

Demon Slayer: From History to Fantasy

Disclaimer: All the following chapters were first published on my personal blog: <<https://ellas-journey.tumblr.com>> The results of this research was then combined in the following paper.

Abstract:

“Demon Slayer: From History to Fantasy” is a research project that aims to show that you can study the culture and history of a country from all kinds of media. In this case, through the manga and its anime adaptation.

Tanjiro takes us to the Taisho period, but Muzan takes us to the Heian Period, we have the sun breathing that takes us to the realm of the gods, the bushido and the honor of the samurai, the family questions, the red light district, westernization of Japan... these and many more references that are taken for granted by Japanese audiences but harder to understand for the common western viewer, lost in translation.

Come along with me in this journey and together we will explore the various references in this fantasy world that allow us to understand the real history behind the fiction.

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The Timeline:

The Demon Slayer Timeline is actually a really long one. While it does not follow the totality of the Japanese history, it follows closely the beginning and fall of the samurai era. While the main plot takes place in the *Taisho Era*, *Sumiyoshi Kamado* and *Yoriichi Tsugikuni* take us to the *Sengoku Jidai*, and *Muzan* to the *Heian Era*.

Muzan says that he was turned into a demon by a doctor in the Heian Era. The Heian Era [c.794-1192] is today regarded as one of the times of highest culture, even though it was one of the many times of political and military conflicts. After conflicts between the imperial court and the Buddhist sects, that were starting to have way too much power, the capital was moved from *Nara* to *Heian-kyo* - today known as *Kyoto* - to be safely away. That said, it also started a religious reform with the introduction of new kinds of Buddhism. *Tendai Buddhism* and the *Pure land Buddhism* would start gain attention during these times and the temples would open their doors to every one of every type of social class - as we can see with *Gyomei Himejima*, the Rock *Hashira* that was a blind man that took care of orphan children in a Buddhist temple.

The temples stopped having political power, but they also stopped having financial aid. So, to survive they had to start exploring the natural resources of their territories. It's not going to take long before the temples start to argue about said territories, and to protect them, they will start to train the farmers that inhabited it, creating what would become a military class.

In 'other hand, in the capital we see a court that is way to centred on herself. The Fujiwara clan was the family with the biggest amount of power. Fujiwara women would marry into the Imperial family in a what could be called genetic colonialization. In the 10th century the Imperial household could not function without the Fujiwara one, starting the tradition were until they reached adulthood the emperor had a Fujiwara regent, so basically it was the Fujiwara that ruled, not the Imperial family. But, after 170 years, in 1068 an emperor without a Fujiwara mother sits on the chrysanthemum throne. *Go-Sanjo* would start to eradicate the Fujiwara by abdicating, leaving the throne to his already adult son. And the same would happen for the next 2 emperors. But by starting to cut ties with the Fujiwara, the imperial family cut off his right arm, and the arm that had the military power, nonetheless.

Japanese had a natural border against enemies, that also meant that they did not have to where to expand their natural territory. So, without new territories to be conquered, the only solution was to start fighting each other for the lands that existed. The families that lived far from the capital were old families that knew their territories like the palm of their hands. With the crescent responsibilities of safeguarding their territories, like with the temples, this *Shoen* - local provinces - start to train their inhabitants. We start to see the conquest of territories, and when a clan was defeated, the warriors would start to serve the winning clan. It's the birth of the Samurai Code.

In the 12th century we start to have clans that are ready to go against the imperial court. In 1160 we have the *Heiji* war, where the *Minamoto* and *Taira* clans are confronting each other at the capital, and the *Taira* family wins, and with entering the court life would become an exact copy of the *Fujiwara*. The only heir and survivor of the *Minamoto* clan starts to see the military machine of the *Taira* to transform into an aristocratic one and waits until 1180 to strike back. In 1185 the *Minamoto* would win the *Genpei* war starting the 1st ever Shogunate rule.

When Tanjiro goes to the Swordsmith village, he encounters the mechanical doll made by *Kotatsu*'s ancestors called "*Yoriichi Type Zero*" where he goes on saying that that face is familiar to him and *Kotatsu* says that that technology is from the Sengoku Era. Then after that we start to see Tanjiro's flash backs of his ancestor Sumiyoshi Kamado and his encounter with Yoriichi Tsugikuni and all of that is confirmed with the backstory of Upper Moon 01 *Kokushibo*. Now, what was the Sengoku Jidai? Also known as the "warring states era", the Sengoku-Jidai [c.1467-1573] was the time where the Japanese archipelago was buried on the total anarchy that was the civil war. So, we have a circa 275 years jump.

After the failed rule of the Ashikaga Shogun, the *daimyo* - local governors - continue to train their locals to defend their territory. Thanks to the fidelity bonds, the commoners responded to their daimyo, while the daimyo had to respond to the Shogun. Since the Shogun no longer protected the daimyos, they started to rebel against him saying that he was the first that broke the fidelity law. The commoners started to learn specific combat techniques - the *Kenjutsu*, art of the sword - and would develop to what we know call samurai. The word samurai comes from the word "saburau" which means "to serve", the rising of the samurai class marks the beginning of the feudal era in Japan. At the beginning, these warriors could have two jobs - be warriors and farmers as an example. When *Hideyoshi* came to power, he required that they choose one or the other, but as long as a samurai remained loyal, they were guaranteed a good life.

The samurai's weapon of choice was a 2-sword combination. The 1st one, was the combat sword, a long one called *Katana*. The 2nd one was a small curved one called *Wakizaki* that served to cut one's stomach. "*The peasant recruits were known as "Ashigaru" or "peasant foot-soldiers" the etymology of the word implying "light feet"; unlike the traditional bushi, a dying breed who lived by a strict code of behavior and valued independent duels with the enemy, the Ashigaru fought and hunted in packs like wolves. Oda Nobunaga would become especially famous for recruiting vast number of these peasants' weapon-carrying.*" (Chaplin, 2018.)

Now, while everyone was fighting each other for territory, a man in the middle of the territory started what would soon become the union of Japan. *Oda Nobunaga* [織田 信長 1534-1582], as the eldest son that everyone thought would not do much, turns out he collaborated with his uncle to kill his brother, to then kill said uncle. At 25 years old no one was bad mouthing him in *Owari* anymore. He started then to expand his territories were battle after battle he seemed unstoppable. Then

Nobunaga's troops were defeated for the 1st time, and *Akeshi Mitsuhide* [明智光秀 1528-1582] would profit this momentarily loss of confidence on Nobunaga to obligate him to commit suicide. But Mitsuhide victory was short lived since *Toyotomi Hideyoshi* [豊臣 秀吉 1527-1598], learning what was had succeeded rushed to confront Mitsuhide, ending up defeating him. Hideyoshi would be de one finishing what Nobunaga started and re-uniting all the territory under one ruler.

But, after Hideyoshi's dead, his son was still a minor. He would go on nominating 5 daimyos as regents: in case 1 rebelled the other 4 would protect the heir. Still, that did not stop *Tokugawa Ieyasu* [徳川家康 1543-1616] from rebelling. At 1600 Tokugawa would win the legendary *Sekigahara* battle, and in 1603 he would ask the emperor for the Shogun title. He would go on to establish the longest Shogunate in Japanese history. So as the saying goes: "*Nobunaga oiled the national rice cake, Hideyoshi kneaded the dough and, in the end, Ieyasu at down and gobbled it up*".

