile, many Japanese will continue to find resonance with Inari, engaging in a relationship of mutual support.

#### **4.6 Final Thoughts: On Nostalgia and Seeking Identity in Modern Japan**

One final and particularly profound example of the contrast between *Jinja Honchō* Shintō and popular Shintō is found in the concept of nostalgia. Nostalgia is often referred to through the term *natsukashii* 懐かしい, an adjective used to modify people or things that are missed, beloved, or yearned for. *Jinja Honchō* Shintō and popular Shintō have two very distinctive narratives, which use the concept of nostalgia in markedly different ways. In the case of *Jinja Honchō* Shintō, nostalgia is used to describe Japan’s mythical past, which nationalist ideologues sought to recreate during the Empire of Japan, which included deifying the emperor, possessing a strong military, and expelling foreign influences. This narrative reflects both violence and xenophobia, representing the ideology of a time that few wish to return to. Today, the organizing body of Ise Jingū is trying desperately to appeal to Japanese, but few refuse to fall for the repackaged narrative that is being presented. Most Japanese are anti-war and will not overlook what happened in the name of their country in the not so distant past. It may not have always been the case, but in contemporary Japan, Amaterasu is strongly connected to war, nationalism, industrialization, a modern urban lifestyle, and a distrust of outsiders. Many of these are concepts that many Japanese want nothing to do with or, at the very least, find problematic. Instead,

Japanese have focused their attention on a different narrative, such as that exemplified through Inari, which is similarly “old,” but by no means irrelevant.

As we have seen through *Inakon*, popular Shintō places heavy emphasis on community, through respecting one’s relationships to other people, places, and often, deities. In this case, popular Shintō reflects nostalgia for a time before the innovations of the imperial and postwar periods, many of which have led to a sense of a loss regarding community and belonging. The ways in which Japanese resonate with Inari have nothing to do with the nostalgia invoked by the *Jinja Honchō*, but rather everything to do with a concept called *furusato*. *Furusato* 故郷 (lit. “old village/home”) typically refers to one’s home village or hometown community and reflects “a quest, a consuming popular desire to “travel home.””<sup>45</sup> While it relates to where one’s family is from, *furusato* also connects more broadly to a strong sense of community and “places that are imbued with the spirit of the homeland, full of the essence of Japanese tradition,” particularly the countryside.<sup>46</sup> *Furusato* is evocative of childhood memories, motherly love, interdependency, intimacy, and nurturing.<sup>47</sup> The concept of *furusato* has a strong resonance for many Japanese, particularly when considering the dramatic changes Japan underwent following the war.<sup>48</sup> Increased urbanization, industrialization, and Westernization have created a sense of displacement and worries of losing cultural identity. Millie Creighton explains how the notion of going “home” in the sense of *furusato* is wrought with difficulty, since it reflects a non-geographical location:

“Home” in a temporal sense is the antithesis of the way most modern Japanese live, and a contradiction to four decades of successful struggle to achieve the desired goal of economic parity with the West. In today’s modern, urban-centered, postindustrialized Japan, product in part of the “economic miracle” that transformed a devastated Asian nation into a foremost economic power with an apparently Westernized lifestyle, “home” is a “real Japan,” which in the collective nostalgic imagination implies the return to a pre-Western, preindustrialized, and nonurban past.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Millie Creighton, “Consuming Rural Japan: The Marketing of Tradition and Nostalgia in the Japanese Travel Industry,” *Ethnology* 36.3 (Summer 1997): 239, 242. *Furusato* is also frequently written as 故郷. The concept of *furusato* is strongly linked to Japan’s booming domestic tourism industry, which is bolstered by advertisements appealing to the desire to reunite with “Japanese identity.”

<sup>46</sup> Ian Reader, “Back to the Future: Images of Nostalgia and Renewal in a Japanese Religious Context,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 14.4 (December 1987): 290.

<sup>47</sup> Creighton, “Consuming Rural Japan,” 242-243.

<sup>48</sup> Michael Dylan Foster, “Haunted Travelogues: Hometowns, Ghost Towns, and Memories of War,” *Mechademia* 4 (2009): 166.

