Haunting the Bathroom

Vengeful Ghosts in Japanese Contemporary Legends

Ritgerð til BA-prófs í Austur-Ásíufræðum

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Abstract

The main focus of this essay is on 4 contemporary legends which all have the same subject; Vengeful ghosts in Japanese contemporary legends. The author’s interest in this particular subject was awoken while studying in Fukuoka Japan, where these legends seemed to be a popular interest amongst the public, or at least they thought it to be a good idea to share these legends with a foreigner.

In this essay a general introduction is given to the term contemporary legends is explained with the help of Dr. Jan Harold Brunand who is a known folklorist and has written a number of books on the subject. Then the vengeful Japanese ghosts are introduced into the essay, their appearance and behavior, followed by the four legends chosen, Toire no Hanako-san, Aka Manto, Teke-Teke or Kashima Reiko and Kuchisake-Onna. Samples of western stories are also mentioned as to show that there are similar stories from other places of the world.

As well as written research an online survey was conducted and shared with native Japanese where they were asked if they knew and believed in the four legends cited in this essay. Stories and believe of co-students and others in Japan were also taken into consideration.

The authors believe is that the contemporary legends will continue to be recognized maybe not through oral exchange but more through the media, such as the Internet, movies and books.
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1. Introduction

Some people like the thrill of not knowing what might be lurking in dark places, or even in their own bathrooms, are ghosts real and are they really hiding in the bathroom?

Every country in the world, no matter how rich, how poor or its cultural makeup, it is bound to have some types of contemporary legends floating around and these stories are bound to have some impact on the people living there due to their power and peoples’ reaction to them.

As a child, my father would read me Icelandic and South-Asian folktales. I adored listening to these stories every night, even though I was extremely scared of the ghosts and spirits, those were my favorite stories. My interest continued, I tried to watch and read everything remotely based on the supernatural, I even begged my mother at the age of 10 to let me watch the television show The X-Files, although I knew I would get nightmares. I would read through books on ghost stories at the library, since they were too scary for my age and the checkout lady would not allow me to check them out.

When it came to picking my topic for this thesis, I knew I wanted to write something about Japanese folklore, the myriad of folktales on monsters or ghosts. Whilst living in Japan. I was told numerous stories about ghost living here or living there, occupying dolls, houses, shrines, bathrooms or train stations.

I decided to that it would be a worthwhile task to take a better look at these entities. What is their possible function in society and how did they come into existence?

A number of individuals from school, my host family and even children from elementary schools I visited in Japan told me different stories about ghosts and I noticed a considerable variety in the stories dependent on who told the story. I was curious to know how widespread the knowledge of these legends was, and whether they were believed by the individuals as children and possibly even by grown ups. I therefore
decided to make a short online survey focused on Japanese respondents, questioning if people knew the legends I picked out, and if so to please tell me their versions of them, as well as to share if they believed in them as children or even as adults.

So my question became “Are these legends still vibrant and current or are they something the Japanese tell to foreigners to scare them off from going to the bathroom?”

I chose particular legends for this thesis, based on their seeming popularity as well as how frequently I came into contact with them during my stay in Japan. Among these there was only one legend of which I was aware of before moving there, and that was the legend of *Kuchisake Onna*, which will be discussed later on.

1.1 What are contemporary legends?

There was this young girl who owned a dog. The dog would lie under her bed at night, and whenever the girl was feeling scared she would let her hand hang from the bed and the dog would lick it. One night she was alone at the house and woke up feeling a scared so she put her hand down for the dog to lick, and like always, her hand was licked. Later during that same night she got out of bed to get a glass of water. When she came to the kitchen she heard a dripping sound, “drip, drip, drip” she turned around to see her dog lying on the table, cut open and his blood dripping to the floor, “drip, drip, drip” and a note was attached to the dog with a kitchen knife saying: “Humans can lick, too”

This story which I heard in Iceland when I was around 10 years old, I heard from my ”friend’s older sister, who had heard it from her friend, that had a friend that knew this unfortunate girl”. This is a typical urban legend that goes around from person to person. Of course this specific legend is known in many other countries, and presumably didn’t happen in Iceland. Through out the years I heard this legend in a variety of formats, sometimes the girl would get something to eat and find the dog in the refrigerator, or in
the bathroom. The last time I heard it was when I was staying in a bungalow in a rainforest in the Philippines, told by our guide, who was of course convinced that this story was true, and told it in an extremely convincing way, a prime example of how these legends travel all over the world.

