

## VISUALIZATION DIFFERENCES OF *ONI* MYTHOLOGICAL CREATURES IN JAPANESE CULTURE WITH *KIMETSU NO YAIBA* ANIME

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**ABSTRACT** :This research is entitled "Visualization Differences Of Oni Mythological Creatures In Japanese Culture With Kimetsu No Yaiba Anime". This study aims to determine the differences in the visualization of Oni mythological creatures in Japanese culture with the anime Kimetsu no Yaiba. The method used in this study is an informal method. The theory used is the semiotic theory proposed by Barthes (1957). Based on the results of the study, it was found that there were differences in the visualization of Oni in anime with the point of view of Japanese people's beliefs. In the anime, Oni is depicted as a figure who has sharp nails on his feet and hands. In addition, Oni are said to enjoy eating humans to make their blood a source of Oni strength. In Japanese mythology, the Oni is depicted as a red, blue or green giant. Oni in Japanese mythology is more about the bad nature of humans.

**KEYWORDS** : *Oni, japanese culture, japanese mythology, anime*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Japan is one of the countries in East Asia which is famous for its unique culture. Japanese culture is influenced by the geographical characteristics of the country and has a reciprocal relationship with the characteristics of its people. Japanese people are known as people who always try to maintain and pass on their cultural values and ensure their survival. Therefore, when there is a culture or something new that comes from outside, if it is useful, they will accept it with open arms but without reducing the cultural values and personality (Beasley, 2003:25). At this time, Japan's modernization is still influenced by western culture, one of which is in the field of technology. Japan learns and develops technology from the west but still adheres to the traditions and culture of its own country (Beasley, 2003: 127). One of the technologies developed by Japan is digital media. Various entertainments can be accessed through digital media in the form of internet access services via laptops, tablets, smartphones and televisions. With this media, the public is presented with popular shows such as drama series, films, music, web series to animation. Japanese animation productions are commonly known as anime. Anime is usually characterized by colorful images featuring characters in various locations and stories. In general, Japanese animation is an adaptation of Japanese comics (manga) and is usually made in the form of two-dimensional (2D) animation (Ranang et al., 2010:241).

Barthes' definition of myth is based on the idea of responsible language. Thus, mythology recognizes the freedom of language. This means that in a mythological sense it corresponds to the world. The discourse is metallic language that remains in obscurity, with reference to moral origins. Myth can live in the atmosphere of revolutionary action by imagining it. It therefore has the self-conscious character of its rigid function and simple so that it blatantly influences the behavior of intellectuals with political backgrounds and all in metallic language. Meanwhile, according to Barthes, myth theory does not only consider classical myths but also modern myths in literary works. Myths were originally oral stories that were told orally. This theory also confirms the existence of elements borrowed from other myths in literary works together. Myths can appear as exaggerated explanations of historical events, as allegory or personification of the nature of phenomena, or as explanations. Mythological rituals are disseminated with the aim of transmitting religious or idealistic experiences, forming models of certain traits, and as teaching materials in society (Fatimah, 2014:89).

Anime is one of Japan's popular entertainment and culture that is in great demand and currently the popularity of anime has spread to various countries around the world. Many anime have been translated into various languages in the world. Themes that are often raised in anime include action, adventure, drama, history, samurai,

slice of life, school of life, fantasy and others. One of the anime that is currently very popular among the Japanese and international community is *Kimetsu no Yaiba*, or in its international title Demon Slayer by KoyoharuGotōge. *Kimetsu no Yaiba* is an action, fantasy and historical themed anime series adapted from the Japanese comic series (manga) of the same name. This 26-episode anime series premiered on April 6, 2019. *Kimetsu no Yaiba* has been widely praised for its beautiful animation, especially its dynamic action sequences where every frame feels like a work of art. Not only featuring stunning visuals, this series also presents an interesting storyline with a very strong depiction of each character. The popularity achieved by the anime *Kimetsu no Yaiba* led to increased interest in the manga series, which continued until the first season finished airing in Japan. Books from the *Kimetsu no Yaiba* manga series topped the Japanese sales charts in 2020 (Brown, 2021).

