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From Bestiaries to Pokédexes: Ordering the Otherworldly in Japan's Monster Traditions

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Includes a Glossary, Online Resources, and Discussion Questions

Abstract

This article traces the enduring presence and transformation of Japan's monsters—from medieval picture scrolls and Edo-period bestiaries to contemporary manga—emphasizing their role as symbolic figures and creative devices. By focusing on the Japanese legend, the Night Parade of One Hundred Demons (*Hyakki Yagyō*)—a nocturnal procession in which a multitude of monsters march through the streets—as a recurring visual framework, the discussion shows how *yōkai* and other monsters have been continually reimagined to reflect shifting cultural functions, serving as tools of satire, imagination, and social commentary. Despite their changing forms and meanings, these monsters consistently act as catalysts for artistic invention, embodying a playful—yet sometimes terrifying—engagement with the mysterious, the uncontrollable, and the unknown. Their persistence in today's manga underscores a continuing human desire to impose order on, and simultaneously revel in, encounters with the otherworldly.

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Suggested Courses

Japanese Studies, History of Art, Manga Studies, Folklore Studies.

Introduction: Monsters and the "Horror" of Modernity

Late in March 1927—just three and a half years after the devastating Great Kantō Earthquake—cartoonist Kitazawa Rakuten (1876–1955) issued a special "Horror Edition" of his pioneering satirical magazine *Jiji Manga*. Dominating the cover was the mythic catfish Ōnamazu, a well-known *yōkai* monster once believed to unleash earthquakes when no longer restrained by the deity Kashima.[1] The reference to the recent catastrophe is unmistakable. Yet Rakuten positions Ōnamazu not as a mere historical footnote but as a base from which to deliver a more pointed commentary on the present (see Figure 1).

The catfish's faint, unsettling grin signals this shift. Behind it appears a young married couple and their pockmarked infant. The husband, dressed in a Western suit, stoops forward with a sickly green complexion, gnarled hands, and blistered, blood-red lips, while his wife collapses beside him in horror. Nearby, a four-legged creature labeled baikin ("germ") crouches as a personification of disease. The accompanying subtitle clarifies the intended message: "More horrifying than earthquakes: venereal disease." In Rakuten's formulation, the traditional yōkai (also translated as "demon" or "specter") becomes less menacing, particularly when placed alongside the far more visceral depiction of illness.

Figure 1. The cover of the "Horror Issue" of *Jiji Manga* (Issue 308, March 27, 1927) presents modern social problems as more frightening than the Giant Catfish Ōnamazu and its attendant earthquakes. Courtesy of The Ohio State University Libraries' Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum.

This juxtaposition reflected a broader early twentieth-century expectation that yōkai—and the folk beliefs surrounding them—would inevitably "disappear with the advent of modernization."[2] The prominent folklorist Yanagita Kunio (1875–1962) famously resisted this presumed disappearance, working to preserve such "folk spirits" in foundational texts like *Tōno Monogatari* (*Folktales from the Region of Tōno*). For Yanagita, their loss would have marked a diminishment of the cultural imagination of ordinary people.

From the vantage point of the present, however, this predicted decline never materialized. Japan's monsters did not vanish; they adapted, proliferated, and eventually became central to the global circulation of manga, anime, and video games. Today, yōkai figures old and new—Shigeru Mizuki's Kitarō, the radioactive dragon-lizard Godzilla, and even the deceptively adorable Pokémon—stand as prominent cultural emissaries in what has been termed Japan's "Gross National Cool."[3]

Artists both before and after Rakuten's satirical *Jiji Manga* have depicted Japan's legendary spirits and beasts across a wide range of media—from medieval picture scrolls and Edo-period (1603–1868) encyclopedias to pre-war cartoons and contemporary manga. Central to many of these works is the Night Parade of One Hundred Demons (*Hyakki Yagyō*), understood as a nocturnal procession in which a multitude of yōkai march in unruly succession through the streets. The parade's visual framework—its recurring creatures, narrative patterns, and compositional tropes—has provided creators with a flexible

structure for staging scenes of supernatural chaos and pandemonium. As symbolic figures, the yōkai in these pieces have not only borne shifting meanings but also served as visual and rhetorical devices—tools of satire, pedagogy, and artistic invention. Their staying power reflects a persistent desire to tame and play with the strange and unknowable, an impulse that continues to animate Japanese visual culture to this day.

From Picture Scrolls to Bestiaries: The Night Parade across Time

Centuries before Rakuten's modern cartoons, earlier visual traditions of yōkai often depicted these creatures as entities worthy of study and classification. The oldest surviving color painting of the Night Parade is the *Nocturnal Procession of One Hundred Goblins Picture Scroll* (*Hyakki Yagyō emaki*), attributed to Tosa Mitsunobu (1434–1525) and preserved today at Shinjuan, a sub-temple in northern Kyoto.[4] Created in the late Muromachi period (ca. 1336–1543), the scroll builds on earlier folk tales (*otogizōshi*) about animated tools and instruments known as *tsukumogami*—tea kettles, lanterns, and musical instruments, for instance—that gained spirits and came to life after a hundred years of use.[5] These stories, charming yet often didactic, furnished a cultural backdrop in which yōkai could be imagined as wayward spirits that occupied the edges of human experience.

