

**From Classical Literature to Video Games: Analyzing Characters from *The Tale of the Heike***

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# From Classical Literature to Video Games: Analyzing Characters from *The Tale of the Heike*

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*The Tale of the Heike* is one of Japan's most famous works of classical literature. The characters from this epic have continued to endure and be used in new forms and contexts as entertainment media has evolved, creating a new afterlife for themselves. Much of their afterlife came in new legends and theater plays continually made, expanding the depth of characters such as Yoshitsune, his retainer Benkei, and the woman warrior Tomoe. These heroes have permeated much of Japan's pop culture and have appeared on TV, in film, manga, and perhaps most prevalently in recent years, in video games. In this contemporary moment, video games have become an omnipresent medium, only continuing to increase in popularity. With each iteration, these characters from *The Tale of the Heike* resonate with the Japanese people as a way to remember the past or embody the worries of a generation. The medium of video games reveals how the modern age interprets these characters and how the form of video game adaptation and interactivity of the medium creates and draws from the palimpsests of these characters. These palimpsests pave the way for the characters to remain culturally relevant in the present and future while not forgetting the past.

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## 1.0 Introduction

*Heike Monogatari*, or *The Heike Story* in English, is an anime that aired last year in 2022 between the months of January and March. It took a new spin on the classical text of *The Tale of the Heike*. The studio that created the anime, Science SARU, chose a contemporary translation of the tale created by the author Furukawa Hideo. In an interview, Furukawa stated how the younger generation does not listen to the older generation when asked about the importance of his modern translation of the tale. It is unfathomable for someone young to think about being old or what the old have experienced. However, we are still connected to the past. Whether or not we want to be, we all meet the same end; we go through ups and downs. We know this because their stories have been written for us to read and gain that knowledge. For Furukawa, this means, “We must do the same, transcribe all of this so that one day there will be someone else who can read and perceive what we experienced. Through literature, we can leave traces in the future of what we have lived today.”<sup>1</sup> Furukawa’s modern translation once again opened up this classic tale to new generations by creating a form more accessible for younger readers through a contemporary format and language they understand. *The Heike Story* anime transcribed and opened the tale to a new generation. Similarly, the medium of video games has been able to transcribe the past for a unique contemporary moment. Simultaneously, these games create new stories in the present for

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<sup>1</sup> Stefania Viti, *INTERVIEW | ‘Literature as Hope For The Young Generation’ Says Famed Novelist Hideo Furukawa | JAPAN Forward*. 7 Aug. 2022, <https://japan-forward.com/interview-literature-as-hope-for-the-young-generation-says-famed-novelist-hideo-furukawa/>.

the future to look back on. Video games are able not only to keep *The Tale of the Heike* in the memories of people but have been used to give many of these heroic characters from the tale a new afterlife, adding new untold depth to these new contemporary stories of these ages-old characters while upholding the values of their previous iterations.

This thesis considers how old characters from *The Tale of the Heike* are adapted into the new medium of video games, considering Tomoe, Benkei, and Yoshitsune's use in contemporary contexts. While video game studies have considered how the games address current issues and adaptation, it has not regarded Japanese literary heroes. This study, therefore, adds to the understanding of how famous historical and cultural figures are implemented within the medium, considering the novel challenges provided by the medium itself. These characters have been given new afterlives by traveling from their original medium into wholly new ones. This is done through the medium's interactivity, which allows storytelling and audience (player) involvement not possible within other formats such as film or novels.

*The Tale of the Heike* is the most popular and retold tale throughout the history of Japan. The characters of this war tale have continued to endure and be used in new forms and contexts as entertainment media has evolved. However, as Furukawa notes, the young ever seek to ignore the past, and *The Tale of the Heike* has had to change to permeate much of Japan's pop culture. It is found in Noh plays dating back to the playwright Zeami (1363-1443), all the way into the modern media mix of television and manga, perhaps most prevalently in recent years, video games. As Rachael Hutchinson notes in *Japanese Culture Through Video Games* (2019) about the game of *Okami* (2006) and its connection to the *Kojiki*, the literature is vital to the game's world and characters. The rising field of video game entertainment is an open avenue for repurposing classical literature such as *The Tale of the Heike* to attract an audience.



## 1.1 The *Heike*

*The Tale of the Heike* takes place in 12<sup>th</sup>-century Japan before and during the Genpei War (1180-1185). The central conflict of the tale is between two clans, the Heike, and the Genji, otherwise known as the Taira and Minamoto, respectively. The Heike rose to immense power quickly and took control over Japan. However, many took issue with the Heike due to their quick rise and violent actions to attain higher power. They viewed the Heike as young upstarts reaching above their station. Political tension devolves into a civil war between the two clans. This results in the Heike being defeated after the battle at Dan-no-Ura. This is a tale rife with the themes of tragedy. There is hardly a section or chapter within the tale that does not include death or destruction in some form or fashion. The people within that world live bleak lives stained by those in power. The tale lends significant thought to how impermanent the world is, showcasing how the tale is inspired partly by religious Buddhist thought. In *The Tale of the Heike*, more so than the history that the tale presents, the characters have been utilized many times through the years, reaching into modern pop culture.

The colorful cast that makes up this tale impacts the reader and society, reaching farther than the main narrative of the tale itself. These characters are the ones who experience these tragic events unfolding around them. In particular, the three that will be examined in this study are known for the tragedy surrounding them. Tomoe Gozen, a woman warrior, is forced to witness the death of her lord. She suffers because she is not permitted to die alongside him due to being a woman. Musashibō Benkei was a monk who suffered due to being constantly mistreated in his younger years, leading to many brash actions before he met his lord Yoshitsune, to whom he tragically and heroically gave his life protecting. Minamoto no Yoshitsune is known in Japan

as the underdog hero, the tragic character betrayed by his brother and forced to stand against those in power. Ultimately, he ended his own life after years on the run and suffering.

The characters of *The Tale of the Heike* have reappeared throughout various genres and media of Japanese entertainment culture. Royall Tyler, in his translation of the tale (2012), describes the omnipresence of the *Heike* in his introduction, “The legacy of *The Tale of the Heike* consists especially of dramatic episodes, touching or tragic... These and many others inspired centuries of theater (Noh, Bunraku, Kabuki) and visual art (painting, prints), followed more recently by film, television, modern retellings, manga, and warrior fantasies of all kinds.”<sup>2</sup> Many of these retellings or reinterpretations have concentrated on said warriors who star in the tragic tales of the *Heike*, such as Yoshitsune, Benkei, and Tomoe. Yoshitsune, the tragic warrior stars in many adaptations, such as a TV drama titled with his name. Benkei has his story expanded in *Gikeiki*, transferring over to plays and paintings, one of the standouts being *Benkei on the Bridge*, a 15<sup>th</sup>-century Noh play. Tomoe in her play adaptation, *Tomoe* gets more detail given to her. The 2022 anime retelling of the tale refocused the Taira into being the tragic protagonists of the story, getting swept up in the events of the Genpei war. Roberta Strippoli points out in her chapter “Zeami, a Wandering Ghost, and the Lotus Sutra: The Story of Giō and Hotoke from the *Heike Monogatari* to Nō” why tragic characters have a natural draw to them over creating new stories and characters.<sup>3</sup> She draws upon the playwright Zeami and how characters with known stories already have an imbued aura that comes with the story of said

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<sup>2</sup> Royall Tyler, *The Tale of the Heike*. Viking, 2012, xxi.

<sup>3</sup> Roberta Strippoli, “Zeami, a Wandering Ghost, and the *Lotus Sutra*: The Story of Giō and Hotoke from the *Heike Monogatari* to Nō” *Like Clouds or Mists: Studies and Translations of No Plays of the Genpei War*, Cornell East Asia Program, 2013, pp. 23-40.

character. These characters are already established, such as the warrior-monk Benkei who is widely known for his escapades alongside Japan's tragic hero Yoshitsune (his story expanded upon outside of the *Heike* itself). The playwright does not need to flesh out an already canonized identity. Strippoli adds that in addition to Zeami's points, a story using these characters needs something to draw and keep the audience's attention, whether a surprising twist or plot point. These assertions that using established characters in print or other genres carry over to modern media forms. While probably not what Strippoli had in mind while writing, video games carry out her constraints on Zeami's points through the interactivity provided in the medium. The interactivity that gaming provides the player cannot be found in any other form of media. Thomas Rimer aptly describes this carrying over of the *Heike* into the modern age by noting, "Each succeeding age, of course, adapts borrowed material to suit its concerns, and so *Heike*, its larger themes, and its characters, come out a bit differently on each historical occasion."<sup>4</sup> This can be observed within the performance and depiction of these characters in the media form of video games. Historical or mythical characters being used within video games are nothing new, as many of the stories of video games seek to draw upon the stories of the past. Each chapter of this analysis will focus on a specific character from *The Tale of the Heike* and how they have been utilized throughout Japanese gaming for many years. What was taken to create the character, or what is being newly added to the existing lore of these characters to create a new amalgamation? How does the player interact with these figures inside the game; what makes this interactivity between player and character unique? I intend to answer these questions about

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<sup>4</sup> J. Thomas Rimer, "The Tale of the Heike in the Theater of the Twentieth Century: Three Examples." *Like Clouds or Mists: Studies and Translations of No Plays of the Genpei War*, Cornell East Asia Program, 2013, 463.

Tomoe, Benkei, and Yoshitsune through this deep dive into the sphere of games centered around including these characters.

## 1.2 Video Game Adaptation and Afterlife

To do this study, I will focus on adaptation as a key critical term. In *A Theory of Adaptation* (2013), Linda Hutcheon defines adaptation as “... a derivation that is not derivative – a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing.”<sup>5</sup> Maintaining the mindset of video games as a work that is an adaptation while simultaneously having its own unique experience is vital to understanding how the *Heike* characters are treated in video games. Palimpsests bear the repeated use of these characters across mediums, and video games reflect that notion. Almost all video games are an adaptation in one form or another. They take from the world around us or those created by others to build fantastical new worlds that enrapture an audience.

Similar to how video games constantly use adaptation, the concept of the afterlife is present in almost all games. When the player dies, they can retry and correct the mistakes made in that previous life to make progress or beat the game. Alice Bennet, in her article “Afterlife” (2019), discusses the importance of the afterlife, which we can apply when thinking about video game adaptation of the *Heike* characters, “The majority of modern stories of the afterlife unfold not in eternity but in temporary locations that function as a supplement to existence, in effect

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<sup>5</sup> Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O’Flynn. *A Theory of Adaptation*, Routledge, 2013, 5.

allowing for the story of a life to be completed satisfactorily after death.”<sup>6</sup> While I shortly touched upon the concept of the player reviving after death to try again, video games not only let the player revive to try again but also give new life and experiences to age-old characters through adaptation. The *Heike* characters have transcended past death in video games earning a new life with which they can pursue a chance to address the regrets or anger they held in life.

### 1.3 Video Games

The Japanese gaming industry is financially significant for Japan and has developed a presence in the worldwide market. Regarding the monetary potential of video games, the most recent *Call of Duty* in the West, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare II* (2022), earned \$1 billion in under two weeks after being released, as Forbes and other news outlets reported<sup>7</sup>. Video games as an entertainment industry rival the potential monetary value of a Hollywood blockbuster. In terms of video games as an avenue for research and analysis into Japanese culture, Rachael Hutchinson notes, “Games should not just be seen as market products but as artistic works and cultural artefacts, that can tell us much about the culture of the place of origin... deep-seated Japanese attitudes and values are not only visible in the content of these videogames, but can

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<sup>6</sup> Alice Bennet, “Afterlife.” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, Oxford University Press, 2019, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Erik Kain, “‘Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare II’ Passes \$1 Billion In Sales In Less Than Two Weeks.” *Forbes*, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/erikkain/2022/11/07/call-of-duty-modern-warfare-ii-passes-1-billion-in-revenue-in-less-than-two-weeks/>.

also be experienced first-hand by the gamer, giving great insight into Japanese culture.”<sup>8</sup> Video games have much to tell us about the people who created them and the societies within which they are made, just as films do. This thesis builds on Hutchinson’s words by looking at what the games, including the *Heike* characters, can tell us about Japan and the country’s interests.

Gaming has grown considerably since Atari’s *Pong* in 1972. With the progression of technology, the range of what games are capable of has increased. Computers have gotten ever smaller and more powerful, exceeding the pixel limitations of *Pong* and the large arcade machine that contained it. There are now home consoles capable of showcasing games in 4K resolution. Gaming has grown from a niche interest to a hobby many partake in.

This transition started in 2000 with the Sony PlayStation 2 (PS2) release. The release of the PlayStation 2 marked the date when gaming began to rapidly evolve and grow ever more popular in the modern gaze. The console could double as both a space for gaming and a DVD player, allowing people to get two expensive pieces of technology for the price of just one. This era is when Hollywood began to pursue film tie-in games, introducing many to video game adaptation. I remember seeing my older brother play an adaptation of *The Mummy Returns* (2001) and even the film *Reign of Fire* (2002) on the PlayStation 2. While adaptation had existed before the advent of a new console, the PS2 showcased a jump in what technology was capable of, garnering more popularity in the medium. This would allow larger IPs to want a hand in the pot. As a note of reference, the PlayStation 2 is considered the best-selling video game platform

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<sup>8</sup> Rachael Hutchinson, *Japanese Culture Through Videogames*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2019, 1.

of all time, selling 158 million units worldwide as of 2022 (over 20 years after its release).<sup>9</sup> The PS2 introduced millions of households to gaming by having a console that not only jumped technologically into what gaming could be (with immersive 3D gaming experiences) but a console that could double as a DVD player, the one size fits all entertainment machine.

The stories in video games have become vastly intricate and intimate due to the control given to the player over the characters in the story. While games now can have a film-like quality to the narratives and imitate the depth of a novel, Hutchinson differentiates between the mediums, “Playing a game is very different to reading a book or watching a film, no matter how involving those pursuits may be. When a game script and description is printed out and read like a book, the plot complexity and fast pace seem overly intricate and confusing. This is because it takes a lot more time to play through a scene than to read it.”<sup>10</sup> While taking cues and lessons from how films present themselves, gaming is a different experience.

Games are interactive entertainment and require intimate player interaction to fully experience what the writers and developers had in mind when creating the game. Interactivity between the game and the player is essential to the game’s commercial and aesthetic success. The player having that feeling of control over the destiny and progression of the character further immerses them into that world. Some video games even allow for self-inserts, protagonist characters that you control by naming and customizing the appearance to your liking (enabling the player to write themselves into the story directly). The characters from the *Heike* showcase

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<sup>9</sup> Timothy Owens, “PlayStation 2 Lifetime Unit Sales by Region 2022.” *Statista*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1101876/unit-sales-playstation-2-region/>.

<sup>10</sup> See Hutchinson, 4.

this as the player forms a connection and bond with these characters. In gaming, the player can experience a pseudo-human interaction with the *Heike* characters (due to the characters, in reality, being lines of written code) instead of just seeing them play out on a screen.