The *Kimetsu no Yaiba* series is set in Japan during the Taisho period (1912-1926) which tells the story of a boy named Kamado Tanjiro who lives with his family and makes a living as a charcoal seller. One day his family was attacked and killed by an *Oni* (demon). Tanjiro and his younger sister, Nezuko, survived the incident, but Nezuko turned into a demon due to being bitten by a demon. Even so, surprisingly, Nezuko still showed emotions and thoughts like a normal human. Knowing this, Tanjiro is determined to become a demon slayer squad to return his younger brother to a human again and to prevent the tragedy of attacks by demons in society. *Oni* is a demon with a big mouth, has two or more eyes, who likes to target bad people and likes to steal their souls when they are dead. *Oni*'s stature is human-sized but has very sharp horns and hooves, besides that they can also fly. Some sources write that *Oni* also had the head of a horse or ox with a human-like body. *Oni* sometimes appear in stories and legends as ghosts that frighten children (Roberts, 2004:87). *Oni* often appear in anime with historical themes, for example in the anime *Gegege no Kitarō* which is an adaptation of the manga of the same name by Mizuki Shigeru.

In addition to showing traditional Japanese culture, this anime series is full of Japanese mythology that is packaged in an interesting way. This anime raises a lot of things related to the supernatural such as the many types of *Oni* or demons that are displayed in it. This makes one of the interests of the *Kimetsu no Yaiba* anime so that it is used as an object in this research. This study focuses on the differences in *Oni* visualization in the anime *Kimetsu no Yaiba* with the point of view of Japanese society which will then be analyzed using semiotic theory by Barthes.

## II. THEORY

The theory used is the theory of semiotics proposed by Roland Barthes (1957), where he developed semiotics at three levels, namely denotation, connotation and myth. Literally the meaning of denotation has an independent descriptive meaning which is literally shared by almost all members of a culture. The meaning of denotation is a meaning that is really socially agreed upon, referring to social reality. Meanwhile, connotative meaning is formed by linking markers with broader cultural aspects such as beliefs, attitudes, frameworks, and ideologies of a social framework (Sobur, 2017: 145). The connotative meaning is open to new interpretations. There must be a relationship between the signifier and the sign so that this will form the sign and the relationship will inevitably develop as determined by the sign user. The relationship between the two is arbitrary (arbitrator). So, in a denotative sense, it creates an explicit meaning and is the first system of meaning signification. Meanwhile, connotative meaning creates latent meaning and is a second meaning signification system (Vera, 2014: 27). Barthes also sees another aspect of signification, namely the myth that marks a society. Mythology and semiology both deal with values that are not in accordance with facts (Barthes 2011: 155). Myth is a special system that is built from a semiological chain that already exists. The characteristics and functions of myths are used to understand the environment and people around them (Barthes, 2011: 152).

The myth proposed by Barthes is a type of speech or speech act presented in a discourse. The discourse that is raised will produce a myth, if the myth is accepted then people's behavior will follow the mythical discourse. The existence of myths is an expression, story and narrative, all of which are messages conveyed through a discourse system (Barthes, 2011:152-153). These three levels are interconnected, denotative meaning is direct, meaning the special meaning contained in the description of an object. The connotative meaning will be related to the culture implied in the wrapping, namely the meaning contained in it. Myth is associated with meaning based on beliefs that exist in society (Barthes, 2011:162). In this theoretical research, it is used to determine the meaning of denotation, connotation to the meaning of the myth of Japanese culture based on the anime *Kimetsu no Yaiba* so that the culture contained in the object is known.

