

**“Oni’ with ‘ryu,’ as in ‘ryu-gu-jo’; ‘in’ is the ‘in’ that is used in monastic names. And, as for ‘hana’... as for ‘hana’... it’s the ‘hana’ that means flowers.”**

There is no real English counterpart here per se, as the name of the main character is being “spelled out” in Chinese logograms. Each logogram corresponds to each phoneme of her name.

The word “oni” refers to supernatural creatures from Japanese folklore, similar to demons or ogres. In Japanese mythology, the oni were fierce, human-like demons that lived in desolate mountain regions and preyed upon the souls of evil-doers. Although their image has changed over the years, they are most often perceived as horned monsters with blue or red skin and tiger striped clothing.

“Ryu” means “dragon”, and “ryu-gu-jo” means “dragon palace-castle”, another symbol of Japanese mythology. “-in” is used at the end of monastic names, and denotes belonging to a temple, such as a priest or nun. The words for “flower” and “nose” are pronounced the same in Japanese: “hana.”

### **1918, Tosa, Kochi**

Tosa is the name of a district, town, and city found in the present-day Kochi Prefecture of Japan. Kochi Prefecture was formerly called Tosa no kuni (Tosa Province). However, the “Tosa” name is still widely used to describe the region and culture. During the Edo period, the feudal Tosa Domain played an important role in events of the late Tokugawa era, involving a political movement called Sonno joi, the purpose of which was to overthrow the shogunate.

**“But... the Boss is just a yakuza, after all.”**

Yakuza are members of traditional organized crime groups in Japan, a.k.a “The Japanese Mafia.” Outside of Japan, the term also refers to traditional Japanese organized crime in general. Today, the yakuza are one of the largest organized crime cultures in the world.

The term “yakuza” comes from a Japanese card game, Oicho-Kabu (similar to baccarat), and means “good for nothing” -- it comes from the worst hand in the game, a set of eight (or “Ya” in the traditional Japanese form of counting), nine (“Ku”), and three (“Sa”). The Ya-Ku-Sa hand requires the most skill at judging opponents and the least luck to win. The name was also used because it signified bad fortune, presumably for anyone who went up against the group.

There is no single origin for all Japanese yakuza organizations; rather, they evolved from different elements of traditional Japanese society. Most modern yakuza organizations trace their origin to two groups which emerged in 18th century Japan: “tekiya” (peddlers) and “bakuto” (gamblers). As Japan began to industrialize and urbanization became more prevalent, a third group, called “gurentai,” began to form. Their status as a traditional yakuza group has been debated, but they were the origin of the violent gangs that peddle their brutality for profit.

The yakuza follow the traditional Japanese hierarchial structure of “oyabun-kobun,” where the “kobun” (foster child) owes their allegiance to the “oyabun” (foster parent; the boss, or “Godfather”). The oyabun-kobun relationship is formalized by the ceremonial sharing of sake from a single cup. Members of yakuza gangs cut their family ties and transfer their loyalty to the gang boss. They refer to each other as family members - fathers and elder and younger brothers. The yakuza is populated entirely by men, and there are usually no women involved except for the Oyabun’s wife (called “o-neh-san” or “ane-san,” older sister).

Until recently, the majority of yakuza income came from protection rackets in shopping, entertainment and red-light districts within their territory. However, they have expanded to various other criminal activities, including blackmail, money laundering, drug trafficking, arms smuggling, Internet SNS fraud, and international crime.

**“The first dog to enter is Boss Suenaga’s national Yokozuna grand-champion, ‘Tosa Storm.’”**

Besides being a geographical locale, the “Tosa” (a.k.a. “Tosa Ken”) is also a rare Japanese breed of dog which is still bred in Tosa as a fighting dog. Also known as the Japanese Mastiff throughout the world, the Tosa is generally a large dog, but the Japanese-bred Tosa are generally half the size of those bred outside Japan (80-120 lbs, or 130-200 lbs, respectively). The breed originated in the late nineteenth century from the Shikoku-Inu

dog, and was crossed with European breeds such as the Bulldog, Mastiff, St. Bernard, German Pointer, Great Dane, and Bull Terrier over the next half-century to breed a larger, more powerful dog. The heyday of Tosa breeding was from 1924-1933, right around the time of this scene. At this time, there were reportedly more than 5,000 Tosa breeders in Japan. The Tosa itself is a very loyal and intelligent breed, but also can be very protective, and generally can't live with another dog unless they've grown up together or are related.

