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Spirited Away: Film of the Fantastic and Evolving Japanese Folk Symbols

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Released in 2001, Miyazaki Hayao's[1] (1941 -) animated film entitled *Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi* (*Spirited Away*) became the highest-grossing film of all time in Japan. It won a number of awards, including a 2003 Academy Award for Best Animated Feature Film and a Golden Bear at the Berlin International Festival in 2002. Derek Elley, a reviewer, writes, "It's almost impossible to do justice in words either to the visual richness of the movie, which mélanges traditional Japanese clothes and architecture with both Victorian and modern-day artifacts, or to the character-filled storyline with human figures, harpies and grotesque creatures" (72). Many critics have compared *Spirited Away* with such western stories as *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Wizard of Oz*, or even *Harry Potter*. While the influence of western stories, art, and architecture is evident, as Miyazaki himself expressed, *Spirited Away* is replete with Japanese folklore, tradition, and symbolism. Indeed, the title itself, *kamikakushi* (hidden by kami/ deities), alludes to Japanese folk belief. Some of the film's principal characters such as Yubaba (a descendent of *yamauba* or mountain witch) and Kamaji (a *tsuchigumo* or earth spider) are reminiscent of characters found throughout Japanese folklore, their residence within the bathhouse offering a reflection of

Japan's vertical society. To this point, situating the film as an exemplary work of the fantastic, I shall examine covert and overt Japanese folk beliefs, imagery, and symbolism of the film as a text, which resonates with voices of Japanese past and present.

Spirited Away as a Film of the Fantastic

Spirited Away is an adventure and coming-of-age film in which the main character, a young girl by the name of Chihiro, embarks on a quest to save her family from a supernatural spell. The film opens with Chihiro's family moving to a new town, leaving Chihiro uneasy and sulky. On their way to their new house, the family unwittingly enters into a supernatural realm, where Chihiro's parents are turned into pigs. While Chihiro is in a panic, a mysterious boy named Haku appears and offers his help. Chihiro learns that the only way to break the spell and re-enter the "human-world" is to find work at the bathhouse (of the supernatural). There, through various challenges and pitfalls, Chihiro finds friendship, she finds a way to help her family, and most importantly, she finds herself.

According to Todorov, "the fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event" (25). As many critics have noted, Todorov's definition of the fantastic is limited, marked by the duration of hesitation or uncertainty by the reader, and often the characters themselves. *Spirited Away* is an exemplary work of the fantastic in that the uncertainty is experienced both by the character and the audience.[2] For the protagonist, Chihiro, the uncertainty comes at the beginning of the film in the restaurant area of a strange town in the other world. Seeing her parents turned into pigs before her eyes, Chihiro talks to herself, "What? I'm dreaming. I'm dreaming. Come on, wake up. Wake up! It's just a dream. It's just a dream. Go away. Go away. Disappear..." Chihiro then realizes that her body is disappearing. Panicked, she cries out, "I'm see-through! It's just a bad dream!" Clearly Chihiro thinks what she has seen and what she is experiencing are against natural law. Luckily, Haku, the apprentice of Yubaba, who is the owner of the bathhouse, comes to the rescue and gives Chihiro some food from this strange realm in order to prevent her from disappearing. The motif of consuming food from the other world in order to stay alive in that realm may remind the audience of a famous Japanese mythological story of Izanagi and Izanimi. Izanimi, the female creator of Japan, dies while

giving birth to a fire deity. Izanagi, her brother and husband as well as male counterpart, misses her so much that he goes to the nether land to retrieve her. But Izanami says that she has already eaten the food from that realm, implying that it would be difficult for her to return easily to this one. The food produced in the other world has the power to make one stay in that world. Chihiro's hesitation and uncertainty does not last very long, for she has to rescue her parents before she forgets who she is. She acts, casting away any doubt about whether what she is experiencing is a dream or not. From this point forward in the story, Todorov's definition of the fantastic appears to be applicable only now and then. One is not sure whether Chihiro is uncertain of the strange deities' existence on such occasions as when Chihiro faces *oshirasama* (spirit of radish) or simply if she is fearful of them. Throughout the film, however, Chihiro never stops believing that her parents will be turned back into humans in "this world." In order to rescue her parents and return to "this world," Chihiro ventures into the supernatural realm as a real entity, and she stands firm when faced with the challenges of the other world.

Chihiro's fear and hesitation are felt by the audience, albeit not to the same degree and not at the same intensity. After all, the audience is sitting comfortably in the movie theater or at home, watching the story develop as third-party bystanders. Despite this inherent detachment, the audience marvels at the transformation of Chihiro's parents into pigs. As a successful film invariably does, the audience quickly starts to empathize with Chihiro and is drawn into Chihiro's viewpoint. The masterful artwork, architecture, and cinematography render a realistic backdrop to the other realm, giving the audience a feeling that it really exists. Indeed, the director Miyazaki has said, "I created a world where Yubaba lives in pseudo-western style to make it seem as if it is something that has been seen somewhere else and to make it uncertain whether it is a dream or reality" (Yu 2002, 16).[3] And unlike *Alice in Wonderland* or *The Wizard of Oz*, what has happened in the other world is not entirely a dream. Again, Miyazaki explains that he did not want the audience to think that the world Chihiro has experienced was all dreams (Saitō, 117). To blur the distinction between dream and actuality, the text of *Spirited Away* drops some hints to the audience about the end of the film. For example, the leaves accumulated on top of the car and the wild grass grown in front of the tunnel (entrance to the theme park) suggest a passage of time from when Chihiro enters

the tunnel until her return. Chihiro's hair band given by Zeniba (Yubaba's twin sister)—its glittering underscores the hint—provides evidence of the objective existence of the "other world." It is important to note, however, that the audience is not given any clear evidence as to whether Chihiro will remember her adventure once she returns to "this world." Zeniba says to Chihiro, "You don't forget what happened. You just can't recall it." This may be reassuring. But if nobody remembers it, who would say that it really happened? Equally important, even if Chihiro remembers it, who would say that the other world through the tunnel really exists other than in Chihiro's memory or in her daydreams or imagination? Thus the audience is not entirely sure what happened to Chihiro: was she really in another realm experiencing all this or was she dreaming or imagining it all? At the end of the film, the audience is left guessing.