The term “contemporary legends is probably confusing for some, although most people have heard of the term “urban legend”. According to folklore scholars, the terms are interchangeable and contemporary legend is in fact the same as an urban legend. The term “urban” however, isn’t the best description for these tales, as the legends don’t necessarily happen in the urban locations, thus folklorists and sociologists prefer to use the term “contemporary” to differentiate the modern legends from the traditional folktales. For clarification the term contemporary legends will be used throughout this essay instead of urban legends.

So what constitutes these urban and contemporary legends? As we saw above, they happen in familiar environments, to people we “know” and are believable. The well-known folklorist Dr. Jan Harold Brunvand, who has written numerous books about urban legends in different countries, for example The Vanishing Hitchhiker, Too Good to be true and The Colossal Book of Urban Legends where he explains what urban legends are:

Urban legends (ULs) are true stories that are too good to be true. These popular fables describe presumably real (though odd) events that happened to a friend of a friend. And they are usually told by credible persons narrating them in a believable style because they believe them. The settings and actions in ULs are realistic and familiar- homes, offices, hotels, shopping malls, freeways, etc. –and the human characters in urban legends are quite ordinary people. However, the bizarre, comic or horrifying incidents that occur to these people go one step to far to be believable. (Brunvand, 1999:19)

Then he continues:

Urban legends are also too neatly plotted to be believed. Nothing is extraneous; everything in the story is relevant and focused in the conclusion. Thus, they are
too weird and coincidental to be absolute truth, especially considering that the same stories are attributed to many different settings, yet each telling of an urban legend is presumably about something that really happened to a friend of a friend— a FOAF, as we folklorists say. In short, ULs are just too darn good— that is polished, balanced, focused, and neat-to be true. (Brunvand, 1999:19)

In short, according to Jan Harold Brunvand there are 6 main characteristics of urban legends the main of which being that: they are invariably believed to be “true”, they are also primarily oral, short, tend to be linked together, tend to be unusually detailed and, try as one may, they cannot be traced directly to a reliable witness.

An interesting facet of contemporary legend is the so called “legend tripping” where upon hearing about something scary, a ghost haunting a house that has a history people, although most often kids, then dare each other to go there and check if the ghost is available for visits. This doesn’t only apply to children or teenagers, there is a group of people going around from house to house to measure ghost activities and they do it for the thrill, spending the night in a haunted house.¹ Ghosts are nowhere near to be the only creatures people want to see, there are those who check alien sites and people travel miles just to check if they can see the Loch Ness monster, Iceland even has it’s own Nessie, the famous monster that is believed to live in the Loch Ness. The one here in Iceland is called Lagarfljótssormurinn, which is a giant worm and is rumored to live in the Lagarfljót.

A typical example of legend tripping would be a group of teenagers sitting in the dark and somebody says: Have you heard about the…. And then a scary legend follows, setting the mood. For example some tells the legend of Bloody Mary and how she will appear in the mirror when called. Then her caller will be killed violently, or haunted for the rest of his or her life by Mary herself. Following the telling of the story, while everyone is a bit afraid after the scary end, someone suggests going up to the bathroom in the dark and call for Bloody Mary to see if she in fact shows up in the mirror. Will she be there? Who is courageous enough to be the caller? This is a game of bravery.

¹ Koven.M. (2007:1)
Some scared but brave kid will step up and perform this quest and often, because of build up, thinks he sees her in the mirror and of course thinks that Mary come after him.

Ghosts are liminal, they are stuck or chose to stay in the living world, because they cannot cross over until they finish what they have to do in the land of the living. This is the case with the vengeful ghosts that are the focus of this essay. They were somehow wronged in life as will be explained later on. Perhaps a woman that was raped and killed and seeks vengeance before she moves on. Some are attached to their bones, which perhaps were never found, and then they move on after the bones are found and put in holy ground. The movie Shutter (2008) is a movie about a revengeful ghost that does not stop until she gets what she wants. In short the movie is about a man who wronged a Japanese girl whom he had been dating while living in Japan, but when she became too clingy he ended it with her with the help of two friends. When he returns to Japan again with a new girlfriend things start to get strange and it is apparent that there is a ghost involved. When they look into it they find out that this Japanese ex-girlfriend had committed suicide. When the two friends of the man die mysteriously and the couple receive visits from the ghost, the girlfriend starts looking into the mans past only to find out that his two friends raped the poor Japanese girl, while he stood by taking photos that he meant to use as a blackmail if the girl made a scene, trying to get him back. His new girlfriend was of course disgusted by his behavior and left him with the Japanese girl ghost finally able to have him all to herself.

