

Youkai

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An introduction to the Culture of Yokai

Introduction

- Many of the things presented in this talk are lifted from the interpretation found in Michael Dylan Foster's book titled *The Book of Yokai: Mysterious Creatures of Japanese Folklore*.
- I have coupled these ideas with my own explorations of Japanese culture, and religion.
- This, like most things in studies of culture, is a very large topic, and we will only be grazing the surface of many of the topics covered here.

Outline

1. Basic Concepts

- a. Shinto
- b. Degradation Theory
- c. Youkai gaku
- d. Youkai Taxonomy
- e. My organization system

2. Mysterious Events

- a. Mysterious Happenings
 - i. Yanari
 - ii. Nurikabe
 - iii. Kamaitachi
- b. Untimely Deaths
 - i. Kappa

3. Outsiders

- a. Oni
- b. Yamanba (Yamauba)

4. 100 Year Old Things

- a. Significance of the number 100
- b. Tsukumogami
- c. Nekomata
- d. Kitsune

5. Encyclopedic Creatures

- a. Baku

6. Artistic Creation

- a. Mokumokuren

Basic Concepts - Shinto and Degradation Theory

- The native religion of Japan, Shinto, is an interesting blend of polytheism and animistic belief.
- The polytheistic component of Shinto is what is going to be important for this class
- Degradation Theory
 - Originally suggested by Yanagita Kunio, this is the idea that Yokai are Kami which have stopped being worshipped, and have lost their godly spark.
 - This was modified by Komatsu Kazuhiko who suggests that it could go both ways. That a yokai can become a kami by being worshipped.

Basic Concepts - Youkai gaku

- Youkai gaku is the name for the area of study which focuses on Yokai. It can be thought of as meaning something like Yokai-ology
- Inoue Enryou - A Buddhist priest and scholar of Eastern and Western Philosophy who sought to explain away Youkai during Japan's Westernization. He called his area of study Youkai gaku.
- This area of research has continued through to today. With various researchers taking a slightly different approach including the aforementioned Yanagita Kunio who established the discipline of Folkloristics in Japan. Whose approach was to collect the stories, without judgment.

Basic Concepts - Youkai Taxonomy

- In Biology, Taxonomy is the classification of organisms into groups of similar organisms so that we can better understand them.
- In the study of Youkai, this becomes a little bit harder. There are many approaches to classifying Youkai. In his book, Michael Dylan Foster uses a grouping system which is based on how far from human habitation you are likely to find a given youkai.
- My organization system is a little different for the purpose of this class. I think that youkai are more interesting when you present them relative to what form the youkai's creation took.

Basic Concepts - My Youkai Taxonomy

- For the purpose of this class I am dividing Youkai into 5 rough groups
- Strange Events
 - a. Including Untimely Deaths
- Youkai-ifications of Outsiders
 - a. Including things like Oni, and Yamanba/Yamauba
- 100 Year Old Things
 - a. When objects and animals become 100 years old things can get strange
- Encyclopedic Youkai
 - a. Youkai that came out of the academic drive of the Japanese in the 18th and 19th C
- Deliberate creations
 - a. Artists and others have invented some Youkai throughout Japanese History.

Sources for Images of Youkai

Hyakki Yagyou Emaki

https://www.hyogo-c.ed.jp/~rekihaku-bo/historystation/digital-exhibitions/ebanashi/ka0014_en.html

Hyakki Yako no Zu (17th Century)

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hyakki_Yako_no_Zu_by_Tosa_Mitsuoki-_all_1400.jpg

Gazu Hyakki Yagyou (18th Century)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gazu_Hyakki_Yagy%C5%8D

Konjaku Gazu Zoku Hyakki (18th Century)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Konjaku_Gazu_Zoku_Hyakki

Konjaku Hyakki Shuui (18th Century)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Konjaku_Hyakki_Sh%C5%ABi

Gazu Hyakki Tsurezure Bukuro

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gazu_Hyakki_Tsurezure_Bukuro

Strange Events - Yanari

The strange event here is the knocking and banging sounds that can be heard throughout old houses late at night.



Strange Events - Kamaitachi

This Yokai appeared in the Medical Literature in The British Medical Journal in September 1911. Where it was mentioned in a paper about Spontaneous Wounds, “kamaitachi disease”.



Strange Events - Kappa

Kappa are known far and wide in Japan. There are many local names for them including kawataro, and komahiki.

Komahiki means “horse puller” and is a reference to Kappa’s tendency to pull people and animals into their ponds to drown them.



Outsiders - Oni

Oni represent everything that goes against the values of Japanese Culture.

They are chaotic, and brutish.



Outsiders - Yamanba/Yamauba

Yamanba is both malevolent and benevolent depending on the conditions that you meet her in. If you are in her territory (typically mountains), beware. However, if she is in the village and you show her respect you are likely to be rewarded.

I, personally, think of her in a similar way to Western Wise women living in the forest away from people.



100 Year Old Things - Tsukumogami

Tsukumogami are an interesting expression of Shinto thinking on the animistic nature of the world.

The idea is that objects that 'survive' longer than 100 years may come to live.



100 Year Old Things - Nekomata

Cats which live to their 100th year are also said to develop magic powers.

Later depictions of Nekomata show them as cats with forked tails.



100 Year Old Things - Kitsune

While the image I have here is of Kitsunebi (fox fire); The creature in the image is a kitsune.

Kitsune that live longer than 100 years are said to become yokai. It is also said that a Kitsune will add a tail every 100 years after that.

Kitsune are also central to the worship of the Kami Inari. Inari is (among other things) a goddess of the rice harvest.

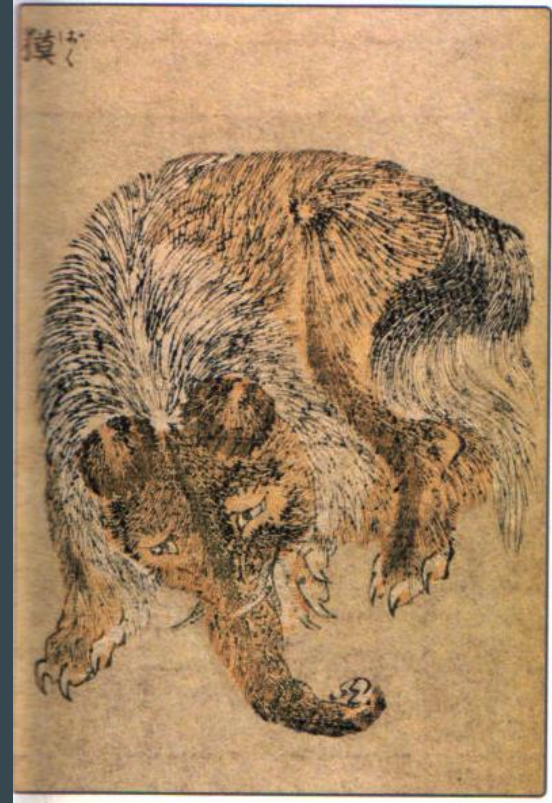


Encyclopedic Youkai - Baku

The baku came into Japan via Chinese Encyclopedic texts. It was included in the Wakan Sansai Zue, a Japanese compilation of previous Chinese and Japanese texts.

It started in Chinese folklore as a Giant Panda, and later became associated with the Malayan Tapir.

It is one of the influences which lead to the Pokemon Drowzee and Hypno.



Deliberate Creations - Mokumokuren

An invention of Toriyama Sekien

It is a youkai which was invented to represent a clear idea. The feeling of being watched in an old house.