The Tosa is also known as the "Sumo Dog" inside of Japan, and dog fighting is carried out according to sumo rules. Sumo is a 1500-year-old competition contact sport where two wrestlers (called "rikishi") face off in a circular area (called a "dohyo"). The winner is mainly determined by two rules: 1) the first person to touch the ground with any part other than the soles of his feet loses, and 2) the first person to touch the ground outside the ring loses.

In dogfighting, however, the winner is the dog which can knock its opponent off its feet and hold it to the ground. Also, Japanese rules require the fights to be silent (growling dogs are disqualified), and dogs which turn their backs on their opponent will also receive a loss. Though Tosa fights more often feature wrestling-style moves, as opposed to the thrashing and repeated biting seen in Cajun-style dogfighting, the fight is still brutal, and Tosas do bite. The difference is that the Tosa uses its grip on an opponent to control and dominate until they cower and refuse to fight, from exhaustion or otherwise. Generally, the best fighting dogs are those who are physically strong, courageous, and possess skill, patience, and stamina. Yokozuna (a.k.a. Grand Champion) is the highest of the five ranks in professional sumo wrestling, and literally means "horizontal rope," due to the rope ("tsuna") worn around the waist that indicates rank. The rope serves to purify and mark off its content, and is only worn during the "dohyo-iri" entrance ceremony. There are currently only two active yokozuna, and there have been only 69 since formal record-keeping began in 1789.

**"The next dog to enter is a high-ranking Maegashira, 'Sea God.'"  
"I can tell by the glint in his eyes. Sea God's going to get a Kinboshi."**

The "maegashira" are the lowest of the five ranks in professional sumo wrestling, and within the maegashira rank, there are several more levels which further indicate rank. Maegashira ranked 5 or below generally only fight amongst themselves, but higher-ranked maegashira will often fight higher ranks such as ozeki or yokozuna. The most impressive feat is for a maegashira to defeat a yokozuna, which is called a "kinboshi." Upon achieving this feat, the maegashira is rewarded monetarily for the remainder of his career. This is because sumo wrestlers use a system of payment for bonuses, called "mochikyukin," which utilizes a complex formula based on how he performs. Each kinboshi amounts to a bonus of ¥240,000 (or ~\$2600) per year.

The term kinboshi can also be used outside of sumo or dogfighting, meaning a major victory, or—in slang—a beautiful woman.

**"And the dragon on your back, Boss... they say you're finished if it looks at you."**

Pictorial tattooing in Japan became very popular during the 18th century, but because of the association between criminals and tattoos, it was outlawed for being "deleterious to public morals." However, common people such as firemen, laborers, and those of the lower classes still continued to get tattoos. With the publication of the Chinese novel, Suikoden, which features heavily tattooed heroes, tattooing was once again popular. However in 1867, upon Emperor Meiji's coronation, the laws restricting tattooing became strictly enforced because the new leaders believed that the people of the Western world would think that Japanese customs were strange and barbaric. Over the next 75 years, artists continued to tattoo their clients illegally. After WWII, under the American occupation, General MacArthur liberalized many of the Japanese laws and made tattooing legal again.

The Japanese dragon is a water deity associated with rainfall and bodies of water, and is typically depicted as a large, wingless, serpentine creature with clawed feet, usually with three claws. Dragon lore is traditionally associated with temples, and myths about dragons living in ponds and lakes near temples are common. The modern Japanese language has numerous "dragon" words, including the indigenous "tatsu" from the Old Japanese "ta-tu."

**"When I was a kid, the adults and I would grab the sandy Bonito that washed up on shore."**

Bonito is the name of a variety of species of mackerel, but the most common are the Atlantic bonito (sarda

sarda) and the Pacific bonito (sarda chiliensis lineolata). In Japanese cuisine outside of Japan, the word “bonito” is usually used to refer to the skipjack tuna (katsuwonus pelamis), which is known as “katsuo” in Japan, and is smoked and dried to make “katsuobushi”, an important ingredient in making “dashi” (fish broth, a staple of Japanese cooking). The meat of young or small bonito is a lighter color, similar to skipjack tuna, so it’s sometimes used as a cheaper substitute when canning.

