

Research Article

Anthropomorphism of the Character Kitsune in Mukashi Banashi

Felita Eugenia*¹, Linda Unsriana

Universitas Bina Nusantara, Jakarta, Indonesia

*felita_eugenia@binus.ac.id

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Abstract

Japanese folktales (mukashi banashi) have many characters that are animals or non-living things acting as if they are humans, such as raccoons (tanuki) that can talk, birds that can dance, or even persimmons and cow's feces that can talk. One of the most famous animals in Japanese folklore that behaves like humans is the kitsune. Kitsune are also depicted as characters that are mischievous and at other times, they are depicted as being good. The purpose of this research is to find out the anthropomorphism of kitsune characters and whether they are depicted as good or evil in mukashi banashi. This research uses a library research method that is done qualitatively. This research also analyzes dialogues and narratives in chosen mukashi banashi, with the theory of anthropomorphism, taken from mukashi banashi websites Gongitsune, Sanboneda no Kamisori Kitsune, and Bakekurabe. It can be concluded that "anthropomorphism" refers to the attribution of human characteristics to non-human objects. In this three mukashi banashi the antropomorfism of Kitsune can be explaine as follows: (1) Kitsune act, talk, have human feelings, and even know human culture; (2) Kitsune are morally ambiguous character.

Keywords: Anthropomorphism; Folktales; Gijinka; Kitsune; Mukashi banashi

1. Introduction

Ardini (2012) states that folktales are stories that are told by passing them down in a culture. There are 5 purposes of a folktale, which are: (1) Stimulate and grows children's imaginations and fantasies naturally; (2) Develops critical and creative reasoning abilities; (3) Have children to have a caring attitude towards the noble cultural values of the nation; (4) Have children to be able to distinguish between good deeds that need to be imitated and bad ones that do not need to be imitates, and; (5) Have children to have respect and encourage the creation of self-confidence and a commendable attitude in children (Rukiyah, 2018). For the purpose of storytelling to be achieved, the folktales (stories) that are chosen should be chosen according to the age of the child." Rukiyah also explained that folktales should also include educational values and entertainment and use simple languages,

according to the education level of the child.

Mukashi banashi often uses animals as characters in the story, that behave like humans, and are either the lead role or the supporting role. This phenomenon is called anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphism is the application of human characteristics to something that is not human, which can be objects, a phenomenon or an event, and living things that are not human such as animals, plants, nature, and even God (Agustiningrum and Wedawati, 2020).

Gijinka refers to "the application of characteristics and/or human nature to gods, animals, or objects." From this statement, it can be concluded that anthropomorphism in Japan is called *gijinka* (Azura, 2018). It found that the first *gijinka* character has already been recorded in the *Kojiki*, the history book of Japan, which was published in the year 712 that contains certain events, such as the creation of the heavens and earth

and various tales of mythology and legends. The *gijinka* that is contained in the *Kojiki* is a god that appeared in the form of a giant white boar (Azura, 2018). Besides that, *gijinka* (Japanese anthropomorphism) can also be seen since the 12th and 13th century, through an artwork called *Chōjū jinbutsu giga*, that contains pictures of frogs, rabbits, and monkeys that wrestle, bathe, swim, and following Buddhist rituals (Wood, 2019).

The character of the fox (*kitsune*) often appears in Japanese folklore, including traditional stories (*mukashi banashi*), legends (*densetsu*), and tales of the gods and goddesses (*shinwa*). During a time of famine in Japan when the gods were creating the country, the goddess Inari descended from the heavens riding a white fox, bringing cereal crops or grains (Opler and Hashima, 1946). *Kitsune* is a character capable of transforming into a human form, particularly that of a beautiful woman who hides her tail behind the kimono she wears. White *kitsune* also serves as messengers for the goddess Inari. Despite being portrayed as benevolent figures, *kitsune* are also depicted as cunning, as seen in the story of "Kuma to Kitsune," where a *kitsune* tricks a bear into planting vegetables that the *kitsune* then proceeds to eat.

Boss (2020) states in their research about the portrayal of fox characters in European fairy tales, comparing that of the *kitsune* in Japanese folklores, foxes in European tales are often seen as manipulative and evil characters. On the other hand, the fox character in Japanese folklore, known as *kitsune*, is depicted as a morally upright creature that warns men against trusting women who deviate from the boundaries set by patriarchal Confucianism.

What makes the author interested in this theme is the depiction of the fox character (*kitsune*) in Japanese folklore (*mukashi banashi*), and its role in the stories. The reason the author chose *kitsune* is that this character can be portrayed as both good and mischievous, as well as

cunning. Like the *tanuki*, *kitsune* can also transform into a human and interact with humans, using human language. Not only with humans, but there are also many *mukashi banashi* that are fables, only narrating the interactions of *kitsune* with other animals, where these characters behave like humans through the concept of anthropomorphism.

Anthropomorphism has been ingrained in Japanese folklore since ancient times, giving rise to various animal-themed stories with anthropomorphic concepts. These stories have featured creatures such as *yōkai* and *kami*, as well as tales with religious elements that impart moral values based on Japanese religious teachings of Buddhism and Shintoism during the time of the stories. The moral values found implicitly or explicitly in *mukashi banashi* continue to resonate in Japanese society to this day (Wood, 2019).

