My Power is Your Power

Representation of Yokai in the Game Persona 5

Ritgerð til BA-prófs í japönsku máli og menningu

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Abstract

Japanese traditions and culture are widespread all around the world. Following the ever-growing Japanese gaming industry, this thesis will explore the game of the year of 2017, Persona 5 (2016). This study aims at analyzing the representation of yokai, Japanese folklore creatures, in the game by clarifying relevant concepts involved in the study. First, the definitions of games and videogames will be discussed, their advantages and disadvantages and their significance as objects of study in academia. Later, to clarify what constitutes a Role-playing game, a brief historical background on Role-playing and Tabletop Role-playing games up to the creation of the first RPG will be discussed. Then, the study will define and compare Tabletop Role-playing games and video game Role-playing Games giving examples of the most prominent titles. The yokai sections will also define and explore yokai in Japanese folklore and their influence throughout the world. Later, an analysis of five yokai creatures from the game Persona 5 will be carried out: Kodama – the Wavering Tree Spirit, Shiisaa - the Guardian Holy Beast, Arahabaki – the Awakened God, Obariyon – the Piggyback Demon, and Inugami – the Possessing Dog Ghost. Within each yokai, their historical background, their references on popular culture and how they are portrayed and represented in the game will be discussed. Concluding that yokai represents much more than tales from Japanese folklore, they constitute a cultural item that is constantly changing and it perpetuated by diffusion through media, especially in games. Semiotic resources such as video games help to mold and keep alive narratives in a juxtaposition of the traditional and modern. Therefore, highlighting the importance of research into games as not only an entertainment phenomenon but a tool to understand and explore different cultures.
Introduction

With the increase in gaming culture around the world, video games are becoming more and more an object of study in several areas of knowledge of academic, especially within the human sciences. According to The Statistics Portal Statista\(^1\) website, the Japanese gaming industry is home to the largest group of game hardware (consoles) consumers and the industry is the world's largest and most profitable one. After a small recess in its growth, PlayStation 4 gave back breath to the Japanese gaming industry in 2017 with the work of Japanese franchises such as the *Megami Tensei* series with *Persona 5* (2016) (the object of study of this paper) and *Dragon Quest* with “*Dragon Quest XI*” (2017) by being acclaimed by critics and selling over 1.5 million copies immediately following their release (Webster, 2017). With that in mind and concerning the increasing popularity of Japanese culture throughout the world, I believe that Japanese games specifically, due to their global reach, are an important semiotic resource to understand how the Japanese culture is portrayed, promoted and represented all around the world.

As a gamer for over twenty years, I was witness to newborn Role-playing game (RPG) genre becoming one of the most influential and important industries in Japanese video game market. Since my childhood I have been an avid RPG enthusiast, actively playing several popular games in the genre. The genre Role-playing games, as the name suggests, is a game that consists in taking the role of a character in a fictional environment where the player (the hero) makes choices throughout the adventure, clearing puzzles and, by winning over the enemy (the villain), uncovers the main storyline in order to attain the biggest reward of the game (the goal). A common pattern in the narrative of old RPGs and video game RPGs (VGRPGs) where the good (the hero/me) fights the evil (the villain/the other) (Ryan, 2001). This notion, however, represents a classic point of view on RPGs that is present in the first Japanese VGRPGs such as “*Dragon Quest I*” (1986) and “*Final Fantasy I*” (1987). This concept, however, differs from the one portrayed in the first game of the *Megami Tensei* series “*Digital Devil Story: Megami Tensei*” (1987), released a year after “*Dragon Quest I*” (1986). In the first *Megami Tensei* series’ game, good and evil might coexist within the main

protagonist depending on the choices made by the hero (me) throughout the game.

Being my favorite genre and the one I most actively participated in, I believe that the RPGs culture was an effective learning tool that aided my personal development as a child. These games made me curious about where all those great ideas contained within the games came from and it effectively piqued my interest in the world by placing me into contact with other cultures and different languages. The Role-playing game experience gave me the opportunity to train mental resilience and hard-working by presenting me with complex challenges. They offered me the opportunity to actively participate in past history by taking my imagination back to ancient ages. It transported me to nearly unreachable places and gave me the opportunity to experience joyful fantasy worlds where magic was possible and mythical creatures were alive.

One of the best recent experiences I had that reminded me of how a video game can bring to life all sorts of feelings, was when after living in Japan for one year in 2004, I returned home and played a game called Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne. The game happens mainly in Tokyo, and it transported me back to the Japanese capital and I found myself in the same streets I had been some weeks earlier, except this time inside a game. Fascinated by the background knowledge involved in the production of the Megami Tensei franchise and eager to explore other games of the series, I kept following the its titles through the subsequent years. Following years of contact with the Japanese culture through RPGs, studying their language and culture and looking forward to repeating the experience of exploring the Japanese culture portrayed in the games, I decided to write this paper, this time through academia.

