

# FROM NOH PLAYS TO MODERN ANIME: THE ROLE OF PEONY FLOWERS IN JAPANESE CULTURAL IMAGERY

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## Abstract

This paper examines the symbolism of the peony flower as an attribute of female demons or *kijo* in traditional and contemporary media. The peony, which symbolises the supernatural power of *kijo*, is depicted on the demon fan used in Noh theatre and remains in Japanese cultural memory. Over time, the meaning of this symbol has become ambiguous or lost, making it difficult for modern audiences to interpret. This study explores the linguistic, iconographic, and cultural sources of the peony on the demon fan and discusses how traditional aesthetic methods such as *mitate* (analogical representation) are used by contemporary media creators to revive the multilayered meanings of symbols.

**Keywords:** peony symbolism; *kijo* 鬼女 (*oni*-women) in Noh plays; cultural imagery; iconographic analysis; props as attributes; Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba.

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## 1. Introduction

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The peony, originating in China, was highly esteemed in *The Complete Poetry Collection of Tang Dynasty*<sup>2</sup> being celebrated as 花王 the “king of flowers” or “queen of flowers”. Peonies were introduced to Japan during the Heian period (794-1185), or possibly even earlier, in the Nara period (Amemiya, 2015: 68-69). They became popular among the Heian aristocracy as ornamental garden plants. This is documented in *The Pillow Book* by Sei Shōnagon, a masterpiece of Heian literature. She noted that Minamoto no Tsunefusa, who visited her, remarked on the elegance and tastefulness of the peonies in front of the terrace<sup>3</sup> at Empress Teishi’s residence.

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<sup>2</sup> 『全唐詩』: *The Complete Poetry Collection of the Tang Dynasty*, consisting of nine hundred volumes, was edited in China during the Qing Dynasty. The project began in 1705 under the orders of Emperor Kangxi, led by Peng Dingqiu and others, and was completed the following year. It contains approximately 48,900 poems by more than 2,200 authors.

<sup>3</sup> 「台の前に植ゑられたりける牡丹などのをかしきこと」 - It has often been noted that the kanji character 台 has a variant 対 because the original text is written in *kana* as

Often referred to as the ‘queen of flowers’, the peony is known for its associations with nobility and wealth. However, it is also intriguingly associated with demonic women known as *kijo* (鬼女, *oni*- women), who are typically associated with anti-social behaviour (Baba, 1988). This seemingly paradoxical combination of the elegant peony and the menacing *kijo*, which have no obvious visual connection, is a fascinating area of study. Van Straten (2000: 4-12) suggests that in order to uncover deeper meanings and content from visual symbols, one must explore the abstract, intangible concepts they represent. He advocates interpreting the inherent meanings in relation to their form and linking them to visual and cultural sources and facts. Furthermore, Van Straten (2000: 45) defines a symbol as something that prompts the viewer to imagine what it represents beyond its literal form, such as plants, animals or other signs. For example, the peony could symbolically evoke the image of a *kijo*. This raises the question: could the peony be a symbol imbued with cultural, social and historical facts that link it to the image of a *kijo*?

To the best of my knowledge, no research has directly addressed this question. This paper aims to explore such a research question by analysing the visual motifs of peonies and *kijo* as they appear in traditional Noh theatre and modern anime, using an iconographic approach. Before delving into this analysis, it is important to note a crucial point highlighted by Van Straten (*ibid.*). He points out that symbols invite the viewer to consider meanings beyond the literal representation of the subject, assuming the viewer understands the creator’s intended meaning. Over time, the meanings of symbols, once widely understood, can become ambiguous or lost. This is why modern viewers often struggle to identify and interpret the symbols embedded in classical imagery from centuries past.

To address this issue, this paper will first assume that the peony is an attribute of the *kijo*. An attribute, as defined by Van Straten (2000: 48), is a specific symbol in the visual arts that serves to identify its owner by representing an object or mark associated with it. While symbols can represent other things, attributes are depicted as accessories, their symbolic meaning remaining superficial and objective. A well-known example of an attribute in Western art is the “white lily” of the Virgin Mary, symbolising her purity and virginity, although this may not resonate with those uninterested in Western cultural contexts. A more familiar example within the context of Japanese culture is the story of Momotarō in Japanese folklore, where his tale of defeating *oni* (鬼, demon) has been passed down through generations. Because Momotarō appears as an ordinary child, specific attributes such as certain animals (a dog, a monkey and a pheasant) and symbols such as a peach banner or a peach-patterned *kimono* play an important role in identifying him as Momotarō.

