**East Asian Folklore**

Every nation has folklore. It pops up in stories, customs, festivals, and proverbs for everyday living. Folklore provides context for modern traditions and cultural practices that might seem alien and strange otherwise. Ancient folk traditions make up the back bone of modern life, and reveal the interactions between nations of the past. European folklore, while nowhere near uniform, still expresses common themes, fears, and beliefs. Through wars, immigration, and trade, cultural exchange has made connections between all nations and people to some extent.

The connections and ties in Europe are strong, because, geographically, they have been living on top of each other for thousands of years. Far Eastern Asia, however, has not had that contact. Through much of history, contact between the east and west has been minimal. Long distance travel and communication were made nearly impossible because of the lack of technology, and dramatic geography.

The lack of interaction makes eastern Asian folklore especially interesting to study because it developed without any influence from the west. Monsters and folk heroes exist to deal with completely different fears, and festivals celebrate the achievements of many whose contributions to society and wisdom would not be celebrated anywhere else in the world. Religious traditions teach different moral hierarchies that influence daily life and consideration of the afterlife.

The phenomenon of cultural exchange does exist in East Asian folklore though. Folklore from China, Japan, Taiwan, and many other neighboring countries have similar tales and practices, illustrating similar values.

China is a cultural monolith, occupied by over a billion people. Their folklore is equally vast, and well recorded. Naturally, it varies through each of the towns and cities throughout, the three million square miles, and over a thousand years of recorded history. Some stories only exist in a specific, tiny town, and are never heard anywhere else, while others are celebrated throughout the country, and honored with festivals, and special traditions.

The Wilson Folklore Archives highlight a very small portion of this vast culture, mostly through interviews with immigrants from China and what stories and traditions they could remember after years of living in America.
Though much of the richness was lost as China turned to communism, the values of determination and personal responsibility still shine through stories and practices that could not be stamped out. Great tasks, celebrated centuries later, were accomplished, not through brute strength or even cleverness, but through audacity and strength of will to deny the impossible.

Animals and humans who did the great deeds of the past are still respected for their contributions to society. In *FA 01 63*, the story of the white monkeys is told. These sacred monkeys were created to guard the book of heaven. They exist on the earth to seek out new knowledge and were released from their duty due to the curiosity of one white monkey who still guards the book alone today after his curiosity got the better of him and he decided to take a peek at the secrets of heaven. It is culturally appropriate to show respect for these beings as they continue on their quest to gather all the knowledge of earth.

Ghost stories and cultural fears reveal a deep respect for spirits and a commitment to order. An important everyday practice in modern China is Feng Shui. *FA 01 1656* tells of the practice, where furniture, doors and windows are balanced to allow energy to flow through Chinese houses without stopping. Professionals still exist today to help arrange houses according to the principles of Feng Shui, even though much of the reasons behind the need for balanced energy deal with things that are no longer officially beliefs according to the Chinese government.

Festivals exist as a break from the regular routine, and as a unifying force within communities. The origins of beloved holidays do tend to get lost in the grand shuffles of life. Modern Festivals rarely even barely resemble the event they were originally created to celebrate. The hidden roots are intriguing to attempt to divine through the stories, costumes, and customs of a festival day.

One of China’s most interesting festivals is the festival of Gwei Jye. *FA 01 63* tells of glorious feasts that are created for the many ghosts of China, which emerge from the underworld to walk with the living during the seventh lunar month on the lunisolar calendar. Families prepare garlic green bundles to ward off evil, and feasts are left outside so that the spirits will have no cause to come inside.

Japan

Like any neighboring countries, Japanese and Chinese folklore share similar origins, and borrow from each other quite a bit. Through wars and centuries of trade, stories and customs were traded along with blood and currency.
However, just because festivals and mythology share aesthetics does not mean that they share a belief system. Both Chinese and Japanese folklore emphasize honor and politeness but while Chinese folklore regards figures of great power, Japanese folklore focuses on the ordinary person’s interactions with gods and demons. Manners are used in Japanese folktales to thwart monsters that are too powerful to be directly fought.

These themes are especially prominent with kappa lore, explored in FA 01 1388. Kappas are supernaturally strong and hunger for cucumbers, liver, and human children. Clever and mischievous, kappas victimize all those who dare come near their watery territory. Kappas are defeated through excessive politeness. Kappas feel obligated to bow as deep as or deeper than any traveler who bows to them first, and through deep and speedy bowing, lose the water in the bowl of their head that gives them their supernatural strength. One should never try to physically challenge a kappa, and they have never been easily tricked, but they can be defeated.

Other

Each nation in Eastern Asia has its own folklore, rich with traditions and practices explained by hundreds of years of stories. Unfortunately, there is not very much information on these cultures in the Wilson Folklore Archives. What does exist shows a similarity between cultural values. East Asian folklore puts value in hard work, determination and honor above all else.

Unlike Western culture, friendship is the most highly valued relationship in Eastern Asian folklore. A man must show honor in his dealings with all men, but it is most important to keep a promise to a friend. The project, FA 01 597, illustrates the efforts of one servant who saved his extravagant Lord through thriftiness. The servant carefully saved and dried the excess rice wasted during the family’s frequent, lavish feasts. During a time of famine, when all the money in the world could not buy food, the servant was able to provide for his family.

Instead of grasping at power when he was put in a position to do so, the servant lived cheerfully in his designated role.
Chinese Folklore

Legends, Folktales, and Customs of the Chinese People (FA 01 63)

The story of Chaung-ur (FA 01 63)

A long time ago, the earth had nine suns, and nothing could grow under the oppressive heat except humans and one giant bird. The humans lived under the shade of the wing of the giant bird, and in exchange for its services, they would sacrifice a girl every year for the bird to eat.

One year, the girl they chose to sacrifice was particularly beautiful, and had a boyfriend of unparalleled skill in archery. He took umbrage to the idea of his girlfriend being sacrificed. He decided that the nine suns were the cause of his woe; if he shot down the suns, it would no longer be unbearably hot. He got permission from the elders to attempt to shoot down the suns. To fulfill his task, the boy had to leave the protection of the bird’s wing. He was able to shoot down eight of the suns before the elders stopped him, because they did not know what would happen to the world with no sun. By that time though, the earth was cool and breezy, and the boy’s hair was completely burnt off.