## III. RESEARCH METHOD

The data sources used are primary data sources and secondary data sources. The primary data source used in this study is the anime *Kimetsu no Yaiba*, the first season from episodes 1 to 26 with a duration of about 23 minutes per episode. In addition, secondary data such as theoretical books, journals, and articles are also used. The data collection methods used in this research are netnographic methods and library methods. The netnographic method is an online observational research method. This method uses computer-based communication,

especially via the internet (Konzinets, 2010:60). Data was collected by joining a community on the internet and conducting participatory observations. In addition to data obtained from the anime *Kimetsu no Yaiba* and the internet, there are several supporting data sources such as books, journals, and theses. The method used in analyzing the data is a qualitative method. The qualitative method as a whole utilizes ways of interpretation by presenting it in the form of a description (Ratna, 2015:46). This method gives the main attention to the meaning and message, according to the nature of the object, namely as a cultural study (Ratna, 2015:27-28). The method of presenting the results of the analysis used is an informal method, namely the presentation of the results of data analysis with a series of words, not in the form of numbers (Ratna, 2015:50). The data that has been analyzed is then presented by explaining the evidence in the form of quotes and pictures contained in the anime *Kimetsu no Yaiba*.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### 4.1 Visualization of *Oni* in *Kimetsu no Yaiba* Anime

In this study, the results obtained are (1) Visualization of mythological *Oni* creatures and their characters in the anime *Kimetsu no Yaiba*; (2) Visualization of *Oni* mythological creatures and their characters in Japanese culture until now with the semiotic theory proposed by Roland Barthes (1957), namely denotation, connotation and myth. Denotation is a direct or literal meaning which means explaining something as it is, while connotation meaning in a double meaning is the result of personal or cultural experience (Barthes 2017: 128)

Culture is a form of abstraction from human experience that is dynamic and tends to develop in line with the development of the supporting community. In a culture, myths function to reflect the supporting culture and convey transformative messages (Iswidayati, 2007: 181). Myths and legends contain wisdom, experience, and cultural values. The *Kimetsu no Yaiba* anime represents many elements of Japanese mythology, one example is the *Oni* or mythological creature that looks like a demon. The shape of the *Oni* and all its variations depicted in this anime illustrates the cultural values that are reflected in the attitudes and behavior patterns of the characters in the anime. *Oni* as one of the mythologies in Japanese culture in the anime *Kimetsu no Yaiba* is described further through the following data findings.



Figure 1  
Visualization of *Oni* in anime  
(*Kimetsu no Yaiba*, Ep 3 02.55)

(1) Urokodaki : 鬼。試食人間、人間を殺して食べる。いつどこから現れたのかは不明。身体能力が高く。きずなどもたち所に治る。切り落とされた憎み繋がり、手足を新たに生やすことも可能。体の形を変えたり、異能をもつ鬼もいる。太陽の光か、特別の刀で首を切り落とさない限り殺せない。

*Oni. Shushokuningen, ningen wo koroshitaberu. Itsu doko kara arawareta no ka wafumei. Shintai nōryoku ga takaku. Kizu nadomo tachi dokoroninaoru. Kiri otosaretanikumitsunagari, teashi wo aratanihayasukotomokanou. Karada no katachi wo kaetari, inou wo motsu Onimoiru. Taiyō no hikari ka, tokubetsu no katana de kubi wo kiriotosanaikagirikorosennai.*

'*Oni*. They prey on humans by killing and eating them. We do not know when and where they will appear. Their bodies were extremely strong, any wound could heal in an instant. They can put their bodies back together and can grow new hands or feet. With the ability to transform, demons are adept at using supernatural powers. Only sunlight or swords with special powers could kill them.'

(*Kimetsu no Yaiba*, Ep3 02.28 - 02.58)

Semiotics put forward by Barthes emphasizes that there are three processes of identifying signs, namely knowing the meaning of denotation, connotation, and myth (2011:162). Based on the kanji meaning *Oni* in the Japanese dictionary is defined as demons, giants and feared creatures (Semita, 2015: 350). The connotative meaning of *Oni* is found in data (1) it is explained that *Oni* is a demon who always preys on humans as food. *Oni* are described as very strong creatures and can regrow body parts that have been cut off such as hands and feet. In the anime *Kimetsu no Yaiba* it is explained that *Oni* can die if exposed to sunlight and by slashing the *Oni*'s neck with a special sword. Figure 1 shows the *Oni* visualization in the anime *Kimetsu no Yaiba* which is depicted as a figure who has pale skin, large eyes, has horns and long nails. The picture also shows an *Oni* covered in blood after eating a human.