Now we know that *Urokodaki* was active at the *Edo Period* [c. 1603-1868]. That does not say much since that is a 200-year era but let us resume that. Japan would enter isolation, meaning there was no contact with the outside forces and people were forbidden to leave or enter the country- the famous *Sakoku*. The Shogunate would also start the *bakuhau*, meaning the tight control of the land. He also created a new code that commanded all the samurai, where he would tell the samurai to live frugally, wear appropriate clothing, continue they military training and not go crazy with entertainment. "(...) "great barbarian-suppressing supreme general" would keep Japan safe from the foreign, and the best way, was by isolating it. "*For two centuries, Japan enjoyed a relative good time, locked in a time warp that pretended it was still the 1630s while the world outside experienced the industrial revolution*" (Clements, 2017)

With Japan locked into himself, and the government controlling everything and everyone, there were no more wars, and the samurai class turned into a warrior class just in name, starting to have his status as a hereditary one. They turned into clerks, night watchers, security guards, but extremely overdressed ones. On the other hand, we going to observe the rise of merchants and artisans. Even if the samurai class still looked with bad eyes to these classes, they would be the ones that would create the new culture that the samurai would consume. *Kabuki* theatre would be born, *shinju dramas*, the red-light districts were courtesans and actors would be the ones dictating fashions, mass publishing of books and art printing with the *ukiyo-e*, the *shunga* - erotic paintings- etc. All of this was a culture that was born during the times were Japan as closed over himself but still had its dramas that where sweep under the rug by the government.

Now just like with the Edo we must do a quick rundown about the *Meiji Era* to understand the Taisho one. The Meiji Era [1868-1912] was where the things that the Japanese knew started to change. After almost two centuries of peace, the Americans decided to knock on Japanese borders, and then them to open them with two options: yes or yes. Commodore Matthew Perry dropped anchor on July 1853. The Dutch that lived on Daneshima, the artificial island in Nagasaki warned the Shogun

that the Americans would be returning some Japanese runways and look for some goods. The Shogun did not care. Perry was sent away. Perry returned in February 1854 with even more less friendly terms - they would start fire if they did not open the borders. He was then guaranteed the "Treaty of Kanagawa". *"But all was no well. There was no way to put a healthy spin on the Shogun's surrender to these terms. He failed his duties. There were already bellicose samurai domains who thought they could do a better job"* (Clements,2018.) War started in January 1868 were rebels seized the imperial palace in Kyoto proclaiming that the power of the Meiji Emperor "has been restored". More battles broke out after that, but surprisingly without much violence. *"Modernization was now the keyword, starting with the moving of the capital from Kyoto to Edo, the city that had been the de facto center from 200 years; The emperor's new home, where he took up residence in the departed shogun's castle, was soon given a new name: the East capital, Tokyo"* (Clements,2018.) Most of the old daimyos were rebranded with a new set of European-like noble titles creating the "kazoku" or "glorious houses".

The samurai, even if they fought for the restoration or against it, received a payment cut of 50%, and in 1871 they were freed from using their swords. They could chose wearing their swords or not as it was a matter of fashion. But in 1876 this preference turned to a ban. They were forbidden to wear swords, every-piece of the samurai status was being destroyed.

Once again, the keyword of the Meiji period was modernization but in a specific kind: westernization. Only by learning the western way could the Japanese beat them. So, we going to see this quick change in which Japan leaves it's Edo characteristics to become like their European counterparts. Which would also mean that they would learn the not so good stuff. Yes, I'm talking about imperialism. It will start with the Ainu and Ryukyu kingdoms to then turn to the continental lands. I will not go into detail into the various wars during these times, but the rising sun symbology, that is present on Tanjiro's earrings was not a good thing for non-Japanese. While in Tanjiro's case the earring might symbolise, the sun breathing and Amaterasu, during this time it was the flag of Japanese imperialism.

Now back go Tanjiro's Timeline aka *Taisho Era* [1912-1926]. After fighting in World War I, they realize that it is a well-developed country, but the government had its issues, mainly because new ideas and sects were being born so the Taisho emperor had to find a solution that is reflected in the election of various political parties for the government, that did not go so much as planned. In 1921 Japan wanted to prove that it was not an aggressive country and will agree with Washington that would maintain the Status Quo of the empire. There was this reduction of the military that would only end up with the older generation teaching the newer generation bigger hate speeches. But the Taisho emperor would die 5 years later, and his son Hirohito did not have the same ideas as his dad. So, he will again give power to the military and that would start the Manchuria incident in 1931 and what would be the beginning of a snowfall of incidents that would culminate in 1945.

What is an Oni?

At this point I believe we all know the history of Demon Slayer. Kamado Tanjiro, the eldest son of a charcoal seller that decided to enter the Demon Slayer cops to find a way to turn his sister, Nezuko, back to human, after Muzan turned her into an Oni after killing the rest of their family.

But what exactly is an Oni?

“After the death of Izanami, the female creator of Japan, Izanagi, her husband, and male counterpart, misses her so much that he goes to the nether land to retrieve her. But Izanami says that she has already eaten the food from that realm, implying that it would be difficult for her to return easily to this one. The food produced in the other world has the power to make one stay in that world, so she tell him to wait and not look. (...) When Izanagi looks at Izanami, however, she is ugly, with maggots squirming and eight thunder deities growing around her entire body. Izanami is furious, probably because he broke the promise/taboo and looked at her changed appearance. Instead of bemoaning her fate and going back to the nether land quietly, she attacks him saying that he caused her undying shame.” (Reider,2010)

When we think of an Oni, right know the image of a girl with hair half black half orange, pink eyes, in a box, with the personality of a cat comes to mind, even for Japanese people. But it was not always like this. Sometime before 2016, when we said Oni the image of a *“humanoid creature, with horns and fangs and clad in only a plea loincloth”*, a terrifying wicked creature was probably the main image. I mean it is not that difference, but Oni were not always cute.

Onis are part of the Yokai culture, a concept that was more or less always present in Japanese minds. During the Heian period [c.794-794] we are going to find a lot of Oni themes in literature. In terms of depictions of said demons, we see them coming to life mainly during the *Muromachi period* [c.1338-1578], were *emakimono* -horizontal illustration handscroll- started to appear, followed by encyclopaedias during the Edo Period.

Onis are probably the product of Japanese people's fear of the natural disasters that were extremely common in the Japanese territory, for instance, lightning and thunder are strongly associated with them. Some even say that if *kami* - gods- aren't worshiped enough, they will become Oni. The *kami* were always related to the yang and the Oni to the yin - meaning the *Kami* related to the world of living and the Oni to the world of death. *“(...) their souls have nowhere to go and nobody worships them. So they linger in the air and cause various problems...”* (Reider,2010.) If one truly takes the time to think, there are some *Kami* that aren't that different from the *mono* - evil spirits-, most of the time, the same characteristic would apply to both entities in terms of power, both were feared, but only one was truly respected. Also, there the theory that says that Oni where the product of the Humans that ended up on one of the Buddhist levels of hell, where *Emma-O* would turn them into horrifying servants. Other theory would say that a Human would turn into an Oni by committing horrible crimes.

Needless to say, there are various depictions of Oni, they take different shapes depending on which belief we are looking at them either it being the Buddhist cosmology, *Onmyodo* -Ying yang beliefs- Chinese literature or Japanese imagination. Almost of the size of humans, sometimes taller. With sharp nails, horns, tusks. Big mouths, various eyes. Red or blue skin. Some say they can fly. Some say they have some animal parts. Some also say that a woman can also become an Oni when she is overcome with jealousy or grief. Some eat children. Some eat the dead. Some eat souls. They wear loincloths made of the skin of great beasts. What all of this have in common is that they are all scary things.

One of the biggest characteristics of the Oni is their huge desire for human flesh. It is said that they can eat a human in one gulp. Their transformative power, they can transform their grotesque forms into handsome man or woman allowing the victim to grow interest in them. Oni would have an extreme strength, some of them being talented sorcerers. Also, people that lived far away from the emperor, or had different customs, would be considered an Oni. People that looked different or thought differently from the normal Japanese were called Oni, this was especially common during the imperialistic times. Emotions like anger, jealousy, infidelity, and lust were emotions that one would connect to Oni.