Research on anthropomorphism has been conducted by Boss (2020) with the title "An Analytical Comparison of Foxes Within European and Japanese Beast Tales," focusing on the characterization of fox characters. The research utilizes the concepts of anthrozoology and critical animal studies to compare the characterization of foxes in European tales and *kitsune* in Japanese tales. Boss compares the fox character found in Europe, specifically Reynard the Fox, with the *kitsune* characters from the stories of Kuzunoha and Tamamonomae. It was found that the character Reynard is portrayed as a wicked and masculine figure, with roots in Greek philosophy and associations of the fox with the devil in Christian religion. On the other hand, the *kitsune* character is morally ambiguous, depicted as both good and evil, and often represented as a woman.

The next research is by Agustiningrum and Wedawati (2020) with the title "Elements of Anthropomorphism in Kung Fu Panda 3 Film by Jonathan Aibel and Genn Gerber." This research utilizes

semiotic methodology with techniques of documentation, observation, and descriptive-interpretative data analysis. In this study, various emotions and behaviors exhibited by the animal characters in the Kung Fu Panda 3 film were identified, which form the core concept of anthropomorphism. Agustiningrum then selected scenes and dialogues from the film, which were later analyzed using the concept of anthropomorphism. The research found that the animal characters in the film possessed the three human-like elements: character, emotions, and behavior.

The next research is by Pressler (2022) with the title "Replicas of Social Change: Examining Reflections of Religious Shifts in Japanese Society Through Literary Depiction of *Kitsune* Characters." This study explores the role of female *kitsune* characters in Japanese literature across different time periods. In her research, Pressler (2022) found that as time progressed, the portrayal of *kitsune* characters also evolved. They transformed from being religious figures disseminating religious teachings to becoming symbols for political critique, and eventually, they became sexualized figures influenced by Western culture, often depicted as cute and female characters (*kawaii kitsune*). Additionally, it was discovered that *kitsune* served as a means to spread Buddhist teachings and were portrayed as characters driven by either malevolent intentions or a sense of gratitude for the help they received.

Next is a study by Wilbur (2016) with the title "The Fox Spirit: The Japanese Trickster?". Wilbur (2016) seeks to determine whether the character of *kitsune* in Japanese folklore is portrayed as cunning or not. He analyzes several Japanese folktales to understand the character of *kitsune* present in those stories. Wilbur found that the fox character (*kitsune*) in Edo period tales represents someone's nature, rather than being an actual fox character. He concludes that *kitsune* is a paradox, as it plays a role similar to and different from the

typical cunning trickster figure. Additionally, *kitsune* also reflects the serious attachment to a place and a sense of obligation within Japanese society.

The next research is titled "Animals as Character: Anthropomorphism as Personality in Animation" by Jardim (2013). The data corpus used by Jardim consists of animated films from Disney, namely "Robin Hood," and Dreamworks "Kung Fu Panda." Through his research, Jardim aims to explore how animal characters in animation are used to determine the personality of a character by comparing the two fox characters in the mentioned animated films. Regarding the gender of anthropomorphic characters, according to Wells as cited in Jardim (2013), male characters tend to be defined by their actions, while female characters tend to be defined by their appearance and language usage.

There have been several previous studies on the concept of anthropomorphism in folklore and research on *kitsune* in *mukashi banashi* individually. However, there has been no research that combines the concept of anthropomorphism with the *kitsune* characters in *mukashi banashi* and investigates the specific anthropomorphic traits utilized by these characters. In this research, the authors will focus on exploring anthropomorphism in *kitsune* characters within a limited scope, specifically in *mukashi banashi* with the following titles: "Gongitsune," "Bakekurabe," and "Sanboneda no Kamisori Kitsune."

The selected three folktales will serve as the corpus data for the study, allowing the author to analyze and compare the anthropomorphic traits exhibited by *kitsune* characters in these traditional Japanese folktales. By examining these specific stories, the research aims to gain a deeper understanding of how anthropomorphism is portrayed in the context of *kitsune* characters, as well as the character of the *kitsune* in *mukashi banashi*.

2. Methods

The study's main data is taken from the three folktales: "Gongitsune", "Bakekurabe", and "Sanboneda no Kamisori Kitsune" which are collected using documentation method. According to Mardalis (1999) in Sari and Asmendri (2020), documentation research is used to collect data and information from various sources that exist in libraries, such as documents, books, magazines, historical tales, etc. The data collected are then analyzed using content analysis. Holsti in Asfar and Taufan (2019) states, "Content analysis method is a technique for drawing conclusions by objectively, systematically, and comprehensively identifying various specific characteristics of a message."