The legends live on with the help of people. Before the advent of television and movies the main mode for stories to travel was through oral transmission. The story would spread between people and areas, and of course a little dash of color here and there would be added with each telling. It was easy to imagine something lurking in murky lakes and dark corners, and the imagination would go wild, especially after hearing about a ghost that supposedly roamed around town. In the days before the Internet, television or perhaps public access to books, telling the stories was perhaps the one entertainment people had in their lives and they tried to make the most of these stories by continuing to tell them to the next man, making them live on.
Today the means through which these stories and similar ones are transmitted has changed. The Internet and media play a big role in how stories travel. We find that many of the most popular contemporary legends are then often adapted to movies, television-series, computer games, books, comic books, cartoons and even video games. Although scary stories are many peoples favorite type of legends, there are many more genres. Take Iceland for example, stories of trolls living in the mountains stealing children and what not, elves trying to seduce people to their stone homes and of course we cannot forget the mysterious sea creatures.

A few of the legends that will be discussed in this essay are known in a number of countries. Japan, for instance, isn’t the only country to have toilet ghosts, the White Lady has been seen all over the world, and Kuchisake-Onna is known as the Grinning Ghost in Scotland.

1.2 What function do contemporary legends serve

Children! Do not, I repeat, DO NOT cut cross this field on your way home! Especially after dark! The angry skinless foal will catch you and bite you and stomp you to death!

This is a legend my father and his siblings grew up with, living on a remote farm in the west of Iceland. When asked about the story he claimed he didn’t quite believe in it, but as a kid he thought it prudent not to take the chance just in case. The siblings would then dare other children from the neighboring farms to cross the field, and those neighboring children would usually run like maniacs a cross the field while the my father and his siblings stood by terrified. This game was however only played during the day, as after dark nobody even thought about daring someone to cross the field and thus be in grave danger of meeting the skinless foal. (Grétar Þór Kristinsson, March 30th 2012)

It is the same with the terrible monster under the bed. As a child I often slept over at the house of my few years older cousins. I would have to go to bed earlier than them and they would tell me that if I tried to sneak out to see them, the horrible monster
under the bed would grab my legs and drag me under the bed and to hell. Terrified I stayed in bed wondering about the monster and what my cousins were doing, but never even thought about getting out of bed. In both of these cases the main reason of the stories seem to have been to make us frightened enough not to disobey the instructions given.

So the question arises, is the purpose of these kind of scary legends only to frighten children? My father now knows that the story of the skinless foal was meant to ward off children from running through the field. Nobody wants children running through the field at all times, ruining flowers and crops.

The same thing applies to my cousins; they simply did not desire to hang with their too young and to their mind, too stupid cousin any longer than they needed, so they made up the monster under the bed. A story made believable, as older cousins do not lie.

1.3 Research methodology

In this essay the primary method for gathering material was bibliographical research but in order to get more defined answers about certain questions, such as if the legends are still vibrant and popular in Japan, how many had heard of the legends and did they believe in them as children and in adult hood, I decided to conduct a short online questionnaire.

Having heard some of the legends recounted in this thesis whilst living in Japan, there was no way to be sure if the legends I was told in Japan were something that Japanese people actually believed in or if they were merely legends they told to the gullible foreigners. Foreigners, who had seen way too many horror movies featuring the famous woman, clad in white with her stringy hair, the onryo. I was also curious to find out whether Hanako-san, for example, was isolated to just one place in Japan, or several?

The online survey contained 10 questions and was set up and sent out to people who were born and raised in Japan. A note was sent out alongside the questions, where the
intentions and usage of the answers were portrayed. There it was also pointed out that
the survey was anonymous and there would be no way of tracing answers back to
individuals. In the end the questionnaire received 23 responses to the questionnaire that
that was set up April 1\textsuperscript{st} 2012 and taken town on April 26\textsuperscript{th} 2012.
Participation in the survey was very acceptable and the answers were clear and helpful.

It became very clear that some legends are much more popular than others, for example
there didn’t seem to be much knowledge on the legend of Aka Manto, and many
respondents decided to skip that question completely. The legends, which on the other
hand inspired the strongest reaction, were the tales of Hanako-san and \textit{Kuchisake-Onna}.

This chart shows the recognition level of the legends.
2. The vengeful ghosts of Japan

Since all of the legends chosen for this thesis involve ghost that are still tied to our world because of something hateful was inflicted upon them in their living life, I felt that an explanation of the vengeful ghosts in the Japanese contemporary legends was in order.