Mitsunobu's Shinjuan scroll transformed this visual narrative into something increasingly enumerative and systematic (see Figure 2). Rather than telling a single story, the scroll unfolds as a continuous visual sequence in which a diverse assortment of yōkai—anthropomorphized *tsukumogami*, animalistic goblins, and other uncanny demons—advance through an open landscape. Importantly, they appear not as characters in a plot but as discrete entities presented for observation. The lack of background is significant: rather than anchoring the figures within a larger narrative world, the empty landscape isolates each creature, directing our attention toward its respective features. They march forward in an improbably orderly line, their neat procession sharply at odds with their wayward and intractable temperaments. As the scroll unfurls, each figure steps forward in turn, its traits and behaviors revealed in gradual succession. As folklorist Michael Dylan Foster (whose article "Folklore, Popular Culture, and Hometown Yōkai in the Twenty-First Century" appears in this issue of *Education About Asia*) observes, the lack of any real plot or narrative suggests that such scrolls were made for the purpose of recording information, and perhaps also for teaching and entertaining, akin to children's books today.[6]

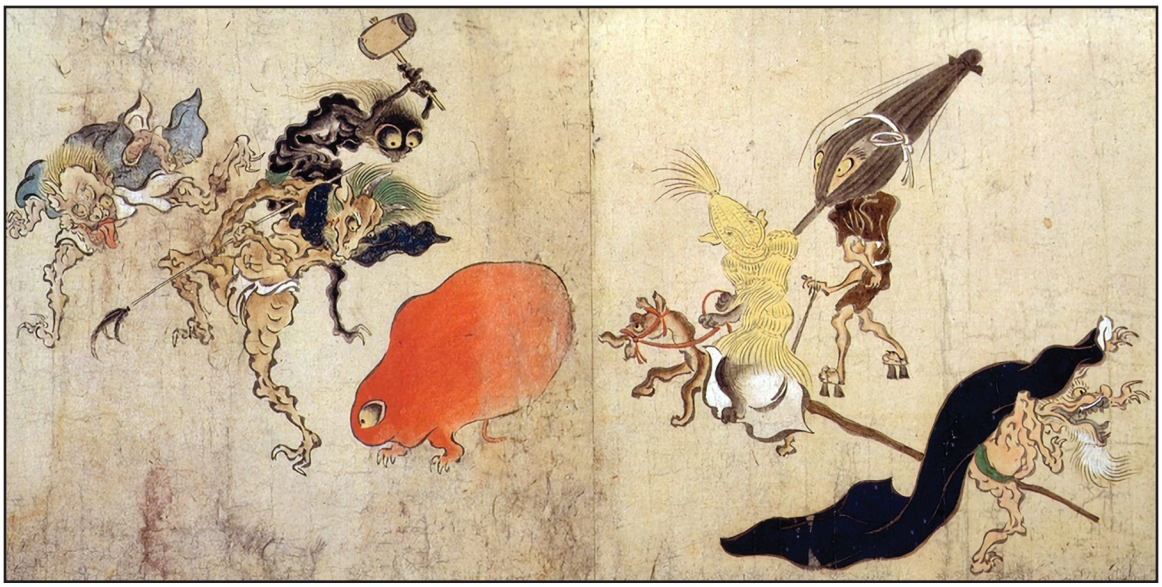

Figure 2. A scene from the Shinjuan picture scroll attributed to Tosa Mitsunobu. Memorable beasts appear, such as the "Three-Eyed Boy" (*mitsume kozō*, far left corner), the anthropomorphized "Tiger Beast" (*koinryō*, to his immediate right), the one-eyed "Red Yōkai" (*akai yōkai*), and the Umbrella Ghost (*kasa-obake*, upper right corner). Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

This version of the Night Parade proved enormously influential. Many of the figures introduced here resurfaced in later Edo-period picture scrolls, prints, and woodblock printed books (*hanpon*), together shaping the visual lexicon of yōkai for centuries. As Foster observes, the Shinjuan scroll effectively sparked a "veritable [Night Parade] 'boom' in which all sorts of different yōkai were pictured in numerous scrolls produced in a range of styles," in most cases with humorous and wacky figures.[7] Yet the Shinjuan scroll remains distinctive. With no continuous story to anchor it, it offers instead a careful sequencing and a sharp focus on each yōkai's particularities—evidence of a nascent desire to record and classify spirits that had long moved through folklore without fixed forms or names. Seen in this light, the Shinjuan scroll becomes one of the earliest efforts to give material shape to Japan's invisible spirit world, an illustrated catalog that draws the unseen into view.

As later artists reinterpreted the Night Parade, the classificatory impulse of the Shinjuan scroll did not disappear either; instead, it migrated into new media and new visual technologies. The most influential of these came in the early eighteenth century, when Toriyama Sekien (1712–1788) brought the Night Parade into the world of mass-produced books. He did this with his *Illustrated Bestiary of Night Demons* (*Gazu Hyakki Yagyō*, 1776), the first of four volumes that eventually formed a tetralogy known by the same name.[8] Unlike the one unique Shinjuan scroll, Sekien's books circulated widely, making the classification of yōkai accessible to a broad reading public. Each page introduced a single creature—its name, features, and succinct description—often positioned within a small natural "habitat" (see Figure 3). As yōkai experts Hiroko Yoda and Matt Alt observe, these "little 'habitats'" helped to create a kind of portable reference work, an illustrated handbook that resembled the encyclopedias and almanacs that were already proliferating during the mid-Edo period.[9]

Figure 3. Sample pages (frame 70) from Volume 3 of Sekien's *Illustrated Bestiary* featuring *Biwa Boku-boku* (Lute Spirit) and *Koto-furunushi* (Old Man Koto), two reincarnated spirits, or *tsukumogami* yōkai, born from the Japanese lute (*biwa*) and zither (*koto*). Courtesy of the Japan National Diet Library, https://dl.ndl.go.jp/en/pid/2551543/1/8.