The latest in the Megami Tensei series, developed by Atlus, Persona 5 is a Japanese role-playing that contains a diverse bestiary and numerous beings therein are creatures from the Japanese folklore - the yokai. This brief study will investigate and explore the yokai present in the game, how and why the yokai are a relevant object of study of old Japanese traditions and Japanese popular culture. The hope is not only to arouse curiosity in people that are unfamiliar to the subject, a further reason behind the current study is to help strengthening the bounds between the gaming community and academia, placing emphasis on the games as a cultural and educational resource for research, one which comes complete with a multinational community of people with shared perceptions and experiences.
Video Games

This chapter is dedicated to discussing the significance of video games as an object of study in Human Sciences; initially defining the terms “game” and “video game”. After, it presents some advantages and disadvantages alongside its repercussion around the world.

Games, Video Games and Genres

Since the term “game” is rather a broad one, in order to differentiate it from other kinds of playthings, Chris Crawford, computer game designer and author of several books about games since the 80s, defines games using a series of dichotomies:

Creative expression is art if made for its own beauty, and entertainment if made for money. A piece of entertainment is a plaything if it is interactive. Movies and books are cited as examples of non-interactive entertainment; If no goals are associated with a plaything, it is a toy. If it has goals, a plaything is a challenge; If a challenge has no "active agent against whom you compete," it is a puzzle; if there is one, it is a conflict. Finally, if the player can only outperform the opponent, but not attack them to interfere with their performance, the conflict is a competition. However, if attacks are allowed, then the conflict qualifies as a game (Crawford, 2003, p. 6).

The oxford online dictionary defines video game as a “game played by electronically manipulating images produced by a computer program on a monitor or other display”. Games can be categorized by genres, such as: action, adventure, puzzle, first-person shooter, amongst others. Each one of them have their own purposes and goals. However, it is their gameplay interaction that is used as a method to divide them into different genres (Adams, 2009).

Another topic of interest regarding video game concerns their advantages and disadvantages. Mark Griffiths on studying the benefits of video games as educational tools, states some of the advantages and disadvantages of video games in our everyday lives. According to the author among the advantages are: “videogames can be used as research and/or measurement tools; They are fun and stimulating for participants, consequently, it is easier to achieve and maintain a person’s undivided attention for long periods of time; Because of the fun and excitement, they may also provide an innovative way of learning; they allow participants to experience curiosity and challenge, this may
stimulate learning; They equip children with state-of-the-art technology; and, Over time it may also help eliminate gender imbalance in IT use (as males tend to be more avid IT users)” (Griffiths, 2002, p. 48). Another advantage is the use of video game for real life job training, such as for the simulation games, which have been used for pilot training. (Arshavskiy, 2015).

In relation to the disadvantages (Griffiths, 2002), some of them are: Videogames cause participants to become excited and therefore produce a whole host of confounding variables such as motivation and individual skill; Videogame technology has rapidly changed across time. Therefore, “videogames are constantly being upgraded which makes it hard to evaluate educational impact across studies; videogame experience and practice may enhance a participant’s performance on particular games, which may skew results; and, videogames cause participants to become excited and therefore produce a whole host of confounding variables such as motivation and individual skill” (p. 48). It finishes stating that despite the disadvantages video games in the right context are an excellent tool as an educational tool.

**Games as Object of Study**

Popular video games have a tremendous influence around the world, therefore, the way characters, places and semiotic elements are being represented is a highly significant aspect to explore in order to understand their impact. There are numerous ways in which academics have explored games as object of study. Hall (2005) emphasizes the importance of studies on visual representation since "the image - whether moving or still - seems to be or to have become the prevalent sign of late-modern culture" (p. 6).

Regarding the significance of studies of video games, Frasca has argued that nowadays games are not seen as only a mass entertainment phenomenon, but a tool to promote critical thinking concerning your decisions throughout the game (Frasca, 2001), whilst Gee has studied the influence of games upon the development of strategic and analytical skills (Gee, 2005), multitasking, problem-solving skills, and not to mention, sociability and the possibility to make friends. Therefore, “games, players and their interactive relationship have come to be subject of study of Human Sciences’ researchers specially with the popularity of computers” (Souza, 2010, p. 17). Therefore, the gaming community shows to be a relevant matter of investigation.
RPG

With the idea of games presented in the previously, this section is dedicated to demonstrate how human beings engage in role play and how a predecessor of Chess evolved with fantasy fiction for the creation of the first RPGs.

Role Playing

Role playing has been present in human culture since ancient times, in both the west and in the east. Many forms of role-playing were and still make part of our society. As children, human beings engage in “Make Believe” play, where while acting, they can acquire new abilities and improve previously learned skills (Lillard, 1993). In the business area, role playing focuses on social skills training (Robinson, 1987) and in the psychology area, used as treatment, such as the psychodrama technique (Moreno, 1969). In a RPG, the improvisation aspect that helps creating the story and changing the world where the players are. This improvisation aspect was widespread in the work of Viola Spolin, a theatre academic, educator and acting coach, who developed the improvisational theatre aiming for actor training purposes (Spolin, 1999).

Historical Background

As for the game part of a videogame RPG, it is worth mentioning Chaturanga; a strategy game made in India in the 6th century, the predecessor of Chess. Game designer Warwick argues that Chess’ elements as the board itself was used to create the first wargames - strategy games created to simulate military strategies back in 1780. Wargames and the improvisation aspect of the improvisational theatre became the most important element in a Tabletop role-playing game - the most influential game genre used to make the first VGRPGs. In wargames, such as Kriegsspiel (1812), the participants have to use complex calculations that require knowledge of how different terrain types affect your performance, how to reach specific weapons and how enemies’ weak points can be exploited. However, its main characteristic is that the human behavior on war has to be taken in account when playing (Rilstone, 1994).

