

Portrayals and Prejudice Concerning Women in Folktales: A Comparative Study of Japanese and American University Students

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Research Outline

- Significance of the Study
- Research Questions
- Research Background
- Research Method
- Survey of the Results
- Conclusion
- Limitations of the Study & Future Studies
- Bibliography/References
- Acknowledgements

Significance of the Study

- We have taken a large amount of courses concerning Japanese culture and language in both America and Japan.
- By learning about various folklore, we consequently came to understand the cultural circumstances of Japan.
- We realized there was an clear connection between the portrayal of women in folktales and how they are viewed by society at large.
- Through this research we would also like to explore what kind of influence folklore has on university student's perceptions in regards to societal issues and education.
- We would also like to analyze whether university students think that cross-cultural misunderstandings can be mitigated through learning more about the folklore of other cultures.

Research Questions

1. How do American and Japanese college students differ in their awareness of folktales influence on the perception of women in their respective cultures?
2. How would the inclusion of folktales in second/foreign language classes impact American and Japanese university students' perceptions about social issues and education?

Research Background Outline

- A. Defining Folktales in Folkloristics
- B. Background of select Western Folktale Characters
- C. Background of select Japanese Folktale Characters

Defining Folktales in Folkloristics

“How are distinctions made between folktales, folklore, legends and so on? This problem, often referred to as a problem of genre, has been an area of contention for some time in the field of folkloristics.” - Oda, Jun'nichi

“If use of the term "folktale" to include such literary narratives seems somewhat broad, it can be justified on practical grounds if on no other, for it is impossible to make a complete separation of the written and the oral traditions. Often, indeed, their interrelation is so close and so inextricable as to present one of the most baffling problems the folklore scholar encounters.” - Stith Thompson

Folktale 1st Def. : “Tales that are told amongst the folk (people).”

Folktale 2nd Def. : “A fictional story that is spread by word of mouth.”

(Thompson, 1946), (Oda, Jun'nichi, 2006).

西洋の民話の例と背景

- オデッセイのアテナ
- スラブ地域のババヤガ
- ヘンゼルとグレーテルの魔女
- ヨーロッパから北アメリカのピューリタン植民地までの魔女に問われた女性に対する描写
- 「ホーカス ポーカス」(1993年)、「ブレア・ウィッチ・プロジェクト」(1999年)と「ウィッチ」(2015年)現在のウィッチに対する描写

古来

中世

近世から近代まで

Athena

- Beth Cohen sets the stage for the conversation about women being depicted in folktale as a reflection of how they're expected to perform in society.
 - Supports wishes of father (male authority) openly and behind scenes.
 - Weaving (literally and metaphorically).
 - Unable to transcend position.
- Isn't a witch but emphasizes some of the qualities a witch does.
 - Cunning, weaving, portrayed in such a way that strengthens an androcentric society..



(From the Piazza dell'Emporio, Rome)

(Cohen, 1995)

As Major Religions Spread

- As Christianity spread, becoming a major religion, it either brought in or rejected local beliefs on a case by case basis.
 - Local beliefs had to be presented to church officials for consideration.
 - If rejected, these beliefs were deemed Satanic.
 - Things “marginal and other” were perceptibly Satanic and challenging to God’s kingdom.
 - Over time giving birth to the Christian narrative of the witch - A change that becomes visible in two stories: Hansel and Gretel, and Baba Yaga.

Baba Yaga to Hansel and Gretel

- Baba Yaga is an ancient witch from the Slavic region, where stories weren't yet successfully influenced by growing Christian powers.
 - An amalgamation of Pagan deities but stands on her own.
 - Wild embodiment of Mother Nature.
 - Completely neutral; helps or kills as she pleases.
 - Has many kinds of familiars, even inanimate objects.
- The witch in Hansel and Gretel as recorded by the Grimms in early modern Germany very much resembles Baba Yaga, however:
 - She is decidedly wicked, malicious and opposed to a God.
 - Has red beast eyes and sense of smell; Is not human.
 - Has animal familiars, much like later Christian-centric concepts of witches.

(Forrester, Goscilo, Skoro, Zipes, 2013)(Grimm, n.d.)(Karlsen, 1998)

Baba Yaga



(Ivan Bilibin, 1900)

Hansel and Gretel's Witch



(Corbis, N.D.)

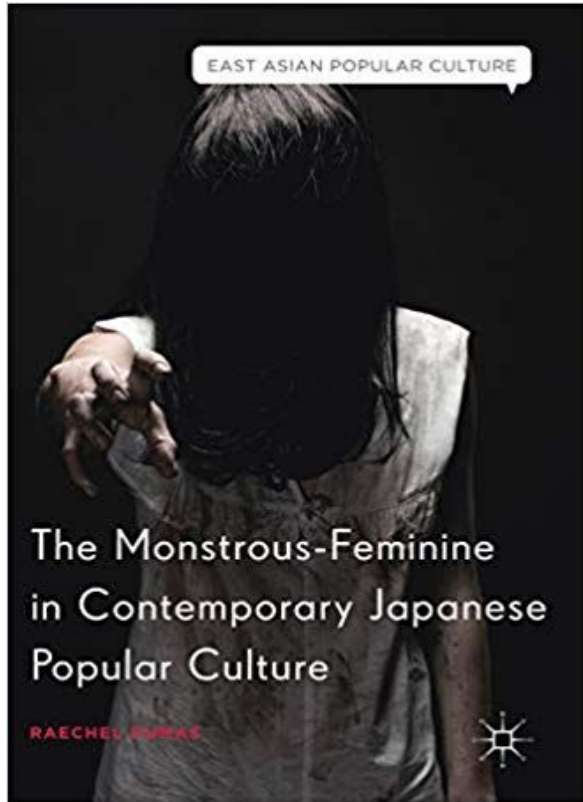
Witches in Early Europe and the Puritan Colonies

- As Karlsen puts it, women, being considered part of the “marginal and other” group, allowed them to be suspected of leaning towards Satan in their discontent, leading to their designation as witches.
- In the consolidation of power by an androcentric entity, women were scrutinized alongside folk traditions, beliefs and other aspects of culture.
 - Women of any station of society could be accused and convicted, so long as they were perceived as being discontented; which, to the Puritans, meant “thinking oneself above one's place in the social order”.
- The image of the witch has continued to change into today and many such depictions are beginning to separate from the early modern Christian narrative, though that narrative is still heavily visible, as shown in movies like *The Blair Witch (1999)*, *The Witch (2015)* and even childrens movies like *Hocus Pocus (1993)*.

(Karlsen, 1998)(Zwissler, 2018)

Western Characters	Presence of Christianity	Moral leaning	Appetite for children	Humanity
Athena	None	Good	None	Divine human
Baba Yaga	None	Very <u>neutral</u> / Case by case	Yes	Non-human / can be divine
Hansel and Gretel's witch	Some	Evil / Wicked	Yes	Non-human
Witch in early Europe ---> Puritan colonies	A lot	Evil / Wicked	Yes (For magic)	Very human, demonified by Satan
Blair Witch, Hocus Pocus, The VVitch	A lot but not like Puritan New England	Evil / Wicked	Yes (For magic)	Very human, demonified by Satan

The Monstrous Feminine in Contemporary Japanese Popular Culture



- Raechel Dumas claims, “Monstrous configurations of femininity have long occupied a place in the Japanese cultural imaginary, routinely emerging as sites for modeling deviant (and reinforcing normative) moral behaviors and social norms.”

Raechel Dumas also mentions that there exist many representatives of the “Monstrous Feminine” in medieval and modern Japan, and that these portrayals are influenced by events and phenomena throughout Japanese history.

- Shinto, Buddhist sutras and didactic narratives
- Influx of women into workforce (1970s - Present)

(Dumas, 2018).

