

Yōkai: Evolutions in Image, Definition, and Media

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Abstract

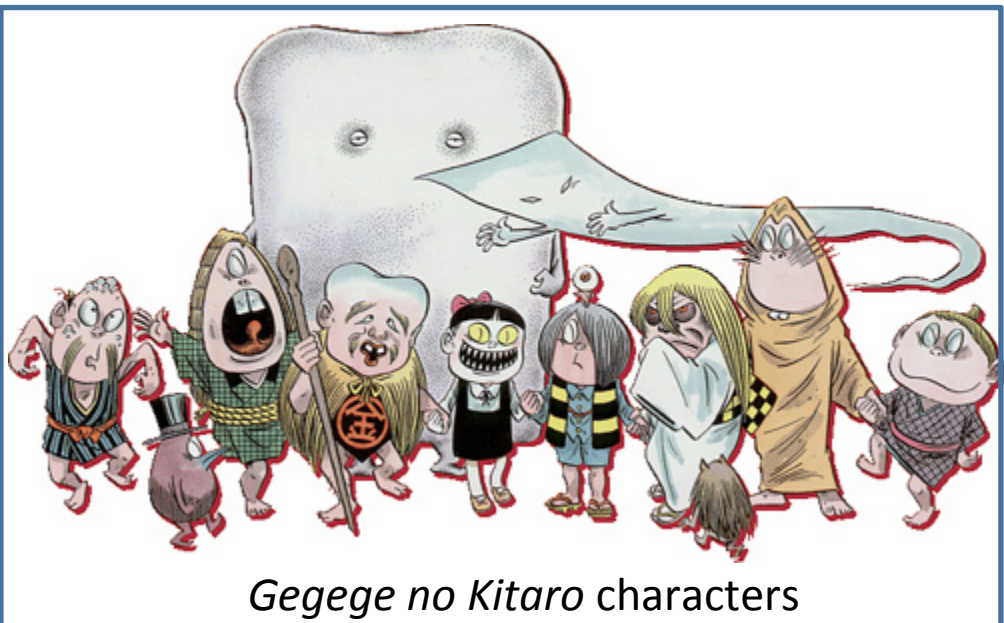
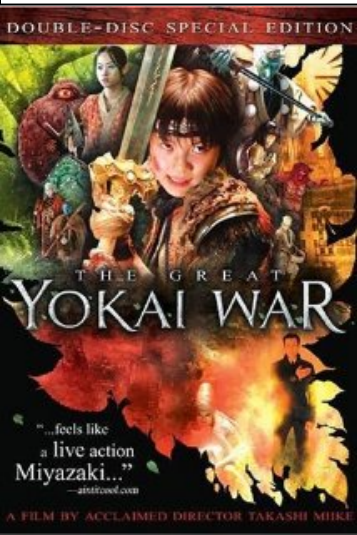
The uniqueness of *yōkai*, which can be defined as Japanese supernatural beings or monsters, lay not only in the numerous and diverse characters themselves, but also in the holistic impact of the concept of *yōkai* on Japanese popular culture. A historical survey of *yōkai* reveals that the meanings and categories of “*yōkai*” have changed according to the Japanese peoples’ perception of the unknown and of the supernatural world. Moreover, the *yōkai* 's image and the accompanying narrative evolved accordingly to cope with the unknown. Finally, this study attempts to gauge how the media has had a direct influence to how people visualize and narrate *yōkai*. These factors regarding *yōkai* 's creation and evolution affect how we recognize them in today's pop culture.