With time, wargames became more popular and changes also occurred. In 1913,
“Little Wars” made its debut in the market as the first miniature wargames, made by taking the idea of a wargame but adding miniature figures, trees and mountains. After the 40s, influenced by epic fantasy stories (known as the “Sword & Sorcery” genre) such as Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (1954), miniature wargames also started exploring fictional set-ups and created the Fantasy Wargames. The oldest Fantasy Wargame ever demonstrated was based on Tolkien’s fantasy world. In the early 70s, the miniature wargame “*Chainmail*”\(^2\) (1971) had a good reception and some years later was used as a basis for the rule set of the first Tabletop RPG called “*Dungeons and Dragons*” (1974). (Donovan, 2010)

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\(^2\) *Chainmail* is a medieval miniature wargame created by Gary Gygax and Jeff Perren.
Videogame RPG

This section will analyze the similarities and differences of TRPGs and VGRPGs, explaining them and giving examples.

TRPG & VGRPG

In order to understand better what a videogame RPG (VGRPG) is, it is also worth mentioning their influence from Tabletop RPGs (TRPG). TRPG are spoken games played in turns and just like theatre games, the improvisation must be the strongest element on the acting. In a TRPG, there is always a game master (GM). The GM describes the setting where the game takes place, the basic idea of a storyline, and any characters not being represented by the other players of the game. The player notifies the GM the action that is intended to be performed and the GM, according to the game rules’ and his personal opinion, establishing the turn of events. “The DM presents the players with situations, such as the one above, and asks the players, “What do you do?” (Cover, 2010, p. 6).

A videogame RPG (VGRPG) is heavily based on the before mentioned TRPGs. A significant difference between a TRPG and VGRPG is that, on a TRPG there is room for improvisation, because the GM can change the course of events according to what might be relevant to the story, thus, the way the game unfolds is not pre-defined like in a VGRPG. In a VGRPG what the player can do, most of the time, is picking up answers and choosing different routes that was all programmed beforehand. Barton (2008) claims that "most role-playing games take place in a high fantasy setting usually derived from the fantasy works of J. R. R. Tolkien, however, there are also plenty of science fiction and alternate reality games" (p. 5).

Differences may vary, but mainly in a VGRPG the player controls more than one character and their decisions. Since there is no GM (in this case may be compared the game developers which programmed the outcome of the decision the players can choose) the progress is done by taking actions while interacting with the environment inside the game and are not spoken out loud like in a TRPG.

3 In Dungeons & Dragons, the GM is called DM (Dungeon Master)
Relevant Titles

The first VGRPG called “Adventure” from 1972, was created by William Crowther, and after many changes, became an Atari game in 1980. Later, in 1981, many other western RPG titles also made their way into the market strengthening the genre. “Wizardry” (1981) and “Ultima” (1981) were the most famous by that time. In the East, the first RPG released was called “Dragon Quest” (1986), which was based on the western style RPG but with its own peculiarities. The game released first in 1986 by Enix was a boom in Japan, and then, under the name “Dragon Warrior” (1986) was released in North America. “Dragon Quest” was and still is one of the most popular Japanese RPGs with over 15 titles being the last one “Dragon Warrior XI” (2017). Other popular series as “The Legend of Zelda” and “Final Fantasy” released in the 80s are still some of the most influential franchises within the genre, with recent titles such as “The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild” (2017) and “Final Fantasy XII: The Zodiac Age” (2017).

One important aspect is that most of Japanese RPG are made for consoles such as PlayStation and Xbox. Barton (2008) claims that one of the reasons of the growing numbers of console users is due to cultural development of Japanese RPG in consoles:

Even though many Western CRPGs did find their way onto consoles in the 1990s, they weren’t nearly as successful as the Japanese RPGs (JRPGs) that dominated that sector of the market, which had always been controlled (at least indirectly) by the Japanese. JRPGs differ markedly from their Western counterparts, and console gamers had had plenty of time to develop strong expectations of what a role-playing game ought to be like. It certainly didn’t help, either, that many Western RPGs for consoles were terrible to begin with, such as SSI’s dreadful Heroes of the Lance. Compared to the latest Zelda or Final Fantasy, these offerings were laughable at best (p. 384).
Yokai and Japanese Folklore

Yokai are supernatural creatures from Japanese folklore. The world of yokai includes ghosts, gods (kami), transformed humans and animals (bakemono), spirit possession (tsukimono), urban legends, and other strange phenomena. In relation to its term, Meyer (2015) claims that "over the years, many different words have been used as translations, such as demon, monster, goblin, and spirit—but each of these words carries cultural baggage. None of them quite does the trick of capturing the essence of yokai” (p. 5).

According to The Book of Yokai (2015) from Michal Dylan Foster, people can understand yokai as forms of folkloric expression. Foster (2015) elucidates the folkloric creative process: “the process by which folklore operates is a kind of tug-of-war between two forces-the conservative pull of the past versus the immediate pull of present (and future) needs” (p. 11). Their stories are hidden in people’s interactions, making themselves real in what we cannot understand: “they slip through the cracks of official history” (Foster, 2015 p. 8).