Yurei is a type of Japanese ghost, and is most commonly visualized as a female with long stringy black hair that often hangs in front of her face. They are known to be able to defy gravity, crawling along the walls or on the ceiling. They move fast and sometimes on all fours, are known for being able to create illusions as well as stretching their faces into something horribly grotesque and are by many thought of as the most dangerous ghosts in the world.\(^2\)

Onryo which is the most common type of the yurei, is known as the vengeful ghosts of Japanese folklore that are able to return to the physical world. This type of ghost is very often to be seen in Japanese horror movies, animations and Japanese comic books. This well-known image of the Japanese vengeful ghost is usually female. As told by a teacher of mine in Japan, there are a few male onryo, those exist mostly in Kabuki plays.

The typical image of the onryo, clad in a long, white nightgown or burial Kimono that drags along the ground, with long black stringy, unruly hair that falls over her face and covers up her usually big bug like eyes and pale face. The stringy hair has a way of showing up in places like the shower drain or from the ceiling or attack people, and a single lock can hold a person down, According to a friend of my Japanese host family. She walks with raggedy movements but still is unbelievably fast. That’s the typical onryo portrayed in popular culture originating from Japan. They have appeared in popular horror movies such as The Ring [Ringu] and The Grudge [Ju-On]. The onryo is also seen in many computer games.

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\(^2\) [http://maskofreason.wordpress.com/grimoire/know-your-ghosts/yurei/](http://maskofreason.wordpress.com/grimoire/know-your-ghosts/yurei/)
The English author Jim Harper, who has written a good deal of texts on horror stories from all over the world, and he is the author of the book *Flowers from Hell The Modern Japanese Horror Film*, (2008) Explains what the vengeful spirit like so:

Typically the Vengeful Spirit is a woman who has suffered abuse at the hands of men, either being murdered, forced to commit suicide, or simply abandoned and left to die. Tied to the place of their demise, the ghost remains on the earthly plane until her desire for vengeance is satisfied. (p. 12)

So we see that a woman left behind by her husband haunts and even kills many people until she is forced to move on. She never inflicts personal harm to her former husband, the one that actually wronged her. The same goes for a wife that was given a promise by her husband on her deathbed. A promise of the loyalty of the husband, a promise of never remarrying, a promise that he then goes on to break. Subsequently his new bride looses her head, but no physical harm to him. Of course he is inflicted with great mental harm and pain, similar to the pain his dead wife had to endure during her living life. So according to legend if a person dies in sorrow, jealousy, angry or hate they will likely become *onryo*. A very good example of this behavior of the *onryo* is from Kabuki play written by Tsuruya Nanboku IV in 1825. The play has been adapted to movies quite often and cites the ghost story of Yotsuya or Toukaidou Yotsuya Kaidan.³

The origin of *onryo* is uncertain, but it has been mentioned to me by an elderly Japanese woman that it started somewhere around the 8th century when it was noted that enraged souls of the dead could influence the land of the living, but the appearance of *onryo* was unclear until the art of Kabuki, a Japanese play, made it into what we know it as today by means of make-up and appearance.

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³ Interview, Svava Sigurjónsdóttir (2012)
3. Representative contemporary legends.

Having looked at the basic theories on the study of contemporary legends as well as reviewed the stereotypes in Japanese ghost lore, it is time to look at the legends chosen for this thesis. I chose as the basis of this thesis legends which all focus on vengeful ghosts such as were described above. The three legends chosen are called Toire no Hanako-San (トイレの花子さん), Teke-Teke, or/and Kashima Reiko (鹿島玲子), and the legend of Kuchisake-Onna (口裂け女). These legends were chosen based on the fact that they are the ones I heard most of whilst living in Japan as well as my own interest in them.

Along with some other bathroom related and similar legends, both from the Western World as well as Japanese which is a personal favorite.

3.1 Toire no Hanako-san

The outline of the legend is that a young elementary school girl died somewhere in the school, according to some she committed suicide as a result of extreme bullying, a recurrent problem in Japanese schools, or worse, that she died when bullying got out of hand. Other versions say that she actually fell out of the window of the library, and yet another cites that she had an abusive relative that found her hiding in a bathroom and killed her so her ghost stayed there, seeking vengeance on the children that pass her by. There even is a version where a young girl had been playing hide and seek with friends during school hours and decided that the bathroom of her school was a good hiding place unfortunately during the bombing raids of World War II resulting in the school collapsing with her stuck in the bathroom. It is save to say that there are as many Hanako-san stories as there are elementary schools in Japan.  