But the question of “What are Oni” is actually a really tough question, since we can find a lot of variations of Oni in this huge catalogue. “[...] monstrous and cruel Oni, who eat the flesh of corpses, Oni who devour the living, Oni who murder, Oni who trick people, Oni who cause famine, sickness or plague; and there are humorous and charming Oni, Oni unthreatening they hardly seem Oni at all, totally defeated Oni, pity deducing Oni, etc” (Komatsu,2017) in fact this goes well with the catalogue of Oni characters that we have in the anime, the Upper-moons inclusive.

The ambiguity of the concept of an Oni is something that was adapted in different times in history, but without fully losing indigenous beliefs against the foreign concepts. But some scholars say that what we associate to Oni today was not what they always were. The word simply meant something big, and the Oni were a creature that did not show himself except for gathering of spirits were enormous forms were perceived, an invisible spirit. The most primitive form of Oni is said to be the spirits of the ancestors of the village. Oni was an umbrella term for all monsters. But from simple ancestors they would develop into something that the people feared. *Yomotsukome* -the soldiers that defended Izanami in the myth- are said to be the precursors of the current Onis. In Edo period an Oni would be a dark enigmatic force that would threaten all the classes. Even if Oni themes were not discussed in the courts anymore, they would still linger on their personal lives, translated in the literature, visual and performing arts.

For medieval Japanese people, Oni were real, they were always lurking somewhere, especially in people’s minds. They were real entities with real substantial bodies, that affected the lives of Japanese people. If they needed to make a day’s long trip, they would carefully plan the trip to never be on the road during the night. But the powerful image of the Oni gradually starts to fall. Oni

frequented both the urban and rural areas, always making trouble, causing fear. With the mass printing of books that had Oni histories and illustrations this once terrifying beings became an entertainment in the urban areas. Through the hands of the artists, Oni started to be transformed in different kinds of beings. In the Edo times, people were more scared of the samurai than Oni themselves, these warriors were a living threat with their ritual, privileges and two swords. For urban residents, Oni's were creatures of art and literature that flourished in nostalgia and futuristic imaginations. Oni stories started to have sex and violence on their stories and started to be told from their point of view in a kind of victimised way.

"If one accepts the tenet that Oni impact the physical everyday lives of people in the culture from which they emerge, then it is relatively easy to make sense of the Oni's functions within and influences upon the political events that drive Japanese history" (Reider, 2010)

The Bushido:

It may surprise you, but the code of the Samurai, technically did not exist. Well, it did, but not in the way that you may be thinking.

When we think of a code that all the samurai had to follow, we may think of a huge codex that would be distributed to all of those that would go on to learn the *Kenjutsu* - the art of the sword. And that would be... wrong. Since the samurai were trained to defend the land of their daimyo all the concepts that we all associate with a Samurai would be passed via oral tradition. There was not even a name for it, it was just the way these warriors were expected to act.

But as time did go into the Edo Period, this samurai that were the central part of everyday life during centuries, lost their job. What the Pax Tokugawa brought was peace in the land and with peace there was no more wars to fight. So, the samurai class would go to fight the nostalgic heroic feelings that they lost, so they decided to recall this code that once ruled all the samurai and apply them on their life. *"The Bushido did not exist until the mid-Edo period. Until then, the most important qualities in a samurai has been bravery, honor, and a strong masculine spirit. [...] The samurai dispenses the business, of the farmer, artisan and merchants and confines himself to practicing his "way" [...] It was the samurai's duty, to safeguard Japanese morals, and this ideas formed the basis of the unwritten code of Bushido"* (Hillborough,2017)

The Bushido literally means *the way of the warrior* and was the way this nobleman would have to behave in everyday life and in their work. *"[...] its a tactician code, not written, but having the sanction and force of a royal deed and a law written in the fleshy tables of the heart. It was not conceived by a brain, however competent it might be, nor based on the life of an individual character, however famous and famous. It was an organic development of decades and centuries of military career."* (Nitobé,2023)

Now, when we talk about the code and honour of the samurai, there is one thing that will come to everyone's mind: the eccentric ritual of the suicide. There is this famous story where a Minamoto loyalist was ordered to behead his father. Stopping his lord to commit patricide, a lieutenant acted and beheaded him instead. Shortly after he killed himself. (Clements, 2017) This is by no means the 1st ever recorded suicide, but it would start this chain of this kind of suicides were the samurai transformed the suicide into a performance.

Where a samurai in apparent defeat they would kill themselves instead of falling into the enemy's hands or having an awful dead. When the question was the honour, the bushido would say that the key would be death. Even though, the Japanese believed that the soul was store in the abdomen, this act was not a faith one but more like a philosophical or ceremonial one. It was a way in which the warriors could present their crimes, be forgiven for their mistakes, escape dishonour, etc. In case of a full-on legal punishment, it would have public ceremony. This would mean that the

condemned would use the *wakizaki* and would have a *kaishaku* - a person that would be there to cut is head. The cut on the abdomen was a painful one, just the cut on the head to stop the suffering.

“Over the years, seppuku would take on new rituals. Samurai would wear white kimono, symbolising death, and purity. They would write a death poem, ensuring that parting words, criticisms, or curses were encapsulated in repeatable form. Seppuku started as a battlefield compromise - a last resort by besieged men in burning castles, determined not to surrender to enemies, who would torture and humiliate them. But once it became enshrine in tradition, it became the default means of repentance, and even criticism.” (Clements,2017)

Now we do understand with this is a reference made so many times during the series. When Urokodaki says to Tanjiro that if Nezuko eats any human, Tanjiro should be the one to kill her and then kill himself. When in the 1st Hashira gathering Urokodaki and *Tomioka* put their honour with Tanjiro and Nezuko's. And mostly, why *Zenitsu* was so mad when he received the news that *Kuwajima* had done the seppuku.

With the Romanticism era we can observe a revival, or better, a nostalgia of the idealized chivalry happening with reinterpretations on education, art, and literature. Just like in the West the same would happen in Japanese culture.

The most popular belief is that the martial ethic of the bushido started to develop in the twelfth century, but that samurai were too preoccupied with warfare to formally codify it before the late sixteenth century. Nitobe Inazo popularized an ideal version of the bushido that was adapted to the *Meiji-Taisho-Showa* governments as a ruling ideology. It is more suited to understanding the modern Japanese relationship with this "historical" code and the times that they truly lived on. *"The simplistic account of the development of Bushido is problematic, however, and relies on pre-war theories that conflated diverse historical periods and ideologies to provide legitimacy for the modern imperial state and nation"* (Benesch, 2014) In the start of the modern era with the regain of power by the emperor, the Bushido was adapted from the military education to a civilian education too. Only after 1945, this "corrupted" bushido was discarded, and scholars returned to study the more "traditional" samurai behaviour. *"Both popular culture and many scholarly works continue to treat Bushido as a traditional ethic originally codified and/or practised by samurai"* (Benerch, 2014)

Historians have not yet found a common and widely accepted code that could potentially be practiced by all warriors. There was this common nostalgia towards the ancient medieval Japan in which Edo people saw as the golden age where warriors could apply all their martial skills. One thing that the bushi is always the balance between civil and martial virtues. This meaning the binary "bun-bu" - bun meaning "civil/letteredness" and bu "military/martiality". With the turmoil on the 16th century a skilful application of this duality meant a skilful rule and defence of their domains. *"Just as yin is the root of yang, and yang is the root of yin, bun is the root of bu, and bu is the root of bun... Bun is correctly practising the way of filial piety, brotherliness, loyalty and trustworthiness. Bu is*

striving to eliminate things that obstruct filial piety, brotherliness, loyalty, and trustworthiness"
(Nakae Toju, cited in Benerch, 2014)

The assumptions and texts that people wrote on Edo period of what people thought, would end up inspiring the bushido canon. The term bushido is not even found in any text of medieval Japan or any compatible concept. *"The development of bushido was an essentially modern phenomenon, with core symbols borrowed from the historical samurai. (...) This process of appropriation tended to ignore or distort the historical context of the texts and tales used as evidence, and the effects of this are still evident"* (Benerch, 2014)

Hagakure by Yamamoto Tsunetomo is the biggest evidence of romanticized early Japan. Yamaga said that the samurai were superior to the commoners because they had more time to focus on their ethical behaviour serving as moral guides to the rest of society, meaning that if they wanted, they could kill the non-samurai.