For a long time, yokai were known by other names, for instance, during the Heian period (794 - 1185) they were known by Mononoke, in the Edo period (1603 - 1868) they were called Bakemono - all of these names would always refer to all things that cannot be explained. However, Foster has argued that it was “not until the Meiji period (1868–1912), most prominently in the work of Inoue Enryo, that yokai gradually became a technical term for all things beyond the realm of explanation” (Foster, 2015, p. 198).

The creation and maintenance of yokai resides in between the traditional and the modern, conviction and distrust; and its understanding will always involve a mystery. The process of constant changes itself also gives them their most important attribute: the mystery. The yokai is an unsolved question since “the moment a mystery is solved, yokai assume different shapes, evolving right alongside humans and inspiring us to keep asking questions” (Foster, p. XII). They live in the ambiguity and in what it is unknown.

According to Foster, the line that distinguishes a kami from a yokai is not visible; kami are known for violent outbursts due to their temperament, in a way that kami can be considered a yokai that is praised and a yokai can be considered a kami that is unpraised. He also argues that, compared to a monster, a yokai is a broader concept
that involves not only creatures, but also natural phenomena. What also defines what is a kami or a yokai can be geographically related to the place where they are worshiped (or not). For instance, they can bring water to a village (Thus been adored as a Kami), but at the same flood another (and feared as a yokai). (Foster, 2015)

The yokai folklore can also be found in two different kind of stories that most of the time end up overlaying one another, giving the idea of uncertainty: a legend or a folktale. Legends are commonly perceived as true stories, for either the listener or the teller. Since they are usually more specific, people get to know other peoples' names and the time period on which that event occurred and they are also a story that happened with “friend of a friend”. The folktales, on the other hand, are usually perceived as fiction, made for entertaining: they are stories that happened “once upon a time” (Foster, 2015).

Yokai is also the vivid mark of Japan's interests in ghost stories and folklore, becoming a mark in its tradition and culture. Meyer (2015) claims its importance and the way yokai evolved into printed material as an entertainment tool:

From the 17th through the 19th centuries, Japan experienced an unprecedented flourishing of culture and art. Ghost stories exploded in popularity, along with tales of monsters and strange happenings from the various regions of the country. During this period, the first mythical bestiaries were assembled by folklorists and artists like Toriyama Sekien and Sawaki Sūshi. These entrepreneurs collected the oral traditions of rural Japan—adding a few monsters of their own and creating mass-market entertainment for commercial consumption by the growing urban population. Yokai bestiaries begun as collections of painted scrolls, and later expanded into multi-volume illustrated encyclopedias of strange tales and supernatural stories (p. 6).

Nevertheless, the yokai folklore belongs to anyone and to everyone at the same time, since people perpetuate those narratives. With that in mind, to understand how these stories keep on renovating themselves in games, the notion of a folk group is extremely important. According to American folklorist Alan Dundes (1980) a folk group is “any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is-it could be a common occupation, language or religion - but what is important is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions which it calls its own” (p. 6).

Concerning the impact of yokai in media nowadays, Meyer (2015) states that “the influence of yokai can be felt in Japanese books, movies, animation, product design, video games, and more. Today, as Japanese culture becomes more and more
global, yokai are becoming known all over the globe” (p. 7). By realizing that several RPG games’ bestiary were based or had a great influence of yokai folklore, it is plausible to understand game producers as a folk group that maintain the yokai alive not only by presenting those stories to a large group, but also by promoting the change that helps the yokai to keep its status as mysterious beings. Foster (2015) also states the longevity of yokai with its roots on Japanese culture and traditions and its presence in nowadays society:

In contemporary Japanese culture, yokai may indeed be more prominent than monsters and spirits are in many other countries. If so, this is in part because of their deep connections to local places, to the landscape, and to folklore and history. And more important, it is because of the long and intimate relationship of local places, folklore, and history with art, literature, and popular culture. Having long ago been documented even old yokai continue to have a presence in contemporary culture. This presence has been bolstered by key individuals who have breathed new life into yokai at various times, reinvigorating them in the popular imagination. (p. 31)

This section attained to present the historical development of the term yokai and how the region where they are known to appear can change their definitions from kami to yokai or vice-versa. By presenting the yokai stories as a blend between the traditional and the modern and by demonstrating how they are perpetuated through the years, this section aims to show how the enigmatic stories that surrounds the yokai realm stimulates folkloric expression in different popular media such in games like Persona 5.
Persona 5

Persona 5 is the sixth game in the Persona series, and as mentioned before it is a RPG video game developed by Atlus. The game was released in 2016 in Japan and 2017 worldwide for PlayStation 3 and PlayStation 4. The game won as the best RPG video game (2017) from the Game Awards annual ceremony and it is one of the top selling and most played game of industry at the moment. The game takes place in modern Japan, where the main character is being interrogated by the police after getting caught for disrupting public order. It is, in the interrogation room where the story then unfolds; we get to know that before getting caught this time, the main character had moved from its his hometown to live in Tokyo for a probation year for being previously involved in another incident.