This study mainly uses the concept of anthropomorphism. Etymologically, anthropomorphism comes from the Greek language, "anthropomorphos," which consists of two words, "Anthropos" meaning human, and "morphe" meaning form or shape. This term refers to attributing human characteristics such as personality, emotions, appearance, and behavior to animals, plants, and other objects (Agustiningrum and Wedawati, 2020; Ohe, 2022). Anthropomorphism has several indicators, such as emotions, intentions, motivation, and proportional behavior. Emotion indicators include feelings of anger, hatred, sadness, happiness, and kindness. Intention indicators involve having plans, intentions, and goals for future goodness. Motivation indicators consist of having drive, desires, and the will to achieve something (Shavira, 2020). Moreover, anthropomorphism indicators, in addition to emotions and intentions, also encompass consciousness, desires, ambitions, and reasoning - all of which are included in the indicator of nature (Laksmidewi and Soelasih, 2016).

One-way children learn about everyday events is by attributing human characteristics to non-human objects (anthropomorphism) through illustrated

storybooks (Sotirovska and Kelley, 2020). While the use of anthropomorphism in stories or folktales may vary, argue that anthropomorphic characters are used so that young readers can explore emotionally charged subjects such as death, bullying, race, and social class from a safe distance - as these things do not happen to "real" people. Quoting Ganea et al. (2014), "Many children's picture books depict reality in a distorted way. Human consciousness, knowledge, abilities, intentions, and goals are often attributed to animal characters, and even inanimate objects." Ganea et al. also explain that fantasy elements are often employed in books used to convey serious information about the real world.

Another concept in this study is the concept of *mukashi banashi*. *Mukashi banashi* is a type of folktale, which is a cultural form of imaginative and fantastical stories that are passed down orally from generation to generation. These tales often involve elements that are beyond the realm of reality. *Mukashi banashi* carries valuable benefits in the form of moral values, cultural insights, religious teachings, and more. The distinctive characteristic of *mukashi banashi* is the opening phrase "*mukashi mukashi aru tokoro ni*" or something similar, indicating that the story takes place in an unspecified time and place. These tales are often concluded with the phrase "*medetashi medetashi*" or something similar, suggesting that the characters in the story lived happily ever after.

The concept of *kitsune* is also used in this study. *Kitsune* is the most popular animal character in Japanese folklore and mythology (Pressler, 2022). He believes that *kitsune* stories can be found throughout Japan, and the Japanese people have simultaneous feelings of liking and fearing *kitsune*. *Kitsune* is portrayed as a *yōkai* with various supernatural powers in folktales. Some *kitsune* are depicted as benevolent beings, like the Inari *kitsune*, while others are portrayed as malevolent, such as Tamamonomae. Quoting Florin (2015),

"Feared as *yōkai* and respected as gods, the image of *kitsune* is strong everywhere." This demonstrates the dual nature and significant cultural impact of *kitsune* in various contexts.

Another concept to know about, used in this study, is the concept of *ninjō*. Quoting Fredy (2016), *ninjō* refers to "feelings of kindness and natural desires." Additionally, Fredy also suggests that the term *ninjō* originates from the word *nasake* (情け), which means affection or compassion. The concept of *ninjō* can serve as the foundation for various relationships, such as friendship, love, family, and others (Teyzal, 2022).

3. Result and Discussion

In this chapter, the author will analyze Japanese folktales (*mukashi banashi*) focusing on the dialogue and narration that depict anthropomorphism of *kitsune* characters in each tale. The synopses of the three *mukashi banashi* used are as follows:

- 1) "Gongitsune": This folktale originates from Aichi Prefecture and tells the story of a mischievous and playful fox (*kitsune*) named Gon. Gon often causes trouble in the village but eventually realizes his mistakes and tries to make amends.
- 2) "Sanboneda no Kamisori Kitsune": This tale hails from Fukushima Prefecture and revolves around a confident man named Hikobee who believes he cannot be tricked by the *kitsune* in the village, especially by one named Sanboneda. He boasts that a great human cannot be deceived by *kitsune*. However, Sanboneda manages to deceive Hikobee without him realizing it.
- 3) In the version of "Bakekurabe" that the author read, there were two *kitsune* competing in the shape-shifting contest. This tale from Kagoshima Prefecture features a red *kitsune* named Akadon who successfully wins the shape-changing contest against a blue *kitsune*

named Aodon, thanks to his cleverness. When Aodon tries to expose Akadon by introducing him to two hunters to catch him, Akadon reveals that the hunters are actually Akadon himself, who transformed to expose Aodon's intention to harm him. Aodon then admits defeat to Akadon.

In the points hereon below, the author will quote of the dialogues and/or narratives used to portray the anthropomorphic properties of the characters in the stories and give a analysis for each of the chosen dialogues or narratives.

3.1 Kitsune being mischievous like humans

3.1.1 Gongitsune

夜でも昼でも、あたりの村へ出て行って、いたずらばかりしました。畑へ入っていもをほりちらしたり、菜種がらの、ほしてあるのへ火をつけたり、百姓家のうら手につるしてあるとんがらしをむしり取っていったり、いろんなことをしました。 (Nankichi, 2012).

Gongitsune: "Day or night, Gon went out to the nearby village and did nothing but mischief. Gon would dig up radishes in the fields, set fire to the vegetable waste, pluck the chili peppers hanging in the backyards of farmers' houses, and do various other things."