Spirited Away conforms not only to a limited literary genre of the fantastic defined by Todorov but also to a more popular understanding of the fantastic as a form of escape. D.G. Hartwell writes, "Fantasy promises escape from reality. It is characteristic of fantasy stories that they take the readers out of the real world of hard facts, hard objects and hard decisions into a world of wonders and enchantments."[4] Indeed, Miyazaki says that "fantasy is necessary. During childhood when children don't have much power but feel angst, fantasy gives some kind of salvation. When children face difficult and complicated problems, they will be beaten if they tackle them directly. You don't need to use a dubious phrase like 'escape from reality'" (Saitō 2001, 119). Miyazaki further comments that, "Today, the world has become ambiguous; but even though it is ambiguous, the world is encroaching and trying to consume (everything). It is the main theme of this film to describe such a world clearly in the form of a fantasy."[5] It gives assurance to children when things are not so black and white in this modern world. Miyazaki considers *Spirited Away* as a fairy tale, a direct descendant of Japanese fairy tales, "Suzume no Oyado" (The Sparrows' Inn) or "Nezumi no Goten" (The Mouse's Castle) (Saitō, 74).[6] His statement reminds one of Bruno Bettelheim's children's favorable reactions to the traditional genre of fairy tales: "In the traditional fairy tale, the hero is rewarded and the evil person meets his well-deserved fate, thus satisfying the child's deep-seeded need for justice. How else can a child hope that justice will be done to him, when he feels unfairly treated? And how else can he convince himself

that he must act correctly, when he is so sorely tempted to give in to the asocial prodding of his desires?" (144).

Spirited Away also fits well with Susan Napier's definition of the fantastic: "fantasy is any *conscious* departure from consensus reality." Napier's definition is much broader, for she encompasses the author's intention in creating the text. Napier explains that she is "...also concerned with the motivations behind the writer's decision to write in the fantastic mode. By choosing to use the fantastic, the author guarantees that the story will be received differently from one written in a conventional realistic mode" (9). As mentioned above, Miyazaki chose the fantasy genre to give assurance to children. Further, he believes that creating fantasy is akin to opening up the world of the subconsciousness where psychological reality reigns. In that sense, fantasy is more real than reality of this world (Saitō, 118-19). The film is dedicated to those who "were once ten years old, and those who are going to be ten years old" (Saitō, 114). Clearly, the director is appealing to children as well as to the child in all of us, giving universal assurance that justice does indeed prevail, even (or because it is) in the realm of the fantastic and supernatural.

Japanese Folk Beliefs, Imagery, and Symbolism

The genre of the fantastic is one aspect of *Spirited Away*'s appeal. Another attraction is the richness of its Japanese folklore elements. Miyazaki states that Japanese traditional design, rites, and tales are a rich source for the imagination. He believes that "it is a poor idea to push all the traditional things into a small folk-culture world. Surrounded by high technology and its flimsy devices, children are more and more losing their roots. We must inform them of the richness of our traditions" (Yu, 16). Indeed, Miyazaki does an excellent job of portraying Japanese traditions within the film. There are numerous references to the Japanese customs and folk beliefs including *kamikakushi* (Spirited Away) and legendary figures. Several of the more conspicuous examples of Japanese folk legend, custom, and belief present in the film, are examined here in further detail.

Title*: Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi*

First to be discussed is a folk belief, *kamikakushi* (literally, hidden by *kami*, deities), which is part of the title of the film. In the past, when children or women suddenly disappeared and could not be found for a long time, it was presumed "they had met *kamikakushi*."

Sudden disappearances were often attributed to the spirit realm, as many believed that spirits took the person away to the spirit world. Yanagita Kunio's *Tōno monogatari* (*Tōno Tales*, 1909) includes many examples of *kamikakushi*. One of them is about a daughter of a rich family in the village. Some time after she disappears, a hunter from the same village meets her in the mountains. She tells him that she was captured by a strange being and forced to marry it and bear its children, only to have them devoured by her husband. She tells the hunter that she would remain in the mountain for the rest of her life but that he should return to the village as soon as possible (Yanagita 1978,113).[7] Komatsu Kazuhiko, an anthropologist, writes "the truth of *kamikakushi* could have been a runaway disliking a village life, longing for urban city, or elopement. The veil of *kamikakushi* conveniently situates a runaway in the realm of deity.... *Kamikakushi* hides not only a person but also the truth behind the escapee" (Komatsu 2002, 217). Komatsu further comments that *Kamikakushi* is a verdict of "social death" in this world, and coming back to this world from *Kamikakushi* meant "social resurrection." *Kamikakushi* may be said to be a horrible experience of the other world, and at the same time, a time of rest as a "social being," or entering a life of "the other world" as a new social being (Komatsu 2002, 229). At the beginning of the film, Chihiro is seen as a sulky-looking girl, moving to a new town. Indeed, with all the stress of relocation, she may have felt like she needed an escape from this world. Entering the other world, she discovers her own potential and identity. She comes back to (or resurrects in) this world as a new, more mature and responsible girl. *Kamikakushi*, however, does not always have a happy ending – someone who is abducted by a spirit may be found dead after a while. Fortunately in *Spirited Away*, *Kamikakushi* turns out to be a benevolent veil for Chihiro.