Medieval Buddhism

Buddhism

- Didactic Narratives: In a number of medieval Japanese buddhist tales, women are portrayed as transforming into dragons. Monika Dix attributes this to the fact that “women were thought of as the embodiment of passion and desire.”
- Menstruation Sutra: According to Momoko Takemi, this sutra “teaches the way of salvation for women who have fallen into hell because of the pollution of blood.” 「女性劣機観」- women’s inability to follow Buddhist teaching.
- *Go-shou* 五障
 - The 5 inherent hindrances that keep women from reaching enlightenment. - Miwako Kudo



The Blood Pool, retrieved from twitter

(Dix, 2009), (Miwako, 2009), (Takemi, 1983)

Japanese Female Ghosts



The Ghost of Oyuki, retrieved from Japanese Ghosts and Demons, Art of the Supernatural

According to Brenda Jordan, it is thought that ghosts pass on from our world of the living to an eternal one, but sometimes enroute to this eternal world they become trapped in a limbo like realm, often times due to lingering, “powerfully gripping” emotions such as sorrow, spite, and hatred.

Jordan also writes that a common theme amongst ghost stories in the Japan’s Edo period where “wronged” or “consumed by envy” women.

It can be thought that a point of commonality between portrayals of women in buddhist didactic tales and ghostly portrayals of women is their emotional driven nature.

Representatives : Oiwa, Okiku, Kashima

(Brenda, 2005)

Two Representatives: Yuki-onna

- Origin of the Folktale
 - According to Makido Yoko, Lafcadio Hearn's portrayal of Yuki-Onna in Kwaidan is most similar in a number of aspects to the original.
- Character Attributes
 - White clothing
 - Described by the main character Minokishi as beautiful, but having a frightening gaze.
- Literary Interpretation :
 - Embodiment of Loneliness
 - Indications of wanting to live as a human



Retrieved from Hyakkai-Zukan by
Sawaki Suushi

(Makido, 2013), (Ikeda, 2017)

Two Representatives : Kuchisake-onna

- Original Folktale : Urban Legend
 - There are a number of theories for the origins of Kuchisake-Onna, but much evidence points to Western Japan, specifically Gifu Prefecture.
- Character Attributes
 - Large Medical Mask
 - Mouth with a gaping slash
 - Can run at an incredibly fast pace
- Origin Story of “the slashed mouth”
 - butchered plastic surgery
 - was assaulted by a murderer



Image retrieved from the website
“Fountain of Fear”

(Nakao, 2005)

Japanese Ghosts & Yokai	Buddhist influence	Experience killing people?	Are there any traces of Humanity?
Oiwa (Ghost)	Can be inferred	No	Originally Human
Okiku (Ghost)	Can be inferred	No	Originally Human
Yuki-Onna (Yokai)	Unable to confirm	Yes	Traces of Humanity
Yamamba (Yokai)	Unable to confirm	Man-eater	Unclear
Kuchisake-Onna (Yokai)	Unable to confirm	Yes	Traces of Humanity

Research Method

Study Participants:

103 University Students

- 53 Japanese (Japanese college students)
- 50 Americans (American college students)

Research Instrument:

- Online Survey (Google Forms)
- Both a Japanese and English survey will be made available

* Different survey questions were constructed for both the Japanese and English versions of the survey to account for inherently different intercultural and intracultural knowledge concerning folklore.

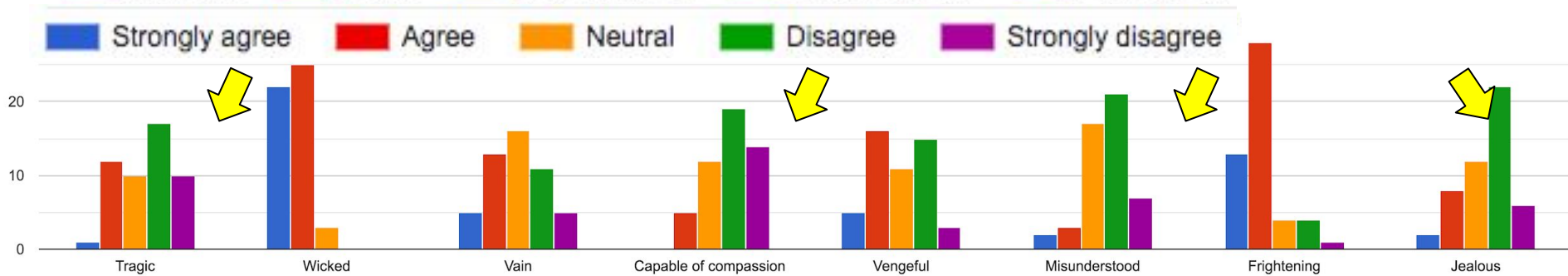
Survey Results

Research Question #1

How do American and Japanese college students differ in their awareness of folktales influence on the perception of women in their respective cultures?

American Respondents

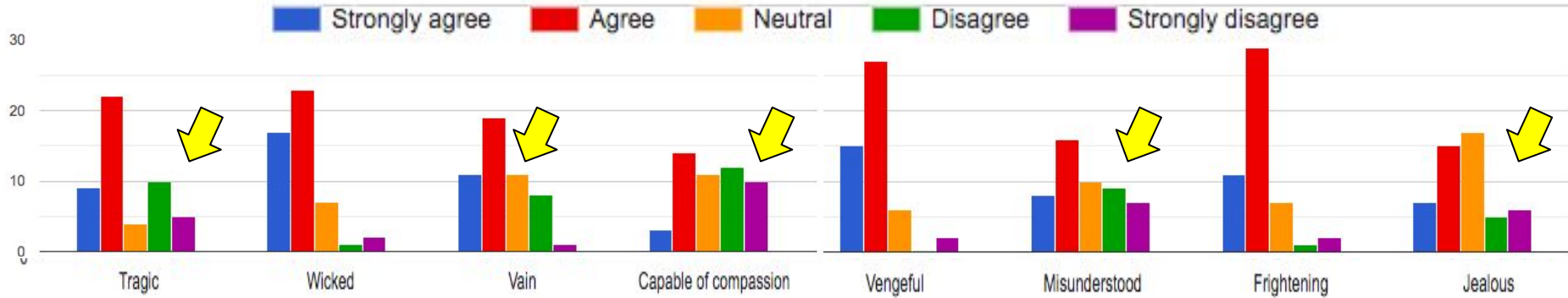
What kind of character do you think the witch from Hansel and Gretel is?



- A majority of the American respondents chose “wicked” and “frightening” from the choices.
- Over half of the respondents did not think of the witch as “tragic”.
- Over 60% of the respondents did not think of the witch as “capable of compassion”.

American Respondents

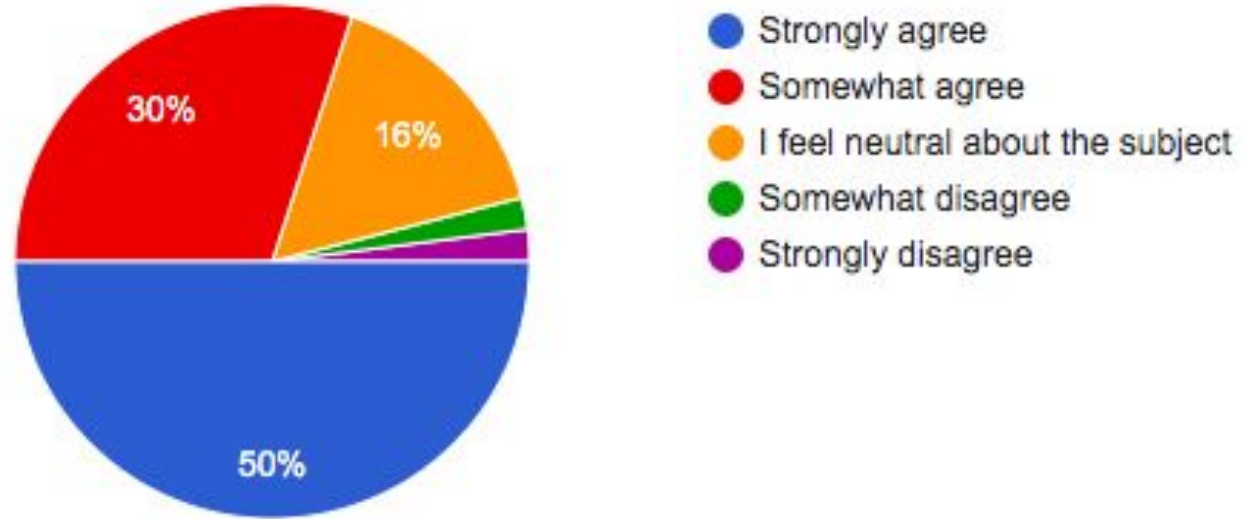
Which of the following do you feel best expresses the portrayal of witches since the 17th century?



