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## Ancient Magic and Modern Accessories: Developments in the Omamori Phenomenon

Eric Teixeira Mendes  
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ANCIENT MAGIC AND MODERN ACCESSORIES: DEVELOPMENTS  
IN THE OMAMORI PHENOMENON

by

Eric Teixeira Mendes

A thesis submitted to the Graduate College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
Comparative Religion  
Western Michigan University  
August 2015

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# ANCIENT MAGIC AND MODERN ACCESSORIES: DEVELOPMENTS IN THE OMAMORI PHENOMENON

Eric Teixeira Mendes, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 2015

This thesis offers an examination of modern Japanese amulets, called *omamori*, distributed by Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines throughout Japan. As amulets, these objects are meant to be carried by a person at all times in which they wish to receive the benefits that an *omamori* is said to offer. In modern times, in addition to being a religious object, these amulets have become accessories for cell-phones, bags, purses, and automobiles. Said to protect people from accidents, disease, loneliness, failure, computer viruses, among many other things, these objects are one of the few material aspects of religion that are a component of everyday life in contemporary Japan.

Acting as both accessory and amulet, *omamori* offer a clear representation of the power of the public to dramatically alter an established religious object, as well as the religious institutions' ability to re-appropriate such alterations for their own benefit. Through a discussion of the ways that aesthetics from popular culture have been incorporated into *omamori* designs and advertisements, alongside more "traditional" elements, subjects, and motifs, I will show how these institutions are creating economically viable religious objects which are as appealing to the general public as possible, while still being identifiable as boundaries of sacred space. An analysis of the relationship between Japanese society, religion, and modernization through the lens of a practical and material object like *omamori* offers new ways of understanding how religion maintains relevance in a modern and scientific world and how an object can serve as a manipulable bridge between these groups.

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Eric Teixeira Mendes

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Fireworks exploded, newspapers rushed “Extra!” editions into print and Japanese exchanged “Banzai!” cheers at news of Japan’s crown princess giving birth to a girl after more than eight years of marriage... In a foretaste of the special life that awaits the baby, a purple sash and an imperial samurai sword were bestowed on the 6.8 pound girl just a few hours after her birth - - along with a sacred amulet said to ward off evil spirits. The girl will be named in a ceremony Friday, after experts are consulted on a proper name for the child. (Zielenziger)

This quote, which ran on December 2, 2001, in an article from the *Orlando Sentinel*, describes the birth of one of Japan’s most recent princesses. In honor of her status and in preparation for her “special life” she received three gifts upon her birth, a purple sash and a samurai sword, both powerful symbols of her station, as well as “a sacred amulet said to ward off evil spirits.”<sup>1</sup> These amulets, these *omamori*, a class of objects so tied to Japanese identity that they are one of the first gifts given to a newborn child, are the subject of this project.

#### ***Omamori***

*Omamori*, from the Japanese root *mamoru*, “to protect”, are amulets meant to protect or benefit their possessor. Frequently translated as talisman, amulet or charm, variations of *omamori* have been present throughout Japanese history. *Omamori* have evolved over time, changing with the people that use them. Today, *omamori* are small amulets sold by Buddhist, Shinto and other Japanese religious institutions. These objects are generally made of wood, paper, metal or plastic, often placed inside a fabric pouch,

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<sup>1</sup> Zielenziger

and customarily cost between five and fifteen U.S. dollars. As amulets, *omamori* are meant to be carried with a person, or adhered to an object, at all times the individual seeks the aid of the *omamori*. The proximity of an *omamori* to its beneficiary is key to its efficacy.

As material objects, *omamori* hold a great deal of information about the aesthetic tastes and concerns of modern Japanese society, as well as the relationship of that society with its religious institutions. More than many other world religions, Japanese Buddhism and Shinto concern themselves with aiding the population through this-worldly benefits, which are immediately obtainable through the acquisition of *omamori*. As such, the benefits these religions believe they can offer society are readily visible through the *omamori* they offer.

Most Japanese have owned *omamori* at some point in their lives. These are not obscure objects functioning on the margins of society, but a regular component of everyday life in Japan. *Omamori* act as gifts which express the support and concern of family; a commercial force that keeps the economies of various temples and shrines alive; representations of “traditional” Japanese culture; souvenirs; expressions of social identity; an organic link between religion and the populace; and a means of bearing the weight of the human condition. *Omamori* offer people a way to combat, express, and bear their concerns. These objects are a commodity altered in both “form”, the morphology and design of an *omamori*, and “function”, the supernatural benefits an *omamori* offers its possessor, by the concerns of the Japanese public. As such, the examination of *omamori* promises to greatly advance our understanding of Japanese society, as well as the interaction of religion with a modernizing and globalizing world.

## A Visual Sampling of *Omamori*

For me, as it is for most, the first introduction to modern *omamori* was visual; they are seen. As you walk down the street or ride on a train you notice them dangling from backpacks, purses, and cell phones. Cars have them hanging from rear-view mirrors or adhered to the back as bumper stickers. At temples and shrines they are on display, waiting to adorn the goods of their future owner. In the spirit of this tradition of visual introduction, I offer the following five examples to lure the unfamiliar into the world of *omamori* (see Figures 1-5).

Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 1 is an *omamori* from the temple Shinobazunoike Bentendo and features cute versions of the seven gods of luck in their treasure ship. Each of the seven gods of luck has its own identity and specialization. Benzaiten is particularly popular. The only female of the seven, she specializes in the arts and music, as well as in matters of love.

Figure 2 is an *omamori* in the form of a fox. Obtained from Fukugawa Naritasan

Shrine, this *omamori* is meant to “open” one’s luck and drive away evil. The fox (*kitsune*), in this case, acting in his role as messenger and intermediary for the deity Inari, a god of rice, wine, and abundance.

Figure 3 is an *omamori* of the most iconic shape, that of a rectangular six-sided pouch. This particular *omamori*, from Haritsuna Shrine, features Wanmaru-kun, the city mascot for Inuyama (lit. “dog mountain”). City mascots are a recent, but influential trend in Japan. As a cute, general purpose *omamori*, this amulet is an example of the mixing that takes place between popular culture and religious institutions.

Figure 4



Figure 5



Figures 4 and 5 are the two sides (“front” and “back”) of a single *omamori*. Like Figure 3, this amulet is in the iconic rectangular pouch form. This *omamori* was obtained at the mountain temple Takaosan Yakuoin, and features fiercely depicted *tengu* (Japanese goblins). There are two types of Japanese *tengu*: a green type with a crow-like beak called *karasu tengu* (see Figure 4), and a more spiritually accomplished red type with a



long nose called *hanadaka tengu* (see Figure 5). Both types of *tengu* are worshipped at this temple in addition to the main deity. These mountain-dwelling beasts are mysterious and powerful, and are said to protect the good and punish the bad. This *omamori* is quite unique in that it is treated as two-in-one, the *hanadaka tengu* on one side offers the benefit of “opening” one’s luck, and the *karasu tengu* on the other side wards off calamities.

## **Chapter Breakdown**

The proceeding chapter briefly address the use of the terms *amulet* and *talisman* as they will be treated, followed by sections outlining the theoretical and methodological foundations for this project, and a very brief overview *omamori*’s history in Japan. It shows that there is a discussion of amulet use in Japan at least as far back as the Nara period (645-784 A.D.), and that *omamori* have maintained a significant place in Japanese society. I demonstrate this through the consistent presence of amulet use in literature and popular forms of entertainment from the Kojiki to modern examples seen in manga and anime. Due to restrictions in access as well the scope of this project, I have not compiled any grand history of *omamori* use in Japan here. Instead, I have focused on the analysis of modern *omamori*, to examine the insight they have to offer on the effects of modernization and globalization, Japanese society, and the institutional and theoretical relationships between the sacred and the secular.

Chapter three examines *omamori* as they exist in contemporary society, as well as the ways in which *omamori* have been altered to accommodate changes in Japanese society over the last 30 years. The latter analysis is based on a comparison of my

findings and observations with those in Eugene Swanger's 1981 article, A Preliminary Examination of the *Omamori* Phenomenon. Even in such a short period of time, *omamori* have changed dramatically in both form and function, a set of changes that have also altered the traits which make them popular. Each of these three qualities - form, function, and the reasons for their popularity - were examined by Swanger, and, for this chapter, will serve as the basis of comparison between modern *omamori* and those discussed in his article. Each of the subheadings within chapter three will deal with changes that have taken place in the last 30-50 years in terms of *omamori*, and the interpreted purpose and significance of those changes.

Chapter four will examine the use of narratives in *omamori*. This chapter moves the discussion of *omamori* from a comparison of how they have changed over time to one more focused on their current state. For the most part, when images are applied to an *omamori*, their presence plays a more significant role than that of mere decoration. In religious terms, images may tie the object to a deity, legitimate the *omamori*'s supposed function, visually tie the *omamori* and its efficacy to a location, and/or tie the *omamori* to a particular narrative whose story or moral (the entirety or any part thereof) reinforces the power of the *omamori* and, as an extension, that of the temple or shrine. In secular terms, the use of images on *omamori* can make them more desirable as an accessory/souvenir/memento, and thus more effective as an economic entity.

The chapter begins by presenting several narratives that appear in *omamori*. These stories will be retold to convey the importance of that story for the *omamori* with which it has been associated. Specifically, I discuss the *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*, the "White Hare of Inaba", the story of Benkei and Yoshitsune, and the Sanzaru narrative

of Toshogu Shrine. After presenting these narratives, I examine the ways in which each story been portrayed over time, paying specific attention to changes and discrepancies amongst its most popular depictions.

Chapter four ends with an examination of the ways that the narratives and their depictions are employed in *omamori*. In most cases, styles of depicting these narratives that might be considered traditional are abandoned for depictions that employ the kawaii (“cute”) aesthetic that currently dominates Japanese popular culture. I examine why this shift takes place, theorizing that it is the embodiment of a negotiation between popular tastes and religious ideals. Thus, by examining the imagery on *omamori*, I hypothesize that a scholar has access to an understanding of the balancing of elements that religions can perform when creating *omamori*. One can see which “traditional” elements religious institutions deem necessary for the objects to retain their “sacredness,” as well as which elements they are comfortable manipulating with popular culture. This understanding will offer insight into the processes of modernization that religions must go through in order to maintain relevance in constantly changing cultures.

Chapter five, my final chapter of analysis, examines a commercial that was released in 2012 which advertised a set of *omamori* that were being sold by Norton Internet Security, Symantec Japan. In this commercial, Norton presents a new line of computer security for customers. This new item was a set of USB drives that were blessed by a Shinto priest and encased in an *omamori* pouch. These objects, explicitly called *omamori*, were advertised to offer the user the protection of both technology and “god power.”<sup>2</sup> I deconstruct the commercial, the objects themselves, and the efficacy of the commercial, and analyze it in relation to my previous claims regarding the mixing of

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZCgo6\\_r5c1I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZCgo6_r5c1I)

religion, modernity, and popular culture in the forms, functions, and conceptualizations of *omamori*. This chapter will end by illustrating that these particular Norton USB *omamori* epitomize my theory that the dichotomy of sacred and secular does not work when discussing Japanese *omamori*. These objects are the result of the simultaneous and harmonious comingling of the sacred *and* the secular. As religious items intended for popular use, *omamori* cannot be limited by the sacred-secular dichotomy in any meaningful way, and in their complexity demonstrate the potential of these types of objects in examining the ways religion and modernity interact.

### **Implications**

As a product driven by the needs, concerns, and desires of the populace, *omamori* have regularly taken on new forms and functions. Modern *omamori* incorporate images and styles from a variety of sources – everything from the “traditional” canon of Japanese aesthetics, to manga, Hello Kitty, and electrical components. Because the aesthetics of *omamori* are partially or fully adapted to the aesthetic tastes of the population, *omamori* also offer insight into popular culture and its conceptualization, acceptance, and/or appropriation by politically powerful organizations in Japanese society, like religions.

This project has implications for a variety of fields, including archaeology, art history, economics, anthropology and religious studies. An analysis of the relationship between Japanese society, its religions, and modernization through the lens of a practical and material object like *omamori* will offer new and interesting ways of understanding how religions maintain relevance in a modern and scientific world, how an object can

serve as a malleable bridge between the religious and the secular, and how such an item can be adapted by other institutions to create products that are modern, culturally aware and, potentially, embraced by a global audience.

## Chapter 2

### **Background**

In every place in our own country and in foreign lands where excavations on the sites of ancient cities have been made, the spade of the excavator has brought to light a number of objects of various kinds and sizes which we may call generally AMULETS and TALISMANS... and the great mass of evidence about the matter now available justifies the statement that the use of amulets and talismans was and, it may be added, still is, universal. (Budge 1930, 1)

The statement above holds true to this day. Amulet use is about as universal a phenomenon as can be identified. One would be hard-pressed to locate a society, even in today's world of science and supposed secularization, which does not possess amulets for the protection and/or benefit of its members. These staples of human culture have been with us since time immemorable, and show no evidence that they will be abandoned any time soon. Analyses of the amulets of ancient peoples have proven immensely useful at helping us understand human societies. Even though modern amulets are equally rich in cultural information, they do not receive the attention paid to "fine art," scripture, rituals, or even their ancient counterparts. Although researchers have attempted to contribute to the study of contemporary amulet use, it remains a rather esoteric discipline, with little credible information available to the casual, or even committed, researcher. This thesis is my attempt at contributing a case study, as well as some theory to aid in the understanding of both contemporary Japanese society and the study of modern amulet use as a global phenomenon.

## Amulets

To begin, the term “amulet” requires a definition. At present, the word is typically used in its colloquial sense, a usage that is quite ambiguous and is generally interchangeable with the terms talisman, charm, and mascot. This broad usage of the term is not limited to the general public, but includes scholars of all varieties. Used indiscriminately or without definition, these terms lose all distinction (see Swanger, Long, and Miller for examples of such work). Even when definitions are attempted, distinctions between these terms are often muddled. As a result, I have created definitions for the terms *amulets* and *talismans* that are clearly delineated. These definitions are based on both the accepted origins of the terms and their modern colloquial usages.<sup>3</sup>

For this project an *amulet* is an object with general applicability that is endowed with magical powers and meant to be carried by or adhered to a person or object in order to grant that individual/object/contents of the object aid and/or protection. A *talisman*, on the other hand, is an object with general applicability that is endowed with magical powers and meant to be placed in a, generally stationary, location in order to offer its owner aid and/or protection from that location. It is my opinion that these definitions represent the best fusions of accepted definitions, and offers the clearest guidelines from which to distinguish these two types of objects from one another, as well as from other types of “magical” objects. As the term magic plays a significant role in these definitions and this project in general, *magic* will be defined as a force that allows humans to bring

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<sup>3</sup> For a more complete examination and development of definitions for the terms amulet, talisman, charm, and mascot see Appendix I.

about an effect beyond what is considered their natural ability to provide or perform, and that may or may not be regulated by a superhuman being/essence.

## **Theoretical Influences**

### **Lived Religion**

As the objects of this study were created for popular consumption, the topic of lived religion permeates this study. I use the term lived religion here, as opposed to popular religion, consciously. The notion of popular religion encompasses many of the basic realities of these objects, and their place in Japanese culture. According to David Hall, popular religion has come to “signify the space that emerged between official or learned Christianity and the profane (or pagan) culture. In this space lay men and women enjoyed a certain measure of autonomy... fashioning (or refashioning) religious practices in accordance with local circumstances.”<sup>4</sup> Not limited to Christianity or monotheism in its utility, this arena of religious study has been examined by scholars dealing with a variety of religious movements.

That said, Hall goes on to point out that many of these studies adopted a “structure of opposition” with a “distinction between high and low.”<sup>5</sup> In agreement with Hall on the need to undermine this assumed hierarchy, I have employed the label of lived religion, which incorporates the methods and perspective of popular religion while

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<sup>4</sup> Hall, viii

<sup>5</sup> Hall, ix



abandoning its “structure of opposition” and its tendency to “displace the institutional or normative perspectives on practice.”<sup>6</sup>

My fifth chapter approaches an incorporation of a “structure of opposition” in its treatment of a religious response to a secular company’s promotion and distribution of a religious item. However, my purpose therein is to show that in distributing religious objects to the public, the distributor must balance sacred and secular elements. I will show that the “high” and the “low” do not oppose each other. In fact, my analysis will demonstrate that they are able to come together harmoniously. However, there are certain boundaries in this relationship that can betray that balance when crossed and, as we shall see, the explicit support of behaviors considered immoral by members of the Shinto priesthood was such a crossing. That said, the object itself, and its use was not a target of criticism, only the commercial that supported supposedly immoral behaviors. As such, a “structure of opposition” was not identified, but rather an element in a system through which the sacred and the profane are able to come together to form elements of lived religion, used by the populace and supported by the institution.

### **The Sacred-Secular Divide**

In his *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Emile Durkheim offered an understanding of the sacred and the profane which has been highly influential in reinforcing the conceptualization of a sacred-secular dichotomy in academic research on religion. Durkheim boldly declares,

The only way to define the relation between the sacred and the profane is their heterogeneity. This heterogeneity suffices to characterize this classification of

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<sup>6</sup> Hall, ix

things and to distinguish it from any other for one particular reason: *it is absolute*. There is no other example in the history of human thought of two categories of things so profoundly differentiated or so radically opposed to one another... Because man's notion of the sacred is always and everywhere separated from his notion of the profane by a sort of logical gulf between the two, the mind radically rejects any mingling or even contact between things that correspond to these realms... The sacred thing is, par excellence, that which the profane must not and cannot touch with impunity.<sup>7</sup>

Not only has Durkheim's theory been influential in solidifying a dichotomy between these two categories, it also makes explicit the fact that the sacred and the profane would lack any meaningful individual definition. Each is categorized by what it is not, with the implicit understanding that a scholar would know it when they saw it. As a result, most scholars have used the terms profane and secular indiscriminately, understanding both as things, acts, or phenomenon that are not sacred. As such, for this paper I choose to utilize the term secular rather than profane, with the understanding that the two words are synonyms.

Multiple scholars have worked to complicate this binary thought, regularly using material culture to do so.<sup>8</sup> The interactions of people with material culture often complicate or debunk relationships that may be imagined in abstracted or ideal situations. If one examines what people "do rather than what they think, we cannot help but notice the continual scrambling of the sacred and the profane."<sup>9</sup>

As society manipulates aspects of religion, and religion manipulates itself for society, new practices, materials, and conceptualizations emerge that retain elements of both the sacred and the secular, thereby making any notion of a dichotomous relationship between the sacred and the secular obsolete. This project will work to show how

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<sup>7</sup> Durkheim, Pg. 38-39

<sup>8</sup> See Colleen McDannell, 1995; Nancy Netzer, 2006; and Caroline Walker Bynum, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> McDannell, 4

*omamori* embody this reality in their ability to be used, conceptualized, and visually portrayed in a way that mixes elements and motivations that are secular and sacred in a way that allows them to exist simultaneously, harmoniously and without hierarchy.