Another folk belief present in the title revolves around the importance of one's name. This theme is not endemic to the Japanese – it is universal, but should nonetheless be mentioned, as it is part of the film's title. The act of depriving a person of one's name has far more reaching consequences and implications than simply affecting how one person addresses another; the very act implies total control over the person whose name is being withheld. A good example of this can be found in the European folktale *Rapunzell*, and a counter example is present in the Japanese story *Daiku to Oniroku* (Carpenter and Oniroku). In this tale, a carpenter has to build a bridge over a fast river

and is worried as to how to go about its construction. A demon then appears from the river offering the carpenter a deal: He will build the bridge for him in exchange for the carpenter's eyes. The carpenter agrees and the bridge is magically completed. Having fulfilled his side of the bargain, the demon intends to collect his prize, but the carpenter runs away from him. While running in the mountains, the carpenter hears a song that identifies the demon's name as Oniroku. On the following day the demon demands his eyes again unless, he says, the carpenter spots the demon's name. No sooner shouts the carpenter, "Oniroku," and the demon disappears. In *Spirited Away*, Yubaba has Chihiro sign a contract and takes three-quarters of Chihiro's name, i.e., three characters 荻野尋 out of Ogino Chihiro 荻野千尋 from the signature, leaving only Sen 千. Actually, the audience never knows the content of the contract Chihiro signs. We only know that Yubaba controls people by depriving them of their names. When Haku has remembered his real name, for example, his true form comes back and he decides to quit being Yubaba's apprentice. The importance of names, however, probably comes from Ursula Le Guin's the Earthsea quartet, i.e., *A Wizard of Earthsea, The Tombs of Atuan, The Farthest Shore*, and *Tehanu*. The Earthsea quartet, a series that influenced Miyazaki Hayao in creating *Spirited Away*, describes a wizard's quest to restore peace in the land by pursuing a shadow-creature that he had unwittingly released. Throughout the quartet, names are critical as "who knows a man's name, holds that man's life in his keeping" (Le Guin 1968, 75). In the second book, the *Tombs of Atuan*, when a girl remembers her true name, her memory as a human gradually comes back and she fights against the dark forces. This experience is similar to Haku's recalling his true name, quitting as Yubaba's apprentice. Beliefs in the importance of names are ubiquitous and universal.

How Chihiro goes to the other world—entering through a tunnel (an entrance building of an abandoned theme park)—is also based upon conventional beliefs. This mysterious tunnel leads to a strange town in another realm, a land of spirits. The locus of the spirits' recreational place, a bathhouse, is located across a bridge. Conventionally, in the world of Japanese folklore, bridges, tunnels, and crossroads are often considered to be a demarcation point between this world and the other. Regarding the location of the film, a bathhouse, Miyazaki states, "It would be fun if there were such a bathhouse. It's the same as when we go to hot springs. Japanese gods go there to rest for a few days, then

return home saying they wished they could stay for a little while longer" (Saitō, 116).[8] Needless to say, a place of relaxation, such as the bathhouse in the film, also reflects the Japanese proclivity for bathing.

The Character in *Spirited Away*

Yubaba

Among various Japanese customs and conventions depicted in the film, perhaps most noteworthy is the emphasis on character depth. The spirit-characters are rich, multi-faceted entities replete with cultural memories and histories. It is said that some eight million deities reside in Japan. Some of these, not necessarily in their traditional Japanese forms, appear in the film to take a bath or to work at the bathhouse. The most interesting among them is the memorable Yubaba, the witch who owns the bathhouse. She is an avaricious old witch who is quite strict toward her workers. Many critics have pointed out the similarity between Yubaba and the Queen of Hearts in *Alice in Wonderland.* Indeed, Andō Masashi, the art director of the *Spirited Away*, states, "In our previous project, ... Yubaba... was drawn as a grotesque character, the kind that might appear in the illustrations of *Alice in Wonderland.*"[9] Yubaba's appearance and demeanor, the very way she commands her minion workforce, is reminiscent of Lewis Carroll's Queen of Hearts character. But Yubaba, who is also seen excessively pampering her gigantic spoiled baby-boy named Bō, strikes me most as a descendent of a yamauba, Japanese mountain witch.

To many contemporary Japanese, a yamauba conjures up the image of a mountain-dwelling hag who devours unsuspecting humans who happen upon her path. In many ways, she can be considered the Japanese counterpart of the witch in *Hansel and Gretel* of the Grimm Brothers as well as Baba Yaga of Russian folktales. In the tale *Ushikata to yamauba* (Ox-Cart Puller and Mountain Witch), a ravenous yamauba attempts to devour anything she can obtain: first, she demands fish from a young man carrying fish in his ox-cart. After consuming all of the fish in his cart, she demands the ox and after devouring the ox, she sets her sights on eating the man. He flees from her and soon comes upon a lone house in the woods that turns out to be the yamauba's dwelling. Eventually, he vanquishes her with the help of another maiden who is living with yamauba (Seki 1956, 155-161).

Yamauba are almost always endowed with supernatural powers. In the Medieval Noh text entitled *Yamamba*, the protagonist yamauba

uses her supernatural power to darken the sky so that the courtesan / entertainer who is reputed to be good at yamamba dance would be forced to spend a night at her lodging. In *Spirited Away*, Yubaba is an old woman with white hair who controls her employees through the power of language and magic. She can freely transform humans into animals and eat them, which is entirely reminiscent of yamauba's cannibalism.