With the change in climate on the earth, plants and animals were able to grow, so the giant bird no longer required human sacrifices. The boy and girl were able to be married happily. The boy grew into a powerful man, and practiced the many arts of hunting, to always bring fresh meat to his beautiful wife. He was so good at hunting that no animal stood a chance, and soon the area where they lived was over hunted. The man’s wife complained that there was no more meat to eat. To pacify her, he told her that he had gotten a magic potion from a wise man that would allow them to move on to heaven if he could not find a way to keep his wife in the manner she had grown accustomed. However, he was pretty sure he just needed to travel farther to find meat.

He went on a long hunting journey, finally coming back with a single chicken that he had found. When he returned to his home though, he discovered his wife missing. Neither she nor the potion were anywhere to be found. He looked up in the sky, she was in the moon.

He decided to shoot down the moon, since he felt so angry and betrayed by his wife. Unfortunately, at this point he was quite old, so he lacked the power to do more than shake the moon, and his wife has lived there ever since.

The story of Pan-ku (FA 01 63)
In the beginning there was only chaos. Out of the chaos came Pan-ku, a man. He is the only thing created, and the darkness and mists upset him, so he kicks and punches the chaos until it forms earth and sky. Earth is under his feet and sky is over his head, and he grows ten feet every day to separate the two. Once the earth is created, he realizes he is all alone, so he sacrifices his body to make the sun, moon, stars, mountains and rivers. After his death, men begin to inhabit the beautiful place he is looking for.

*Why Monkeys are Sacred (FA 01 63)*

When the earth was created, heaven was created also, and a book of heaven’s secret was made. To protect the humans from ever discovering the secrets of heaven, a group of white monkeys were enlisted to protect the book. One of the monkeys was very curious, so he looked in the book while no one was around and learned some of the secrets of heaven. As punishment, he was forced to guard the book for eternity, forever knowing the secrets of heaven and never able to tell anyone. The other white monkeys were relieved of the duty and let free to discover more knowledge from other sources.

*Story of the Egg Man (FA 01 63)*

One day there was a monk who found an egg in the river near the temple. He picked up the egg and held it to the light to find out if it was fertilized. He could see something growing in it, so he put it under a hen to hatch. After seven days, he went back to the hen and discovered that it and all its eggs were dead. In the corner of the nest was a little boy.

The boy could not speak, so he just smiled at the monk. Declaring this behavior unnatural, the monk decided to bury the boy alive and hope he would suffocate. More resilient than that, the egg boy dug his way out of that and two other shallow graves the monk dug for him. Frustrated, the monk took the egg boy far away, buried him, placed rocks on top of his burial place, and locked the gate to keep him out.

Though this did not prevent the egg boy from escaping, it did delay his emergence from the earth long enough for the monk to have peace of mind regarding his successful banishment of an unnatural being. Eventually the egg boy freed himself once again, and found himself alone. He was still very young, so a wild dog came along and helped raise him. As an adult, he was larger than most of the people in the village where he lived, and he could talk, despite being raised by a dog.

He decided to get the book of heaven after finding out that the white monkey who guarded it had a day off once a year. Not having a lot of friends or any kind of job, he had all year to discover the day
the book would lie unguarded. Unfortunately, despite his advance planning, he was unprepared for just how large the mountain he would have to climb was. Taking too long to ascend it, he ended up getting to the book just as the white monkey was returning from his day off. The egg man had to go back to his village to wait another year to see the book, but the second time he was prepared. He reached the mountain a few days early, and waited outside the book’s resting place for its guardian to leave. As he did, the egg man swiftly ran into the place of the book, and learned the secrets of heaven. He was so engrossed in reading, he read the whole day long and the monkey came back.

The white monkey knew that he could not allow a mortal to escape with the secrets of heaven, so he trapped him in the place with the book. The egg man was fine with this, because it gave him more time to read the book. However, after a year of reading the book he knew everything he needed to know about the secrets of heaven, so when the white monkey got his day off, the egg man left and returned to his village.

The secrets in the book included things like fire, cultivation, irrigation, music, and the arts. The villagers adopted these secrets to improve their lives, and the secrets spread, until all of China had the secrets of heaven.

*The Executioner’s Wish (FA 01 63)*

There was once a wealthy man in the North of China whose wife was very sick. He called for a famous doctor from the South of China. The doctor came as fast as he could, and did all he could for the wife, but one of the wealthy man’s servants hated the doctor and sabotaged the wife so that she died under the doctor’s care.

The wealthy man decided to execute the doctor for failing to save his wife. As the doctor is in jail, waiting to be executed, he tells the executioner he is sad to die, only because he was writing a book, and he is not done. The executioner decides to help the doctor out. He puts pig blood on the doctor’s chest and tells him that he must run south as fast as he can after he kills him. The doctor agrees, and dies, his spirit running home as fast as he can.

The doctor reached home, wearing a scarf to disguise his mortal wound, he immediately starts on his book. His wife is rather confused by his lack of need to sleep, or drink hot tea. Spirits cannot drink hot things, or sleep, so his wife begins to be suspicious after a few days of his lack of interest in anything beyond his book. After he finished, his spirit began to turn to blood, as all spirits must, and
he turned to tell his wife of his death, but someone came to the door, so she left the room and he disappeared before she returned.

Back in the north, the executioner had investigated the doctor’s death. He discovered the servant who had really killed the rich man’s wife, and brought him to trial. The servant was scared to die and asked the executioner for one last wish. The executioner told him he would grant it, put pigs’ blood on his chest and told him to run to the north as fast as he could after he was killed. The servant died, and the man’s spirit turned into a pig.

*The story of Woufong (FA 01 63)*

Woufong was a great leader who lived among the aboriginal people of Taiwan. There it was a custom to perform human sacrifices to guarantee the gods’ favor. Woufong thought this was wrong, so he attempted to convince the people that human sacrifice was not the way to go. This worked for a few years until the people’s crops started experiencing difficulty.