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たい。 Consequently, there are two possible readings: 台の前 and 対の屋 (Matsuo & Nagai, 1997: 261). This paper follows the interpretation in Morris’s translation (1971: 115).

These attributes allow readers to recognise the boy as Momotarō through their symbolic associations.

Having introduced the research motivation, question and methodology of this paper, I will next outline the specific analyses to be undertaken. The following section begins by outlining how *oni*, as shared knowledge, are conceptualised in Japanese society. This is followed by an examination of the relationship between *kijo* and peonies within the medieval worldview depicted in *Noh*, a classical performing art with over 650 years of history and recognised by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage. Finally, the paper will explore the interpretation of classical imagery in modern media, analysing how popular media creators reinterpret these motifs from the perspective of contemporary viewers.

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## 2. White Peonies and Female Demons

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### 2.1 What are *oni*?

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The lineage of *oni* is complex, spanning over a thousand years and deeply rooted in the Japanese psyche and society. Throughout history, *oni* have been portrayed as objects of fear, anti-human and anti-social entities (Baba 1988; Komatsu 2017; Reider 2010). According to Komatsu (2017: 98), “the essence of an *oni* is something inhumanly strong, fearless, ruthless, and terrifying.” For ancient and medieval Japanese, *oni* were real - an invisible yet terrifying presence that possessed supernatural powers beyond human comprehension and brought misfortune to people. Examples include *mononoke* (物怪, invisible supernatural forces), *raijin* (雷神, nature deities), and *ekijin*<sup>4</sup> (疫神, plague gods). Until the Middle Ages, mysterious phenomena were regarded as messages from the gods. Nature was considered superior to human, and natural events such as droughts, floods and lightning strikes were attributed to malevolent supernatural beings such as *mononoke* and *oni*. Onmyōji practitioners of the Onmyōdō, interpreted such mysterious supernatural phenomena for the imperial court. Their systematised techniques included protecting the nobility from attacks by supernatural beings and forces and other life-threatening events (Reider 2010).

Komatsu (2017) mentioned Baba Akiko’s “*Oni no Kenkyū*” (Oni Research, 1988) as one of the most impressive works on *oni*. Komatsu (2017: 74) explains that Baba’s research explored the transformation of suppressed emotions into *oni*, convincingly arguing that *oni* were more than just degenerate echoes of ancient

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<sup>4</sup> The compound kanji character 疫神 can also be read as either ‘*ekishin*’ or ‘*yakujin*’. There is also a synonym, 疫病神 (*yakubyōgami*), but all these terms refer to an evil god who spreads plague.

benevolent deities. Komatsu emphasises the need for a thorough re-examination of *oni* from various new perspectives as he believes that the human-transformed supernatural beings are one of the most interesting and scary Japanese *yōkai* (妖怪) <sup>5</sup>. Komatsu points out that Baba explores the themes of *oni* in Japanese literature, illustrating that *oni* cult reached its height from the Heian period to the Middle Ages.

A recurring motif in Japanese cultural traditions is the transformation of a beautiful woman into a terrifying *yōkai*. These human-transformed *oni* represent the emergence of darkness within the human mind. As noted above, in Heian Japan there was a widespread belief in invisible *mononoke*, which were thought to haunt the living world, causing illness, death and other misfortunes. Barnes (1989: 107) points out that such beliefs are common across many cultures, but a distinctive aspect of the Japanese belief system is the notion that the spirit of a living person, if sufficiently provoked, could assume a secondary existence and invisibly attack its enemies. The person whose spirit became such a living ghost or *ikiriyō* (生霊) would remain unaware of these events. A notable example is the angry and jealous living spirit of Lady Rokujō, a character from the Heian masterpiece “Genji Monogatari” (*The Tale of Genji*). Lady Rokujō, one of Genji’s lovers, becomes so jealous of Genji’s young wife that her spirit leaves her body to possess and ultimately kill her rival, Lady Aoi. The Noh play “Aoi-no-ue” (葵上, Lady Aoi), which draws its themes from “The Tale of Genji”, provides a unique insight into the medieval worldview at a time when *oni* culture was at its height.