A relevant data, regarding the game, is also the official plot summarized by the game console company. The following plot is retrieved from the PlayStation official website:

RPG fans rejoice! Uncover the picaresque story of a young team of phantom thieves in this latest addition to the critically acclaimed Persona series. By day, enjoy your high school life in the big city, spending your time however you please. The bonds you form with the people you meet will grow into a great power to help you fulfil your destiny! After school, use your Metaverse Navigator smartphone app to infiltrate Palaces—surreal worlds created from the hearts of corrupt adults—and slip away to your double life as a phantom thief. With the power of Persona, make these criminals have a change of heart by stealing the Treasure of their distorted desires. Join your new friends in the fight to reform society with your own sense of justice!

During the events of the main storyline, the player gets to understand about his connection with a group of other young people who help others to take away evil from their minds, as they succeed in doing it, the thieves end up “stealing” the bad desires residing in people’s personalities. Such bad desires are usually correlated to social problems, such as abusive teachers, bad working conditions, among others. Therefore, the game shows its intention in presenting such issues as a way to explore critical thinking. Such assumption goes in contrast to the common notion that Japanese RPGS and Japanese popular culture appeal only to a cute factor, but the game Persona 5 also explores mature themes. Accordingly, Barton (2008) state that “it’s quite easy to hear a

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CRPG\textsuperscript{5} fan dismissing all JRPGs as simplistic and juvenile, with none of the depth or mental challenge of the real thing” (p. 208).

Persona 5 requires you to manage your schedule for almost a year and, in case you cannot achieve the goal, the game is over. In the game, the daily life choices will help you when fighting demons in an indirect way. For instance, studying a book about physical exercises aids you getting stronger in battle to defeat the enemies (in Persona 5 these monsters are actually based on different cultures' historical backgrounds) which are required in order to advance in the main storyline.

\textsuperscript{5} Computer role-playing game
Analysis of Yokai

In “Persona 5” the enemies found in the battles are called “Personas”. The “Personas” have their own personality traits and unique fighting characteristics that are described in the “Persona” status page in the game. It also gives the player hints on how to interact and negotiate with them. When inside a battle, the player can either vanquish the enemies or, after hitting their weak spot, try to communicate with them by talking. The bestiary of the game (compilation of the monsters/demons) contains over 200 “Personas”, each of them with a background history based on real world culture. A big part of them is somehow related to Japanese folklore, making the game an interactive tool bearing an immense source of information on the country's history and culture.

Each Persona is guided by an Arcana, a feature based on tarot cards and represent different aspects of personality in the game. Another point concerns the interaction of the character we play in the game with others; we, as players, have three options of sentences to choose in order to develop the dialogue, and as a RPG, each answer will lead to a different unfolding of the narrative. Before interacting with the player, each persona has a shadow name, and if the negotiation is effective the Persona remembers their real name and joins your team.

The following analysis will investigate five Personas in the game and its correlation with yokai. In each Persona, I will present a brief historical background of the yokai and its references in popular culture. Later, I will present the yokai character in the game followed by its description, arcane card relations, shadow name, visual representation and analysis of the verbal interaction and negotiation in the game. With that, it will be possible to establish how the image of the yokai is being represented and portrayed in the game.
Kodama (Wavering Tree Spirit)

As the folklore says, the Kodama spirits are plant spirits that are born from and inhabits trees older than a century. In Japanese language, “Kodama” in kanji meaning can mean “Tree Spirit” (木霊, in kanji) or “Echo” (こだま, in hiragana), because it is believed that some sounds echoing in the mountains are made by those spirits. The Kodamas live in trees that, once identified as a home for a Kodama, are marked with a “Shiminawa Rope” around it; a common shinto tradition to mark sacred places and purify it from evil. Cutting off one of those trees is believed to bring curses and misfortune for entire villages. According to Foster (2015), the Kodama originally “is not set in behavior or appearance” and the first drawn image of these spirits appears in Toriyama Seiken's 1776 yokai's catalog cover. The compilation illustrated by Shinonome Kijin portraited an elderly couple leaning out from an old pine tree.

In Western cultures the Kodama spirits can be compared to the Dryad, a Greek mythology nymph which life is also connected to the tree. In popular culture, one of the most famous images created for the Kodama spirits appear in the famous Japanese animation Mononoke Hime (Studio Ghibli) from Miyazaki Hayao, where they are portraited as small humanoid creatures with mask-like features that can float around. Representations of these tree spirits also appears in other popular games as “The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild” (2017) as small leafy creatures and in “Okami” (2006) where the kodama spirit has no physical body; they are but an echo from an old cherry tree.
The game shows the following description of *Kodama* in his Persona’s background information screen:

"Japanese plant spirits born from trees that have lived for 100 years. Cutting down one of these trees is said to cause misfortune."

The description, accordingly with the historical background, portrays *kodama* as plant spirits. Such representation of trees that have lived for 100 years also correlates to the first visual representation, mentioned before, of the *Toriyama Seiken's yokai's catalog* cover page portraying an elderly couple.

