

Monsters, Ghosts and the Making of Modern Japan

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Course Outline / Description

The Japanese popular imagination has always been haunted by myriad monsters, ghost, demons, and goblins that have always both frightened and entertained. But these are by no means the only two roles that such creatures have played in Japanese history. In this class we will study the many ways that monsters and ghosts have symbolized and personified the issues, problems, hopes and fears that have shaped modern Japan. We will begin by looking at the importance of the horrific and grotesque in the creation of Japanese popular culture in the 17th century. We will then discuss how 19th century Meiji modernizers created the scientific study of “monsterology” to debunk peasant superstition and to redirect supernatural belief toward a divine emperor. We will also examine how artists like Kawanabe Kyōsai, and writers such as Izumi Kyōka used monsters and ghosts to both resist and satirize modernization. We end the first half of the semester by looking at how the Western observer Lafcadio Hearn used Japanese ghost stories to feed a foreign appetite for images of a mysterious Orient. Of course, this class will also examine modern uses of monsters and ghosts. We will begin the second half of the semester by examining how manga author Mizuki Shigeru used yōkai to help provide continuity with the past in a postwar Japan that had been torn from its traditions. We will discuss the political origins of Godzilla and read manga by authors such as Hino Hideshi and Umezu Kazuo who used horror to express their anxieties about the state of Japanese society in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. The course will finish with a look at recent Japanese TV and movie monsters from adult horror films like *The Ring* to popular children’s animation like *Pokémon*. Our main concerns will be what such media say about Japan today, and how their popularity abroad shapes foreign preceptions of the country.

Section 2

Course Objectives/Goals/Learning Outcomes

At the completion of this course, students will be able to explain and discuss many of the social, economic and political conditions that have shaped Japanese history and identity. They will also learn a great deal about Japanese, folklore, religion, art and popular culture, and be able to recognize the socio-political subtexts that inform them.

Section 3

Class Schedule

Lecture 1: Course Introduction: Why Study Monsters?

The Supernatural in Pre-modern Japan: From Mononoke to Yōkai

Lecture 2: **Reading Assignment:** (1) and (2) “Introduction” from *Japanese Ghosts and Demons* by Akira Yamamoto; and “Tengu, the Mountain Goblin” by Pat Fister, from *Japanese Ghosts and Demons*.

Yōkai and Yūrei in Edo Period Entertainment and Political Satire

- Lecture 3: **Reading Assignment: (7)** “Natural History of the Weird” from *Pandemonium and Parade* by Michael Dylan Foster, (the section on Toriyama Sekien beginning on page 107 is most important).
- Lecture 4: **Reading Assignment: (10)** “One Hundred Demons and One Hundred Supernatural Tales” by Midori Deguchi from *Japanese Ghosts and Demons*.
- Lecture 5: **Reading Assignment: (8)** “Vengeful Spirits,” from *Archetypes in Japanese Film*, by Gregory Barrett
- Lecture 6: **Reading Assignment: (12)** “Kuniyoshi’s Minamoto Raikō and the Earth Spider: Demons and Protest in Late Tokugawa Japan” by Melinda Takeuchi in *Ars Orientalis*, Vol. 17.

Monster Presentations 1 and 2

Monsters and Ghosts in Early Modern Japan

- Lecture 7: **Reading Assignment: (14)** “Science of the Weird,” from *Pandemonium and Parade* by Michael Dylan Foster.

Monster Presentations 3 and 4

- Lecture 8: **Reading Assignment: (17)** *The Legends of Tono*, by Yanagita Kunio.

Monster Presentations 5 and 6

- Lecture 9: **Reading Assignment: (19.1) and (19.2)**, “Hell Screen,” from *Rasamon and other Stories* by Akutagawa Ryūnosuke; and “The Holy Man of Mount Koya,” From *Japanese Gothic Tales* by Izumi Kyōka.

Monster Presentations 7 and 8

- Lecture 10: **Reading Assignment: (20)** “Of Ghosts and Goblins,” by Lafcadio Hearn from *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*.

Monster Presentations 9 and 10

- Lecture 11: **Reading Assignment: (23) and (24)** “Reconciliation” by Lafcadio Hearn, from *Shadowings* and “The Story of Mimi-nashi Hoichi” and “Yuki Onna,” by Lafcadio Hearn from *Kwaidan*.

- Lecture 12: **Reading Assignment:** “The Human Chair” and “The Caterpillar” From *Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, by Edogawa Rampo.

Monster Presentations 11 and 12

- Lecture 12: **Reading Assignment: (26)** Butoh: Twenty Years Ago We Were Crazy, Dirty and Mad,” *The Drama Review: TDR*, Vol. 30, No. 2.

