

Ghosts, Goblins, and Godzillas: The Supernatural History of Japan

History 299

Instructor: Terrence Jackson

Course Description

In recent years, Hollywood has exposed Americans to Japanese ghost stories through popular remakes such as *The Ring* and *The Grudge*. However, ghosts, goblins, and other monsters have long haunted Japanese popular culture, and can tell us much about its history. This course uses folk stories, religious tracts, paintings, movies, comics, scholarly research, and various other materials to investigate not only Japan's enduring fascination with supernatural creatures, but also transformative periods of its past. Among our topics of examination will be the meaning of ghosts and magic in the religions of Shinto and Buddhism; the importance of spirits in constructing gender ideals in Japan's classical age; the use of supernatural explanations for traumatic historical events such as political revolution in the 19th century; the psychological value in transforming enemies into cruel, impure goblins during WWII; and the metaphors of monsters and cyborgs to express the anxieties of the nuclear and high-tech age. Students will leave this course with a general understanding of Japanese history since the 7th century and specific skills for relating culture to social and political change in history.

Course Goals

- To improve your critical eye toward culture and ability to access its relationship to historical development.
- To develop skills for analyzing historical materials such as reading primary documents.
- To improve writing skills.

Texts

In Godzilla's Footsteps edited by William Tsutsui and Michiko Ito

Civilization and Monsters: Spirits of Modernity in Meiji Japan by Gerald Figal

The Making of Modern Japan by Kenneth Pyle

Handouts (copy voucher to be purchased at bookstore)

Assignments and Grading

Attendance

Do not miss class! For every absence over 3 you will lose 1% off of your final grade.

Participation (25%)

Joining into our daily class discussion is essential for those who want to receive a strong grade in this class. It will be impossible for you to meaningfully participate unless you have completed the reading by class time, so make sure that it is done.

Homework and In-Class Assignments (15%)

Students will do a variety of in-class assignments and homework. Much of this will ask them to reflect on their readings or analyze visual documents.

Short Papers (50%—10% each)

Students will write five short papers that ask them to tie-together what they have learned in their readings and in-class discussions. Each paper will be 3-5 pages in length. See appendix for more details.

Final—Build-a-Monster (10%)

Students will create their own Japanese monster for the final. See appendix for details.

Schedule

The instructor reserves the right to change the schedule or assignments at any time.

Week 1 The Monstrous Mind: Theories and Tropes

Readings

- “Monster Culture: Seven Theses” by Jeffery Jerome Cohen in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen
- “Monsters, Marvels, and Meaning” from *Embodying the Monster* by Margrit Shidrick
- “The Origins of Monsters” in *The Monster in the Machine* by Zakiya Hanafi
- “Evil, monstrosity, and the sublime” in *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters: The Ideas of the Otherness* by Richard Kearney

Week 2 Enter the Monster: Early Writing and Imagining “Japan”

Readings

- Excerpt from *Kojiki* translated by Donald Philippi
- Excerpt from *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times*
- Excerpt from *Records of Wind and Earth* translated by Michiko Aoki
- “The Fabulous East” by Mary Campbell in *The Witness and the Other World*

Week 3 The Natural Supernatural: Shaping Shinto

Short Paper 1 Due (Monday)

Readings

- “Japanese Religion in Historical Perspective” in *Japanese Religions: A Cultural Reader* by Robert Ellwood
- “Oni: The Japanese Demon” by Juliann Wolfgram in *Japanese Ghosts and Demons* edited by Stephen Addiss
- “The Question of Monsters and Ancestor Worship” by Gerald Figal in *Productions of Culture in Japan*
- “Shoki, the Demon Queller” by Matthew Welch in *Japanese Ghosts and Demons* edited by Stephen Addiss

Visuals

Princess Mononoke (anime movie)

Week 4 Salvation At Gates of Hell: Buddhism

Readings

- Excerpt from “Rootless Weeds” from *Early Modern Japanese Literature: An Anthology* by Haruo Shirane
- “How E no Ubasoku Recited Spells and Employed Demonic Deities” and “How Kaya no Yoshifuji Became The Husband of a Fox and was Saved by Kannon” from *Konjaku Monogatari*
- “Bird Catcher in Hedes” in *Japanese Folk Plays*
- “A Plea from Hell” and “The Bridge” from *Japanese Tales* translated by Royall Tyler