In Persona 5, the *kodama* spirits are aligned with “The Star” Arcana. The card that will usually mean that you have passed through a great life challenge represents hope, luck, peace and joy. The “Personas” of “The Star” Arcana can be astrological figures, deities or multi-talented figures. *Kodama* is visually represented as a slim (almost paper-like width) humanoid green creature that can hover in the air. Their heads spin like a roulette and since they have red spirals in the place of their eyes and mouth it is hard to distinguish one from another. They are similar to the *Kodamas* in *Princess Mononoke*.

![Figure D – Kodama in Persona 5](image-url)

The *Kodama* in the game has its shadow name as “Wavering Tree Spirit”, after the interaction it identifies himself as *Kodama*. *Kodama*'s type of personality is described as upbeat, therefore in order to establish a successful negotiation through the interaction, the player has to choose funny answers among the options and avoid serious
or vague sentences. Although Kodama assumes his identity as a child in the interaction, (I'm just a widdle child / a kid like me) his sentences and choice of words in the dialogue also suggest a childish discourse. It is constantly teasing and challenging the protagonist with the use of assumptions and direct questions (You're a big bully! Don't you think that's “immature”?). The turning point in the interaction whereas the kodama finally accept to join the team is when the protagonist claims it does not know about something, this, accordingly, creates a bound between the kodama and the player ‘s lack of knowledge in which kodama assumes they are similar and finally accept to lend his power to the protagonist.
Shiisaa (Guardian Holy Beast)

The name Shiisaa comes from the Chinese language. In English, translated by “Shishi”, literally means “stone dog”. Shiisaa statues are a Ryukyuan cultural artifact, worshiped as guardians and popular in the Okinawan Archipelago in the southern part of Japan. They look like a dog with lion features like a mane and a big jaw that resembles the popular “komainu” dog statues in Japan. Shiisaa guardians are also considered to be gargoyle beasts that are usually placed in house’s entrances or roofs. Faced to the entrance, they are paired for protection, repealing disasters and bringing good luck. It is believed, in Okinawa, that the dead people’s souls become balls of fire that could burn down places and these guardians would also protect houses from burning.

One of them has its mouth wide open as it would vocalize the letter “A”, the first letter of the Japanese alphabet and would keep away evil spirits. The other one has its mouth shut tight, as it would vocalize the letter “N”, and would keep good spirits in. The Shiisaa statues are considered to be one of Okinawa's cultural artifact and nowadays, the Shiisaa figure is commonly reproduced as local crafts as an imagery identity for Okinawan in order to commercially promote the tradition and cultural property of Okinawa for tourists (Aoyagi, 2016).

In the game, the Shiisaa Persona is guided by “The Chariot” Arcane. The card is usually portraited as a person riding a chariot with two similar creatures differing in colors is a symbol of victory, conquest and self-confidence. The Personas of “The Chariot” Arcana usually represent driven individuals with strong goals and, as a rider that needs to control the opposing forces of the different creatures, the card represents victory by self-control and determination. The visual representation of the Shiisaa I the game is pretty similar to the famous Okinawan statues: a mix between a dog and a lion with big eyes and thick eyebrows. In the game, the Shiisaa do not have fangs neither horns like many other popular representations. It also has a thicker fur in its legs and its face resembles a man's face: a human-like teething and nose.
The game shows the following description of Shiisaa in his Personas’ background information screen:

"A holy beast said to protect houses from evil and bring good fortune. They look similar to Shinto guardian dogs, but are actually modeled after a lion. There are many stories about it Ryukyu lore"

The description agrees with the historical background and grounds the notion of the Shiisaa image being used to protect houses. It also mentions that its lore is large, especially due the fact of being derived from another culture. In the game, since the Shiisaa is not a wild enemy, the player cannot interact directly with him, it does not have a shadow name, and the only way to obtain it, is by the fusioning of two other Personas. One of the only verbal texts that appears in the game as reference for the Shiisaa, is the phrase “Don’t Worry, Be Happy”. Such phrase used by the Shiisaa before it joins your team is a reference to Meher Baba, a spiritual master born in India in 1969 that called himself an Avatar, or the reincarnation of a god. The phrase, usually known by the works of Bobby McFerrin or Bob Marley is popular as a motivational quote and set as a trademark for a feel-good lifestyle.
The Dogu are a Jomon Period (14,000 – 300 BC) artifact. Dogu means “Clay Dolls” and these figurines are believed to be dolls of a chief god of an aboriginal belief in Japanese religion lore, even prior to the old Japanese Shinto beliefs. The most accepted theory is that they were used for body purification against illness, for fertility rituals or for religious purposes, but as studies on these doll shows us, they are inconclusive (Nakajima, 1943). These clay dolls that seem to have tattoos made by bamboo incisions and wear ancient Inuit snow googles (see figure 8) to prevent snow blindness are found spread across the Japanese territory, but more common in the Eastern portion of the country.

Since the real purpose of the figurines are unknown, they are used as fake proof for many theories. The book “Chariots of God?” (1968) that says that aliens visited earth a long time ago and helped humans to develop technologies also used the Dogu image as proof because the statues resemble astronaut suits. The in-game background for this Persona is also based on a tale published in the Japanese magazine Tsugaru Soto Sangun-shi that was proven to be a false document. The story tells that worshipers of Arahabaki led a successful attack against the Emperor Jimmu (the first Emperor of Japan, according to a legend) making the image to become a symbol of tracheary.