Gaming would take another step in its evolution with the advent of mobile gaming with the debut of the iPhone/Smartphone in 2007. While mobile gaming had existed beforehand with handheld consoles such as the PlayStation Portable (PSP) and Nintendo Gameboy, the iPhone opened up gaming yet again to a new wealth of people due to its broad range of uses. These new phones would be used by everybody, allowing the gaming market to change and create genres of gaming specific to the mobile space (games that were quick and not too time immersive). Smartphones helped to spawn a new genre within the gaming market of Japan itself, called *gacha*. In this roulette gambling system, people can pay actual monetary currency to roll for the chance of obtaining a character within the game. Many of these gacha games are on mobile devices such as smartphones, making it a form of playable media accessible on the go and whenever the mood strikes a person. Mobile games are the only or best option for quick entertainment that can be turned on and off at leisure. In one of these gacha games, many characters from *The Tale of the Heike* are advertised to attract more people. The names of the characters from this tale have an iconic pull that helps to push sales, not just in the gacha genre but in other genres.

#### **1.4 Chapter and Games Overview**

This thesis analyzes various games to showcase how the characters from *The Tale of the Heike* have crossed mediums and have been given a new afterlife for a new generation. The first



chapter focuses on the nature of Tomoe, looking at Tomoe's use in the modern context, balancing and coming to terms with both her inherent masculinity and femininity. Tomoe points out that someone does not need to choose between two sides of themselves but instead accept who they are. We will see how the game developers change her character to adhere to that message or decide to create a fresh and new interpretation. For the specific analysis of this character, the video game series, *Persona* and *Fate/Grand Order* will be discussed with its interpretation of Tomoe and the differing approaches each takes to realize the character.

The Japanese mobile game titled *Fate/Grand Order* is of the gacha genre, with the term gacha originating from the coin-turn capsule machines that give out various toys or candy, known as *Gacha-Gacha* (for the sound of the turning of the crank to produce the toys). The toy or candy received from the capsule machines is random based on the number of toys within the device (i.e., five toys equal a 1/5 chance). This genre transferred to the mobile platform (phones), first appearing in 2010 with Konami's mobile game *Dragon Collection*. The game used a free-to-play model (which almost all mobile gacha games to this day emulate) wherein they would implement the gacha system to make money. Through paying money to obtain an in-game currency, the player could roll in an in-game lottery to receive different items and characters to elevate their combat ability (the better the item, the percentage to obtain would drop). The chances to get many characters within *Fate/Grand Order* stand at about a 1% chance. The system in place has much in common with gambling, and due to the heavy restrictions on gambling in Japan (much being considered an illegal activity), the mobile gaming version of gacha is an easily accessible and just as addicting alternative where the players can simultaneously gamble and play a video game. This thesis will examine how the Heike

characters are monetized in Fate/Grand Order to promote the gacha gambling system, utilizing a mixture of modern appeal and an established character's natural allure.

*Fate/Grand Order* includes many historical and mythical Japanese figures, with characters from the *Heike* outside of Tomoe also appearing, some earning spotlight in the game's story. Someone uninitiated to the series may wonder, what is *Fate* and why is it essential that the *Heike* characters are prominently showcased? The series is known for the Holy Grail War, in which figures from history or mythology are brought back to life as superpowered beings known as servants by a magician termed a 'master.' The relationship between the two is similar to a witch with their familiar. These servants and masters fight together against other servant-master pairs, seeking to be the last one standing to earn the Holy Grail and attain a single wish to be granted. Having the *Heike* characters appear in a game named *Fate* is fitting, as many characters had fates that were deemed tragic and unhappy. Characters from the *Heike* in the game are given a chance to change the fate they were dealt with. The game in question here, *Fate/Grand Order* (termed *FGO* for short), is a mobile spinoff of this concept published in 2015, where multiple historical or mythical figures from around the world can be summoned or attained to utilize them in your party (group of characters) to fight against enemies. The story of *FGO* plays out much like another genre of games popular within Japan, referred to as a visual novel. As the name implies, visual novels are interactive gaming experiences in which a story is told primarily through text (similar to a novel), and the player makes dialogue choices for the main character, pushing the narrative forward. The genre reenacts the process of reading a novel while adding the interactivity that gaming is known for. Within the game's visual novel structure, much of the characterization of figures from *The Tale of the Heike* is visible, as the exposition and stories of the characters are explained in these novel-like sections. The visual novel style utilizes the novel-

level commentary the genre allows to explain to the player the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of characters such as Tomoe inside of the game's narrative without forcing the player to infer the intentions or have voiced dialogue stating those thoughts (like a villain monologuing their evil plan).

The second game analyzed that utilizes Tomoe is the JRPG (Japanese Role-Playing Game) *Persona 4*. Role-playing games are in both the Japanese and Western gaming markets; however, the specifics of the Japanese games have earned them the title of JRPG in the West. Hutchinson describes some of the characteristics of JRPGs that have been taken note of as “‘textual’ or ‘literary’ nature, with tightly structured linear scripts, deep psychological character development, and the sheer length of the text, with many games taking 50– 100 hours to complete.”<sup>11</sup> The *Persona* game series is a JRPG with each entry set in present-day Japan (correlating to the year the specific game was released). Within this setting, the game puts the player in the shoes of a Japanese teenager seeking to figure out who they want to be. As they play as a teenager living out a high school life, and gaining friends, some event specific to the game happens in which they, as the character, unlock their inner ability to manifest this supernatural entity known as a persona that embodies their inner self. Through these games, the friends close to the player character also unlock the power of a persona as they go through the trials of being a teenager in Japan trying to figure out who they want to be in the world. Tomoe appears in the entry to the series titled *Persona 4* (*Persona 4 Golden* for the revamped/remade version released at a later date in 2008 and 2012, respectively, the latter version having new scenes and gameplay added to promote buying the game a second time for the new experiences).

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<sup>11</sup> See Hutchinson, 6.

Within this game, one of the main cast attains the persona, in other words, a supernatural entity of the *Heike* character of Tomoe that directly correlates to the experiences of that character within the world, trying to figure out who she is and whom she wants to be. Tomoe is used to discuss coming of age, gender roles, and teen angst. The title of *Persona* correlates to the personas that people put on to fit in with society, with the true self being hidden and, much of the time, denying its existence. Tomoe exists as the true self of a teenage girl, the part of oneself that she needs to come to terms with.

The second chapter focuses on Benkei in modern pop culture. Much like Tomoe, his role in the tale is not prominent as he mainly accompanies Yoshitsune. Benkei is known for his actions and legends outside *The Tale of the Heike*. I will analyze Benkei in several games and media. In particular, the Gilgamesh character (he embodies many traits and iconic events that surround the character Benkei) who appears in the *Final Fantasy* franchise (started 1987). While the character of Gilgamesh appears in multiple franchise entries, I will focus on the 14th entry in the series because it has the most in-depth and frequent character usage. In many franchise games, he appears as a reoccurring boss, but in 14, he is added as a central part of the cast of characters in some of the story content. As a supplement, the *Fate/Grand Order* game will showcase their version of Benkei. Benkei's use in video games can show us how Benkei himself was propelled into a hero status through varying legends that expanded his story not from the *Heike*.

*Final Fantasy 14* (running from 2010-present with a reboot of the original game coming out in 2013) does not include direct references to the *Heike*. Still, it has a strong-arm approach to alluding to many tales and entertainment surrounding Benkei. The game belongs to the genre known as MMO-RPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game), where groups of

different people play together and fight against enemies in battles developed for these groups to defeat. This game series is mainly known for stories and worlds more than anything else.

Typically, MMOs are known for the game's battle content and the interconnectivity it allows with other players across the globe. *Final Fantasy 14* is a departure from that identity; it concentrates on the characters and story that other games in the genre do not. In particular, this game has been lauded by the community that plays it for its rich story and world. In the game, you create a customizable character where you are the main protagonist of the story interacting with the various figures presented to you, adding a new level to the interactivity of the medium, communicating not only with the NPCs (Non-Player Characters) but with other people playing alongside you, sharing in the experience. Within the game itself, the character of Gilgamesh, which will serve as the Benkei equivalent (due to how despite the name, Gilgamesh is shown to mimic the traits of Benkei instead of the figure after which he is named), is a recurring character within one of the game's most popular side story content (stories the game tells outside of the main narrative that is undertaken at the player's leisure) known as the Hildibrand questline. Gilgamesh becomes a recurring boss that is fought within the questline to progress the story.

Chapter three focuses on Yoshitsune. Yoshitsune has had the most iterations of any character in *The Tale of the Heike*. His tragic story is well known to people in Japan. Yoshitsune differs from the other two in his stature as a cultural hero. For Yoshitsune, the games will be used in varying degrees to analyze what developers deemed important about the character and how he evolved. A concentration will be put on the depictions from *Yoshitsune Eiyūden*, *Nioh 2*, and *Fate/Grand Order*, as these games have the most in-depth characterization of Yoshitsune. The final game that will supplement this analysis is *Persona* which will be more limited due to his iconography being the sole usage.

*Yoshitsune Eiyūden* (2005) is from the PlayStation 2 era of games. The game was made by the developer known as From Software which is known today as one of the most popular and successful game developers lauded for the gameplay and difficulty of their games. This game's genre is hack and slash, where the controller's buttons are repeatedly pressed to hack and slash enemies. The game follows Yoshitsune's heroic legend (his story) while romanticizing and exaggerating elements to promote combat gameplay encounters. Yoshitsune is created to be an appealing action hero (a physically attractive man gifted in the art of combat). This game will not have much content analysis due to the difficulty in acquiring and playing through the game (the game was released only in Japan on an older console with no American localization). The analysis is based on examining the narrative and art from watching playthroughs of the game on YouTube. Yoshitsune as the titular lead speaks to the character's enduring popularity in Japan, where he was given his own game as the lead. However, the game was not localized to other countries, which presents the question of if the company in charge was not sure that Yoshitsune would be successful outside of Japan or made the game solely for Japan.

*Nioh 2* (2020) is a game inspired by the gameplay style that From Software is known for today, known as Soulsborne (the challenging combat encounters). It is a game set in a warring feudal Japan that brings many historical Japanese figures to the front and combines them with Japanese mythology. The timeline and historicity of the game are of no concern to the developers as you, the player, meet many famous Japanese figures alive at separate points in time. The game is known for its difficulty and Japanese setting. The gameplay is unforgiving if the player makes a mistake, making it a game that a specific audience enjoys. I will examine the game's DLC (downloadable content) for its iterations of Benkei and Yoshitsune.

In addition to the analysis of the adaptations of the characters, the interactivity of the particular games will be discussed. To what extent and end does the player get to interact with these iconic characters? Does the player get to control them, be the character within the story, or are they instead being inserted personally into the games through self-inserts? I will look at how the games get the younger generation to care about these characters in a new contemporary moment by having them form bonds with the characters only able to be achieved through video game interactivity.

The conclusion will return to the themes of interactivity and adaptation present in all the games. Drawing those themes with ideas within a more extensive scope, such as Furukawa presenting the old as new in this contemporary moment and Fukushima's impact on creating these games and their iterations of these characters. Japanese video games and gaming as a medium will be positioned as a subject worthy of a deeper inspection and level of analysis as they can provide meaningful commentary about the current contemporary moment and cautionary tales for the future. In particular, I will showcase the importance of using the characters from the *Heike* as models for a younger generation to see and how it connects the popularity of the old to that of the young. Gaming is now a worldwide phenomenon, and the implications of a world where video games can cross cultures and countries to affect and inspire people that the old texts could not have without this contemporary omnipresent medium of video games cannot be ignored. I will end by looking at how this line of research can be continued and expanded upon.

## 2.0 Literature Review

Video game studies was in its infancy when the very first articles were written about Pong (1972). Despite their popularity as a hobby, video games are still an emerging topic for academic study. Video game studies is an essential field due to the stories that games tell and the issues they address being subject to a global audience, with the medium garnering worldwide popularity. Video games provide an entertainment form unlike any other as the medium's interactivity (how the player interacts with and impacts the game world) allows the audience to be a participant rather than a viewer or reader. Video games are a vehicle through which audiences can experience new worlds and stories that tell much about the culture and time they were created in.

Most of the scholarship that can be found appeared only after the year 2000, with works such as Barry Atkins' *More Than a Game* (2003) described in summaries as "The first academic work dedicated to the study of computer games in terms of the stories they tell."<sup>12</sup> In recent years academic video game analysis has increased evident by Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernard Perron's *The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies* (2014)<sup>13</sup> being a comprehensive reference work including essays of many scholars in the field. Perhaps the most prolific scholar in the field is Ian Bogost, who has written books on video game studies, his work being cited in no small

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<sup>12</sup> Barry Atkins, *More Than a Game: The Computer Game As Fictional Form*. Manchester University Press, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Mark J. P. Wolf, and Bernard Perron. *The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2013.



number of works. One of the medium's most prominent creators, Japan, has garnered scholarly attention. Mio Consalvo, in *Atari to Zelda: Japan's Videogames in Global Contexts* (2016),<sup>14</sup> explores the cross-cultural interaction between Japanese games and the West. However, Rachael Hutchinson's *Japanese Culture Through Video Games* is the most impactful work on Japanese video games.

Rachael Hutchinson seeks to showcase the cultural significance and artistic mode of expression in video games by examining an array of Japanese games across various genres. Hutchinson provides one of the few works exploring gaming in connection to classical literature. Her chapter on *Okami* (PlayStation 2, 2006) discusses the game's relationship to the *Kojiki* (*Record of Ancient Matters* 712). In another section, she delves into how Japanese game developers have addressed feelings towards nuclear power (its dangers) and how they develop and interpret violence, such as in the popular game series *Metal Gear Solid*.<sup>15</sup> Hutchinson introduces how video games have become a medium that can comment on world events or cultural worries. This book intervenes in the discussion about video games by showcasing how Western and Japanese games can make in-depth commentary and reflect upon the essential values of a culture and people. My work aims to complement Rachael Hutchinson's through a couple of avenues. The first avenue considers a broader range of games and genres to add to our understanding of the current Japanese video game industry. As for the second, it considers the adaptation of *Heike* characters as a topic for video games as commentary on Japanese gaming culture.

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<sup>14</sup> Mia Consalvo, *Atari to Zelda: Japan's Videogames in Global Contexts*. MIT Press, 2016.

<sup>15</sup> See Hutchinson, 207.

Much of the scholarship on video games has emphasized the process of adaptation. This study will follow Linda Hutcheon's definition of adaptation. Specifically, my work will be an explanatory model through which we can examine adaptation in video games as constantly changing palimpsests. Video game adaptation is hardly ever one-to-one in transferring the characters into the medium. Instead, the adaptations take separate parts and piece them together to fit into the world and story of the video game adapting them. My work showcases how the *Heike* characters are taken and adapted to be unrecognizable and new yet still remain themselves in ways only the medium can, combining the old and the new.

In a recent engagement with Hutcheon's work, Dawn Stobbart in *Adaptation and new media* (2018) notes, "Franchises expand beyond Linda Hutcheon's definition of adaptation proper, and they offer a method by which to satisfy fans who demand fidelity by creating prequels, sequels, and spin-off texts."<sup>16</sup> We see this in the more recent adaptations as Stobbart showcases the Telltale company's *The Walking Dead* in which it is not the direct tie in but is a spin-off concerning a whole different cast of characters created specifically for the video game with their own story. She notes the branching narratives starting to be produced in which the player can change the narrative with their own choices, introducing a new level to the interactivity that helps define the realm of video games. Stobbart's work is essential as it begins to show us the interactivity that is special to the medium of video games. However, her work is confined to Western media. This thesis supplements her work by looking at Japanese cultural

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<sup>16</sup> Dawn Stobbart, "Adaptation and New Media." *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018, 384.

heroes being adapted into game characters and how their adaptations interact and are changed by the player.