### **(Rock-Paper-Scissors using Chopsticks)**

“Hashiken” (a.k.a. “teken”) is a Japanese guessing game similar to rock-paper-scissors, which originated from Tosa and is often played as a drinking game between two or more people. To play, all you need are six chopsticks. The two opponents face off, each hiding three chopsticks behind their backs, then they “janken” (rock-paper-scissors as Westerners know it) to see who goes first. The loser of the janken chooses a number from zero to three and holds that many chopsticks in front of himself, concealing them under his forearm. Upon doing so, the guesser says “irasshai!” (“come on!”) and then guesses how many chopsticks are concealed by holding out enough of his own chopsticks for the total number of “played” chopsticks to equal three and saying “san!” (“three”). The janken loser then gets a guess, and says either “ichi!” (“one”) or “go!” (“five”), depending on whether he’s holding zero/one or two/three chopsticks, respectively. Both players show what they’re holding, and if the total number is three, the guesser gets a point, and if it’s one or five, the janken loser gets a point. If the total is two or four, nothing happens. Roles are switched and this time the janken loser guesses first. If hashiken is played as a drinking game, best two-out-of-three is common, with the loser drinking a shot of sake. If no one is winning after a few rounds, spectators can call for a “mizu iri”, which means both players must drink.

**“With all due respect, I don’t think of myself as a yakuza.”  
“Well now... so you deem yourself a chivalrous man?”**

The word used here for “chivalrous man,” and throughout the film, is “kyokaku.” The kyokaku (“street knights”) originated in the 17th century, and considered themselves guardians of the common people. They either descended from the samurai classes (“hatamoto-yakko”) or the chonin class (“machi-yakko”), and the two divisions were at odds in feudal Japan. The kyokaku undermined the status quo and lived under a code of conduct called “kikotsu,” which was similar to the samurai’s bushido code. This code allowed rebellion and outrage in the face of injustice, as displayed in Onimasa’s disobedience to his boss.

**“At the Harimaya Bridge in Kochi of Tosa, I saw the temple priest buy a kanzashi. Yosakoi, yosakoi...”**

Onimasa is singing “Yosakoi-bushi,” or “Yosakoi melody”, an old local song that later acted as the basis for the highly-popular Yosakoi dance style, which originated in the city of Kochi in 1954 as a modern rendition of Awa Odori, a traditional summer dance. The word “yosakoi” has no semantic meaning per se, and mostly serves as an alliterative device.

Harimaya Bridge, or “Harimaya-bashi,” is Kochi’s most recognizable landmark, and the site of the city’s most famous love affair, which is immortalized in this song. In the middle of the 19th century, a monk named Junshin, from Chikurin-ji Temple, fell in love with a woman named Ouma. Junshin’s feelings were inappropriate due to his status, but he persisted regardless. As a token of his affection, he bought Ouma a kanzashi from a store beside the bridge. Word began to spread, and Junshin was sent away in shame. A “kanzashi” is an elaborate hairpin, generally reserved for upper-class women. Following the Meiji Restoration, though, less conspicuous hair-combs became the norm.

**“Lately she can tell the different brands; she can tell that this one is Club, this one is Papilio, and this one is Shiseido.”**

The first two makeup brands appear to be no more than memories of a distant era, a bygone time when women were unaware of the toxicity of their white lead-based products, and thus were easy targets for lead poisoning. The latter company, Shiseido, is still a major Japanese hair-care and cosmetics producer, and is actually the oldest surviving cosmetics company in the world. Shiseido was the first line to introduce flesh tones and colored powders when all other Japanese powders were white. They also developed the softening lotion, largely as a response to widespread lead poisoning. There are now some 25,000 Shiseido outlets, and Shiseido products can be found in major department stores and pharmacies around the world.

**“Father... I took the entrance examination for the Prefecture First High School for Girls. I passed the exam.”**

“Koutou jyogakkou” (or just “jyogakkou” for short) refers to a girls’ school under the pre-WWII Japanese school system. Girls who graduated grammar school and were aged 14 (in old age count, equivalent to 12-13 now) or above could enroll into a jyogakkou, which provided for a total of 6 years education (3 in lower-level, 3 in upper-level).