### **Displaced Meaning**

Grant McCracken's theory of displaced meaning has contributed a great deal to the understanding of *omamori* for this project. For McCracken, *displaced meaning* is the protection of cultural meanings and ideals through their displacement into another space or time. Dislocating an ideal, by its nature something that is unlikely to be able to exist in reality, into the past, future, or another place allows that ideal to continue to exist and offer hope for its attainment.<sup>10</sup> Examples he offers include the notion of a "golden age" and the idealized lifestyle of the "rose-covered cottage."<sup>11</sup> For McCracken, the notion of a "golden age" is a "historical period for which documentation and evidence exists in reassuring abundance... in which social life is imagined to have conformed perfectly to cultural ideals,"<sup>12</sup> and acts as a mode of displacing cultural ideals to the past. His second example demonstrates displaced meaning in the romantic ideal of a life in the country living in a "rose-covered cottage," an ideal that is displaced in the future as a possibility.

To maintain a connection with the present, McCracken theorizes that material objects offer a bridge to displaced meaning. Through the attainment of a particular object (like the rose-covered cottage), or collection of objects, one should be able to access the ideal or cultural meaning that was displaced. This access, however, is generally only partial or temporary, as full exposure of a displaced meaning into the reality of the

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<sup>10</sup> McCracken, pg 104-117

<sup>11</sup> McCracken, pg 110-111

<sup>12</sup> McCracken, pg 106

present causes it to either dissolve in its shortcoming, or for the creation of a new ideal to replace it, that one can now strive for.<sup>13</sup>

This theory fosters an understanding of two aspects of *omamori*. First, displaced meaning offers a partial understanding for the utility and desirability of *omamori*. As objects with the potential to offer aid in the pursuit of some goal, for instance an *omamori* for passing college entrance exams, *omamori* could be seen as a plank in the bridge connecting reality to an ideal displaced in the future. By helping pass the college entrance exam, the *omamori* can be imagined as getting an individual one step closer to getting into the right university, which will get them the right job, which will give them their ideal life. Thus, *omamori* are a material object that can aid people in the pursuit of their ideal.

Additionally, and more importantly for this project, Laura Miller's extension of McCracken's displaced meaning theory offers a useful way of understanding belief in the functions *omamori* are meant to offer.<sup>14</sup> In this variation, displaced meaning offers legitimacy for "magical" objects by conceptualizing them as a bridge that creates a connection to ancient magic, largely through the use of origin stories and symbolism. As magic is not a common aspect of modern life, at least not in the way it is described in classical texts and folklore, any magic born in modern society can be considered comparatively weak. Classical Japanese texts, origin stories, and folklore describe the Japan of the past as inhabited by powerful mystics and monks employing and demonstrating great powers that go far beyond what is commonly considered humanly

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<sup>13</sup> McCracken, pg 109-115

<sup>14</sup> Miller, pg 41-42

possible, as well as active and apparent interactions with deities, spirits, and demons. The relative lack of such individuals and events in modern society implies a world that has “lost” a permeating magic. Therefore, by displacing an *omamori*’s claim to efficacy, and thus its origins, to an ancient deity or event, the temple/shrine can bring ancient magic into the present through its connection via the *omamori*. Just as *omamori* act as an individual’s link to divinity through the essence of a deity, they also act as a link to ancient magic through symbolism and origin stories.

### **Re-Enchantment**

In 2011 Patrick Galbraith published an article examining female fans (in Japan) who produce, consume, and discuss “fictional narratives of romance, often inspired by commercial manga (Japanese comics) and anime (Japanese animation).”<sup>15</sup> The specific type of female fan he observed are generally referred to as *fujoshi* or “rotten girls,” thus termed “because they are enthusiastic about *yaoi*, a genre of fan-produced fiction and art, usually manga, that places established male characters from commercial anime, manga, and video games into unintended romantic relationships [with each other], roughly analogous to ‘slash’ fiction outside Japan.”<sup>16</sup> Our interest, however, is not in these women themselves, but in the activity Galbraith describes them to be performing.

Galbraith claims that more important than the product for many of these women, is the “play” participated in through the creation and consumption of *yaoi*. These fans take characters, either from established works of fiction (manga, anime, books, videogames, etc.) or real people, and layer them in imagined circumstances,

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<sup>15</sup> Galbraith, pg 211

<sup>16</sup> Galbraith, 212

environments, and histories, allowing things to play out in new ways (generally involving some kind of male-male romantic relationship).<sup>17</sup> Galbraith states that in this “play,” “fans not only produce works of homage and parody to reenchant commodities for personal pleasure, but they also publicize their works to facilitate interaction or to bridge a shared imaginary.”<sup>18</sup> My discussion of modern *omamori* utilizes Galbraith’s theory of re-enchantment through play.

The aesthetic of *omamori* currently disseminated by Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples can be better understood through the framework of Galbraith’s particular theory of re-enchantment. As stated above, through displaced meaning, I hypothesize that one way the power of *omamori* is justified is through the displacement of the source of their power to the past, a time when various sources claim that the kind of “magical” power *omamori* profess was both abundant and immediately accessible. Thus, *omamori*, at least partially, displace their authority to the past, in ancient myths, folktales, and *engi* (“miraculous stories”).

Employing Galbraith’s theory, I assert that temples and shrines select ancient sources of authority, largely narratives, which offer a link to an imagined past made possible by displaced meaning. In visually representing these stories on their *omamori*, temples and shrines take established scenes and symbols from the story, but re-present them using pop-culture styles, such as depicting the characters as *kawaii* (‘cute’), to re-enchant them, making the narratives more appealing and relevant to modern society. The resulting *omamori*, carrying imagery from “traditional” narratives represented in a

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<sup>17</sup> Galbraith, 211-216

<sup>18</sup> Galbraith, 211

contemporary way, becomes a re-enchanted bridge to the imagined past, granting access to ancient magic through a culturally relevant product. This theory will be especially important in chapter 4, for my analysis of narrative imagery on *omamori*.

## **Methodologies**

In order to collect the data for this thesis, I performed field work totaling fourteen months in various parts of Japan from 2008-2010 and a second season of fieldwork in 2014. I visited over 250 temples and shrines, paying specific attention to *omamori*. I purchased most of the *omamori* that I believed to possess aesthetics, functions, or backgrounds that were celebrated or that I believed could produce notable results when analyzed individually rather than simply as a member of a class of objects. This distinction was generally made based on aesthetic decoration of an *omamori*, the amount of accompanying information that was offered when it was obtained, and by the degree to which individual *omamori* were advertised by the temple or shrine. As a result I collected a sample of 366 distinct *omamori* from 18 cities in Japan. In addition to these distinct *omamori*, I have data for the complete 2010 offerings of *omamori* for 5 temples and shrines of various sizes and popularity in Japan, and data for the complete 2014 offerings of *omamori* for 60 temples and shrines of various sizes and popularity in Japan. For this thesis, I will use the combination of these two data sets (the collection of individual *omamori*, and the full data for 50 institutions) to compare and contrast descriptions and examples of *omamori* from the past 50 years. In addition, I will perform in-depth analysis of selected *omamori* from this sample to expand upon the understanding of contemporary *omamori* through their functions, forms, and conceptualization to

examine the negotiation they embody between religious institutions, the Japanese public, and modernity.

In addition to these artifacts, I will be examining modern advertisements that pertain to *omamori*. Specifically, I will dedicate a chapter of my thesis to the analysis of a 2012 commercial for a line of computer security usb products released by Norton. This commercial employs a mixture of religious and popular aesthetics and functions that should produce fruitful results for my examination of *omamori* as an embodiment of negotiation between religion and society.

### **A Brief History of *Omamori***

*Omamori*, and the ways they are conceptualized, have changed a great deal over the course of Japanese history. In the Nara period (645-784 C.E.) we find the first known extant examples of written history in Japan, the books the *Kojiki* and the *Nihongi*. Within these books there is a great deal of discussion of amulets owned by deities with a variety of useful traits. These range in form and power and include: a bow and arrow that give life, a hammer shaped object with the ability to grant wishes, a scarf that can ward off insect and reptilian threats, peaches that repel demons, and a sword that can grant life. Each of these objects benefited its user and only functioned when in the immediate possession of an individual or deity. Aside from sharing a similar mode of use, these objects also offered benefits similar to those attributed to modern *omamori*.

There are also stories in the *Kojiki* which tie supernatural power to the Japan inhabited by humans through material culture. These connections are then used by temples and shrines in their creation of *omamori*. A good example of this can be found in the *Kojiki*'s story of the deity Izanagi fleeing the land of the dead after having broken his



vow to the deity Izanami. Izanagi is being pursued by “the eight thunder deities and a horde of warriors of Yömi<sup>19</sup>” and arrives at the foot of a pass. When he arrived, he...

took three peaches which were there and, waiting for his pursuers, attacked them with the peaches. They all turned and fled. Izanagi-nō-mikōtō said to the peaches: “Just as you have saved me, when, in the Central Land of the Reed Plains, any of the race of mortal men fall into painful straits and suffer in anguish, then do you save them also.”<sup>20</sup>

In this portion of the story of Izanami and Izanagi, there are a multitude of interesting inferences that can be made. In this story, the magical object was not originally a possession of a god, but a fruit found in its natural state. Many other examples of amuletic objects from the *Kojiki* are items that were owned and utilized by deities with no reference to humans. The story of the peach allowed for objects in nature to hold inherent mystical power, as well as for the employment of that power by humans. This helped lay the groundwork for many modern *omamori* which contain pieces or symbols of objects found in nature, such as trees, seeds, and the peach itself, which are said to empower them.

Heian Japan (784-1185 A.D.) also has evidence of *omamori* use that survives through literature. Two of the more famous examples are found in *The Tale of Genji*, which is widely considered the world’s first novel<sup>21</sup>, and in a portion of *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter* called the “Easy Delivery Charm of the Swallows”. A continued presence of protective objects, and a move to (rather than an implication for) their use by humans instead of deities can be seen through these two stories.

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<sup>19</sup> Philippi, pg 64

<sup>20</sup> Philippi, pg 65

<sup>21</sup> “In Celebration of the Tale of Genji, the World’s First Novel: Year in Review 2001”

*The Tale of Genji* offers an interesting example of *omamori* use in popular culture from the Heian period. In this book, author Murasaki Shikibu, relays the life of Genji, a son of the emperor. At one point in his life, Genji comes down with a grave fever, and after “all sorts of spells [are] cast and healing rights done, but to no avail”, he seeks out a hermit in a mountain, reputed to be able to cure any illness. The ascetic then “made the necessary talismans, made Genji swallow them, and proceeded with the rite”.<sup>22</sup> Genji does in fact quickly recover from his illness with the help of these “talismans”.

This is one of the first cases in which there are extant examples of *omamori* that can be obtained with the same general form and purpose.<sup>23</sup> Although they are rare today, Koganji Temple, in the Tokyo area, distributes this kind of talisman, which, when ingested, is said to cure illness. This modern *omamori* takes the same form as the one described in *The Tale of Genji*, a small slip of paper carrying the Sanskrit name of a deity.<sup>24</sup> It is clear that the use of *omamori* was already established by the Heian period based on their inclusion in this novel.

By the Tokugawa period (1615-1867 C.E.) charms purchased from religious institutions were carried on a person in a manner that would make the activity inconspicuous to others. Patrons of *omamori* wore them around their necks, in their pockets, or inside small cases that hung from their obi.<sup>25</sup> These *omamori* were aesthetically very simple. Comprised mostly of a small piece of paper or wood bearing a

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<sup>22</sup> Murasaki, 83

<sup>23</sup> See Chamberlain (1893), 363, and discussion of omikage *omamori* distributed by Kōganji which is “a small paper image of Jizō designed to be swallowed or stuck to the skin at the point of the affected area” Swagner 1981: 242

<sup>24</sup> Murasaki, 83

<sup>25</sup> see Miyake, 69; and Traphagan, 114

short inscription<sup>26</sup>, the aesthetics of *omamori* does not seem to have been a driving force in their public appeal. That is not to say that quality was neglected, as there are references to the use of fine woods and high quality paper,<sup>27</sup> but these objects seem to have been created for their supernatural function alone. Tokugawa period *omamori* were objects with a purpose, they were bought and used for that purpose, and discarded when that purpose had been fulfilled.

Today's *omamori* have changed a great deal. In addition to carrying its religious power, *omamori* have now become an object of personal adornment. One major event leading to this change in modern *omamori* was the popularization of placing the paper charms into a cloth pouch.<sup>28</sup> It is a long standing belief in Japan, especially within the Shinto tradition, that deities inhabit hollow and dark places: hollow trees, mountains, and the insides of stones, for example. Since an *omamori* carries the essence of a deity, it was said that for that essence to remain in the charm, the individual would have to keep the *omamori* in a dark place, hidden from light.<sup>29</sup> Since the part of the *omamori* inhabited by a deity's essence was now constantly enclosed in a dark place, a cloth pouch, it was no longer necessary to keep the *omamori* hidden. This practice was already in place before 1893,<sup>30</sup> but does not seem to have been very common until the 1950's and 60's.<sup>31</sup>

With the popularization of this innovation, the potential for *omamori* changed a great deal. Not only could *omamori* aid their possessors, they could now also be made visible, advertising for the temple and allowing people to use their *omamori* as

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<sup>26</sup> Swanger, 240

<sup>27</sup> See Hur, 41

<sup>28</sup> Swanger, 240

<sup>29</sup> Swanger, 244

<sup>30</sup> Chamberlain, 1893, pg 364; Holtom, 439.

<sup>31</sup> Swanger, 240, and Yanagita, 314-315

accessories.<sup>32</sup> Based on Swanger's article (1981), *omamori* of the time seem to have been used in a manner similar to the way they had been before, kept inside a bag, pocket, or wallet, and generally hidden from sight. What likely popularized the transformation of *omamori* into accessories since then was the development of bumper sticker and adhesive *omamori* for cars, and *keitai* strap *omamori* for cell phones, electronics and their cases.

The aesthetic changes that have accompanied *omamori*'s use as an accessory, the functions that have been developed to address the stressors of modern society, and the way that contemporary *omamori* are popularized will be the sources of analysis for this project. By examining these three attributes of *omamori*, I will show that modern *omamori* can offer a great deal of insight into Japanese culture, and the ways that religion and society interact and influence one another.

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<sup>32</sup> Anderson, 370

## Chapter 3

### **Changes Over Time**

#### **A Re-Examination of the *Omamori* Phenomenon**

*Omamori* are organic, they change with the society in which they are immersed. For this chapter, I will examine the ways in which *omamori* have altered to accommodate changes in Japanese society over the last 30 years. In doing so, the chapter will offer insight into both the ways in which Japanese culture has changed in this time, as well as the ways that religious institutions saw fit to accommodate those changes through *omamori*.

I will explore these changes through a comparison of my findings and observations with those in Eugene Swanger's 1981 article, A Preliminary Examination of the *Omamori* Phenomenon. Swanger's article is the only work centered on *omamori* that has been published thus far in English. Though it is a self-proclaimed preliminary study, it offers a good amount of data on *omamori* of the late 70's and early 80's and thus serves as an important precursor to this paper.

Even in a period of time as brief as 30 years, *omamori* have seen a dramatic increase in both "form", the morphology and design of an *omamori*, and "function", the supernatural benefits an *omamori* offers its possessor. Changes in these two traits have also been accompanied by changes in the reasons for an *omamori*'s popularity. Each of these three qualities (form, function, and the reasons for their popularity) were examined

by Swanger, and, for this chapter, will serve as the focus of comparison between current *omamori* and those discussed in his article.

## Functions

There are functions of *omamori*, and of amulets found throughout the rest of the world, which transcend time. These functions are ever-present as they represent aids to the human condition, or as Swanger puts it, “ritual sustenance of the normal order.”<sup>33</sup> These functions include promotion of good health, easy childbirth, deterrence of evil, the “opening” of one’s luck, relationship aids, and prosperity.

In addition to these ever-present functions, new additions have been made to the *omamori* roster as society and its concerns have changed. With the development of new technologies, conditional stressors, such as traveling on foot, have been abandoned by *omamori* functions in favor of more pressing concerns, such as driving safety. The functions which *omamori* serve only persist for as long as their patrons need them; once their need has diminished they can, and have been, abandoned for more relevant stressors.

In the past century there have been at least two major developments in terms of *omamori* function. The first, and most apparent of these two, is the development and rampant popularity of driving safety *omamori*. Before these, there were *omamori* for travelers that protected them from misfortunes (such as bandits) and from pain due to extensive walking. Today, these *omamori* are all but extinct, replaced by sales of *omamori* for safety in vehicles, most commonly cars, but also planes and bicycles. Traffic related purification ceremonies at a temple in Kawasaki went from 100 incidents

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<sup>33</sup> Swanger, pg 237

in 1963 to 67,000 in 1982<sup>34</sup>. The increased volume in vehicular transportation, and the threat it carries, has given rise to driving-safety *omamori*. Swanger discussed this type of *omamori* in his article, and, as it was then, it is still one of the most popular kinds of *omamori* functions available.

The second, and newest, development in *omamori* function is the creation of *omamori* for the protection of electronics and the data these products carry. This type of *omamori* function is still uncommon; however, based on personal observations, its availability has steadily increased between 2008 and 2014.

*Omamori* for the protection of electronics and their data did not exist when Swanger wrote his article in 1981, and are a result of the increased dependence society has developed on electronics since then. With the proliferation of cell phones, personal computers, and other electronics, the potential loss of information that these objects carry has become a major stressor in modern society. Due to this, people in Japan have begun to turn to religious institutions for an increased sense of security in the safety of their cyber-data. With society's continuing dependence on electronics, it is likely that this function will quickly proliferate to the point that it may one day rank among the most popular *omamori* available.