After a few years of difficulty, they wanted to appease the gods in the only way they knew how, and nothing Woufong said could convince them otherwise. Instead, the people got a letter from the gods, identifying the one to sacrifice as a person who would be waiting for them in the city square, covered in a red hood. On the day of the sacrifice, they found the sacrificial person waiting for them and cut his head off. With the removal of his head came the removal of his hood, and the horrified people discovered that their leader had sacrificed himself. After that, they never made another human sacrifice.

*The story of Yoo-Whoo-Loo (FA 01 63)*

Yoo-Whoo-Loo was a kind but foolish man who slaughtered pigs for a living. His love of wine prevented him from being successful in business, so one day after his wife had died, he reached a point where he just did not have the money to buy pigs to slaughter. He could not buy or sell and thus could not support himself or his daughter. To mitigate this problem, Yoo-Whoo-Loo went to his sister-in-law and told her of his problem. She, being generous, lent him five bundles of coins to revitalize his business.

When he got home, his daughter was shocked by his fortune. As a joke, he suggested that he had gained the money by selling his daughter to a local match maker. He was far too drunk to realize the distress this had on his daughter, so he went to sleep without revealing the joke. This proved his
downfall, because his daughter ran away in the night. She left the door ajar as she hurried to her aunt’s home to beg her help in escaping the fate that her father had chosen for her.

A gambler was passing by in the night after losing all his money. He had heard that Yoo-Whoo-Loo came home with an abundance of coin, so he was passing by his house, considering how he could get some of that coin for himself. Noticing the door was open, he allowed himself into the house of the pig butcher. The gambler found the coins and tried to take them, but Yoo-Whoo-Loo woke from his drunken slumber just long enough to discover the burglary. In a panic, the gambler-turned-burglar stabbed Yoo-Whoo-Loo with his own butcher knife.

The next morning, a friend who had been enlisted to wake Yoo-Whoo-Loo from his drunken stupor discovered instead the body of his friend. Dutifully, he called for the police to be informed of the murder. The police were suspicious to discover the dead body of a father with his daughter missing, and went out in search of her. Along her way to the next village, the daughter of Yoo-Whoo-Loo had met with a business man going the same way and agreed to walk with him. When the police discovered the two together, and observed the vast amount of coin that the business man carried on his person, the immediately assumed the business man must be the murderer.

With a case this serious, after the local court had proven the man’s guilt three times over, the case moved to a higher court to be investigated. The businessman was sentenced to death, but the higher judges thought there was something not quite right about the investigation. One of the major issues was the court’s lack of concern with the businessman’s story of being sent out by his employer. Not only had the employer not been given a chance to corroborate his story with his employee, he had not even been allowed to testify.

The execution date had already been set, but the high court judge was convinced that the young man was innocent and was willing to stake his profession for more time to investigate the matter. The prime minister allowed him a month, and with that month, he went back to look at the evidence, discovering loaded gambler’s dice left in the room where Yoo-Whoo-Loo was killed. Asking around, he discovered the gambler who had become suddenly rich after the death of the pig butcher.

The gambler had never set out to become a killer, so he was rather terrified of what his fate might be. He was seeking fortune tellers to tell him his future, and so ran into the judge in disguise. The pseudo-fortune teller warned that staying in town would cause misfortune to fall on him. He encouraged the gambler to flee, and then followed when he actually took his advice.
When the police searched the gambler as he was fleeing town, they discovered him with a bag filled with the missing coins. The daughter was able to prove that the bag belonged to her father because she knew it had a rip she had mended with embroidery in the shape of a flower. She and the young man were finally free, and the gambler confessed. He was executed for his crimes.

**Chinese Superstitions (FA 01 1656)**

*Numbers (FA 01 1656)*

The number four, when said in Chinese, is syllabically identical to the word death. Though it is spoken in a different tone, the words are similar enough that bad luck has been associated with the number four. It is considered extremely rude to give someone a gift that consists of four objects. For example, a floral arrangement with four flowers would be considered extremely improper. Likewise, serving a meal with four dishes is bad luck.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, ninety-nine is very lucky. The number ninety-nine is often used in association with romance. A gift of ninety-nine paper stars in a jar will serve someone well on their future romantic endeavors.

There are also bad luck superstitions that deal with unspecific numbers. For example, the number of grains of rice that a child leaves in his or her bowl after dinner will supposedly correspond with the number of pockmarks on the face of a future spouse. This encourages bowls to be scraped absolutely clean.

The number of raindrops people allow to fall on their heads is equal to the number of headaches they will have in their lives. Umbrellas are taken very seriously because of this superstition.

*Colors (FA 01 1656)*

Red is a lucky color. Used in association with weddings, births, and celebratory holidays, it is the color of decorations, costumes, clothes and gifts. Women wear red to their weddings, parents dye eggs red to announce the birth of a child, and Chinese New Year is absolutely encapsulated by all things red. Conversely, it is disrespectful to wear red to a funeral. Instead, people wear white, the color of death, or black, a neutral color.

*Pregnancy (FA 01 1656)*
Pregnant women are not to look in mirrors because doing so could endanger the life of their unborn baby. There is no reason given for this belief. Pregnant women are expected to stay in their homes for an entire month after they give birth, never leaving or washing their hair.

Good Luck Symbols (FA 01 1656)
Jade is a lucky rock. It is a precious green stone, crafted into jewelry, talismans, and small objects for home decoration. Dragons are also considered good luck and symbols of the power of the emperor. Dragons decorate doorways, clothing, art, architecture, and sons’ names.

During Chinese New Year, good luck foods are eaten. Half a fish is eaten, because the word for fish is very similar to the word for surplus. A vegetable called faat choi (hair vegetable) is eaten because its name sounds similar to a good luck greeting. Floors are not swept if possible, during Chinese New Year. Sweeping out the door is bad, because it symbolizes sweeping out future blessings.

Feng Shui is a practice of arranging furniture for good luck. Doors, windows and other fixtures need to be balanced so that energy can flow through the house without stopping. There are professionals who exist purely to help people put their houses together pleasingly.