Yamauba is regularly portrayed in an unflattering manner, but one of yamauba's lesser-known traits is her nurturing character, often associated with motherhood.[10] Hori Ichiro writes, "In the popular belief of rural areas, the mountain deity is believed to be a goddess who gives birth to twelve children every year. She is therefore called Mrs. Twelve (Jūni-sama), and her twelve children symbolize the twelve months of the year" (Hori 1968, 167). The dichotomy of the Yamauba persona, that she is on the one hand viciously cannibalistic while on the other a nurturing mother, seems virtually irreconcilable. However, as Yoshida Atsuhiko asserts, the roots of the yamauba can be found in various female deities in Japanese myth, i.e., her real identity is a dichotomous primordial goddess —the Great Mother—who brings fertility and wealth as well as death (Yoshida 1992, iii).[11] Kawai Hayao writes that in Japan, *Kannon*, who accepts everything, is the positive Great Mother, and yamauba, who appears in fairy tales as an all-devouring mountain witch, is the negative image.[12]

One example of yamauba's motherhood appears in legends of yamauba being the mother of Kintarō. The legend goes that a mountain yamauba gave birth to and raised a son possessing Herculean-strength, by the name of Kintarō. Kintarō was then discovered by a great warrior, Minamoto no Raikō (or Yorimitsu, 948-1021), changed his name to Sakata no Kintoki, and became one of Raikō's *shitennō* (four guardians/ lieutenants). Eventually Raikō and the *shitennō* eliminated such supernatural beings as Shuten dōji (Drunken Demon) at Mount Ōe and *tsuchigumo*, the earth spider. The oldest extant story of Yamauba being the mother of Kintarō is found in the old *jōruri* (Puppet Theater) text of the middle of the seventeenth century.[13] Given the widely held perception that yamauba was the mother of many children or super-children in the medieval period, it is not surprising to find her as the mother of a strong warrior who conquers demons. Kintarō is portrayed as full of energy and presently often identified with his red *harakake* (bib/apron) on which the character 金 *kin* (from Kintarō) is printed.

Yamauba's motherly aspect toward her son is further enunciated through a series of *yamauba-buyō* or yamauba dances in Kabuki; which appear in the late eighteenth-early nineteenth century. In the dance pieces, yamauba's doting motherhood is amplified as she speaks of him, "it's been seven years since... Day and night, my pleasure is my only son, Kaidōmaru [i.e., Kintarō]" (Tsuruya 1975, 61).

In *Spirited Away*, Yubaba is the mother of super-baby, Bō. Just like Kintarō, Bō wears a red harakake on which a big character 坊 (Bō) is written. Similar to Kintarō, Bō has prowess in accordance with his gigantic size – he can easily break Sen's arm if he so wishes. In contrast to her strictness to her employees, Yubaba dotes on Bō and protects him almost to excess, confining him in a germ-free playroom full of germ-free toys. In this detail, the director may be hinting at an aspect of present-day Japanese parenting: the tendency to spoil/shelter children while depriving them of negative experiences, some feel, deprives children of developing their full potential. Perhaps most strikingly, this same image of over-protecting one's offspring is portrayed by yamauba in Kabuki's dance pieces.

The visual juxtaposition of a white-haired elderly mother bearing a baby boy may appear rather strange. Indeed, be it Kabuki dance pieces or famous ukiyo-e series of Yamauba and Kintarō, yamauba is portrayed as an alluring mature beauty.[14] Yet, the predominant image of yamauba as an old hag remains, and there are a number of precedents in which a white-haired elderly yamauba is portrayed with Kintarō. One notable example is a votive painting of *Yamauba and Kintarō* created by Nagasawa Rosetsu (1754-1799), a treasure of Itsukushima Shrine in Miyajima. In Rosetsu's painting, yamauba looks like a distrustful old woman – what Robert Moes calls "a caricature of geriatric non-beauty." Moes, however, also comments, "there is a sympathetic humor in the way the mythical old hag stares out suspiciously at the beholder" (Moes 1973, 28).[15] Yubaba does, on occasion, have a humorous look embedded into her suspicious character. Indeed, Yubaba and Bō may be looked at as a pumped-up, well-fed version of Nagasawa Roan's *Yamauba and Kintarō*. Further similarity is found in the absence of Yubaba's male partner. Yamauba first appeared as the mother of Kintoki in the seventeenth century text, though yamauba's partner was never mentioned. Likewise, Yubaba's husband is non-existent in the film.

Moreover, while Yubaba is avaricious and strict toward her

workforce, she also has the ability to observe diligence in her workers. When the Stink Spirit (*okusare-sama*) visits the bathhouse, for example, after checking how hard Sen works, Yubaba decides to give her hand to Sen. Similarly, Yamauba also helps humans that are helpful to her. The yamauba in *Hanayo no hime* (Flower Princess, ca. late Muromachi period to the early Edo period), for instance, brings wealth to the princess who helped kill coiling worms in her hair (Yokoyama and Matsumoto 1982, 531).[16]