3.1.2 Sanboneda no Kamisori Kitsune

「そりやお前え、狐に化かされただな。女も 老婆も住職も、みんなグルだったのさ」 (Tsunoda, 2020).

"You were certainly deceived by a fox. The women, the old ladies, and even the temple's head monk, they were all in on it."

3.1.3 Bakekurabe

青どんが「これは一体どうした事だ？」とうろたえて居ると、突然後ろから赤どんの笑い声が聞こえました。驚いて振り向くとそこには赤どんが無傷で立っており「昨日お前さんが酷く怒りなすって居たで、お前さんの心の中を見てやろうと獵師に化けて見申した」とすました顔で言うのでした。心の内まで読まれたのではとても勝ち目は無い... (Teruhito, 2013).

“Aodon was in a state of confusion, wondering, "What on earth is going on?" Suddenly, he heard Akadon's laughter from behind. Startled, he turned around, only to find Akadon standing there unharmed. With a calm expression, Akadon said, "Yesterday, you were terribly angry. I decided to transform into a hunter and peek into your heart." Aodon realized that there was no chance of winning since his innermost thoughts had been read...”

Kitsune are often found in human settlements because ancient Japanese society believed that wherever humans spread, so did *kitsune* (Wilbur, 2016). The same goes for the case of Gon from “Gongitsune”, who resides around human settlements, specifically near the residence of the main character, Hyōjū. Epley in Anthropomorphism describes not physical or behavioral traits that exist, but rather representations of existing physical and behavioral traits that go beyond what can be observed. In this folktale, Gon, who is an anthropomorphic character, has the physical characteristics of a fox (*kitsune*) but behaves like a human (Salles et al., 2020). This demonstrates that while Gon's physical traits are typical of a fox, his behavior goes "beyond what can be observed" in regular foxes. The mentioned behavior refers to the mischievous nature of the character Gon.

What can be understood from the tale of “Sanboneda no Kamisori Kitsune”, is that the *Kitsune* transforms into the forms of

a monk and a woman, working together to deceive Hikobee. The *kitsune* successfully "plays the roles" of a pregnant woman, an old woman, and a monk, tricking Hikobee without his knowledge. One of the reasons why *kitsune* deceives humans is to play pranks on them, especially men, either to scare or charm them. However, another motive for *kitsune* to deceive humans is gratitude - something that does not align with the typical "trickster" nature (Jordan, 2013).

Meanwhile, in the tale of “Bakekurabe”, the *kitsune* Akadon transforms into two hunters who converse with each other, mentioning that Akadon has been deceiving people lately, and they are going to hunt him down. After Aodon realizes that the two hunters that had put an act to shoot Akadon were all a part of Akadon's plan to deceive Aodon to reveal his true intentions, Aodon then admits defeat to Akadon. *Kitsune* if known to frequently deceive people as pranks and because they enjoy it (Jordan, 2013). This shows that the two *kitsune* in this story enjoys deceiving each other, thus showing their mischievous characters.

3.2 *Kitsune* understanding and using human language

3.2.1 *Gongitsune*

「おや」と兵十は、びっくりしてごんに目を落しました。

「ごん、お前だったのか。いつも栗をくれたのは」

ごんは、ぐったりと目をつぶったまま、うなずきました。(Nankichi, 2012).

“Oh my,” Hyōjū was surprised and looked down at Gon. ‘Gon, was it you who always gave me chestnuts?’ Gon nodded weakly with his eyes closed.”

3.2.2 Sanboneda no Kamisori Kitsune

「お陰様で、助かりました」

すっかり安心した彦兵衛はお礼を言いましたが、住職は厳しい顔で訊ねます。

「さて……あの者の申すことは、真か？」

「……相違ありません」(Tsunoda, 2020).

“‘Thanks to you, I’ve been saved’ Said Hikobee, completely relieved, and expressed his gratitude. However, the monk asked with a stern expression, ‘Now then... is what that person wais true?’ ‘Yes.... There is no mistake,,” replied Hikobee.

3.2.3 *Bakekurabe*

途中でふたりの猟師が立ち話をしているのに出くわしました。隠れて様子を伺っておりますと「赤狐の奴が最近人をたぶらかしてならないから、退治してしまおう」「明日、野原の地藏様の前で待ち合わせしよう」と語らっているのです。(Teruhito, 2013).

“On the way, Aodon came across two hunters having a conversation. He hid and eavesdropped on them. They were saying, ‘That red fox has been deceiving people too much lately, so let's get rid of it. Let's meet in front of the *jizō* statue in the field tomorrow.’”

In the tale of “Gongitsune”, Gon, when asked by Hyōjū if he was the culprit, understood Hyōjū's words, as evidenced by his response of nodding his head as he closes his eyes. The gesture of nodding shown by Gon is often done by humans when caught doing something, just like Gon did at that moment. It is a characteristic of anthropomorphism displayed by Gon, where he understands human language, responds to Hyōjū, and uses familiar gestures to convey his message to Hyōjū.