<sup>49</sup> Creighton, “Consuming Rural Japan,” 239. The yearning for preindustrial Japan is particularly profound, considering the Fukushima nuclear disaster of 2011.

With this longing for an idealized “home,” urban life in contemporary Japan is frequently conceptualized as corrupt, emotionally cold, and alienating, whereas rural life is romanticized as pure, maternal, and humanizing.<sup>50</sup> What this is especially suggestive of is the search for identity and community. There is a certain sense that the feeling of “belonging” has eroded in modern Japan, as an exchange for the success of Japan’s economic and technological development.<sup>51</sup> *Furusato* is also particularly meaningful when considering Japan’s post-bubble economy coupled with the crisis of an increasingly aging population. The heavy industrialization and urbanization connected to the imperialist regime have left many Japanese seeking an alternative, particularly through romanticizing the past. Creighton highlights how nostalgia functions as a tool with which to deal with these changes.

[C]ollective nostalgia is often a response to cultural transitions that leave masses of people with feelings of loneliness and estrangement from others. Despite a long history of city centers, the modern sense of estrangement and lost community in Japan is strongly associated with accelerating trends toward urbanization. Historically, the Japanese understanding of belongingness developed in a context of rural, community-based social life exemplified by rice-farming hamlets and fishing villages where subsistence was based on co-operative work efforts.<sup>52</sup>

In this way, nostalgia reflects seeking identity and certainty through a notion of the past, which is not necessarily authentic, but serves the needs of the present.<sup>53</sup> By connecting to the past, albeit an idealized one, nostalgia allows the opportunity to heal, through reflecting on current problems and seeking “traditional” solutions.

When considering the concepts of nostalgia and *furusato*, it is clear that *Inakon*’s emphasis on community and relationships is connected to something deeply meaningful to many Japanese. In the case of *Jinja Honchō* Shintō, nostalgia is used as “a conservative, non-productive, even dangerous form of desire, a longing for a mythical home place/time that can be manipulated for nationalist and other ideological purposes.”<sup>54</sup> However, as *Inakon* reflects, nostalgia can also be used more consciously as a means of revolution, translating “a wistful longing for an idealized past into productive stimulus toward a future that incorporates ideals

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<sup>50</sup> Creighton, “Consuming Rural Japan,” 240.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 242.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Foster, “Haunted Travelogues,” 177.

without ignoring the realities of the present.”<sup>55</sup> This is not necessarily reflective of a desire to abandon the developments of urbanization and industrialization, but rather a desire to bring the community values of the *furusato* into urban spaces. There have been an overwhelming number of narratives told that reflect the trauma and healing process in the postwar period in the popular media of Japan. Themes such as apocalypse, resurrection, innocence, and nostalgia are all vital components of these stories. *Inakon* tells a particularly remarkable narrative, because it does not explicitly emphasize themes of war. While *Inakon* perhaps indirectly reflects on the war through its crude representation of Amaterasu, it demonstrates that something else has taken precedence. *Inakon* reveals that the Japanese have perhaps moved on from these traumas and are instead more focused on what matters to them: nurturing the bonds with one’s family and local community.

*Inakon* does not advocate for a return to a rural, preindustrial Japan, but instead points to a desire for something that feels like “home” through reconfiguring community values within urban spaces. These values are those typified by the community-based nature of the *furusato*. In this way, *Inakon* shows how it is not just a matter of “an empty materialist contemporary Japan and an idealized traditional Japan.”<sup>56</sup> Instead, it is a process of using an idealized past or notion of “tradition” to transform the present into something more ideal. This “delving into tradition is portrayed as part of a continuing search for identity and values by which to live in a changing, modern society.”<sup>57</sup> The past is not without its problems. What matters is taking what is meaningful and applying it to today. Nostalgia functions as both a means to remember and forget.<sup>58</sup> It is selective and, in the case of Inari and popular Shintō, Japanese are choosing to remember the community-based aspects of village life, while forgetting (or moving forward from) the atrocities of Imperial Japan. As demonstrated by the examples of *Jinja Honchō* and popular Shintō, it seems that multiple narratives can co-exist and suit the needs of different groups. While *Jinja Honchō* is attached to a narrative that is often viewed as “central,” most Japanese people do not identify with this narrative. Instead, they are attracted to the narratives of the peripheries, which is particularly obvious in the case of Inari worship. The boundaries of center/outside are reversed in practice and thus the peripheral is rendered “normative.”