From the spatial point of view, too, there is a parallel between Yamauba and Yubaba. Komatsu Kazuhiko writes that "[t]he concept of mountains, as a mountainous realm where *oni* [demon/ogre] and *yōkai* [strange supernatural creatures] reside, is better understood as the "spatial other world" (Komatsu 1991, 58).[17] Indeed, the mountains are often the entry-point to the realm where the *oni* and yōkai live along with other mountain deities and deceased ancestors. Yamauba is also a resident of the mountains. Likewise, the environment of Yubaba's bathhouse is a locus of the other world where all the supernatural beings come to relax and unwind. Pertinent to the spatial aspect, a further parallel is seen in the altitude where yamauba and Yubaba live. The mountain where yamauba lives is higher than ordinary flatland. Likewise, Yubaba lives on the top floor of the bathhouse – higher than anyone else, a command center where Yubaba controls her operation and gives orders to her employees. This architectural structure is reflective of vertical, hierarchical Japanese society. As delineated by Nakane Chie, Japan is a society where relations such as senior-junior rankings are strong and strictly prescribed, people in the lower social ranks work for and obey the orders of those in the higher echelons. In return, the senior members advise and take care of the junior members (Nakane 1970). Junior-ranking members may be assigned monotonous and basic work, but the work is vital to the promotion of teamwork. Of course, the relationship between bosses and junior members is not without tension. The character who lives on the opposite end of this vertical relationship—steadfastly resisting Yubaba, but still providing vital work to the bathhouse—is Kamaji; one of Yubaba's employees, he lives in the basement of the bathhouse.

Kamaji

Kamaji is an old man who controls a boiler room. He has six long arms and two ordinary length-legs. At first sight he looks scary,

but in reality he is a kind and understanding man (Uekusa 2001, 10). From all angles - the way he sits and manipulates his unusually long limbs - Kamaji resembles a spider (or spirit of a spider).[18] On the symbolic significance of the spider, Merrily Baird writes, "...with the importation of Chinese traditions, the Japanese adopted the view of the spider as an emblem of industry and ability" (Baird 2001, 120). As evident in the film, Kamaji is a diligent worker who makes full use of all his extra limbs and his helpers, sootballs (*susuwatari*). A spider has an ominous aspect, too. It is commonly accepted among scholars to consider that *tsuchigumo* refers to less-cultivated indigenous people who had lived before the Heavenly descendents claimed his authority. Specifically termed an earth spider, *tsuchigumo* is an appellation used derogatorily in ancient Japanese literature for those who defied imperial (central) authority.[19] For example, in *Kojiki* (Ancient Matters, 712) on his eastward expedition to claim his heavenly authority, Emperor Jimmu and his men smite a great number of resisting indigenous pit dwelling tribe-men described as *tsuchigumo* (Kurano and Takeda 1958, 157).[20] An overwhelming majority of *tsuchigumo* had fought and been eliminated in bloody battles; only a few survived by apologizing profusely and escaping capital punishment.[21] Regarding the origin of the term, *Itsubun Settsu Fudoki* (a missing writing from the *Topography of Settu Province*, known from other literary sources) notes that, "in the reign of Emperor Jimmu, there was a villain called *tsuchigumo* - he was given of the disdainful name *tsuchigumo* because this person always dwelled in a pit" (Uegaki, 437). An attribute of pit dwelling is strongly associated with *tsuchigumo*. This also applies to Kamaji, who lives in the basement of the bathhouse – a form of pit dwelling.

In *Spirited Away*, Yubaba is paralleled to the central authority ruling the bathhouse from the top of the building, and Kamaji is likened to *tsuchigumo* who live in the pit dwelling, or bottom floor. While Kamaji does not openly battle with Yubaba, he does not always go along with her either; sometimes, he outright resists Yubaba's wishes. The most evident example of this occurs when Kamaji protects not only Chihiro but also Haku, abandoned and left for dead by Yubaba. And yet, Kamaji works for Yubaba, as some *tsuchigumo* did.

Kamaji is a warm being who understands human feelings. However, the descriptions in the ancient chronicles hardly express anything that encourages the readers to empathize with *tsuchigumo*. After all, from a viewpoint of the editors of Nihongi, *tsuchigumo* is a

certified enemy of the central government. Interestingly, though, the sympathetic descriptions of *tsuchigumo* appear in the later text, specifically in the Noh text entitled *Tsuchigumo* (ca. late Muromachi Period).[22] According to the Noh's *tsuchigumo*, the mighty imperial warrior, Minamoto no Raikō (or Yorimitsu) is attacked by a strange illness. One night, a strange priest appears at Raikō's bedside and begins casting silken threads across Raikō. Surprised, Raikō strikes the creature with his renowned sword and the being disappears, dripping its blood behind. It turns out that Raikô's illness was caused by this strange creature, whose real identity is the spirit of the spider who had been killed by the emperor's army at Mount Katsuragi. A Raikō's vassal follows the blood trail and kills the spirit of the spider. The *tsuchigumo* cries at the moment of his death, "I am the spirit of *tsuchigumo*, who, long ago lived at Mount Katsuragi. At this present time, too, I wished to harm the Imperial land and approached Raikô [who protects the land]. But to the contrary, you are going to kill me." (Sanari 1931, 2065) As Baba Akiko notes, this statement does shed a sympathetic light on *tsuchigumo* as a victim of the central government (175-178). Perhaps he had lived peacefully before the advance of the heavenly imperial army to his district. From *tsuchigumo*'s point of view, the Imperial army not only disturbed their way of living, they eliminated their tribe without legitimate reason. *Tsuchigumo*'s statement is just a few lines, but it reveals *tsuchigumo*'s pent-up emotions.

Likewise, in *Spirted Away* Kamaji is a man of few words and helps those whom Yubaba is no longer interested in. In this sense, Kamaji is reminiscent of the *tsuchigumo* narratives of the past Kamaji has cherished train tickets for forty-years, implying that he has a desire to be away from the bathhouse someday. Yet, he gives them up to help Chihiro save Haku. Kamaji, a spirit that understands the meaning of "love" and an important pillar of the film, becomes complex when one considers the relationship between him and Haku, the Yubaba's apprentice.