While in the tale of “Sanboneda no Kamisori Kitsune”, all of the characters besides Hikobee are all *kitsune*. Anthropomorphism is the attribution of human characteristics such as personality,

emotions, appearance, and behavior to animals, plants, and other objects (Agustiningrum and Wedawati, 2020; Ohe, 2022). The *Kitsune*, who has transformed into a human, can mimic humans by understanding and using human language to communicate with them. The quote indicates that besides imitating the way an old lady speaks, the *kitsune* can also speak like a monk in the human language. Once again, Hikobee had no idea that the monk was also a *kitsune* who was deceiving him.

When humans find themselves in a state where they need interaction and social relationships, as is inherent in human nature, non-human forms are used to fulfill these needs by creating connections resembling humans (Salles et al., 2020). Similarly, in this folktale, the *kitsune* interacts with each other, displaying anthropomorphism by behaving and speaking like humans with the purpose of fulfilling the human need for social interaction and relationships. This is done to understand the situation at hand, thus anthropomorphizing the interactions between the *kitsune*, Akadon, and Aodon, by associating them with something familiar, humans, so that the listeners of the story can grasp the situation unfolding in the folktale (Felder, 2021).

3.3 *Kitsune* having intention like humans

3.3.1 *Gongitsune*:

そのあくる日もごんは、栗をもって、兵十の家へ出かけました。。

(Nankichi, 2012).

“The next day, Gon once again went to Hyōjū's house, carrying chestnuts with him.”

3.3.2 *Sanboneda no Kamisori Kitsune*:

「殺してやる！殺してやる！殺してやる！」真っ暗な竹やぶの中を必死で逃げる彦兵衛を、老婆はどこまでも執念深く追って来ました。(Tsunoda, 2020).

“I’ll kill you! I’ll kill you! I’ll kill you!” In the pitch-black bamboo thicket, Hikobee desperately fled, while the old lady relentlessly pursued him, showing unyielding determination.”

3.3.3 *Bakekurabe*:

青どんは良い事を聞いたと勇み立ち、元来た道を引き返して赤どんの元へ行くと「とっておきの術を思い出した。もう一度化けくらべしようや。明日、野原の地蔵様の前に来てくれ」と頼み込み、赤どんもそれを承知しました。(Teruhito, 2013).

“Upon hearing the good news, Aodon felt encouraged and turned back along the same path to go back to Akadon. He said, ‘I’ve recalled a special trick. Let’s have another shape-shifting contest. Meet me in front of the *jizō* statue in the field tomorrow,’ and pleaded with Akadon, who also agreed to it.”

From the quote of “Gongitsune”, Gon bringing chestnuts to be given to Hyōjū shows that Gon has intentions, just like a human, to redeem his mistake, which is feeling guilty for taking the eel from Hyōjū's mother during her final moments. Gon having these intentions aligns with the attributes of emotions, intentions, and cognition in anthropomorphism (Spatola et al., 2022). Another indicator of anthropomorphism is motivation, which includes having the drive, desire, and the will to achieve something. Gon's motivation for giving chestnuts and *matsutake* mushrooms to Hyōjū is the same as his intention, which is to redeem his mistake (Shavira, 2020).

The same concept can also be applied to the *kitsune* from “Sanboneda no Kamisori Kitsune”. According to the indicators of anthropomorphism such as intention and motivation (Shavira, 2020; Spatola et al., 2022), in this folktale, *kitsune*

can be seen exhibiting intention and motivation. In the quotation, the *kitsune* in the form of an old lady shows the intention to kill Hikobee because he had killed her grandchild, as evident from the old lady's words, 'I'll kill you!' while chasing Hikobee with a knife. The motivation of the old lady to chase Hikobee is fueled by the fact that her grandchild was killed by Hikobee.

Again, using the same concept, Aodon's intention in the tale of “Bakekurabe” becomes evident when he overhears the conversation between the “hunters” who are targeting Akadon. Aodon intends to lead Akadon to meet the “hunters” with the hope that they will capture Akadon.

3.4 *Kitsune* can get mad and irritated like humans

3.4.1 *Gongitsune*:

ごんは、へえ、こいつはつまらないなと思いました。おれが、栗や松たけを持って行ってやるのに、そのおれにはお礼をいわないで、神さまにお礼をいうんじゃア、おれは、引き合わないなあ。(Nankichi, 2012).

“Gon thought, ‘Huh, this is not interesting at all. I’m the one who brought chestnuts and *matsutake* mushrooms for him, and yet he doesn't thank me but thanks the gods instead. I guess we're not a good match.’”

3.4.2 *Sanboneda no Kamisori Kitsune*:

「待てえ.....この怨み、晴らさでおくべきか！」(Tsunoda, 2020).

“Wait... should I settle this grudge and seek revenge!”

3.4.3 *Bakekurabe*:

然し、化ける術の凄さでは無く赤どんの知恵に負けた青どんは面白くありません。酷い目に合わせてやると怒

りに燃えながら家路についておりますと……(Teruhito, 2013).