- A majority of the American respondents chose the responses “wicked” and “frightening”.
- In contrast with the results from the previous question, the number of respondents who chose the response “tragic” were over 60%. In addition, those who chose the response “misunderstood” accounted for nearly half of the respondents.

American Respondents

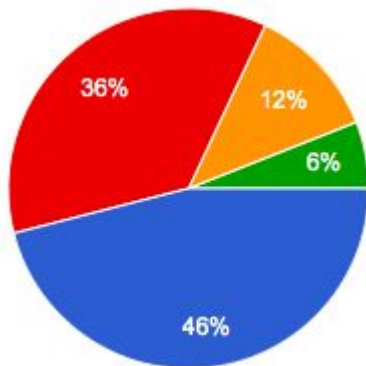
Do you agree with the following statement: "The portrayal of witches today is fairly different than it was 50 years ago. "



- 80% of the respondents agreed that the portrayal of witches today is fairly different than it was 50 years ago.

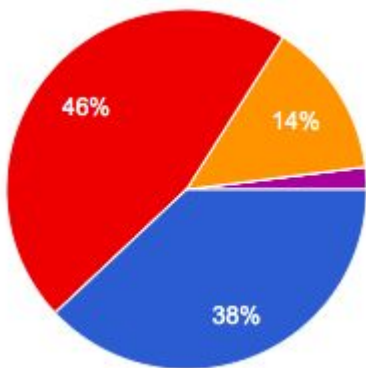
アメリカ:

1. アメリカには一定の明確な男女の役割があると思いますか？



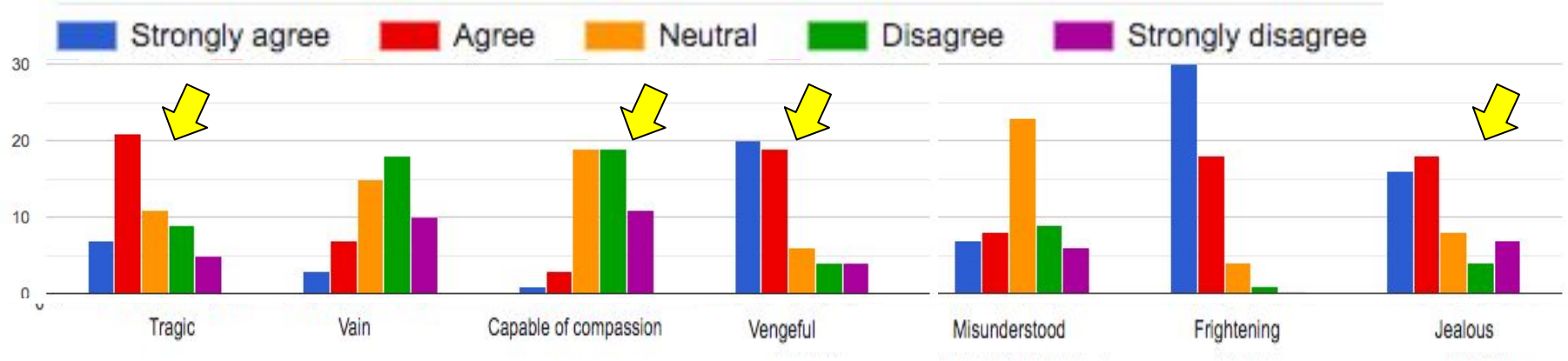
- 強くそう思う
- そう思う
- どちらとも言えない
- あまりそう思わない
- 全くそう思わない

2. 現代のアメリカにおける家庭での女性の役割は、50年前とは異なると思いますか？



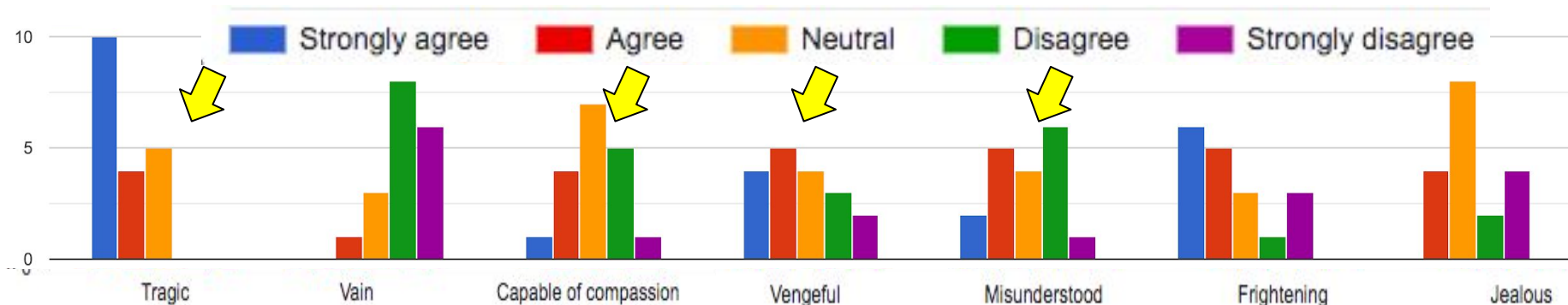
- 約8割のアメリカ人は一定の明確な男女の役割があると思っている。
- 84%のアメリカ人は家庭での女性の役割は50年前とは異なると思っている。

What kind of character do you think Kuchisake-onna is?



- A majority of the Japanese respondents think of Kuchisake-onna as “frightening” or “vengeful”.
- Roughly half of the respondents think of Kuchisake-onna as “tragic”.
- In terms of whether Kuchisake-onna’s character is “misunderstood”, the participants are for the most part neutral.

What kind of character do you think Oiwa is?