- Lecture 13: **Quiz 1 and Discussion**
- Lecture 14: **Monster Presentations 13-19**
- Lecture 15: **No Class (Gaidai Festival)**
- Lecture 16: **Reading Assignment: (27)** “Momotaro (The Peach Boy) and the Spirit of Japan: Concerning the Function of Fairy Tale in Japanese Nationalism of the Early Shōwa Age” by Klaus Antoni, in *Asian Folklore Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 1
- Monster Presentations 20 and 21**
- Lecture 17: **Reading Assignment: (28)** “The Birth of Gojira,” from *Godzilla on My Mind*, by William Tsutsui.
- Discuss Scenes From:** *Gojira* (Godzilla), Honda Ishirō, dir., 1954
- Monstrous Change and Ghostly Nostalgia in Postwar Japan**
- Lecture 18: **Reading Assignment: (29)** “The Godzilla Franchise” from *Godzilla on My Mind*, by William Tsutsui.
- Monster Presentations 22 and 23.**
- Lecture 19: **Watch in Class:** *GeGeGe no Kitaro* cartoons
- Reading Assignment:** “Media of the Weird,” from *Pandemonium and Parade* by Michael Dylan Foster.
- Monster Presentations: 24 and 25**
- Lecture 20: **Reading Assignment: (32)** “Haunted Travelogue: Hometowns, Ghost Towns and Memories of War,” by Michael D. Foster, in *Mechademia*, Volume 4.
- Monster Presentations 26 and 27**
- Lecture 21: **Reading Assignment: (34)** “Monstrous Loss: The Dismemberment and Reanimation of the National Body in Japanese War and Horror Manga,” by Mark Hollstein.
- Lecture 22: **Reading Assignment: (35) and (36)** “Unusual Fetus: My Baby” from *Lullabies from Hell* by Hino Hideshi and *The Drifting Classroom, Chapters 1 & 3* by Umezu Kazuo.
- Monster Presentations 28 and 29**
- Lecture 23: **Quiz 2 and Discussion**
- Lecture 24: **Reading Assignment: (38)** “The Spiral Obsession,” in *Uzumaki*, by Junji Ito.
- Discuss Scenes From:** *Uzumaki*, Higuchinsky, dir. 2000.

J-Horror Today at Home and Abroad

Lecture 25: **Reading Assignment: (39)** “Spiraling into Apocalypse” by Jay McRoy From *Nightmare Japan*.

Monster Presentations 30 and 31

Lecture 26: **Reading Assignment: (40)** “Ghosts of the Present, Specters of the Past: *Kaidan* and the Haunted Family in the Cinema of Nakata Hideo and Shimizu Takashi” from *Nightmare Japan: Japanese Contemporary Horror Cinema*, by Jay McRoy.

Lecture 27: **Reading Assignment: (41)** “Floating Water” in *Dark Water* by Suzuki Koji.

Monster Presentations 32 and 33

Lecture 28: **Reading Assignment: (44)** “Pokemon: Getting Monsters and Communicating Capitalism” from *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*, by Anne Allison.

Monsters and Marketing in the Age of Globalization

Monster Presentations 34 and 35

Lecture 29: Murakami Takashi and the Ghosts of 3/11

Lecture 30: **Review/ Last Day to Turn in Presentation Papers**

Reading Materials:

All reading assignments will be available in the “Assignments” section of Blackboard from which they can be downloaded and printed or read online.

Section 4

Grading:

Quiz 1: 20 percent

Quiz 2: 20 percent

Final Exam: 20 percent

Participation: 10 percent

Class Presentation: 15 percent

Presentation Essay: 15 Percent

Section 5

Quizzes:

Two quizzes and a final exam will be given over the course of the semester; they will be comprised of about 25 true-or-false and multiple-choice questions. You will have about thirty minutes to answer, after which we will correct and discuss the questions in class.

Participation:

Attendance will generally be taken by circulating a roll during class. If you come late, it is your responsibility to make sure you sign the roll. If you must be absent, please talk to me before the class you will miss to see if your absence can be excused. Your score in this category depends upon BOTH regular attendance and regular participation.

Monster Presentation:

You will be required to make a brief (about 5-7 minutes) presentation to the class on a particular monster of your choice. Two or more students will make a presentation at the beginning of most class periods. A sign-up list with possible presentation dates will be made available to students early in the semester. Your presentation may be about any supernatural being **as long as it is Japanese in origin**. In other words, you can choose to explain one of the hundreds of traditional *yōkai*, any ghostly character from folklore or even a ghost/monster from a contemporary Japanese monster movie, television show, J-horror film, manga or anime. Your presentation should include visual aids such as (but not limited to) PowerPoint slides containing images relevant to your topic. You must also provide a list of sources that you used in preparing your presentation.

Presentation Paper:

You must write up the information you provide in your presentation in the form of a double-spaced typed, four to six-page paper. The paper is due at the end of the semester; however, you may turn it in at any time after your class presentation. Both your presentation and essay should explain the basic physical and psychological characteristics of your monster or ghost as well as other basic information such as from where the creature came; what kind of social situation may have engendered it or what social or psychological fears it might represent or what societal role it might play; the period or years it was popular or prevalent; how it evolved over time; its special characteristics or powers and from where these powers come; the kinds of media it appears in; how you can protect yourself from its powers; how it is related to other kinds of Japanese or foreign ghosts or monsters, etc. You should also include some of your own reaction to it such as why you picked it; what about it is interesting or important to you? You must reference your sources in the text of your paper and provide a works cited page that includes a full citation at the end.