“However, Aodon is not amused as he feels defeated not by the skill of transformation but by Akadon’s cleverness. Fuming with anger and vowing to get back at Akadon, he starts his journey back home, but along the way…”

In “Gongitsune”, Gon feels frustrated by the injustice of not being acknowledged. Justice is treating everyone equally based on their performance or individual needs (Lee, 2018). This demonstrates the characteristic that Gon possesses as an anthropomorphic character, such as experiencing feelings of annoyance and injustice towards himself, similar to how many humans feel when they are deceived or not appreciated for their efforts, especially when those efforts are wrongly attributed to someone else (in this context, it’s the *kami*) who is being appreciated instead of Gon.

While in “Sanboneda no Kamisori Kitsune”, one of the indicators of anthropomorphism is emotions, including feelings of anger, hatred, sadness, and happiness. The quote shows the old lady’s deep-seated grudge against Hikobee for killing her grandchild, leading her to seek revenge by trying to kill him with a kitchen knife (Shavira, 2020). With the presence of the anthropomorphic indicator of emotions, the old lady, who is a *kitsune*, can feel such a strong sense of vengeance that she wants to avenge her grandchild’s death by taking Hikobee’s life.

In the quote of “Bakekurabe”, Aodon is angry because he lost the shape-shifting contest against Akadon. Moreover, Aodon feels that he lost not due to lack of skill but because he was outwitted. In the story, Aodon transforms into a fire watchtower, while Akadon turns into a bamboo shoot. When Aodon thought he had won the contest, suddenly Akadon grows taller and transforms into bamboo that reaches up to the sky. Aodon’s displayed anger is a

characteristic of anthropomorphism of the *kitsune* in this tale.

3.5 *Kitsune* can feel happiness like humans

3.5.1 *Sanboneda no Kamisori Kitsune*:

…かねがね楽しみにしていた初孫の顔が見られて嬉しい…(Tsunoda, 2020).

“I have been looking forward to seeing the face of my first grandchild, and I am so happy now that I can finally see it.”

3.5.2 *Bakekurabe*:

「やった！ざまあ見ろ赤どんめ！」と青どんは大喜びしました。(Teruhito, 2013).

“Hooray! Take that, Akadon!” Aodon exclaimed in great joy.”

Feelings of joy or happiness in humans are conceptualized as “a relatively stable, positive, and affective trait, with an emphasis on subjective well-being and overall life satisfaction.” (Izzo et al., 2022). Based on the anthropomorphic indicator of emotions (Shavira, 2020), the *kitsune* in “Sanboneda no Kamisori Kitsune” shows that *Kitsune* possesses human-like emotions, as demonstrated in the quote, where the old lady feels happy seeing her first grandchild who came along with her son, after her son had been away from home for a long time. The same concept also applies to “Bakekurabe”, when Aodon feels happy because he believes he has taken revenge on Akadon, solely because he was angry that Akadon outsmarted him in the shape-shifting contest due to his cleverness.

3.6 *Kitsune* can feel sadness like humans

3.6.1 *Gongitsune*:

いつもは、赤いさつま芋みたいな元気のいい顔が、きょうは何だかしおれていました。

「ははん、死んだのは兵十のおっ母だ」

ごんはそう思いながら、頭をひっこめました。(Nankichi, 2012).

“Normally, Hyōjū's face is always lively, like a red sweet potato, but today it looked somehow withered. ‘Ha... ha... It was Hyōjū's mother who died,’ Gon thought to himself, and he withdrew his head.”

3.6.2 *Sanboneda no Kamisori Kitsune:*

老婆は涙ながらに、娘を狐だと言いつけて孫を焼き殺した彦兵衛の悪行を語ります。

“The old lady tearfully recounts the wicked deeds of Hikobee, who insisted that her daughter was a *kitsune* and burned her grandson alive.”

In “Gongitsune”, besides Gon speculating that Hyōjū is sad because of his mother's passing from observing the funeral ceremony and Hyōjū's expression, Gon's behavior of lowering his head indicates that he can mimic human body language, which is commonly used by humans when they feel sad. This demonstrates Gon's anthropomorphic characteristics, as he exhibits human-like behavior and displays the anthropomorphic indicator of the emotion of sadness (Shavira, 2020).

Sadness is a human emotion, although animals do display their emotional states in other ways (Ganea et al., 2014). Sadness is also a fundamental human emotion, which is a part of brain activity (Tobore, 2023). In the story, the old lady cries because she feels sad about her grandson being killed by Hikobee. The character of the old lady experiences sadness and cries like a human due to anthropomorphism, displaying the anthropomorphic indicator of the emotion of sadness (Shavira, 2020).

3.7 *Kitsune* having *ninjō* like humans

3.7.1 *Gongitsune:*

兵十は今まで、おっ母と二人ふたりきりで、貧しいくらしをしていたもので、おっ母が死んでしまっちは、もう一人ぼっちでした。

「おれと同じ一人ぼっちの兵十か」

こちらの物置ものおきの後うしろから見ていたごんは、そう思いました (Nankichi, 2012).