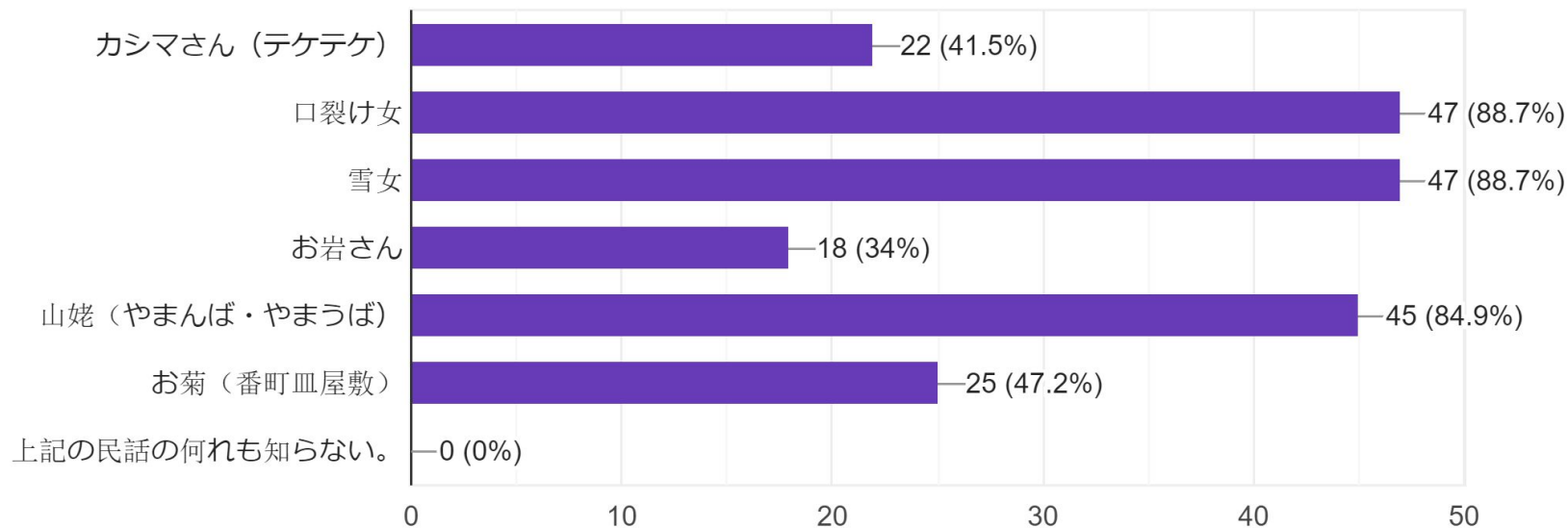


- Over 70% of the respondents think of Oiwa as a “tragic” character.
- The number of respondents who chose “frightening” exceeded 60%.

** Among the Japanese respondents, those that were familiar with Oiwa came out to only 18 people, accounting for just over $\frac{1}{3}$ of the total respondents.

日本:

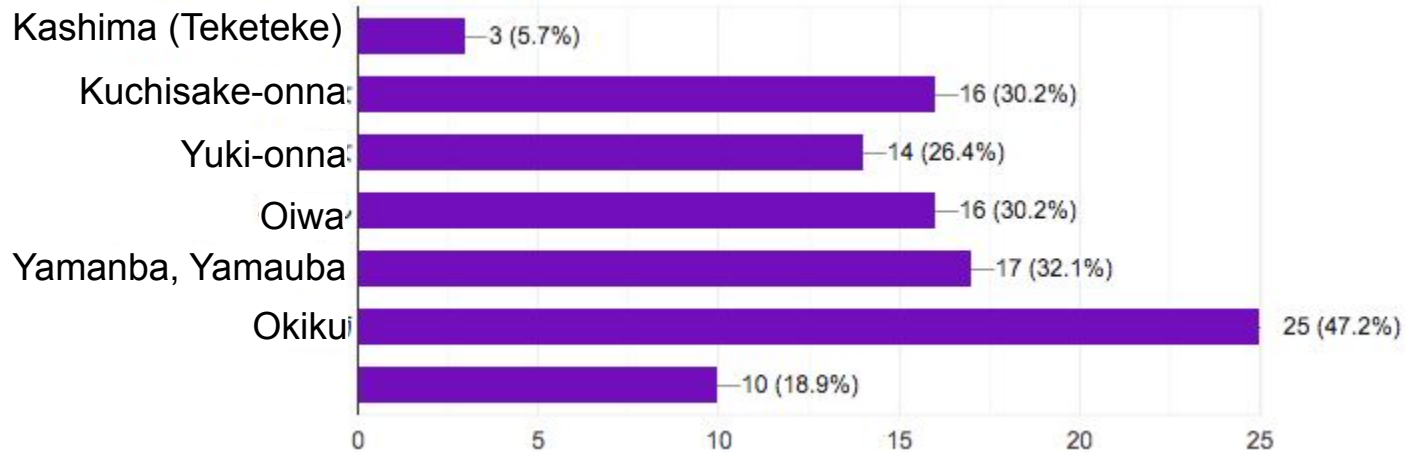
以下の民話のキャラクターのうち、知っている民話を全て選んでください。



- ほぼ全員の回答者は「口裂け女」と「雪女」と「山姥」を知っていると答えた。

Japanese Respondents

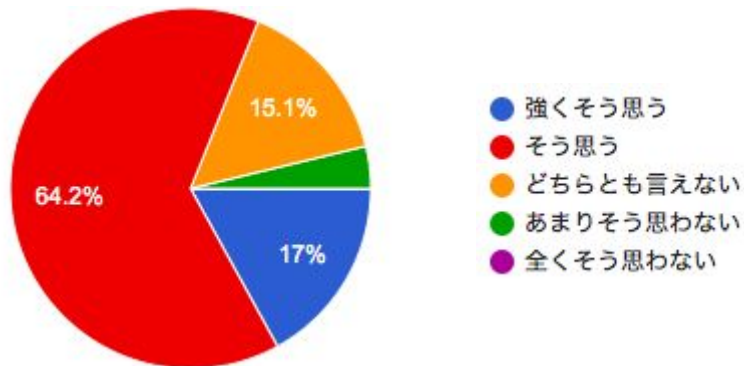
Please choose the characters that you consider to be an actual women as opposed to a monster, yokai, or ghost.



- Over 90% of the respondents that are familiar with Oiwa and 100% of the respondents that are familiar with Okiku responded that they regard these two characters as actual women.
- Those that chose Yuki-onna and Kuchisake-onna made up less than 35% of the respondents.

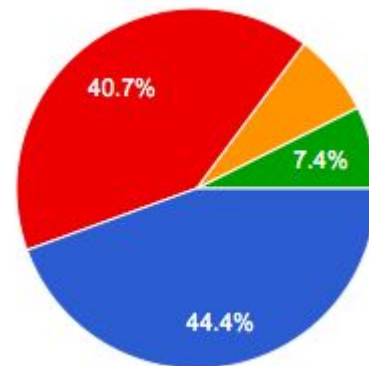
日本:

1. 日本には一定の明確な男女の役割があると思いますか。



- 日本人の回答者の大多数は「強くそう思う」と「そう思う」と答えた。
- 「あまりそう思わない」と答えた人は3.8%にすぎない。

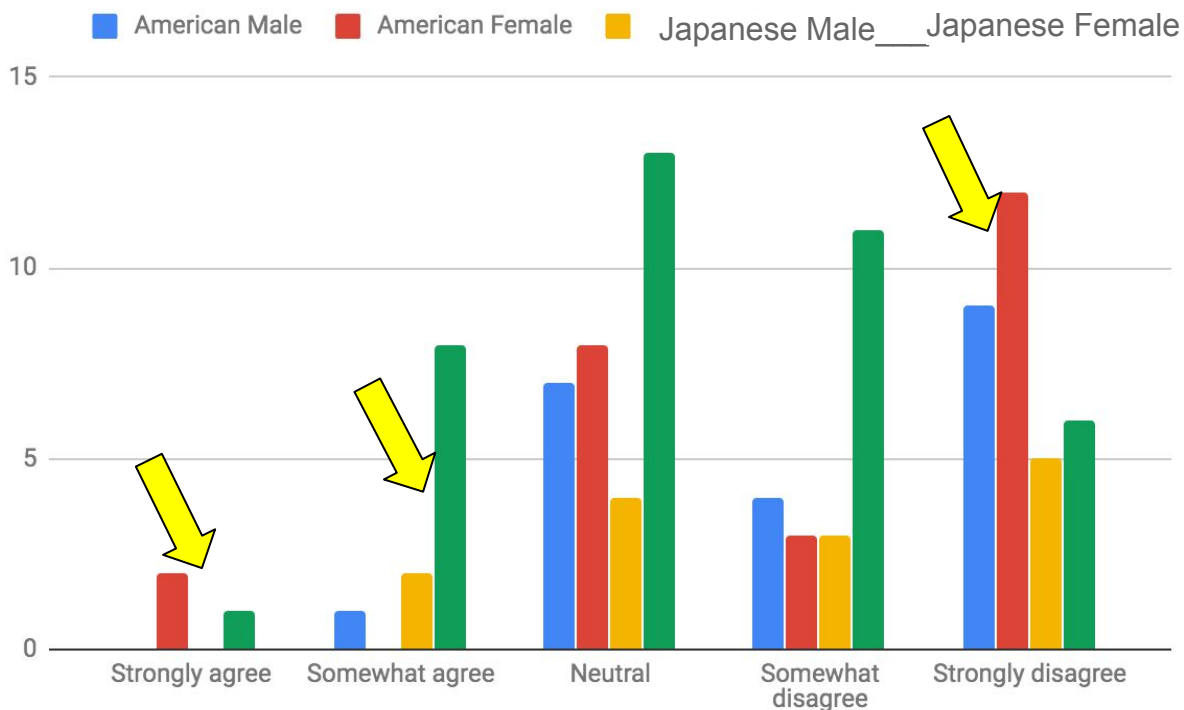
2. 現代の日本における家庭での女性の役割は、50年前とは異なると思いますか。



- 日本人の回答者の大多数は「強くそう思う」と「そう思う」と答えた。
- 「そう思わない」と答えた人の人数は8%以下である。

Japanese and American Respondents

In your opinion, are there situations in society where men should be positioned higher than women?



