

COMPLETION REPORT

Monstrous women: A comparative study of shapeshifters in Japanese and Philippine stories

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In this study, monstrous women represent specific socio-historical issues and the concerns they portray are supposedly not easily translated into another cultural setting, in theory they should be local beings. The anxiety that these female characters bring about, though culturally specific, translate successfully from one culture to another. Marginal figures twice over in the sense that “woman” and “femaleness” are wholly seen as evil especially in the narratives, the different shapeshifters – monsters and metaphors for “impurity” – were obscenities in and of themselves. Taken together, each of these female shapeshifter – *kitsune*, *yamamba*, *kijo*, *asuang*, *asuang-hayop*, *manananggal* – individually interrogates and re-imagines master narratives, whether it is biological, political, familial, social or gender inequality. The study offers a series of readings from chapter to chapter that opens aspects of Philippine and Japanese culture to inquiry.

In “The Forces of Things Unknown: Japanese Shapeshifters,” the boundary-crossing and deceiving actions of the *kitsune* highlights not only the assumption of identity but also negotiated quality of one’s place in the natural and social order. The important insights into the fox’s symbolic role in Japanese religious history as well as the basic modes by which the Japanese have lived within the different life-worlds they have. To reduce the complex *kitsune* into the product of Japanese reflections on the natural world would be unfair as it is part of the contours of a shared cultural schema.

This “Otherness” is also present in the *yamamba* and *asuang* (as old woman) figures. Although the *yamamba* is a multi-faceted woman who may also appear as a good old crone or a beautiful wife, the narratives discussed here are those that portray her as a frightening old woman who has a penchant for human flesh. Both types of narratives (Philippine and Japan) try to reconcile hag monsters with the needs of society which in most cases are cautionary of strangers and for children not to stray from the path. The *yamamba* and the *asuang* show themselves in an image that only partly belongs to them. Here the shapeshifting into devouring monsters is an odd twist on the means for characterizing this specific female group which the dominant culture finds disposable since their usefulness has run out.

As a complement to the first two sections on the Japanese shapeshifters, the trope of shapeshifting expands to that of the *kijo*, women scorned turning into demons, to examine women as monstrous. Mostly monsters serve to warn. They have freedoms we lack. And in the *kijo*, this freedom translates to that of jealousy. Jealous wives are threats to the social order because their jealousies are capable of turning them into demons. Here, the *kijo* polices the borders of the possible, interdicting through its grotesque body some behaviours and actions.

The Philippine *asuang* and the *manananggal* have changed in this century as more narratives have coopted their otherness. The *asuang* is forever linked to prohibited practices to ensure that she does not transgress social norms. Even as she is vilified, the *asuang* evokes an escapist fantasy especially with the ability to bisect in the *manananggal*. Through the *manananggal*'s capacity to fly, she can be at different places. She can also enjoy oneness with a child not her own but could be through the process of "devouring" it.

The most important thing I hope readers will obtain from this study is to understand that the female shapeshifter is separate from our selves but mirrors ourselves. They are metaphors for human fears and anxieties and as such will always be in our midst.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)

July 8, 2015 Adelaide Convention Center

9th International Convention of Asia Scholars

Resistance in Shapeshifting Narratives in the Philippines and Japan

Article (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Article, etc.)

Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society (forthcoming 2016)

"The Philippine Asuang and its Variants"

The Mindanao Forum (forthcoming 2016)

The Line of Possibilities: The *Yamamba* and the *Asuang*

Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)

Proposed publication of the manuscript as soon as two readers have reviewed it for publication