In popular culture, the “Pokemon” games (for instance Pokemon Ruby and Pokemon Sapphire, 2002) and “Digimon” animation there are also other creatures based on the Dogu image. The concept of animism or that plants and objects have a spirit, that is extremely important to Shinto traditions, is also tied up to the concept of this Persona and, according to (Foster, 2015, p. 17) “the morphing of normal utensils (kibutsu) into yokai seems to have been the fate of objects that had survived a hundred years”, making the idea of a “new” yokai or kami based on artifacts even more plausible.
The game shows the following description of Arahabaki in his Persona’s background information screen:

"A mysterious god of ancient Japan. Most famously worshipped by Nagasunehiko, who was defeated in battle against Emperor Jimmu, Arahabaki came to be treated as a symbol of rebellion and defiance”.

The description of the game mainly focused on Emperor Jimmu tales, creating the image of Arahabaki as a symbol of rebellion. In the game, the Persona Arahabaki is based on the Dogu figure. Arahabaki is guided by the Arcana card “The Hermit”, which is linked to is the representation of wisdom and inner guidance. As a seeker of inner knowledge, the card that usually portraits a lone old man holding a lantern and a staff, is at the same time a symbol of power and solitude of a path that requires isolation in order for oneself to find the right way. Most of the Personas aligned to this arcane card are representations of deities that operate behind the scenes going away from the main stage. Also, under “The Hermit” Arcana influence that are other mythical yokais that have a real history background, like other yokais summoned by a Fujiwara family's member, one of the most influential ones during the Heian Period (794 - 1185).

The Arahabaki is visually represented with a big and strong build, small arms and eyes that seem to be protected by the snow goggles. The Arahabaki, just like the Shiiisaa, is similar to their popular images. The game's representation is almost identical to the Jomon Period clay dolls and even though there are different kinds of those dolls, the one used to be portraited in the game is the most well-known. Also, due to the fact the image of Arahabaki is set within objects such as the statues, the visual representation in the game chose to maintain the same imagery in order to perpetuate the symbology.
Arahabaki has its shadow name as Awakened God before the negotiation. Concerning the interaction with Arahabaki in the game, in order to establish a successful negotiation, since his type or personality is gloomy, the player needs to avoid serious and funny answers as it tends to like vague ones. One of the most effective ways to make him join your team is by being in a superior level in the game. Therefore, it immediately shows respect and accept to join the team not needing an extensive negotiation through the dialogue. Such attitude can also be related to his personality trait and his arcane card alignment with “The Hermit” which avoids social situations.
**Obariyon (Piggyback Demon)**

“Piggyback Demon” is a common name for a *yokai* in the Japanese folklore. The name varies from place to place but is always a childish way to say “Give me a piggyback ride!”. The most common name for the Piggyback demon, *Obariyon*, is related to Nigata Prefecture because “Give me a piggyback ride!” in the local's dialect is “*Obariyon!*” in Japanese. This *yokai* can become invisible and it is a small, imp-like creature that lurks in grassy roads and around trees to ambush distracted travelers. The person cannot be really sure if the *Obariyon* is attached to them because it can become invisible to chew on the carrier's scalp. According to the “*Yokai Attack*” (2012) guide, its appearance can vary but a common trait is that it is gets heavier and heavier, nearly killing its victims.

The *Obariyon* attacks are feared to a point where villagers began to use metal bowls to protect themselves while traveling. While it is really hard to get rid of this *yokai* by normal means, if the traveler gets to its destination before the worse happens, the burden or the “*Obariyon*” becomes gold coins delivering great fortune to its victims. In Western culture, a tale derived from “The German Legends” of the Brothers Grimm, Volume One (1981) describes a similar creature known as the “*Huckup*” that also jumps on peoples’ backs and gets heavier over time. The *Obariyon* tale can also be interpreted as a metaphor for parent-child relations; the demands of young children as the weight that is worth to be carried through the path to finally be rewarded with a big reward.

In “Persona 5” *Obariyon* is guided by the Arcana “*The Fool*”. This arcane card usually portrays a young person on the brink of falling from a cliff and is often related to innocence, madness, creativity and inexperience. With a dog barking by its foot as if it was trying to reveal the danger, “*The Fool*” also represents naivety and even a lack of
awareness. This card is also related to an empty vessel, or a new journey; a blank state to be filled up. One of the strongest Persona of "The Fool" Arcana is the mythological deity Izanagi, one of the creators of the Japanese archipelago according to the Japanese book Nihon Shoki.

Obariyon's visual representation resembles a child that is always prancing and carries a big smile on its face. Obariyon is portrayed as an orange (imp-like/demonic) small creature with horns and fangs that resemble more of a monster. It also features the common hairstyle of Japanese boys, but in the color purple the bangs covering its eyes.

The game shows the following description of Obariyon in his Persona’s background information screen:

“A Japanese "piggyback monster" that jumps on people's backs as they walk along grassy paths. It is heavy and not easily removed, but if you can take it back home, it will turn into gold coins if you can carry it back home”.