Kevin M. Flanagan in *Videogame Adaptation* (2017)<sup>17</sup> describes four encounters that define video game adaptation, two of which are noted in the discussion with this Thesis. The first encounter addresses the differing levels of adaptation, going from the more literal transferring of the source material (such as in the Lego games based on famous IPs) to the transference of the experience and mood of a source, connecting us back to Stobbart with *The Walking Dead*. “Localization,” Flanagan’s third encounter, details the process of gaming being accessible to a worldwide market in which translation must be done to enable the games to cross cultures effectively or ineffectively, depending on the quality of the translation. While covering video game adaptation, Flanagan does not look to Japan or the action of bringing these old literary characters into new worlds created by a modern medium. My work supplements his by detailing how these characters from the *Heike* are brought into video games, how they interact with the world around them and the implications from a Japanese to a global scale.

Flanagan references the process of bringing a game to another country through localization but does not specify the adaptation processes within each country. In Japan, there is a much larger concentration on what Marc Steinberg qualifies as the media mix in *Anime’s Media Mix*<sup>18</sup>. For Japan, adaptation and translation across media is considered the norm. Japan

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<sup>17</sup> Kevin M. Flanagan, “Videogame Adaptation.” *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, edited by Thomas Leitch, Oxford University Press, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Marc Steinberg, *Anime’s Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan*. University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

has anime and manga that are adapted into video games as part of the media mix to promote overall sales of the IP (IPs such as *Naruto* and *Dragon Ball*), and vice versa. Some games are made into anime to promote the game instead. Steinberg situates this as first being successful with the IP of *Astro Boy* in the 1950s and '60s. Every form of media within Japan is interconnected and is not a one-way street that many of the works on video game adaptation seem to make it out to be. Steinberg concentrates not on the media mix surrounding video games but on anime. I supplement Steinberg's work by showcasing video games that mix influences in adaptation from all over the media mix. This leaves room to discuss how adaptation in Japanese games, while similar enough to where we can use a definition from Hutcheon, differentiates itself through the interconnectivity of media.

As I look at the *Heike* characters, I connect them with other iterations and adaptations, relying upon the extensive scholarship available. Building off of the *Heike* itself as material with which we are concerned, Paul Varley's *Warriors of Japan: As Portrayed in the War Tales* (1994) provides an excellent historical overview of war tales such as the *Heike*, giving needed insight on the tale. Steven T. Brown is used for all things Tomoe. He introduces us to the multiple histories that Tomoe exists within, providing us with an understanding and a level with which we can proceed to look at the character. Japanese studies scholarship addresses the many adaptations and iterations of the Heike characters in older media such as literature and theater. My study supplements the scholarship by looking at these characters in modern contexts, in contemporary media. Discussing these *Heike* characters together with the medium of video games has not been explored and can showcase the lasting impacts of the literature the scholarship covers.

Video games subject cultural tropes to creative repurposing, putting the audience in an active and exploratory role. Flanagan aptly states, "Videogames adapt, and make us into

adapters, at all stages of their conception, creation, distribution, and reception. Games are adapted from hypo texts, and the transformation of textual material that results from such a movement invites close analysis.”<sup>19</sup> In the ensuing chapters, I hope to follow Flanagan’s invocation to analyze how players and developers adapt and interact with the characters from the *Heike*. Video games are a rising medium that is ever-increasing in popularity and reach. The work done in the field has begun to address adaptation in its many forms. However, the work on adaptation in relation to classical texts and histories is still sparse and deserves a more in-depth gaze.

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<sup>19</sup> See Flanagan, 454.

### 3.0 Tomoe Gozen

Tomoe Gozen is a minor character in *The Tale of the Heike*, found solely within the episode “The Death of Kiso”. Yet, she is a popular character and considered the epitome of the woman warrior. She showcases relentless might, incredible athletic ability, and embodies the warrior mindset. Tomoe does all this in the tale despite being born in medieval Japan, where the role of women was limited. Despite her brief appearance in *The Tale of the Heike*, she leaves a lasting impression through her warrior prowess. Video games take this identity and play with it, producing a Tomoe who is as much of a warrior as she ever was but plays more into a modern interpretation of a woman and attractiveness.

In the tale, Tomoe is an outlier, different from every other woman in the story because she is also a warrior. Steven T. Brown, in his article “From Woman Warrior to Peripatetic Entertainer: The Multiple Histories of Tomoe” (1998), describes Tomoe for us “as a female warrior, female servant, leading general, mistress, wife, nun, miko, and asobime.”<sup>20</sup> Brown also notes, “It seems unlikely that the figure of Tomoe actually pushed the medieval envelope of gender, since on the battlefield Tomoe was rarely perceived as anything other than a woman warrior.”<sup>21</sup> Supplementing this is Paul Varley, who, in his book *Warriors of Japan: As Portrayed in the War Tales*, states in response to Tomoe’s description within the tale, which concentrates on her physical features, that “Such a description, although brief, is unusual since, as discussed

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<sup>20</sup> Steven T. Brown, “From Woman Warrior to Peripatetic Entertainer: The Multiple Histories of Tomoe.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 58, no. 1, June 1998, 185.

<sup>21</sup> See Brown, 197.

earlier, the war tales seldom say anything about the personal appearances of warriors, other than their armor and weapons.”<sup>22</sup> From the beginning, Tomoe being a woman is intrinsically part of who the character is and to an extent, concentrated on within the stories created about her. Tomoe straddles the line of both masculinity and femininity. Scholars such as Brown and Varley have noted that Tomoe embodies both feminine and masculine ideals, setting her apart from contemporaries and marking her as unique. The games analyzed in this chapter prove the scholar’s conclusions as both games showcase a Tomoe that does not deny her masculine or feminine features. Instead, they change them to fit into a modern image of what those features could be.

Helen Craig McCullough shows us the importance of translation being an aspect of adaptation with Chapter 9-4 of the *Heike* “The Death of Kiso”, where she describes Tomoe as:

“...Tomoe was especially beautiful, with white skin, long hair, and charming features. She was also a remarkably strong archer, and as a swordswoman she was a warrior worth a thousand, ready to confront a demon or god, mounted or on foot. She handled unbroken horses with superb skill; she rode unscathed down perilous descents. Whenever a battle was imminent, Yoshinaka sent her out as his first captain, equipped with strong armor, an oversized sword, and a mighty bow;”<sup>23</sup>

Translations are adaptations, with McCullough’s pulling the tale further away from the original form of dispersion via Biwa Hoshi. They were priests who would recite the tale alongside a Biwa

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<sup>22</sup> H. Paul Varley, *Warriors of Japan as Portrayed in the War Tales*. University of Hawaii Press, 1994, 102-104.

<sup>23</sup> Helen Craig McCullough, *The Tale of the Heike*. Original printing 1988, Stanford Univ. Press, 2005, 291.

(lute-like instrument) accompaniment. Video game designers are no different from McCullough, as they take their interpretations and readings of Tomoe and incorporate that into how she is depicted in each game. *Fate/Grand Order* will look at Tomoe's myriad histories and adapt them according to their artistic takes on the character. Meanwhile, *Persona 4* looks less at the history of the character and more at what her identity means in the modern day and age.

This chapter considers how Tomoe is adapted inside the video games *Fate/Grand Order* and *Persona 4*. She is a complex character that adapts to fit into these created worlds. As a creation of the *Heike*, Tomoe will embody the tragedy inherent to her character in *Fate/Grand Order*. Yet, Tomoe will go beyond just being a vehicle for tragedy as the game will have the players experience both the masculine and feminine traits of the character in her modernization to the world of the 2010s. In *Persona 4*, Tomoe embodies inner identity as she represents the internal struggles of a teenage girl coming to accept herself. Through this analysis, the reasons for choosing to implement Tomoe will be revealed as the interactivity of the medium allows for narrative character choices for Tomoe that help push each respective game and their story forward.

### **3.1 Tomoe in Mobile Gaming**

*Fate/Grand Order* is a mobile device-based gacha game where historical and mythical figures are introduced to the player's roster of heroes as recruitable characters. The player is the "Master" a magician capable of summoning these heroes to the modern age to aid them in their quest. The world as we know it is destroyed within the game itself by interference in humanity's collective history. The player recruits these heroes to help them restore history to the proper



state. Tomoe Gozen is one of those heroes that has been added to the game with multiple interpretations of her character being introduced. She stands alongside mythical and historical heroes such as Gilgamesh (the ancient Sumerian king), Achilles, and King Arthur (known as Artoria). Tomoe fits right into the gacha genre as the main cash-grab characters to obtain are typically beautiful women. Outside of being a woman, Tomoe is able to capitalize on being an already established popular character to which a fresh interpretation of the character unique to the game itself would be a safe path to produce a profit instead of risking a miss with a new character. *Fate/Grand Order* recycles Tomoe as a legacy collectible item only available in this game.

The *Fate* series, as the title hints, is about the implications of fate and destiny, what is supposed to be. Tomoe is a character who had little control over her destiny due to the time period she lived in. The *Heike* is about tragic fate; a game called *Fate* gives Tomoe a chance to acquire something she never had: the power to change fate by her hand. She is given the opportunity to work towards changing her past into a happy ending, that is, if she is summoned into what the game deems a Holy Grail war. Instead, for the game, Tomoe is summoned to help restore humanity after its destruction. She is determined to be a hero worthy to fight for the world's fate. Tomoe is asked to give up changing her fate to revert the destruction of humanity and change the fate of everyone alive but herself.

Within *Fate/Grand Order*, there are role and class systems to which heroes are assigned. In order to be put into the game, Tomoe had to match with these roles as matching with one proves you are a hero of repute in that field (showcasing Tomoe's mastery over weapons). These systems determine a character's effectiveness in battle. There are two classes with three roles under each. They are called the Knight class and the Calvary class. The Knight class has the

roles of Saber, Archer, and Lancer. Tomoe has been given two roles under the Knight class; Archer and Saber. This draws upon the description of Tomoe given to us by *The Tale of the Heike*. Tomoe is a skilled warrior with both the bow and the sword being described as wielding both.

Tomoe's Archer variant is the first and foremost iteration of the character presented within the game. The depiction is recognizable as Tomoe from *The Tale of the Heike*. Her character art showcases pale skin, long white hair, and an outfit that resembles a mix between a miko (shrine maiden) and a samurai. She wields a sword in one hand and a naginata in the other, with her bow appearing during battle animations. Within *Fate/Grand Order*, it seems the developers have combined the warrior and miko descriptions to interpret how she looked. This connection is not explicitly stated, but Tomoe reflects many traits Brown mentioned in his work. Brown notes that Tomoe being seen as a miko could be due to a Sengoku era *Yōkyoku*<sup>24</sup> or Tomoe's fate in the *Genpei Suiseki* (extended version of the *Heike*), where she becomes a nun.<sup>25</sup> This leads us to believe that the game developers were selective in what they take from tradition as they are using stories created about Tomoe outside of the *Heike* in addition to her chapter in the tale. This can be seen further when looking at what is taken for her role in relation to the player as Tomoe becomes the player character's warrior/servant in the game (she is in the game's world defined as a female servant due to servant being what they call summoned heroic spirits). In her interactions with the player, Tomoe treats them as her general/lord who gives her orders in combat. Tomoe showcases this in a line directed to the player: "Being my Master

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<sup>24</sup> Vocal music is sung by a chorus accompanied by an instrumental ensemble.

<sup>25</sup> For more on the record of Tomoe as a nun, see Brown, 193.

means you are my lord. My only job is to serve you in earnest.”<sup>26</sup> Tomoe is a story as well as a character. In *Fate*, her character is layered with the tradition surrounding her while she is in her Archer variant.

The Saber variant of Tomoe Gozen within *Fate/Grand Order* is an alternative take on the character added after her Archer variant. This variant draws upon Tomoe’s legend that describes her as a proficient swordswoman. However, that is where the connection between the Tomoe of *The Tale of the Heike* and the Tomoe of *Fate/Grand Order* ends. Tomoe’s Saber self is a summer version designed wearing a swimsuit meant to entice the players into rolling in the gacha system to obtain her. While Tomoe was always an object to be obtained within the confines of the game, the swimsuit version's creation further objectifies her to be appealing to a modern male gaze. She is made to embody more of what the game developers perceive as a modern anime woman and less of the fierce warrior that *The Tale of the Heike* made her to be. To showcase the importance of this, we will look back to the statements made by Brown and Varley. *Fate/Grand Order* crosses the line Tomoe straddles almost entirely into the realm of femininity with the swimsuit version. Tomoe, in this form, is now sexualized; she has been designed to be thought of as purely a woman, her feminine traits brought to the forefront while the masculine is dialed back. In the media that Tomoe has been in through the years since the creation of the tale, her character, while sexualized, has never been in the approach that *Fate/Grand Order* takes. The sexualization of Tomoe can be seen as a rewriting of the warrior into a recentering of her as a woman. This swimsuit version of Tomoe shows how video games

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<sup>26</sup> For quotes from *Fate/Grand Order*, see *Tomoe Gozen (4-Star Archer Servant) - Grand Order Wiki*. [https://grandorder.wiki/Tomoe\\_Gozen](https://grandorder.wiki/Tomoe_Gozen).

can make us see her in new and interesting ways, as before *Fate/Grand Order* and the gacha genre, putting Tomoe in a modern bikini-style swimsuit would be unheard of. Gaming introduces new concepts and ideas for characters like Tomoe, revitalizing them for use in a contemporary entertainment medium.

However, the sexualization of male and female characters (primarily female) is intrinsically part of the gacha genre. Typically, free-to-play games use this obtainable character for monetization and profit. For an audience that is assumed to be primarily male, what better way to gain money than to sexualize a female character they have never seen in that context before and sell it to them? Tomoe's sexualization, while seemingly a significant departure from what many would know of the character, is only just a part of the adaptation process of bringing her into the gacha genre. We genuinely see Tomoe in this aspect as an echo of her previous appearances. Much of what one can recognize about the character is still there when looked at from different angles, such as personality or background. The new has only been written on top of the old, as even though the character has bridged a new genre and is now battling in a swimsuit, it is still Tomoe, as the game has told us she is. The sexualization of the male characters is more reserved than with the females as the male characters are typically just created to be an Adonis-like figure (perfect male body in terms of muscles and looks).

Tomoe's personality within *Fate/Grand Order* combines the differing stories describing her. She embodies the descriptions of the female warrior, a leading general, and a wife/mistress. Elizabeth Oyler, in "Giō: Women and Performance in the 'Heike Monogatari'" (2004), describes women within *The Tale of the Heike*, "They represent the home that is abandoned as men leave

for war, and their stories of loss and longing are among the tale's most moving.”<sup>27</sup> the loss and longing describe this interpretation of Tomoe as she is showcased to still be loyal to Kiso as both a warrior and as a lover, having the dialogue line, “I was not by Lord Yoshinaka’s side during his final moments in battle. That is my ultimate regret.”<sup>28</sup> This line is reminiscent of the Noh play *Tomoe* (circa 15<sup>th</sup> century), wherein her spirit says to a priest, “I am Tomoe the woman-warrior, / But since I am a woman I was not allowed / To die here with my lord, / And so my smoldering anger keeps me here.”<sup>29</sup> This suggests a connection to the multiple versions of Tomoe’s story that contribute to her in-game depiction. In much of her voiced dialogue directed to the player character, Tomoe tells the player character about her and Yoshinaka. Varley states, “Some scholars have suggested that Tomoe, although probably a fictional character, represents those warriors and others attached to armies who survived battles and went on to tell about them,”<sup>30</sup> Tomoe’s constant references to Yoshinaka within the game can be construed as a continuation of that form of knowledge preservation as the Tomoe within the game gives insight to the character on Yoshinaka. Due to Tomoe being a preserver of knowledge and how the heroic spirits continually get summoned across time, Tomoe can be construed to continue that role with the player character as she can now preserve their history. *Fate/Grand Order* continues to show how their Tomoe is steeped in the tradition of the past, not limiting her to just the interpretation from the *Heike*.