Festivals

Legends, Folktales, and Customs of the Chinese People (FA 01 63)

Festival of Gwei Jye (FA 01 63)
Once a year, during the seventh lunar month, the ghosts of China emerge from the underworld to walk among the living. At the beginning of the seventh month, families start preparing their safety against spirits. Sometimes, garlic greens are placed in bundles above doors to prevent evil spirits from coming inside. Families prepare special food for the ghosts and leave it outside so the spirits will have no cause to come into their home and bring bad luck. The ghosts get distracted by the food, eating for the whole day, until they are drawn back to the underground. Special paper offerings and incense are burned, and after the ghosts have consumed the spiritual portion of the food, people are permitted to eat the feasts laid out for their ancestor spirits.

Ching Ming Jye Festival (FA 01 63)
The Cold Festival celebrates a man called Wen who, during the Cho dynasty, refused to go against his personal beliefs when there was a political uprising and he was called upon to fight. Because Wen
was a prominent man in the city, the revolt attempted to force him to join them. Instead of being coerced into service, Wen fled with his family to the hills surrounding the town. His enemies could not find him in the wilderness, so they burned the grasses and plants off all the hills. Eventually, when everything was gone, they found the burned bodies of Wen and his family lying on the hillside.

To celebrate Wen’s conviction and integrity, people still make pilgrimage up to the place where his body was found, and no one uses fire anywhere. Cook fires, bonfires, and all other methods of heat are forbidden in honor of Wen.

**Maiden’s Eve (FA 01 63)**

On a certain night in the summer, an unmarried girl can go to a Buddhist temple and pray before an altar. She brings oracle bones with her, and throws them to the floor in front of the altar, and then follows the direction they point until she finds a door with people talking behind it. She should eavesdrop on the house to discern her future. If there is an unmarried man within the house, she should marry him.

**Japanese Customs and Beliefs (FA 01 1099)**

**New Year Celebrations (FA 01 1099)**

New Year’s is the biggest holiday of the year, celebrated for several days. The night before the celebration starts, the entire house is cleaned to welcome the gods for the New Year. On the first day, people dress in nice clothes, eat special meals and watch television with the family. No work is done the entire day. The second day, visiting relatives, friends and coworkers is common. Children and students are given lucky money from friends and relatives. The post office holds all New Year’s cards until the holiday, so that they get them all at the same time.

**Children’s Day (FA 01 1099)**

Though named for all children, this holiday is mostly for boys. All children get the day off from school, but the activities are for boys. Boys hang koinobori (carp streamers) and decorate their homes with dolls dressed in traditional military attire. The dolls symbolize the boys’ desire to grow up strong as a samurai warrior. The koinobori represents the number of people in the household. There will be quite a few koinobori hanging above a household with many sons.

**Girl’s Day (FA 01 1099)**

In the spirit of fairness, there is also a girls’ festival, or peach tree festival, to celebrate and pray for the happiness of girl children. Girls wear kimono, drink rice wine, and have female friends over.
Special doll sets are sold for the occasion, and arranged in boats in a very special order. The Emperor doll and his empress are on a top tier with members of court on lesser tiers. The boats are then launched in a river, and with them they take hardship and misery away.

*All Soul’s Day (FA 01 1099)*

August 15th, the spirits of dead ancestors return to their family shrine. Food and flowers are brought, and incense is burned. The family prays together and, in certain regions, performs ceremonial dances. Many help the spirits return by lighting candles and floating them in small straw boats down a river.

*A Collection of Customs and Traditions Her Family Brought From Japan to America (FA 01 1535)*

*Flower Festival (FA 01 1535)*

April 8 is the Buddhist flower festival, celebrating the birth of Gautama, the founder of Buddhism. The festival includes dancing, skits, and flowers for everyone in the community.

*Japanese New Year (FA 01 1535)*

Japanese New Year was once celebrated by the men in charge of household. The father of a family would go from house to house, eating delicacies prepared by the lady of the house in exchange for wishing them a prosperous year.

**Folklore of Taiwan, Hong Kong, India, and Korea**

*Closer Than Brothers: Oriental Friendship Folklore (FA 01 246)*

In Taiwan, it is common practice for people of all ages to hold their friend’s hands to show affection. Many will walk along the streets in same gendered pairs. In America, such a thing could never be accepted, because of the possibility that someone assume the pair were in a romantic relationship.

Taiwan also has the practice of making friends into ‘dry relatives,’ who are as close as family, including familial obligations, but are not related by blood. China has a similar tradition of referring to friends as though they were family. Young boys even like to assign birth order to their friends. It is a tradition in Chinese culture to refer to sibling by birth order, so by assigning a hierarchy among friends, they are claiming each other as brothers.
Legend of Friendship (FA 01 246)

There was once a man called Chung Tse-Ching. He was a very skillful music master. One day, while he was playing his chen (a type of stringed instrument) a peasant heard and knocked on his door. The peasant exclaimed that his music sounded like water humming, so Tse-Ching played him another song. This time, the peasant said, the music is a great mountain. Chung Tse-Ching was surprised and excited to find that the peasant understood his music as no one else had. They became friends, because only friends have the same thoughts.

Tse-Ching promised to visit the peasant when he came back to the river in a year. After a year away, he returned to find that his friend was dying. He broke his chen and refused to play ever again, because there was no point in playing when no one could understand the thoughts of his heart as he created music.

The story is told with different names and different instruments depending on the teller, but the accompanying proverb is always the same, “It is terribly hard to find a person who knows your mind.”

Duty of Friendship (FA 01 246)

True friends share everything in common. For instance, if a man is buying a house and is two thousand dollars short, he may ask his friend to lend it to him, and his friend will instantly send him the money. Two friends must be willing to give freely of what they have, even if it would bring poverty upon themselves. “The duty of friends is to have common fortunes.” Money is not the only obligation that friends have to each other. Any kind of trouble that the friend gets into is important for the friend to assist in. “When friends invite you to dinner go slow; when friends in trouble go in a hurry”

The behavior of a man towards his friends reveals what kind of man he is. “The friendship of the gentleman is constant like water; the friendship of the inferior man is full-flavored like wine.” This is taken to mean that a gentleman is constant in his friendship, and will always be available to help and support his friend. An inferior friendship depends on things like drinking wine together, and is not the constant support of a true friend.

Friends of the Heart (FA 01 246)
In Indian culture, friendship is likewise set as very important. One may have many associates, but a true friend would share similar aspirations, beliefs, and thoughts. “A true friend is a friend of the heart.” That means that roommates don’t count as friends.