Hanako of the toilet is probably the best-known contemporary legend in Japan, in fact so popular that it has been made into quite a few Japanese animation (anime), comic books (Manga) and even a few motion pictures according to some of the answers in the survey, people had seen and read about this legend.

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As is commonly found with legends, a number of variations can be found, depending on the prefectures, this was seconded both by the survey responses as well as on the same website (see footnote 3), where I found the best and most comprehensive versions of the legends used. There the legend was separated into different versions from different prefectures. The survey brought to light shows that there are also different versions depending on the elementary or primary school people went to, although they lived in the same prefecture. This legend became a national phenomenon in the 1980’s, although some versions of the story date all the way back to The World War II, as will be noted a bit later on according to the same website as mentioned above (See footnote 3).

The bathroom she haunts is to be found in almost every elementary school in Japan, the 3rd floor, 3rd stall, although in some version, the 4th stall is where one will find her hiding. There are various ways in which to induce her to show herself in a bathroom, one should call out: “Hanako-san are you here?” and if she is present in that particular bathroom she will answer you: “Yes, I am here”. To provoke her one can also knock three times on the door of her stall, and if she is in fact in there, you will be greeted by a girl with a short bob haircut and wearing a red skirt, who will drag you in the toilet. As mentioned above there are some variations to the story, not only because of different versions from different prefectures, as is shown on pinktentacle.com but also because it is a common knowledge that over time, stories change. Tales grow in the retelling. Yes time adds color! According to a respondent in the survey, in Yamagata prefecture, Hanako-san is in fact a 3-headed lizard, with a 3-meter long body poses as a little girl to lure his victims in, while in the Iwate prefecture in a small town called Kurosawajiri a giant white hand comes up from a hole in the floor if you dare say her name 3 times and in Yokohama it is the boys bathroom that is occupied by Hanako-san and if you walk three times around the toilet (the original squatty potty) 3 times while saying her name a bloody hand will emerge from the toilet and grab you. In the survey one participant said that if you meet Hanako-san in the bathroom, she would call you up on the phone and then kill you.

Aka Manto, or Aoi Manto, the story cites that while he lived he was such a handsome man that he ran to the toilets to get peace from ladies who adored his pretty face. As
heard from a Japanese person, a jealous husband of a wife who adored the *Akai Manto*, killed him in a public bathroom, causing him to haunt it ever since, which is why he is often portrayed with a mask over his face, as a ghost.

He will ask if you want a red cape or a blue cape. If you want the red one he slits the throat so it will look like you are wearing a red cape, if you ask for the blue one apparently he chokes his victim until the face becomes blue and his victim dies. One variation of that story which I heard from a school teacher in Japan is that Aka Manto asks if you want blue toilet paper or red toilet paper with the same consequences and one of the respondents of the survey gave a variation of the tale involving is yellow paper or red paper. The person asked for yellow paper and got some pretty nasty yellowish waste poured over themselves and had the red paper been chosen that same person would have ended up in a pool of blood. Judging by the responses received with the questionnaire it would seem that the story of *Akai Manto* was not well known, with only 5 responses, which all gave a very incomplete and short answers to the legend.

For instance in the book *Haunting Experiences* by the authors Goldstein, Grider and Thomas, the legend of Hanako-san is mixed with the legend of *Aka Manto*, where Hanako-san offers red paper or blue paper, with same results as quoted above, red means blood and blue means choked to death. Goldstein, Grider and Thomas also mention that Hanako-san has a boyfriend called Taro-san, who allegedly haunts the boy’s bathroom at elementary schools.

Legends of ghosts haunting toilets are not limited to Japan. The story of Bloody Mary, which is a very popular contemporary legend in the Western world, also takes place in a bathroom, where you have to repeat her name; Bloody Mary, 3 times for her to appear in the bathroom mirror. Similar to Hanako-san, Bloody Mary has many variations, in some she was a mother who lost her baby and decided to stay in this realm in order to find it, while in others she was to believed to be a witch who was killed for her beliefs and in yet another she was just a woman who was wrongfully accused of killing her child, as Armitage points out in his paper ‘*All About Mary*: Children’s use of the toilet ghost story as a mechanism for dealing with fear, but fear of what?’. Whatever the reason for Bloody Mary to appear in the mirror, it always ends with one thing; death.
She is known to scratch the face or neck of the person who summoned her, often scratching their eyes out and inflicting deadly wounds.\(^5\)

The White Lady is also known as a toilet ghost throughout the British Isles, as Marc Armitage draws attention to. In his research, he asked students from various elementary schools around Britain about toilet entities and found that most schools had a story about a white lady roaming around in the bathroom stalls, while in some others she was called the grey lady and the green lady in a few. (Armitage, 2010) Armitage also mentions that the Woman in White appears in other countries as well, such as France and Holland. (2010:3)

The toilet ghost figure is not only known in Japan, but also in the western popular culture as well, an example of which is in the famous books about the Wizard Harry Potter by J.K Rowling where a toilet ghost is introduced.

In Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (1998) we get to know Moaning Myrtle, who, like Hanako-san, is a female ghost that occupies the girls’ toilets. She was a witch, born to Muggles, which are persons with no magical abilities. Myrtle had no friends and was bullied excessively. One day, hiding from a girl teasing her about her glasses, she decided to hide in the girl’s bathroom when Salazar Slytherin’s Basilisk killed her by the orders of an evil wizard. Ever since that she roams around the bathroom throwing tantrums and flooding the toilets so in the end the bathroom was closed down. Although she throws tantrums, she is not noted to be dangerous to people but she rather enjoys when misfortune happens to students. If she is teased she cries, screams and jumps in the toilet so water splashes all over. It can be said that she is perhaps some kind of an onryo, she haunts the place in which she died, and swore to haunt the boy who teased her the most, though she does not appear to grow any stronger after her death,

Why do these ghosts decide to stay in the bathrooms? When asked, female Japanese university student mentioned that she thought it was because of how poorly lit and

\(^5\) http://americanfolklore.net/folktale/2009/10/bloody_mary.html
tucked away the elementary school bathrooms used to be. It was easy to believe that some kind of ghost resided in there because of conditions. She even said that she would rather hold it in until she was home, so she would not have to risk a deadly meeting with Hanako. In Haunting Experiences the authors mention the fact that there might just be something about the bathroom, since going to the bathroom is perhaps the most private action you take during the day, and there they also mention that the bathroom can be a scary place for example for a child learning the proper way to use the bathroom. The scholar Elizabeth Kenny, (quoted in Spetter, 2004) argues that these supernatural legends, such as Hanako-san and Bloody Mary might express a certain fear for girl, that is their concerns about menstruation, while Armitage says that the stories are about “dealing with irrational fears that come within the child.” (Armitage, 2010:12).

3.2 Teke-Teke- Kashima Reiko

Teke-Teke-Kashima Reiko is yet another toilet entity in Japan, who likes to tear her victims in half so they look like her. Similar to Hanako-san and Aka Manto, she dwells in bathrooms, most often in elementary schools all over the country. The legend of Kashima or Teke-teke also has a few variations to it. Some claim that rather than a variation on the same legend that Teke-Teke and Kashima Reiko are not actually the same being. The Teke-Teke is said to be the sound that Kashima Reiko makes when she drags her upper severed body across the floor. Based on the research and available literature, it would seem that the origin of the legends stay almost the same. According to the legend Kashima Reiko was a young woman living in the north of Japan on the island Hokkaido. There are a number of variations within the legend of how she became a ghost. One legend claims that one night the young woman was ambushed by several men that beat and abused her so badly that she could no longer walk. She used the last of her strength to crawl to the nearest train tracks, in hope to find someone to help her, but unfortunately the train came, ran her over and cut her body into half. Other versions say that she fell on the tracks and before she could climb back up, the train came and severed her body in half. She is mostly know for stalking bathrooms at elementary schools, although she is also known to show up in the
bathrooms of private homes in the middle of the night. Yet other versions claim she haunts train tracks in the lookout for a victim. She moves around on her hands or elbows and makes the haunting sound Teke-Teke-Teke. She has a penchant for tearing people in half. In some versions of the legend she carries a saw to saw her victims in half, in other versions she pulls her victim on to the train tracks to meet the same destiny as she did, and yet another version she just tears people in half.

Whilst the variant focuses upon the bathroom she will ask the person upon the persons entry: “Where are my legs”? To which you must answer correctly or she will twist your legs from your body. The drawback being that there are different versions of what would be the correct reply, and the wrong answer will invariably lead to death.

One supposedly right way to answer her question is that “her legs are at Meishin Expressway”. This will lead to her asking: “who told you that?” and the correct reply should be: Kashima Reiko told me, and thus you should be save. The reason for this is that in this version as told by a respondent in the survey, Kashima is said to stand for KA for Kamin which means mask, SHI for Shinin which means dead person and MA for Ma which means demon. So Kashima means masked dead demon. One version of the legend is about a young boy who was walking home from school at night. He looked up to see a beautiful girl standing in one of the many windows of the school, which he thought to be a bit odd since it was a all boys school. But before he could think any more, the girl leaped from the window, showing her severed body, landed in front of the poor boy and tore his body in half.