"The gap between the abolition of the samurai and the beginning of bushido discourse in Meiji was less than two decades" - Benerch, 2014

What this basically means is that, like in many other situations in the world history, we cannot be 100% sure of what was the true samurai code. The people that lived in the times after would go on changing the narrative to best fit them. What we can be sure is that just like these samurai intrigue our imagination, they also did in times long gone.

Time in Japan

Did you realize noticed different in the clock that the spider Oni showed Zenitsu? Yes, it does not have numbers. I mean it does, in the tiny clock within the clock. And there is a reason for that, the clock that he is holding is a Japanese clock.

People in Japan, like in most of Asia, did not count the time like we do today. There is the conception that ancient people lived according to natural cycles, that for them the daytime was for the living and the night-time for the dead. Taking a step further, that westerners were concerned with schedules, and non-westerners seem to act like they did not care, they did not have a time-consciousness at all. But that was not true. The way they counted time sure was different but was still a way of counting the time, they used the so called “variable hour system”.

As the name suggests, the length of the hours varied with the seasons. The day was divided in daytime and nighttime, and each divided further in 6 equal periods called *koku ou toki*. Each of the twelve hours had the name of an animal of the zodiac. They would know what time it was thanks to a public time-telling bells or drums, that were installed in high towers so that the sound would be carried into the distance.

The mechanical clock arrived in Japan through the hands of the Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier in the 16th century. It was gifted to the daimyo of *Yamaguchi* - *Ouchi Yoshitaka* - for him to allow Christianity in his territory, as soon more of this ticking machines would be asked to the Jesuits. Even Oda Nobunaga asked Louis Frois to see this intriguing machine, and, even tho this was an “useless thing” more and more clocks were brought to Japan to be used as expensive gifts. Even the Tokugawa family loved clocks even if they hated the westerners.

You should expect that since there was a flood of clocks in Japan that they soon would adopt this way of counting the time. That was not the case. The koku system continued in Japan until 1873, were in the 5th year of the Meiji Era the Emperor decided to adopt the Western calendar and way of dividing the time. But before that, western clocks were adapted into the Japanese way of seasonal time.

They were called *Wadokei* - japanese clock - 和時計. Why did this happen? Well because “the clocks were counting the wrong time of hour!” Edo people were not used at not having the distinguishing between long and short hours, so they quickly decided to adapt the various types of western clocks into their system. *“The mechanism of these clocks was practically identical to that of Western devices of the sixteenth century, with the only alteration being made to the locking plate of the alarm, which was modified to allow the clock to strike the number of times according to the Edo-period hour count, which consisted of double nine-to-four countdown series”* (Frumer, 2012)

While it started as a novelty, by the 18th century clocks were not a rarity anymore. *“Most mechanical clocks were only available to the rich and powerful, but the emergence of the economical and less decorative type indicates that there was some demand for mechanical clocks in the general*

society, possibly by merchants for their practical use in knowing the precise time.” (Hashimito, 2020) While we see the most expensive and decorative ones at museum, we must not forget that is exactly these characteristics that made their owners not throw them away, because in the case of a simple one you wouldn’t even think twice. “Clocks are not different from other museum exemplars such as pottery or lacquerware - the existence of the state-of-art object does not imply that there were no simpler versions used by people of humbler status the daimyo” (Frumer, 2012)

Japanese clocks soon started to have both the Japanese hours and western hours, like in the clock that the Oni does have! While sure by the Taisho era the Japanese society would be fully adapted to the western way of telling the time but imagining that the Oni was a human while this was the standard way of telling the time it is understandable why he does have that clock. Plus said clock had a specific time for the sunrise so can you really blame him for sticking to that?

The eternal question of rebirth

As you can recall one of the most common talking points in the series is the rebirth. In one of the last chapters illustrations, you can see that Lady Tamayo is walking to the opposite side of all the Demon Slayer corps. Why? Because she is an Oni, so she does not stand a chance of rebirth contrary to all the fallen Hashira.

Throughout the series you see Tanjiro praying for the Oni, burying the corpses of the victims and the Oni's remembering their life as humans talking about their way to hell. For instance, you see with the Upper Moon 6 when *Daki* and *Gyutaro* fall, he does not want his sister to go to hell with him, but she follows anyway. Or *Rui*, when he dies and thinks that he will never see his true family because they were good people, but they waited for him and went to hell with him.

Now, the concept of hell and redemption in Japanese culture is different from our western, mostly Christian, base idea of these concepts. Japan does not have only one specific religion. Shinto is said to be the native religion, and Buddhism was introduced in the 6th century. But the thing is, Shinto and Buddhism would soon start to influence each other, what made things difficult when the Meiji government when in the 19th century gave the order to separate the two. But in what regards the afterlife we can say that early Shinto myths and legends did not define in detail what happened after a person died. We can look at Ainu and Ryukyuan traditions to try to find what these people thought. These two places still have a strong connection with the *Jomon Era* [c. 30000-300 B.C.E] traditions, this gives us a kind of time machine to see the traditions that were widespread in all over the Japanese territory.

"The Other world is a perfect mirror image of this one, but in other respects it is not very different from it. There is in the Other World no distinction between heaven and hell, and consequently no judgment of the dead" (Umehara, 1991.) This means that the order of space and time is backwards. Right is left, down is up, and a soul is waiting its time to go back to earth. However, if a person has done something really terrible or has profound resentment, if it has a strong attachment to this world, or if the body was never found, it cannot go directly to the other world, which explains why all the Kamado family still lingers in the world with Tanjiro and Nezuko, they have both a strong attachment to them and a resentment against Muzan. When we send a person to the other world through funeral rites is assuring that that person will be returned to this world again. Those that had a good life will quickly be reborn, those that behaved badly will have to be reborn delayed.

Buddhist priests were the ones responsible for the funeral rites, even if the original Indian Buddhism has nothing to do with the dead. While Buddhism became associated with the rituals of the dead, Shinto became associated with the rituals of the rebirth like weddings, births, and growing-up ceremonies. Genshin [942-1017] said that there were 6 realms of transmigrations: Hell, starving ghosts, beasts, *Ashuras* - Titans, Humans, and Heavenly beings. All of these were suffering lands, and all beings circulated through these lands in accordance with their karma. *Honen* [1133-1212] said that

even a person that had committed one of the Five Heinous Crimes [01 - Killing one's mother; 02- Killing one's father; 03 - Killing a saint; 04 - to wound the body of a Buddha; 05 - to destroy the harmony of the sangha] could achieve rebirth in the Pure Land if he chanted the Nambutsu - Namu Amida Buddha.