People of India do not have the same ‘dry relative’ system as the Chinese and Taiwanese. They acknowledge that jealousies and the mundane problems that crop up when living together mean that friends are closer than brothers. With a friend, it is always a choice to be with them, whereas family is duty. However, because it is difficult to find a true friend, it is even harder to find a second friend. Two people understanding each other completely is miracle enough without attempting to find another who gets along with both. One friend is considered more than sufficient.

Folklore as A Determinant for Right or Left Brain Dominancy in Hong Kong and Taiwan (FA 01 597)

The Meeting of the Stars (FA 01 597)

There was once a young boy who was very poor. His mother was dead, and his father was very sick. When his father died, he had no money to pay for a funeral, so he bonded himself to a wicked lord in exchange for the money to bury his father.

The wicked lord would set impossible tasks before the boy and punish him when he was unable to finish. Without ever finishing a task, the boy could never repay his debt and free himself from bondage. The seven daughters of the Divine Emperor looked down from the heavens and pitied the boy and so came down to help him. They spend an entire night helping him grinding rice into flour, and when the morning comes, six of the sisters return to their place in the sky.

One sister, despite desperate begging from her sisters, refused to leave the young man. Her father took away her powers and made her mortal so long as she chose to stay with the young man, but she never minded because she was so in love. She married the young man, and when the lord gave her husband yet another impossible task, she begged her sisters to come help weave raw silk into beautiful cloth. The Lord finally had to release the young man from bondage because he had returned his debt multiple times over.

The happy couple went to start a family together in freedom, but after the birth of their first son, the Divine Emperor sent one of his warriors to bring the girl home to heaven. She was unsuccessful in her attempt to escape the warrior, so she was taken home to her father and sisters, separated from her son and husband.
The husband’s sorrow was so great that the birds took pity on him and created a heavenly bridge for him to meet his wife on. The Emperor was impressed by the bird’s compassion, so he agreed to allow his daughter to meet her husband once each year. On the seventh day of the seventh month on the lunar calendar, two stars meet. The stars, called “herder” and “spinner,” represent the lovers as they spend their one night a year together.

*Lyang and Shamboban (FA 01 597)*

Another story tells of a couple who only had one daughter. The loved her very much, so though it was not customary for women to study, they allowed her to dress as a boy and study under a master for three years. During that time, she fell in love with her study partner. Near the end of their training, she tried to subtly signal to her love that she was, in fact, a girl. He was unsuccessful at picking up her hints, so when she received a letter from her family telling her that her to come home because of her mother’s severe illness, she told her study partner that she had a sister just like her, and she wanted him to find her and marry her.

In actuality, her mother was not sick at all. Her parents had just decided that three years was long enough without their daughter and they were ready for her to come home and get married. Her parents had arranged a marriage to a wealthy man. Desperate for a chance with her sweet heart, the girl was able to postpone the wedding for two months. After that time was up, and her love had not come, the girl accepted the gift of jewelry and became officially betrothed to the wealthy man.

Three days too late, her study partner showed up. Not only did she have to reveal herself as his friend, but she also had to tell him he was too late. He left her then, and a few days later, died of a broken heart. When she received word of this on the morning of her wedding, she told the servant to take her to the grave rather than the wedding ceremony. She threw herself into the open grave and died. Two butterflies rose out of the grave, as the souls of the two lovers were finally united in love.

*The Lunar New Year (FA 01 597)*

A very long time ago, there was a wicked dragon that came to terrorize a village every year at harvest time. It was big and strong, and many had failed to kill it. It killed people, kidnapped children, and destroyed crops, and there was nothing the villagers could do to stop it. Until one year, one brave man threw a fire cracker at the dragon. The bang was so loud, the fire so red, that the dragon was scared away. Every year the villagers place long red strips of paper over their doors to keep the dragon away and shoot off fireworks to ensure a safe harvest.
Myth of the Moon Cake (FA 01 597)

There was once a very brave and noble lord. He wished to live forever so that he could protect his people from war, hunger, and pain. He went on a journey to find a fountain of youth, and eventually found a wise man who offered to make him a potion that would make him live forever. He chose to hide the potion from his wife, though she knew of its existence. The lord was surrounded by wicked advisors, so he started to fall prey to their influence. His wife worried about what he would do with immortality, so she searched relentlessly for his secret potion. She found the potion and drank it herself to prevent him from living forever and becoming an evil ruler. The potion made her very light, so she could not touch the ground. She flew up in the sky and became the moon. People eat moon cakes every autumn to celebrate her as the moon goddess.

Legend of the Moon Cake (FA 01 597)

Long ago the people of China were controlled by Mongolia. They were oppressed and treated poorly, and were not allowed anything that could be used as a weapon. They were not even permitted a small knife to cut food with. A group of rebels knew that they would have to be united to throw off the tyranny of the Mongols, but they had to be very careful for they were being closely watched. They wrote the date of the rebellion on small pieces of paper and inserted them into small, round shaped cakes. They gave the cakes an enormous number of people, and all were able to coordinate into a rebellion. Now they eat moon cakes every year in celebration of their freedom.

Dragon Boat Festival (FA 01 597)

There was once a wise poet who was advisor to the emperor. After many years of service, the emperor decided to go against the poet’s advice to avoid war and attack a neighboring country. The poet, saddened by the emperor’s lack of respect for his people’s lives, left the court to become a hermit. Many died in the ensuing war, and the poet became sadder and sadder as time went by without peace. Eventually, he threw himself into a river and drowned. The people were worried about fish eating his body, so the decorated their boats like dragons and sailed up and down the river searching for his body. It was never found, but they still decorate their boats like dragons every year on the anniversary of his death.

Folktale Concerning Thriftiness (FA 01 597)

There was once a very poor man who worked for a rich and extravagant lord. The lord and his family were so rich that they would waste much food at their daily feasts. The poor man took much of the rice they threw out and dried it. After many years of this practice, there came a great famine, and the
rich family, despite their abundant wealth, could not buy any food. They were terrified that they would starve to death, but the servant brought out bags of dried rice for them and they were saved through his thriftiness.