Beyond the addition of new functions for *omamori*, the array of functions that a single temple or shrine offers has also increased since Swanger wrote his article. As Swanger put it, of the seven specific functions he identified that *omamori* commonly served ("traffic safety, avoidance of evil, open luck, education and passing the

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<sup>34</sup> Reader, pg 190

examination, prosperity in business, acquisition of a mate and marriage, and healthy pregnancy and easy delivery”) “seldom are all seven needs met by a single shrine or temple”.<sup>35</sup> He went on to specify that *omamori* at Tenmangu Jinja in Dazaifu served seven different “functions”, *omamori* at Senso-ji in Tokyo served 6 “needs”, and *omamori* at Konpira Shrine in Shikoku offered *omamori* for forty-five “needs”.<sup>36</sup>

Though Konpira Shrine deviates from the general trend, by looking at tables one and two, one can see a dramatic increase in the variety of functions offered at the other shrine and temple he discussed.

**Table 1**

*Omamori* Functions Offered at  
Various Temples and Shrines in  
2014

Shine/Temple Name	<i>Omamori</i> Functions*
Sensō-ji	12
Tanmangu Jinja	24
Konpira Shrine	26

**Table 2**

*Omamori* Functions Offered at  
Various Temples and Shrines as  
Described by Swanger in 1981

Shine/Temple Name	<i>Omamori</i> Functions*
Sensō-ji	6
Tenmangu Jinja	7
Konpira Shine	45

**\*The quantities for *omamori* functions in table 1 and 2 were derived in the following ways:**

**Table 1:** I collected these quantities personally on site at each temple and shrine. Distinctions were made based on the advertised function of each *omamori* at its specific shrine or temple. For all *omamori* in which no description of a specific function was given, I categorized them under a single function of general purpose *omamori*. For *omamori* that were not specifically advertised for any single function, but were attributed with more than 2 functions, I also categorized them as general purpose *omamori*. In the case that a temple or shrine advertised an *omamori* for a single specific purpose, however, written on the *omamori* were additional attributes, I categorized them under the function as advertised by the temple, rather than as general purpose *omamori*. I did not condense any *omamori* functions into categories, for instance, if a

<sup>35</sup> Swanger, 239

<sup>36</sup> Swanger, 239. In his article, Swanger uses the words “function” and “need” interchangeably to describe the supernatural benefit(s) offered by an *omamori*. For the purpose of clarity, however, in this paper, when discussing *omamori*, function will always refer to the supernatural functions *omamori* are attributed with (i.e. driving safety, longevity, opening luck).



shrine had an *omamori* for recovering from an illness, one for good health, and another for longevity, even though all of these functions pertain to health, they were left as distinct functions. The only time I condensed functions was when an *omamori* was attributed with the same function as another, for instance, each of these temples and shrines had more than one *omamori* specifically for driving safety, thus all driving safety *omamori* would be categorized under a single function.

**Table 2:** These quantities were taken from Swanger's article "A Preliminary Examination of the *Omamori* Phenomenon". In this article he gave numbers for what he called *omamori* functions, but did not elaborate on how he obtained these numbers or delineated between functions.<sup>37</sup>

Senso-ji alone has doubled its repertoire, while the number of functions at Tenmangu Jinja has more than tripled. Konpira Shrine offers an exceptional situation. Though I cannot definitively explain its apparent drop in available functions, the reduction may be a result of the shrine's rebranding to focus on happiness. The shrine's emphasis on this branding is clear in its website and promotional materials which highlight the need for happiness in modern society, the sense of "happiness" one feels when they have completed the famously arduous climb of 1,368 stone steps up the side of mountain to the shrine, and the exclusive "smiling face genki-kun" *omamori* strap and sticker one can only purchase at the main shrine on the mountain (See figure 6).<sup>38</sup>

**Figure 6<sup>39</sup>**



<sup>37</sup> Since Swanger did not elaborate on his system for counting or distinguishing between *omamori* functions, this analysis is tentative until document research can be done on the *omamori* available at that time at the three institutions.

<sup>38</sup> "笑顔元気くん守り"

<sup>39</sup> Photo credit: <http://www.konpira.or.jp/>

These specific comparisons with Swanger's data that demonstrate an increase in the varieties of functions available at temples and shrines is supported by my own collection of *omamori* data for sixty temples and shrines in 2014 of variable size and fame, that average about fourteen functions per location. Since the average number of *omamori* functions exceeds Swanger's counts for Sensoji and Tenmangu Shrine, both of which are large, famous institutions known for their *omamori*, a general trend for larger function variability seems to be clear.

The source of this rise in the variability of *omamori* functions is difficult to identify, however there are two likely causes. The first is that the proliferation of mass manufacturing makes the production and acquisition of various *omamori* much easier for temples and shrines to offer a wider array of functions that would appeal to the concerns of a broader set of patrons. It is likely that this reasoning works in tandem with what is often argued to be a growing lack of belief in these objects by the Japanese population. This issue will be discussed further later in this chapter, but for now, it is important to understand that there are many people, if not most people, in Japanese society who claim that the act of purchasing *omamori* is not a religious act but a societal custom.<sup>40</sup>

If one accepts this premise, the persistence of this custom is often attributed to the acts of obtaining *omamori* as a souvenir and/or gifting *omamori* to show your concern or support for someone, generally family.<sup>41</sup> When someone is going through something difficult, stressful, or dangerous, a way to express your concern and support for that person is to gift them an *omamori* with a function relevant to their issue. I believe that

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<sup>40</sup> Anderson, 369-370; Arakawa, 53; Reader, 11

<sup>41</sup> Anderson, 369-370; Arakawa, 53; Reader, 189; Traphagan, 115

this rise in the profession of gift giving as a primary justification for purchasing *omamori* represents one of the main reasons that shrines and temples have increased the variety of functions they offer since over the last few decades.<sup>42</sup> A greater variety of *omamori* functions would allow any temple or shrine to offer a patron an *omamori* that would address the concerns of their loved one(s), giving shrines and temples a one-stop shopping feature.

## Form

Industrialization and technological advancement have altered *omamori*'s form as well. Originally produced by lay women,<sup>43</sup> *omamori* are now almost entirely produced by large secular manufacturing companies that specialize in the production of religious objects.<sup>44</sup> The switch to secularized manufacturing is due to both the ease of long-distance travel, and an accompanying increase in demand for these objects. The high demand for *omamori* has made it impossible for temples and shrines to continue using their laity for *omamori* production.<sup>45</sup> This transition from laity to industry caused Peter Takayama, who wrote the supplemental remarks for Swanger's article, to project that maintaining an aspect of uniqueness in *omamori* for individual temples and shrines was

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<sup>42</sup> There is a long history of obtaining *omamori* for others in Japan. However, this was not generally framed as being as personal or as about expressing concern as it is today. Traditionally, as pilgrimages were extremely expensive and time consuming endeavors before modern modes of travel, a large group, village, or city would send a representative who would obtain *omamori* for the members. This brought benefits of the pilgrimage to patrons and supporters of the pilgrim, allowing those who could not make the trip themselves to have access to the supernatural functions claimed by the pilgrimage site. Representatives from shrines and temples also traveled disseminating *omamori* to those unable to make pilgrimages, again making the supernatural functions of a given pilgrimage site available to a larger population. For more on these traditions see Thal, 103-115 and 172-176; Pigliasco, 182-183; Groemer (1999), 276-279; and Hardacre, 15-16

<sup>43</sup> Swanger, pg 240

<sup>44</sup> Reader and Tanabe, pg 222-223

<sup>45</sup> Anderson, pg 371

unlikely.<sup>46</sup> His projection, however, did not come to pass. Although mass manufacturing has produced a degree of ubiquity amongst *omamori*, one rarely encounters an *omamori* with the same combination of form and function at more than one temple or shrine.<sup>47</sup>

The visual aspect of *omamori* has become extremely significant. As stated in chapter 2, earlier in their history *omamori* took on very simple forms — a small piece of wood, or paper with a prayer or the name of a deity written on it.<sup>48</sup> The only apparent concerns for aesthetics were in the quality of wood and paper used to create the *omamori*, likely done to avoid having the amulet's potency questioned due to poor craftsmanship. *Omamori* needed be little more than objects which brought about desired effects. If a person was being haunted<sup>49</sup> or came down with an illness, that person bought an *omamori* to alleviate their problem, carried it with them, and kept it hidden until it served its purpose. Today's *omamori* have changed a great deal. In addition to carrying religious power, *omamori* have now become objects of personal adornment.

The first major change made to modern *omamori* was the addition of a cloth pouch.<sup>50</sup> It is a long standing belief in Japan, especially within Shintoism, that deities inhabit hollow and dark places - hollow trees, mountains, and the inside of stones for example. Since an *omamori* carries the essence of a deity, it was believed that for that essence to remain in the charm, the individual would have to keep it in a dark place, hidden from light.<sup>51</sup> Once the aspect of the amulet inhabited by the deity's essence was

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<sup>46</sup> Swanger, pg 250

<sup>47</sup> Personal observation from fieldwork in 2008, 2010, and 2014, which included the visitation of over 200 temples and shrines throughout Japan.

<sup>48</sup> Nelson (2006), pg 80, and Miyake, pg 69

<sup>49</sup> Hearn (1971), pg 73-116

<sup>50</sup> Swanger, pg 240

<sup>51</sup> Swanger, 244

constantly enclosed in a dark place, the cloth pouch, it was no longer necessary to keep the *omamori* hidden.

To avoid confusion, the term *omamori* refers to the entire amulet, not just its empowered core. Thus, *omamori* before the pouch were just the empowered aspect that one needed to keep hidden. Once temples and shrines started permanently sealing the empowered aspect within individual cloth pouches, that entire object (empowered core and protective pouch) is referred to as *omamori*, and the belief becomes that if one opens the pouch, that the *omamori* would lose its power. Thus, the pouch becomes a necessary aspect of the amulet itself.

With the addition of the pouch, the potential for *omamori* changed a great deal. Not only could *omamori* aid its possessor, it could now also be made visible, advertising for the temple and allowing the person to use the *omamori* as an accessory.<sup>52</sup> These uses for *omamori* were not discussed by Swanger, and likely represent more recent phenomenon. Based on Swanger's article, *omamori* at the time he did his research seem to have been held in a manner similar to the way they had been before, kept inside a bag, pocket, or wallet, and generally hidden from sight.

As time went by, it seems that the importance of *omamori*'s connection to being hidden diminished. Within a generation<sup>53</sup> of the standardization of pouch use, new *omamori* were being produced which clearly possessed no consistently hidden aspect. Temples and shrines started making telephone card *omamori*, which one would have been expected to regularly remove from one's wallet. It seems as though the elimination

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<sup>52</sup> Anderson, pg 370

<sup>53</sup> Roughly 25 years

of the conscious act of hiding *omamori* allowed people to forget that this had been a significant aspect of their use. As this was no longer important, new *omamori* made their way onto the scene that had not been possible in the past. What likely popularized *omamori*'s use as an accessory in the last thirty years is the development of bumper sticker and adhesive *omamori* for cars, and *keitai*-strap<sup>54</sup> *omamori* for cell phones, electronics and their cases. Lacking the need to have a hidden aspect, these *omamori* soon gained a variability and popularity that has persisted and proliferated to this day.

Cell phones have become one of the most personalized objects in Japanese culture. A cell phone in Japan, especially for young people, is “more than just a tool, it is something they are highly motivated to animate and customize as a dream catcher, good luck charm, an alter ego, or as a pet”.<sup>55</sup> This fad was seized by shrines and temples, which turned *omamori* into objects meant to be hung from one's cell phone, keys, bag or adhered to a car. Putting *omamori* in plain sight, and selling them as something that would be visible to others, created a need for shrines and temples to make *omamori* more attractive.

One of the ways that this attraction is achieved is through the use of popular culture. Examples include the use of cute culture, the adoption of popular characters like Hello Kitty, and the use of historical figures popularized by pop-culture media, including Abe no Semei (popularized by graphic novels and a set of films), and Sakamoto Ryoma (popularized by TV dramas, films, and graphic novels).

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<sup>54</sup> *Keitai* is the Japanese word for cell phone. For examples of *keitai*-strap *omamori* see Figures 7 and 8.

<sup>55</sup> Ito, Okabe and Matsuda, pg 87

Since Swanger wrote his article, cute culture has become such a significant element of Japanese popular culture that in 1992, the word *kawaii* (cute) was “estimated to be the most widely used, widely loved, habitual word in modern living Japanese.”<sup>56</sup> Cuteness in Japan is said to be represented by “being small, soft, infantile, mammalian, round, without bodily appendages, and without bodily orifices (e.g. without mouths).”<sup>57</sup> The dramatic spread of cute culture since the 1980’s left few objects unchanged, there were even houses one could purchase especially marketed for their embodiment of cuteness.<sup>58</sup> This new aesthetic craze did not leave *omamori* behind. *Omamori* were, in fact, to become an embodiment of *kawaii* (cute) culture in their design.

Figure 7



Zodiac Animal *Omamori*

Figure 8



Yoshitsune and Benkei *Omamori*

Figure 9



Jizo *Omamori*

It has become nearly impossible to visit the amulet counter at any temple or shrine and not encounter a wide array of cuteness. The twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac are made into characters one would expect to see in a children’s book (Figure 7), warriors of legend are turned into little cloth characters with tiny limbs (Figure 8), and Jizo, a deity, is turned into a small round, chubby snowman like figure (Figure 9). With cuteness and childlike whimsy acting as an expression of rebellion towards growing older

<sup>56</sup> Kinsella, pg 221

<sup>57</sup> Kinsella, pg 226

<sup>58</sup> Kinsella, pg 226

and gaining responsibility in Japan,<sup>59</sup> the country's consumption of cute culture is enormous, and the creators of *omamori* do not fail to take advantage of this situation.

Figure 10



*Omamori* featuring Hello Kitty

As part of cute culture, the popular Hello Kitty character is one of the only non-religious figures to permeate *omamori*. In fact, in 2010, there was one shrine in Tokyo in which more than half of the types of *omamori* sold there featured Hello Kitty.<sup>60</sup> Hello Kitty is undeniably one of the most powerful marketing characters of Japan's post-war generation. Representing a billion dollar a year industry, she successfully crosses the age gap, appealing to children as being cool, adolescents as being cute, and adults as being nostalgic.<sup>61</sup> Hello Kitty is so powerful that a study from Tôyô Gakuen University in Japan showed that when asked, people who did not like Hello Kitty often owned something with her on it, and acted as though they liked her around others.<sup>62</sup> The trend for liking Hello Kitty is so powerful, that people feel obligated to be fond of the little cat.

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<sup>59</sup> Kinsella (1995), pg 240-243

<sup>60</sup> Togo Shrine in Harajuku, Tokyo.

<sup>61</sup> Mcveigh, pg 225

<sup>62</sup> Mcveigh, pg 239-240



As I have stated, this marketing power and love from her fans is understood and utilized by temples and shrines that feature her on their *omamori*.

Color variation is also a highly used means of making *omamori* appealing. There are many religious institutions that offer the same talisman in a variety of (generally 2 or 3) colors, and an array of other charms that can complete the color rainbow. The purchasing of *omamori* today can be dictated solely by their attractiveness to a patron or tourist,<sup>63</sup> and in various cases are purchased as souvenirs<sup>64</sup> and even collected.<sup>65</sup> The reality is that, today, *omamori* are an accessory, and, as such, they must help accentuate the image an individual wishes to project.

It is clear that these changes have affected the variety of *omamori* forms (their morphology and design) available at temples and shrines. The increased importance in aesthetics, due to the new application of *omamori* as accessories, has resulted in a dramatic increase in the selection of *omamori* one has to choose from. Swanger described Senso-ji as having 15 “forms” of *omamori* and Tenmangu Jinja as having 19 different “kinds” of *omamori*. The ambiguous nature of Swanger’s language makes certainty in cross analysis impossible, as he did not specify what constituted a kind or type of *omamori* in his assessment. However, some comparisons can still be made.

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<sup>63</sup> Traphagan, pg 122

<sup>64</sup> Reader, pg 189

<sup>65</sup> Traphagan, pg 114

**Table 3**

Comparison of Omamori Forms Offered at Various Temples and Shrines in 1981 and 2014

Shrine/Temple Name	<i>Omamori</i> Offerings as Described by Swanger	<i>Omamori</i> Offered in 2014	
		Types of <i>Omamori</i> *	Absolute Number of Types*
Sensō-ji	15	19	39
Tenmangu Jinja	19	46	105

\*The quantities for *omamori* types in Table 3 were derived in the following ways:

**Types of *omamori*:** I have provided two sets of tallies for each of the temples and shrines. The first set, categorized as “types of *omamori*”, includes a tally of *omamori* which differed in any combination of shape, design motif or function. I condensed *omamori* which were identical in every way except color variation or size, combining those into a single “type”. I also condensed *omamori* which were of the same form and style, but varied based on the recipients’ year of birth, i.e. if there were 12 *omamori*, one for each animal of the Chinese zodiac (see Fig. 1), or 9 *omamori*, one for each of the Buddhas/bodhisattvas one might be born to, the set was condensed into a single “type” all 12 or 9 *omamori* respectively counting only as 1.

**Absolute number of *omamori*:** For the second tally, “absolute number of types”, I do not make the distinctions made in my “types of *omamori*” tally. Rather, I counted each *omamori* offered at a shrine or temple that varied from one another in any way as one, thus including all of the *omamori* excluded in the “types of *omamori*” tally<sup>66</sup>.

**Kinds of *omamori*:** Swanger failed to discuss the way in which he counted types of *omamori*, and thus, it is impossible to state with certainty whether his numbers match my “types of *omamori*” or “variety of types” categories.

Regardless of whether Swanger’s kinds of *omamori* corresponds to my “types of *omamori*” or “variety of types” categories, the data shows a dramatic increase in the variety of *omamori* forms available for purchase at a given shrine can be identified. At Sensō-ji, in the last thirty years, they have increased the amount of variability in their

<sup>66</sup> See Appendix 1, 2, 3, and 4 for an illustration of this process for Asakusa Jinja and Sensō-ji.

*omamori*'s form from fifteen to thirty nine, more than double what it had been.

Tenmangu Shrine experienced a much more dramatic increase, going from nineteen types to a towering one hundred and five in 2014. From this comparison, it seems that as a result of changes discussed in this section, most significantly the use of *omamori* as objects of adornment, the variability of *omamori*'s forms offered at a single shrine or temple has increased dramatically in the last 30 years. This demonstrates that aesthetic consideration in the selection of an *omamori* has been acknowledged by the temples and shrines and allowed to manifest in the *omamori*.

### **Conceptualization and Popularization of *Omamori***

The final aspect of *omamori* that I will discuss here are the modes by which temples and shrines attempt to manage the popularization of *omamori*. Swanger discussed the aspects of *omamori* which influence their popularity, and the ways in which these have changed over the last 30 years says a great deal about contemporary Japanese society.