Also, one of the most famous depictions that Japanese Buddhism shows is that a person who just died is pictured traveling across a river - *Sanzu no kawa*. *"A person who did much good in his or her life can take a bridge. A mild sinner can cross wade across the shallow part of the water. Evil people must struggle across the deepest passage, harassed and held back by horrible monsters."* (Roberts,2009.) Then they are judge by *Emma-O* to the underworld were people work they sins off. This underworld is different from the Christian hell since everyone can obtain the rebirth, they just have to go through the different levels of hell according to their sins. This vision was the good were rewarded and the sinners worked on their punishments gave the living some kind of consolation.

There is this important key point that merges all the points of Japanese religious cults, that is the worship of the ancestors. *"The original Japanese view (...) assumes the family as a basic unit. When someone dies, that person's soul goes to the other world where is welcomed by the ancestors. It remains there a while, then is born again as one of the deceased person's descendants."* (Umehara,1991.) First born sons had a really important function in following the family legacy and worshipping the ancestors.

There is this belief that soul stay in their country after dead, that a wish of a living person can be carried on by his descendants, and that a person would be reborn again and again to carry their work. Ancestors stay in the land to carry on with the property of the land. That would explain the end of the manga, were we finally see all the characters being happy and being reborn into the same family not long after their death.

Into the Pure Land

Buddhism was introduced during the 6th century in Japan. It was an Indian religion based on the teaching of *Siddhartha Gautama*. The teachings soon spread into other parts of the land, and particularly in China had a great adherence that resulted in an evolution in the research and practice of the religion. *“The study of buddhism over the past century or so has resemble the encounter of the blind men and the elephant in many ways. Students of Buddhism have tended to fasten onto a small part of the tradition and assume their conclusions held true about the whole”* (Keown, 2000)

When the Japanese looked at the continent, they saw a civilisation that had a centralised government, and they wanted the same, but for that the introduction of a new religion was needed since politics was still extremely related with the government. But they had a problem: the power basis in which the imperial family laid was based in a religion itself, and so introducing a new religion could be dangerous to their power.

Taking things with a grain of salt, the imperial household would allow religious liberty so that Buddhism would naturally spread in the territory and even more naturally they could use the Buddhist rules without destroying the whole narrative that they had built where the imperial family were the living descendants of Amaterasu. But conflicts would arise between the Shintoism forces and Buddhist forces. While the Shintoism forces gain momentarily, the Buddhist will counterattack and in 587 the Chinese administrative model is implemented. The learning of the Chinese ways was not with intent of transform Japan into a new China, but to utilize this new knowledge knowing what would make the country better - it's the filtering of knowledge. It's also the time where the name of the country changes from *Yamato* to *Nihon* - the country of the rising sun.

When we talk about Japanese Buddhism one figure comes to mind: Prince *Shotoko* [574-622], a figure that studied the Buddhism, Korean culture, and Confucianism. Prince Shotoko would end being the one that would take care of all the changes, meaning the religious sects or the court changes, and he would end up becoming a venerable person himself.

But Buddhism would soon turn out to start to have a social function. Noble families would start to build temples, and to alleviate family tensions while the heir would go on to inherit the household, the 2nd son, most of the times, would be sent to temples. And soon the ones that led the temples would also lead the political power. Buddhism would soon turn out to be a means to an end and the political power would be the wanted end. As we talked about in the timeline, the Heian period would cut ties with the religious sects, and more simple Buddhist ways that were open to all became predominant.

In the beginning the Pure Land Buddhism was not seen as a religious cult, more like an association with the ancestor's cult that are so important to the Japanese as we have seen in the ideas of afterlife. *“Although Buddhist scholastic discourse held that the Pure Land was a realm existing*

beyond the world of transmigration, at this early stage was simply understood as a pleasant abode of the dead." (Rhodes, 2006)

The Pure Land Buddhism would preach that by being mindful of Amida Buddha the chance of rebirth on the pure land would increase. There was 2 important texts *Ojoyoshu* written by Genshin and *Gokuraku-ki* written by *Yoshishige no Yasutane*. Genshin like many in his time thought that the age of the Last Dharma was arriving. For context the Buddhist timeline said that after Buddha's nirvana the times would be divided in 3 times: the true dharma - the golden age of Buddhism teachings - semblance dharma - the world would increasingly become corrupt - and the latter dharma - the world's condition was so poor that only buddha's teachings would remain but no enlightenment would be possible. He would argue that since the world was deteriorating it was extremely difficult to gain liberation from the cycle of transmigration by practicing the traditional Tendai way, so one could seek salvation into Amida Buddha's Pure Land. Genshin goes on to say that the Six paths of rebirth - Hell, starving ghosts, beasts, Ashuras [Titans], Humans, and Heavenly beings- are always a troubled way, the only way one could seek peace is attaining rebirth in the Pure Land.

And how could one obtain the rebirth into the Pure Land? By practicing the Nembutsu. He describes the Nembutsu as a practise of visualizing the figure of Amida Buddha. This would be divided into the *Mental Nembutsu* and *Vocal Nembutsu*. Mental Nembutsu would refer to meditation and the visualization of Buddha. Those incapable of visualizing his marks can try his tuft of hair between the eyebrows. But for those that cannot visualize anything it was recommended the Vocal Nembutsu that would refer to the practice of recitation of the formula "Namu Amida Butsu" where gradually one would focus one mind on Amida and eventually embark on the practice of the meditative nembutsu. *"Both types of nembutsu, meditative and vocal, result in three kinds of benefits: (1) the eradication of evil karma created over the course of countless past lifetimes which keeps one bound to the cycle of transmigration, (2) the attainment of good karmic roots leading to awakening, and (3) the ability to remain mindful of Amida Buddha at the moment of death (..)"* (Rhodes, 2006)

According to one of the main texts even a person that had committed the Five Heinous Crimes could be born in the Pure Land by chanting the Namu Amida Butsu, and this would obviously cause problems for the rules cause people would start to cause trouble.

Gokuraku-ki is compilation of bibliographic narratives of various people that are believed to have obtained the rebirth in the Pure Land. Things varied but in common have the rightmost behaviour of oneself. What was trying to be said was that everyone could achieve que pure land, the things that were needed were a righteous personality, and be mindful of Amida Buddha in the end.

The red light district.

It is true that there are three figures that we associate with Japan: Naruto, Luffy and Goku - I mean the ancient samurai, the modern salary man, and the eternal Geisha. Especially during the Edo Period, there was a rise in the so-called red-light districts, stage of the mesmerizing ukiyo-e, that the common mortal would happily purchase, in special, the shunga, that could picture the most obscene acts. But things aren't always like the art portrait am I right?

Sex trade in early modern Japan was so important that its history can also be read as the history of the society. But even though the prostitution relationship with the government changed, one thing they always had in common: it was the exchange of sexual services for a payment.

Before all, let's say something: male prostitution did exist. But it was not considered the same business than the woman's prostitution. Male sex trade became more associated with the theatre world and the teahouses. It was never recognised or regulated and had never the same punishments that woman did. This could be linked to the function of the man and woman in the households. Since a man could only be a brother, but the woman could start turmoil and try to substitute the wife in the family and give the male heirs.

During the 17th century prostitution was flued by the demographic movements of man opening cities, by the 18th the power shifted to the small provinces. And to where the man goes, the sex trade goes. In the 19th century the sex trade spread to all the territory.