It was also mentioned by one respondent that Kashihma Reiko would come after anyone that heard or read her story.

Kashima Reiko, or Teke-Teke is like Hanako-san very popular in the world of legends in Japan. Teke-Teke has been made into movies and she also appears in Japanese comic books, Manga for example Hell Teacher Nube as was mentioned by a respondent of the survey.

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3.3 Kuchisake-Onna

*Kuchisake Onna* is probably one of the most famous contemporary legends currently, both in Japan and within my research. According to the questionnaire, the legend of *Kuchisake Onna*, or slit mouthed woman was the best known legend among the respondents, 22 out 23 knew the legend about Kuchisake-Onna and could share a version of their own. The original legend dates to the *Edo* Period of Japan (1603-1868) and featured an extremely beautiful woman who was married to a Samurai, or a Ninja according to one answer in the survey. The husband was jealous and distrusting towards his wife, believing that she was unfaithful to him he decided to disfigure her beauty and slit her mouth open from ear to ear with a sword. After the mutilation he is said to have screamed at her: "Do you think you are beautiful now?" After that she roamed around clad in Kimono, the Japanese formal wear, and hid her face with her sleeve or a fan. It also cited that when she came across someone she would ask, “do you think I’m beautiful” ( 제가 아름답다고 생각해요). These words can be a play on words, like seen in the legend teke-teke above, because the word *Kirei* means beautiful and the word *Kiru* means to cut. If the answer was yes she revealed her disfigured mouth, slit from ear to ear and said: “How about now?” If the victim did not panic, and kept calm and the answer was still yes, the person was save and walked away free, but if they said no, panicked and tried to run away she always caught up to them with the words: “I want to do to you what has been done to me” and cut her victims mouth from ear to ear.

According to a young male Japanese friend, a woman who is cut by the *Kuchisake-Onna* will become a *Kuchisake-Onna* herself. It is said that it is impossible to outrun her, as she can run faster than a car and yet other variants say that she floats. According to modern versions of the story the reason for her disfigurement vary, I was told that she was mutilated after an oral surgery gone wrong, plastic surgery gone wrong, a wound received during a car or a bus crash, and yet another version heard by a co-student in Japan that it was done to her by a motorcycle gang that raped and mutilated her. In some variants of the newer stories it does not matter if you answer with yes or no, she will invariably kill you. If you say yes to her beauty she makes you beautiful, just like her. If you say no, she slits your mouth anyways saying, as above, that she wants to make you look the way she does. She seems mostly to stalk children in
shadowed and foggy streets, where she will stand on a corner, or beside a light post watching, with her face covered with the white surgical mask that is not uncommon in Japan during cold and flu season. She is described as a young woman in her twenties or thirties, with long black hair, big beautiful eyes and wearing a trench coat, or a raincoat, some say it is red but that varies with the surgical mask over her mouth, hiding her slit mouth which reaches from ear to ear and she carries a knife or a scythe. In one variant, by a respondent of the survey, she is said to love rock candy and if she catches you and asks the deadly questions, you should offer her a rock candy. She cannot say no to her favorite candy and accepts it, giving the victim the time to run away from her, while she sucks down on her candy.

In the late 70’s the legend of the Kuchisake-Onna reached new heights, with children spreading the story around panicking about the Kuchisake-Onna being back, running after children and cutting their faces, as according to a respond in the survey. Because of this mass hysteria, the police doubled security around elementary schools, and some teachers even walked their student’s home or made them travel in groups so they could stay safe. The fact that the legend sprang to life again with that much intensity lead to people wondering if there was in fact a woman out there chasing down children, and according to an online article a coroner in Japan found records of a woman who was hit by a car and when inspecting the body, he discovered that her mouth was sliced open from ear to ear. Foster. M cites in his paper Slit-Mouthed Woman that recently the word of the Kuchisake-Onna spread over the Internet to Korea where it also caused a mass hysteria there as well, even finding out that there were women chasing children dressed as the scary legend. Even a co-student from Indonesia told me that there were reports of a gang of guys that cornered women giving them the choice of a big smile or rape.

