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**The Epidemiology of *Amabie*: Prophetic Creatures in Japanese Folklore
and Popular Culture Yuriko Yamanaka
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The word “monster” comes from the Latin word “*monstrum*” which is derived from the verb “*monere*”, meaning “to warn”, and had originally referred to bizarre events and creatures that were considered precursors or portents to natural disasters and other calamities. Pandemic imaginary has caused the proliferation of discourses and images of monstrous beings in many cultures over the ages. Monster representations may be a kind of “antibody” which resurfaces from the substratum of a culture in times of crisis, to neutralize and tame the fear of the uncertain.

In Japan, various monsters have historically emerged from the anxiety and fear associated with epidemics and social unrest, such as the *kudan* (human faced cow), or *amabiko* (three – legged monkey – like beast). They are called *yogenjū*, or “prophetic creatures”, by Japanese historians and folklorists who specialize in the study of *yokai* (uncanny, fantastic creatures in Japanese lore).

The *amabie*, an aquatic creature with long hair, a beak, scales, and three fishtails, is such a *yogenjū* which survives in a single handbill from the late Edo period (mid – 19th century). The revival and rapid spread of the *amabie* image during the initial Covid – 19 lockdown period and consequent months, was a unique opportunity to observe the process of transmission and transmutation of this image, thus to study the epidemiology of monster representation as an ongoing, real – time phenomenon. In this presentation, we will apply the “epidemiology of representation” approach by anthropologist Dan Sperber, to analyse how the *amabie* was revitalized in the creative outburst on social media by professional and amateur artists, emblemized in the governmental infection prevention campaign, sanctified as pseudo – talismans by shrines and temples, and then commodified. What made this particular “pathogen” (i.e. image) so virulent? What was the “conducive environment”? Who were the “susceptible hosts”? And how did it “mutate” over time?