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<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth Oyler, “Giō: Women and Performance in the *Heike Monogatari*.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 64, no. 2, Dec. 2004, 341.

<sup>28</sup> For quotes from *Fate/Grand Order*, see Tomoe Gozen’s Grandorder.wiki page

<sup>29</sup> A. L. Sadler, and Paul S. Atkins. *Japanese Plays: Noh, Kyogen, Kabuki*. Tuttle Pub, 2010, 28.

<sup>30</sup> See Varley, 104.

The game, however, adds another aspect to her personality unique to the interpretation of Tomoe they have created. Tomoe in *The Tale of the Heike* is a character that takes the way of the warrior, mastering her combat abilities. The way of the warrior and combat in general within *The Tale of the Heike* is considered something only men typically take part in, with Tomoe being the outlier. *Fate/Grand Order* decided to update this trait with a modern twist by making her enjoy and be skilled at the very platform they were using, video games, a realm traditionally thought of as masculine. In a report by the game journal GameSpot in 2015, covering a survey done by the Pew Research Center, they found that “60 percent of adults (men and women) believed that most people who play video games are men; this includes 57 percent of women who themselves said they play games.”<sup>31</sup> While this survey was done with American participants, it can be construed that similar views are shared within the Japanese gaming sphere. Video games are considered a male-centric activity, one of the many ways young men can assert combative impulses that lie at the heart of warrior masculinity. In *Fate/Grand Order*, Tomoe becomes interested in video games after being summoned into the modern day, showcasing how she enjoys the activities generally associated with men. The Saber variant of Tomoe incorporates this aspect as a central theme of her design, as her swords are controllers for the Virtual Reality (VR) gaming headset she uses to help her attack her enemies. Virtual Reality is a recent addition to gaming, with various headsets released in 2016. Having Tomoe incorporate that new video game technology in her design shows a desire to mesh Tomoe with modernity making her relevant to a gaming audience.

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<sup>31</sup> Eddie Makuch, “Men and Women Play Games Almost Equally, Survey Finds.” *GameSpot*, 15 Dec. 2015, <https://www.gamespot.com/articles/men-and-women-play-games-almost-equally-survey-fin/1100-6433130/>.

Tomoe was added under the name Archer of the Inferno in “The Stage of Carnage: Shimousa” chapter of the game set during the 16<sup>th</sup> year of Kan’ei (1639-40). Her anger and sorrow over being unable to prevent Yoshinaka’s death had been manipulated to the point where the demon inside her was set free, drawing from the idea of the Noh play *Tomoe* in which she’s caught in an afterlife of anger and regret. However, once the character becomes summonable as an ally to the player, she is given a new afterlife unique to the experience of the game. Tomoe is not given the agency to change her fate in many of her iterations. Yet here she is now, able to have a new life. If she attains the omnipotent Holy Grail, which grants her a wish, she can change what her fate has become. If not, she still now had a new lord under whom she served where she could ensure he accomplished what Yoshinaka could not survive to see a better world.

In *Fate/Grand Order*, Tomoe has the blood of Oni within her. Much of the biography of Tomoe is debated, leaving room for free artistic interpretation of the character.<sup>32</sup> She is touted for having immense strength, showcased in the game through her demon blood empowering her. The inspiration for Tomoe being visibly demonic (in an Oni-like state) could also be drawn from her being “a warrior equal to a thousand men” as quoted in *The Tale of the Heike*. Stories of Tomoe’s strength and warrior prowess would have caused people to fear her. That fear could be attributed to turning her into a demon, as that would have been what her foes on the battlefield saw her as. Alternatively, making Tomoe’s strength an inheritance of demon blood can be seen as an attempt to devalue her strength compared to men's. The thought process possibly was that no woman could have power matching that of men. This would not be a new occurrence as Ryan Sassano-Higgins points out in *Women Warriors of Premodern Japan* (2008) that due to the

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<sup>32</sup> For more on Tomoe’s debated history, see Brown, 185.

constant different treatment Tomoe received from other male warriors in “The Death of Kiso” there was “a conscious effort on the part of the authors of the tale to degrade her personality in comparison with the men as a result of her biological sex.”<sup>33</sup> The developers could be continuing the patriarchal themes present in the tale itself.<sup>34</sup>

Tomoe’s combat abilities combine the personality traits taken from *The Tale of the Heike* and the Oni blood lore the game gives her. Her ultimate attack, otherwise known in the game as her noble phantasm, prominently showcases the combination. The noble phantasm named ‘On Arorikya Sowaka’ is described in the game as “Tomoe’s grief at not dying alongside Yoshinaka, combined with her own inner fire and her monstrous oni strength, manifest in the form of a Noble Phantasm.”<sup>35</sup> The attack utilizes Tomoe’s strength as she hurls the target into the sky, piercing it with a flaming arrow imbued with her love and grief. Her regular attacks showcase her ability as a weapons master utilizing the sword, naginata, and bow to damage enemies. Tomoe has unlockable skills, each drawing upon either the manufactured aspects or legend-based aspects of her personality. The first skill, Demonic Nature of Oni, draws upon Tomoe’s demon strength to increase her attack. The second skill, Knowledge of Combat, draws upon Tomoe’s legend as a warrior and her experiences fighting under Yoshinaka, “it grants one the ability to fight bravely in such a frenetic conflict. Many against many, one against many... those

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<sup>33</sup> Ryan Sassano-Higgins, *Fighting from the Shadows: Women Warriors of Premodern Japan*. State University of New York at Binghamton, 67.

<sup>34</sup> The Game’s Mascot character is a female King Arthur, so it is doubtful that this is true. However, due to the interpretation being open ended, the possibility must be noted.

<sup>35</sup> For quotes from *Fate/Grand Order*, see Tomoe Gozen’s Grandorder.wiki page.



are the battles to which Tomoe is accustomed”<sup>36</sup> The inspiration for *Fate/Grand Order*’s takes on Tomoe is summarized in her profile within the game, “A fair-skinned, long haired, and beautiful archer as strong as a thousand warriors... that is indeed Tomoe Gozen.” *Fate/Grand Order* draws upon the Tomoe presented within *The Tale of the Heike* and the various stories surrounding her to craft an interpretation of the character that remains faithful to those past interpretations. Simultaneously *Fate/Grand Order* takes artistic steps to make their interpretation unique from the others before it to gain the attention of their player base. *Persona 4* chooses to circulate an adaptation entirely on its own, owing little to the past representations of the character.

### 3.2 Tomoe’s Persona

The *Persona* series developed by Atlus Systems (dating back to 1993) is known to take various legends and figures from history and adapt them to their games. There are many summonable personas throughout the games. However, there is only one Tomoe. This Tomoe is un-summonable and linked to a party member<sup>37</sup> character who appears within *Persona 4* (released in 2008, the remake in 2012). Each persona that the game creates is associated with a relevant tarot card. The *Persona* series is known for its narrative stories and decisions. The association with a tarot card directly relates to how Atlus wants that persona to be seen. Within

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<sup>36</sup> For quotes from *Fate/Grand Order* see, Tomoe Gozen’s Grandorder.wiki page.

<sup>37</sup> Party members are typically side characters that fight alongside the main character in RPG’s combat encounters.

the *Persona* series, the personas utilized by the side characters are always linked inextricably to the motivations and personality of the character that summoned them. This is vital for understanding this adaptation of Tomoe as it addresses the question of what it means for Tomoe to be a persona.

Addressing this question similarly to *Fate/Grand Order*, a prerequisite must be met to become a persona. The only requirement is that the character in question to become a persona must match in personality and goals to the character with whom they form a contract. In literal terms, the persona is the other self of the characters that share in their hopes and dreams and know their darkest secrets. Tomoe being a persona means the developers had to use an established and well-known character to match the narrative written for one of the main cast in the game. Tomoe as a persona needed to be a meticulous decision as creating a persona/character pair without it could lead to difficulties in narrative structure (matching Tomoe to a dainty character untalented at a fight would not make sense).

Artistically there are two showcases of what could be considered Tomoe within *Persona 4*. One is the character of Chie Satonaka, who embodies Tomoe within the game world. Chie is a high-school-age girl who wears a green track jacket over her school uniform, and she has short brown hair and a muscular build. In adapting Tomoe with the character of Chie, the game needed to allude to and connect the two characters. Gregory Pflugfelder notes about characters like Tomoe Gozen, “These individuals selectively incorporate elements of both genders into their personae, most commonly through the medium of apparel and hairstyle. Through such androgynous performances, which are usually only temporary, they empower themselves and

inspire awe in the reader/listener.”<sup>38</sup> For video games, having male characters with feminine traits or female characters with masculine traits is nothing new to the medium. However, for *Persona 4*, it was a choice that connected the two characters as Tomoe is known for the incorporation of masculine elements and to be of conventionally feminine appearance, and Chie, as an iteration of Tomoe, incorporates aspects of both genders into herself to allude to the connection between them. It is essential to see the links between Tomoe and Chie as it makes it possible to believe that the character of Chie is indeed a reimagining of Tomoe within the game’s modern world. Unlike *Fate/Grand Order*, where the Archer variant was heavily inspired by the tradition surrounding Tomoe, *Persona 4* pursues an approach that never explicitly states connections to tradition. In *Persona 4*, the player is left to discover the link to Tomoe through the allusions to her in the persona’s artistic direction and through the character of Chie herself (the game does not mention the Heike or Tomoe’s tradition but leaves hints for the players aware of Tomoe’s history to pick up on).

Chie has immense strength echoing that of Tomoe from *The Tale of the Heike*. She utilizes said strength throughout the game as that becomes her primary method of attacking enemies. Chie is interested in what is considered dominantly male interests, which makes her similar to Tomoe, not adhering to what was typically expected of women during *The Tale of the Heike*. Tomoe was a master of combat; Chie is interested in martial arts and fighting methods. The most significant similarity between the two that reinforces that Chie echoes Tomoe is their unconventional characteristics. In *The Tale of the Heike*, Tomoe is referred to as beautiful.

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<sup>38</sup> Gregory M. Pflugfelder, “Strange Fates. Sex, Gender, and Sexuality in Torikaebaya Monogatari.” *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 47, no. 3, 1992, 358.

However, that is different from what makes her unique. Her way of life, choosing to be in her element, to fight with the strength of a thousand warriors, draws her eyes to her. Similarly, Chie echoes that unconventionality by doing much of the same, choosing to be who she is in a world where many consider her not to be what a proper woman should be. However, Chie is forced to face many insecurities about herself to get to a state of acceptance. Within the game, Chie is introduced alongside her best friend Yukiko, who is the epitome of conventional Japanese beauty, so much so that her persona is based on the princess Konohana Sakuya, later evolving into the sun goddess Amaterasu. Chie is forced to face the inadequacies she believes she has within herself to save Yukiko. In the *Heike* and tradition, Tomoe is an inherently tragic character, unable to save her lord and lamenting that failing in death. By saving Yukiko, Chie fulfills the lingering regret that hangs over the character of Tomoe. This sets up the fulfillment of regret often seen in achieving the passing of souls into the afterlife. The audience is introduced to a new version of Tomoe that is able to work to avoid the failings of the original. *Persona 4*'s Tomoe/Chie combo gives the audience a video game exclusive Tomoe who is not bound by the tragedy that the *Heike* carries with it. Chie, of course, is never explicitly stated within the game to be the reincarnation of Tomoe, but with her persona being the entity of Tomoe herself, it begs for a comparison to be made between the two.

The second showcase of Tomoe is the persona of Chie that she wields within the confines of the game's story. This persona wears a *Kill Bill* styled yellow and black stripe jumpsuit with boxing boots and motorcycle gloves. She is adorned with a samurai waist guard and a shark fin motorcycle helmet from which long, flowing black hair emerges. The weapon she wields is a dual-bladed naginata. In an audio interview that the game's director Katsura Hashino did, he commented on the design of the personas of the main cast stating how they tried to match the

persona to the personality of the character that summoned them believing that while people in Japan were familiar with the names of mythical figures, they did not know their appearances<sup>39</sup>. With the Tomoe persona, this can be seen in many of the design choices, which reference other strong female characters in pop culture. However, these aspects also connect with the idea of Tomoe herself. The samurai waist guard, dual-bladed naginata, and long flowing black hair connect back to her original depiction in *The Tale of the Heike*. Tomoe's *Kill Bill* jumpsuit along with the boxer boots echo the interests of Chie. By echoing the interests of Chie, they call upon other references to what modern iterations of Tomoe-esque character traits would be. The *Kill Bill* jumpsuit refers to the main character of *Kill Bill* (Tarantino, 2003), The Bride, and her peerless ability within the world of that film as a warrior (as well as Bruce Lee from which those films derived their suit), drawing similarities between the characters of Tomoe and The Bride. Chie is interested in strength training and martial arts, where boxers have the physique of strength; giving the boxer boots to the persona version of Tomoe connects the two characters further with the strength they share.

*Persona 4* takes a liberal route when adapting the character of Tomoe. References are made to the Tomoe within *The Tale of the Heike* and supplementing legends. However, those are put to the side in favor of pursuing a more modern, fantastical take on the character in artistic aspects for the persona. Looking at the persona of Tomoe, Tomoe as she is known from the *Heike* cannot be seen. The persona itself is devoid of any personality as it is an embodiment of the inner power of the character Chie, showcasing a ghostly afterlife for Tomoe as she is no more

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<sup>39</sup> "Behind The Design Of Persona 4." *Siliconera*, 22 Sept. 2010, <https://www.siliconera.com/behind-the-design-of-persona-4/>.

than a phantasmal being. Within the game of *Persona 4*, the persona of Tomoe unlocked by Chie Satonaka is given the tarot card of the chariot. The chariot card is typically given the attributes of willpower, determination, strength, triumph over obstacles, and focus, everything that Tomoe within *The Tale of the Heike* embodied. Chie, being the modern echo of Tomoe, shares in all those traits with Tomoe. The developers suggest this identification through Chie's characterization. Chie Satonaka's characterization appears to be a faithful adaptation of Tomoe's personality. Tomoe was both a fierce warrior and a woman possessed of unmatched martial prowess in the realm of men. Chie showcases how the modern world would interpret Tomoe, a modern Tomoe in nearly every aspect of her personality. Tomoe is given an afterlife by living vicariously through Chie; she is allowed to be this young girl's guiding light, the image of acceptance of oneself, fighting back against the gender stereotypes of a new age.