- A large majority of respondents were either neutral or disagreed with this statement.

**Written responses on next slide

In your opinion, are there situations in society where men should be positioned higher than women? (Write-in Responses)

- Written Responses
 - Among written responses from Japanese woman who agreed with the statement, 5 wrote responses such as, “I prefer men to lead”, “If a women gets pregnant there is an expectation to leave the workplace”, and “In a society in which it’s difficult to return to one’s company after getting married or pregnant, it would certainly be tough for a woman to be in a higher-up position.”
 - Among written responses from American men and woman who agreed with the statement, a number of people cited that “there are situations/environments that require considerable physical strength” and “it should be decided based on qualification, not sex.”

「立場」に対する日本人の何人かの書き込んだ回答

「男性に引っ張って行って欲しいと思うから。」

「引っ張ってくれるときは引っ張ってほしい。」

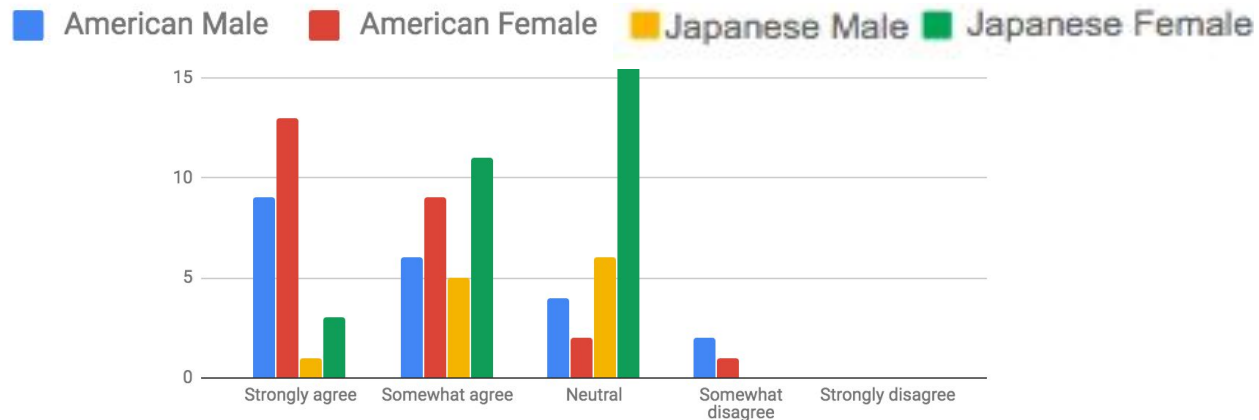
組織を束ねる人というのはあまり交代するものではないと思うし(組織統一のため)、女性はどうしても出産があるのでblankを作りやすい。

『結婚して子どもを産む』ことが女性の最高の幸福だと考えている人が多い上、結婚・出産を経た女性の社会復帰が難しい現在の社会システムの中では、上に立つ女性はきっと辛い思いをするだろうから。

「立場」に対するアメリカ人の何人かの書き込んだ回答

<p>“Some cases at home and some at work whether he is the boss or based in physical strength.”</p>	<p>“Some cases at home and some at work whether he is the boss or based in physical strength.”</p>	<p>“I don't really know. In academics no, but there is a natural physical difference between men and women giving them more strength naturally, unless a woman works out like crazy.”</p>
<p>“In situations where they are more qualified and have more experience.”</p>	<p>“It should all depend on your ability to work or how useful you are.”</p>	<p>“I don't agree. People should be hired/fired for their overall talents and shortcomings.”</p>

Do you think there is prejudice towards women in (America/Japan)?



- A majority of all respondents (American and Japanese) do think there is prejudice in their respective countries directed towards women.
- While Japanese female respondents were the largest demographic to reply neutrally, American female respondents were the largest demographic to reply with conviction.

Summary of Research Question 1 Results

- Contrary to our assumptions, less Japanese men than women think that there are cases in which men should be placed in a higher social position.
- In comparison to American respondents, the Japanese respondents were more neutral on whether there is prejudice towards women in their own country.
- While all of the characters we referenced were thought of as frightening by the respondents, there were a number of characters that were simultaneously thought of as tragic.
- According to Zwissler, “The story of witchcraft is primarily the story of women”, violence towards women, fears about women, [and] their place in society.

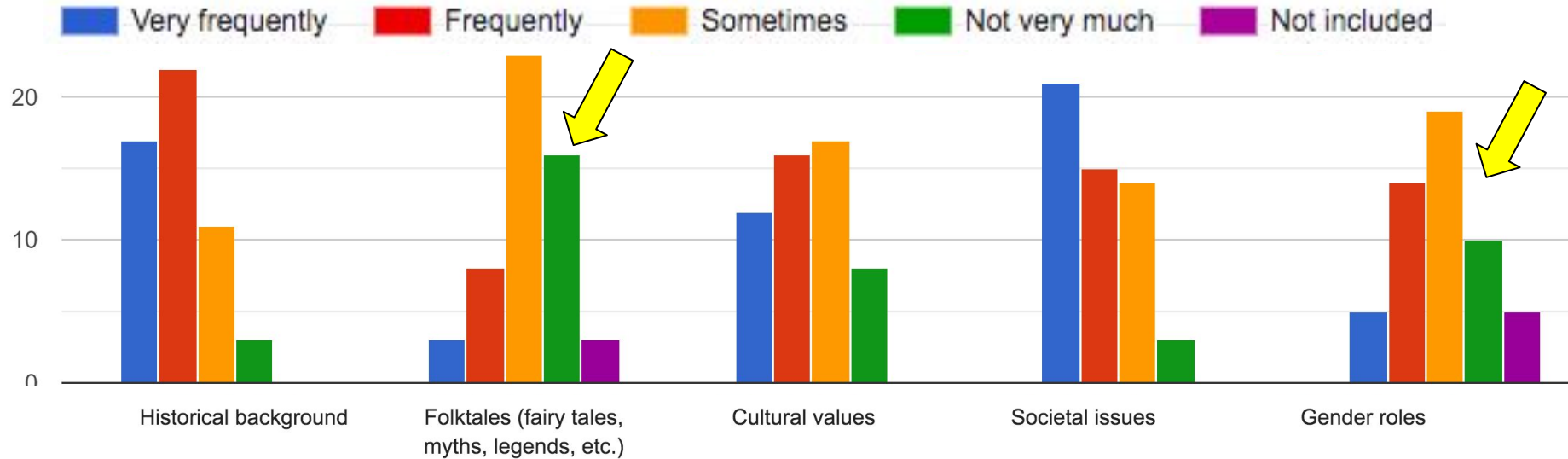
Survey Results

Research Questions 2

How do American and Japanese college students differ in their awareness of folktales influence on the perception of women in their respective cultures?