Sekien's version of the Night Parade also playfully echoed the encyclopedic methods of Terajima Ryōan's monumental *Illustrated Sino-Japanese Encyclopedia of the Three Realms* (*Wakan Sansai Zue*, 1712). Ryōan's work—an extraordinary compendium spanning 105 volumes—grouped foreign peoples, exotic animals, and yōkai together within a shared cosmology of the familiar and uncanny. Under headings that blended "strange people" from distant lands (such as the *Oranda*, or "the Dutch") with supernatural beings, Ryōan cataloged figures like *Shokuin* (Torch Shadow), *Kawataro* (River Spirit / *Kappa*), *Sansei* (Mountain Spirit), and *Hitōban* (Flying-Head Barbarian). Its popularity was immense, and its taxonomic logic set important precedents for later Edo visual culture. Readers were also already captivated by new scholarly fields such as botany, natural science, and *honzōgaku* (herbal medicine)—all disciplines that encouraged close observation and the classification of the natural world.[10] With these developments, the rise of Sekien's alluring Bestiary was no accident.

Importantly, in caricaturing Ryōan's work, Sekien adopted many of the same yōkai while expanding on their graphic representations. A painter trained in the prestigious Kanō school, Sekien excelled at portraiture and depictions of supernatural creatures, and he brought this expertise to bear in his yōkai illustrations. When Ryōan's Kawatarō (Kappa) is placed next to Sekien's version (see Figure 4 and Figure 5), the difference is striking. Ryōan's version presents a simple, matter-of-fact monster accompanied by somewhat lengthy explanatory text. By contrast, Sekien's offers a more detailed image with a full visual background—elements that make his rendering more engaging to the eye. In sum, by expanding and popularizing the visual repertoire of the Night Parade, Sekien produced what Alt and Yoda call a new "standard desk reference"—a work that presented his yōkai as the new heroes, or pop culture superstars, of the era and helped circulate them through an increasingly diffuse world of visual and comedic lexica.[11]

Figures 4 and 5. Individual pages, featuring the river spirit Kawatarō (also known as "Kappa") from Terajima Ryōan's encyclopedia, *Wakan Sansai Zue*, p. 149, courtesy of The Rare Book & Manuscript Library, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Library (Figure 4, left) and Sekien's *Illustrated Bestiary* (*Gazu Hyakki Yagyō*), Volume 3, Frame 13 of 40, Courtesy of the National Diet Library, (Figure 5, right).

More than a century later, the great painter and caricaturist Kawanabe Kyōsai (1831–1889) brought the theme of the Night Parade into the modern era with his *Illustrations of a Hundred Demons (Kyōsai Hyakki Gadan, 1889*).[12] Created during the Meiji era (1868–1912)—a period marked by far-reaching transformation—his version of the Night Parade continued the interplay of parody, bestiary, and scroll format while simultaneously blending past and present. Printed in multi-colored *print* (*nishiki-e)* and bound in a "concertina" (*orihon)* format, the work occupies a hybrid space: when closed, it resembles a compact codex, but when opened, it unfurls like a traditional picture scroll (emaki). Sample pages from the *book* show several recognizable yōkai—such as the lute spirit and the red, one-eyed yōkai—rendered against empty backgrounds (see Figures 6 and 7), a choice that recalls the presentation style of the Shinjuan scroll.

Some scholars emphasize the "cinematic" sweep of such long formats, likening the sequential frames of traditional picture scrolls to the panning motion of present-day anime.[13] Yet Kyōsai's long fold-out book remains fundamentally non-narrative—its images segmented into discrete scenes without accompanying text—again echoing the presentation of the Shinjuan scroll and treating yōkai as objects of individual study instead of as characters in a continuous story. The preface—the only textual component of Kyōsai's book—makes this explicit. There, Tosa's work is cited as a major inspiration for Kyōsai's version of the Night Parade. At the same time, however, the preface explicitly addresses a new global readership that Kyōsai's demons are now meant to impress.[14]

Figures 6 and 7. Excerpts from the *Kyōsai hyakki gadan* (Frames 9 and 14) reveal familiar yōkai such as Old-man Koto (*Koto-furunushi*), the lute spirit (*biwa boku-boku*), and the one-eyed red yōkai (*aka yōkai*), among others. Courtesy of The Ohio State University Libraries' Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum.