Association with the past is a highly used method for the popularization of *omamori*. As explained in chapter 2, using images and stories that tie a temple, shrine, or specific *omamori* to a past supernatural power or event, creates a degree of justification for belief in that power. As magic is not a common aspect of modern life, at least not in the way it is described in classical texts and folklore, any magic born in modern society can be considered comparatively weak. Classical Japanese texts, origin stories, and folklore describe the Japan of the past as inhabited by powerful mystics and monks employing and demonstrating great powers that go far beyond what is commonly

considered the ability of humans, as well as active and apparent interactions with deities, spirits, and demons. The relative lack of such individuals and events in modern society implies a world that has “lost” a permeating magic. Therefore, by displacing<sup>67</sup> an *omamori*’s claim to efficacy, and thus its origins, to an ancient deity or event, the temple/shrine can bring ancient powerful magic into the present through the connection it has through the *omamori*. Just as *omamori* act as an individual’s link to divinity through the essence of a deity, they also act as a link to ancient magic through symbolism and origin stories. Thus, use of images and symbols that tie an *omamori* to one of these stories makes *omamori* use more defensible to one-self and others, and thus more publically acceptable.<sup>68</sup>

Swanger discussed the importance of a good *engi*, or miraculous story, to justify and popularize *omamori*,<sup>69</sup> and this persists as one of the features which make an *omamori* marketable today. People will still travel from all over Japan to go to a temple or shrine that is famous for an *omamori* for a given purpose, a fame and popularity that is often rooted in some kind of *engi*.<sup>70</sup> Though *engi* are extremely important in the popularization of *omamori*, changes in the beliefs individuals hold about *omamori* and their efficacy have created new modes of popularizing *omamori*.

Today, religion itself is matter of great debate among scholars studying Japan. It has become commonplace for Japanese people to say that they are not religious, often

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<sup>67</sup> See McCracken, pg104-117 and Miller, pg 41-42

<sup>68</sup> See Nelson (1996), 122 and Davis, 232 for a discussion on the perceived aversion of some Japanese to associate themselves publicly with a particular religion or belief. In Kimura, 49-50, an interview can be found that outlines some of the embarrassment that may ensue from making *omamori* publicly visible.

<sup>69</sup> Swanger, pg 240-243

<sup>70</sup> Examples include the *omamori* for protection of one’s progeny from Yasaka Jinja discussed by Swanger (pg 241-242), the fish scale *omamori* at Sensō-ji, and the sports *omamori* at Shiramine Jinja.

stating they do not actively practice any specific religion, and any activities they partake in that may be construed as religious are nothing more than tradition and habit.<sup>71</sup> In such an outwardly “modernized” society, which valorizes scientific-mindedness, it has become somewhat old-fashioned to label yourself religious,<sup>72</sup> with many people only visiting a local temple or shrine for special occasions, like New Years and the Obon festival, and at times of need, such as before college and high school entrance exams. Given that most Japanese claim to be non-religious, there has been much debate over the actual religiousness of purchasing *omamori*, and there are two arguments made for the secularity of *omamori* purchasing.<sup>73</sup>

The first is that, for many people, *omamori* are no longer considered to be magical or hold any power of their own. They are purchased, instead, to follow in the tradition of showing your consideration of someone by gifting them an *omamori*.<sup>74</sup> This case is especially true for parents or grandparents and children. Through the gifting of *omamori*, a person is given the opportunity to express their feelings towards others.<sup>75</sup> When giving someone an *omamori* for success on a final exam, you are not necessarily offering them something you think will give them a supernatural edge, but showing them that you are concerned and invested in their success and prosperity.<sup>76</sup>

The second argument “against” the religiousness of the act of obtaining *omamori* is that *omamori* are not believed to hold supernatural power. However, with their long

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<sup>71</sup> See Reader, pg 11; and Tanabe and Reader, Pg 51 wherein a girl justifies her purchase of an *omamori* by saying that she is “only being a good Japanese”.

<sup>72</sup> Kimura, pg 48-49; Warms et al., pg 56-59; and Covell, 169-170

<sup>73</sup> Anderson, pg 369-372

<sup>74</sup> Kimura, pg 48-49

<sup>75</sup> Traphagan, pg 115

<sup>76</sup> Kimura, pg 49

history in Japanese culture and their ties to religion, there is a chance that they may have some power, so one should buy them “just in case”. It is true that *omamori* are gifts which allow one to show concern for an individual. In addition to showing concern, however, there is considered to be a chance that the folklore about *omamori* could be true.<sup>77</sup> It is this type of rational thinking that has allowed *omamori* to maintain their status as potentially powerful objects. For, though one might consider them unlikely to have any power, their deep history in Japanese culture gives them too much credibility to be regarded as pure fantasy.<sup>78</sup>

The public aspect of *omamori* is extremely significant in the reserved social atmosphere of Japan. Showing one’s true nature, or the ties one has to religion is a very revealing act, something that is not taken lightly. Taking this into consideration, *omamori* can be thought of as coming in two basic forms, traditional – those which are plainly religious in nature from their appearance; and non-traditional – *omamori* which take the form of an animal, character, or object, which are only verifiably religious upon closer inspection. The use of a traditional *omamori* makes it clear to those around an individual that they are using a religious object. Non-traditional *omamori*, however, are far more discrete. These *omamori* tend to look identical to cell phone charms that can be bought at shopping centers and souvenir shops which carry no religious ties. Often the only way to know if a non-traditional *omamori* is in fact an *omamori* is if one looks at the small silver or gold tag attached to the strap which carries the name of the temple or shrine where it was purchased. The discretion, and often exaggerated cuteness or

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<sup>77</sup> Tanabe and Reader, pg 128

<sup>78</sup> Though there are people who fully believe in the efficacy of *omamori*, what I have attempted to show here are popular opposing views within and without Japanese culture that have had a significant effect on *omamori*’s conceptualization and status.

coolness of these charms in particular, makes them the ideal talisman for someone who wishes to use an *omamori*, but do so inconspicuously.

Today, it is not uncommon for people to purchase *omamori* primarily as souvenirs, accessories and collectables, their potential religious benefits acting as a nice bonus or even a non-issue. Though support of this motivation by religious institutions is rarely verbalized, acceptance and accommodation of this type of *omamori* purchasing can be seen in the *omamori* offered by temples and shrines today. Religious institutions offer *omamori* that depict a famous garden, scene or aspect of the temple or shrine to serve as souvenirs of the place or a festival.

The changing degree of faith in Japanese society has allowed *omamori* to become popular for reasons which do not seem to have come into play to such a degree for Swanger. Trends for accessorizing and cuteness as well as a valorization of scientific thought, which experienced heightened growth after Swanger's article, made room for *omamori* to become popular for non-religious reasons, focusing on their appearance rather than their religious functions. The greater degree to which open religiosity is seen as old fashioned has created space for the popularization of *omamori* which are not plainly religious. Again, there are many people who believe in *omamori* and seek them out for the powers they are attributed with.

## **Conclusion**

Several changes have taken place in the thirty years since Swanger wrote his article that have dramatically altered *omamori*. A rise in mass production and the changing aesthetic preferences of the population have created greater variability in

*omamori* form and aesthetic. A rise in dependence on technology has created a new function for *omamori*. The mass use of cell phones created a niche for *keitai* (cell phone) strap *omamori* to fill, a development which also helped bring *omamori* into the realm of personal adornment objects. Finally, changes in beliefs surrounding *omamori* have created new reasons for the popularization of certain *omamori* that either did not exist or were too sparse for Swanger to include in his analysis.

*Omamori* are a patron driven commodity. They have changed form and purpose over time with the society in which they exist.<sup>79</sup> With a reduction in attesting to belief in supernatural powers, *omamori* are said to be used as symbolic gifts offered to show people your concern and consideration for their plights. With a rise in popularity of cute and accessorizing objects, *omamori*'s forms have changed to fill this desire. With the adoption of new technologies, and thus new stressors, *omamori* have also adopted new functions such as the driving safety and the protection of electronic data. The ability of *omamori* to adapt in these ways is a significant reason why a tradition tied to ideas that might be considered magical has not only persisted into, but flourished in modern times. The next chapter will examine some of the specific stories that are treated in *omamori*, the aesthetics used to express those stories, and the relationships of those stories to the functions the *omamori* is meant to serve.

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<sup>79</sup> Nelson (2006), pg 80, and Miyake, pg 69



## Chapter 4

### **Elements Representing the Whole: Narrative Use in *Omamori***

“A picture is worth a thousand words.”

As discussed in the previous chapter, *omamori* have gone through an array of changes in their recent history. Over the course of 60 years, these objects have shed their need to be hidden, resulting in their ability to be used as accessories. Their functions have adapted to serve the prevailing concerns of the time, and the sacred and the secular have been brought together to create religious objects that are appealing for a variety of religious and mundane purposes (as amulets, souvenirs, accessories, gifts, motivators, and external signs of effort towards a goal). This comingling of sacred and secular elements in *omamori* will be highlighted in this chapter. Through an examination of the use of narrative-based art on modern *omamori*, I will argue that the producers of these amulets are navigating and utilizing a combination of sacred and secular elements that allow modern *omamori* to maintain relevance and desirability, while still utilizing elements which maintain their grounding in the sacred. Essentially, I will argue that images from narratives are used not only to legitimate the function an *omamori* is said to offer and to connect the *omamori* and the temple or shrine to said story, but also to act as a sacred foundation, that is then layered with a popular, secular aesthetic, making them a sacred object that is “re-enchanting”<sup>80</sup> for a modern populace.

#### **Images Signifying a Narrative**

An image is a concentration of things waiting to be released. Memories, stories, emotions, and histories can all be evoked by a single image. An image is also a means of

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<sup>80</sup> Galbraith, 211; also, see my section on re-enchantment in chapter 2, pages 7-9.

connection by association. An image that calls forth a narrative, and thus all that that narrative is meant to convey, can connect/associate that group to a character, lesson, morality, or situation present in that narrative.

To convey the points presented in the previous paragraph, I will use an example. For most Americans, as well as many other people across the world, the image of the emblem on the chest of Superman's costume can be used to bring forth not only the Superman storyline, but also the morality that that character represents. Those who know this image, and have even a passing knowledge of the storyline and/or moralities embodied in the narrative, would likely expect that any individual or organization that appropriates this image is promoting, or connecting themselves to, some or all of the morals it embodies.

Some images of a narrative have the privileged status of being a point of convergence, the confluence of the essence of either the entire story, or a significant aspect of it. Some moments or objects within a story become so powerful that they have the ability to invoke the entire narrative, and all that it inspires in its audience: emotions, lessons, morality, etc.

The story of Jesus Christ can be fully embodied in the image of the crucifix; in the right context the apple can reference the narrative of Adam and Eve; The Buddha's journey to enlightenment is summoned in the image of Siddhartha gesturing the bhumi-sparsha (calling the Earth to witness) mudra; and Hanuman's tale (especially his triumph) is embodied in the image of him carrying the medicine mountain. Each of these examples shows how a single image can embody an entire narrative. Such meaningful concentrations of a story make for influential devices. These devices are utilized by

entities - in the case of this paper, Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines- to achieve evocative and meaningful connections that can further the image they wish to portray of themselves, and to create associations that connect them to powerful and influential individuals and events which these institutions consider beneficial.

### **Use of Images on *Omamori***

The use of images on *omamori* takes a variety of forms. Images of deities are used in many cases to display the being that is empowering a given *omamori*. Many *omamori* feature images of a part of a temple or shrine complex, most often a particularly famous part of a complex, to connect the object to that place and possibly to offer the souvenir style aesthetic that someone visiting a famous location may desire. Many others are decorated with images of secular and religious objects which serve a variety of functions. For instance, the depiction of a biwa (stringed instrument) on an *omamori* serves to tie it to the deity Benzaiten, as the biwa is one of her symbols. The image of an eggplant is another example, recalling the belief that dreaming of eggplants upon the transition into the new year will bring luck and prosperity to the dreamer,<sup>81</sup> thus depicting a theme relevant to an *omamori* with the function of offering prosperity.

Images of a narrative are often the attempt to create a visual expression of a given story, a way for the story to become embodied. This embodiment can serve, and has served, many functions, however the choices made in illustrating a story is not the focus of this chapter, the focus of this chapter is on the effects and motivations of the selection, manipulation, and use of images that have already been created and have become associated with a story. These established images, images that have already been created and are popularly understandable as being connected to a given narrative, are adopted,

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<sup>81</sup> Anonymous, 41

and at times manipulated, by temples and shrines for use on their *omamori*. The next section will summarize four of these narratives, and in the subsequent section I will examine the functions the presence of these narratives play, as well as some of the ways and reasons that these images are manipulated by temples and shrines in their use.

### **Selected Narratives**

As stated in Chapter 1, I performed field work in various parts of Japan from 2008-2014. Over that time I visited over 250 temples and shrines, paying specific attention to *omamori*. I purchased most of the *omamori* which I believed to possess aesthetics that went beyond mere decoration, *omamori* that could produce interesting results when analyzed individually rather than simply as a member of a class of objects. This distinction was generally made based on uniqueness in the aesthetic decoration of an *omamori*, the amount of accompanying information that was offered when it was obtained, and by the degree to which individual *omamori* were advertised by the temple or shrine. The result of this collecting was an accumulation of 366 distinct *omamori* from 18 cities in Japan.

In examining this collection, I noticed that the use of images that embody narratives is relatively common,<sup>82</sup> especially on *omamori* acquired at shrines.<sup>83</sup> In total, I was able to identify ten distinct narratives represented on the *omamori* in my possession. The identified narratives represented by my *omamori* are: *The Tale of Genji*; *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*; The story of Izanagi fleeing Hell; the “White Hare of Inaba”; the story of Benkei and Yoshitsune; stories told of the Seven Gods of Luck; the see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil monkey narrative of Toshogu Shrine; and the engi

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<sup>82</sup> Of the 205 *omamori* from 2014 in my collection, I could identify 21 (10%) as featuring images which embodied narratives.

<sup>83</sup> Of the 21 *omamori* featuring images which embodied narratives, 16 (76%) were acquired from shrines.

(“miraculous stories”) of the Kawasaki Shrine, the Asakusa Shrine, and the Isonokami Shrine. From these narratives represented by my *omamori*, I have selected four specific narratives to analyze based on their abundance and functionality for their *omamori*. In the remainder of this section I will summarize each of these four narratives. Then, in subsequent sections, I will examine the illustrations of these narratives, leading to an analysis of the selection and treatment of these images on the *omamori*.

Figure 11  
Opo-Kuni-Nushi-no-Kami and the White Hare of Inaba<sup>84</sup>



The first narrative I chose to examine is that of the “White Hare of Inaba” found in the *Kojiki*.<sup>85</sup> In this story, a white hare wishes to cross the ocean to get from an island to the city of Inaba on the mainland, but has no way of making the voyage. Mustering his creativity, he comes up with a plan that he considers ingenious. He speaks to a crocodile<sup>86</sup> and challenges him to a test. He claims that his clan is more numerous than

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<sup>84</sup> Photo credit:

[https://www.google.com/search?q=inaba%20usagi&safe=off&sa=X&rlz=1C1SKPL\\_enUS429&es\\_sm=93&tbm=isch&tbs=simg%3ACAQSSQmv\\_1ixR\\_1WBwWRo1CxCwjKclGiwKKggBEgQeJBkjGiD5xnZySYxIBbaFYep\\_Wjo9ltz-qeVcsqoDo2F1n-ZqVaQwhuliCUq5vwNw&ei=JFmWUvuKIs2ayQHOoIDICg&bav=on.2,or.r\\_qf.&bvm=bv.57155469%2Cd.aWc%2Cpv.xjs.s.en\\_US.8\\_h2iq0a8e8.O&biw=1014&bih=590&dpr=1&ech=2&psi=JFmWUvuKIs2ayQHOoIDICg.1385602938984.1&emsg=NCSR&noj=1&ei=JFmWUvuKIs2ayQHOoIDICg](https://www.google.com/search?q=inaba%20usagi&safe=off&sa=X&rlz=1C1SKPL_enUS429&es_sm=93&tbm=isch&tbs=simg%3ACAQSSQmv_1ixR_1WBwWRo1CxCwjKclGiwKKggBEgQeJBkjGiD5xnZySYxIBbaFYep_Wjo9ltz-qeVcsqoDo2F1n-ZqVaQwhuliCUq5vwNw&ei=JFmWUvuKIs2ayQHOoIDICg&bav=on.2,or.r_qf.&bvm=bv.57155469%2Cd.aWc%2Cpv.xjs.s.en_US.8_h2iq0a8e8.O&biw=1014&bih=590&dpr=1&ech=2&psi=JFmWUvuKIs2ayQHOoIDICg.1385602938984.1&emsg=NCSR&noj=1&ei=JFmWUvuKIs2ayQHOoIDICg)

<sup>85</sup> Philippi, 93-95, and Chamberlain, 99-100

<sup>86</sup> Sometimes translated as shark rather than crocodile.

that of the crocodile, and proposes that they count how many crocodiles there are to find out which is truly more numerous. To do this, the hare suggests that the crocodiles line up single file, and the hare will walk across them, counting them as he goes. They do this, and as the hare is jumping off the last crocodile he proclaims that he has outsmarted them, using them as a bridge to get to his destination. Before the hare finishes his descent, however, the last crocodile manages to seize and skin him, removing his fur coat, but leaving him alive.

Just as this takes place, 80 deities, who happen to be brothers, pass by the hare, each on his way to seek the hand of the princess who resided in Inaba. These deities, quite maliciously, tell the hare to first bathe in saltwater, then go to the hills and let the wind dry his body. When he does this, the wind causes the saltwater to dry and makes his skin crack and blister. Meanwhile, the eighty-first, and final, brother arrives at Inaba carrying the luggage of his eighty older brothers. This brother, who is teased and disregarded by his eighty brethren, sees the hare and hears his story (illustrated in figure 11 above). This deity, Opo-Kuni-Nushi-no-Kami, tells the hare to quickly go wash himself in a freshwater river and to roll in the pollen of some grass at the end of the river. The hare does this, and is restored to health. The hare is then identified as a deity himself, and tells Opo-Kuni-Nushi-no-Kami that he will be the one to marry the princess in Inaba, not his brothers. Opo-Kuni-Nushi-no-Kami goes to see the princess, and finds that she has turned down his brothers and agrees to marry him.