Japanese Respondents

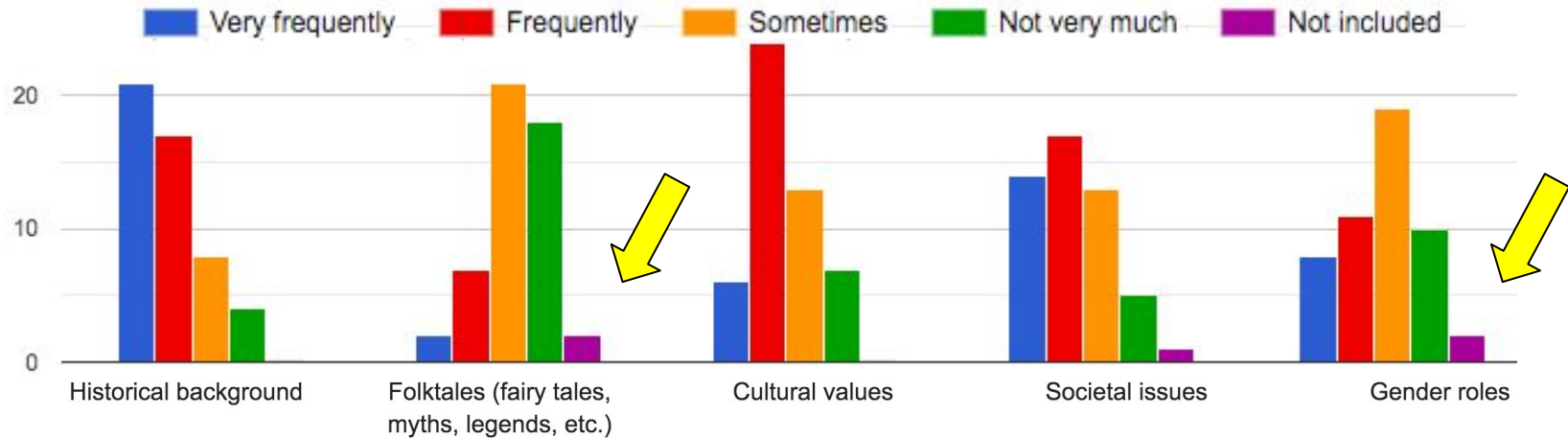
In your experience of Japanese education, how much were the following factors of Japanese culture included?



- While 43% of respondents think that Folktales were sometimes included in their education, 36% think that it was included “not very much” or “not included”.
- In comparison to other elements, Folktales and Gender Roles were not included that often.

American Respondents

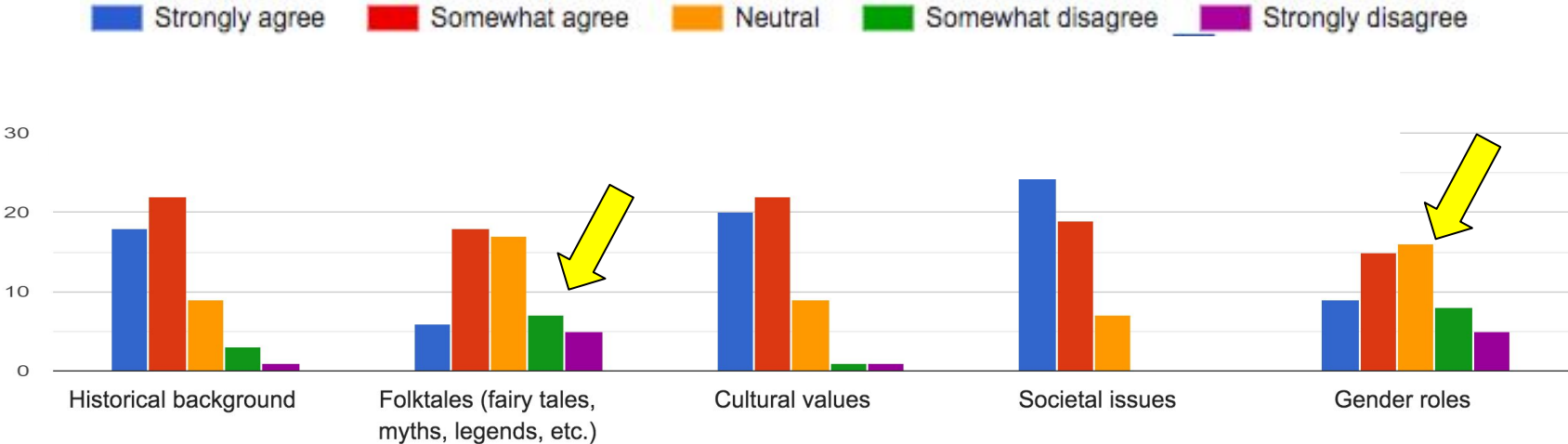
In your experience of American high school-level education how much were the following factors of Western culture included?



- 42% of American respondents believe that folktales were “sometimes” included in their high school education.
- 40% of American respondents believe that folktales were included “not very much” or “not included” in their high school education.

Japanese Respondents

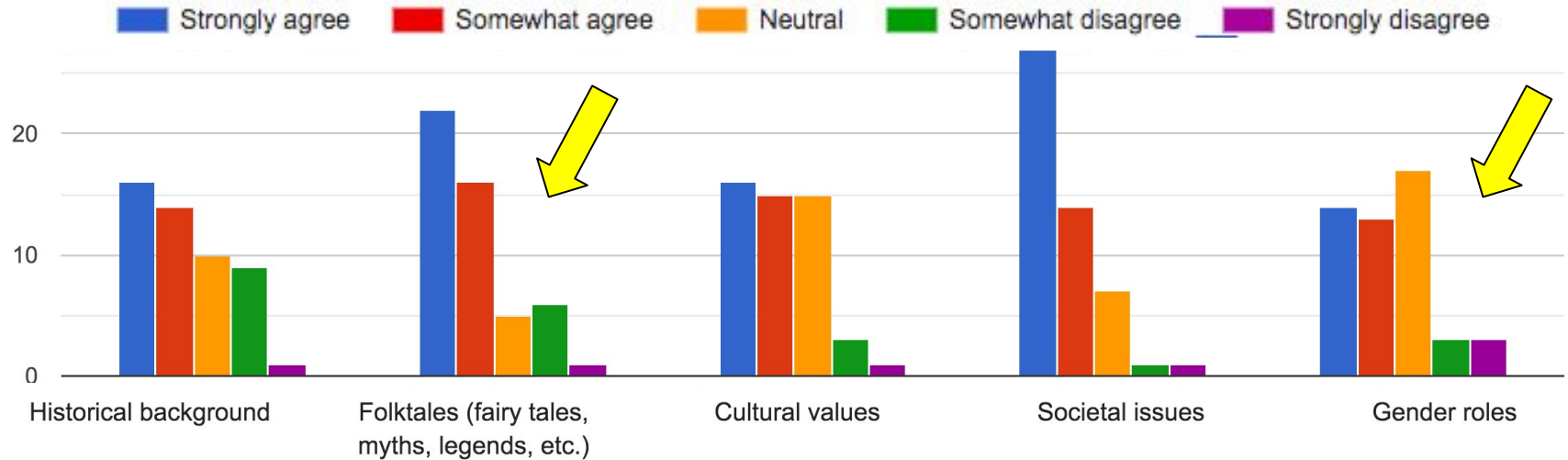
Which of the following categories of Japanese culture would you have liked to have learned more about in your Japanese education?



- The Japanese respondents for the most part would have liked to have learned more about subjects such as “societal issues” and “cultural values”
- In this question as well, folktales and gender roles were the least popular categories among the choices.