In the beginning of the Edo period, the rule of the "wife" and the "prostitute" could be confused. After all the women could be said to only have those two paths, and it wasn't for her to choose, but her male guardian. Since the woman was viewed as an object of the man's property, he could sell her as he wished. Yes, even wives and daughters from "good" families were sold as a way to pay a debt. *“There was no question that the Tokugawa authorities' vision of status order had been confining for woman: it subordinated them to male household heads and emphasized the values of obedience and submission. Indeed, some must have welcomed the opportunity to step outside their narrowly defines roles as wives and daughters. (...) But for the vast majority of woman who worked in the sex trade, the crises of the gendered order, and the disintegration of the limited protection it offered, was hardly a form of liberation.”* (Stanley,2012)

In 1612 a man called Jin'emon tried to ask the Shogunate to recognise his business. He said that unregulated sex trade could cause a lot of problems like young girls being kidnapped, samurais plotting rebellions in the courtesans' beds, man splurging their wages on woman, etc. The shogunate agreed and gave him a plot of land in the outskirts of town with a lot of conditions: they would regulate the sex trade, they would record the comings and goings, report anything suspicious, and the woman - *yujo* - could not leave the "pleasure quarters" and thus the Red Light district was born, at the time called *Yoshiwara* or "Reed Plain".

The Shogunate soon started to forbid the selling and buying of humans, believe it or not this also included woman. But, as always, with exceptions. Woman could enter the “pleasure quarters” if the *hitonushi* -the woman’s legal guardian- allowed and if she consented. The same would apply if a family was in extreme poverty, the man could only sell his wife as a last resort. Also, eternal servitude was now illegal, the limit was now 10 years, but obviously the Yoshiwara’s pleasure houses lords would manipulate the contracts to go around this rule.

The Shogunate tried to regulate the clandestine prostitutes that the common people called *baita* -whores. But these women, that normally worked on the side of the streets, were paid very little and were the wives and daughters of marginal men. There was also the problem of the “bathhouses”, where pretty women would scrub the backs and rinse the hair of men. Yoshiwara brothels complained that these bathhouses were hurting their business since it was at the time that bordels were forbidden from working during the night, so these bathhouses would do drinking parties with shamisen music and everything. And the *yuna* -bathing girls- were cheaper than the *yujo*. But after the big fire of *Meireki* at 1657 these bathhouses chose to relocate to Yoshiwara.

But there was a problem in this tentative of politicised the sex trade: the woman that only sold sex as a secondary option. The shogunate realised this problem and declared that all the waitresses, dancers and entertainers that agreed with patrons to sell sex would be considered clandestine prostitutes. But there was a rise of a type of artistic woman, that was skilled in entertainment, that started to imitate the male way of entertainment - the *Geisha*. *“Originally, both men and women professionally living on light accomplishments inseparably went under the name of “geisha”, although men were called “otoko geisha” or male geisha, and women “onna geisha” or female geisha. Subsequently the term “onna” was dropped, so that the onna geisha came to be called simply geisha, and the otoko geisha or male geisha changed simultaneously their name into “hokan” or jester.”* (Longstreet; Mansfield; Longstreet, 2020)

The word *geisha* can be split into “art” and “person”, meaning that the *geisha* were the perfect mix between the performance and prostitution. They were supposed to have many artistic talents like singing, reciting poetry, performing the tea ceremony, playing the shamisen, arranging flowers, telling the best jokes, whispering obscene things, in short entertaining men. Selling sex was a last thing. They were sexually available, but they had a price, and with a higher price came its social value.

These *Geisha* usually had their hair up in the traditional *maga* style -which was mostly made of wigs- wore colourful makeup, kimonos, and obi. Normally they had various apprentices called *maiko* or *hangyoku*.

Obviously, they also had lovers, but outside their job. In the workplace they would smile and bow to entertain their patrons. Sometimes they could choose a wealthier patron that would sponsor their lifestyle. Sometimes they had another lover that was their true love, but that was not the best option since time was money. Unlike the courtesans the *geisha* could choose their patrons, but sooner or later their professions would start to be confused.

Many of the trends of the Edo period continued after the Meiji restoration. Until the Taisho Era the number of prostitutes registered in brothels doubled. It was estimated that 1 out of 31 Japanese young women were employed in the sex trade. The funny part was the money that these women made was income that would be invested in important modernizing infrastructures like elementary schools.

With the westernization government started to bring pressure to liberate this woman, but soon these women realized that they did not have where to go. So, in technical terms nothing really changed. But the Japanese started to see this woman as impure, in part because of the sexual diseases that were starting to be aware of.

Remember how Koinatsu [the Oiran at the house of Tokito, the one that Tanjito infiltrates] says that she is finally leaving Yoshiwara because she found a husband that was willing to take her? That was a common courtesan dream, that one day they will find a lover that will be willing to pay out the rest of her contract and make her live a beautiful life. Well, while it was not unusual for courtesans to marry after the end of their contract, what was unusual was that someone would pay for their contracts or that they would marry a wealthy husband.

In the end a courtesan would always be the other side of the loyal wife. Her job and sexuality were for the pleasure of her clients while the wives would be for his husbands only. It may look like totally different routes, but again, they were the two sides of the same coin. The truth was that a wife's sexuality was related to the family values: her function was to produce heirs, obey her husband, and protect the harmony of the family. The courtesan values were related to the pleasure values: she would pretend to love without loving, only obeying the ones that hold her contract. Fertility and pleasure were the dichotomy that shaped Tokugawa society. Because after all only with pleasure could there be more children, and while the wife would be there for her husband it was with a courtesan that he would live his wildest dream and return to his wife to fulfil his duty.

The parallels between a woman navigating her married life are not that different from a courtesan trying to navigate the pleasure quarters life. A wife would provide for her husband's family using her energy to maintain the household, while the courtesan would orientate her life and learn to navigate between the waves of principles and behaviours of the man in the pleasuring district. A wife would be expected to provide children and change her loyalties to the husband's household. Just like a courtesan would in a way stop being loyal to her family, but instead to her brothel. A courtesan would be expected to have a playful spirit, many talents and be confident. And a wife was expected to be loyal, calm, observant, skilful in the household management and extremely fertile.

Ie - the traditional family

“(…) the word household traditionally includes two elements: the same name and veneration of the same ancestors, that is, the same ancestor, therefore the same household. In the household the interplay of on (often translated as “obligation” or “indebtedness”) and ko (“filial piety” or “gratitude”) are basic but here we would to consider them as they are related to the conceit of ancestor” (Doerner, 1977)

With the rise of the Tokugawa rule, the society was divided in various social classes with various rules within the household. The *ie* was a system based on the generational continuity of the male bloodline. The ruling force was the male head of the household, and the hierarchy would go down based on the gender and age. The wife would be expected to swear moral fealty to their husband, and with that, start to venerate his ancestors.

The first son, meaning the heir and successor of a household, had a series of obligations and functions. As instance, not so long ago, more prevalent in rural areas, the first son would be expected to carry on the occupation of his ancestors, assuring like this is future title of his ancestors. One was not only connected with their parents but to all the ancestors that came before them, so he had the obligation to continue the work that his ancestors laid before him. It is true that the male heir earned that position just by being born, but he also needed to show that he was capable of managing the *ie* because he could be replaced by more capable brothers. The heir had the status, but not the freewill to choose other talents, that was a regally for his younger brothers.

The woman on other hand was the lowest ranking on the *ie*, since, technically she as originally from other *ie* “*Expected to be up first and go to bed last, to work hard and produce heirs. In the event that there were no suitable heirs, successors could be brought in by adoption, hat is, a groom could be adopted for the most suitable daughter*” (Mamura, 2009)

There was also a hierarchy within households. Houses of samurai, nobels, *mura* [villagers], peasants, *cho* [city wards], townsman, *shu* [buddhist sects], all were assigned *different mibun* - status in the society and with that the taxes that one had to pay. The Tokugawa rule would soon politicize and try to standardize the household. They would come out with laws that said that the husband was the one that should rule the household, even if later changes added room to the woman to be able to act, in certain cases.

We need to remember that this was the high classes way of *ie*, since commoners would have a more chill approach to marriage and sexual relationships. Even if the event of selling their daughters – either to other family by marriage or to a brothel – as common in all classes. But the ideal Japanese family slowly started to change. The early modern commoner *ie* was a group of individuals, that were related to blood - even if sometimes a male member could adopt someone into the household- that were committed to corporate into one identity. Meaning, damaging one's honour was damaging the honour of the household.