### 3.3 Why Tomoe?

After discussing the implementation of Tomoe within the two games *Fate/Grand Order* and *Persona 4*, the question of why choose Tomoe for these roles over other notable characters within *The Tale of the Heike* remains. For *Fate/Grand Order*, a possible argument could be made that Tomoe would be one of the few viable options to implement over non-combatant characters such as Gio or Kiyomori for a combat-based game. However, that argument only holds up within the sphere of the game. *Fate/Grand Order* has implemented characters such as the author Murasaki Shikibu and the Chinese imperial consort Yang Guifei. Two notable non-combatants whose histories do not paint them as warriors. That leaves us with the line of thought that Tomoe as a character is more memorable and profitable for modern audiences. In his book *Anime's*

*Media Mix*, Marc Steinberg showcases how having a recognizable character image within the media mix is key in selling merchandise associated with the brand. He uses the example of *Astro Boy* and his early implementation in advertisements for toys, candy, and stickers compared to similar products not using the *Astro Boy* image/label. The products that used the images of *Astro Boy* and supporting characters sold better than those without. For a modern audience Tomoe's character is the more recognizable brand image. Tomoe is synonymous with the idea of the woman warrior in Japan not unlike how western countries may think of Joan of Arc in a similar context. Tomoe as a character grabs attention for a gaming audience more so than political actors as she to many is more interesting.

*Persona 4* takes a different approach to the question of, why? The Tomoe within *Persona 4* finds it hard to use her name as a brand being that the persona is only available in the game's combat. Her image is completely changed from that of *The Tale of the Heike*, almost unrecognizable in the artistic interpretation. Instead, what Tomoe stands for is key to understanding why she was chosen for the role. In the audio interview, the director stated that they decided to go with more Japanese personas due to the game's setting in the countryside of Japan. As the *Persona* series is known for their personas being based on many historical and mythological figures, a malleable figure was needed—Tomoe's ambiguous history made for an easily malleable entity. With the decision to go with more Japanese-centric personas weighing them down, they needed to craft a character that could embody whatever Japanese figure they chose. Chie Satonaka is a modern Tomoe. She lives as an outlier, an outcast as a teenage girl in modern Japan. She's interested in all things associated with men and less so interested in what is considered feminine. However, unlike Tomoe, she is plagued by insecurity and self-doubt over who she is. Others do not accept her, causing her to develop these notions; she feels alone in her

problems with no one to rely upon. Chie could not accept who she was as a person. Conversely, Tomoe is shown as confident in who she is. Tomoe has already accepted herself for who she was by the time we are introduced to her within *The Tale of the Heike*. Her only resentment that we are clued in on is through the extended version of the tale and stories created after—the resentment of how she was not allowed to die alongside her lord like all other male retainers. Chie needed to learn to accept who she was, just like Tomoe once did. Once Chie begins the process of accepting herself, she unlocks her persona of Tomoe, letting us the player know that Chie is starting to forge her own path. Chie will be confident in who she is no matter what others say about her. Tomoe is chosen to be the key to Chie’s acceptance.

We must also look to the interactivity of the medium of video games to see that through implementing Tomoe in these games her character can provide unique interactions with the player to create bonds or strengthen the message they want to tell. Within *Fate/Grand Order*, Tomoe now has a new lord, the player. The player character is her new reason for having this afterlife, this second chance at serving under someone who will let her carry out her duty as a warrior and not treat her differently than a man. As the player you also connect with the character as she expresses a similar interest to you as her trait of enjoying video games reaches outside of just the character interactivity and reaches the player directly. *Persona 4* has your character work alongside Tomoe to achieve your goal similar to that of the *Fate* franchise. However, here you are helping alongside Tomoe to get Chie to accept herself and grow into who she can be as a person. In both games you and Tomoe are part of a team working together to save others, the player is given a close look at who they can strive to be.



### 3.4 Concluding Thoughts on Tomoe Adaptation

The adaptation of Tomoe in *Fate/Grand Order* make her story and the rich tradition surrounding her accessible to video game users who may be unacquainted to the tales from the *Heike*. In *Fate/Grand Order*, Tomoe exists as an adaptation of the woman warrior of Japan that is put together with worldwide heroic figures, pushing us to think about Tomoe and, by extension, the *Heike* on a more global scale. Tomoe has to stand toe to toe with worldwide heroic icons such as King Arthur and his knights, the historical figure Nikola Tesla, and even gods like the Norse Skadi. *Fate/Grand Order* crafts their adaptation of Tomoe in both her versions meticulously to the point where they expect her and, by extension Japanese culture to stand equally with the rich, diverse cultures of the world. For *Fate/Grand Order*, Tomoe exists not only to introduce new users to the *Heike* but to add the literature and the tradition that follows it to the worldwide stage.

Looking at the adaptation of Tomoe in *Persona 4*, we go from the worldwide stage that *Fate/Grand Order* gives us to a rural Japanese town with only historical or mythical Japanese figures as the titular personas. The worldview is instead confined to a singular Japanese town and its residents. This Tomoe was not meant to make the *Heike* literature more accessible as the game tells us nothing of who Tomoe is; it is expected that the player already knows Tomoe's tradition. This adaptation meant to take an existing character that was assumed that the Japanese audience knew and have them form the connections between Tomoe and Chie themselves. This Tomoe is adapted for the audience already aware of the *Heike* to help flesh out who Chie is. For those who did not know of the *Heike*, Tomoe's design was meant to be the vehicle that tells us who both Chie and Tomoe are. The Bruce Lee jumpsuit tells us they are fighters while the naginata and Haidate (Japanese samurai thigh armor) are the only allusions to Tomoe as a Japanese warrior.

These two adaptations of Tomoe in video games showcase just how different the artistic interpretations of a character can be between separate games while simultaneously making us look at Tomoe in new and exciting ways. *Fate/Grand Order* introduces Tomoe to the worldwide stage, where she and the other *Heike* characters have to stand with the world's many diverse cultures. On a smaller scale, *Fate/Grand Order* also gives us Tomoe in a modern swimsuit decked out with modern video game equipment in a new guise that the character has never been associated with before, adding to the rich tradition that Tomoe carries. *Persona 4* forgoes pushing Tomoe and the *Heike* into direct comparison with worldwide literature and instead provides a confined story and take. However, due to the game's popularity internationally, the confined story was thrust into a global audience, through which the game introduced them to Tomoe. The players are introduced to a Tomoe that, on a surface level, resembles the Tomoe from the Noh play as a spirit but on deeper inspection reveals a dissection of identity in modern times. *Persona 4* makes think about Tomoe in relation to modern themes of identity and pop culture, separating her from the tradition to forge something new.

## 4.0 Benkei

Like Tomoe, Benkei is shown in tandem with his lord in *The Tale of the Heike*. Benkei in *The Tale of the Heike* is synonymous with Yoshitsune as he only appears in any relevance alongside the tragic hero. Most of what is known and loved about Benkei is not from *The Tale of the Heike* itself but rather from an extension of the legend of Yoshitsune called the *Gikeiki*. The *Gikeiki*, titled by McCullough in her translation, *Yoshitsune: A 15<sup>th</sup> century Japanese Chronicle* (1966), details stories about Yoshitsune and his retinue. Specifically, these stories expound upon what is known from the *Heike*, explaining how his retainers came under his service and what happened to Yoshitsune after the events detailed in the *Heike* leading up to his death. Benkei is given a backstory as a child raised to be a monk but with a monstrous appearance. Eventually, Benkei leaves the monastery and becomes a wanderer. Benkei starts to duel samurai and take their weapons, but after 999 duels, he unwittingly comes across Yoshitsune, who bests him and decides to join his retinue. The critical thing to note about the *Gikeiki*, Varley points out, is that it lacks almost all factuality. He states, “Apart from some information that can be historically corroborated, *Gikeiki* presents only legends (*densetsu*) about Yoshitsune... In other words, *Gikeiki* jumps almost directly from the pre-Gempei to the post-Gempei legends.”<sup>40</sup> For comparison, *The Tale of the Heike* is based on historical events but dramatizes them, often increasing the scale of the conflict to make events more dire.<sup>41</sup> Video games are rarely faithful narrators of history, dramatizing the *Heike* and creating new legends with their own stories

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<sup>40</sup> See Varley, 157.

<sup>41</sup> For more on the historicity of the *Heike*, See Varley chapter on Yoshitsune.

similar to the *Gikeiki*. Many of the Noh plays about Benkei and, by extension, Yoshitsune, take inspiration from their trials and tribulations within the *Gikeiki* not *The Tale of the Heike*. As we will see, much of what is taken about the character of Benkei into the realm of video games is from the iteration of him created in the *Gikeiki* and ensuing plays.

Benkei in the chosen video games is constantly mixed with other characters and cultures. We will see how these video games utilize the aesthetics of the tradition surrounding Benkei. He is mixed in *Final Fantasy* with the Mesopotamian Gilgamesh, where the game showcases all manner of physical aspects of Benkei's tradition. The Benkei/Gilgamesh combo looks like a character inspired by Kabuki and Noh (where he has starred in many plays) and acts like a character pulled from the stage to the game. Locations in the game also take after iconic moments from tradition, with every battle stage referring to his duel with Yoshitsune. *Fate/Grand Order* mixes Benkei with another character from Yoshitsune's retinue to push the idea of what it means in a game titled after the word fate for these certain characters to be brought back to life. The characters brought back to life in *Fate* need to have a wish, a need to change tragedy from their past or give hope for the future. We will see how *Fate/Grand Order* utilizes the Benkei known from the *Gikeiki* as a model for the wish for another one of Yoshitsune's retainers.

#### **4.1 Benkei and Gilgamesh**

The *Final Fantasy* series' Gilgamesh is Benkei; the two characters are one and the same, melding together cultures and tradition. Aspects of both of the characters' histories are present. However, the amount dedicated between the two in adaptation leans heavily towards Benkei's

tradition. Gilgamesh seems to be used mainly as a name that better fits into a world based on Western fantasy styles. This raises the question, why choose to resemble Benkei with the name Gilgamesh a hero-king? It is an interesting combination because on paper, it would seem that Gilgamesh is more similar to Yoshitsune, with Benkei's counterpart in the Gilgamesh myth being the companion Enkidu. I believe this was intentional, as nowhere but in *Final Fantasy* will you find a Gilgamesh who is a warrior-monk and a Benkei with connections to Mesopotamian mythology. The differences between the two characters are equally important as the similarities creating a unique adaptation of both characters in media.

As an instance of adaptation, it is impressive how *Final Fantasy* can take Benkei and be both true to his past and tradition while maintaining the fantastical elements of Western fantasy. Gilgamesh worldwide is the larger and better-known character with his legends capable of easily fitting into the Western fantasy genre. To meld together two separate cultures is hard enough, but to insert Benkei into a Western fantasy world without seeming out of place is a fantastic accomplishment of adaptation. Square Enix recreated the warrior-monk of Benkei with Gilgamesh by accentuating his colors and art design not to have the warrior-monk garb stand out, instead looking like the design of any important boss enemy in the series. Benkei's legends themselves were seamlessly interwoven into the story of the games being changed to fit the game's world in location and fantasy aesthetics while keeping the tone and scenario surrounding them similar to the original. Video games can meld the past with fantasy into an interactive experience that only those who play the games will have a chance to witness.

The *Final Fantasy* series takes explicitly from the tradition surrounding Benkei created by the *Gikeiki* and *Noh* plays. Gilgamesh is first introduced in the *Final Fantasy* series' fifth game (1992) and continues to return through the subsequent entries. In almost every iteration he

is a weapon thief seeking to steal potent weapons. In the iteration we will look at *Final Fantasy 14* (the MMO); he adheres to the weapon thief modus operandi. This seems to be a homage from the game as a nod to the *Gikeiki* as in the section, “How Benkei Stole Swords in the Capital” we see Benkei become the weapon thief, “Night after night he followed this plan, until people began saying, ‘A goblin monk ten feet tall is stalking the capital streets these days, stealing swords.’”<sup>42</sup> Within *Final Fantasy 14*, similar events to this legend from *Gikeiki* are carried out within the game world. However, Benkei was changed in this video game adaptation since a straight one-to-one adaptation would not work inside the game’s world. Instead of just stealing swords and challenging the player unaware of their identity, Gilgamesh focuses during the side story he is in on stealing one weapon claimed to be legendary in its quality and power. The player only gets involved after being hired to investigate the thief going after this singular weapon. In order to make the adaptation fit the story needed to be specifically created to meld together pieces of the original with the new parts coming from the video game itself.

This melding of tradition with the game world becomes more apparent in the game’s combat encounters with Gilgamesh. In *Final Fantasy 14*, you fight bosses through a menu called Duty Finder, where it gives you descriptions of the story and boss you are about to fight. The in-game explanation for the fight against Gilgamesh titled, “Battle on the Big Bridge” (being inspired by the title of the Noh play *Benkei on the Bridge*) is stated as follows, “In his quest to acquire the strongest of weapons, the notorious duelist Gilgamesh has long eluded authorities—until now...he has challenged you to a ‘duel.’ Triumph, and he shall yield his latest

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<sup>42</sup> Helen Craig McCullough, *Yoshitsune: A Fifteenth-Century Japanese Chronicle*. Stanford University Press, 1966, 121-122.

prize. But should you fail, your weapons will be forfeit.”<sup>43</sup> The description alludes to the events that occurred within the *Gikeiki*. A notorious duelist who has eluded authorities challenges the player to a duel, almost a one-to-one description on surface level with Benkei’s duel with Yoshitsune. However, the circumstances and in-game location of the duel have been changed to make the adaptation fit. Just as Benkei faced off against Yoshitsune, Gilgamesh faces off against the player on a bridge. However, this bridge does not resemble the bridge from Benkei’s legend. Instead, it is a long stone bridge similar to those found across Europe to make the adaptation fit into the world. The adaptation of Benkei in *Final Fantasy 14* continually showcases the melding of Western fantasy with Japanese legends that are only capable due to the name of Gilgamesh, allowing Benkei’s character to travel across cultures.

Here is the interactivity that the game provides that no other medium can give. You are the stand in Yoshitsune, the skilled hero/warrior who defeats Benkei (in this case, “Gilgamesh”) and sets him back on the right path. Through the lens of this fantasy world, the player learns about the stories surrounding the character of Benkei. As Hutchinson believes, this showcases video games as a way to learn and experience Japanese culture (literature and history). Through this video game the player can experience the legends of Benkei from the *Heike* and *Gikeiki*, albeit altered to fit into a Western fantasy setting. *Final Fantasy 14* gives players both new and old to the Benkei legends an experience with this rich tradition only available in the video games series.

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<sup>43</sup> Inc, SQUARE ENIX. “Eorzea Database: Battle on the Big Bridge.” *FINAL FANTASY XIV, The Lodestone*, <https://na.finalfantasyxiv.com/lodestone/playguide/db/duty/c370021f429/>.

*Final Fantasy's* Gilgamesh may be closer to that of the Benkei from *Musashibō e-engi*. As Roberta Strippoli states, “*Musashibō e-engi*, first of all, presents Benkei as a trickster-like figure, poised between the realms of what might be termed refined culture and wild, untamed nature... In addition, while some of the characters within the tale perceive Benkei as a demon, he is also viewed as a religious saint.”<sup>44</sup> All of what Strippoli states has been transferred over to Gilgamesh within *Final Fantasy 14*. Gilgamesh, within the game is a shapeshifter able to disguise himself, alluding to his trickster nature. At times, He can be sensible and wild (requiring the player to intervene and battle); most see him as an apparent evil. At the same time, the main character of the side story quest Gilgamesh appears in sees him incapable of hurting a fly. These two characters Hildibrand (the main character of the side story) and Gilgamesh, start to form what is known within Kabuki as *wagoto* and *aragoto* where we see a juxtaposition between temperamental and sensitive characters<sup>45</sup>. Laurence Kominz posits that the Benkei and Yoshitsune from *Gikeiki* were “clear prototypes of the *wagoto* and *aragoto* characters who would populate the thousands of kabuki and puppet plays based on the two tales.”<sup>46</sup> Even the player character, on occasion within the confines of the side story becomes the Yoshitsune equivalent for Gilgamesh. Benkei inherently is a buddy character being the retainer to Yoshitsune, leading the adaptation of Gilgamesh to transition into a buddy role with the other Yoshitsune stand-in

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<sup>44</sup> Roberta Strippoli, “Warrior/Monk, Demon/Saint: Humor and Parody in the Late Medieval Tale of Benkei.” *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol.70, no. 1, 40. JSTOR.