American Respondents

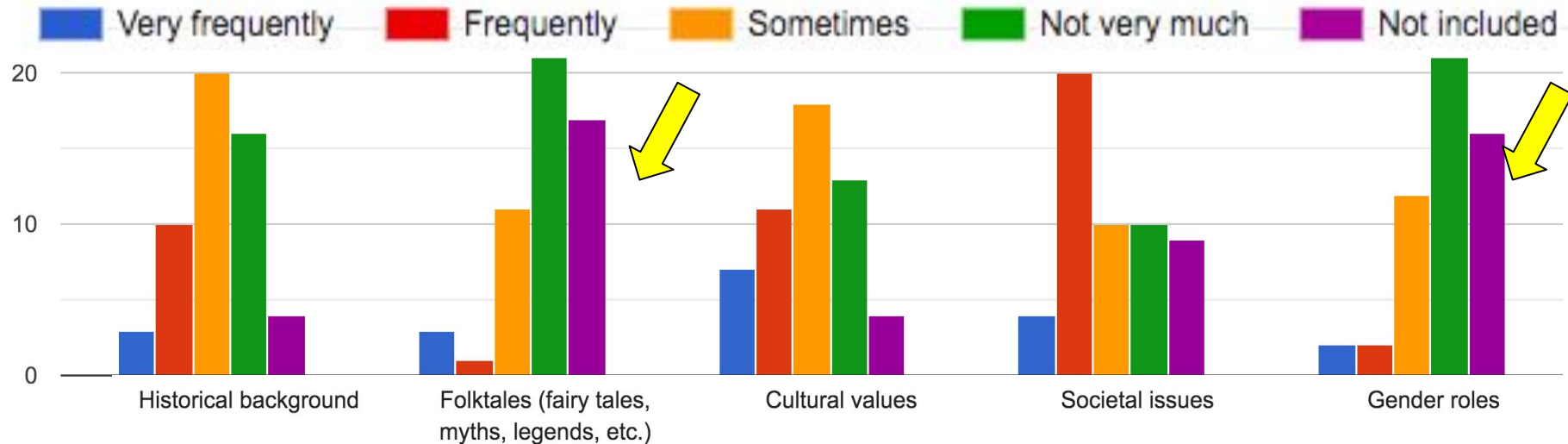
Which of the following categories of Western culture would you have liked to have learned more about in your American high school-level education?



- The American university students (76%) in comparison to the Japanese university students (45%) would have like to have learned more about folktales and gender roles in their education.

Japanese Respondents

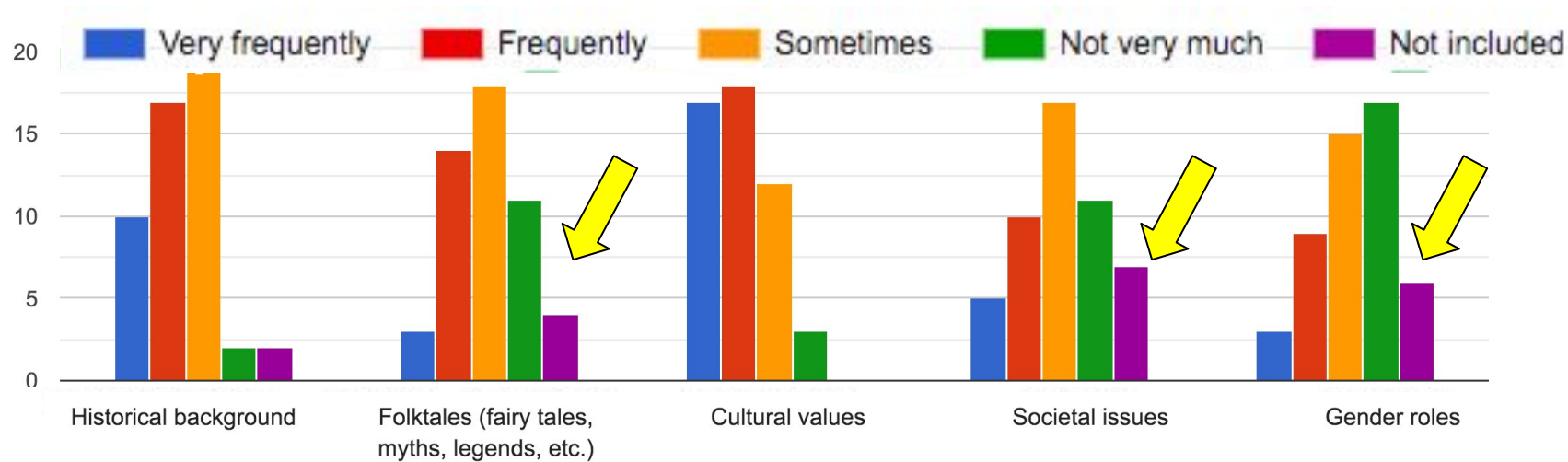
How frequently were the following categories included in your high school-level foreign language classes?



- Both folktales and gender roles were “not very much” included or simply “not included” (72%) in the Japanese respondents high school English courses.

American Respondents

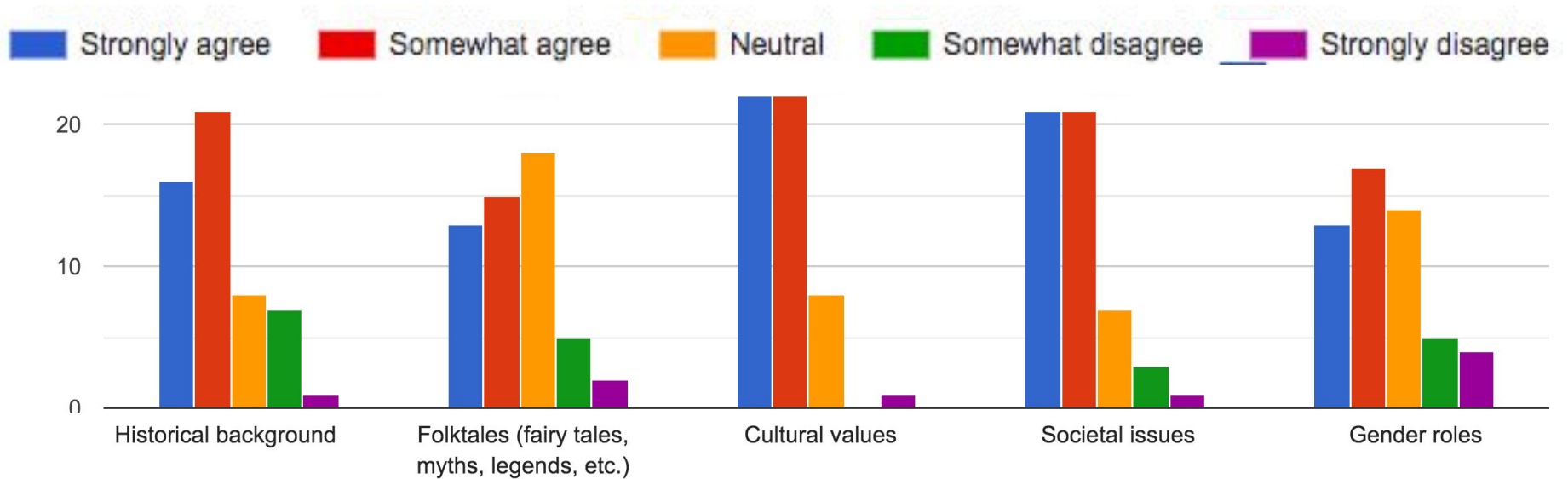
How frequently were the following categories included in your high school-level foreign language classes?



- In the same fashion as Japan, in American students foreign language education, gender roles was the least included element.