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## 2.2 *Kijo* – angry and jealous *oni*-woman in Noh theatre

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Originating as a unique theatrical form in the 14th century, Noh is recognised as the oldest surviving professional theatre in the world. It is a highly symbolic form of theatre that emphasises ritual and suggestion, creating an atmosphere of refined

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<sup>5</sup> Defining *yōkai* is a complex task due to their elusive and multifaceted nature. Michael Foster describes *yōkai* as “the spooky unexplainable things lurking on the edge of knowledge” (2015: 29), emphasising that they lack a single definition or function. Komatsu (2017: 64-66) also highlights the complexity of the term *yōkai*, noting its multiple definitions and synonyms. He argues that this complexity arises from the need to distinguish between similar terms. For instance, we must consider whether *yōkai* and *bakemono* (化け物, monsters) refer to the same entities, or if *obake* (お化け, spooks) and *yūrei* (幽霊, ghosts) can be considered identical. Komatsu further explains that the term *yōkai* was rarely used before the Meiji era, making it difficult to find earlier terminology that precisely matches the post-Meiji concept of *yōkai*.

aestheticism. There are about 240 plays<sup>6</sup> in the current repertoire of Noh. “Aoi-no-ue” is a well-known and frequently performed Noh play by the talented playwright Zeami (1363-1443). The story begins with Lady Aoi, Genji’s pregnant wife, falling ill from being possessed by the vengeful spirit of Lady Rokujō. Lady Rokujō’s living spirit, resentful of Lady Aoi’s position as Genji’s wife, is summoned by a sorceress. The spirit attacks, but is eventually subdued by the prayers of Yokawano-kohijiri, a powerful mountain priest of *Shugen-dō* (修験道), who saves Lady Aoi. This contrasts with her fate in the original story, where she dies during childbirth, attacked by an angry and vengeful spirit.

Regarding this ending, Akio Awaya, Kita School’s *Shitekata* (シテ方, lead actor), and holder of the Important Intangible Cultural Property designation, provided insightful comments. In his “Performance Report by Akio Awaya: The Profound Depth of Aoi-no-ue’s Utai”<sup>7</sup> published on his website, he explains that the play ends with the chorus describing the compassion of the bodhisattvas, as the evil spirit’s mind is soothed and enlightenment is attained, signifying salvation from the torment of jealousy and obsession. He noted that it was not necessary to overemphasise the demonic aspect, and concluded by saying that such an ending was quintessentially Noh. In the same weblog, the Noh actor states that the most important part of Lady Aoi is the *utai* (謡) chant of the *shite* in the first act. The *shite*, as the living spirit of Lady Rokujō, appears when summoned by sound and incantation, and driven by intense emotions, almost single-handedly drives the story forward to the climactic scene where she beats the ailing Lady Aoi and declares, “My grudge will never be exhausted.” The *shite*’s *utai* chant in this scene expresses the tormented emotions of Lady Rokujō, a normally noble and intellectual woman, who, overwhelmed by sorrow, jealousy, deep resentment, self-pity, and self-loathing, had no choice but to turn into an *oni*.

Lady Aoi does not appear in any scene of the first act. Instead, the *shite*, who plays the living spirit of Lady Rokujō, approaches the *kosode* (小袖, lit. small sleeves) symbolising Lady Aoi, called ‘*dashi kosode*’ (出し小袖), which is placed in the centre of the stage (see Figure 1), kneels down, and strikes it once with an *ōgi* (扇, fan). The *shite* then drops the fan and moves on to the next act. The fan is either thrown backwards while open or placed closed near the *kosode* (Koyama, 1989: 283). I will discuss the patterns and their visual semantics on the fan, an important handheld prop in this scene, in more detail later.

<sup>6</sup> There is no consensus on the number of pieces in Noh plays, as the number varies according to specialised Noh books and commentaries.

<sup>7</sup> <http://awaya-akio.com/2000/10/01/post157/> accessed on 05/02/2024.



**Figure 1. *Dashi Kosode* (symbolising Lady Aoi) Tosa Mitsuoki. Lady Aoi, from “Fifty Noh Plays, Illustrated”, Edo period (1615-1868), 17th century. Harvard Art Museums / Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Bequest of the Hofer Collection of the Arts of Asia (1985.586.8)**

In the first half of the play, the Noh actor portraying the main protagonist (前シテ, *mae-shite*) wears a *deigan* (泥眼, golden eyes) mask (see Figure 2-right below), which allude to a supernatural being or a deceased person. The *hannya* (般若) mask (see Figure 2-left below) signifies the dramatic transformation of Lady Rokujō into a terrifying *oni*. This mask, with its open mouth, strong jaw, sharp teeth, golden eyes, and two horns, heightens the intense emotional turmoil.