Only around 5% of girls went to a jyogakkou in 1905, and by 1925, the percentage was closer to 15%. The opportunity for a girl to earn a middle/high-school education was very prestigious in Japan at this time, and even until after WWII. So Matsue’s request was a bold one, and probably insulted Onimasa (who was uneducated and illiterate), since he, like many other men of the era, expected women to be subservient and certainly less educated than they, in order to maintain control.

**“The Tosa Railroad strike has been going on for five days now.”**

The first railway in Japan, the Tokyo-Yokohama railway, was built in 1872 and ran between Shimbashi Station and Yokohama Station.

In 1906, under the Railway Nationalization Act, the Japanese government nationalized the railway by purchasing over 2,800 miles of track from 17 private railway companies. In 1920, the Ministry of Railways was established, and the government continued to control the rails until 1949, when the Japanese Government Railways (JGR) was reorganized to become a state-owned public corporation named the Japanese National Railways. However, over the years, the expansion effort eventually resulted in a massive debt load of 25 trillion yen (US \$200 billion). In 1987, the Japan Railways Group (JR Group), a group of seven independent companies, purchased the former government-owned railways.

**“Because of the World War, the economic depression is becoming deeper.”**

Between 1929 and 1931, the Japanese economy shrank by 8%, but due to Finance Minister Takahashi KOREKIYO’s Keynesian economic policies, Japan was not as affected by The Great Depression as many other countries. Takahashi implemented a large fiscal stimulus involving deficit spending. This “bailout” negatively affected the value of the currency, and the devaluation resulted in Japanese textiles quickly displacing British textiles in export markets. But by 1933, due to the deficit spending (most of which went towards the armed forces), Japan was out of the depression. Of course, the negative effect of such bailouts began to show by 1934, when Takahashi realized that the economy was at risk for runaway inflation, and made moves to reduce the deficit spending. Nationalists were furious at the reduction of military spending, and the strong reaction, especially from those in the Army, culminated in Takahashi’s assassination during the February 26 Incident. Because of a subsequent “chilling effect” on civilian bureaucrats in the Japanese government, military dominance of the government continued to grow from 1934 on. Instead of reducing deficit spending, the Japanese government introduced price controls and rationing which helped to reduce inflation. However, the deficit was too severe, and inflation remained a serious problem until the end of World War II.

**“What? Weren’t you a geisha at 14?”**

A geisha, geiko, or geigi is a traditional female Japanese entertainer, whose skills may include performance of various Japanese arts, such as classical music and dance, and playing instruments such as the shamisen (three stringed guitar). Though popular western belief may usually indicate that geisha are prostitutes, this is not the case. True geisha are strictly entertainers, though some prostitutes have marketed themselves as geisha over time. For instance, during occupied Japan, prostitutes that dressed like geisha, known as “geisha girls”, solicited their services to American GIs, which may have carried the image of geisha as prostitutes back to the United States. Though true geisha definitely flirt with men and make playful innuendos, it is understood that nothing more can be expected.

Because true geisha usually have an aide to help in the difficult process of dressing them in their elaborate clothing, which could take over an hour, a surefire way to recognize the difference between a geisha and a prostitute is to note the position of the bow of their sash, or obi. If the obi is in the back, they have been dressed by someone else, and are certainly not prostitutes. If the obi is in the front, and the clothes less complicated, they may be a prostitute, because the obi must be in a position for the ease of removal and replacement

several times a day. Prostitution was not illegal in Japan before the Anti-Prostitution Law of 1956, but there was a strict separation distinguishing geisha and prostitutes, and the more refined geisha were not allowed or required to solicit sex, even though there was often intense pressure to do so within the geisha house.

Though in the 1920s there may have been upwards of 80,000 geisha in Japan, today it is estimated that there are only 1,000-2,000, mostly in the resort town of Atami. Many geisha are reserved in 30 minute or hour-long segments, and some traditionally offer their services in the time it takes to burn a stick of incense. High class geisha would probably charge a minimum of \$500/hour/customer.