Like Sekien, Kyōsai trained at the renowned Kanō school, and his prodigious output earned him the nickname "the painting demon." His enthusiasm for Western-style political cartooning connected his spirits and beasts to the early development of "modern manga."[15] In fact, in 1874 he helped launch Japan's earliest manga magazine, the short-lived Illustrated *Newspaper Nipponchi* (*Eshinbun Nipponchi*), modeled on the English cartoonist Charles Wirgman's *Japan Punch*. One of his most famous works from this time is "A School for Spooks" (1874), in which the demon-queller Shōki becomes a schoolteacher tasked with wrangling a room full of mischievous yōkai (see Figure 8). In this print, Kyōsai uses yōkai again—rendered here in a Western-influenced satirical cartoon (*ponchi-e*) style—as a vehicle to lampoon Meiji-era reforms (such as the introduction of compulsory education). As with much of Kyōsai's work, the print demonstrates how, by the late nineteenth century, yōkai were now becoming flexible rhetorical devices that not only critiqued the onset of modernity, but also allowed for experimentation with foreign satirical styles.

Figure 8. In the print "A School for Spooks," Kyōsai uses monsters in Western-influenced "*ponchi-e*" as a vehicle to lampoon Meiji-era reforms. Courtesy of Harvard Art Museums (https://harvardartmuseums.org/collections/object/316932).

Collecting Chaos: Contemporary Monsters and the Database Imagination

The Night Parade's blend of wonder and chaos finds new life in modern manga and transmedia franchises, shaping how artists continue to imagine and reinterpret yōkai. Shigeru Mizuki's manga series, *GeGeGe no Kitarō* (1960), revived folkloric figures such as Nurarihyon, the slippery "big boss" of the yōkai world, and Rokurokubi, the long-necked woman who oscillates between menace and mischief. Drawing from oral traditions and the collection of author and folklorist Yanagita Kunio, Mizuki recast Japan's folkloric heroes as new pop culture icons for the postwar era. In doing so, he helped established "yōkai manga" as a genre, a development that was celebrated in the pages of the *Yomiuri Shimbun* by the late 1960s.[16]

By the 1970s and 1980s, yōkai—and soon other "strange beasts" called *kaiju*—were everywhere. Horror comics, *shōjo* (girl) romances, and avant-garde comics all swelled with supernatural beasts, grotesque spirits, and folkloric archetypes. Artists like Hino Hideshi or Takahashi Rumiko incorporated monsters so routinely that "the strange" began to feel ordinary—part of the manga landscape itself. Classic yōkai like

the *kappa*, the *chōchin-obake* (haunted paper lantern), and the *kasa-obake* (umbrella ghost)—once staples of the Toriyama Sekien's bestiaries—surfaced anew in this context, notably in the global blockbusters of *Pokémon* and *Yokai Watch* by the turn of the century. In this sense, Japan's demons and beasts proved to be consummate "shape-shifters": moving across comics, anime, and video games; adapting to new global audiences; and taking on forms that reflect society's shifting tastes, fears, and obsessions. Their transmedia persistence reveals both their imaginative appeal and their remarkable flexibility, while also showcasing the wild and the ethereal.

Yet their path to global stardom has never been linear—or entirely flattering to human values. As noted earlier, pre-war comic strips such as those in *Jiji Manga* often cast monsters as foils to the truly "beastly" crises of modern life. Urban decay, political corruption, and the spread of venereal disease, for instance, overshadowed the capricious demons of the medieval past. In the postwar era, as yōkai resurfaced in manga, they returned with a renewed ambiguity and dread. Predatory monsters like Jorōgumo, Gashadokuro, and Nure-onna punctured the child-friendly veneer of Shigeru Mizuki's *GeGeGe no Kitarō*, appearing to devour, possess, and terrorize the humans they encountered.

At the same time, the terrifying aspect of yōkai also persisted in the larger-than-life kaijū Godzilla, a monster whose colossal body and apocalyptic force reframed premodern anxieties within a modern cinematic mode. Godzilla remains perhaps the most potent critique of the doomsday consequences of modern science and "progress." Similarly, the shape-shifting *tanuki* (racoon dogs) in Isao Takahata's anime *Pom Poko* (1994) confront viewers with the ecological ruin of urban expansion. In one climactic scene, the tanuki revive the demonic procession itself, staging a harrowing reenactment of the Night Parade as both a spectacle of resistance and warning of environmental collapse (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. Two screen captures from *Pom Poko* (1994), dir. Isao Takahata. Shapeshifting tanuki appear as demons and beasts in a mesmerizing reenactment of the Night Parade. © Studio Ghibli. Distributed by Toho. Reproduced under fair use for scholarly analysis.

Despite these contradictions, many contemporary representations have also retained their grounding within the tradition of encyclopedic display. Much like the catalogic version of the Shinjuan scroll, the richly illustrated yōkai dictionaries and manuals of Shigeru Mizuki exemplify the enduring human impulse to impose order on the chaotic. As Michael Foster Dylan remarks, "in many ways Mizuki might be considered a modern-day Sekien, using the popular media of his day not only to document yōkai but also to invent new ones."[17] Other scholars likewise note how such popular "yōkai databases" translate folkloric content into a visual and narrative lexicon that is easy to navigate by modern readers.[18] Though their subject matter is the supernatural and bizarre, the systematic structure of these manuals recalls the Edo-period drive to label and categorize. This paradox—imposing order upon chaos through classification—remains central to the way yōkai are transmitted across time and cultures.