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<sup>55</sup> Foster, “Haunted Travelogues,” 177.

<sup>56</sup> Susan J. Napier, “Matter out of Place: Carnival, Containment, and Cultural Recovery in Miyazaki’s “Spirited Away,”” *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 32.2 (Summer 2006): 301.

<sup>57</sup> Reader, “Back to the Future,” 288.

<sup>58</sup> Foster, “Haunted Travelogues,” 166.





## Conclusion

*Inakon* provides a compelling lens through which to examine Inari worship. This animation reinforces the fact that Inari are intimate with humans and explicitly connected to people's concerns with their families and communities. *Inakon*'s representation of Inari makes even more sense when framed in the historical context of *kitsune* in Japanese media. Foxes are increasingly represented as beneficent companions and allies of humans. This intimacy is even more significant when considering Inari worship's success in relation to *Jinja Honchō* Shintō. There is a tension being played out between *Jinja Honchō* and popular Shintō, as it is represented through *Inakon*. While the *Jinja Honchō* presides over twice as many official shrines as Fushimi Inari Taisha, these shrines are struggling to support Ise Jingū, let alone themselves. *Inakon* points to a very pertinent issue in contemporary Shintō: the presence of nationalism in a nation of citizens who are typically pacifist and more concerned with local matters. Given the overwhelming resonance that Inari have with the majority of Japanese, it is shocking how little consideration Inari worship is given in English language scholarship. While support for religion in Japan seems to be declining, as far as *Jinja Honchō* Shintō goes, this support is abundant at Inari shrines and interwoven in the fabric of everyday life.

One final example of the rift between imperial-themed shrines and popular shrines is found in the reception towards the video game *Ōkami* (2006).<sup>1</sup> *Ōkami*'s narrative combines many aspects and stories from Japanese religions and legends and features Amaterasu as its protagonist. Throughout the course of the game, Amaterasu takes the form of a white wolf and journeys across Japan, saving the country and its inhabitants from darkness.<sup>2</sup> While *Ōkami* has received critical acclaim, primarily overseas, it suffered poor sales in Japan, with only 66,000 copies sold in its first year of release.<sup>3</sup> *Ōkami*'s overseas success is at least in part due to its exotic nature: the game was designed to resemble the *sumi-e* 墨絵 (“ink wash painting”) style of art and features

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<sup>1</sup> *Ōkami* was first released for Sony's PlayStation 2. It has also been released on the Nintendo Wii (2008) and PlayStation 3 (2012).

<sup>2</sup> This darkness is referred to as Yami or “The Emperor of Everlasting Darkness.”

<sup>3</sup> This is especially significant, considering that *Ōkami* was produced by Kamiya Hideki, a widely-known video game producer, who was responsible for the Devil May Cry series and the hugely-successful Resident Evil series.

narratives largely unknown outside of Japan. Although it is a beautiful game and features strong gameplay, it is not terribly surprising that Japanese did not find it appealing. Amaterasu remains undeniably connected to imperial themes, themes which, as we have seen, the majority of Japanese consider repulsive. Even with its emphasis on cute character design, something that is incredibly popular in Japan, *Ōkami* did not succeed.<sup>4</sup> *Ōkami* not only tells the story of Amaterasu saving Japan, but also about the importance of revitalizing belief in the *kami*, particularly in the sun goddess herself. This theme of *revitalizing* belief strikes a nerve, since, as we have seen, the *Jinja Honchō* is seeking to *revitalize* the prominence of the emperor and Amaterasu in Japan. In North America for example, the closest equivalent to *Ōkami* would be a fundamentalist biblical-themed video game: supported by few, cringed at by many. Because the majority of Japanese do not find *Jinja Honchō* Shintō meaningful, *Ōkami* tells a narrative that is difficult to identify with, especially because it presents Amaterasu and thus *Jinja Honchō* as morally “good,” while failing to account for Japan’s troubled past. This is a past that most Japanese have moved on from.