Figure 2



Figure 3.

Nezuko before becoming an *Oni* / Nezuko already an *Oni*  
(*Kimetsu no Yaiba*, Ep 1 10.32)

(*Kimetsu no Yaiba*, Ep 1 18.19)

- (1) Giy :簡単な話だ。傷口に鬼の血を浴びたから鬼になった。人喰い鬼をそうやって増える。

*Kantannahanashi da. Kizuguchini Oni no chi wo abita kara Onininatta. Hitokui Oni wa sou yatte fueru.*

'The reason is simple. When the *Oni*'s blood touches the wound, it becomes an *Oni*. That's how the man-eating *Oni* increased their numbers.'

Tanjiro :ネズコわ人を食ったりしない！  
*Nezukowahito wo kuttari shinai!*  
'Nezuko don't eat people!'

Giy:よくもまあ。今姿己が食われそうになっておいて？  
*Yokumomaa . Ima Sugata onore ga kuwaresouninatteoite ?*  
'You even say it . Aren't you almost eaten by her?'

Tanjiro :違う！俺のことはちゃんとわかってるはずだ！俺が誰も傷付けさせない。きっとネズコを人間に戻せ。絶対に治します！  
*Chigau ! Ore no kotowachantowakatteruhazu da! ore ga daremokizutsukesasenai . Kitto Nezukoswoningennimode .Zettaininaoshimasu !*  
'No ! She definitely recognize me. Not will I let she hurt. Nezuko will Becomes man again . I will heal her!'

Giy :治らない。鬼になったら人間に戻ることはない。  
*Naoranai .Onininattaraningennimodorukotowanai .*  
'she can't be healed. After becoming *Oni* she cannot become human again'

Tanjiro :探せ！必ず方法を見つけるから殺さないでくれ！家族を殺したやつも見つけるだすから！俺が全部ちゃんとするから！だから！だから！やめてくれ！

*Saga !Kanarazuhōhō wo mitsukeru kara korosanaidekure ! Kazoku wo koroshitayatumomitsukerudasukara ! ore ga zenbuchantosuru kara ! Dakara ..! Dakara ..!Yametekure !!*

I'll look for it ! I certain will find how ! Do not kill her! I will looking for the person who killed my family! I will do everything ! So ..! So ..! Do not kill her !!

( *Kimetsu no Yaiba* , Ep1 13.32 – 14.25 )

Data (2) Giyū explains that humans can turn into an *Oni* figure when a human's wound is hit by *Oni* drops, the human will turn into an *Oni*. When a person has turned into an *Oni*, he will not be able to return to being an ordinary human. They no longer have reason, thoughts and emotions like humans in general but they have a high desire to eat humans to make them stronger. Picture 2 is the figure of Nezuko who is described as a petite girl who is very beautiful and gentle. However, after Nezuko became an *Oni* her body underwent significant changes. In Figure 3, you can see the body changes experienced by Nezuko. His skin color is getting paler, there are sharp fangs on his teeth, veins appear on the forehead and Nezuko's energy is getting bigger and stronger.

(2) Giyū :簡単な話だ。傷口に鬼の血を浴びたから鬼になった。人喰い鬼をそうやって増える。

*Kantannahanashi da. KizuguchiniOni no chi wo abita kara Onininatta .HitokuiOniwa sou yattefueru .*

The reason is simple. When the *Oni*'s blood touches the wound, it becomes an *Oni*. That's how the man-eating *Oni* increased their numbers.'

Tanjiro :ネズコわ人を食ったりしない！

*Nezukowahito wo kuttari shinai!*

'Nezuko don't eat people!'

Giyū :よくもまあ。今しがた己が食われそうになっておいて？

*Yokumomaa . Ima shigataonore ga kuwaresouninatteote ?*

'You even say it . Aren't you almost eaten by her?'

Tanjiro :違う！俺のことはちゃんとわかっているはずだ！俺が誰も傷付けさせない。きっとネズコを人間に戻す。絶対に治します！

*Chigau ! Ore no kotowachantowakatteruhazu da! ore ga daremokizutsukesasenai . Kitto Nezuko wo Ningennimodosu .Zettaininaoshimasu !*

'No ! She definitely recognize me. Not will I let she hurt. Nezuko will Becomes man again . I will heal her!'