The logic of cataloguing monsters has also taken on new life in global franchises such as Pokémon. The Pokédex—its fictional digital encyclopedia—functions both as a narratorial feature within the anime and videogames, and as a broader cultural phenomenon, inviting players to collect, name, and organize over 1,000 unique "pocket monsters" (abbreviated as "Pokémon") across gaming consoles and Pokémon GO apps. Hiroki Azuma's theory of the "database animal" is especially useful here: in his analysis, contemporary Japanese consumers privilege databases of characters and attributes over big stories or grand narratives.[19] The Pokédex epitomizes this shift by presenting yōkai-like creatures as a field for collection and exploration as much as for storytelling. The recent publication of *Pokécology: Pokémon Ecology Encyclopedia* (2025) makes this dynamic explicit, blending scientific language and ecological frameworks with the franchise's familiar encyclopedic structure (see Figure 10). Edited and illustrated by Yonehara Yoshiari and Kinoshita Chihiro—both PhD holders from the University of Tokyo's Graduate School of Agricultural and Life Sciences—the volume offers systematic commentaries and new illustrations that reframe the imaginary creatures as subjects of ecological study. By situating Pokémon with a quasi-scientific taxonomy, the book demonstrates how cataloguing practices not only sustain interest in these fantastical beings but also integrate them into broader systems of knowledge and play.

Figure 10. Book cover of ポケモン生態図鑑 *Pokécology* (*Pokécology: Pokémon Ecology Encyclopedia*, 2025), by The Pokémon Company, Inc. © 2025. Published by Shogakukan.

Educational and commercial tie-ins such as the *Yokai Watch* guidebooks and English-language Scholastic handbooks extend this encyclopedic impulse, showing how categorization itself becomes a form of entertainment, in the contexts of learning, leisure, and play. These compendia encourage readers—often children—to memorize the different traits, powers, and origins of dozens of beings, transforming the alien and uncanny into something familiar and collectible. As shown in Figure 11, *Yokai Watch* handbooks marketed to schoolchildren in Japan and North America explicitly frame the activity of studying facts and data about cute, contemporary yōkai as both educational and fun, reinforcing the appeal of cataloging as play. Turning monsters into entries in a guidebook also places these wild and enigmatic characters within trusted and familiar frameworks. This dual process—of codifying while still preserving strangeness—echoes long-established traditions in which creatures both real and imagined, foreign and otherworldly, serve at once entertaining and didactic functions.

The persistence of yōkai across these encyclopedic forms reveals more than a simple continuity of cataloguing practice; it reflects a broader cultural strategy of managing chaos by turning it into pattern. From Sekien's woodblock prints to Mizuki's manga and the global reach of Pokémon, the monstrous has repeatedly functioned as a field for imaginative ordering and efforts to tame the unknown. At once whimsical and uncanny, such colorful works help readers grapple with disorder by inviting them to name, describe, and collect. Yōkai are thus both disruptive and integrative—destabilizing categories through their hybridity yet often enabling assimilation by being slotted into compendia and other predictable story worlds. In this sense, the encyclopedic treatment of yōkai and their modern descendants does more than organize information: it performs a cultural function, translating uncertainty into play, the unknowable into imaginative knowledge, and the overwhelming into new visual forms of enjoyment.

Figure 11. Two book covers from the Yo-kai Watch franchise that frame the cataloging of cute monsters as entertaining and educational. Left: 妖怪ウォッチ ようかい だいずかん：ともだち だいしゅうごう！ (*Yo-kai Watch Illustrated Encyclopedia: Friends Collection!*, 2014), by the Yo-kai Watch Production Committee. © 2014. Published by Shogakukan. Right: *Essential Handbook (Yo-kai Watch)* (2016), by Tracey West and Sonia Sander. © 2016. Published by Scholastic, Incorporated.

Conclusion

From medieval *tsukumogami* scrolls to Sekien's illustrated bestiaries, from Kyōsai's caricatures to Mizuki's manga and the global reach of *Pokémon*, a procession of monsters has marched across centuries of Japanese culture. Yōkai have been continually reshaped to meet shifting cultural needs—didactic, satirical, playful, and encyclopedic—yet they remain catalysts for artistic invention. Their evolution across picture scrolls, woodblock prints, manga, and transmedia reveals not only the endurance of cataloguing practices but also a deeper cultural strategy for managing uncertainty by transforming chaos into pattern. At once disruptive and integrative, whimsical and uncanny, they embody a way to confront the mysterious and the otherworldly through acts of naming, collecting, and imaginative play. Their resurgence in modern media ultimately shows how the human impulse to order the monstrous continues to thrive—sustaining creative engagement with the strange and uncanny, not only in Japan but also more recently with the rise of "Gross National Cool" across an ever-expanding global cultural sphere.

Notes

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all Japanese names in this essay will appear as in Japan, with family names first and personal names second. On the defining the term, the great scholar Komatsu Kazuhiko notes that "'Yōkai' is a tricky word, complicated by multiple definitions." Numerous terms might be used to describe yokai, including monsters, ogres, spirits, beasts and demons. Ultimately, he concludes that as a category, yokai might be best described as "strange entities," or "mysterious phenomena." See Komatsu, *An Introduction to Yōkai Culture*.