The illustration on the left in Figure 1 shows the climax of the second half, in which the vengeful spirit of Lady Rokujō, wearing a *hannya* mask and a serpent robe with a repeated pattern of glittering golden triangles, battles a mountain priest from Yokawa. The integration of music and dance creates a powerful atmosphere as drums and a flute play frenetically, and Lady Rokujō resists the exorcism and attacks with a long wand called *uchizue* (打杖, hitting stick), used by non-human characters to exert supernatural power. In short, the visual elements such as the stylised costumes, masks, hand-held props and other attributes in Noh theatre convey Lady Rokujō’s non-human traits and her supernatural abilities to the audience.



Figure 2. Hannya Noh Mask (left) / Deigan Noh Mask (right) Hannya: 井関家重作.  
 (Important cultural property), Edo period, 17<sup>th</sup> century. Deigan: 近江打朱書.  
 Edo period, 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> century. Collection of ColBase (<https://colbase.nich.go.jp/>)

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### 2.3 Iconography of Oni Ōgi (Demon Fan)

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The fan has its origin in Japan and has spread from Japan to the rest of the world, and Noh fans are considered the masterpieces of Japanese stage props. Every Noh performer on stage carries a fan, as fans hold significant cultural value for Noh performers, akin to a warrior's sword, stated Kanta Nakamori, a *shitekata*/lead actor from the Kanze School. According to Nakamori<sup>8</sup>, fans are used during greetings, rehearsals and performances to show respect and readiness. During rehearsals, performers place their fan in front of them when greeting the master. During performances, the choir keeps the fan at their waist and places it in front of them before singing. The assistant (後見, *kōken*) also carries a fan and places it next to him, ready to support the lead actor if needed.

Before proceeding with the analysis, it is important to understand more about the fans. Below is a brief summary of my recent fieldwork in Kyoto, which included an interview with Mr. Yoshihiro Fukui<sup>9</sup>, the owner of Tomatsuya Fukui Senpo

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.nohbutai.com/contents/12/1/nohgaku4.htm> accessed 10/01/2024.

<sup>9</sup> I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Mr. Fukui for his invaluable cooperation in this research. His insights as a Noh fan specialist provided knowledge beyond what is available in books.

(十松屋福井扇舗), a Kyoto-based specialist in Noh and Kyogen fans since its founding in 1703 during the Edo period. We discussed the historical background and design concepts of the Noh fans that Tomatsuya Fukui Senpo has been crafting. This report outlines the significance, historical background, and evolving design conventions of Noh fans, highlighting their role in enhancing the symbolic and aesthetic aspects of Noh performances. It highlights the importance of fans in Noh theatre, not just as props, but as symbols of dignity and belonging. Made with the finest materials and techniques, the fans follow strict conventions based on the user's role and affiliation within the Noh tradition.

**Historical background of Noh fans** - Noh theatre originated in the Muromachi period, a time when Zen monks and other cultural leaders introduced various Chinese influences to Japan. During this period, many Noh fan designs were created, often depicting Chinese historical figures and themes such as “Emperor Ming and Imperial Concubine Yang” (明皇貴妃図, *mei kō kihi zu*), “Four Greybeards of Mt Shang” (商山四皓図, *shōzan shikōzu*), and “The Seven Sages (竹林七賢人図, *chikurin shichi kenjin zu*). These motifs are often found in artworks such as the folding screen paintings at Nanzenji Temple in Kyoto.

**Background of Noh fan designs** - Traditionally, Noh actors received their masks, costumes, and fans as gifts from influential noble patrons. These items were not specifically designed for individual roles or performances, although there were exceptions. Over time, Noh actors systematised the use of these items to suit the themes and direction of each play, establishing conventions such as specific colours, motifs and combinations for particular roles.

In modern practice, Noh actors typically select their costume elements in the order of mask, costume, and fan, with the fan being the most flexible in terms of design constraints. This flexibility allows actors to reflect their interpretative intentions in the design of the fan. Interestingly, the motifs on Noh fans are often not directly related to the theme or character of the play, unlike in traditional Japanese dance where motifs such as seasonal flowers directly reflect the theme of the performance. Noh fans often have motifs that are not seasonally related to the play's theme, often depicting “*shiki-soroe*” (四季揃え, all seasons) or a mixture of seasonal elements.