Giyū :治らない。鬼になったら人間に戻ることはない。

*Naoranai . Onininattaraningennimodorukotowanai .*

'she can't be healed. After becoming *Oni*she cannot becomehuman again'

Tanjiro :探す！必ず方法を見つけるから殺さないでくれ！家族を殺したやつも見つけるだすから！俺が全部ちゃんとするから！だから！だから！やめてくれ！

*Sagasu !Kanarazuhōhō wo mitsukeru kara korosanaidekure ! Kazoku wo koroshitayatumomitsukerudasukara ! ore ga zenbuchantosuru kara ! Dakara ..! Dakara ..!Yametekure !!*

I'll look for it ! I certain will find how ! Do not kill her! I will looking for the person who killed my family! I will do everything ! So ..! So ..! Do not kill her !!"

( *Kimetsu no Yaiba* , Ep1 13.32 – 14.25 )

Data (3) explains that *Oni* can increase the number of group members. If a human's wound is hit by a drop of *Oni*'s blood, that human will turn into a demon. They will not be able to be healed and turned back into humans. This is because the *Oni* blood droplets have entered every cell in the human body. The most obvious change is that the human body will get stronger and bigger. Until now there is still no way to turn back a human who has been bitten into a normal human again.



Figure 4  
Oni heal the wound  
( *Kimetsu no Yaiba* , Ep 6 13.52 )

- (3) Thought Tanjiro :ネズコ。ネズコは違うんだ。人を食ったりしない！  
*Nezuko ... Nezukowachigaunda . Hito wo kuttari shinai!*  
 'Nezuko ... Nezuko is different .She doesn't eat human !'

Thought Giyū :昔、同じようなことを言って、鬼にくわれたやつが言った。気概状態になっている鬼は親でも兄弟でも殺して食べる、栄養価が高いからだ。今までそう言う場面を□♥

*Mukashi ,onaji you nakoto wo itte , Oninikuwaretayatsu ga itta . Kigajōtaininatteiru Oniwaoya demo kyōdai demo koroshitaberu ,eiyōka ga takai kara da . Ima made sou iubamen wo yama our hodomite . Kono museum wakega wo owasareteori , afternoon wo naosu tame chikara wo shouhishiteiru . Oninikawarutokimo kanari tairyoku wo shouhisuruhazudakara .Machigainakuimawa judo nīgajōtai .*

'In the past, someone once said the same thing, in the end he was eaten. When hungry, *Oni* will eat their family members because of their high nutritional value. I don't know how many times I've seen this scene. This girl was injured, she used energy to recover herself. When he became an *Oni*, he must have used up a lot of energy. Without a doubt, he is very hungry.'

( *Kimetsu no Yaiba* , Ep1 18.12 – 18.55 )

On data (4) in his mind, Giyū explained that the main food for the *Oni* was human blood. When an *Oni* is injured, a lot of energy is needed, therefore they need energy from human blood to help heal their wounds. The more blood an *Oni* gets, the more power it will gain. Figure 4 is an example of how an *Oni* can heal its own wounds. When the *Oni* is hit by a sword cut, the wound will quickly close again and disappear without a trace. This is the main reason for the *Oni* to continue to prey on humans.

#### 4.2 Visualization of *Oni* in Japanese People 's Belief



Figure 5  
Visualization of *Oni* in Japan mythology  
( Source : Japanese Station)

In Japanese mythology *Oni* is described as a figure that has a large body and is red, blue or green. Generally, *Oni* do not wear clothes but there are also those who wear cloth from the waist to the thighs. *Oni* are also described as having sharp claws on the hands and feet. These creatures are considered as evil and cruel creatures who like to prey on and disturb humans with their *kanabo* or mace (Ashkenazi, 2003: 230). The *Oni* figure in picture 5 is a figure that has a red body like a giant with sharp claws and carries a club. In Japan the belief in the power of evil spirits living in mountains has existed since ancient times. In addition, the ancient Japanese had a fear of natural phenomena such as thunder, storms, lightning and earthquakes. Thunder and lightning are often associated with the appearance of *Oni*. In ancient Japanese belief, there was no clear difference between *Oni* and *kami* (gods). Both are seen as supernatural beings but *Oni* are not revered like we are. *Oni* are considered as part of the *tokoya kami* or gods who live in the spirit world of the dead (Sari et al., 2015: 42).