This narrative communicates a variety of moral lessons, while also setting a precedent for certain actions. First, humility and control over one's pride are important moral standards. It is the hare's boasting which initially causes him to suffer. As an

extension of this, the story teaches of blessings received when one acts in a benevolent and kind manner. The story also sets a precedent for the asking and receipt of favors from deities. Finally, the story communicates the importance of caring for animals, for benevolent actions in general bring blessing, but animals too have the capacity to offer blessings/enrichment/joy to one's life.

The next narrative I chose to examine is the earliest example of the *monogatari* (vernacular prose fiction) in Japan,<sup>87</sup> the *Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*, dated to 909 A.D.<sup>88</sup> As this tale is quite long, and the majority of it is not relevant to the examples of narrative images on the *omamori* to be examined, I only summarize the first of the four sections of the *Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*. In this story, there is an old bamboo cutter who goes into the bamboo groves every day and collects bamboo to carve into various goods. One day, he noticed a bamboo stalk which was glowing at the base. When he looked inside, he found a three inch tall female (portrayed variably as either a young woman or a baby) in the center and named her Kaguya.

The old man, who had no children, adopted her and took her home to live with him and his wife. From that day, when he would go out to cut and collect bamboo he would regularly find stalks full of gold. The child lived with the old bamboo cutter and his wife, bringing them more joy than could be described, as well as great wealth. She quickly grew into the most desirable woman in Japan, even to be courted by the emperor.<sup>89</sup> Once she grew into adulthood, Kaguya was revealed to be a goddess who was exiled from the moon. She is then “recalled” to the moon, leaving the old bamboo cutter and his wife behind, but giving them an elixir of life upon her departure. Having lost

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<sup>87</sup> Shirane 168

<sup>88</sup> Shirane, 169-184

<sup>89</sup> Shirane, 169-184

their daughter, the bamboo cutter and his wife have no desire for eternal life. They give the vial to the emperor. The emperor, equally devastated at the loss of Kaguya, has the vial cast into a volcano he believed to be the closest peak to heaven, giving the volcano its name, Mt. Fuji; *fuji* meaning “immortal”.<sup>90</sup>

In this abbreviation of the Tale of the Bamboo Cutter, there are several morals and miraculous occurrences that shine through as especially significant. One miraculous occurrence in this story is the endowment of a child on a couple who never had children. This instance of good fortune and “surrogate fertility” creates a precedent of commoners being endowed with great blessings from deities. A lesson conveyed by this story can be found in the wealth and blessings received by the couple after their adoption of Kaguya. In loving their daughter and treating her properly, they were rewarded with a deep love and joy in their lives, and great prosperity and wealth.

Figure 12

Panel 2 of the Toshogu Shrine monkey narrative



Figure 13

Tourist photo emulating the three monkeys in panel 2



The third story I choose was the narrative of the *Sanzaru*, “the three monkeys,” as it is conveyed in the carved wooden panels of the sacred stables of the Toshogu Shrine in Nikko, Japan. This narrative follows the life of a monkey, and each of the eight panels making up the narrative depicts a moment in her life, meant to teach the viewer what to

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<sup>90</sup> Temple, 7 and Shirane 184



expect from life as well as how to behave. It starts with the monkey as a baby in her mother's arms, the mother looking off, imagining her child's future, and the child looking up at her.

The next panel (Figure 12) expresses the view that in childhood one should see no evil, speak no evil, and hear no evil. This is an extremely iconic relief, and is physically emulated and immortalized in countless photographs by tourists to this UNESCO national heritage site (Figure 13). This lesson is also a source for representing this story through monkeys. In Japan, the hear no evil, speak no evil, see no evil lessons are called *kikizaru*, *iwazaru*, and *mizaru*, which literally translates to “hear nothing, say nothing and see nothing”. The verb ending *-zaru* makes each verb negative, giving the meanings offered in the translation. *Zaru* is also a phonetic synonym with the word for monkey: *saru*. Each of the three monkeys is named after their specific lesson: Kikizaru, the monkey who hears no evil; Iwazaru, the monkey who speaks no evil; and Mizaru, the monkey who sees no evil. They became the companions of Kōjin, the deity of roads and crossroads,<sup>91</sup> highlighting the importance of following the lesson the monkeys represent in making life choices.

Following this lesson in childhood, and moving into adolescence, in the third and fourth panels the monkey is preparing herself to set out on her own, and is ambitiously looking out on her own future and its potential. In the fifth panel the monkey becomes “frustrated in life,”<sup>92</sup> learning that in “facing [one's] own life straightly, sometimes it comes to a crossroad,”<sup>93</sup> but her friend is there trying to cheer her up. In the final three

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<sup>91</sup> Temple, 271 and Ashkenazi, 245

<sup>92</sup> Source is from a set of informational panels in front of the stable house at Toshogu shrine.

<sup>93</sup> Nikko Tourist Association website. <http://www.nikko-jp.org/english/toshogu/sanzaru.html>

panels, the monkey falls in love, marries and learns that both love and life are powerful but can be rough. Finally, she gets pregnant and becomes a mother herself.

The second panel sets a direction for the life of the monkey, and acts as a key lesson of the story. As she followed the lesson put forth (in childhood one should see no evil, speak no evil, and hear no evil), she received blessings that allowed her to live a full, well-rounded life. This story does not disguise the fact that life can be/is difficult, but it teaches that with proper action your life will be blessed and things will work out.

The final narrative I will discuss is that of the priest warrior Benkei, and his master Yoshitsune, a son of the head of the Genji clan who fought against the Taira clan in the Genpei War (1180-1185).<sup>94</sup> The Taira were attempting to gain full control of the imperial throne, and the Genji, siding with the son of the former emperor, were attempting to re-seize the throne. Leading the Genji was Yoshitsune's elder brother Yoritomo, Yoshitsune being one of his generals. Yoshitsune and Benkei's stories have been told and retold in various formats. Their stories are presented in the *Tales of the Heike*, the *Yoshitsune Monogatari*, various noh plays, and in modern times through manga, anime, soap operas, and films.

Benkei's origins vary between sources, but all agree that his birth was extraordinary. He gestated in his mother's stomach for an unusually long time, 18 – 39 months, and was born as large as a child of 2 or 3 years of age, with hair that reached as far as his shoulders or knees, and a complete set of teeth.<sup>95</sup> At 6 years old he was ravaged by smallpox and his face became quite scarred. At this point, "his aunt, contemplating his scarred swarthy complexion and unkempt, shoulder-length hair, said to herself, 'with

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<sup>94</sup> Adolphson, 4

<sup>95</sup> Ashkenazi, 123 and Shirane, 906

that kind of face and hair, he'll never look like anything, I had better make him a monk.”<sup>96</sup> And that is just what she did. Proving a brilliant scholar, Benkei became the disciple of the “chief scholar” at Enryakuji Temple on Mt. Hiei.<sup>97</sup>

Though Benkei excelled in scholarship, he was also unfocused and destructive. At adulthood he measured about 8 feet tall and constantly tried to wrestle with and distract those around him. This caused discord amongst the priests at his presence, and led to his becoming a *sōhei*, a warrior-monk. Benkei is said to have been extremely skilled in battle, and carried with him his swords and seven other weapons: a broad axe, a rake, a sickle, a wooden mallet, a saw, an iron staff, and a half-moon spear.<sup>98</sup>

After becoming a warrior-monk, Benkei began to challenge people to battles in an attempt to take their swords, with the goal of collecting 1,000. After accumulating 999 swords, he challenged a “youthful, almost childish looking”<sup>99</sup> young man carrying a fine sword that he choose to be the final one he would collect. This young man, however, was Yoshitsune, who, being highly trained and extremely skilled himself, bested Benkei in their battle. Being beaten for the first time, Benkei vowed to serve Yoshitsune as his retainer.<sup>100</sup>

Benkei served his master loyally, and together they played a decisive role in the Genji clan’s victory over the Taira. After their success however, Yoshitsune’s brother, Yoritomo, now the shogun, became suspicious of Yoshitsune, and labeled him a traitor. One of the more famous accounts of Benkei and Yoshitsune’s relationship took place in their attempt to escape to the north of Japan. While trying to cross a checkpoint created

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<sup>96</sup> Shirane, 907

<sup>97</sup> Shirane, 907 and Adolphson, 117

<sup>98</sup> Ashkenazi, 124-125

<sup>99</sup> Ashkenazi, 125

<sup>100</sup> Shirane, 911-913

for the purpose of detaining Yoshitsune, Benkei and Yoshitsune's other retainers disguised themselves as traveling monks, and Benkei had Yoshitsune dress as their luggage carrier, thinking that no one would give such a person a second look. Upon crossing the barrier, however, one of the men at the checkpoint stopped the group as he suspected Yoshitsune was the carrier. In an attempt to save the situation, Benkei, who is dressed as the lead monk, chastised the carrier (Yoshitsune in disguise) and beat him with his staff for being the cause of the group's slowed progress. Benkei's ploy worked, and the guard was convinced that the carrier was not Yoshitsune, as no one loyal to him would treat him that way. After they passed, Benkei apologized profusely, but to his surprise his actions were praised by Yoshitsune. This story epitomizes the loyalty and devotion of Benkei to Yoshitsune, as well as their intelligence and aptitude as warriors and survivors.<sup>101</sup>

In the end, Yoshitsune and his retainers were betrayed by individuals who had given them a place to rest. His brother's forces went after him, and Benkei battled them until his own death. Benkei's fighting and death served to offer Yoshitsune enough time to take his own life, and thereby die an honorable death.<sup>102</sup>

This story encapsulates many values and morality lessons, but there is one specific lesson I would like to highlight in this chapter. That is the importance of loyalty, and the positive results that can be received when it is properly felt and employed. For example, in the episode at the checkpoint, though Benkei broke social protocol and seemed to disrespect his master, he did so from loyalty, with feelings of guilt, in order to save Yoshitsune's life. Beyond this single instance of success, Yoshitsune and Benkei, as

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<sup>101</sup> Shirane, 1016-1036, and Ashkenazi, 125

<sup>102</sup> Adolphson, 117, and Shirane, 915-917

a team, played a decisive role in the victory of the Genji over the Taira. In fulfilling their mutual obligations to each other, based on their relational roles, both also died honorable deaths: Benkei on his feet, fighting; Yoshitsune through ritual suicide.

### **Narrative Choice and Presentation on *Omamori***

The use of each of these narratives in the decoration of *omamori* can be understood in a variety of ways. In the first narrative I discussed, that of the “White Hare of Inaba,” there are a few different modes by which the use of images from this narrative can be understood to function on particular *omamori*. Figures 14 and 15 are *omamori* acquired from the Kanda Myōjin Shrine in Tokyo’s Akihabara district, each utilizing imagery of the “White Hare of Inaba”.

Figure 14

*Omamori* for the granting of a wish,  
featuring the Hare of Inaba



Figure 15

*Omamori* for the safety and health of one’s  
pets, featuring the Hare of Inaba



Figure 14 is an *omamori* for the granting of a wish and the opening of one’s luck. Here, the hare is in a praying position, and is attached to two other small panels, one identifying the *omamori* as being for opening luck, and the other left blank for the purchaser to write their wish upon. Having done so, the owner places the three connected pieces inside the bag, seals it, and the *omamori* becomes active and should serve its designated function. Figure 15 is an *omamori* in the form of a pet’s collar designed to

offer the pet wearing it travel safety and prayers for good health. The packaging for this *omamori* clearly depicts the white hare of Inaba in the arms of Opo-Kuni-Nushi-no-Kami, the youngest brother of 81 deities who helped to heal the hare.

The image of the White Hare of Inaba on these *omamori* is meaningful. For both of these amulets, the images call forth a narrative that ties the *omamori* to a situation from the past<sup>103</sup> in which the benefits now sought through the *omamori* were once received. In the narrative, the rabbit got both of his wishes - to cross the sea and to recover from his injuries - and Opo-Kuni-Nushi-no-Kami got to marry the princess of Inaba. As this story clearly demonstrates the realization of wishes, it makes sense that it would be employed to validate and reinforce an *omamori* designed to grant wishes and bring luck.

The second *omamori*, Figure 15, employs the same motive in its use of an image to call forth this narrative. Though the hare was extremely clever, he still found himself in a difficult situation and needed help, and a deity stepped in and offered him the aid he needed. Additionally, in return for care and aid, the rabbit offered benefits out of appreciation for his patron. By tying this *omamori* to the narrative of the White Hare of Inaba, the *omamori* gains the legitimacy of a connection to a situation in which the benefit being sought has taken place. In the story the hare was injured while attempting to travel, but was healed with the help of Opo-Kuni-Nushi-no-Kami. The *omamori* also puts forth the possibility for reciprocal affection and benefits from one's pet if the owner cares for it properly. Pet *omamori* have become increasingly popular in Japan in the last couple of decades, and this particular *omamori* sets itself apart through association with a

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<sup>103</sup> See discussion in chapter 2 about the relationship between the imagined past and the legitimization of spiritual/magical power. (pg 15-16)

story that demonstrates that this *omamori* is part of a lineage of supernatural history in Japan that leads back to a situation in which an animal was aided by the goodwill of a deity.

Figure 16  
*Omamori* for realization of love  
and affection featuring the Hare of Inaba



The use of the White Hare of Inaba in figures 14 and 15 epitomizes the employment of a traditional myth to simultaneously ground an *omamori* in the sacred, while applying it to the modern stressors it was meant to serve, especially in the case of the *omamori* for pet safety. Figure 16 takes the incorporation of secular elements further, in that the narrative image is not only used to tie the *omamori* to the story, but the image is also made *kawaii* (cute), to give it a desirable modern aesthetic. Thus, through the use of a single image, the *omamori* is grounded in the sacred through connection to a Shinto myth; legitimated through connection to a “past” event in which such a blessing was obtained (Opo-Kuni-Nushi-no-Kami was selected to marry the princess, the implication being that he found his love); and the *omamori* offers a popular, secular, *kawaii* aesthetic to increase its desirability and quality as an accessory.

Figure 17  
*Omamori* for featuring an image that calls  
forth the Tale of the Bamboo Cutter narrative



Figure 17 is an *omamori* acquired from Kanayama Shrine in Kawasaki, Japan. This shrine has its own fertility narrative in an *engi*, or “miraculous story”, about a woman who had a demon in her vagina - a rather common storyline in world cultures referred to as *Vagina Dentata*. What makes this shrine’s version rather unique is the manner by which the woman solves her problem. After the demon castrates two of her lovers, she goes to a blacksmith and asks him to fashion her an iron penis. He does so, she employs it, and the demon’s teeth are shattered, allowing her to live happily ever after with her next husband.<sup>104</sup>

Employing this narrative in multiple *omamori*, the shrine already has a claim to efficacy for fertility; after “defanging” her demon, she was able to marry and procreate. In modern times, however, the temple has become associated with the prevention and curing of sexually transmitted diseases. The more phallic and vaginal images that are used to call forth the shrine’s *engi* have become associated with this purpose and have somewhat obscured the benefits of the shrine related to fertility. By showing the Kaguya

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<sup>104</sup> “The Giant Pink Penis Festival of Kanamara.”



baby in the bamboo, a story associated with fertility that legitimates and sets a precedent for the function of the *omamori*, the shrine is able to emphasize the fertility aspect of the benefits they are renowned for, rather than the prevention of sexual disease ability for which they have more recently gained global fame.

Figure 18



Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 21



The story of the Toshogu shrine monkey is summoned by Figures 18-21, shown above. The representations of this narrative on *omamori* serve two significant functions. As with previous examples, use of these images on the *omamori* connects the *omamori* and the shrine to the narrative's lesson and provides precedence for the benefits the *omamori* claim to offer. These particular *omamori* are what I call general *omamori*, amulets that are meant to do everything, providing no specific benefit. This makes sense based on the story they are aesthetically attached to. The lesson of the story described above was that as long as one follows the guidelines of hearing, seeing, and speaking no evil, they would receive blessings/benefits. Thus, as these *omamori* recollect that story and convey that lesson, as long as the owner follows the lesson these *omamori* should help one reap the various rewards they are due.

### Cute-ification

In addition to this function, the expression of the narrative on these *omamori* serves a more secular function. The monkeys represented on these *omamori* are made

cute, rather than realistic, accommodating an extremely popular aesthetic in Japan of *kawaii*, “cuteness.” Though shrines and temples do not generally take on contemporary popular culture characters in their decoration of *omamori*, they are willing to portray characters from “traditional” narratives using contemporary popular aesthetics, thus accommodating the period they are living in, but not going so far as to cross a constructed line between what is appropriate for religious institutions, and what might be considered selling out.

Figure 22

*Omamori* for victory in the form of Yoshitsune



Figure 23

*Omamori* for victory in the form of Benkei



It is my opinion that the *omamori* shown in Figures 22 and 23 epitomize this layering of popular aesthetics on “traditional” figures. These *omamori* feature Yoshitsune and Benkei, respectively, and are meant to bring victory to their owner. Benkei and Yoshitsune’s success becomes connected to the *omamori*, and is thus conceived of as being accessible through these *omamori*.

It is the style of representation in these examples, however, that I find quite interesting. As described above, Benkei was a giant of a man who was generally considered extremely unattractive. Representations of him, especially those of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, portray this bruteness and unattractiveness. However, in attempting to

display this “bruteness,” rather than using the traditional ackne riddled, bearded, oversized Benkei, the choice was made to make him nearly the same size and form of the more childish or feminine looking Yoshitsune. The biggest difference between the two is the use of a very *kawaii* mode of expressing Benkei’s bruteness through the enlargement of his eyebrows. This gives him an appearance that is more unkempt and disproportionate, making him adorably thugish.

### **Conclusion**

Through the use of images that reference “traditional” or “religious” narratives, temples and shrines are able to increase the connection of their *omamori* to situations in which the benefit being sought in the *omamori* was met, thus strengthening the validity of the *omamori*. By adopting popular aestheitc styles, temples and shrines are also able to adapt to different periods without comprimising themselves by crossing what seems to be a line they have created between religions and the use of popular characters. Through the adoption of a *kawaii* aestheitc, these temples and shrines modernize old stories, images, and objects, helping them create economically viable objects that are grounded in the sacred: *omamori*.

## Chapter 5

### **“Technology x God Power”**

#### **Sacred and Secular Elements United in Harmony**

As has been reiterated throughout this study, *omamori* adapt to their respective time period, maintaining a grounding in the sacred while adopting varying aspects of the secular. This attribute of *omamori* crystalized in a unique and entertaining way in 2012 for an advertising campaign developed by Beacon Communications K.K./Leo Burnett Tokyo, for a set of *omamori* made for and disseminated by Norton Internet Security, Symantec Japan (Norton). These *omamori*, their accompanying advertisements, and their implications for the theory that *omamori* embody a negotiation of sacred and secular elements will be the subject of this chapter.