“Until now, Hyōjū had been living alone with his mother, leading a poor life. With his mother gone, he was now all alone. ‘Hyōjū is now just like me, all alone,’ Gon thought as he observed from behind the storage shed.”

3.7.2 *Sanboneda no Kamisori Kitsune:*

……老婆はしわだらけの顔をクシヤクシヤにしなから、赤子をゆすり、あやすのでした。(Tsunoda, 2020).

“...The old lady crinkled her face full of wrinkles while gently rocking and soothing the baby.”

The meaning of "*ninjō*" can be seen from the kanji used, which is composed of 人 (*nin*) meaning 'person' or 'human', and the character 情 (*jou*) which means 'emotion', 'feelings', 'sincerity', and 'sympathy' (Fredy, 2016). It can be said that "*ninjō*" signifies human emotions or feelings.

One of the indicators of anthropomorphism includes emotions such as anger, hatred, sadness, and happiness. Gon in “Gongitsune” shows that he can feel sadness through the sympathy he feels for Hyōjū, who lost his mother. This sympathy also indicates that Gon possesses "*ninjō*." (Shavira, 2020).

While in the tale of “Sanboneda no Kamisori Kitsune”, the old lady can be seen smiling as she cradles her grandchild, showing happiness just like a human displaying affection towards their grandchild. Besides expressing happiness, the character of the old lady also shows love and affection towards her family, just like a human. In this folktale, "*ninjō*" in the form of parental love is demonstrated by the old lady, who is a *kitsune*, as shown in the quote

when she is seen showing affection to her first grandchild that she finally meets.

3.8 *Kitsune* feeling responsibility like humans

3.8.1 *Gongitsune*:

ごんは、うなぎのつぐないに、ま
ず一つ、いいことをしたと思いました
(Nankichi, 2012).

“Gon felt that he had done one good thing as a retribution for the eel.”

3.8.2 *Sanboneda no Kamisori Kitsune*:

「いや……ここには来ておらぬぞ」

「嘘じゃ！ここへ駆け込むのを、確かに見た！」

「まあまあ。そもそも何があったのか、事情を話しては貰えぬか……」
(Tsunoda, 2020).

“No... He hasn't been here.” ‘Lies! I'm sure I saw him rushing in here!’ ‘Calm down. Can you tell me what happened? Could you explain the situation?’”

Gon shows his sense of responsibility in the quote of “Gongitsune”, where he considers stealing sardines and giving them to Hyōjū as a form of redemption, reflects a human-like trait. Having a sense of responsibility is something experienced by humans. Understanding responsibility, norms, and patterns of interaction are essential aspects of human cooperation, one of the typical human skills (Kox et al., 2021). As an anthropomorphic character, Gon is seen to have a sense of responsibility like a human.

While in “Sanboneda no Kamisori Kitsune”, the same concept can also be applied to the *kitsune* of the tale. The sense of responsibility displayed in the quote is evident in the old lady's feeling of being responsible for avenging her grandchild's death by killing Hikobee. The monk also demonstrates his sense of responsibility as a monk by staying calm and conveying

religious teachings (such as the belief that all actions will not go unnoticed by heaven (Buddha) and that actions like killing will have consequences). The monk also takes responsibility for saving Hikobee after he pleads for the monk to hide him from the old lady.

3.9 *Kitsune* understanding human culture

3.9.1 *Gongitsune*:

ごんが、弥助というお百姓の家の裏を通りかかりますと、そこの、いちじくの木のかげで、弥助の家内が、おはぐろをつけていました。鍛冶屋の新兵衛の家をうらを通ると、新兵衛の家内が髪をすいていました。ごんは、

「ふふん、村に何かあるんだな」と、思いました。

「何なんだろう、秋祭かな。祭なら、太鼓や笛の音がしそうなものだ。それに第一、お宮にのぼりが立つはずだが」。 (Nankichi, 2012).

“As Gon passed by the back of a farmer named Yasuke's house, he saw Yasuke's wife wearing an *ohaguro*. When he walked by the back of the blacksmith Shinbee's house, he saw Shinbee's wife combing her hair. Gon thought to himself, ‘Hmmm, something seems to be happening in the village.’ He wondered, ‘What could it be? Perhaps it's the autumn festival. If it's a festival, there should be the sound of drums and flutes. Besides, there should be banners erected.’

3.9.2 *Sanboneda no Kamisori Kitsune*:

「左様か……ひとたび御仏にすがった以上、いかなる罪も赦されようが、俗世との因縁は絶たねばならぬ。この場で出家剃髪して、殺（あや）めてしもうた赤子の菩提を弔うのじゃ」
(Tsunoda, 2020).

"I see... Once you have sought refuge in the Buddha, all sins may be forgiven, but you must still sever worldly ties. Here and now, I shall become a monk and shave my head, and I shall offer prayers for the repose of the soul of the child I killed."

3.9.3 *Bakekurabe*:

「参り申した！」と土下座する青どんに赤どんは言いました。(Teruhito, 2013).

"I surrender!" said Aodon to Akadon, who was doing a *dogeza*."