Cute characters, supernatural themes, and emphasis on relationships and helping others all tend to be attractive to Japanese audiences. *Inakon* and *Ōkami* both have an abundance of these elements, yet *Ōkami* did not succeed. This undoubtedly has to do with the issues encountered in this project, particularly how *Jinja Honchō* Shintō places emphasis on the nation, whereas popular Shintō is more locally-concerned. *Inakon* tells a story that is grounded in a specific place – the Fushimi ward in Kyoto – and shows the intimate relationship between a young girl and the rice goddess. *Ōkami* is more detached, taking place across the entire nation of Japan (or Nippon, as it is referred to in the game) and during a mythical past that contemporary Japanese do not connect with. In the virtual world of *Ōkami*, Amaterasu battles an abstract incarnation of darkness. In the real world of contemporary Japan, Amaterasu is connected to a darkness of Japan’s past, which has also lingered into the present. These two tales, one real, one fictional, are irreconcilable. And Japanese have long had their attention focused elsewhere.

## Reflections on *Animating Inari*

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<sup>4</sup> This is even more apparent when considering the follow-up to *Ōkami*, *Ōkamiden* (2011), which again, sold fairly well overseas, but sold significantly fewer copies than *Ōkami* in Japan. While other factors, such as poor advertising, might have also affected the sales of *Ōkami*, most of the weight falls onto the game’s connection to nationalism.

This thesis has demonstrated the profound prevalence of foxes within the cultural and religious landscape of Japan, which is given little consideration in English scholarship. While I place particular emphasis on Fushimi Inari Taisha, it is important to reiterate that Inari shrines are not only found in Kyoto, they are found all over Japan, including Toyokawa Inari in Toyokawa City and Saijō Inari in Okayama. This includes the roughly 40,000 officially designated shrines, as well as additional unspecified shrines, which can increase this number dramatically, and Buddhist institutions.<sup>5</sup> Outside of religious institutions, foxes proliferate within various cultural forms, as highlighted through the narratives of the Meiji and contemporary periods. *Kitsune* manifest in dozens of ways, which has led to a rich history of fox narratives, which continue to shift today, particularly in conjunction with Inari worship and contemporary needs and practices.<sup>6</sup> Beginning in the 1990s, Japan underwent a dramatic transition from print to digital media, particularly where fox narratives are concerned (and demonstrated by my chart in Chapter Three). Supernatural themes are extremely popular in contemporary Japanese media, with foxes as the most commonly represented type of supernatural creature.<sup>7</sup> As Inari, foxes are absolutely everywhere and have an enormous footprint in Japan, which is only further amplified by their presence in popular media.

By choosing to examine *Inakon*, I have demonstrated that the study of religion, particularly where it concerns Japan, must give greater consideration to material and popular culture. This thesis has shown a detailed consideration of how an animated series intersects with the religious practices surrounding a real shrine in Kyoto and real deities, which are also the most popular *kami* in Japan. One of the most valuable outcomes of choosing to examine *Inakon* is the perspective it provides on the contention between popular and formal religion, via Inari worship and *Jinja Honchō*. By identifying this contention, I concluded that Shintō is better understood through at least two designations: popular Shintō and *Jinja Honchō* (or formal)

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<sup>5</sup> As mentioned earlier, Smyers estimates that these unspecified shrines would increase the number of Inari shrines 10-100 times (*The Fox and the Jewel*, 1). Foxes appear in Buddhist temples as Inari-Dakini as tutelary Buddhist deities (in *chinjusha* 鎮守社), typically providing similar this-worldly benefits as at Inari shrines. Ōmori Keiko lists 75 sites like this in her text on the Inari cult (Ōmori, *Inari Shinkō to Shūkyōminzoku*, 392-399).