Haku

Throughout the film, Haku helps Chihiro, and in return, Chihiro saves his life and also helps him recall his identity as a river deity named Nigihayami kohakunushi. As his name Haku (literally meaning "white") reveals, he is a white dragon, and when he takes human shape, he wears white clothes (with water-color blue pants). In spite of the

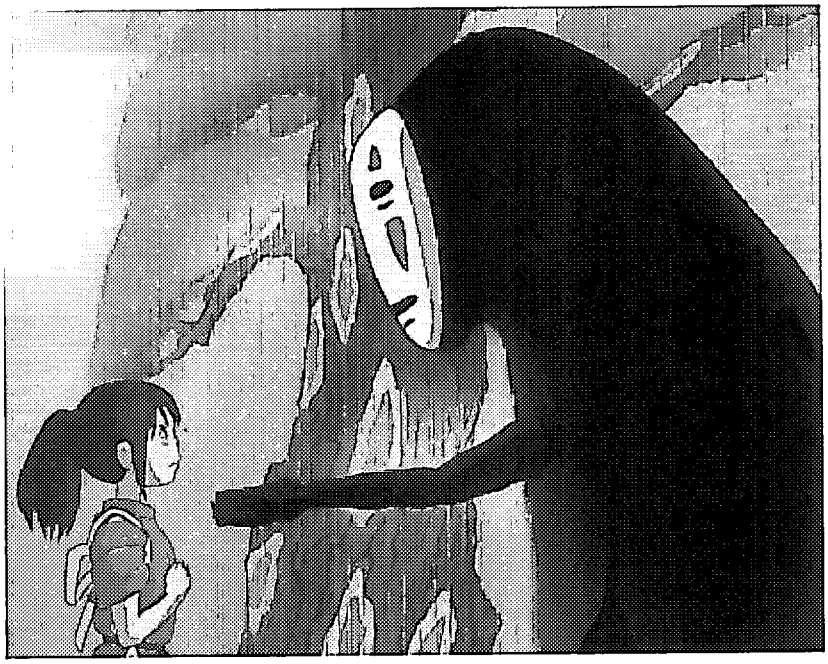
symbolism of "white" being "pure," he possesses a somewhat dubious aspect. While he gives a helping hand to Chihiro, he is working for Yubaba to learn Yubaba's magic.[23] He further steals Zeniba's (Yubaba's twin sister) precious seal. Haku "is a thief," according to Zeniba. Tachibana Takashi, a critic, surmises a source of Haku Nigihayami kohakunushi in Nigihayahi, a heavenly deity in Japanese ancient chronicles. Tachibana says,

> Nigihayahi is an important name in ancient Japanese history. ... During the Emperor Jimmu's eastern expedition, the emperor meets the resistance of Nagasunehiko [lit. a man with long legs], a chief of a powerful native clan. Nigihayahi had married to Nagasunehiko's sister who bore him a son; therefore, he is supposed to be on Nagasunehiko's side. But Nigihayahi abandons Nagasunehiko and comes to the emperor's side. With the defeat of Nagasunehiko, Yamato region is pacified. ...Haku is Yubaba's apprentice, but [Nigihayahi's act of deceiving Nagasunehiko] is similar to Haku's betraying Yubaba. ... Probably Haku's name is based upon this narrative [of Nigihayahi] (Uekusa, 30).[24]

Tsuda notes that Nagasunehiko, a man with long legs, probably was considered *tsuchigumo* as well (Tsuda,191). Indeed, in the world of *Nihongi*, Nihihayahi suddenly showed up one day to Nagasunehiko's region, just as Haku did in the land of the bathhouse. However, if the act of Nigihayami's betrayal is applied to the Yubaba-Kamaji paradigm, Haku betrays Kamaji to be richly rewarded by Yubaba. In the film, however, there is little to suggest Haku's intentional betrayal of Kamaji. Miyazaki departs from the Nigihayahi source on this particular point, probably because of Chihiro's intervention. Haku could have betrayed Kamaji's innocent trust. But then, Chihiro came from nowhere, "entering a life of 'the other world' as a new social being" through *kamikakushi*. By entering "the other world," Chihiro has saved Haku's life, and importantly through Chihiro's love for Haku, Haku's true nature came back. With a positive chain of reactions, Chihiro ends up saving Kamaji's life, too.

That Haku's river has been reclaimed and he does not have a home to return to leads to Miyazaki's familiar environmental theme: Modern technology continues to encroach upon nature, destroying natural habitats.

Spirits Arrive at the Bath House (PHOTOFEST)



Chihiro and No-Face (PHOTOFEST)

The world of spirits on Japanese land is getting smaller and less friendly. Yet, Miyazaki gives hope that Haku will find a place and Haku and Chihiro will meet somewhere – though there is no guarantee that "somewhere" is in this world.

No-Face

Without doubt, the character of No-Face (*Kaonashi*) is a most baffling creature, worthy of note here simply because he is so peculiar. No-Face first appears on the bridge that connects to the bathhouse. He is a mysterious man, who, "like Chihiro, came to the world of the bathhouse from a different realm. He is a pathetic creature who does not have self, and he can only communicate through the voice of someone he has swallowed" (Saitō, 59). No-Face may be interpreted as a lonely young Japanese person who does not know how to make friends.