Questions and Key Changes

- **Guiding Questions:**
 - How have *yōkai* changed?
 - How does the change influence today's *yōkai* and popular culture?
- **Key Changes (bullets marked with *)**
 - 1) *Yōkai* image/character story (*pink)
 - 2) *Yōkai* definition & categorization (*Purple)
 - 3) Media's change & influence on Yokai (*Green)



Yōkai movies



Gegege no Kitaro characters

Origins to Kamakura Period (-1333)

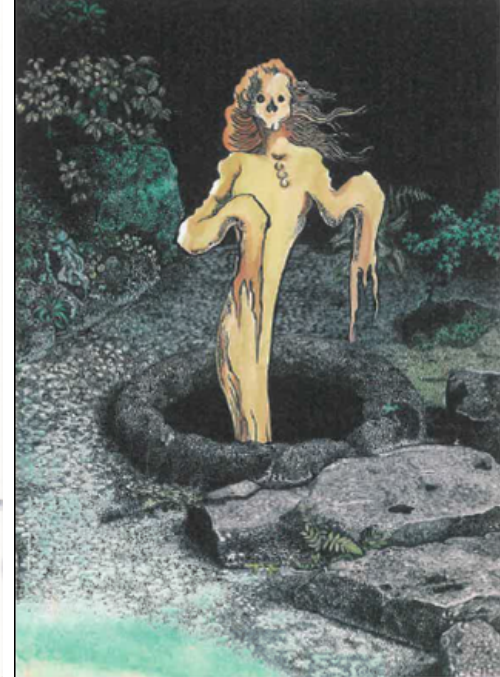
- Shinto idea of *Yaoyorozunokami* ('800 spirits / gods')
- Regional monsters, gods, etc. Some which were very similar to each other in different regions
- Early terminology:
 - Heian period (794-1185) : *Mononoke* (lit. 'thing/ matter of mystery') → *Bakemono* (lit. 'changing thing')
(*)
- *Tsukumogami* (old objects that come to life):
Image change from scary/terrifying to comical (*)



Inoue, Enryo



Nurarihyon



Kyoukotsu



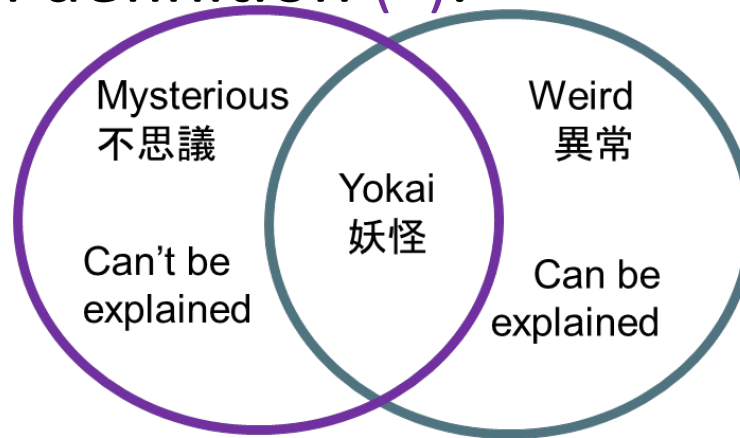
Mizuki, Shigeru

Edo Period (1600-1868)

- Time of Collecting and Cataloging things
- First catalogue/encyclopedia: *Kimouzui* (*)
 - Sorted by outer appearance (*)
- Toriyama Sekien's *Yōkai* catalogue (*) (*)
 - First to focus specifically on *yōkai* in a catalogue
 - Included imported and created *yōkai* (e.g.: *Kyokotsu*) (*)
 - Changed the roles/stories of some of the *yōkai* (e.g.: *Nurarihyon*). (*)
- Scary storytelling called *Hyakumonogatari Kaidankai* becomes a popular way to title collections of scary stories (*)