Noh fans are usually chosen based on the overall impression they give, such as ‘bright and vibrant’, ‘melancholy’ or ‘powerful’ and so on. A once bright and vibrant fan may fade over generations and take on a more melancholic appearance, illustrating the interplay between the fan's design and the passage of time. An interesting perspective suggests that the motifs (e.g. spring flowers, autumn



flowers) on Noh fans represent the evolution of beauty in stages of life, rather than just the seasons themselves. This symbolises youthful, budding beauty and the refined, essence-like beauty that comes with age. The Noh fan with a peony and a demon, as discussed above, probably has a symbolic role. This will be explored further in the upcoming sections.



Figure 3. Oni Ōgi (鬼扇, Demon Fan) 赤地一輪牡丹図 (*akaji ichirin botan zu*)  
Red Ground with a White Peony and Golden Arabesque Design

As mentioned in section 2.2, Noh theatre involves the use of various props, such as fans and swords, which the actors carry or wear during the performance. These props are known as “*mochidōgu*” (持ち道具, hand-held props). Koyama (1989: 618) introduces 18 types of *mochidōgu*. In this section we will focus on the fan, especially the “*chū-kei*” (中啓), the most basic prop in Noh. *Chū-kei* fans, which have a partially open top, have designs that correspond to the role of the main actor (*shite*) and follow established patterns.

Roles in Noh are generally divided into five types based on the content of the play: *shin* (神, gods), *nan* (男, men), *nyo* (女, women), *kyō* (狂, madness), and *ki* (鬼, demons). For example, the fan *oni ōgi* used by plays depicting demonic spirits in the fourth category (*onryō-mono*) typically has a red ground with a single peony design, symbolising the female demon’s love of peonies (Shinpan Noh Kyogen Jiten, 2011). Upon investigating the origin of the demon fan, it is often stated that peonies are depicted on the fan because “demons like this flower.” However, there is a lack of explanation as to why demons favour peonies. This knowledge might be considered common among those familiar with Noh, but for those without this background, the peony on the demon fan is merely recognised as a flower. As a result, the layered symbolic meanings are lost.

Through the lens of linguistics, the kanji character 丹 in peony (牡丹) signifies the colour of the flower, red (丹 is an archaic word for red earth, *aka*), and also represents the elixir of immortality (仙薬, *senyaku*), which grants eternal youth. This dual meaning is confirmed by the peony's introduction to Japan in the Nara period by envoys to Tang China as a medicinal plant (Amemiya, 2015). Thus, the *oni ōgi*, depicting a peony, symbolises the supernatural powers of immortality and longevity associated with *oni*. In Noh, where some props are believed to possess magical powers, the *oni ōgi* may suggest the *oni*'s supernatural immortality. The peony has another mnemonic name, 花妖, which can be interpreted in two ways through the second kanji character 妖: (1) a bewitching woman who confuses people, and (2) something supernatural that brings misfortune. This dual meaning suggests that while peonies are beautiful and alluring, they also possess a mysterious and uncanny quality. In conclusion, while the analysis from both cultural and linguistic perspectives confirms that the *oni ōgi* is indeed an attribute of the *kijo*, I have found no concrete evidence to support my interpretation regarding the peony flower. This may indicate a loss of symbolic meaning, as predicted by Van Straten (2000: 45), or it may suggest that the association between peonies and *oni* was primarily aesthetic and visual, with no deeper significance. Nevertheless, the large central peony on the *oni ōgi* conveys a sense of strength, evokes an image of concentrated power, and represents an interesting interplay of elements.

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### 3. Analysis of the Traditional Visual Motifs in *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba*

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#### 3.1 Auspicious Iconography and Its Symbolism on Traditional *Obi*

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The concept of the peony symbolising the immortality of demons, is also used as a motif in *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba*. For example, in the ending of the anime's "Entertainment District Arc" (遊郭編, *yūkaku hen*), Tanjiro Kamado is seen holding a beautifully decorated *obi* featuring peony and chrysanthemum patterns. As mentioned earlier, the peony is a flower favoured by demons. The chrysanthemum is one of the most beloved flowers in Japan, often compared to the sun because of its radiant petals. It is considered an auspicious motif representing immortality, longevity, health, and protection from evil (Akiyama 2021).