Apparently, at the beginning of the production, No-Face was just a character standing on a bridge, but because of the need to finish the film on time Miyazaki assigned No-Face a major role of "something like a stalker" (Uekusa, 106). Andō Masashi writes that, "No-face is basically expressionless, but I ended up adding just a tiny bit of expression. It might have been better to make his mask more Noh-like without any expression at all, conveying his expressions through lighting. No-Face swallows the bathhouse workers, and I thought it might have been interesting if he acquired their personalities and ability to reason. This way he might become more human and appealing" (Yu, 109). Born entirely of Miyazaki's imagination, No-Face does not readily correspond to any conventional folk image. As fans of Miyazaki's film know well, the creatures of Miyazaki Land also tend to appear in his other films. A notable example is *susuwatari*, which appeares in *My Neighbor Totoro* (*Tonari no Totoro*, 1988) and also shows up in *Spirited Away* as Kamaji's helpers. Likewise, No-Face seems to carry an image of Tatarigami (curse spirit), which appears in Miyazaki's previous film, *Princess Mononoke* (*Mononoke-hime*, 1997). At the beginning of the film, Tatarigami is shot by Ashitaka, the hero, and Tatarigami furiously chases Ashitaka, trying to kill him. Tatarigami's fast and violent movement is repeated in *Spirited Away*, when after eating food given by Chihiro, No-Face lividly chases her, with the intent of seizing and then swallowing her whole. In both cases, the chased are the protagonists of the film, and the chasers put misguided anger against the chased,

who are trying to do good for others. Both Chihiro and Ashitaka narrowly escape their fatal assaults.

Though by far not a conventional folk image, No-Face does resemble several other literary/folk sources. One such source is *manga* (graphic novel) and/or anime. Authors influence each other. It may be just a coincidence, but No-Face-like creatures appear in the enormously popular *manga* titled *Inuyasha* (Dog-demon), which has been running since 1996. In one of *Inuyasha*'s early episodes, "Gendai ni yomigaeru noroi no Nõmen" (Revived Cursed Noh Mask), a woman has an ominous old Noh mask which "once one puts it on, it can never be removed... except in death" (Takahashi 1997, 89).[25] The owner tries to get rid of the mask, but becomes possessed by it. The neck of the masked woman stretches like No-Face's neck. After a while, the mask cracks open vertically in the middle, and the crack transforms into a huge mouth with sharp teeth. Similar to No-Face, who swallows up frogs at the bathhouse, the Noh mask-monster of *Inuyasha* has a voracious appetite. Simultaneously, the Noh mask-monster gets fatter as it consumes humans. The monster's appearance is exactly like that of No-Face. Further, the way the Noh mask-monster chases the heroine bears a great resemblance to the scene in which No-Face is chasing Sen. Again, it may be just a coincidence, but it is interesting to see that frightening chasing scenes and images continue to turn up in modern-day Japanese animation.

It should also be noted that in both cases, Noh masks play an important role. In the case of *Spirited Away*, as quoted earlier, a Noh mask was considered for the face of No-Face (a higher deity, river spirit, has a face similar to Noh's *okina* [old man] mask). As attested to by Andõ's comment, there is an expression in Japanese that goes, "someone is like a Noh mask" meaning "someone is inscrutable." Regarding the role of the mask itself, Doris Bargen writes, "Symbolically, masking can hide or disguise the self; it can also be a form of self-disclosure or revelation. Sometimes masking is associated with twinning in that the doubled face has the effect of blurring or confusing identities. Masking also has the potential for making a face both more elusive and more expressive.No matter what the interpretation, the 'effect of this double exposure is central to the aesthetics of Noh'. It can also create the impression of immutability, thereby claiming universality" (Bargen 1991, 149). Using a Noh mask creates an otherworldly ambience. Ema Tsutomu, a noted folklorist

and a Kyoto scholar, recounts an example of a mysterious old mask transforming into a mysterious woman. Ema notes that an old mask transforming into something/someone is called *menreki* (mask monster); this has been a conventional phenomenon since olden days (Ema 1923, 40). A masked, trouble-making spirit is a conventional, even sometimes common folk belief. No-Face is a lonely figure. But it is reassuring that No-Face does find a place at the end by becoming Zeniba's helper. This development is perhaps, again, explained by Chihiro's intervention just as she did for Haku.

So what is the significance of all the symbolism and folk beliefs intertwined in *Spirited Away*? It is often said that in Japan high technology and traditional customs live side by side. They exist in fact not only side-by-side, but are inseparable, symbiotic. The animation, *Spirited Away*, provides a good example of how, within the modern and the technological, folk beliefs and customs still thrive. As quoted earlier, Miyazaki writes, "It is a poor idea to push all the traditional things into a small folk-culture world. Surrounded by high technology and its flimsy devices, children are more and more losing their roots. We must inform them of the richness of our traditions." Miyazaki is very successful in informing children (and adults) about the richness of Japanese traditions through the high-tech world of animation. Just as in olden days where a storyteller would entertain the audience by fireside with interesting stories (with some moral edification), Miyazaki's story is entertaining and hopeful. It appears that the folk beliefs and images come to surface in artifacts regardless of the media form. The phenomenon of *Kamikakushi* gives an unstable youth a period of rest from this world (social death) while s/he has disappeared. If and when s/he comes back to this world, s/he is ready to start a new life. During the time of disappearance, s/he may have saved the lives of some creatures in the other world, much as Chihiro did. That world may be inhabited by supernatural beings who have lost their place in this world. Those beings who have lost their physical place in this world—be it by modern technology and/or belief in materialism—have reclaimed it in the very modern technology such as animation and computer games. In the screen of virtual reality, folk characters including *yamauba*, *tsuchigumo*, and millions of spirits appear abundantly with some modern-day additives to the original images. At the same time, the "original" images are evolutionary rather than set in stone. They are alive and continue to stay alive, morphing with the times and they remain both important and dear to the Japanese.