The first matter I should address here is that these *omamori* were blessed by a Shinto priest, and thus are religiously empowered objects. There are souvenir shops and secular businesses that sell “*omamori*” which have not been blessed by any religious organization. As stated in the introduction, this study has left the analysis of those objects for a future researcher, and has dealt exclusively with *omamori* blessed in either the Shinto or Buddhist tradition. As the *omamori* distributed by Norton for this campaign were blessed by a Shinto priest, they fall under the parameters of this study.

For the purposes of analysis I will describe the aspects of this campaign as follows: I will first offer a description of the commercial advertisement for this product, I will then describe the objects themselves, and finally, I will briefly discuss the manner by

which they were disseminated as well as some of the measures of efficacy of the campaign.

## **Campaign Information**

### **The Commercial**

The commercial opens on the inside of a shrine, in which a “multiethnic” group of “supplicants” in business suits are seated on the floor, facing the alter space. A priest enters the shrine, and ceremoniously walks up to the alter space to the accompaniment of a taiko drum. The narrator then begins to explain that since ancient times people have been trying to come up with ways to protect (守る) their precious information (大切な情報). This notion is emphasized through the presentation of three scenes from famous Japanese woodblock prints (*ukiyo-e*) that were manipulated by the advertisers to include laptops being attacked by various malicious forces (see Figures 24, 25, and 26).

**Figure 24**<sup>105</sup>



**Figure 25**



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<sup>105</sup> Figures 24-44 are screenshots from the Norton Data Backup USB *omamori* commercial developed by Beacon Communications K.K./Leo Burnett Tokyo, for Norton Internet Security, Symantec Japan.

Figure 26



The narrator then continues by proclaiming that “today, the gods have answered the people’s prayers.” At this point, a priestess (*miko*) enters the room carrying an offering tray (*sanbō*) of black USB drives (see Figure 27). The priest then ritually purifies the USB drives by striking a flint, and, while waving a paper wand (*ōnusa*) in their direction, proceeds to bless them as *omamori* (see Figure 28). This blessing ends the first part of the commercial, and the viewer is then transported, with the blessed USB drives, to a Noh play stage, where the drives are located in the center of the stage, and framed on either side by three women dressed in variations of priestess (*miko*) garb. Techno music begins to play, with two of the women playing instruments, one a *koto*, the other a DJ’s turntable. The women then bow, the USB drives begin to float up above the offering tray, in a double helix formation, until the drive at the top is engulfed by an *omamori* pouch that manifests around it, as the narrator proclaims, “the blessed data backup USB *omamori* is born” (誕生ご祈祷ずみデータバックアップUSB オマモリ一) (see Graphic 1).

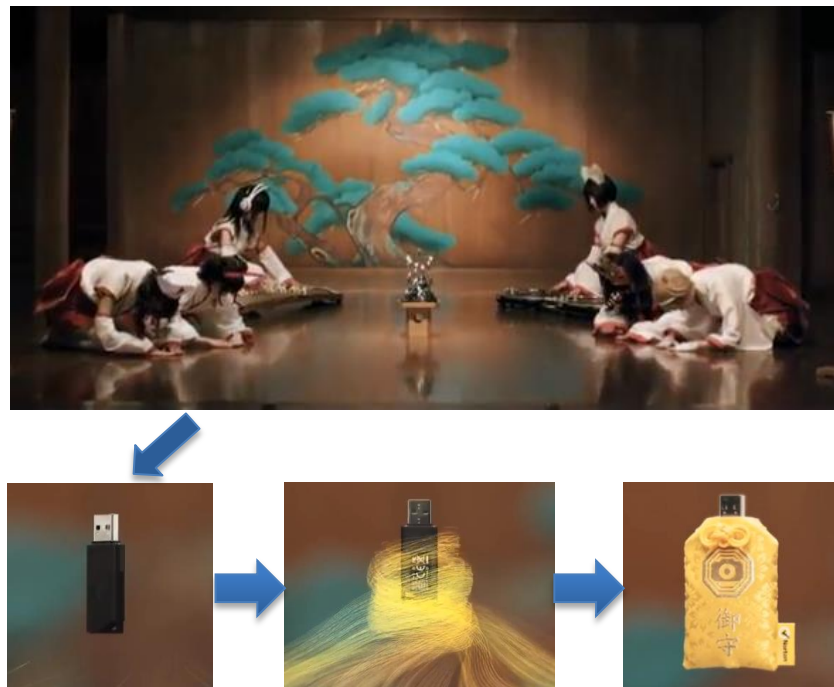
Figure 27



Figure 28



Figure 29<sup>106</sup>



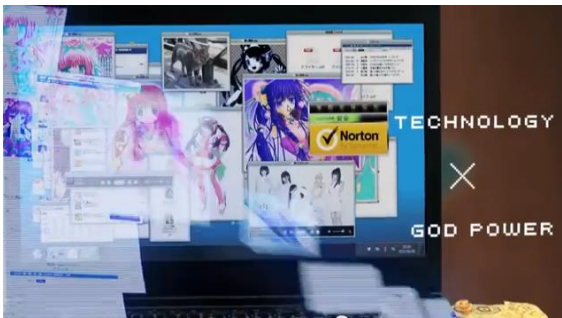
The remainder of the commercial offers personifications of the *omamori*'s “god power,” coupled with symbolic physical actions that demonstrate this power. This begins with the appearance of a black clad figure in a black noh demon mask, who is meant to represent a virus. This “virus” creeps up to an open laptop with his sword out, ready to

<sup>106</sup> Graphic 1 is a flowchart created by the author using cropped screenshots from the Norton Data Backup USB *omamori* commercial developed by Beacon Communications K.K./Leo Burnett Tokyo, for Norton Internet Security, Symantec Japan.



strike at the computer. The narrator then states that if anything threatens the digital information of someone with a Norton USB *omamori* the USB will use its combined powers (力) of Norton security **technology** and the “**god power**” of the myriad deities of ancient Japan (ノートンのセキュリティ技術に日本の古来の八百万のゴッドパワー融合) to offer double protection. This protection is symbolically demonstrated by the *omamori* absorbing copies of the information on the computer (Figure 30), and the six women in miko garb previously mentioned appearing and firing arrows at the virus’ personification, thereby stopping it from reaching the computer (Figure 31).

**Figure 30**



**Figure 31**



The commercial then goes on to state that to match the different kinds of important data one has, there are six different variations of the Norton USB *omamori* to choose from. This clarifies the fact that each of the girls dressed in variants of priestess garb are individual personifications of the unified power of Japan’s myriad of deities held in each of the six different variations of the USB *omamori*. The final section of the commercial describes and demonstrates the six varieties of USB *omamori* that were made available.



This section opens on a scene of the “virus” approaching a stereotypical looking *otaku* (individuals who are considered to be overly obsessed with a given thing, the iconic example being a reclusive, socially inept male obsessed with manga and anime), at his desk, surrounded by paper cutouts of female anime characters on his desk (see Figure 32). Neither this male, nor any of the 5 “human” characters to come, perceive the virus, despite his presence in front of them or at their side. As soon as the virus character gets close to him and his computer, the virus is shot in the head by an arrow fired from off screen, and falls to the ground as the narrator says, “protecting the 2D wife you love” (愛する二次元の嫁を守る). The scene then cuts to one of the six girls wearing a variation of priestess garb, this one wearing fuzzy white animal ears, holding the USB *omamori* with the function of the protection of *moe* (a term used in association with *otaku* denoting deep affection or romantic love towards something that cannot reciprocate,<sup>107</sup> often referring to anime or manga characters) pictures and images (萌へ画像安全) (see Figure 33).

**Figure 32**



**Figure 33**




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<sup>107</sup> Condry, Ian. Pg.187.

The next scene opens on a grey-haired, elderly man in a tracksuit using his laptop with his tongue sticking out (see figure 34). The “virus” comes towards him, and is about to strike the older man with a sword, when the narrator says, “several gigabytes kept secret from your family,” (家族に内緒の数ギガバイト) and the virus is shot in the back, falling to the floor. The scene then cuts to a different one of the girls in priestess grab, wearing a nurse’s cap on which the cross has been replaced by a sequined “play” arrow. She holds the second of the six types of *omamori*, this one with the function of protecting treasured videos (お宝動画安全) (see Figure 35).

**Figure 34**



**Figure 35**



The third presentation of one of the six USB *omamori* opens on a woman in a wedding gown and veil working on her laptop, again with the virus figure creeping up on her (Figure 36). The narrator then proclaims, “memories of indiscretions from those days,” (あの日の過ちを作って思い出) and the “virus” is shot in the side of the head, and again falls to the floor. The scene then cuts to the third woman representing one of the individual personifications of the power of Japan’s myriad of deities, This one wearing a headband with a pair of large red @ symbols attached as ears. She is holding

an *omamori* with the function of protecting secret/confidential (e)mails (マル秘メール安全) (see Figure 37).

Figure 36



Figure 37



The fourth person to be protected from the “virus” is a middle-aged woman in a kimono, using her laptop, smiling and giggling, as the virus approaches. The narrator says “wholly concealing your adult affairs,” (大人の事情全て隠蔽) and the “virus” is shot by an arrow to the face, despite his trying to stop the arrow by clapping it in his hands on it as it came at him (see Figure 38). The scene then cuts to the fourth female personification of an *omamori*’s power, this one wearing a red masquerade mask, raised to show her face, and red lace gloves, holding the *omamori* with the function of private folder protection (隠しフォルダ安全) (see Figure 39).

Figure 38



Figure 39



The commercial then opens on a girl wearing headphones and a purple wig with two large ponytails, listening to music on her laptop, with a stack of cd cases in front of it (see Figure 40). The “virus” jumps out of the darkness rather quickly, and is immediately shot in the side by an arrow and falls to the floor. As this happens, the narrator says, “the real you is a diva” (本当の私は歌姫). The scene then cuts to the fifth girl in priestess garb, wearing a pair of white headphones, and holding an *omamori* with the function of protecting “anime songs” (アニソン安全) (see Figure 41).

Figure 40



Figure 41



The final demonstration of the six variants of *omamori* opens on a bald man in a suit, wearing a large gold ring, holding a cup of wine, and chuckling while working on his computer (see Figure 42). The “virus”, who is kneeling behind the table, is immediately shot by an arrow in the head before he even has a chance to get up, and the narrator says, “things that would be dangerous if they got exposed, illegal bidding” (バレたらヤバいブラック見積). The scene then cuts to the final girl in priestess garb, this one unique in that she has a blonde pixie-cut hairstyle, and is wearing a headset, holding the *omamori* whose power she represents. In this case, an *omamori* with the function of protecting confidential documents (機密文書安全) (see Figure 43).

Figure 42



Figure 43



The commercial then moves to a scene of all six of the women representing the power of the six different *omamori* sitting in a rather seductive fashion, on the floor of the Noh stage (see Figure 44). Each girl then begins to pixelate, transforming into the *omamori* whose power she represents, until the viewer is left with an image of all six USB *omamori* floating above the stage as the narrator states, “The reverently made Norton *omamori*, eternally protecting your data” (あなたのデータに永久安全をノートン謹製お守り). The screen then goes completely yellow, with the Norton company logo and a phrase above it: “protection for your important things” (大切な物を守る). The commercial ends with an image of a variety of the USB *omamori*, all in individual boxes, laid out next to one another in rows, with text imposed over the image reading, “bestowed at shopfronts beginning April 28<sup>th</sup> (2012)” (4月28日(土)より、店頭にてお授け開始).

Figure 44



### The Product

Aesthetically, the Norton USB Backup *Omamori* is immediately recognizable as an *omamori*. The hexagonal brocade-bag type of *omamori*, of which this is one, is the most iconic and ubiquitous form of *omamori*. The bag is sealed with the appropriate knot for brocade *omamori*. Additionally, the *omamori* was distributed in a wooden box made of paulownia, featuring an inscription on the front describing its function, “protection of important things” (たいせつなものを守る). This type of box is often used in the same way by shrines and temples when distributing special, limited edition, or commemorative *omamori*.

The Norton USB Backup *Omamori* is true to form in that on one of its two sides it is embroidered with a description of its specific function. Each of the six variants of *omamori* thus feature a different description: *moe* picture and image protection (萌へ画像安全), treasured video protection (お宝動画安全), secret/confidential e-mail protection (マル秘メール安全), private folder protection (隠しフォルダ安全), and confidential document protection (機密文書安全), respectively. However, on the opposite side, the *omamori* is embroidered with the specific emblem of its particular

variant of the six *omamori*<sup>108</sup>, followed underneath by the characters 御守 (*omamori*).

Both sides of the *omamori* are thus redundant in specifying the particular function the *omamori* is meant to serve. This breaks with the tradition of most brocade *omamori*, which feature the function on one side, and the name of the institution from which it was blessed and obtained on the other.

Additionally, these *omamori* feature a version of what Levi Strauss & Co. has trademarked as a “tab device,”<sup>109</sup> a rectangular fabric tab sewn into the product featuring the name of the company that is selling it. The tab features the company name, Norton, accompanied by its logo, a black checkmark in a white circle. This is a severe deviation from any current *omamori* practice, whereby the company that produced the physical form of the *omamori* is never advertised, only, as stated previously, the temple or shrine at which it was blessed and obtained. In point of fact, it appears that neither the name of the shrine nor the priest responsible for blessing these objects, and thus empowering them as *omamori*, were ever made public.

Finally, as Norton’s *omamori* are the first USB *omamori* I am aware of, they are the only ones I have ever seen with a USB plug protruding from the brocade bag. This serves obvious functional purposes, especially considering that as these are blessed *omamori* and thus should never be opened, at the risk of their blessing being lost and potentially attracting misfortune. Though they were not pictured in the commercial, each

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<sup>108</sup> Emblems of each of the six types of *omamori* can be seen above the text in figures 33, 35, 37, 39, 41, and 43.

<sup>109</sup> That Tab on Your, Um, Pocket? It’s 75! <http://levistrauss.com/unzipped-blog/2011/10/tab-your-um-pocket-its-75/>



*omamori* also featured a small yellow plastic cover for the protruding USB plug, protecting and camouflaging it when the *omamori* was not being inserted into a computer.

Figure 45<sup>110</sup>



Norton also released a ritual process for when one wishes to actively use the USB *omamori* (see Figure 45). The ritual is broken down into a five part process. To begin, when one wishes to add or remove information from the *omamori*, they must first thoroughly wash their hands. This process closely mimics the ritual process for visiting a shrine or temple. Just before entering the grounds of either of these institutions, one is expected to wash their hands (and mouth) to purify them. This practice is common when dealing with the sacred – whether that be sacred space, or a sacred object. The need to wash ones hands before using the Norton USB *omamori* thus reinforces the importance of the object being conceptualized as a sacred object.

Once one has washed their hands, the user of the *omamori* is meant to insert it into their computer's USB port. The user then designates and prepares their important documents to be backed on the *omamori*. Before the backup actually takes place, one must bring their hands together in prayer for the safety of their data (両手を合わせ、お

<sup>110</sup> Image credit:  
<http://genjutsu.es/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Norton-Omamory-02.jpg>



データの安全を祈願), and say aloud the function of their *omamori*.<sup>111</sup> One then initiates the backup to the *omamori*, protecting the data forever (あなたの知らぬ間にバックアップがなされ、たいせつなものが末永く護られます).

### **Campaign Efficacy**

Norton's USB Backup *Omamori* campaign was highly successful in terms of both sales and acquisition of institutional prestige. Though there was some religious and civilian backlash as a result of the campaign, which I will discuss later, this backlash had little, if any effect on the product's success, though that may be a result of the short duration of the promotion.

Norton's *omamori* were offered as promotional gifts for 2012's Golden Week<sup>112</sup> (April 28<sup>th</sup> – May 4<sup>th</sup>) with the purchase of the product Norton 360™. In the first week of its release, the commercial received over four hundred thousand views on YouTube alone. The product itself sold out about twice as fast as Norton had anticipated, and Norton's sales increased by 122% over the week of the promotion.<sup>113</sup>

Clearly considered a success by the company that developed the campaign, Beacon Communications K.K./Leo Burnett Tokyo, they submitted the commercial to the 2013 ADFEST in New York City, an international advertising festival and competition

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<sup>111</sup> In the example in Figure 45 anime song safety

<sup>112</sup> Golden Week is a annual week-long holiday in Japan that occurs between April and May, and encompasses various specific holidays on the individual days which make up the week.

<sup>113</sup> <http://www.publicisgroupe.com/#/en/videos/info/id/21281> and <http://www.coloribus.com/adsarchive/promo/norton-symantec-omamori-18430355/>

held annually. The campaign received awards under both the “LOTUS ROOTS” and “FILM CRAFT LOTUS” categories at ADFEST.<sup>114</sup>

The FILM CRAFT LOTUS award is granted based upon judgment of the direction and production of a commercial advertisement. According to the ADFEST website, the LOTUS ROOTS award “is an award unique to ADFEST that is awarded to works that embody local values whether in terms of culture, religion, beliefs, traditions, or language. Lotus Roots recognizes works that preserve and celebrate the rich heritage and value of each local culture.”<sup>115</sup> In short, the LOTUS ROOTS awards are granted to the advertisers who most skillfully incorporate cultural and religious elements in their efforts to promote and sell their clients’ products.

The Norton commercial received the bronze award under the category of FILM CRAFT LOTUS, and the campaign was an awarded finalist for the LOTUS ROOTS award. These awards seem to be held in high esteem by advertising firms, offering a good deal of institutional prestige to both Beacon Communications K.K./Leo Burnett Tokyo, for developing this award-winning campaign, and to Norton for funding, adopting, and successfully implementing it.

## **Analysis**

### **Production and Distribution**

The first thing that I want to address in this section is the fact that Norton emphasizes that they had these objects blessed by a Shinto priest as *omamori*. As with

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<sup>114</sup> [http://www.adfest.com/winners2013\\_showcase.php?category=16](http://www.adfest.com/winners2013_showcase.php?category=16)

<sup>115</sup> [http://www.adfest.com/Entries\\_Categories.php?category=FILM](http://www.adfest.com/Entries_Categories.php?category=FILM)

“non-religious” *omamori*, which are known not to be blessed but are still widely consumed, Norton could have called these *omamori* without having had them blessed. This would have given them access to the history and tradition of *omamori*, but would not have required that the company pay for them to be actually blessed. It likely would have also allowed them to circumvent potential criticism for the possibility that individuals might perceive these as corruptions to the religious tradition, as they would not have been tied to a religious entity, merely borrowing the image of a religious item, which the general public has accepted, evidenced in the proliferation of non-religious *omamori*.