<sup>6</sup> Ōmori describes over 50 types of manifestations of foxes and cats that can affect people in Japanese popular culture and religion (*Inari shinkō to shūkyōminzoku*, 32-34). Nozaki's work also makes reference to 13 different types of foxes, including nine-tailed foxes (*kyūbi no kitsune* 九尾の狐), white foxes (*shirogitsune* or *byakko* 白狐), and field/wild foxes (*yako* or *nogitsune* 野狐). These different types of foxes vary in disposition and can use different methods of bewitchery (Nozaki, *Kitsune*, 212). Throughout *Kitsune*, Nozaki also highlights the wide variety of ways in which foxes appear in popular cultural forms, such as art and narratives.

<sup>7</sup> I would estimate that in anime and manga containing supernatural beings, foxes are represented in at least half (or, at the very least, significantly more than any other type of supernatural being).

Shintō. Inari worship and popular religion deserve significantly more attention and reflect what religion looks like on the ground in substantial numbers. By doing so, this thesis contributes to the study of Shintō in contemporary Japan, an area which needs significantly more attention.

By emphasizing the value of popular media and challenging the parameters used to locate “true religion,” this thesis encourages increased energy towards the study of religion on the ground, engaging with the material and popular matters that people connect with. *Inakon* is but one example of how religious reality is being reconstructed in Japan today. Through popular media, everyday people can participate in the shift of religious meaning, thus allowing the religious practices at hand to adapt and thrive.

### **For Future Consideration**

I will conclude by highlighting a variety of ways in which I would like to expand this project. This study points to an overwhelming need to further investigate contemporary Shintō, particularly where it concerns authority and meaning-making.

Nationalism in contemporary Japan is in dire need of attention by scholars of religion. While many scholars have examined nationalism in Japan before and during WWII, few venture to make sense of its presence and impact today. As we have seen, nationalism is undeniably linked to religion in contemporary Japan, particularly through *Jinja Honchō*. One approach would be to conduct fieldwork and compare shrines across Japan. Which shrines are explicitly tied to imperial themes? What are these themes and who supports them? How does their financial support compare to other centers, such as Fushimi Inari Taisha? While most Japanese are anti-war, imperial-themed shrines remain and right-wing nationalists strive to increase their influence. As pointed out in Chapter Four, Minister of Education, Shimomura Hakubun is affiliated with and strongly endorses the agenda of Nippon Kaigi. This begs the question, what are children taught in school regarding shrines and temples and to what extent? With Shimomura in charge, it would not be surprising if the *Jinja Honchō* was involved or at least striving to be involved in developing the curriculum. The positions of authority held by right-wing ideologues should not be taken lightly and deserve more critical attention in studies of Japanese religions and Japan more generally.

As we have seen, Inari are seriously underrepresented in English language scholarship. While there are many more approaches that could be taken, I am eager to learn more about Inari worship before and during the period of Imperial Japan. Inari worship obviously survived the

war, so was it also thriving at that time? Did Inari worship face suppression or did Inari shrines play it safe during this time? How does Inari worship of the Edo period compare to today? What was lost, what has changed, and what remains? It would also be more than worth investigating Ukanomitama, as she is given little consideration in scholarship. Finally, it would also be worth exploring what visitors - both those who identify and do not identify as parishioners - are doing at Inari shrines, such as Fushimi Inari Taisha, such as the types of activities they are engaging with. What kinds of activities did laypeople engage with historically and how do they compare to contemporary practices?

Another topic that this thesis has opened up is that of popular religion. By looking at the success of Inari and Fushimi Inari Taisha, it is clear that a great deal of power lies with the laity.<sup>8</sup> Votive offerings are one of the most prominent (and, of course, visible) examples of the influence of popular piety. I have suggested that votive offerings, such as *torii* and the bibs of fox statues are a way for devotees to physically shape the bodies of the *kami* and insert themselves into the meaning-making process. This intimate activity is especially prominent in Inari worship. It would be fascinating to take an inventory of these offerings, as well as consider who donated or made them and for what purposes (if at all possible). These offerings are not exclusive to Inari shrines, so it would be interesting to survey the prominence and types of votive offerings between shrines, perhaps Inari vs. non-Inari, imperial vs. non-imperial. I would hypothesize that Inari and localized shrines have the most abundant and varied number of votive offerings.