In modern Japanese society, the tradition of viewing chrysanthemums and drinking chrysanthemum *sake* during the Chrysanthemum Festival (重陽の節句, *Chōyō no sekku*) on 9 September continues as a way of wishing for the family health and

longevity. According to Komatsu (2018), in the Otogizōshi tale “*Kibune no Honji*”, the deity Bishamonten advises offering chrysanthemums during the festival as a magical practice to subdue *oni*. Eating chrysanthemums or drinking chrysanthemum *sake* symbolises eating the body of the *oni*, thereby driving away evil spirits. However, the practice of drinking chrysanthemum *sake* is often simply explained as a way to “ward off evil”, indicating that the original symbolic meaning has become ambiguous over time. I therefore interpret the *obi* Tanjiro holds as a combination of two auspicious motifs, implying two meanings. The first is the traditional wish for prosperity and longevity that these Japanese motifs represent. The second is a metaphorical expression technique used in Japanese art known as ‘*mitate*’ (見立て, analogical representation).

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### 3.2 The visual semantics of props in contemporary media

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*Mitate* is a distinctive expression technique in Japanese culture, where one thing is used to directly represent the characteristics of another (Digital Daijisen). It is fundamental to Japanese aesthetics and mental imagery, encouraging viewers to find new meaning and beauty in ordinary objects and scenes. For example, in Japanese gardens, *karesansui* (枯山水, dry landscape gardens) use sand and pebbles to represent water scenes that are not physically present. Similarly, in the Noh play *Aoi-no-ue*, a *kosode* (traditional Japanese robe) placed at the front of the stage represents the sick bed of Lady Aoi, allowing both performers and audience members to visualise her presence through the personified *kosode*.

In this study, the concept of *mitate* (analogical representation or mental imagery) is used to analyse the beautiful *obi* with floral designs held by Tanjiro Kamado. By interpreting the luxurious peony pattern on the *obi* as representing *kijo* or female demon, the ‘presence of demons’ suggested by the pattern becomes evident. The owner of this *obi*, inferred from the ending scene where numerous *obis* fly through the air as if with a will of their own, is Daki (堕姫), a *kijo* who wields the extremely powerful supernatural ability *Yaebis Slash* (八重帯斬り, *yaebis giri*) as a weapon. This highlights the attention to detail and traditional Japanese motifs and expressions employed by the creators of *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba*.



Figure 4. Chrysanthemum and Peony Patterned Obi (c)吾峠呼世晴/集英社・アニメブックス・

However, not all modern media audiences can interpret this concept of *mitate*. Fujisawa (2008:106) states that *mitate* is an idea that can only be understood by those who can appreciate it. Thus, it is acceptable if contemporary anime viewers, who have no cultural memory of the connection between peonies and *oni*/demons to fail to recognise the *kijo* symbolised by the flower. Conversely, viewers who can discern this symbol can enjoy the traditional expression technique of seeing the unseen *kijo* through the peony. In fact, Daki tells the brothel's madam, who recognises Daki's true superbeing nature, "It's wise to keep quiet even if you notice these things. That's how everyone has survived until now." Additionally, even without this *mitate*, the numerous flying *obis* serve as an attribute of Daki, identifying her as the owner of the *obi*. In conclusion, an examination of the 21<sup>st</sup> century *kijo* symbols and traditional motifs on the beautiful *obi* confirms that new and old *kijo* symbols are converging in the context of popular culture.

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#### 4. Conclusions

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The conclusion of this study ties together the symbolic and cultural significance of the *oni ōgi* and peony motifs in Noh theatre with their modern interpretation in the media, specifically in *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba*. The analysis first highlighted how the peony on the *oni ōgi* represents both beauty and immortality, reflecting traditional Japanese aesthetics.

*Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba*, these motifs are reimagined to enhance the narrative, as seen in the *obi* held by Tanjiro featuring peony designs. This usage exemplifies *mitate*, where the peony symbolises demons, specifically Daki, a powerful *oni* character who manifests all the traits of *oni*—inhumanly strong, fearless, ruthless, and terrifying. The visual cues, such as flying *obi*, help to

reinforce this association. The study also considers the audience perception, acknowledging that while not all viewers may grasp the historical context, those who do can appreciate the deeper symbolic layers. The creators of *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba* skillfully blend traditional motifs with modern storytelling while maintaining the significance of these symbols.

Overall, the integration of traditional Japanese motifs into modern media such as *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba* demonstrates the enduring relevance and adaptability of cultural symbols. The detailed use of these elements enriches the narrative, bridging contemporary audiences with historical aesthetics, and ensuring the preservation and appreciation of cultural heritage.

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