<sup>45</sup> For more on *wagoto* and *aragoto*, Laurence Kominz, “Origins of ‘Kabuki’ Acting in Medieval Japanese Drama.” *Asian Theatre Journal*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1988, 135.

<sup>46</sup> See Kominz, 136.



characters. *Final Fantasy 14* seeks to have the players experience the Benkei legend while creating something new and exciting that organically fits the game's world and characters.

Kabuki and theater traditions are vital to the design of Gilgamesh. In various cutscenes (scenes games include to give exposition) as well as the battles in-game, Gilgamesh strikes poses reminiscent of what would be done within a Kabuki play (the Mie). These poses are followed audibly by the accompaniment of music (reminiscent of that done by Hayashi) and the Ki/Tsuke to accentuate the pose and draw attention to it. In Gilgamesh's design, his face is covered with the red makeup of Kabuki, termed Kumadori. In *The Kabuki Handbook*, Aubrey Halford states, "The aragoto style of acting produced a special kind of make-up known as Kumadori." and "various shades of red indicate brave, choleric, passionate, or obstinate characters."<sup>47</sup> Benkei, as Kominz pointed out above, was a prototype for the aragoto character style, and having Gilgamesh painted with the make-up showcases the link between the two. The Kabuki poses and paint fit into the world of the game as it draws attention to Gilgamesh, denoting him as an essential character and due to the comedic nature of the story he is put in, the poses act as a way to showcase just how the character himself is an oddball. This allows the developers to showcase old theater art to a modern audience inside a modern entertainment medium without it feeling shoehorned in.

The design of Gilgamesh does not only take from the Noh and Kabuki iterations of Benkei but draws upon the pre-existing content of the latter. By looking at various ukiyo-e

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<sup>47</sup> Halford-MacLeod, Aubrey Seymour, and Giovanna M. Halford. *The Kabuki Handbook: A Guide to Understanding and Appreciation, with Summaries of Favourite Plays, Explanatory Notes, and Illustrations*, Tuttle, 1971, 439.

paintings of Benkei and going back to the description given to us by *Gikeiki* of his appearance, we can see the inspiration of the game artists Yoshitaka Amano and Tetsuya Nomura and the developers. In the *Gikeiki*, while Benkei's origins are explained to the reader, constant reference is made to the visage of Benkei being one that was unpleasant to look at. As quoted above from the *Gikeiki*, in reference to Benkei people described him as, "A goblin monk ten feet tall,"<sup>48</sup> Benkei was a large unpleasant sight to behold and *Final Fantasy 14* upheld that sentiment. Gilgamesh has the body of a large brute, he himself being over ten feet tall with a goblin-esque visage to his face. It was not out of place to see ukiyo-e of Benkei inspired by the Kabuki and Noh plays staring him. In many of the paintings Benkei is equipped with a naginata and holds a myriad of weapons on his back. Gilgamesh echoes this through the wielding of a spear and a second form he transforms into with which he wields many weapons at once. Attire wise Benkei differs from painting to painting. In some he is adorned in warrior monk garb reminiscent of what one would historically wear, while in other paintings he is adorned in colorful armor.<sup>49</sup> Gilgamesh is a combination of the two wearing bright colored (traditionally in most games his outfit is red) while maintaining the warrior-monk aesthetic.

With the name Gilgamesh, however, one might have cause to think, could this just be referring to the ancient hero? The answer is both yes and no. In almost every aspect of a character design and integration, this Gilgamesh is Benkei as the ancient hero-king not a petty sword thief or dressed stylistically to resemble a Buddhist warrior-monk. Having the integration

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<sup>48</sup> See McCullough 1966, 121.

<sup>49</sup> *Onzōshi Ushiwaka and Musashibō Benkei*. <https://honolulu.emuseum.com/objects/8913/onzoshi-ushiwaka-and-musashibo-benkei>.

of Kabuki elements, the fact that many ensuing tales of Benkei post *Heike* were either created or expanded upon cannot be considered a coincidence either. Each move connected Gilgamesh to the Benkei that is known in Japan. One of the only aspects of Gilgamesh calling back to his hero-killing counterpart is that he is often accompanied by the figure Enkidu, which in the ancient tale was his closest companion (within *Final Fantasy XIV*, Enkidu is made to be just a green chicken). Dean Chan in his chapter of *Computer Games as a Sociocultural Phenomenon* states, “Many new Asian MMORPGs that are aimed at regional markets seek to self-consciously invoke Asian-themed historical fantasy and martial arts. Specific cultural histories are also being represented in the process.”<sup>50</sup> Chan’s statement has twofold meaning. One being that *Final Fantasy 14* once again decided to include Gilgamesh due to his relation to Benkei as part of Asian-themed historical fantasy. The second is that the initial creation of Gilgamesh resulted from seeking to connect Japanese players in a Western fantasy game to their own cultural history. Gilgamesh was turned into Benkei to create a more Japanese element for Japan while simultaneously keeping the name Gilgamesh not to alienate Western players of the game. We can see through connections to the stories from *Gikeiki* and Noh/Kabuki plays that Benkei is more well-known for his legends created post-*Heike* than for his minimal inclusion within the tale.

Benkei/Gilgamesh has no afterlife in *Final Fantasy 14*, at least not one we have seen. A common theme is seen within the series of games' recurring characters and names. Over the

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<sup>50</sup> Dean Chan, “Negotiating Online Computer Games in East Asia: Manufacturing Asian MMORPGs and Marketing ‘Asianness.’” *Computer Games as a Sociocultural Phenomenon Games Without Frontiers War Without Tears*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, 192.

years there have been countless characters named Cid, different real-world entities being battle assistance summonable allies, and weapons. However, each of those in every game is an entirely new iteration, a brand-new palimpsest from the last version seen. That is due to how the series of *Final Fantasy*, while being a series, is almost entirely unconnected between the different numbered games. *Final Fantasy VII* is set in a world utterly different from that of *Final Fantasy IX*, whose history and environment are not a reiteration of each other. One of the few outliers to this is Gilgamesh; he is known to travel between worlds in the series, meaning that he is one of the only characters who can travel between all worlds of the games as what is assumed to be one singular entity. We are given this concept of a Benkei who has yet to meet Yoshitsune on a continuous adventure seeking out weapons and opponents in myriad worlds. Something that the Benkei, within his past iterations of the *Gikeiki* and plays, was unable to pursue due to their duty and loyalty to Yoshitsune. It is an unending journey from which the character remains static in his ways from before the tragic events of the *Heike*.

## 4.2 Benkei: Yoshitsune's Retainer

The adaptation of Benkei in *Fate/Grand Order* is an imposter. This Benkei we are given is fake. The Benkei of the *Fate/Grand Order* games is revealed to be Hitachibō Kaison (in *FGO*, spelled as Hitachibou Kaison). We find out this Hitachibou survives through the *Gikeiki* in “The Battle of Koromogawa”. In said chapter we are given, “Hitachibo and the other ten retainers, who had gone to pray at a neighboring mountain temple that morning, had never returned.”<sup>51</sup> The

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<sup>51</sup> See McCullough 1966, 285.

game's adaptation of the character focuses on the ambiguity of Hitachibou's disappearance choosing to create a version of him that decided to flee and abandon Yoshitsune. Meanwhile, Benkei dies a glorious death in battle, protecting his lord, fighting like a demon to ensure Yoshitsune has enough time to commit suicide. The survival of Hitachibou and the end of Benkei in service of his lord is paramount to how the *Fate/Grand Order* universe treats the identities of these two characters, emphasizing what it means for only one to live again in *Fate*.

The true Benkei is never summoned in *Fate*; we are only given Hitachibou, who chooses to carry the name. Looking at Varley about Yoshitsune can lead us to hints about the motivations of his retainers, "He is beloved by his intimate band of followers to an extent, as noted in the death scene of Sato no Tsuginobu at Yashima, that their feelings for him are a model of the *kenshin*—self-sacrificing—loyalty that is the central ideal of warrior society in the ancient and medieval ages, at least as it is presented in the war tales."<sup>52</sup> In the *Fate* universe, for a hero to become a servant (the familiar used in the war for the Holy Grail to obtain a wish), they must have lingering regret or animosity. This sentiment stays true to the summoning system within the game, as the heroes have reasons written about how they could be summoned in their lore. These mythical and historical figures need a potential wish they would have granted, something they want or would change. Musashibou Benkei, having died faithfully fulfilling his duty reasonably, seems not to regret his life. At the least, in this adaptation, he holds no desire to change his fate. Hitachibou, on the other hand, having not been able to showcase his *kenshin*, his self-sacrificing loyalty to Yoshitsune, would have regrets about fleeing and not dying alongside his lord. Thus, through using the tales from the *Gikeiki* and following the model of *kenshin* that the war tales

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<sup>52</sup> See Varley, 154.

include, *Fate/Grand Order* implemented a “Benkei” who wished to be someone who would undoubtedly sacrifice themselves for their lord.

On the surface level of appearances, Hitachibou wears attire reminiscent of a monk/ascetic while bearing many weapons on his back (calling to the weapon collector aspect of Benkei’s character). He is dressed fitting the depictions of Benkei as a warrior-monk across many pieces of classical artwork. The only separation being his robes in the game are more tattered and worn giving the air of wanderer to the character. Hitachibou is summoned as a Lancer class nodding to Benkei’s proficiency with a Naginata, making him a believable Benkei impersonation. *Fate/Grand Order* desired to make Hitachibou into an undeniable Benkei to sell the con and desire of Hitachibou better.

In *Fate/Grand Order*, Hitachibou is being repurposed after Benkei. Hitachibou looks like Benkei, takes his name, and acts like him, so why adapt Benkei without Benkei? *Fate* is a franchise where fate and desires are integral to the characters. For *Fate*’s adaptation, Benkei has no desires or problems with his fate, so Benkei becomes an ideal to strive for. Hitachibou in the *Fate* universe is a coward who ran away when he was needed most, the furthest from what Benkei stands for. Searching for redemption, Hitachibou’s spirit is brought back, choosing to become “Benkei” as his one desire stated in the game is to make the name Benkei his forever, Benkei being the retainer who carried out his duty with devotion to his lord. Only in the video game *Fate/Grand Order* are players able to experience Benkei not as a person but as the embodiment of a wish and ideal in another’s redemption.

Hitachibou is given his chance at redemption in *Fate/Grand Order*’s 7<sup>th</sup> singularity of the game (7<sup>th</sup> chapter of the main story that the game follows) being given the opportunity do what he could not in life, protect his lord. When Yoshitsune becomes corrupted, losing himself he

transfers from being a tragic hero to a villain. Hitachibou then takes it upon himself to stay and fight Yoshitsune until the end, not abandoning his lord in his time of need. As Kenneth Yasuda states, “Only a thoroughly worthy foe can bring out the full conception of Benkei.”<sup>53</sup> While he may have been addressing *Ataka*, what he says about Benkei can be translated to *Fate/Grand Order*. Only when facing a worthy foe (Yoshitsune himself) while fighting to the death to protect Yoshitsune’s honor as a hero, showcasing an equal force of will, does the game truly show us what it meant to be Benkei. Hitachibou was only able to become Benkei when despite guaranteed death, he chooses not to abandon Yoshitsune; he, like Benkei, stayed with his lord until his end.

Benkei is linked to Hitachibou through their appearance, devotion, and game story. Only in this video game will you find Hitachibou being given an afterlife to live again as Benkei, through which he can get closure from the tragedies he witnessed. The player can interact with Hitachibou, and only when he bonds with them enough will they learn his true identity. Playing through the game’s story, the player grows to care for Hitachibou and helps grant his wish by recognizing him as their “Benkei”, the ideal retainer utterly devoted to his lord. *Fate/Grand Order* makes the name of Benkei a legacy that must be earned and respected.

*The Tale of the Heike*’s Benkei is almost always in tandem with Yoshitsune. The *Gikeiki* echoes this sentiment, having the two agree to meet after they die. Yoshitsune tells Benkei, “It is very hard to say good-bye like this. Long ago, we swore to die together, . . . It cannot be helped. If I go first, I will wait at Shide Mountain. If you are first, promise to wait for me at the River of

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<sup>53</sup> Kenneth Yasuda, “The Dramatic Structure of *Ataka*, a Noh Play.” *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 27, no. 4, 1972, 367. JSTOR.

Three Ways.”<sup>54</sup> The bond between the two is vital to both of the characters. Benkei is a buddy character; he is not himself without the shared bond with Yoshitsune. *Fate/Grand Order* takes the bond between Benkei and Yoshitsune into account. Within the realm of the story, the two are rarely included without the other. They are summoned together in the 7th singularity of the game (the 7th story section not dissimilar to the chapters of a novel). “Benkei”, not wishing to outlive his lord, makes sure he dies together in said singularity. In the event “Farewell to Kamakura,” the story revolves around Yoshitsune, with “Benkei” involving himself to make sure he fulfills his duty to Yoshitsune. Every story *Fate* tells with these two characters is entirely new, showing the developers' creativity in giving these old characters new experiences. Yet, they are constantly drawn back to tradition as Benkei and Yoshitsune are seldom separated, a retainer dutifully following his lord, sacrificing himself to save Yoshitsune.

### 4.3 Traces of Benkei

Benkei, through his association and closeness with Yoshitsune, became a prominent player within the *Gikeiki*. This led him to prominence as a character considered, in some cases, equal to his master. His prominence within the *Gikeiki* would help him become the centerpiece for many plays inspired by the legends and new works expanding his tale. He has adapted to many different forms of media with video games only being one of the many. Video games have sought to adhere to the character created within the legends of the *Gikeiki* and plays. Through doing so, video games have made adaptations of the character that is visibly drawn to tradition

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<sup>54</sup> See McCullough 1966, 288.



but have inserted him into creative worlds unlike any he has been adapted into. Video games are able to understand the core of the character and pass that knowledge on through a new medium to a new audience.

*Final Fantasy 14* shows us this by incorporating elements from various facets of the character's history, creating a unique palimpsest of the character no other medium has accomplished. As Gilgamesh he is involved in storylines that evoke back to his exploits within tales such as the *Gikeiki*. His design evokes his history as a prominent character within the realm of Noh and Kabuki plays. He is mixed with Gilgamesh to not alienate different cultural audiences and to gradually introduce them to the character of Benkei as they start to become more invested in this video game character of Gilgamesh, wondering what had inspired the character. *Fate/Grand Order* chooses to make Benkei into a title, an identity for someone to become. Benkei, in this game's world, does not regret his life; he is satisfied with what happened. Instead, Hitachibou Kaison takes up the mantle using Benkei's identity in his afterlife to erase the failures of his past by holding himself to the standard the title sets. These adaptations of Benkei are only capable in the medium of video games they were created in. The interaction with the player and other characters leads to an exploration of Benkei that is not possible in different mediums.