The culture of a society is reflected in its language and folklore. Quoting Bascom (1954), "Folklore, like language, is a reflection of culture and includes descriptions of ceremonial details, institutions, and technology, as well as expressions of beliefs and attitudes." Especially in Japanese society, where folklore reflects the Shintō religion practiced by the Japanese people, which is also compatible with Buddhism, allowing the Japanese to accept the idea that there is a blurred boundary between humans and animals (Atherton and Moore, 2016).

In "Gongitsune", it can be observed that Gon understands human culture, as mentioned in the quote where he is thinking that something is happening in the village, speculating that there might be an autumn festival in the village. From Yasuke's wife's appearance, Gon can recognize that she is wearing *ohaguro*. お歯黒 (*ohaguro*) is a traditional form of cosmetic teeth blackening that has been practiced since the Yayoi period, and during the Edo period, *ohaguro* became an exclusive cosmetic for married women. The black color is believed to symbolize purity because it does not change (Atsushi, 2022). Additionally, Gon also thinks that if there is a festival, he should hear the sounds of taiko drums or flutes and there would be banners being erected. From this, it can be understood that Gon knows about the existence of festivals,

what usually happens during a festival (taiko drums and flutes), and that banners are erected.

From the quoted dialogue taken from the tale "Sanboneda no Kamisori Kitsune", the *kitsune* that is disguised as a monk gives religious advice to Hikobee, urging him to hold a funeral ceremony for the baby he killed. In Buddhism, followers can pray for the happiness of the deceased in the afterlife. When the *kitsune* monk mentions holding a funeral ceremony, he means that Hikobee should become a monk and shave his head, as he said, to detach from worldly concerns. In Buddhism, monks shave their heads because hair is considered worldly and to attain purity, monks must shave their heads to not be attached to appearance (worldly concerns).

Apart from Shinto, the majority of Japanese society has been practicing Buddhism since it was introduced in the sixth century during the Nara period. Religion certainly influences the culture of the society, including its folktales, as Japanese mythology and folklore reflect the teachings of Buddhism (Atherton and Moore, 2016). The *kitsune* monk character portrayed by a *kitsune* exemplifies the cultural influence of Buddhism in Japanese society at that time, as the religion's teachings are also incorporated into the folktale.

In "Bakekurabe", Aodon admitted defeat while performing *dogeza*. *Kitsune* reflects the culture and traditions of Japanese society (Wilbur, 2016). *Dogeza* (土下座) is a gesture performed to express the deepest and most sincere apologies and to show submission. As a prominent and significant character in Japanese culture (Oshiro et al., 2017), in the quoted passage, Aodon performs *dogeza* to demonstrate his submission to Akadon when admitting defeat. Aodon's behavior as a *kitsune* in this folktale reflects Japanese culture in expressing profound and sincere apologies. The act of performing *dogeza* is indeed a characteristic of Aodon as an

anthropomorphic character, displaying human-like gestures (specifically in offering apologies) in accordance with Japanese societal norms.

4. Conclusion

In this study, the author conducted research on anthropomorphism based on three folktales: “Gongitsune”, “Sanboneda no Kamisori Kitsune”, and “Bakekurabe”. It can be concluded that “anthropomorphism” refers to the attribution of human characteristics to non-human objects. Anthropomorphism is used to convey messages that are hard to convey due to the “walls” of politics, race, etc. Anthropomorphism is also used to educate children, because children feel a sense of familiarity of humans, while preferring animal characters more.

The fox characters (*kitsune*) represent the following human traits: Mischievous, Understanding and using human language, Having intentions, can get mad and irritated, can feel happiness, can feel sadness, having *ninjō*, feeling responsibility and understanding human culture.

It has also been observed that the *kitsune* of “*Sanboneda no Kamisori Kitsune*” and “*Bakekurabe*” have the supernatural ability to shape-shift into humans or objects. The *kitsune* that have transformed into humans can interact with humans directly, speaking in the human language. In East Asian folklore, such as in Japan, foxes have the ability to transform their appearance according to their desires, allowing them to adapt to two different worlds (Li, 2021).

In folktales (*mukashi banashi*), fox characters (*kitsune*) can play both good and evil roles. The good role, being the *kitsune* is a character that serves as the character to give some kind of moral advice or moral values to the characters in the tale itself and/or the listener; while the evil role, being the *kitsune* acts as a trickster in the tale, tricking and deceiving other characters of the tale. In folklores, *kitsune* are known to

deceive people with their tricks, and they enjoy it (Jordan, 2013). The role of “trickster” in folklore involves both deceiving and being deceived.

The author concluded that, anthropomorphized *kitsune* characters in *mukashi banashi* represent humans in the stories, showing that *kitsune* can embody both good and bad qualities in *mukashi banashi*. This duality of *kitsune* characters reflects the complexity of human behavior in everyday life. *Kitsune*, as anthropomorphic beings, become a reflection of human traits and emotions, allowing them to play various roles and showcase the different facets of human nature. This characteristic adds depth and relatability to the tales, as readers or listeners can connect with the *kitsune* characters on a human level and draw parallels between their actions and human experiences.

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