One of the *Oni* sightings is recorded in the *Kojiki* (712) which records the origin of the creation of the universe, the birth of the gods in Japanese mythology and the emergence of the Japanese state. The emergence of *Oni* originated from *yomotsushikome* which means an ugly woman or woman from the spirit world of the dead. This is related to the story of *Izanagi* and *Izanami* who are the gods who created the Japanese archipelago and gave birth to the next gods and goddesses. When giving birth to the god of fire, the body of the goddess *Izanami* burned and then died. After she died, the goddess *Izanami* lived in the *yomi no kuni* or the spirit world of the deceased. The god *Izanagi*, who missed his wife very much, asked the ruling god *yomi no kuni* so that *Izanami* could return to his world. The request was accepted but *Izanami* asked her husband to be patient to wait until *Izanami* was ready to return to the living world. Lord *Izanagi*, who was impatient to meet *Izanami*, ignored the order and entered the *yomi no kuni*. *Izanagi* became frightened and fled after seeing his wife's deformed body. Goddess *Izanami* who feels humiliated, angry and chases her husband in the form of *yomotsushikome*. The *Yomotsushikome* that appears in the *Kojiki* is believed to be the origin of the *Oni* in Japanese mythology (Davis., 2014: 15-16). In addition to the *Kojiki*, writings on *Oni* can also be found in the *Nihonshoki* (720) which also contains an inscription on the origin of Japan. *Oni* are also said to be strange inhabitants of wild and uninhabited places with strange habits (Ashkenazi, 2003: 232).

In Japan there is a festival that is always held at the beginning of every third or fourth of February. The *Setsubun Festival* is a Japanese tradition to expel the *Oni*. At this festival *Oni* is represented as ugliness or evil (Siregar, 2018: 20). The tradition carried out by Japanese people during this celebration is usually people will visit the shrine to get a blessing. People who have the same *shio* as the celebration of the *Setsubun festival* that year will be pelted with nuts by the temple priest who is believed to be able to ward off evil. Not only that, every family in the house also performs the *mame emaki* ritual, where one family member wears an *Oni* mask and the other family throws peanuts while saying "*Oniwasoto, fukuwauchi*" which means go away evil and come good. Japanese people believe that by performing the ritual *mame maki*, people will avoid bad luck and harm (Parastuti, 2001: 23., Joy, 2006: 123-124).

## V. CONCLUSION

The difference between the visualization of *Oni* in Japanese society and the *Kimetsu no Yaiba* anime, namely, in the anime *Oni* is described as a creature that has a stature like a human, but the difference is that *Oni* have sharp nails on their feet and hands. While in Japanese mythology *Oni* is described as a red, blue or green giant. In addition, *Oni* are said to enjoy eating humans to make their blood a source of *Oni* strength. *Oni* in Japanese mythology is more about the bad nature of humans. This can be seen from the tradition of throwing peanuts during the *Setsubun festival* which is believed to be able to eliminate reinforcements. From the previous explanation, it can be concluded that the image of the *Oni* in the film is different from the visualization of the *Oni* in Japanese mythology. However, what equates the two *Oni* is that they both have evil traits, love to prey on and annoy humans. In this study, the author only analyzes the *Oni* mythological creature visualization contained in the *Kimetsu no Yaiba* anime with Japanese culture based on observations with several existing theories. Therefore, it is recommended that in future research, when conducting research on the characteristics of *Oni* and the myths contained in the *Kimetsu no Yaiba* anime, you can use more complete data. Then it is studied more about the characters contained in it, and also uses a more complete theory so that it can be a better research and provide knowledge updates for the community.

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