[2] Matthias Hayek, "Igyō to kairui: 'Wakan sansai zue" ni okeru 'yōkai-teki' sonzai (Strange and mysterious creatures: "monstrous" beings in the 'Wakan Sansai Zue')," in *Bunka o utsusu kagami o migaku : ijin, yōkai, fīrudo wāku*, ed. Hirofumi Tachinbana and Keiko Tezuka (Tōkyō-to Bunkyō-ku: Serika Shobō, 2018), p. 90.

[3] As the great yōkai scholar Komatsu Kazuhiko attests, there is currently "a fad" for all things yōkai—a "rejuvenation," if you will, thanks to the popularity of Japanese monsters everywhere. Kazuhiko Komatsu, *An Introduction to Yōkai Culture: Monsters, Ghosts, and Outsiders in Japanese History*, trans. Hiroko Yoda and Matt Alt, Kindle edition, Japan Library (Shuppan Bunka Sangyō Shinkō Zaidan) (Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo: Japan Publishing Industry Foundation for Culture, 2012), Kindle, 293 & 847 of 3216.

[4] The English translation that I use for this Japanese title draws on that rendered by the East Asian Scroll Paintings project of the University of Chicago Center for Art of East Asia. "View Scroll | East Asian Scroll Paintings," accessed October 8, 2025, https://scrolls.uchicago.edu/view-scroll/7.

[5] A vivid rendering of this tale can be found in the *Illustrated Scrolls of Animated Utensils* (*Tsukumogami Emaki*, 16th century), which feature a band of used tool spirits (*tsukumogami*) who have turned into monsters. The scrolls have been digitized and are available for teaching and learning via Kyoto University Digital Archive at https://rmda.kulib.kyoto-u.ac.jp/item/rb00013599 (English version: https://rmda.kulib.kyoto-u.ac.jp/en/item/rb00013599)

[6] Ibid., 205–206.

[7] Michael Dylan Foster, *The Book of Yokai: Mysterious Creatures of Japanese Folklore* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2015), p. 166.

[8] Yōkai experts Matt Alt and Hiroko Yoda translate this title as *Japandemonium*, foregoing the literal translation for *Hyakki* as "one hundred demons" that most scholars use. Per their understanding, the term implies "a great many demons" (or, alternatively *hundreds* of demons). Anticipating this interpretation, Foster discusses the broader meaning of the proverbial "one hundred" and its important symbolic implications in literature about the mysterious. See Matt Alt, Hiroko Yoda, and Toriyama Sekien, *Japandemonium Illustrated: The Yokai Encyclopedias of Toriyama Sekien* (Newburyport, Unite States: Dover Publications, Incorporated, 2017), p. x, and Foster, *The Book of Yokai*, 166.

[9] Alt, et al., *Japandemonium Illustrated,* p. ix.

[10] In my first monograph on working women, I explore the Edo-period drive to catalog and systematize the world as it applied to the ways Yokohama artists represented foreigners in Japan's treaty ports in the mid-nineteenth century. To make these unfamiliar figures legible to domestic audiences—often imagined metaphorically as "monsters" or "beasts"—such artists often created prints that functioned as visual encyclopedias, classifying the principal foreign groups (American, British, French, Russian, Dutch) entering Japan. Such series frequently included taxonomies of prostitutes as well, aiding viewers in differentiating the foreign male clients they served. Davis, Ann Marie L. *Imagining Prostitution in Modern Japan, 1850–1913*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020, 60–62.

[11] See Alt, et al., *Japandemonium Illustrated,* p. ix.

[12] In the absence of a standard translation, I have provided my own translation for this work. Of others I have seen, I am also fond of the translation form the Japan National Diet Library, "Kyōsai's paintings of the demon horde."

[13] Of the cinematic nature of Japanese handscrolls, see Isao Takahata, *Jūniseiki no animēshon : kokuhō emakimono ni miru eigateki anime*-teki naru mono (Tōkyō: Tokuma Shoten, 1999); Murase, Miyeko. *Emaki, Narrative Scrolls from Japan*. New York, N.Y: Asia Society, 1983; and Eija Niskanen, "Untouched Nature, Mediated Animals in Japanese Anime," *WiderScreen.Fi*, 2007, https://widerscreen.fi/2007/1/untouched_nature_mediated_animals_in_japanese_anime.htm.

[14] Kyōsai Kawanabe, *Gyōsai hyakki gadan* (Tōkyō: Kaishinrō zō, 1890), p. 2.

[15] Pinpointing the origins—and even the definition—of "modern manga" remains a matter of debate among scholars. As Shige Suzuki and Ronald Stewart note, any history of manga depends on how the term is defined. They identify three major frameworks: a "long-tradition" view that traces manga back to premodern visual culture as early as the eighth century; an Osamu Tezuka-centered view that anchors modern manga in the post-1945 rise of story manga; and a late-nineteenth-century view that ties manga's emergence to Western satirical comics and the expansion of Japan's modern print-media industry. While the first two approaches circulate widely in popular discourse, Suzuki and Stewart observe that the third has become increasingly influential in contemporary scholarship. Eike Exner likewise locates the birth of modern manga in the late nineteenth century, linking it to the appearance of pantomime strips and text-based cartoons—both domestic creations and adaptations of foreign material circulating within an international comics culture then dominated by American publications—from the 1890s. Crucially, Exner explicitly rejects the "long-tradition" thesis, arguing that the idea of manga as a centuries-old Japanese artform is a modern myth rather than a historically grounded genealogy. For their overview of the emergence of manga, please see Shige Suzuki and Ronald Stewart, *Manga: A Critical Guide*, Bloomsbury Comics Studies (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), pp. 11–24. For a detailed history of modern comics in

Japan from the 1890s, see Eike Exner, *Manga: A New History of Japanese Comics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2025), pp. 4–27. And for his thoughtful rebuttal of the "long-tradition" view, see Eike Exner, *Comics and the Origins of Manga: A Revisionist History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2021), especially pp 144–155.