The company, a secular entity, clearly believed that blessing these *omamori* would positively impact their desirability for the general population. Norton’s decision to actually have their *omamori* blessed is evidence contributing to the argument that *omamori* and their powers are still considered relevant in Japan, and are purchased with the belief that they may serve a spiritual function for their owner. Further, it demonstrates that this mentality is prevalent enough for secular companies like Norton to recognize it, and to understand that the possession of the sacred element is worth going out of their way to obtain.

This does not mean that *omamori* are not bought by many for strictly secular or cultural purposes, granting no belief in their functional efficacy. Rather, I am arguing that the Norton USB *omamori* is evidence that the purchase of *omamori* for their attested spiritual function is a practice that is alive and well in Japan. These objects have not been relegated to being a “survival” or a “tradition”, something people do because it is what

people do, instead they have managed to remain relevant, not only in style, but also in function.

In addition to showing that *omamori* continue to be seen as religiously efficacious in Japanese society, Norton's adoption of commercially advantageous attributes of *omamori* demonstrates what can be gained by secular companies examining the practices of religious institutions for inspiration. In this case, the Norton USB *omamori* campaign adopted the specialized functionality of religious *omamori* in their creation of a USB backup *omamori*. Even though all six variants of the USB *omamori* function in the same way technologically, protecting all data backed up on the drive equally, the spiritual functionality of the *omamori* is more specific in its designation, purportedly tailored to a particular kind of data. Adopting this practice of multiple *omamori* that serve distinct functions fosters certain impulses that can be very commercially advantageous.

This type of marketing allows institutions to attract a variety of clientele, a method that is further reinforced by the diversity of individuals using the product portrayed in the commercial. Both men and women of various ages, for various purposes, were shown to be protected by their USB *omamori*, marketing to a much larger group than a campaign that might have been more single minded. Another advantageous feeling that can arise from this type of advertising is the notion that an individual may want more than one, not just for practical or even collecting purposes, but also to ensure that their various types of data are given their best chance by being stored in the *omamori* specifically designed for that type of data.

On the topic of the six types of USB *omamori* that were offered, I feel that I must address the examples of data that the commercial claimed that these *omamori* were helping to protect. This aspect of the commercial has proven to be of great interest to both Japanese and non-Japanese viewers, and is one of the main points of contention offered by critics of the campaign.

*Omamori* are objects which arise out of temples and shrines recognizing the major stressors of their community, as well as those of the larger population. It should be of little surprise then that the six USB *omamori* were created to protect what Norton and Beacon Communications perceived as the six major types of files that individuals use, and may wish to keep protected from loss or exposure: pictures and graphics, videos, emails, folders, music, and documents.

What is rather surprising is the expression those six types of data were given in the examples used for the characters in the commercial. Protecting “memories of indiscretions from those days” in the form of emails, “things that would be dangerous if they got exposed, illegal bidding” in the form of documents, and photos of a 2D character one might be in love with, are all rather unexpected objects of protection for a religious item as they represent social and moral lapses. However, these examples do keep true to the general practices by which new *omamori* are born - attempting to address the major stressors of the populace. These examples, then, are rather satirical choices made to demonstrate that these *omamori* will protect the *most* sensitive data one might have. What could one be more worried would be corrupted or discovered on their computer than evidence of illegal or extramarital activity, or images of a character one feels romantically in love with that only exists in the second dimension. Norton’s commercial

utilizes an air of comedy to sidestep moral ambiguities and get right to the heart of what people would most want protected: their secrets and their passions.

That being said, as these were blessed, they became religious objects. When managing a religious object in the place of the religious institution, one cannot expect to sidestep morality and not receive criticism. The claim that these blessed USB *omamori* would protect the evidence of love affairs and illegal dealings were of the utmost concern to the commercial's critics. In a blog post on the Kushihara Tenmangu Shrine's website, the priest makes his feeling about the campaign clear:

Most of the country's shrines, roughly 80,000 shrines, are affiliated with the Association of Shinto Shrines, and for talismans and *omamori*, the standard that is done is direct conferment on the recipient at the shrine. Especially this kind of third party, commercial focused type of thing cannot be allowed to occur. After viewing this video, most Shinto priests have a feeling of anger/rage, and it brings out the opinion in them that this is blasphemy to the gods...One sees things like that and [as a result] the types of files that are protected by these functions are associated with antisocial things, unfaithful/unchaste deeds, and illegal acts. If put in other words, it can be understood as 'we, Symantec, support black market bidding and the exchange of unfaithful/unchaste email'. To associate the gods' power with this, , , (sic) I absolutely cannot believe it.

全国のほとんどの神社、およそ8万の神社が所属している神社本庁では、お神札やお守りは、神社において直接授与することを基本としています。特にこのような、第三者の営利目的にのるようなことがあってはなりません。このビデオを見たほとんどの神職は、怒りを感じ、神さまへの冒瀆ではないかという意見も出ています。... なんていうのを見ると、これらの機能で守られるファイルの種類が反社会的なもの、不貞行為、非合法行為を連想させます。言い換えれば「我々シマンテック社ではブラック見積もりや不貞メールのやり取りを支援します」と言っているようにも取れません。これらに神さまのお力を、、、なんてとても信じられません。

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<sup>116</sup> <http://kushihara.net/modules/d3blog/details.php?bid=603>

In this excerpt, the priest makes explicit his distaste for the commercial and its use of both Shintoism and *omamori*. He addresses two main points here, first that these *omamori* are not being distributed in a way that keeps with tradition, and second, that the gods' power was invoked to protect illegal, illicit, and counter-social behaviors. Similar sentiments are expressed in a small number of posts by members of the public in blogs and online diaries. The priest goes on to claim that as a result of the outrage that he and others Shinto priests felt, the Association of Shinto Shrines sent a "direct inquiry" to Symantec, requesting the name of the shrine that performed the blessing, believing that no shrine in the association could do such a thing, and that it must have been a Sect Shinto shrine. The result of which was them learning that "the shrine is not able to announce itself" (その神社は公表できない、ということでした).<sup>117</sup> The priest concludes his blog with another sentiment shared by other critics; worry about the image that is being projected to the world of Shintoism and Japan through this commercial. He asks, "can the same type of thing be done in religions like Christianity and Islam? Hmm?" (同様のことを、キリスト教やイスラム教でもできますかねえ).

Thus, though the examples of data that would be protected keep with the basic system by which new *omamori* are made, namely the addressing of contemporary stressors, the abandonment of certain moral constraints by the company that ran the campaign caused some friction with some members of the religion that blessed these objects for them. That said, the adoption of this type of varied product no doubt contributed to the success of this campaign, and demonstrated an additional way that

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<sup>117</sup> <http://kushihara.net/modules/d3blog/details.php?bid=603>

religion can and, in this case, has mixed with secular elements of society to become more effective.

### **Infused with *Kawaii***

Additional mixing between the sacred and the secular in these *omamori* can be seen in their use of *kawaii* culture. The first and most apparent form of *kawaii* surrounding these *omamori* is in the six women who personify their power. All were young Japanese women dressed in variations of a priestess' outfit that is shorter and more "cute-sexy"<sup>118</sup> than the original. In *kawaii* fashion, the figures of the women are hidden underneath baggy fabric.<sup>119</sup> However, the skirt and sleeve lengths are significantly shorter than the full-length traditional version; the skirts have very high slits in them, and all of the girls are wearing knee-high white stockings. This aesthetic is common to different types of *Lolita* fashion which downplays traditional aspects of the body that are thought of as being exploitable to look sexy, and creates a different kind of *kawaii*-sexy that incorporates an innocence to the look. In her discussion on the *Lolita* aesthetics' *kawaii* features, Theresa Winge argues that for an observer, the look creates "the ideal girl to be loved or possessed," and for the wearer it creates "a safe space to be sexy and strong".<sup>120</sup> The girls' *kawaii*-ness is further reinforced in the way that each presents their *omamori* to the viewer in the commercial (see Figures 33, 35, 37, 39, 41, and 43).

At certain locations and certain times over this promotion, customers were bestowed the USB *omamori* by the women in the commercial who represented the power of the individual *omamori*. These six women were, and remain, the six members of a

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<sup>118</sup> Porcu, pg. 161.

<sup>119</sup> Winge, pg. 50, and 54.

<sup>120</sup> Winge, 59-60



Japanese idol group named Dempagumi.inc (でんぱ組. inc) based in Akihabara. Each of the girls is a self-professed *otaku*,<sup>121</sup> which, along with their *denpa*<sup>122</sup> (電波) style of music, distinguishes them from other idol groups. The group's self-identification as *otaku* allows them to identify more closely with the major consumers of idol groups, *otaku*, and additionally allows them to exist in the dual state of being both the consumed and consumer within *otaku* culture.

Dempagumi.inc's involvement in this campaign thus reinforced a variety of the aspects the campaign was projecting. On a very superficial level, as a popular idol group Dempagumi.inc added to the draw of this item for *otaku*. The importance of their role on this level of the campaign is significant, as the group advertised the promotion and associated events in their twitter accounts and on social media, exposing their fan base to the product. Norton also made the group's involvement clear in paper advertisements and announcements of special events associated with the campaign where the group would be present.

As a group claiming identity as both the consumer and consumed of *otaku* culture, Dempagumi.inc also helped to broaden the demographic appealed of the commercial. As I stated in the previous section, this advertisement was built to appeal to people of varying ages and sexes. The use of Dempagumi.inc allowed Norton to appeal to young women, especially female *otaku*, in a more profound way. Simultaneously, as the members of the group are self-proclaimed *otaku*, their presence may have increased the

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<sup>121</sup> <http://dempagumi.dearstage.com/tagged/profile>

<sup>122</sup> The word *denpa* in Japanese literally means electromagnetic waves or radio waves. Eventually, the term came to denote things that are unexpected, incoherent, and off-putting, stemming from its connotation of people who hear voices, or whose brain's synapses don't fire properly. As an extension, *denpa* music is characterized by being random, occasionally off-key, and strange, yet catchy.

image that Norton is not judging anyone in this commercial. By protecting everything from illegal bidding, to affairs, to the *moe* love of a two dimensional character, Norton is trying to be inclusive, and Dempagumi.inc, as *otaku* themselves, would also be less likely to judge the more obsessed otaku who experience love for characters. Thus, the use of the idol group, with idol groups themselves being an undeniable extension of *kawaii* culture in Japan, is a clear way in which *kawaii* culture, and its subculture of *moe*, is utilized in the promotion and conceptualization of this new *omamori*.

An additional aspect of *kawaii* culture that was incorporated into the commercial was the music and image of the vocaloid Tone Rion. Vocaloid is a singing voice synthesizer released by Yamaha, which utilizes a “Singer Library,” stocked with prerecorded “fragments of voices,” to allow people to produce singing “without a singer”.<sup>123</sup> Vocaloids are characters that are developed which employ a set group of voice fragments from the “Singer Library” which make up that character’s voice. People can buy the program for an individual vocaloid character to produce their own songs sung by their favorite vocaloid. These characters have physical designs, back stories, and personalities, which embed them directly into *kawaii* culture. The vocaloid who sings the song and appears on the otaku’s shirt in the Norton *omamori* commercial is named Tone Rion, (see Figure 46).

According to Yamaha’s website, Tone Rion is 16-year-old girl from the year 2111, who came back in time to the year 2011 to do “anything to become an idol.”<sup>124</sup> One of the first vocaloids to be marketed as *moe*, and wearing a maid’s costume, the use of Tone

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<sup>123</sup> <http://www.vocaloid.com/en/about/>

<sup>124</sup> <http://www.vocaloid.com/en/lineup/vocaloid3/tonerion.html>

Rion in this commercial further incorporates popular culture, specifically cute culture, into the promotion and conceptualization of the USB *omamori*.

Figure 46<sup>125</sup>



Just as chapters 2 and 3 discuss how *kawaii* is used by temples and shrines to make their *omamori* more attractive, here Norton is using cute culture to make their product more appealing to the general public. However, as this is a religious *omamori*, just as is the case with those distributed at temples and shrines, my theory that *omamori* aesthetics must maintain a grounding in the religious is supported by this USB *omamori*. Though the campaign and imagery in the explanation and presentation of the *omamori* is dripping with cuteness, and its origins and distribution are highly unconventional, the object itself compensates for this with an iconic *omamori* aesthetic. The maintenance of this balance allows the sacred and secular aspects of this *omamori* to exist simultaneously, and in harmony.

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<sup>125</sup> Screenshot from the Norton Data Backup USB *omamori* commercial developed by Beacon Communications K.K./Leo Burnett Tokyo, for Norton Internet Security, Symantec Japan.

## Multiple Worlds at Peace

From the commercial to the USB *omamori* itself, this campaign is rich with unions of the “traditional” and “sacred” with the “modern” and “secular.” To discuss the comingling of these qualities, often considered to be binary, I will first present those most prevalent in aspects of the commercial, and then those in the object itself.

To begin, the commercial can be broken into two parts, demarcated by the transition from the shrine to the Noh stage. These two halves can each be argued to represent one of the traits above, the first half, dealing with the blessing of the *omamori* in a Shinto shrine, portraying the “traditional” side of these objects, and the second half, dealing with the explanation of these objects and how they can aid people by portraying their modern functionality. This two-part structure is reinforced by the more traditional music playing in the first half of the commercial, versus the more modern techno-style vocaloid song<sup>126</sup> playing during the second half. However, even though the second half of the commercial is accompanied by Tone Rion’s song, a very modern work using a synthesized singer, for the brief time that they have two of the six girls dressed as priestesses “playing” instruments on the Noh stage, one is playing a koto<sup>127</sup> and the other is playing a DJ’s turntable, infusing the commercial with an air of being both modern and traditional, simultaneously.

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<sup>126</sup> Tone Rion’s “*omamori uta*” (*omamori* song)

<sup>127</sup> A traditional Japanese stringed instrument

The use of *ukiyo-e* that have been manipulated to include laptops in the first half of the commercial (see Figures 24-26), shows another merging of the traditional and the modern. In this case, the effect creates a new image that portrays what the commercial refers to as an age old problem (the protection of precious information) on a classic Japanese medium, while using a modern symbol (the laptop) to show that this can be likened to its new form (data). The attendants in the shrine, suit clad Asian and Caucasian men and women with laptops, equally communicates a meeting of the secular and the sacred, in that they are attending a ceremony by a traditionally clad Shinto priest, clearly seeking a religious solution to their secular problem.<sup>128</sup>

The second half of the commercial equally comingles sacred and secular elements in the six womens' costumes, as they are "cute-sexy", and also incorporate modern symbols and accessories that represent their modern functionality. The six girls themselves are also a merging of the sacred and the secular, being a secular idol group used to represent the sacred power of Japan's myriad of deities present in each of the *omamori*. And, finally, the use of a traditional Noh demon costume to represent the personification of a computer virus - a very modern threat.

The *omamori* itself, as stated above, balances the modern and *kawaii* elements of its development and promotion with a very traditional looking aesthetic. Further balancing of these elements can be seen in the *omamori*'s union of a sacred mode of dealing with problems - the *omamori* - with a very modern means of dealing with this

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<sup>128</sup> This is nothing new, as seen in the previous chapters. What is important here is not novelty, but examples of the harmonious union of sacred and secular elements. The long history of this tradition only supports the claim that the comingling of sacred and secular so apparent in these *omamori* is also true for *omamori* purchased directly from temples and shrines.

particular stressor - data backup and encryption technology. As the commercial states, the object offers both “god power” and “technology” to protect its patron’s data.

The technology aspect of the *omamori* is not said to outshine the “god power”, and the “god power” is not claimed to offer more protection than the technology. Both elements exist together, simultaneously, in harmony, working for the owner. This perfectly embodies how *omamori*, religious objects meant to be employed in the day-to-day lives of the average person, do not conform to the sacred-secular dichotomy. These objects are composed of elements of both, often nearly indistinguishable from each other, and without an explicit hierarchy. An *omamori* can simultaneously be a souvenir, an amulet, and an accessory, among other things. To try to say that it is a distinctly sacred or religious object is like treating something that is grey as though it exists in a strictly black and white world. The presence of the sacred does not de-secularize these objects, and the presence of secular elements does not divorce it from the sacred world. There are instances where things exist in the in-between, and *omamori* are such an object. Sacred and secular *may* be able to describe specific aspects of something as complex as an *omamori*, but rarely if ever will such binary terms be able to usefully describe these objects as a whole.

The Norton USB *omamori*, and its campaign, aligns with many of the aspects and theories of *omamori* I have discussed throughout these chapters. However, the campaign’s greatest contribution to my thesis might be its ability to demonstrate the simultaneous and harmonious existence of the sacred and the secular in *omamori*, encapsulated in its declaration of offering the protection of both secular based technology and sacred “god power.”

## Chapter 6

### **Where to Go from Here:**

### **Conclusions and Future Research**

This project has worked to illuminate some of the ways that *omamori* embody a negotiation between religious institutions and public desires. I have shown that this negotiation has taken various forms, from layering new aesthetics onto traditional narratives, adoption of new functions appropriate to the daily life of the time, and reconceptualization and changes in modes of making these objects desirable in a time when scientific thought is valorized and belief in magic and the intangible might be considered naïve. Through *omamori*, religions are also able to adopt aspects of popular culture, such as folktales, to reimagine themselves, and to bring attention to aspects of their institution and its history that may have been lost or reimagined. All of these changes inform on the ways that religion navigates through an ever-changing world, as well as the ways the public influences and consumes these religions and their products.

*Omamori* also illuminate the fact that the conceptualization of the secular and the sacred as dichotomous is invalid when one incorporates the lived aspect of religion into their study. A great deal of scholarship has displaced religion into an imagined space where it can exist in an idealized form. However, when we relocate it into reality, and examine the way that people actually live and experience religion, the boundary between the sacred and the secular shatters. Humans tend to make messes of things, and as much as the doctrine or philosophy of individual religions may not wish it so, people mix the sacred and the secular in their practice and belief. *Omamori*, as a lived religious artifact,

embody this mixing beautifully, incorporating elements of the sacred and the secular that exist together simultaneously, harmoniously, and without hierarchy.