Even though Benkei is constantly mixed with other characters, adding to his unique palimpsest, his iconic traits are carried through into the new life these palimpsests live. Unlike Tomoe, Benkei is an idea, an image one has; the person is hardly recreated without some melding of another. Benkei lives vicariously through these new separate beings as they embody different aspects of what it means to be Benkei. In video games, the identity of what it means to be Benkei is preserved while pushing forward fresh creative choices that can expose and

introduce that identity to a new audience. What it means to be Benkei has mostly stayed the same over many years. However, the same cannot be said for his lord Yoshitsune who has been in a flux of constant change in the medium of video games.

## 5.0 Yoshitsune

Yoshitsune is undoubtedly one of the most important heroes in Japanese cultural memory. To glimpse the popularity of Yoshitsune and the repertoire of stories that appeared just in the time post-2000, one can search the name of Yoshitsune on the internet, leading them to find images of him in his tv series (*Yoshitsune*, 2005), depictions within various videogames (such as the *Persona* and *Warriors Orochi* series, 2008), in manga (*Shanaou Yoshitsune*, 2002), and card art of the character within collectible card games only naming a few. Every new iteration of Yoshitsune adapted to the realm of video games can build upon the adaptations from other mediums. Through the many adaptations of the character, his heroic core was defined, making room for each to add elements unique to their Yoshitsune. We can see with Yoshitsune the evolution of a character that a video game adaptation with new worlds and stories allows for.

In many of the stories since the *Heike*, Yoshitsune has been framed as a character with feminine traits (tales within the *Gikeiki* where he cross-dresses and passes successfully as a woman). From some of the earliest adaptations of the character, Yoshitsune was already being treated as a palimpsest where his core as the romantic hero remained, but other details were continually changed. With evolution and change being tied to his character from some of the earliest reinterpretations of the character, evolution itself became a part of his identity. This evolution allows video games to create new stories and experiences for Yoshitsune that are otherwise impossible outside the medium. The interactivity with the player and the video game world Yoshitsune is thrust into forces the character to shift to match once again.

The *Azuma Kagami* has some of the only credible accounts of Yoshitsune dealing with the Genpei war. Yoshitsune's lack of verifiable history paved the way for creating legends and

chronicles such as the *Gikeiki*. The lack of history made Yoshitsune a malleable entity for the early playwrights and authors. Being creative with the character, they created memorable stories that complimented him. Kazumi Hasegawa, in her article, *Resurrection of a Premodern Hero*, states, "The well-known writer Ozaki Shirō wrote a novel about the Yoshitsune legends titled *Jingisukan (Genghis Khan)*, published in 1940...Although he recognized that the Yoshitsune legends are implausible as historical truth, he found them to contain an incredible energy of the hero (*seimeiryoku*), which he wanted to transfer to contemporary society."<sup>55</sup> Hasegawa writes about the legends suggesting Yoshitsune's survival, these legends can be seen as evolutions of the character reorienting him for modern use. Just as Ozaki Shirō did in 1940, video games have tried to adapt even the far-fetched and fictional aspects of the tradition surrounding Yoshitsune. It is natural for Yoshitsune to be adapted into video games because these stories when taken as palimpsests of the character, give him an afterlife rife with the incredible energy of a hero, which can be used on a new generation. Yoshitsune's legend has spurred no small inspiration in the creation of video games, as we will see when a game adapts his very legend.

## 5.1 A Hero's Legend

*Yoshitsune Eiyūden* (a game created by FromSoftware for Sony's PlayStation 2 era of systems published in 2005) tells us a lot about how a game adapts Yoshitsune's legend in total, not just bits and pieces. This is the only game discussed that attempts as close to a one-to-one

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<sup>55</sup> Kazumi Hasegawa, "Resurrection of a Premodern Hero." *Radical History Review*, vol. 2018, no. 130, Jan. 2018, 149.

adaptation as we will get with the Heike characters in video games. Within the game, the player is the titular Yoshitsune following along in his historical battles and legends as they fight against the Taira and Kiyomori. This game sheds light on how creative video games can be while limiting where they can take the story due to following the legends. The game's interactivity puts the player in as Yoshitsune, for they are Yoshitsune; there is no proxy by which the player can interact with the figure from the *Heike*.

Within this game, Yoshitsune is not given an afterlife like the other games allowed, he is stuck where he was in life, the Genpei War. We play through his life, not a posthumous adventure allowing for change and fulfillment of regrets. A video game adaptation is similar to how a page was erased and then written on top of, having old traces remain under the new. In this character adaptation, we can view that as only a minimal erasure to keep most of the old intact. Yoshitsune was not being repurposed for a new age. The game sought to monetize Yoshitsune and his legends, only just retelling his story without giving it a contemporary flair to interest the younger generation that would not care for Yoshitsune and his legends.

Playing as Yoshitsune himself changed the game's interactivity between the player and the characters. They are Yoshitsune himself, the player physically controlling the titular Japanese hero, experiencing his prowess in battle. Playing as Yoshitsune himself and not interacting via proxy insert character affects how the player perceives the adaptation. In this game, due to playing as Yoshitsune, the bonds the player forged with other characters are the bonds that Yoshitsune himself forged. Benkei needs to be a buddy character? Now he is the player's buddy, their retainer serving them. No other media outside of video games lets an audience member become Yoshitsune himself, physically experiencing both his hardships and triumphs. Playing an adaptation that closely follows Yoshitsune's legend makes the game able to become an

interactive lesson for Yoshitsune. Following the legend and inserting Yoshitsune back where he was in life, the game cannot give Yoshitsune an afterlife. However, Yoshitsune can have an alternate life left in the player's hands (Player loses, Yoshitsune dies, ending the journey early).

Video games, like other media, can still change in an adaptation while following the legend. The Yoshitsune provided in the game is as prototypical of a hero character as possible. Yoshitsune is showcased as a hero with skill and charm in the game. This contradicts the figure *The Tale of the Heike* gives us, as Sachi Schmidt-Hori explains, “Indeed, the Kakuichi text, the most widely circulated variant of the tale, makes Yoshitsune’s unimpressive appearance a focal point of two episodes.”<sup>56</sup> Schmidt-Hori quotes a portion of the *Heike* where Yoshitsune is made fun of for his small stature and buck teeth. In this game, Yoshitsune is far from unimpressive; he is shown as tall and beautiful. Yoshitsune being tall is truly a divergence from much of the material that includes him as in most he is of a shorter stature. The added height seems to be from a desire to match Yoshitsune to the ideal image of a modern hero, one who is tall, strong, beautiful, an Adonis of a human being. The departure of Yoshitsune from an unimpressive appearance to being of attractive features is hardly unprecedented now as many video games change how the character appears, whether it be more beautiful or monstrous.

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<sup>56</sup> Sachi Schmidt-Hori, “Yoshitsune and the Gendered Transformations of Japan’s Self-Image.” *The Journal of Japanese Studies*, vol. 48, no. 1, 2022, 99.

## 5.2 Yoshitsune, the Support Character

Yoshitsune is not always the star of the games he is included in. He will often appear as a supporting character with references to his legends. Drawing upon the popularity, the game boosts its own by association. The developers are crafting palimpsests of Yoshitsune as a brief appearance only allows for a limited level of adaptation. These adaptations showcase how video games can convey the history or create new stories of Yoshitsune with only minor appearances in these games. The player can interact or examine the adaptation present of Yoshitsune in a way that only these video games allow.

Within the series of *Persona*, Yoshitsune appears as an acquirable persona (The player character is capable of using personas outside of the one he is given, with many of these extra personas being based on various entities and legends from world culture). He is of the Tower arcana (tarot card), representing Chaos/destruction and sudden upheaval. This directly relates to the tragic story of Yoshitsune as he was ordered to die by his brother and was constantly on the run before he took his own life. Appearance-wise, Yoshitsune echoes the feminine/masculine mix of traits that the Muromachi period began giving him. He has almost waist-length long black hair and a slender/petite body. In older art from the games, he is seen to have pointed ears like an elf would. In traditional fantasy, elves are considered feminine people themselves, being slender and beautiful.

*Nioh 2* takes the character of Yoshitsune and gives him an extended cameo within their game as he is the final boss of DLC (downloadable content) added after the original game was released. The DLC is aptly named “The Tengu’s Disciple”, referring to Yoshitsune himself, as the legends state that he was trained by a Tengu at Kurama Temple in his youth. This connection to his legends teaches the players part of what is considered Yoshitsune’s “history”, once again

preserving the past in a way that interests a contemporary audience. His in-game appearance strays from the feminine/masculine dynamic and takes on a more demonic side. He transforms from a human into a demonic Tengu, taking after his childhood master from the legends and becoming a boss enemy for the player. The reason Yoshitsune transforms into a Tengu gives us insight into how Koei Tecmo/ Team Ninja found inspiration for the contents of the DLC. Within the game, Benkei is defending a bridge against many opponents, not unlike his last stand within the *Gikeiki*, where he is stated to have died standing up giving Yoshitsune time to commit ritual suicide. The critical difference between the two events is that in the game, Yoshitsune is not committing ritual suicide but trying to reach and save Benkei. Varley states, “Yoshitsune is always found with his men, personally leading them into battle. We picture him most vividly...at the head of a small band of fighters, chosen for their personal loyalty to him,”<sup>57</sup> Team Ninja takes this *giri* that Yoshitsune possesses from *The Tale of the Heike* and chooses to expand upon it, giving us a what-if scenario of the character. This creates a precise palimpsest video game adaptation as that *giri* is one of the few things remaining from the character of the old as they created an alternate life written overtop of much of the old. What if Yoshitsune did not lead his men into battle and failed to save them? The developers decided that Yoshitsune would go into a frenzied rampage at the death of his closest retainer, hurting both friend and foe alike. Team Ninja turns Yoshitsune from an ally to an enemy to be beaten, giving the player direct control over the fate of Yoshitsune. Will we save him or end his new story and life ourselves?

The final boss battle of the DLC is Yoshitsune himself. The battle takes inspiration from outside of the *Heike* and the *Gikeiki*, choosing instead the Noh play *Benkei on the Bridge*. The

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<sup>57</sup> See Varley, 134.



battle is reminiscent of the clash between Benkei and Yoshitsune as the Tengu-Yoshitsune alights around the bridge with speed, coming to rest on the rails of the bridge with the player in the position of Benkei being at Yoshitsune's mercy. The scene of Yoshitsune jumping onto the rails of the Gojo Bridge can be seen in many ukiyo-e paintings depicting the self-same event the game provides. Explicitly choosing a locale reminiscent of the Gojo bridge and having Yoshitsune bounce from the rails may have more depth than just calling back to the character's history. The *Nioh* game series is in a genre of video games known specifically for their extreme difficulty and punishing gameplay should a mistake be made. Orrin E. Klapp, who attributes Yoshitsune as a clever hero, states, "All in all, the clever hero is valued as a popular symbol because he teaches that the weak can defeat the great and provides an important lesson in practical life, a formula for success: that the ruse is often more effective than the *tour de force*,"<sup>58</sup> Klapp continues this by specifically referencing Yoshitsune's duel with Benkei and how outwits the monk. In a game series as punishing as *Nioh* by having the player themselves fight Yoshitsune on a bridge after he has transformed into a Tengu, they are leading the player to the line of thought that they can beat Yoshitsune if they take the time to plan and think. The game gives the player an insightful message through dealing with a formidable foe, just like the Yoshitsune of legend did with Benkei. Yoshitsune is now not just a hero to be admired but a friend and rival for the player in which they pit their strength. This interactivity with the character teaches history about Yoshitsune's legends and messages that the characters have stood for in the past, redefining it for this contemporary moment.

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<sup>58</sup> Orrin E. Klapp, "The Clever Hero." *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 67, no. 263, 1954, 28. JSTOR.

### 5.3 Yoshitsune and Ushiwakamaru

*Fate/Grand Order* creates an adaptation of Yoshitsune that has been changed to fit the world of the game and the genre he was introduced into (the mobile gacha). Yoshitsune was not created to be the romanticized tragic hero he was in adulthood but rather as his childhood self when he stayed at Kurama Temple, Ushiwakamaru. However, there are other changes they made to the character. Ushiwakamaru was no longer beholden to his unimpressive appearance the *Heike* gave him as he was now, she. Only in the video game *Fate/Grand Order* can you find a Yoshitsune fully gender-bent from male to female, accepting more of his feminine traits while changing the masculine to fit the boyish self from his youth. Players are allowed to interact with a Yoshitsune not bound by the tragedies of his legends as he assumes the boisterous persona that comes with youth.

We know that Yoshitsune has gained more feminine traits in his appearance over time. In the *Gikeiki* itself, we are given showcases of Yoshitsune cross-dressing and tricking others into thinking he was a woman due to his looks, “To Benkei’s surprise, he was now dressed as a woman, with a cloak over his head. Confused but determined, Benkei rapped him smartly in the side with his sheath. ‘Whether you’re a page or a lady, I’m a worshipper too. Move over,’ he demanded.”<sup>59</sup> Yoshitsune is cross-dressed, effectively confusing Benkei. This would not be the only instance of cross-dressing as Yoshitsune would use his more feminine traits throughout the *Gikeiki*. The choice of making Yoshitsune into a woman may have been affected by the evolution of the character entering the Tokugawa period. As Schmidt-Hori points out, “It is safe

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<sup>59</sup> See McCullough 1966, 125.

to state that by the Tokugawa period, Yoshitsune's good looks had been completely normalized and were expected. This can be verified by the pictorial representations of Yoshitsune in ukiyo-e prints as well...Another notable phenomenon during the Tokugawa period is the hyper-sexualization of Yoshitsune."<sup>60</sup> In *Fate/Grand Order* to help incentivize players to spend money on the characters, they are often sexualized, specifically the female characters. Becoming more sexualized as a character harboring feminine traits in a video game genre where women are oversexualized, Yoshitsune fitting into the mold has his sexualization changed to the gender audiences expected to see.

Only in the video game *Fate/Grand Order* was this transformation of Yoshitsune's character possible. The *Fate* series is known for changing the genders of various heroes, historical figures, and even gods. The mascot of the *Fate* series is a female King Arthur (known as Artoria). Only in this video game can the players interact with a female Yoshitsune due to the series it is crafted from putting in the effort to showcase genderfluidity in the creative process. Video games allow creators to tell the stories they want as the medium can adapt to almost any story and find a willing audience. Players get to experience an alternate history through *Fate/Grand Order*, one where Yoshitsune was female, and the implications and questions it brings create future avenues for stories inside the game itself.

With *Fate/Grand Order* choosing to adapt the younger Yoshitsune known as Ushiwakamaru, Schmidt-Hori can lead us to reasons for that creative choice, with Yoshitsune being exposed to national pride. After the country's opening in the Meiji period, Japanese people

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<sup>60</sup> See Schmidt-Hori, 105.

felt a sense of constant shame and self-hatred stemming from the West's racial hierarchy. Here Schmidt-Hori states,

“Indeed, to reconcile with this national shortcoming of smallness and combat the demeaning gaze of the West, *chiisakutemo tsuyoi* may have been the only motto to which the subjects of the Japanese empire could have clung. And this is precisely how I read the second major transformation of Yoshitsune: from the small but beautiful chigo/nobleman to the small but mighty Ushiwaka-maru.”<sup>61</sup>

Ushiwakamaru gave off what Klapp suggests about a clever hero: someone small could take down someone strong. This image of Ushiwakamaru was taught to the children during the Japanese period of Imperialism as Schmidt Hori tells us, “A simple search in the National Diet Library database reveals that hundreds of short stories and books on Ushiwaka-maru, primarily for juvenile audiences, were published during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.”<sup>62</sup> Competing with heroic figures from all across the world, In *Fate/Grand Order*, the small but strong mentality of the character prevails. Ushiwakamaru is pitted against figures from myth much more prominent than him, but in the game meets them step for step, reconfirming that while these Japanese characters may not be well known, they can stand up to figures from other cultures. *Fate/Grand Order* explicitly allows the player to see how Yoshitsune can measure up to different cultural heroes through experiencing interactions and battles unavailable in any other medium.