Notes

[1] To be consistent with Japanese name order, family name comes first in this paper.

[2] It should be noted that neither characters nor audience experience any uncertainty in *Harry Potter.*

[3]The original text is found in Saitō 2001, 74.

[4] D.G. Harwell, *New York Times Book Review* (1990), p. 1, quoted in Napier 1996, 6.

[5] Translation found in http://www.nausicaa.net/miyazaki/sen/proposal.html. The original text is found in Saitō, 74.

[6]In "Suzume no Oyado," a sparrow that a kind grandpa has cared for disappears after his wicked wife cut its tongue. With much trouble and hardship, the grandpa finds the sparrow's house. There he is entertained with good food and dances. The sparrow gives him a souvenir, which turns out to be great treasures. His wife follows his suit and visits the sparrows' house, too. Disregarding the sparrows' entertainment, she picks a large souvenir, which turns out to be full of snakes, bugs, and monsters. "Nezumi no Goten," popularly known as "Nezumi jōdo" (The Mice Paradise) or "Omusubi kororin" (The Rolling Rice-ball) is a similar story to "Suzume no Oyado." One day a grandpa goes to the mountains to cut wood. When he eats his lunch, one of his rice-balls (or dumplings) falls and rolls into a hole in the ground. The grandpa tried to reach it, but the earth gives way and he tumbles down the hole, too. Following the rice-ball, he reaches the mice's mansion. There he is entertained with good food and songs. As an appreciation of the grandpa's rice-ball, the mice give him treasures. A neighboring wicked old man hears the grandpa's story and attempts to do the same thing as the grandpa did. But the neighbor makes a mistake in the process, and instead of getting treasures, he is punished by the mice.

[7]For examples of *Kamikakushi* from Yanagita Kunio's *Tōno monogatari* in English, see Sadler 1987, 217-226. Komatsu Kazuhiko notes that many stories and legends of *Kamikakushi* are handed down in various regions of Japan and that the typical example of its story is Shuten dōji. Komatsu 1991, 62.

[8]The translation is taken from http://www.nausicaa.net/miyazaki/interviews/sen.html.

[9] Quoted in Yu, 104.

[10] As Õshima Takehiko writes, there are many legends and sites that tell the stories of yamauba giving birth to a child (children) and raising him (them). See Õshima 1979, 51.

[11]The Great Mother who encompasses both the light and dark sides can be seen in many mytho-religious figures such as the Egyptian mother Goddess, Isis, and the Hindu's Kali. Franz 1974, 195.

[12] See Kawai's *The Japanese Psyche*, particularly chapters 2 and 3.

[13]Regarding the birth of Kintarõ and his changing images, see Torii 2002.

[14] The most famous ukiyo-e artist of yamauba is Kitagawa Utamaro (1753-1806), who produced about forty works on the theme of "Yamauba and Kintarõ." Shimizu 1990, 231. For the Utamaro's prints, see Shimizu 1990.

[15] For the Rosetsu's paintings, see Rosetsu 2000.

[16] One of the works which influenced Miyazaki in creating the film is Kashiwaba Sachiko's *Kiri no mukõ no fushigina machi* (A Mysterious Town beyond the Mist). Aunt Picot, a major character of *Kiri no mukõ no fushigina machi*, is an elderly owner of an apartment-house. Her motto is "those who don't work should not eat," and like Yubaba, she appreciates and rewards a good worker.

[17]According to Komatsu Kazuhiko, an anthropologist, the term "the other world" can be understood from two levels: one is to look at the world from temporary point of view - time axis - and the other is spatial viewpoint - space axis. The temporary view considers the world of time from birth to death as "this world," and the time prior to birth and after death as "the other world." From spatial viewpoint, the space where everyday life exists is regarded as "this world" and the space outside of everyday life – meta-everyday life realm – is regarded as "the other world." ... heaven, ocean, river, underground, and strange land are understood as "the other world" from spatial point of view. The "spatial other world" cannot visit easily, but unlike the "temporary other world," if the conditions are met, one can go without undergoing death. Komatsu 1991, 57-58.

[18] Sugii Gisaburõ, an animation director, writes, "I wonder whether a spider is Kamaji's model. Miyazaki likes (a creature with) many hands." Uekusa, 51.

[19] Tsuda Sõkichi, an eminent scholar of Asian history, notes that the term

tsuchigumo is applied to an individual, not to a group. Tsuda 1963, 188.

[20] For English translation, see Philippi 1969, 174-75. Also see *Nihongi* (Ancient Matters, 720). Sakamoto, et. al.1967, 210. Its English translation is found in Aston 1956, 129-130.

[21] For example, one *tsuchigumo* named Õmimi in the district of Matsuura of Hizen Province promised to give food to the emperor a tribute (Uegaki 335-336), another *tsuchigumo* called Utsuhiomaro in Sonoki district of the same province even saved an imperial ship (Uegagi 345).

[22] The Noh text of *Tsuchigumo* is based on the *tsuchigumo* narrative of *Nihongi* (the section quoted earlier in this paper), that of Yashiro-version of *Heike monogatari* (the Tale of Heike, the 14th century), and the picture scroll entitled *Tsuchigumo sõshi* (Story of *Tsuchigumo*, early 14th century).

[23] This is similar to Ged leaving his Master Wizard at Gont Island to enter the Wizard School at Roke to learn magic faster. See Le Guin1968, p. 36.

[24]See Kurano, 161, Philippi, 177, Kojima, et al., 227 and Aston, 128.

[25] For the English translation, see Takahashi 2003, 91.

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