A particularly modern way to look at popular religion would be through a larger survey of popular media in Japan. As we have seen through *Inakon*, popular media present an alternative and compelling means through which to examine religion. My decision to examine this contemporary animation provided me with insights that other, more traditional approaches to Religious Studies would not have been able to. I would first explore how religion is represented in contemporary Japanese media on a wider level. Which aspects of religion are represented the most? Are there any other animations or popular media comparable to *Inakon*? Considering that *Inakon* represents Kyoto and, more generally, the Kansai region, it would be interesting to investigate how regionality functions in media. It is particularly common for Tokyo and the

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<sup>8</sup> It would be particularly interesting to use Michel Foucault's work on power to explore the issue of authority in the context of Shintō, as well as religions in Japan, more generally.

Kinki region to be the dominant setting of anime and manga narratives, but is this different where religious themes are concerned? How do Japanese feel about religious representations in media? I speculate that they would not likely consider the depicted phenomena to be considered “religious,” but instead more cultural.<sup>9</sup> It would also be of interest to compare the kinds of demographics, religious activities, and intent behind these activities being represented in media such as anime. How would these compare to real life? Who is behind the production of these media? With the media the way it is today, the boundary between producer and audience is becoming increasingly blurred. The people who sustain religious activities are increasingly involved in the meaning-making process, which media are most certainly a part of.

Through its themes and characters, *Inakon* points to a strong need to examine gender in contemporary Shintō. The emphasis placed upon Uka suggests that female deities have meaningful roles. It would be interesting to investigate the roles and prominence of female deities from a historical perspective. What kinds of traits do female *kami* (and other deities) tend to have and how does their popularity compare to male *kami* and genderless deities? Uka’s emotional and physical presence play large roles in her popularity. Would this also be the case for other female or feminine deities? *Inakon*’s perspective of young girls points to a need to examine the roles of girls and women as participants in religious spaces and activities. It would be interesting to survey the presence of girls and women at shrines. Are they more numerous than boys and men? What kinds of activities do they tend to engage with and how do these compare to their male counterparts? One major link between women and religion is found in caregiving. Women are largely responsible for raising children in Japan (and caring for the elderly) and a significant amount of religious activity ties into caregiving activities, such as preparing food offerings and caring for *kami* and ancestors through religious practices in the home. While the theme of caregiving, as it relates to women and religion, begs many questions, children’s involvement with religion is perhaps one of the most significant (particularly considering the *Jinja Honchō*’s desire to enforce their ideals in the education system). How do Japanese children learn religious behaviour? Who initiates attending shrine events, such as festivals and annual celebrations? How do children learn about what *kami* are and how to behave at a shrine? I speculate that women are largely responsible for educating children about religious

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<sup>9</sup> This, again, ties into the use of the term *shūkyō*, which implies features of Western religion. These features do not reflect what takes place at shrines or in the home, so most Japanese typically do not identify as “religious,” even if their actions show otherwise.

matters. The presence of female religious officials, such as *miko*, oracles, and leaders of New Religious Movements would also be worth investigating, in terms of numbers, prominence by type of institution (e.g. imperial vs. non-imperial shrines), and roles being fulfilled.

Overall, *Inakon* points to an overwhelming variety of topics that are pushed into the peripheries by dominant research methodologies, including the Protestant model in the study of religion, and the privileging of *Jinja Honchō* Shintō to name just two. In order to better understand and appreciate Japanese religions, particularly Shintō, boundaries such as center/periphery must be approached with care and caution. Multiple narratives exist, not necessarily negating or contradicting one another. Those who tell these narratives have different agendas, whether they are intentional or not. What matters most is that scholars be vigilant of the ways in which the frameworks they privilege might be narrowing their view. In the case of Inari, as shown through *Inakon*, a great deal of power lies within everyday Japanese, who engage with them and shape their tradition in a variety of ways. When traditional frameworks are privileged, power is ascribed elsewhere and worlds of meaning are lost.

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