[16] "Yōkai Manga Naze Moteru? Saike Na Kanzen Chōaku Urusai Gendai 'Nan Ni Mo Nai,'" *Yomiuri Database Service*, October 27, 1968, p. 25.

[17] Foster, *The Book of Yokai*, p. 74.

[18] See notably Alt, et al., *Japandemonium Illustrated*; and Deborah Shamoon, "The Yōkai in the Database: Supernatural Creatures and Folklore in Manga and Anime," *Marvels & Tales* 27, no. 2 (2013): 276–89, doi:10.13110/marvelstales.27.2.0276.

[19] Hiroki Azuma, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, [English ed.] (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

Glossary of Terms

***Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō* (ゲゲゲの鬼太郎)**

A manga series created by Shigeru Mizuki in the 1950s, serialized from 1960 onward. It played a major role in popularizing yōkai in postwar Japan. The series features Kitarō, a yōkai boy who defends humans from malevolent spirits.

Gross National Cool

A term coined by foreign policy researcher Douglas McGray in his 2002 article by the same name. It describes Japan's global cultural influence through pop culture, fashion, and media, rather than traditional economic or military power.

Hyakki Yagyō (百鬼夜行, also pronounced *Hyakki Yakō*)

Translated literally as "Night Parade of One Hundred Demons"—a legendary procession of yōkai. The concept dates back to the Heian period (794–1185) and was popularized in Edo-period (1603–1868) art and literature.

***Jiji Manga* (時事漫画)**

A genre of political and editorial cartoons that emerged in the late Meiji period (early 20th century). It was one of the earliest sustained comic serials in modern Japan, often featuring political satire and commentary on current events. Influenced by Western publications like the British humor magazine *Punch*, *Jiji Manga* helped shape the development of modern Japanese comics and visual journalism.

Kappa (河童)

A water-dwelling yōkai known for its dish-like head, webbed limbs, and mischievous nature. References to kappa appear in medieval Japanese texts, with widespread folklore from the Edo period onward. In modern times, *kappa* have inspired numerous pop culture characters, appearing in manga, anime, and video games—such as in Pokémon (e.g., Ludicolo) and Yokai Watch (Walkappa, Nogappa, Kappa-chan, and Faux Kappa, among others)—often portrayed with humorous or friendly traits. Also known as Kawatarō (listed below).

Kasa-obake (傘お化け)

A whimsical *tsukumogami* shaped like an umbrella with one eye and a long tongue. Popularized in Edo-period ghost stories, it later became a staple in 20th-century children's media. Today, Kasa-obake appears in popular mixed media as a playful or comedic character. Its iconic design and mischievous nature have made it a recognizable figure in series like *GeGeGe no Kitarō* and other yōkai-themed media,

Kawatarō (川太郎)

A regional or alternate name for the kappa (listed above), that usually appears in early folklore and regional dialects, especially in Kyushu and western Japan. Depicted in classical works such as the encyclopedia *Wakan Sansai Zue* (1712) and the *Illustrated Bestiary of Night Demons* (*Gazu Hyakki Yagyō*, 1776), which served to standardize and popularize the image of the Kappa in Japanese visual culture.

Kitazawa Rakuten (北沢楽天)

A pioneering cartoonist active in the late Meiji period (1868–1912). He introduced Western-style comic art to Japan and is often considered the father of modern manga. His comic supplement, *Jiji Manga* (時事漫画, *Comic Strips of Current Events*), which ran from 1902–1932, featured satirical cartoons that poked fun at contemporary society and also carried comic strips from foreign newspapers. It was the first sustained comic serial in Japan.

Ōnamazu (大鯰**)**

A giant catfish believed to cause earthquakes. It appears in Edo-period texts and art, often in the context of earthquake mythology. This myth gained popularity in Edo-period woodblock prints, especially after the 1855 Ansei earthquake. In modern media, Ōnamazu has inspired numerous characters, including the character Zoonama in *Dragon Ball GT*, the creature Whiscash (Japanese: Namazun) in *Pokémon*, and Namazugami (Catfish God) in *GeGeGe no Kitarō*.

Otogizōshi (お伽草子**)**

A collection of around 400 short, illustrated tales from the Muromachi (1336–1573) to early Edo period (1603–1868). Though primarily entertaining, many stories include moral or celebratory endings. The famous allegory of the Night Parade of One Hundred Demons, or *Hyakki Yagyō* (百鬼夜行), appears in this collection, classified under the *Iruimono* (non-human tales) category. Scholars divide *Otogizōshi* into six types: court tales, religious tales, warrior tales, commoner tales, tales of foreign lands, and non-human tales.