After WW2 is when we start to see biggest changes after the import of the family ideas from the west. Little by little the family starts to share meals on the same table, is able to talk freely -even if during a lot of time it was the head of the household that allowed others to talk or guided the conversation- and the inheritance starts to be divided by all children as well as the responsibility of taking care of their parents.

Guns! And Tanegashima does pow pow

Take a shot every time you see the joke "Demon Slayer would take half of the time if they gave a gun to Inozuke", then they realise that Genya does have a gun and that Inozuke does not have one because for him that's probably an alien mechanism. And then everyone asks: "Why does Genya have a gun?!" because they were a thing at the time!

Once again this happens because people forget that we are in the Taisho Era and that Japan was a war machine, while being in the perception that they did not know what guns where, because of the tale that the true warrior would only use a *katana*. Well, let me tell you that the Japanese loved a good gun ever since the 16th century and we have the Portuguese to thank for that.

The Portuguese arrived at Tanegashima in 1543. And arrived by accident. At the time the Ming Empire and the Japanese Empire were not in good terms, and with the Ming closing the borders to foreign trade, it was the pirates that made the trade. The *Waku* – pirates - would trade the Japanese silver for Chinese silks, but still with a lot to gamble. And then the Portuguese arrived at Macau, and casually became the 3rd party that brought to the Japanese and Chinese what was needed for the trade. Now in the Japanese ports more western trinkets would show like bread, tobacco, dark skinned people, plants, and you guessed it, guns!

When the Portuguese and other Europeans -mainly Dutch- arrived in Japan, the country was at war, so every type of war mechanism would be welcomed. The Daimyo of *Tanegashima* - *Tanegashima Tokitaka* - saw one Portuguese sailor, that arrived in a Chinese cargo, shooting ducks, and he quickly asked for shooting lessons. Soon he would buy the gun for himself and order his swordsmiths to replicate the weapons. Within a year the Japanese were able to replicate the gun and within a decade there would be gunsmiths all over the territory. The gun was called *tanegashima* only later being called *teppo*. There would be also books that would explain how to use them. But these weapons would be quickly adopted, used, but also quickly abandoned.

By 1560 guns were already being used in battle. The battle of *Nagashino* was the most iconic one in history in these terms, since Oda Nobunaga used for the 1st time western techniques merged with the Japanese ones. But there was one problem with using guns in battle, all the rituals that took place before could be in danger. Normally, before the slaughter, enemies would exchange some words like presenting themselves or exchanging complements. But with guns, one could skip that and just shoot from afar.

Guns were starting to be seen as double edge sword. Everyone could learn to fire a gun and because of that it became a symbol of a lowly warrior. The mighty samurai still carried the 2 swords, the low-ranking ones started carrying a sword and a gun. Firearms were at its hight, and because of that the resistance would begin. A lowly farmer could kill a samurai. The skill stopped being needed in the warrior but in the weapon. On one hand everyone realised that these guns were superior, but on the other, no one on the bushi class would use them. The Japanese moved from sword, to sword with

guns, to only swords again. The last big battle where guns had a part was in the *Shimabara* rebellion. And after that samurai went back to the sword lessons.

In reality there was never a formal ban of firearms in Japan. The Tokugawa Shoguns 1st started to control the production of Guns in 1607, were then 1st tried to unite all gunsmiths in the same place at *Nagahama*. Japan being against the use of the gun could also be explained to his general reaction against outside ideas. People would try to adapt and develop new guns and swords ideas thanks to the small contacts that still came from the Dutch in *Deshima*, but the true revolution came with Commodore Matthew Perry and when he opened the borders by force. And so, the new government would develop a new military force, inspired by the western counterparts, and would ban the samurai from wearing their swords, and would put guns in the hands of the officials. At the turn of the 20th century Japan was caught up with the new military technology from the west and will start to use them in a war force that would astound the Western side of the world.

The sword, heart of the samurai, or so you thought

There were three sword hunts during the course of Japanese history. The first one was the Hideyoshi sword hunt during 1580 where it was ordered that only the samurai class could have swords. The second one was the 1876's Meiji government order to abolish the wearing of swords, with the consequent ending of the samurai class. And third and last one was the post WW2 sword hunt where the Allied Occupation banish everything that could be a weapon and the katana stopped being a weapon to start being a work of art. While it could be argued that they are technically not true sword hunts, the reality is that they shaped the way the Japanese society behaved around said swords.

Swords were a symbol of status, a symbol of the warrior. Or at least it looked like it.

During a long time, war was made by bow and arrow. Then, various types of swords started to appear: the *katana* (sword), *tachi* (long sword), *hoko* or *naginata* (halberd), *yari* (lance). But guns were introduced in the 16th century by the Portuguese in *Tanegashima*, even if gun powder was already known thanks to the Chinese. There is this myth that the oh so mighty samurai would never touch on a gun. Yeah sure, they loved them, at least during the times they were a novelty.

One of Nobunaga's biggest victories was in *Nagashino* when he used an army with musketeers, and mixed western military techniques with Japanese ones. If they could fight from afar, they would. For instance, the *Boshin* war was mainly fought by gun. The only fully sword fight was the *Jipuren* rebellion and that was because they were precisely fighting against the ban of the swords. Also, guns could be expensive to maintain, but it was even more expensive to train someone during years with a sword.

The fact that the sword alone was portrait as the soul of the samurai since ancient times as a lot to do with its myths and significance. For instance, one of the imperial artifacts is a sword, so it has this air of authority. Also, the fact that you behead a person with a sword, so it was the significance of the ending of a battle. The sword became the social status of the samurai, so when the sword hunts started to affect their status, they started to take it personally.

Japan swords had a symbolic value, far greater than they had in Europe. It was not just the OG fighting weapon, it was a palpable form of honour, "the soul of the samurai". It was the only embodiment of honours, and it was an obligatory part of one's costume. You could not have a family name unless you had a sword. If one commoner made something that would make him go up in the social hierarchy, he would be guaranteed the *myoji-taito* - a ceremony where he would receive a sword and a surname.

Swords were also highly symbolic because of the way the samurai would handle them in battle. There were manuals that would explain the most beautiful and at the same time masterful way of using the swords. And managing a sword was seen as more elegant than managing a gun. Even in the gun teaching manuals it looked like in the remarks that the teachers were sorry because there was

not truly a prettier way of handling it. Still even with guns, they always carried a sword. Men felt undress without their swords.

But sooner or later swords would become works of arts thanks to their masterful swordsmiths. Major swords dubbed as works of art. Yes, swords are seen as major metallurgical works of art in a lot of part in the word but in Japan they would take this to the extreme. For instance, when *Mitsuhide* was sieged, he asked for a quick moment of truce so that his swords could be taken out of the castle to the enemy territory and be safe, and then they could continue to attack the castle and him. That's how they would value the swords! Even more than their lives.

When the Meiji government to renew the new army forbad the samurai to wear their swords, they word rebel. On October 24 1874, in *Kumamoto*, 170 samurai, dressed in full armour carrying swords attacked the new national tropes and it would be need the entire national army to be putted down. But they would not distinguish the word of art from the day to say usable object. Sword would be extremely decorated as a symbol of power and that same sword would be expected to be used in battle.

“The sword remains to this day a source of metaphor in Japan for human characteristics”
(Perrin, 1979)

From a thing to wear to an icon of culture

There is this hidden detail in Muzan that when I noticed I could not help but smile. Remember how he said that the thing he hated the most was change? Well coming from someone that had to live in 5 different eras is kind of funny, and it's even funny when you realize that he ended up adopting the Western fashion pretty fast. But that's the twist, if you look at Muzan's vest you come to realize that it's the exact same pattern as the kimono he used to wear. The best part? That was a thing that actually happened in history.