The Kuchisake-Onna phenomenon has been infused into several movies in Japan, such as The Ring (1998) and Studio Ghibli’s animated film The Tanuki (Raccoon dog) Battles of the Heisei era: Pompoko (1994) (Heisei tanuki gassen Pompoko, where the Tanuki changed into the Kuchisake-Onna to frighten a watchman. The legend of Kuchisake Onna also has her own movies such as Kuchi-sake-onna (1996), which is a

7 Stefani Garrison http://www.terrorsofmen.com/3159/kuchisake-onna
short film focusing on the legend. The story is usually changed a bit but the plot remains

*Ichi The Killer*, a *manga* written by Hideo Yamamoto, which was later adapted into a
movie, which features a mouth slit open as well.

Examples abound of similar themes from other cultures; the Glasgow Grin for instance,
is the act of slicing the victim’s mouth open from the edges of the mouth to the ear. The
cuts are usually made by street gangs, or so called razor gangs, which were booming in
the 50’s in Glasgow, Scotland, but are far from being something from the past,\footnote{Harvey, O. (2009) http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/features/2683007/Suns-look-at-Broken-Britain-day-four-Glasgows-East-End.html} with a
piece of broken glass or a utility knife and the scar left behind this act of violence
resembles a giant smile. These attacks are often aimed at people that are live in the
lesser parts of town or even teenagers. (Mills, 2008) Often the victim is stabbed or
punched to make them open their mouth more so the wound would rip open more. This
was also used quite a lot by English street gangs, especially in Chelsea, and therefore
getting the name Chelsea Grin.

This Glasgow Grin has been inspiring for both killers and for writers of television
characters.

The Glasgow Grin is what inspired a character in the Television series Nip/Tuck series
3. There a man known as The Carver walks amongst people, raping them and then
carving a smile on their faces. It is his belief that physical beauty is evil. When he
carves the faces of his victims, male or female, he says to them that this is almost like
the Glasgow Grin.

A very interesting result from the questionnaire was that the 22 answers about
*Kuchisake-Onna*, cited exactly the same version of the legend, again the same versions
found when reading up on the legend, in Foster’s paper and online\footnote{pintentacle.com} Almost no
variations to the legend can be found. Her methods are the same in all answers and is the same as the one found when researching the legend.

This legend was the best-known legend of the four, with 45.5% of the participants saying that they believed in Kuchisake-Onna when they were children. They most often heard about her from friends at elementary school, from television and from older siblings, magazines, and some even from teachers.
4. Conclusion

In this essay we went through a few Japanese contemporary legends that all had the same subject of vengeful Japanese ghosts that roam around haunting different places or people.

I always had an interest for ghost stories and after spending a year studying abroad in Japan, I learnt quite a great deal more about Japanese vengeful ghosts, through stories and movies and sleepovers.

Through the survey conducted I got a good amount of answers, on whether people knew about the legends and from whom they learned it. Then they were asked if they believed in them as children and as adults. The result shows that most people knew and believed in the legend of *Kuchisake Onna* and I even got answers from 2 participants who said they still believed in that legends as adults. I wonder though, because the Japanese tend to say that they do not believe in something when they actually do, like when they are asked if they are religious, they tend to answer with no, but are in fact a little more religious than they say. Could that have happened in the survey?

Based on the above it is safe to say that the legends chosen for this essay are legends that are still well and thriving, with considerable variances not unexpected as many of them date pretty far back and have changed quite a fair bit through the years. Although the changes are noticable, the plot remains the same, for example, Kuchisake Onna has her slit mouth covered, now with a surgical mask whereas with her sleeve in older versions. Hanako-san, still terrorizes the dim lit bathrooms of elementary schools, waiting for her victims to arrive. But will she live on in the future? When the bathrooms will be more modern and not as poorly lit, as some elementary schools are promising to fix the lighting and appearance of the bathrooms, My guess is that, the legend of Hanako and all of the other will most likely continue to thrive for a fair amount of time, thanks to mass media, movies, manga and computer games.
Bibliography


Films cited


Websites cited


Appendix 1

Questionnaire

1. Gender
2. What is your birth prefecture
3. Which category includes your age
4. Have you heard any of these legends
5. If you know the legend of Hanako-san, from whom did you hear it? Can you recite the legend in a few words?
6. If you know the legend of Aka Manto, from whom did you hear it? Can you recite the legend in a few words?
7. If you know the legend of Kuchisake-Onna, from whom did you hear it? Can you recite the legend in a few words?
8. If you know the legend of Teke-Teke, from whom did you hear it? Can you recite the legend in a few words?
9. Did you, as a child believe any of these stories?
10. Do you believe in these legends now?