**Korean Folklore Told By Return Missionaries (FA 01 908)**

*Origin of the Korean people (FA 01 908)*

A god sent his son down to earth to build an altar and pray. When he got to earth, he met a tiger and a bear who desired to be turned into mortal humans. The son told them that if they would go into a cave and eat nothing but garlic for a hundred days, they would turn into humans. They agreed to do this, and went into the cave together. After a long while of nothing but garlic, the tiger had enough and left the cave, staying as a tiger for the rest of its days. The bear, however, stuck it out and was rewarded by being transformed into a beautiful mortal woman. She married the god’s son, and their offspring are the people of Korea.

*Foodways (FA 01 908)*

At least twice a year, families spend a couple days making Kimchi. Kimchi is a fermented, spicy cabbage dish that is eaten with every meal in Korea. In October or November, winter Kimchi is made and buried in pottery jars to ferment. In the spring and summer, fresh kimchi, or more fermented kimchi can be made.

Dog soup, fried silk worm cocoons, and hot pepper soup are also popular dishes that missionaries and other foreigners have difficulty with. Dog soup is apparently really good, but westerners have difficulty reconciling pets with food.

**Funerals**

*Kan-Shih Stories: Chinese Funeral Customs and Ancestor Worship (FA 01 153)*

*Kan-shih (FA 01 153)*

A Chinese proverb states “Falling leaves will return to the root.” This describes the importance that most feel that a person be buried in the place where they were born. There is a tradition, that if a person dies away from home, a sorcerer be enlisted to walk the body home. Because transportation was so poor for so long, it became necessary for a practiced magician to animate the corpses and walk them home along quiet abandoned roads. No one would mistake the bodies for living, because
they were still very stiff, and walked with their arms straight out. The family of the dead is not allowed to cry until the coffin is closed, because if any water gets near them, the spell is broken and the corpse collapses.

To transport the bodies, the sorcerer or priest will bang a gong, calling “dead bodies, living move aside” as they travel through the night. There are special hotels where the sorcerer can sleep during the day, because the bodies can only travel at night. There are a few stories of living people pretending to be dead to travel to somewhere new, because they thought it would be the simplest way to go somewhere.

Funeral Procession (FA 01 153)
Unlike the somber procession of cars that characterizes the funeral rites in Middle America, Chinese funeral procession take place largely on foot, accompanied by bright flowers, music, and family members in white sackcloth. Occasionally, there would be a bus among the procession to go pick up people who straggled behind the rest. The coffin itself would be carried on bamboo poles, hidden in the midst of the noise and jumbled colors of the parade.

Occasionally, the whole procession will stop on the side of the road to offer food sacrifices. These are accompanied by priests chanting and burning incense, and musicians making lots of noise.

Burial Preparations (FA 01 153)
The first step in preparing a dead person for burial is washing the body. After this is performed, the person may be dressed and arranged in their coffin. To properly dress a body, clothes must be three layers thick and brand new. People do not wear the same clothes in the spirit world that they did in life, and must be dressed accordingly. Special money to be used in the spirit world is lain beneath their head. The coffin itself must be three inches thick, and the body is left for three days before the lid is closed on it. Once the lid is closed, the coffin can be taken to the place of burial in a funeral procession.

It is important that the body be laid level in the coffin, and the coffin be laid level in the ground. If the body is tilted, the blessings to posterity will be unequal. If the head is above the feet, the first generation will prosper, while the subsequent generations will have much hardship and poverty. Level burial means that every generation will have the same luck.
The direction and placement of the coffin in the ground is something that the family must consult a geomancer about. There is not a standard placement, but each body must be buried in the position that will please the spirit the most.

There are two rites performed for the dead, one relating to dead’s former position in society, and the other relating to the position held by the person’s son. They are complex, and not always performed by modern society.

Children and pregnant women are never supposed to attend funerals. It is bad luck for them to see the body being put to the ground, and they may get sick.

The family of the deceased is supposed to mourn for seven years. The daughters or granddaughters are to wear white ribbons or flowers in their hair for three years, or three months. The son or grandson is to wear a white arm band for three years or three months.

*Ancestor Worship (FA 01 153)*

During the Chinese New Year, it is traditional for the family to prepare a feast for the ancestors. The food will all be set out, and the ancestors will be left to eat alone. After a period of time, the matriarch of the home can go and use fortune telling devices to know if the ancestors are finished with their meal or if they would like more. Once the ancestors are done, the food is reheated for the family.

Many holidays have similar traditions of feasts for the ancestors, as well as a few festivals where paper objects are burned for the ancestors to use in the spirit world.

*Traditional Chinese Funeral Folklore (FA 01 1513)*

After a funeral, the living will jump over a fire where paper money was burned for the spirits. Doing this prevents the spirits from following the living home, which is a thing that people really do not want. While spirits are respected, they are also expected to stay in their own sphere.

A body cannot be moved until the head is cold. Many believe that the spirit comes out of the head, so a body cannot be considered dead until the spirit has completely left.

An important aspect of funeral culture is people crying. It shows great respect for the dead to cry for them, but for some people, their own family is not enough of a spectacle. Occasionally rich people with very big funeral processions will hire people to cry loudly at their funeral. This is considered a
legitimate method to let the gods know that the person who died is a good person, even if the family is too busy to waste time on things like mourning.

In some places, instead of traditional burial, there is traditional cremation. Along with the body, the possessions and paper houses and vehicles are burned so that the spirit can be comfortable in the afterlife.

When someone dies in the hospital, the hospital provides white clothing for them right away. White is the color that represents death, so it is important for the dead to wear white. The family of the dead wears rough, undyed cloth to the funeral. For the very old, occasionally, they will dress them in red. However, they will not dress a dead person in wool or silk because if there is a tradition that if a person is buried with wool or silk in their coffin, they'll be reincarnated as an animal.

The spouse and children of the person who died are not supposed to wear bright colors for three years after the funeral. They may also pin mourning cloth to their sleeves so people will know not to invite them to happy events like weddings or the birth of new children. People in mourning bring bad luck to happy celebrations.

Chrysanthemums are traditionally used in funerals, and no other occasions. It would be very rude to give someone flowers that represent death.