Wanting or not, the clothing that the people used to wear represents the history they lived through. *"To look seriously at art objects of the everyday, such as clothes - their discourse and practices, their meaning-bearing forms and their codes of internal and external interpretations - in an essential, and often neglected, component of any study of modern aesthetics."* (Slade, 2009)

Yofuku -Western Clothing- is a type of clothing that is now common all over Japan, but during a lot of time, it was a type of clothes that only selected few grew up with. The 1st contacts with these types of clothing - even if extremely different from what we now call western clothing- was in the 16th century when the Portuguese arrived in Tanegashima. With them came not only different shapes but also different fabrics. But the “true” introduction to western fashion would only happen after the Meiji Restauration where Emperor Meiji would start to dress in a typical western military outfit, and soon after, the empress would start to aper in the typical western dresses.

In the Edo period clothing visually distinguished the social classes. *"Certain articles of clothing visibly differentiated people of diverse social classes, and simultaneously distinguished an individual within a specific group. The materials, motifs and construction of military campaign coats, for example, marked their wearers as men belonging to the military class."* (Milhaupt, 2014) Samurai ranked on the top, followed by farmers, artisans, and merchants on the bottom. What happen was that most of the times the samurai where poor while the merchants lived in economic success. So, samurai had the privilege of using certain types of fabrics and patters, even if most of the times they could not afford them, and the merchants would start to adapt the fabrics and patters they were allowed to wear and would end up becoming the patrons of arts and fashion. The trends of fashion would later be documented in ukiyo-e, and not only in the work of art sense, but also in *pattern books* were people could browse the prevailing styles.

After the 1st contacts with the westers, what would start to happen is that slowly but surely the Japanese would start to integrate the western ways of dressing into their lives. The Japanese started to introduce some of its elements with the kimono like shoes, hats, gloves, glasses, umbrellas, etc. Then in the 19th century a full change would happen starting from the man in the highest classes to the man in the lowest classes. The emperor decided to cut his topknot in 1872 and started to dress in western clothing in official appearances, also changing some of the more cultural habits like eating meat and

more western kind of meals. In the official portraits he appears adorned with a French-style military uniform with ornaments in gold and ostrich feathers. Before this, the emperor was never a public figure, so when pictures of the Meiji Emperor became available, and he started to appear more publicly the nation would have their eyes on him and start to imitate him.

Women would, for the longest time still dress in the now classic kimono, that would develop as a symbol of the old and traditional Japan. The idea of the western clothing being associated with a modernized Japan and the Kimono to a traditional country came from the fact that the emperor would choose to wear western clothes in more formal, international events, and for religious national events would choose the traditional Japanese court dress. The western clothes will end up being a symbol of the modernization of Japan, and the Meiji government would use it as yet another tool of national control.

Unlike the rest of the world where the nations had centuries to adapt to the slow transitions of industrialization, Japan had it all at once. While the rest of the world was trying to update their militaries, Japan was creating theirs.

For all the Japanese born after 1945 the western clothes became the norm. Most families would end up transforming their kimonos into western clothing pieces, and the patterns sold for kimonos would double for kimonos and western clothing.

But it is funny to notice how despite it all Muzan is the one being presented in western clothing and *Ubuyashiki* is the one in traditional clothes, always being the contradiction of the other, but also it can also be interpreted as the Ubuyashiki family being "trapped" in the past since in hundred years the corps never killed an upper moon, the history never changed. And Muzan in his ever-changing cycle of his life, in the changing of eras and changing of personas he decided to reuse the only thing he could: his clothes. And just like him, they would adapt through the times.

Oni in contemporary anime and manga

It is funny to think that the Oni concept changed so much during history. Especially in the modern times we start to see big changes in the myths, and in Edo Japan, some towns even start to associate Oni stories to them. It seems kind of weird. Why would a town want to be associated with a being that is a bringer of disease, pollution, barbarian, etc? Well, because just like hero stories would bring people to certain places, the same rule would apply to ghost stories. *"The use of legends (as opposed to other genres of storytelling) in this development is noteworthy. As folklorists classify, legends are situated in precise spatial and temporal parameters, in contrast, for instance, to myths, which, invoke abstract scales of space and time"* (Carter, 2019) The concept of the Oni changed as much as the Japanese people changed throughout history.

There were a lot of types of Onis, but with the modern times, a new type of Oni was born: the kind and benevolent Oni. The writer *Hamada Hirosuke* wrote a story called *Naita Akaoni - The Red Oni who Cried*, that talks about a Red Oni that wanted to be friends with the humans, and so, his Oni friend, the Blue Oni, attacks the humans so that the Red Oni could be seen saving them. *"Hamada's Oni are righteous and pure-hearted: the red Oni is friendly and prepares tea and home-made cakes for the humans, while his counterpart, the Blue Oni, espouses qualities of self-sacrifice by putting the needs of others ahead of his own. The blue Oni is considerate enough to leave them alone so as to prevent his friend's cover from being blown. Such conduct among humans was increasing rarity at the time the story was written."* (Reider, 2013)

After the defeat in the war, people, for that moment, stopped caring about the paranormal and started to think about survival. But it is in these moments that we see the best ideas float. The Japanese pop culture started to have an extended influence in the midst of the beginning of the social-economic growth of Japan. And thanks to that, right now, anime and manga are the biggest form of contemporary Japanese art.

And if we know a thing or two about anime and manga is that the authors create a lot of magnificent worlds. And some of them are based on history and others on myths. But in contemporary Japan, Oni and all Yokai alike gained a new life in the world of anime and manga. *"Susan Napier writes, 'anime, with its enormous breadth of subject material, is ... a useful mirror of contemporary Japanese society, offering an array of insights into the significant issues, dreams, and nightmares of the day' In the various array of subject materials, oni and yokai are important ingredients to help understand the Japanese, as well as the broader human psyche."* (Reider, 2010)

Oni were believed to inhabit the mountains, rivers and forest, so contemporary media had to take these creatures and portray them in other times and spaces. The important thing is that the Oni is always the "other". This "yokai boom" in contemporary society comes from the fact that, at night

the world is illuminated by modern lighting technologies, so this yokai have been robbed from their "natural habitat".

Nagai Go was one of the pioneers of Oni related manga. Two examples are his works *Devilman* and *Shuten Doji* where one takes the oni into a more Judeo-Christian/Divine Comedy idea of the devil, and the other it's on take of the famous Shuten Doji Oni story. In Akira Kurosawa's movie *The weeping demon* we see Humans that were turned to Oni after the bombings and are suffering the aftermath.

One of the obvious precursors of our dear Nezuko is obvious *Lum* from *Urusei Yatsura*. She is a non-terrestrial Oni. *Takahashi Rumiko* created the character combining the notion of Oni with the one of aliens. But she does have the so-called typical Oni characteristics: she wears an outfit made out of tiger skin, has two horns, bigger canine teeth that indicate her cannibalistic tendencies, and can use electricity as power. Lum's Oni abilities become more obvious because she behaves just like a normal human, she becomes jealous, angry etc. She is capable of piloting a super advanced spaceship. She and her race are out of the emperor's control.

"The Oni has come a long way from being a feared and terrifying creature who threatened the lives of Japanese to one who represents a vital financial resource. These days there are even gentle oni, and cute and sexy ones. The transformation of Japan's own socio-economic change [...] Some aspects of the Oni may be emphasized more than others. Furthermore, oni can be used as art objects, or exploited as political weapons. But whatever the means, oni have been always an important part of the japanese psyche, and continue to be so." (Reider, 2013)

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