Geisha traditionally begin training at a very young age, and though some girls were sold as children to geisha houses, this was not as common in reputable districts. Many geisha were daughters of other geisha who were brought up as either successors or raised by the geisha house.

### **“Is that Rilke’s ‘Die Aufzeichnungen?’”**

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) is widely considered one of the greatest German-language poets of the 20th century, and his haunting poems placed him as a transitional figure between traditional and modernist poets. His most famous verses may be Sonnets to Orpheus and the Duino Elegies, and he also wrote more than 400 poems in French. He is perhaps best-known outside of Germany for his prose, his most famous being Letters to a Young Poet and The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge (Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge).

The latter work is the one mentioned here by Tanabe, and is shortened as “Die Aufzeichnungen,” or “The Notebook.” It’s a semi-autobiographical novel written while Rilke lived in Paris, and published in 1910. The novel addresses existential themes in an expressionistic style, and was heavily influenced by the writings of Nietzsche. In the book, Rilke criticizes the Christian belief of a Second Coming as a promised event that can only lead to a universal sense of “waiting.” Images of the industrial revolution and the age of scientific progress add to the themes of anxiety and alienation.

### **“I won’t take your arm. But if you’ve got the guts... your finger. Cut off your finger.”**

“Yubitsume” (lit. “finger shortening”) is the Japanese ritual with which one atones for offenses to another, either as a punishment or an offer of apology, by amputating portions of their own little finger. Yubitsume is almost exclusively practiced by the yakuza, and can also be referred to as “yubi o tobasu” (lit. “finger flying”). The ritual has its origins with the bakuto, traveling gamblers who were the predecessors of the modern yakuza. In the event of an outstanding gambling debt, yubitsume could sometimes be considered as repayment.

Upon a first offense, the transgressor must cut off the tip of his left pinky finger, wrap it in a cloth, and hand the severed portion to his boss. The reason for doing so stems from the traditional way of holding a Japanese sword. The bottom three fingers of each hand are used to grip the sword tightly, with the thumb and index fingers slightly loose. The little fingers’ grip is the tightest on the hilt, so removal of portions of the little finger (and the next strongest fingers, if necessary) progressively weakens a person’s sword grip. The idea is that a person with a weak sword grip then has to rely more on his boss or the group for protection, reducing individual action.

### **“He said he’s waiting for you at Yokiro.”**

Yokiro is the name of a fictional geisha house and also the title of an award-winning 1983 Hideo Gosha film, released just one year after Onimasa. Yokiro is known as The Geisha internationally, and is also available on DVD from AnimEigo. Both films were adapted from Tomiko MIYAO novels, hence the reference.

### **“She’s got typhus.”**

Typhus is any of several diseases caused by Rickettsiae bacteria (not to be confused with ricketts, a result of vitamin D deficiency). The origin of the name is from the Greek “typhos” (lit. smoky or hazy), as it described the state of mind of those affected. Typhus is completely unrelated to typhoid fever, which is an illness transmitted by the ingestion of food or water contaminated with feces from an infected person. Specifically, the kind of typhus Uta has is Epidemic typhus (*Rickettsia prowazekii*), and is usually transferred between humans via lice.

Symptoms include chills, cough, delirium, high fever, joint pain, low blood pressure, rash, light sensitivity,

severe headache, severe muscle pain, and mental stupor. Untreated, typhus can be fatal, but prompt antibiotic treatment will cure almost every patient. The first confirmable accounts of typhus date back to 1489, when 17,000 Spanish soldiers were killed. The disease was common in prisons and trenches, and epidemics occurred throughout Europe from the 16th to 19th centuries. There were several epidemics in the U.S. between 1865 and 1873, and during World War I, between 1918 and 1922, 3 million Russian civilians died from typhus, out of 20-30 million cases. Typhus epidemics were also especially brutal in the Nazi concentration camps, when thousands of prisoners contracted the disease due to appalling living conditions.

### **(Buddhist chanting)**

This Buddhist chant heard here from Onimasa (“Namu Daishi Henjo Kongo”) is the mantra of the deity Kobo Daishi, the founder of Shingon Buddhism. Literally, the phrase means something like “Homage to the Great Master, the Vajra of all-pervading spiritual radiance.” “Namu Daishi” is an homage to Kobo Daishi, and “Henjo Kongo” refers to what’s known in Mikkyo Buddhism as Dainichi Nyorai, which is the foundation of the universe, and literally means “universal illumination diamond.”