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<sup>61</sup> See Schmidt-Hori, 111.

<sup>62</sup> See Schmidt-Hori, 112.

*Fate/Grand Order* does not just build an evolution of the character of Yoshitsune with Ushiwakamaru but faithfully takes inspiration from the legends and tradition surrounding him. Ushiwakamaru is implemented as a rider class in the game. The game gives requirements to be eligible for the class as historically or within legends, considered peerless on horseback. As Varley gives us from the war tales, “Yoshitsune’s descent of Hiyodorigoe Cliff at the Battle of Ichinotani is one of the most celebrated military achievements in Japanese history. As described in the *Heike*, it is also probably the finest display of horsemanship in the war tales.”<sup>63</sup> Varley says that no other account of horsemanship in the war tales rose to the standard that Yoshitsune created. Being possibly the best horseman in the war tales, it would be hard to justify making Ushiwakamaru appear as anything else. Ushiwakamaru, in addition to his class, takes his penultimate move from the war tales concerning him. Varley gives us the description, “As Noritsune fights his way from one Minamoto boat to another, Yoshitsune does his best to evade him, finally making a spectacular, desperation leap to another boat,”<sup>64</sup> The leaping from boat to boat during the battle and earning the victory at Dan-no-ura became an integral part of the image of Yoshitsune presented within *Fate/Grand Order*.

Ushiwakamaru is seen as brash, reckless, and full of youthful energy within *Fate/Grand Order*. A similar Ushiwakamaru appears in the *Gikeiki* during his time at Kurama Temple. In the sphere of the game, his approach to combat is to fight first and think later. Varley shows us that this is in line with the Yoshitsune we know from the war tales stating, “Yoshitsune, as we have seen, has a crafty, deceptive streak, but as a commander his principal motto might be ‘Ever

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<sup>63</sup> See Varley, 136.

<sup>64</sup> See Varley, 146.

Forward,' and most of his great victories are marked by decisiveness, speed, and even, at times, by death-defying recklessness.”<sup>65</sup> Using Ushiwakamaru instead of Yoshitsune Fate/Grand Order allows the character to return closer to how he appeared in some of the original war tales while preserving the evolution he went through, becoming the tragic hero that Japan recognizes.

Yoshitsune’s tale is a tragic story that concludes with death. However, due to that tragic death, a story event in the *Fate/Grand Order* was specifically created starring Ushiwakamaru as the main protagonist. The story “Farewell to Kamakura” derives heavily from *Gikeiki* and the legends surrounding Yoshitsune during his time at Kurama Temple. Yoshitsune is the only character in this thesis to get his own event in the game. He has also received the most on-screen time, connecting to his popularity within the Japanese cultural image. This on-screen time gives the players more time and content to interact with this version of Yoshitsune, learning through the game about Yoshitsune’s past life, struggles, and lingering regrets. The players get to form a bond over their adventures with Yoshitsune creating a link for the player to care about the character’s history and legends.

The event in the game drew upon two sides of Yoshitsune, splitting them, creating the light and the dark. One side retains the youthful optimism and allegiance to Minamoto, while the other results from all the pent-up rage and resentment over what happened to him. The bitterness merges with the spirit of Taira no Kagekiyo, creating a force of hatred for the Minamoto, that wishes specifically to kill Yoshitsune’s brother, Yoritomo. This calls forward the eras of Yoshitsune that people know. From one, there is Yoshitsune from the war tales, specifically early *Heike*, where he is an applauded military commander taking out the Taira. The other is the

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<sup>65</sup> See Varley, 184.

Yoshitsune we are given when his character starts to evolve, the tragic hero who dies at the hands of his own family for his inability to overcome his station politically. Yoshitsune is now given an afterlife within this game, as his past regrets and anger are directly addressed. Being split into two versions of himself, Yoshitsune has to fight himself to determine what path he needs to follow with the new life that was given him. Like Tomoe, he is given the agency to change who he is, what is vital to this new Yoshitsune, what he should grow past, and how he should evolve.

#### **5.4 The Video Game Yoshitsune**

Yoshitsune has continually evolved since his legend started to expand within *Gikeiki*. He is a character that has almost uncountable works created about him. Video games are just the newest addition to the repertoire of capable avenues for stories to be told. Due to these myriad stories created about Yoshitsune, there is a foundation from which new stories can find the core of the character. Yet as we can see in even just these few video games, the evolution of Yoshitsune still has yet to halt. These new stories told by the games or even the retelling of old legends introduce unique aspects of the character yet to be delved into.

*Fate/Grand Order* took the hero and decided that the next step in Yoshitsune's journey was to revert him to his childhood self and put him up against figures from all over the world. This showcases the small but strong mentality of the character not only to Japanese audiences but introduces it to players around the world. The game allows the player to interact with the character in ways that only it can provide through the gender swapping of Yoshitsune. Gender swapping enables the player to experience an alternate Yoshitsune with their own history

changing how the player views the events of the legend. *Fate/Grand Order* is a prime example of where creativity in the gaming sphere can take audiences giving new experiences and interactions with age-old characters no other medium has yet to achieve.

*Nioh 2* sought to reconnect Yoshitsune with the legend of him being trained by a Tengu, making him capable of turning into one. Players can interact with Yoshitsune forming a bond with the character. This bond makes the ensuing battle with Yoshitsune weigh heavily, as in this alternate history, the player can bring Yoshitsune back from the brink. He is a rival, friend, and enemy from which the player is forced to learn in order to overcome. The game teaches players about many facets of the early life of Yoshitsune through this adaptation, creating a character that draws audiences through the intense fight and design of the character.

*Yoshitsune Eiyūden* introduced the legend of Yoshitsune to a new audience through a young entertainment platform, pushing the character into the mainstream during the most significant boom in the gaming audience (the PS2 era). The game gave players direct control over Yoshitsune's fate, they interacted with Yoshitsune's world as Yoshitsune. No other medium allows the audience themselves to assume the role of the titular hero experiencing both his triumphs and tragedies. Yoshitsune is a timeless hero with which the people of Japan can return to again and again—upon each subsequent return to the character, finding something new as his legends only continue to grow with his adaptation into video games.



## 6.0 Conclusion

This thesis has sought to consider how old characters from *The Tale of the Heike* are adapted into the new medium of video games, looking to Tomoe, Benkei, and Yoshitsune in contemporary contexts. This study looked to the understanding of how famous historical and cultural figures are implemented within the medium. Through so doing, considering the novel challenges provided by the medium itself. These characters have been given afterlives that allow the player to interact directly with them through the medium's interactivity. This interactivity only available in video games allows for storytelling and direct player involvement with these characters not seen before.

These video game adaptations genuinely are a unique version of a palimpsest. The video game itself is something new and developed separately from anything else. Yet, video games reuse these characters, parts of their stories, and messages when adapting. These traits have been taken and in the transference from one medium to another, have changed to something new while maintaining traces of the old and, in essence, changing these characters themselves into palimpsests, creating models for them to continue to exist far into the future in new contemporary ways. Video games allow for the players to experience characters or worlds they already know in new unforeseen ways,

“Lego Lord of the Rings is an open world game that allows players to visit and revisit many of the locales mentioned in its sources (often in ways that go against the linear narrative thrust of these sources, where the adventurers are constantly cut off from terrain already covered) ... Thus, Lego Lord of the Rings is an adaptation constructed across

genres, source texts (some of which are themselves adaptations), and media platforms to give a new experience of Middle-earth.”<sup>66</sup>

Kevin Flanagan shows us that the adaptations seen in the medium seek to provide a “new experience” not felt before by watching films or reading novels. The games with the *Heike* characters are not the only adaptations of world-renowned literature in the gaming sphere. Video games are rife with rich adaptations similar to what we have been able to witness with the characters from the *Heike*. Flanagan and Ian Bogost point out the importance of “translating mechanics, experience, or even mood than with replicating textual content,”<sup>67</sup> *Fate/Grand Order*, in adapting all three of the characters analyzed in this thesis, did not once give a one-to-one adaptation of their stories. Instead, we see their experiences and mood within the textual content being adapted into the medium, providing the artistic freedom needed to create a game rife with unique interactivity related to them alone. “It is this interactivity that carries adaptation in video games beyond forms in other media through direct physical action rather than solely through visual observation or auditory stimuli. Interactivity is a defining feature of the video game,”<sup>68</sup> Through the creative process, video games have made specialized adaptations prioritizing the interactivity of the medium. A game like *Persona 4*, using Tomoe or *Final Fantasy* with mixing Benkei between different cultures, would not be as impactful of an adaptation if it did not have the direct player interaction the medium sets up.

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<sup>66</sup> See, Flanagan, 446.

<sup>67</sup> See, Flanagan, 447.

<sup>68</sup> See, Stobbart, 383.

The interactivity provided by the medium of video games is paramount in connecting the iterations of these characters from the *Heike* to the preservation of history and presenting messages for the contemporary moment and the future. All the games discussed in this thesis, except for *Yoshitsune Eiyūden*, allow the player to create a self-insert character. This means that for *Fate/Grand Order*, *Final Fantasy 14*, *Persona 4*, and *Nioh 2*, you, as the player, get the feeling of direct interaction with these characters from the *Heike*. The player forms bonds with these heroes; they get to go on these journeys with them. They help these characters to have an afterlife, a new life, effectively. The player gets to preserve and remember the past by directly interacting with it in a unique contemporary moment to create new stories for the future. *Yoshitsune Eiyūden*, on the other hand, is more of a direct preservation of the past with the additions of modern sensibilities (closer to Furukawa and his contemporary translation of the *Heike*). You physically control Yoshitsune allowing for direct control over his life and death. However, unlike the other games, the player does not form the same bond as they are Yoshitsune, and his life is theirs through this style of adaptation. The player is the actor for Yoshitsune carrying out their will and script.

These characters, through being put in these games, are given an afterlife or new life where they can attain the happiness or peace there were not able to achieve in life. In *Fate/Grand Order*, Tomoe is given the agency to change her fate to find a new purpose. While in *Persona 4*, she helps another find herself and her happiness. Benkei is given the ability to travel worlds to wander and continue his adventures. Yoshitsune is given the ability to transcend his tragedy in *Fate/Grand Order* and the option to not give into grief and rage in *Nioh 2*. There are many malevolent spirits within Japanese mythology. However, the video games containing these three characters have chosen to hold onto hope instead. Connecting to how Furukawa saw literature as

a way to transcribe the present for the future, this can be seen as an essential message to transcribe for future generations.

Japan has its media mix. Wherein the media within Japan form this interconnected web where the success of one property within a medium boosts the popularity of it in another. Popular anime and manga spawn games with those popular games generating more anime and manga, each acting as not just promotional material but offering unique experiences only available through that medium. Tomoe, Benkei, and Yoshitsune were chosen to connect to this media mix context. All these characters share a history of popularity, not just an account from the *Heike*. Tomoe is the woman warrior of Japan; she is that iconic figure showcasing the power of women during a men-dominated time. Benkei is the loyal friend who was always by Yoshitsune's side when he needed him. Yoshitsune is the tragic hero of Japan, that iconic underdog with a doomed destiny. However, that does not stop him from showcasing the strength and admirable qualities that the nation of Japan has latched onto. When using these characters for a Japanese audience, developers draw upon previous popularity not dissimilar to the multimedia mix Marc Steinberg shows us, where the popularity of another IP can boost your own by association.

However, there are ramifications for using the *Heike* characters in video games. Gaming is now a global phenomenon; if you produce and distribute a game from Japan, the U.S., or even China, it becomes part of a new global market of culture. Incorporating the characters from the *Heike* is not only a decision made with the Japanese audience in mind. Choosing Tomoe, Benkei, and Yoshitsune means that these characters will stand for Japan on a global stage. These characters and the history that comes with them now can actively interact with people from vastly different cultures who grew up unaware of the critical messages Japanese history could

teach. Naoki Yoshida, a producer for the game company Square-Enix confirms this as in a recent interview he addressed his dissatisfaction with the term JRPG, “when we are creating games, at least with our team, we don’t go into them thinking that we’re going to be creating JRPGs, we just go into them thinking we’re going to create RPGs.”<sup>69</sup> The JRPG signifies how the game is specifically Japanese in origin. However, Yoshida and his team view it as games are now created for a worldwide audience, not just for Japan. In adaptation, we see localization and translation across countries, “To localize is to both translate the onscreen language of a game and to make a property culturally relevant to a new audience.”<sup>70</sup> In this worldwide marketplace and culture where the internet has allowed immediate distribution worldwide, countries want to showcase the best of their own culture to the rest of the world. Language has always been a barrier, and there’s no better way to introduce people to new cultures than through entertainment starring what you consider the best and most iconic of your culture. Tomoe is chosen to stand alongside mythical god figures such as Izanagi and Izanami in *Persona 4*. Benkei is made to be a literal mix of Western and Japanese culture in *Final Fantasy*, showcasing the elements of Benkei’s background and colorful association with Kabuki and Noh theatre. Yoshitsune is the beloved underdog hero and is showcased as that within all the games he is in, exposing him to a new worldwide audience. Similar to how superheroes like Superman and Captain America showcase the best of American ideals; Yoshitsune is a case for showcasing the essence of Japan’s perseverance of the small against the mighty to the world.

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<sup>69</sup> Zack Zwiezen, “Final Fantasy XVI Producer Doesn’t Seem To Love The Term ‘JRPG.’” *Kotaku*, 28 Feb. 2023, <https://kotaku.com/ff16-yoshi-p-jrpg-square-enix-yoshida-previews-ps5-1850169822>.

<sup>70</sup> See Flanagan, 451.

Tomoe, Benkei, and Yoshitsune are characters that originated from *The Tale of the Heike* yet have continued to persist and transfer across mediums, giving each iteration a new afterlife. The medium of video games is just another step in continuing these characters' afterlife. Each one is given a unique interpretation in their adaptation as the developers pursue artistic freedom while drawing upon the colorful history that these characters can provide. Without video game studies, these adaptations of classical Japanese literary characters would be unexplored. These adaptations tell us much about the enduring allure of these characters and how they are changed to fit into a contemporary moment experienced by millions worldwide. As Hutchinson pointed out, video games tell us much about the culture and attitudes of Japan at the time of their creation. Tomoe addresses gender roles, Yoshitsune shows us that the small can take on the gigantic in this global market, and Benkei reflects the old onto the new. My work here has hopefully succeeded in continuing the work on Japanese games as cultural artifacts started by Hutchinson and other scholars in video game studies. Video games are an emerging integral pillar of the entertainment medium. Ignoring the potential reach and impact the medium can have on an audience with its adaptations would be a disservice to all media studies, as video games can connect with many different entertainment mediums.

To continue this research presented here, it would be prudent to look to modern heroes. Characters have been created in recent years, and how they have been transferred into video games. Whether that character became a famous hero due to video games or was made in video games. We have worldwide renowned characters such as Pikachu, Mario, and Sonic but has any modern Japanese hero produced a similar level of nationwide appeal that the three examined here from the *Heike* have? Seeing the continual evolution of Japanese heroes in video games can push video game studies to even new depths.

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