Rokurokubi (ろくろ首**)**

Yōkai that are most often depicted as women whose necks stretch to supernatural lengths, often during the night while their bodies sleep. They were catalogued in Toriyama Sekien's Edo-period yōkai bestiaries such as *Gazu Hyakki Yagyō*, which helped standardize their imagery. Today, Rokurokubi continue to appear in modern yōkai manga like *GeGeGe no Kitarō*.

Tsukumogami (付喪神**)**

Tools or household objects that gain a spirit after existing for 100 years. They are often depicted as animated and sometimes mischievous beings. This idea emerged in Heian-period Buddhist texts and was elaborated in Muromachi- and Edo-period art and folklore.

Wakan Sansai Zue (和漢三才図会**)**

An illustrated encyclopedia compiled by Terajima Ryōan in 1712 (Edo period). It blends Chinese and Japanese knowledge, including entries on flora, fauna, minerals, and yōkai. Its encyclopedic format and visual style influenced later works like Toriyama Sekien's yōkai catalogs and continues to shape Japanese manga today. The tradition of cataloging fantastical beings lives on in modern manga and anime through fictional encyclopedias and databases, such as the Pokédex in *Pokémon*, Yo-kai Watch's Yo-kai *Medallium*, and various monster guides in fantasy series.

Yōkai (妖怪**)**

A broad category of supernatural beings in Japanese folklore. The concept spans from ancient times through the Heian, Edo, and modern periods, evolving in literature, art, manga, and anime. In addition to those mentioned already, yōkai are also central figures in popular manga titles today such as *Natsume's Book of Friends*, *InuYasha*, and *Nura: Rise of the Yokai Clan*. Blending folklore with fantasy and adventure, such titles often reinterpret traditional yōkai for modern audiences.

Digital Exhibits and Databases

- **"Toriyama Sekien's Illustrated Night Parade of the Demon Horde"** is a small digital exhibit in the Japan National Diet Library (NDL) Image Bank that not only introduces Sekien's four-volume bestiary but also suggests the great impact of this work by featuring some of Sekien's yōkai alongside other Edo-period prints of the same creatures. Students will not only learn about some of the famous myths and legends that comprise Japanese folklore but also compare and contrast these creatures as they appear in different artists' works.
- The **Database of Folktales of Mysterious Phenomena and Yōkai (Sprits, Ghosts, and Monsters)** is a highly popular Japanese database with over 35,000 entries by the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken) and its former director, Professor Emeritus Kazuhiko Komatsu, the foremost yōkai scholar in Japan today. Using the "Translate" function in their browser, students can search the database to compare and learn about practically any known yōkai. The English homepage to this site offers an authoritative glossary of important terms.
- The Digital Exhibit **"East Asian Scroll Paintings"** by the University of Chicago Center for Art of East Asia, offers a rich, searchable database of over ninety-six rare handscrolls held and curated by museums in China, Great Britain, Japan, and the United States. Apropos the topic of monsters and yōkai, "Scroll #7 from this collection reveals the entire Night Parade of One Hundred Demons Picture Scroll"(aka the Shinjuan scroll) by Tosa Mitsunobu. https://scrolls.uchicago.edu/view-scroll/7
- **Yokai.com, the Illustrated Database of Japanese Folklore.** Evocative of Sekien's late-18th-century *Illustrated Japandemonium*, this online database offers a type of online reference book that follows a systematic format including appealing author-created illustrations, names, Japanese translations, alternate names, and descriptions of each individual yōkai's appearance, behavior, interactions, origins and legends. While not the product of a professional scholarship (and "not intended as an academic research project"), this website offers one of the most appealing, comprehensive, and authoritative reference tools on yōkai in English.

Discussion Questions

1. What are yōkai, and why are they important in Japanese culture? Discuss their roles in art, science, storytelling, and modern manga.
2. Before reading this article, had you heard of yōkai or encountered Japanese monsters in media? Where did you see them, and what were your impressions?
3. What is the Night Parade of One Hundred Demons, and how has it evolved over time? What kinds of yōkai typically appear in these parades?
4. What are *tsukumogami*, and how do they connect to the Night Parade tradition? How did this genre help people make sense of the world around them?
5. Why do you think folklorists like Yanagita Kunio and manga artists like Mizuki Shigeru were drawn to studying or depicting yōkai? What concerns or motivations might have shaped their work?
6. Why did early twentieth-century artists like Kitazawa Rakuten dismiss yōkai, and why do you think monsters remain popular in Japan today despite earlier predictions that they could disappear?
7. How do the manga in Rakuten's magazine *Jiji Manga* compare to the styles and themes of popular manga today? What has changed, and what has stayed the same?
8. Are there monsters in other cultures that remind you of yōkai? How can we compare them, and what do these similarities or differences suggest?
9. What role do monsters play in societies around the world? Why do so many cultures create folktales and art about supernatural beings, and what human fears or hopes do these stories explore?
10. Why do you think Japanese monsters—once rooted in local folklore—are now popular overseas? What aspects of yōkai appeal to global audiences?
11. How do the Shinjuan scroll, Sekien's bestiary, and Kyōsai's *Illustrations of a Hundred Demons* each "organize" or categorize yōkai? What do these shifting methods reveal about how Japanese society reimagined its monsters over time?
12. How do we continue to categorize monsters today—in games, manga, movies, or online fandoms like Pokémon, Dungeons & Dragons, or SCP Wiki? How are these modern systems similar to or different from the historical examples in this article?