Friends attending a funeral will give money to the family in white envelopes, always in odd numbers. After the funeral, the family invites the friends back to their home for a feast.

In Taiwan, the body is put in a tent set up in the road. The coffin lies on ice with incense burning, and a huge picture is put up so that people who wander by know who died.

**A Collection of Customs and Traditions Her Family Brought From Japan to America (FA 01 1535)**

To respect ancestors, traditional Japanese homes have Butsudan, a household altar with names inscribed upon it. The names are given to the family by a priest to represent their loved ones after they die. The family keeps incense and plates with sweets next to the altar to respect their ancestors.
Japanese Folklore

Japanese Ghost Stories (FA 01 46)

Limbo (FA 01 46)
After a person dies, Buddhist tradition states that they do not immediately go to the afterlife. First, there is a period of limbo, where the spirit comes back to life and dies again seven times. The deaths take place at intervals of seven days, so the last death would come forty-nine days after the body has died. On each day of death, prayers are said and offerings are left for the spirit.

Each day that the spirit is in limbo, food is left on the family altar because the spirit is still considered alive, and needs food for nourishment. The Great Judge makes his verdict during this period, so the family prays fervently for a favorable verdict. After the forty-ninth day, the dead’s personal effects are distributed among family, friends, and servants. After that, the dead are celebrated on the third, fifth, and thirteenth anniversary of their death.

Tatari (FA 01 46)
A tatari is a visitation from a divine spirit, or, more recently, a curse visited upon a person for disobeying or slighting divine wish. A person may be cursed because they disrespected a shrine, a sacred tree, or killed an animal. Someone may purposely invoke a tatari on their enemy by taking their weapons of war and burying them.

A tatari manifests in illness, injuries, disabilities, or death. It can last several generations, or even several lifetimes. If a person had a tatari in a former life, it may affect them after reincarnation, though it is more likely that after death a tatari will affect their progeny. Unexpected deaths or sickness are often blamed on the evil conduct of ancestors.

Hitodama (FA 01 46)
A hitodama or human soul ball is a glistening blue-white ball of light that appears after certain people die. Under circumstances where a person dies with a grudge, or with strong attachment to material possessions, the hitodama will appear and float around the object of the person’s obsessive focus. Occasionally, a hitodama will be created when a person dies in unrequited love.

Shinigami (FA 01 46)
Each person’s life is said to be measured, and their time of death is predetermined, and written down in a Shinigami’s book. At a man’s time of death, the Shinigami beckons him to come, he obeys and dies. Right before he is to die, a man’s shadow fades, and people will comment that they knew his end was coming by the faintness of his shadow. A man’s manner also changes, for in his last days or hours, every man returns to the goodness and nobleness he is born with.

_Migawari (FA 01 46)_

There is a belief that someone can perform migawari or acting as substitute with one’s life. That is, if one chooses to die before their years have run out, they can gift those extra years to someone else. This is most often used to explain why a loyal pet dies. A faithful dog might choose to die so that his sick master will not die instead. This supreme act of love and loyalty helps assuage the grief a family may feel at their pet’s death. Occasionally, stories tell of human friends choosing to die to prolong their friend’s life. These are not common, but do exist.

_Kami-Kakushi (FA 01 46)_

Kami-kakushi refers to tales of people mysteriously disappearing from their homes and never being found again. Children are most often spirited away, but adult men and women also occasionally disappear without a trace.

Parents, neighbors, and friends will search the neighborhood, beating drums and ringing bells while calling the name of the lost one. Those who have been hidden by a kami are never found again, though sometimes the family is granted last glimpse of their missing child at a festival or in a crowded street before they are completely lost.

_Kitsune (FA 01 46)_

The kitsune is a tricky fox with a power for shape shifting. It can transform itself into the form of human or surrounding debris of nature into food or shelter. Many who have walked alone at night have found themselves tricked when they thought they were stopping by a warm home for a good meal and wake up in the morning in a muddy pool, belly full of rotten leaves. Others have brought home baskets of fish, only to discover when they reach home that they have only a pile of stones. Many men have also been led on strange adventures by foxes disguised as beautiful women.
Foxes are also said to be able to possess a person. Somewhat different than their shape shifting, a fox-possessed person suddenly acts strangely or violently. Often the one possessed will have a high fever and talk deliriously, eat strange foods, throw things around and jump into rivers or climb a steep mountain. These are usually women, and their families call in priests or witches to pray for them. After a few days, they return to normal.

The phosphorous lights often seen in forests or over fields during the night are also blamed on foxes. Stories say they use lanterns to guide wedding processions during the night or in inclement weather.

*Neko (FA 01 46)*

Besides foxes, cats are also the subject to much superstition. A Japanese proverb states “a cat is a witch.” Though kittens are much loved and considered innocent, older cats are thought to become possessed of an evil spirit.

After the evil spirit is within them, they cause all sorts of mischief for unsuspecting people. Sometimes they take the form of older women by killing and eating her. They use that form to get close to people and harm them, then they disappear again as a cat.

Occasionally, they also eat babies or small children, though they don’t generally take their shapes afterward. Because cats are such bad luck, if someone actually manages to kill a cat, they will be cursed through their next seven lives.

*O-iwa (FA 01 46)*

Another curse is that of O-iwa, wife of a samurai. Her husband poisoned her while he was having an affair with another woman, permanently disfiguring her. She killed herself then, haunting the household of her husband and his mistress, causing many other deaths and much misfortune.

A play was written about this experience, but the ghost of O-iwa is not a very happy spirit. Without prayers offered at her shrine any formal mention of her will result in badness. To this day, artists, theatrical people, and writers are constantly visiting her shrine to appease her.

One man went to the shrine to photograph it, without leaving any offering, and all of his film came out blurry. He went a second time, prayed first, and took his photographs. Every shot came out clear.

*The Slope of the Province of Ki (FA 01 46)*
There is an old hill in Tokyo called Kinokunizaka, or “the Slope of the Province of Ki.” Before the
time of streetlights, the hill was very lonely and dark at night.

One night, a man was hurrying up the hill very late in the evening when he saw a young woman
weeping by a moat. Fearing she meant to drown herself, the man ran to her and offered his
assistance in any capacity she could need. She was a beautiful woman, dressed as the daughter of a
good family, and he was concerned that she should not be alone at night.