There is still a great deal of information that *omamori* have to offer which I and others have yet to adequately investigate. This study has focused on aesthetic and functional aspects of modern *omamori* at the point of distribution, and thus largely deals with the way that religious institutions use the objects to communicate and interact with the public. This analysis has proven fruitful, but it is far from a complete study of these objects.

Future inquiry would benefit from interviewing, investigating the way these objects are discussed by the people that use them and the religious professionals that bless and disseminate them. There are studies which have provided anecdotal understandings of the positions of the public and the priesthoods on *omamori*, however I am not aware of any systematic interviewing. This type of inquiry could also shed light on the various ways in which objects are blessed, thus becoming *omamori*.

Understanding the way that people conceive of and communicate their relationship to and use of *omamori* would strengthen our understanding of how these objects are treated by the religions that produce them, and why they are consumed and used by the people who own them.

Additionally, no research has been released examining the secular companies that produce most of the physical forms of *omamori*. These companies release catalogues of objects, as well as guidelines for priests to design new *omamori*, and distribute them to temples and shrines. Temples and shrines then place orders with these companies,



receive these objects, and bless them, at which point they become *omamori*. Examination into this aspect of *omamori* would be invaluable to our understanding of how they are designed and produced. Investigation of the ways that these are conceptualized by the individuals that produce the physical aspects of *omamori* may also prove informative about how these objects exist in relation to religious institutions and the general public.

*Omamori* have also received no detailed history. Collection of this data would require investigation of temple and shrine histories, government documents, local histories, diaries, and artifact examination. Though many scholars connect these objects back to the Edo period, the survey of literature that mentions *omamori* and *omamori*-like objects I offered in chapter three shows that amulet use was already a part of popular discourse as far back as the Nara Period. Some sources even attribute the first example of block printing in Japan to being a commission of “a million Buddhist charms to be printed on small slips of paper.”<sup>129</sup> Future research should explore the history of *omamori* use and production in Japan, as well as their connection to ancient objects understood as having been believed to have magical properties by the people that used them, such as the *dogū* of the Jōmon Period.

Examination into discrepancies between Shinto and Buddhist *omamori* is another aspect that has yet to be explored. Though a cursory examination of *omamori* shows little variation between the two traditions, there may be significant information available when these objects are put under greater scrutiny. Chapter four hinted at this possibility in the observation that 76% of the *omamori* I identified as featuring narrative from my collection were from Shinto shrines. This is not significant evidence, as my collection

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<sup>129</sup> Chamberlain, 424

does not represent a random sampling of *omamori*, but it may be indicative of a pattern of difference. In performing my fieldwork, I noted that it is more common for temples to feature *omamori* with depictions of deities, and that shrines appeared to be more receptive to change and innovation in the *omamori* they offered. Of course there are exceptions to this supposed trend, most notably the adoption of *moe* aesthetics in the advertising and *omamori* of Ryohoji Temple in Tokyo. Focused examination of difference between these religions, and even sects of those religions, would likely provide interesting and unexpected data that would offer insight into the relationship between these highly interconnected religions.

This study has also excluded *omamori* created and distributed by new religious movements in Japan, as well as the unblessed *omamori* sold at souvenir shops and shopping centers. Both of these types of *omamori* should be understood by scholars of religion; however they have received little to no attention. Many new religious movements in Japan incorporate *omamori*, however they are often quite different than those discussed in this paper. One common difference is that multiple new religious movements offer lifetime *omamori* - *omamori* one is able to use for life, rather than having to dispose of them after a year and buy new ones. Unblessed *omamori* also hold potential for examining the importance of religious institutions in offering this-worldly benefits. If secular institutions are able to successfully sell unblessed *omamori*, how have religions been able to continue selling their more expensive blessed *omamori*?

My next project will be an examination of the Japanese diaspora through *omamori* disseminated in the countries Japanese nationals have migrated to. The focus of this project will be an examination of these objects as they have manifested in Brazil and the

United States in comparison with those in Japan. Examination of variation between the *omamori* in these countries promises to inform on the topics of authenticity, identity, globalization, and the ways that religions and their associated objects change in diasporic communities.

*Omamori* hold implications for a variety of fields, including archaeology, art history, economics, anthropology and religious studies. These are complex objects which navigate a multitude of elements, ranging from public tastes, modernization, and daily life, to tradition, religion, and the notion of sacredness. Temples and shrines produce and disseminate these objects for use in one's daily life, and for many people, these may be the only consistent foothold religion has in their day-to-day experience. Existing in the realm of lived religion, these *omamori* help illuminate a careful and strategic balancing of religious elements that are both necessary and desirable for religious objects, as well as the ways that these institutions are willing to accommodate the secular aesthetics, mundane realities, and popular requests of the public that is meant to use them.

Japanese popular culture is pervasive. Anime and manga are consumed all over the world, Hello Kitty is a global icon, and Japanese videogames are still considered the gold standard. With their incorporation of popular Japanese aesthetics, *omamori* are a lure into the world of religion in Japan. By examining these objects, not only can we discover new things about the agents and cultures that produce them, but we can draw the global consumers of Japanese cute and cool culture into the world of traditional Japanese religion, informing and fostering stronger global relationships.

## APPENDIX

### CREATING A MORE DEFINED TERMONOLOGY

To begin to examine amulets as a class of artifacts, one must first understand what an amulet is, the term requires a definition. At present, the word amulet is typically used in its colloquial sense, a usage that is quite amoebas and generally interchangeable with the terms talisman, charm, and mascot. This broad usage of the term is not limited to the general public, but includes scholars of all varieties. Though distinctions between these classes of supernaturally related objects vary from researcher to researcher and research to research, as long as the author of a work makes their distinctions clear, problems can generally be worked out. It is when an author uses these terms indiscriminately, their definitions lack clear distinction between each other, or they proceed without defining their terms that clarity is lost and a work becomes far less reliable (see Swanger, Long, and Miller for examples of such work). Even when definitions are attempted, distinctions between these terms are often muddled at best. Here, I will create definitions for the terms “amulets” and “talismans” that are clearly delineated, and based on both the accepted origins of the terms and their modern colloquial usages.

Table 1

Author/Term▶ ▼	Amulet	Talisman	Mascot	Charm
Petrie	<p>“something carried about by the wearer, in order to get some magical benefits from it, apart from any material use” (1)</p> <p>“objects worn by the living, without any physical use but for magical benefits, or placed with the dead, or set up in the house for its magical protection apart from deities for household worship.” (5)</p>	N/A	<p>“entirely individual, and which result from a casual observation of what happens to the person when certain objects are present. This is a lower form of belief than that in the general applicability of an amulet; it presupposes no law, but a chance connection which is wholly unaccountable.” (3)</p>	<p>Used alongside the term amulet in-text, but goes undefined. Use of the phrase “verbal charms” (5) seems to signify agreement with Douglas.</p>

Budge	<p>“an object which is endowed with magical powers, and which of its own accord uses these powers ceaselessly on behalf of the person who carries it, or causes it to be laid up in his house, or attaches it to some one of his possessions, to protect him and his belongings from the attacks of evil spirits or from the Evil Eye.” (13)</p>	<p>“The amulet is supposed to exercise its protective powers on behalf of the individual or thing continually, whereas the talisman is only intended to perform one specific task. Thus a talisman may be placed on the ground with money or treasure, which it is expected to protect and to do nothing else.” (14)</p>	<p>“In connection with amulets may be mentioned a series of objects which are regarded as bringers of luck and are known as “MASCOTS.” The word is also applied to men and women who are supposed to be lucky in themselves and to bring luck to others” (31)</p> <p>Budge does not clearly and explicitly define them, but, for him, they seem to be objects which bring luck.</p>	An “inscribed amulet” (27)
Douglas	<p>“an object, often composed in conjunction with written or recited spells, designed to be worn on the body as a protection against specific effects.” (ix)</p>	<p>“an object, design or figure, often incorporating spells, worn as a protection against specific or general influences of the psychic realms.” (ix)</p>	N/A	<p>“a scheme of spells, created with magical power and having an effect of attraction or repulsion in the specific field of its action.” (ix)</p>
Morris	<p>“anything worn about the person as a charm or preventative against evil, mischief, disease or witchcraft” (10)</p>	<p>““a stone ring or other object engraved with figures or characters, to which are attributed the occult powers of the planetary influences and celestial configurations under which it was made; usually worn as an amulet to avert evil from or bring fortune to the wearer; also medicinally used to impart healing virtue’.” (10)</p>	<p>“small ‘lucky objects’” (10)</p>	<p>“uttering of magical chants which led to a condition of ‘enchantment’” (10)</p>

Paine	“a device, the purpose of which is to protect, but by magical and not physical means” (10)	“something thought to be imbued with some magical property. It can both protect, and radiate power, and is often used in ritual.” (10)	N/A	“something believed to bring good luck, health and happiness. In so doing, it might also be expected to protect from bad luck, sickness, and misery, but protection is not its primary function.” (10)
Aveni	“keeps away bad luck and acts as a disease prevention” (355)	“can do both [bring good luck, keep away bad luck and act as a disease prevention] and conjure up demons as well” (355)	N/A	“brings good luck” (355)
Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary	a charm (as an ornament) often inscribed with a magic incantation or symbol to aid the wearer or protect against evil (as disease or witchcraft)	1: an object held to act as a charm to avert evil and bring good fortune  2: something producing apparently magical or miraculous effects	a person, animal, or object adopted by a group as a symbolic figure especially to bring them good luck	<b>1: a :</b> the chanting or reciting of a magic spell: incantation <b>b :</b> a practice or expression believed to have magic power  <b>2:</b> something worn about the person to ward off evil or ensure good fortune: amulet
Encyclopedia of Religion	“an object, supposedly charged with magical power, that is carried on the person or displayed in a house, barn, or place of business in order to ward off misadventure, disease, or the assaults of malign beings, demonic or human.” (297) “designed to repel what is baneful.” (298)	“an object similarly used [carried on the person or displayed in a house, barn, or place of business] to enhance a person’s potentialities and fortunes.” (298) An object that is designed to “impel what is beneficial.” (298)	N/A	N/A

This table presents the definition for each of the terms amulet, talisman, charm, and mascot, as offered by the authors listed in the column on the far left. Excerpts are all from texts that are either encyclopedic (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary and The Encyclopedia of Religion) or dedicated to the study of amulets as a category of objects, or specific examples thereof.

For the purposes of this paper I will begin by defining the term amulet, as my research is centered on the examination of this class of objects. The origin of the term amulet is generally attributed to one of two sources. In Sir W.M. Flinders Petrie's work Amulets, he claims that the origin of the word amulet is the Arabic *hamūlet*, derived from the Latin *amuletus*, meaning "a freight, a burden, or a thing carried" (1). Another seminal work on the subject of amulets, E.A. Wallis Budge's Amulets and Superstitions, offers three proposals that were being considered at the time he wrote his book in 1930. The most likely theory, in his opinion, was that the term amulet was derived from the Latin *amuletum*, meaning "a "means of defense"" (Budge, 13). Though a consensus has not been reached as to which of these two origins is the historical source, both words give us an essential aspect of an amulet.

Table one demonstrates that of eight sources that define the term amulet, all of them consider amulets to be a "means of defense". This is evidenced by the fact that no definition is without the word protect, prevent, or ward, in reference to something destructive, harmful, or otherwise undesirable. Going a step further, I agree with both Petrie's and Merriam-Webster's Dictionary's extension of the definition to include aid and benefits beyond protection. In my opinion, amulets can have both the ability to "repel what is baneful" **and/or** "impel what is beneficial" (Gaster, 355). This claim directly defies the definition of an amulet proposed by Gaster in the Encyclopedia of Religion (see Table 1). Due to the fact that his definition of an amulet is dependent on



the distinction he made between the function of an amulet and a talisman (see Table 1), my definition was bound to directly contradict his. As will be seen when I define a talisman, for me, the distinction between an amulet and a talisman is not found in their functions, but rather in their mode of use.

The second essential characteristic of an amulet demonstrated by the potential origins of the term is that an amulet is “a freight, a burden, or a thing carried” (Petrie, 1). Of the eight sample definitions offered in Table 1, none contest that an amulet is something that is carried. Aveni and Paine’s definitions do not explicitly deal with mode of use, thus they neither support nor deny the notion that an amulet is something one carries. I believe that this situation reflects the complications that arise through an extension in mode of use offered by Petrie, Budge, and Gaster. For them, an amulet may also be something “set up in” (Petrie, 5), “laid up in” (Budge, 13), or “displayed in” (Gaster, 297) a home or building. Budge also allows for the possibility of it being attached to an object that the amulet would then protect (13). The fact that an amulet is something that is carried when used for an individual’s benefit goes unquestioned. The complication arises when the extension is made that an amulet can protect/benefit an object or space that is generally not considered to be able to “carry” something (hence the use of the phrases “set up in” (Petrie, 5), “laid up in” (Budge, 13), “displayed in” (Gaster, 297), and attached to (Budge, 13)).

I agree with Budge, Petrie and Gaster in that an amulet can protect or benefit a possession, including a home or business. Indeed, an amulet may also protect the contents of a possession, i.e. the family in the home, the people in a car, the data on a laptop. The distinction that needs to be maintained for amulets, the fact that it is

something that is carried, is not sacrificed by the understanding that amulets can effect possessions. The simple fact is that for it to be an amulet, the possession that it is protecting/benefiting must be “carrying” it. Therefore, rather than using the phrases applied by Petrie, Budge, and Gaster, which allow for an amulet to be set in or displayed in a home or possession, I contend that an amulet is something that, when used on a home or possession, must be adhered to that possession, so that the object is constantly carrying the amulet when it is supposed to be protecting/benefiting the possession. By “adhered to” I mean that the amulet must be designed to be hung from or attached to (i.e. a sticker) the object when it is supposed to be functioning on behalf of that object. Thus, as things stand, an amulet is something that protects or benefits its possessor which must be carried by a person or adhered to an object in order to effect that person, the object, and/or the contents of the object.

A third element of an amulet that is ubiquitously present in all definitions is that the protection and benefits it offers comes from a source beyond the natural. The most common terms used to describe the power that amulets have or channel are “magic” and “supernatural”. Both of these terms are even more variant and complex than “amulet” is. As these terms are not the focus of this paper, I will not be performing an analysis of their origins at this point, nor will I propose a definition that may be used universally by scholars. Instead, I will choose to use the term “magic” to describe the force exerted by an amulet, and will only define that term for the purposes of my research. For this paper, **magic** will be defined as a force that allows humans to bring about an effect beyond what is considered their natural ability to provide/perform, that may or may not be regulated by a superhuman being/essence. Given this definition, magic and religion are not mutually

exclusive. Generally, when magic (as defined here) is an element of religion, the efficacy of the magic is regulated by a superhuman being/essence within that religion.

The final element that will contribute to my definition of an amulet is that it must have a level of “general applicability” (Petrie, 3). Rather than being “a chance connection [identified by an individual] which is wholly unaccountable” (Petrie, 3), an amulet must be institutionalized to some degree. Thus, objects offered by, for example, religious institutions, healers, witches and medicine men may be amulets, but one’s lucky pair of underwear, a photo of a relative that passed, a grandmother’s ring, or a family heirloom would not be. The latter set of objects would fall under the category of mascots, which will be discussed later. For a magical object to be an amulet, it must be empowered through a system that is accepted by a cultural group, and it must be identifiable to various members of that cultural group.

Given these four elements, we can now create a definition for amulets as a class of artifacts. An **amulet** is an object with general applicability that is endowed with magical powers and meant to be carried by or adhered to a person or object in order to grant that individual/object/contents of the object aid and/or protection. It is my opinion that this definition for an amulet represents the best fusion of accepted definitions, and offers the clearest guidelines from which to distinguish an amulet from other magical objects.

Now that a definition for an amulet has been forged, I will propose a definition for talismans as a class of artifacts. Though the term talisman is often used synonymously with amulet, attempts have been made at distinguishing between these two types of

magical objects. Generally, these distinctions are attributed to one of two traits: function or form. When distinctions are attempted for talismans on the basis of function amulets are generally attributed with the ability to protect, and talismans with all other abilities (wish granting, summoning, attracting luck, etc.) though they are often granted the ability to protect as well (see Paine, Aveni, and Merriam-Webster's Dictionary's definitions in Table 1). From these examples, it is clear that such a distinction is not often helpful. It is understandable however, why this happens.

Functionally, amulets and talismans are often granted more than one ability. Thus, at least one of the definitions would have to accommodate an object which does more than just protect. That being said, having such an overlapping distinction complicates examination. It also makes the category of amulet largely meaningless. Having two categories of objects, one that protects and one that protects and does everything else makes the first category impractical and unnecessary. Thus, functional distinctions between talismans and amulets, as they have been conceived thus far, are not useful.

Formal distinctions between amulets and talismans revolve around inscription. The origin of the term talisman is generally attributed to the Arabic *tilasm*, meaning to “make marks like a magician” (Budge, 13). Given this history, it is not surprising that Morris' distinction between amulets and talismans are that talismans are “engraved with figures or characters” (ix). One problem with this distinction is that other authors have made a similar claim, however they define inscribed magical objects as amulets (MacLeod and Mees, 2-3) or charms (Budge, 27) rather than talismans. Another problem with this line of segregation is that inscription can often be of minimal to no importance to the amulet itself. Finally, using inscription as a deciding factor would leave certain

magical objects generally referred to as an amulet or talisman without categorization. As we have seen, an amulet must be carried by or adhered to its beneficiary. If a talisman is an inscribed amulet, what of the objects which are not carried but left in a home or altar?

Rather than using formal or functional characteristics to determine what a talisman is, I am of the opinion that we should regard mode of use as the distinguishing factor. As amulets are objects that are carried, talismans should be objects that are placed in a location and left stationary. Talismans are the objects which are left in household shrines, in altars, or set/stood in some other space. Talismans do not have to be with/on its beneficiary to be efficacious; they can work from a distance. For example, a talisman to prevent a kitchen fire is something that may be able to be placed in the kitchen or someplace else in the home, it is left there, and it is constantly working to prevent a fire. An amulet for the same purpose would have to be adhered to the stove to work, constantly in contact with what it is effecting.

A definition that makes the distinguishing factor mode of use creates a clear distinction between itself and amulets. This distinction is also meaningful in a practical sense as it conveys the level of interaction between a magical object and its owner on a day to day level. Thus, a **talisman** is an object with general applicability that is endowed with magical powers and meant to be placed in a, generally stationary, location in order to offer its owner aid and/or protection. A talisman is neither adhered to nor carried by the object/individual it is meant to be aiding/protecting.

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