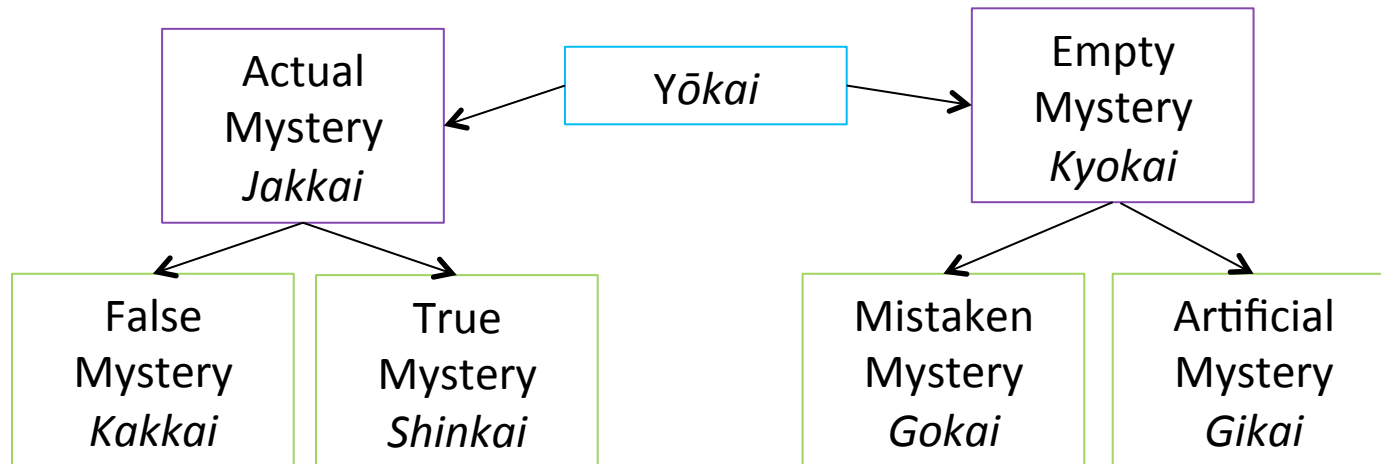
Meiji Period (1868-1912)

- Influence from Western philosophy (*)
- Inoue Enryo
 - Created *yōkaigaku* ('yōkaiology'), demystifying 'false' mysteries to modernize Buddhism
 - Founded *Tetsugakukan* University
- Inoue's yokai definition (*):



Meiji Period (1868-1912)

- Inoue's Categorization of *Yōkai* : (*)
 - Based not on the many *yōkai* themselves, but instead the types of mysteries or strange happenings claimed to be their doing.



Showa Period (1926-1989)

- Books to television to movies (*)
- Mizuki Shigeru:
 - *Manga* artist; wrote the popular *Gegege no Kitarou manga* (Japanese comic book) & researched *yōkai* (*)
 - The *yōkai manga* became an *anime* (animated TV series) and a movie. (*) (*)
 - There were also a couple other *yōkai* movies made not related to *Gegege no Kitarou* specifically. (*) (*)
- Shigeru's definition of *Yōkai* : (*)
 - “Anything that can not readily be understood or explained, anything mysterious and unconfirmed, can be a *yōkai*.”

Showa Period (1926-1989)

- Mizuki's Categories (*)

変化 (*henge*): Shape-shifters



狐
“Kitsune”
fox spirit

幽霊 (*yuurei*):
Ghosts/spirits



子育て幽霊
“Kosodate yurei”
Child rearing ghost

怪獣 (*kaijuu*):
The beasts

Godzilla



超自然(*choushizen*):
Supernatural Phenomenon

狐の嫁入り
“Kitsune no yomeiri”
Fox wedding





Baku (the dream eater)



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Heisei Period (1989-Present)

- A “*yōkai* boom” (ie: *Gegege no Kitaro*, *Yōkai Watch*, etc.) brings *yōkai* into popularity causing creation of more *yōkai manga*, *anime*, movies, and even a few *yōkai* attractions. (*) (*)
- It is not uncommon for a character (even a minor one) in a *manga* or *anime* to have been inspired by an older *yōkai* (e.g.: Drowzee in *Pokemon* from *yōkai* Baku). (*)
- *Yōkaigaku* (*yōkaiology*) exists today as a field of study within the International Japanese Culture Research Center. There is currently a *yōkai* database that has about 35000 *yōkai* entries.

Fox wedding festival (Mie)



Baku (the dream eater)



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Mizuki Shigeru's Yōkai road



Yōkai train
(from Shijo-omiya to Arashiyama)



Findings

- ***Yōkai* image:**
 - Gradually became less terrifying/scary
- **Media changed storytelling:**
 - *Yōkai* portrayal: illustrator/author has increasingly more influence on *yōkai*'s portrayal and image instead of the individual.
- **Changing definition & categorization:**
 - Enabled storyteller (author/illustrator) to create new *yōkai* from a vast range & number that already exists.

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