Also known as Kukai, Kobo Daishi is a well-known Japanese historical figure born in the year 774, in Sanuki Province, Shikoku. An apparent genius and altruist, he founded a temple on Mt. Koya in 816, and lived a religious life of teaching and public service until he died on Mt. Koya on April 23, 835. Kukai was—and still is—the subject of a wide variety of supernatural folklore involving his social undertakings, such as bringing water to dry villages, or reconstructing reservoirs.

Kukai’s travels through Shikoku formed the basis of a well-known 88-temple pilgrimage which is still traveled to this day. It’s believed that Kukai visited all 88 temples, even though only two were specifically mentioned in his writings. It’s not necessary to visit the temples in order, and though it was traditionally completed on foot, modern pilgrims use any form of transportation available. The walking course may take anywhere from 30 to 60 days to complete, and pilgrims are distinguished by their white clothing, sedge hats, and walking sticks.

### **1937, Winter - Osaka**

Onimasa takes place between 1918 and 1940, a time of great social and political change. At this time, Japanese nationalism and militarism were on the rise, and leading up to the Second Sino-Japanese War with China, which officially began in the year of this scene, in July 1937. The reason Matsue and Tanabe are arrested here is due to the Peace Preservation Law of 1925, which effectively criminalized socialism, communism, and other ideologies such as anarchism. The “Tokko” thought police were established years earlier, in 1911, to investigate political groups which could potentially threaten the Emperor-centered social order, but following the Peace Preservation Law of 1925, their power was expanded tremendously, and political dissent was tolerated less and less, until all forms of dissent were outlawed.

In 1941, the Peace Preservation Law was updated to be more severe, with provisions such as harsher punishments, abolishment of appeals, defense attorneys appointed by the Ministry of Justice, and the inclusion of religious organizations in Tokko investigations. From 1925 to 1945, over 70,000 were arrested in Japan under the provisions of the Peace Preservation Law, which was repealed after the end of World War II (1945) by Allied occupation authorities. During these two decades, around 10% of dissenters reached trial, 5% were given prison sentences, and two offenders were given the death penalty.

### **“Hey. Fireworks.”**

The history of Japanese fireworks is relatively new, compared to some other countries. The Portuguese first brought fireworks to Japan, along with firearms, in the late sixteenth century. At first, they were mainly enjoyed by the shogun and other feudal leaders, but were eventually tailored for the common man. In ancient Edo, even though fireworks were occasionally banned because they posed a large fire threat, the technology improved and by the eighteenth century, fireworks displays and festivals began to become increasingly popular. The most notable fireworks festival took place annually along the banks of the Sumida River, when the professional fireworks manufacturers would compete to put on the best show. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Japan was a world leader in fireworks technology, especially once the isolationist policy was overturned and new materials could be imported, such as aluminum and strontium. These materials allowed for brighter and more colorful fireworks than ever before.

Fireworks festivals (a.k.a. “hanabi taikai”) are still a favorite pastime in Japan, and are held almost every day during the summer, somewhere in the nation, with hundreds of festivals every year. The largest of the fireworks shows can use between 100,000 and 120,000 rounds and have attracted more than 800,000 spectators. Street vendors sell drinks and food in stalls, and traditional festival games are common. Even the modern fireworks festival retains some of the more traditional aspects. For instance, men and women spectators still wear a traditional summer Kimono, such as a Yukata or a Jinbei.

**“A human life is 20,000 days. We’re all going to die eventually. I got nothing holding me back.”**

20,000 days is almost 55 years, which was approximately the life expectancy in Japan at the time. Following the end of World War II, mostly due to medical progress, the life expectancy skyrocketed. These days, according to the United Nations 2005-2010 average, Japan has the highest life expectancy of any other country in the world, at 82.6 years. According to CIA World Factbook 2009 estimates, Japan has the third highest life expectancy of any country in the world, at 82.12 years (The U.S. is #50, at 78.11 years / Canada is #8, at 81.23).