She stood as he implored her to allow his help in whatever matter was ailing her. He reached for her
shoulder to really get her attention because she had not stopped crying, the whole time he had been
talking to her. She finally turned to him, faceless.

The man screamed and ran away from the place, and didn’t stop running until he found a light. The
light belonged to a soba-seller who wondered what all the noise was about. The man was nearly
incoherent, but managed to convey that he had seen some horror. He was unable to articulate exactly
what he had seen, but the soba-seller knew of what he spoke. He was even able to demonstrate.

*Mujina (FA 01 46)*

A mujina is a badger shape shifter, much like a fox spirit in that it likes to create mischief. Unlike a
fox spirit, it mostly turns into the same thing, a faceless ghost. There is no apparent malice intended
beyond a simple scare, but even thirty years after the last sighting, people still avoid walking
Kinokunizaka at night.

**American Japanese (FA 01 1021)**

*Ikebana (FA 01 1021)*

Flower arranging is an important art in Japan. Women are trained in ikebana or living flower
arrangement. Each arrangement is meant to have three elements, heaven, earth, and people. Rather
than including a large variety of flowers, ikebana is minimalistic, and contains leaves and stems with
few flowers. Various forms of flora are arranged sparsely across a shallow dish, held in place by
needlepoint. With the three elements, the arrangement often takes on the shape of a scalene triangle.

*Gods of Good Luck (FA 01 1021)*
It is customary for a proper Japanese home to house effigies of the seven gods of good luck. Certain gods should always be paired together, but the fat, happy god of health and abundance should stand alone.

_Shashiko (FA 01 1021)_

Traditional Japanese needlework depicts images from nature, especially animals. Tiny, precise stitching is used to imitate the style of painting. Often, a painting is used to inspire an embroidery pattern.

_The Villainous Philanthrope: A Survey of Kappa Lore in Ancient Japan (FA 01 1388)_

The kappa is a small monster, approximately four feet tall. It has wiry, clawed arms and legs, covered alternately in scales or hair, depending on the teller of the legends. The back of the kappa is like a snapping turtle, while its face has a more simian appearance. The most distinctive portion of the kappa is its head depression, which is filled with a liquid that gives it a supernatural strength. The depression is circled about by straight black hair.

Legend puts the origin of the kappas at the blame of many different historical figures. One story tells of a master carpenter who built puppets to help him finish his project in time. After he finished, he sent the puppets away, but they wanted him to find them new work, food, clothing, and wives. He took offense to their demands and smashed their heads in with an iron hammer, sending them to live in the river and feed off people.

Other stories blame the Chinese or the Russians for kappa, or even Shinto water goddesses. Wherever they come from though, the stories of kappa are always malevolent. Because of their awesome strength, kappas are meant to be excellent wrestlers. Though there are still stories of people being challenged to wrestling matches as they pass kappa infested rivers, most are unsubstantiated. Something like a match must have happened though, because there are books with herbal remedies for kappa-madness as late as the nineteenth century. They say that those who win a fight against a kappa can go crazy, while those who lose may lose their lives. The best result against a kappa is a tie.

Most kappa stories are not about wrestling or testing strength. Kappas live in the water, so most deaths attributed to them are drownings. One such story regards Lord Kato Kiyomasa, whose horses and servants were continually being drowned by kappa. He made a vow to annihilate all kappas. He
enlisted monkeys to help him and he dammed the rivers, cutting off escape routes. His servants made huge bonfires and used them to heat rocks. Throwing the red-hot rocks into the dammed up rivers, they created an unbearable heat that weakened and forced the kappa from their homes. As the kappas left the water, the monkey army lied in wait to slaughter them. The leader of the kappa begged a priest to allow them another chance, and promised they’d never hurt another person if he would allow them to live. An agreement was reached, and the kappas were allowed to return to the river. To this day, monkeys watch over the rivers to make sure the kappas keep their end of the bargain.

It seems a bit silly that anyone would come close enough to a kappa to be drowned, considering that they are so distinctive looking. Some kappas drown by trickery. They can shape shift into human forms, though they are distinguishable by their vertical striped kimonos and, like all monsters, kappas do not have shadows. They stand on bridges, calling to people passing by. When someone gets close to them, they grab them and dive into the river.

The secret to defeating kappas lies in their excessive politeness. A kappa will always keep its word, so forcing it to sign a contract will prohibit it from ever harming anyone again. If there is no way to defeat the kappa and force it to sign a contract, it can be weakened by spilling the magical liquid in its head depression. A person who happens upon a kappa may treat it as an old friend, bowing and nodding frequently while discussing polite things like the weather. The kappa is competitively polite and will match each bow and nod with one of its own, spilling a little bit of the magic liquid each time, until it has too little to be a threat, and the person may run away.

Sometimes, through its own stupidity, a kappa might even be kind. After cutting off the arm of a kappa that was living in his outhouse, one man was able to make a contract with the kappa in exchange for his arm back. The kappa offered to make the man an unguent which could heal any wound without a scar.

Occasionally, instead of eating prey itself, some kappa will attempt to send their prey to a friend. To do this, a few have written a letter to another kappa in a nearby pond, and asked the unwitting prey to deliver it. This has been largely unsuccessful, because some prey are smarter than they appear. One such man added to the letter he was to deliver to the kappa’s friend. His addition instructed the kappa to give him a gift before eating him, and after receiving his gift, he left.
Some towns have kappa festivals, where they shoot off fireworks and leave fish and vegetables in the river to appease the homicidal residents. Other towns have little boys dressed in green with kappa masks, running around with small, shoulder-mounted shrines, allowing the people of the towns to offer up pictures, ornamental paper, and vegetables.

A Collection of Customs and Traditions Her Family Brought From Japan to America (FA 01 1535)

In the early twentieth century, it was a custom for poor young men to come to America alone to make their fortune. When a young man had enough money saved for a wife, his parents and relatives in Japan would seek an appropriate bride for him. Pictures of the young man and the young woman would be sent to each other. If both found each other agreeable, the young lady would cross the ocean to become a ‘picture bride’ to a young man she had never met.