Japanese Respondents

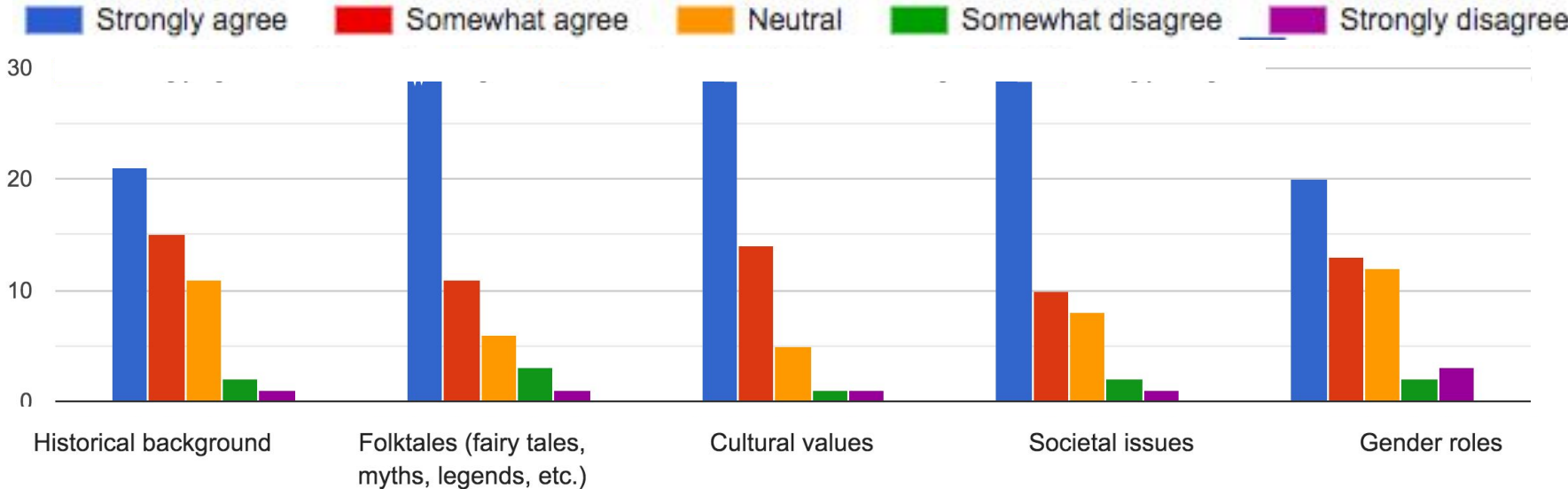
Which of the following categories would you have liked to have learned more about in your high school-level English classes?



- A majority of the Japanese respondents wish to have studied each of the listed elements, excluding folktales, more in their high school English classes. Just over half of the respondents (53%) wish to have studied folktales more.

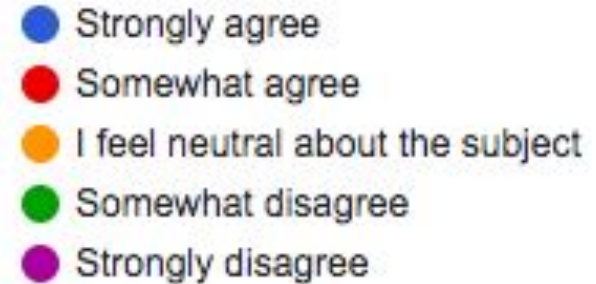
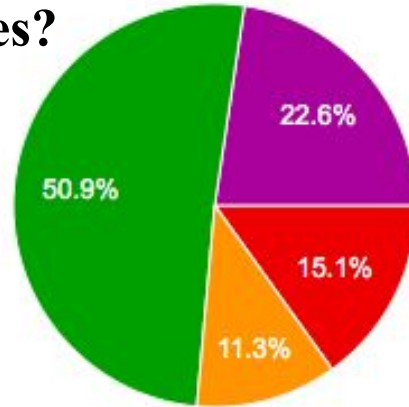
American Respondents

Which of the following categories would you have liked to have learned more about in your high school-level foreign language classes?

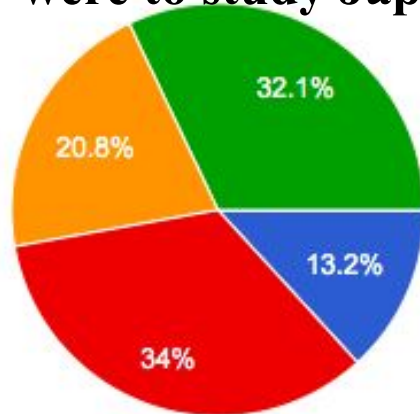


- American University students wish to have learned more about all listed elements in their high school-level foreign language classes.

1. Do you think that foreigners are familiar with Japanese folktales?



2. Do you think that foreigners would better understand the cultural context of Japan if they were to study Japanese folktales?

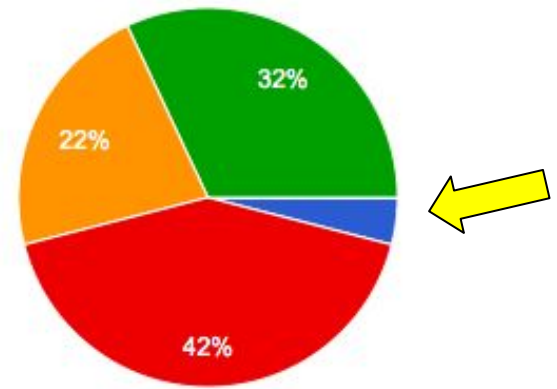


- The number of Japanese respondents who feel that foreigners are not familiar with Japanese folktales accounts for nearly 74%.
- Nearly half of the respondents agree with the sentiment of the second question.

American Respondents

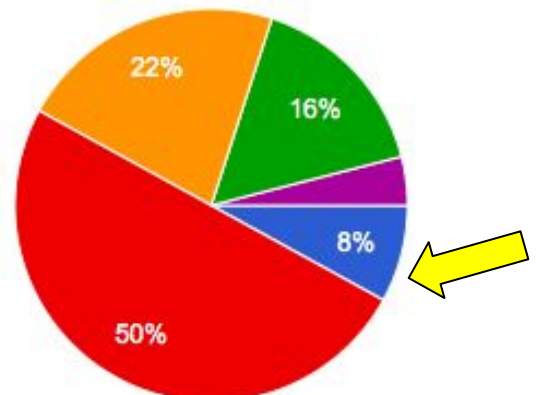
1. Do you feel non-Western cultures are familiar with American/Western folktales?

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- I feel neutral about the subject
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree



- Nearly half of the American Respondents believe that non-Western cultures are familiar with American/Western folktales.
- More than half of the American respondents think studying Western folktales would help those from non-Western cultures to understand Western society and culture.

2. Do you think studying Western folktales would help a non-Western person to understand Western society and culture?



Summary of Research Question 2 Results

- Both Japanese and American university students concerning their own culture studied gender roles and folktales to some degree.
- The American university students studied both folktales and gender roles to some degree in their foreign language education. In contrast, Japanese university students responded that both folktales and gender roles were not commonly included elements in their English courses.
- In comparison to the Japanese students, the American students would have like to study both folktales and gender roles more.
 - As an interesting contrast, the American students who studied folktales more in their foreign languages classes wished to have studied them more, where as the Japanese students who studied them less in their English classes do not wish to have studied them as much in comparison to their American students.
- Folktales, gender roles and societal issues not being included in education and their association with understanding each other may suggest a connection between folktales and social power structures.

Conclusion

- There is a strong correlation between the context/content of folktales and historical as well as modern societal issues.
- Folktales, gender roles and societal issues not being included in education and their association with understanding social issues may suggest a connection between folktales and social power structures.
- Receiving a formal education on the context of a variety of folktales may help one separate their perception from the historical portrayal.
- Both groups want to know more about this aspect of other cultures.
- Although there are university students from both countries that wish to know more about these elements in relation to their own culture, it seems that American university students as a whole in comparison to Japanese students wish to know more about these elements.

Limitation of the Study and Future Studies

- The subject pool for the study was limited to students currently enrolled in University.
 - English survey subjects were largely limited to students living in California.
- A majority of the respondents for the Japanese survey were female.
- The period in which we collected survey responses was less than 1 month.
- The depth of the literature review is limited.
- In the event in which we conduct a future study we would like to..
 - add new questions
 - analyze other characters more in depth
 - broaden the scope of our literature review

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Any questions?