Among different representations of Obariyon, several of them portrait him as a creature that may deliver fortune if you withstand its pressure and weight. Accordingly, the description in the game chose to perpetuate such notion. Also, in the game, his shadow name as Piggyback Monster, corelating to its lore. Obariyon's type of personality is described as irritable, therefore it tends to like serious answers and dislike vague and kind ones. Its verbal construction of identity through the dialogues are
similar to the *Kodama*'s, in which it is possible to notice a childish discourse. However, since the *Obariyon* likes serious answers, in order to be successful, you have to go straight to the point and use direct commands, instead of trying to be funny or vague. *Obariyon*'s discourse also represents him as a funny and young demon due to the constant use of contractions (*lemme, hafta*) and even expressions (*don't party till you drop*). *Obariyon*, as well as *kodama*, evoke the sense of childhood and naivety, but since *Obariyon* likes serious answers, it may be suggested that its identity seeks obedience, in a sense of parenthood, while the *kodama* for being a free spirit seeks only fun and joy.
**Inugami** (Possessing Dog Ghost)

*Inugami* is a *yokai* that can be compared to a “familiar spirit” from medieval European folklore that are common in populated areas all across Japan. It is believed that, like a loyal dog, the *Inugami* were summoned to fulfill their master's harmful tasks obeying their orders for years and even generations. The *Inugami* are, in some cases, treated as a family member, but in rare cases, these spirits can rebel against their masters, if mistreated, causing families to be even completely destroyed.

Families that are known to have connections with *Inugamis* are treated as outcasts. Therefore, in order to keep their secret, the *Inugami* are kept hidden in secret places in their masters' houses. Even though they differ in appearance, they are usually described as identical to dogs when in public, while its true form, is described as a mummified dog’s head with a long body covered in straps.

The *Inugami* can easily take control over feeble and powerless people that in some cases may even start barking like dogs showing a symptom of possession. *Inugami* are also believed to be revengeful spirits, in which can perform several acts under vengeance on behalf of their "owner". However, they are extremely powerful and can exist independently of a master and may even incorporate themselves into objects, making those objects useless.

In popular culture, the image of the *Inugami* is evoked in the popular manga and anime *InuYasha* (1996) by Rumiko Takahashi, since the title protagonist is a hanyou (*half-yokai*) born of an *Inugami* family.
The game shows the following description of Inugami in his Persona’s background information screen:

“A dog spirit said to possess people in Japanese lore. Those possessed are in a state of “inu-tsuki” and lose consciousness. Onmyoji use Inugami as familiars.”

The description relates his identity as a dog spirit and mainly focuses on the possession attribute. Accordingly, Inugami’s shadow name is Possessing Dog Ghost and after a successful interaction it identifies itself as Inugami. The Inugami is guided by the “The Hanged Man” Arcana. The Hanged Man arcane card is often portrayed as an upside-down person hanged from one leg resembling the number 4. The hanged person’s calm face infers the idea that it is in the position on his own free will, that a sacrifice is needed in order to find what is searched, making it a symbol of self-sacrifice.

![Figure O - Inugami in Persona 5](image)

Concerning its visual representation in the game, the Inugami is portrayed with a long tall slim body resembling a snake with a dog’s head, which correlates to its true form representation, thus, not presenting the ordinary dog appearance. In relation to the interaction, his type is described as timid, thus, it tends to like kind answers and dislike vague and funny ones. Therefore, a successful negotiation is established when the player chooses the kindest and not the provocative or funny answers among the options, this way, it soon joins your team and lend its powers. As it could be observed, the Inugami in the game perpetuate several notions of its historical background, such as
evoking a familiar symbol and sacrifices. The game, however, even though chose to portray visually the *Inugami* in its true demon form, its interaction is one of the few that the player has to be kind to in order to achieve an effective negotiating, presenting a tender interaction which evokes the *Inugami* as a family member.
Conclusion

The thesis intended to investigate how elements of yokai are present in games, in this case Persona 5, and how it can be linked with the notions of RPGs and lastly, the importance of games as object of study within the cultural studies area. There are several mediums that features folklore-based creatures, such as animes, movies and mangas, the main difference of investigating these creatures on a video game lies on the opportunity of interaction and immersion, especially concerning a RPG video game in which the choices of the player will change and mold the narrative.

Also, considering the success of the game worldwide, the way these creatures are represented is relevant since they carry ideologies that are also a channel in which new generations have contact with Japanese folklore. Such representations are multimodal, that is, they have an appearance and a personality in which the player can engage to interact. Therefore, the way such personalities are created is also a relevant issue while dealing with their representations since it is grounded on folklore of several millenary creatures and developed as a character you can direct dialogue in the game.

As shown in the analysis, some representations tend to perpetuate the image created by common sense when they are objectified (statues, amulets, symbols) and some of them are resemiotized when they have more room for interpretations, for instance, the Kodama and the Obariyon, not having a specific literature to describe their appearance and personality opens rooms for an identity creation. Their identities are also created with the use of verbal text in the interaction in which they are represented by their discourse and other sociocultural elements such as tarot cards. Such identities created are relevant of investigation due to Persona 5 has become one the most successful game in the latter years.

Therefore, yokai lies on a realm of tradition and modern. Such juxtaposition is also a trademark for Japan's image, architecture and lifestyle. These supernatural beings represent much more than tales but a symbol of resistance of traditional narratives and at the same time are open for new adaptations considering different contexts.
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