Visuals

Hell Scrolls
Scenes from *Jigoku* (movie)

Week 5 Foxy Women and the Peach Boy: The Culture of Gender
Short Paper 2 Due (Monday)

Readings

“Yurei: Tales of Female Ghosts” by Brenda Jordan in *Japanese Ghosts and Demons* ed. Stephen Addiss
“The Loving Fox” from *Japanese Tales* translated by Royall Tyler
“The Adventures of Momotaro, the Peach Boy” in *Myths and Legends of Japan* by F. Hadland Davis
“The Chrysanthemum Vow” and “The Lust of the White Serpent” in *Tales of Moonlight and Rain* translated by Ueda Akinari
“How a Man’s Wife became a Vengeful Ghost” “Red Heat” from *Konjaku Monogatari*
“Demon Women” in *Behind the Mask*

Visuals

Scene from *Onibaba* (movie)

Week 6 Ogres in the Woods: Rural Life in Premodern and Early Modern Periods

Readings

“Provincial Culture” in *Edo Culture* by Nishiyama Matsunosuke
“Ghosts, Ghosts, and Demons in Japan” by Terence Barrow in *Japanese Grotesqueries*
“The Invisible Pair,” “Japan Means Trouble!,” and “Bewitched” from *Japanese Tales* translated by Royall Tyler
“How the Lute Genjō was snatched by an Oni” and “How the Hunter’s Mother became and One and tried to devour her children” from *Konjaku Monogatari*
“Spirited Away: Film of the Fantastic and Evolving Japanese Folk Symbols” by Noriko Reider in *Film Criticism* 29:3 (2005)

Visuals

Scenes from *Gegege no Kitaro* (Japanese TV series) and *Spirited Away* (anime movie)

Week 7 Goblins on Stage: The Culture of Early Modern Urbanization and Commercialization

Readings

“Ghosts and Nineteenth Century Kabuki” from *Early Modern Japanese Literature: An Anthology* by Haruo Shirane
“One Hundred Demons and One Hundred Supernatural Tales” in *Japanese Ghosts and Demons*
“Rootless Weeds” and “The Life of Shidoken” in *Early Modern Literature* edited by Haruo Shirane
“Thunderbolt” trans. by Royall Tyler in *Traditional Japanese Theater: An Anthology of Plays* edited by Karen Brazell

Visual

Woodblock Prints
TBA

Week 8 The Spirit(s) of Revolution: The Meiji Restoration

Short Paper 3 Due (Monday)

Readings

Excerpt from “Shiramine” from *Tales of Moonlight and Rain* by Ueda Akinari
“Sakura Sōgōro” in *Peasant Uprisings* by Anne Walthall
“Bakumatsu Bakemono” and “Words and Changing Things” in *Civilization and Monsters* by Gerald Figal
“Edo in 1868: The View from Below” by M. William Steele in *Monumenta Nipponica* 45:2
“The Carnival of Edo” by Andrew Markus in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 45:2 (1985)

Visuals

Woodblock Prints/Fushiga
Scene from *Eejanaika* (movie)

Week 9-10 Monster vs. Science: Modernization

Readings

Excerpt from “The Monster in Fantasy and Reality” in *The Monsters in the Mind* by Frank Cawson
Reading in *The Making of Modern Japan* by Kenneth Pyle
“The Monstrous Scientific Revolution Comes to Japan” by Terry Jackson (unpublished)
“Modern Science and the Folk” and “Modern ‘Science’ of the Folk” in *Civilization and Monsters* by Gerald Figal
“Strange Games and Enchanted Science: The Mystery of Kokkuri” by Michael Foster in *Journal of Asian Studies* 65:5 (2006)

Visuals

Woodblock Prints

Week 11 “Frankenstein” Delano Roosevelt: WWII and Constructing the Enemy

Short Paper 4 Due (Monday)

Readings

Reading in *The Making of Modern Japan* by Kenneth Pyle
Excerpt from “Kirishitan Monogatari” translated in *Deus Destroyed* by Jurgis Elisonis
“A Thousand Years of Comics” in *The World of Japanese Comics* by Frederik Schodt
“The Demonic Other” by John Dower in *War Without Mercy*
“Apes and Others” and “Lesser Men and Supermen” by John Dower in *War Without Mercy*

Visuals

WWII Comics

Week 12 Monstrous Bombs and Ghostly Survivors: Making Sense of Defeat

Readings

Reading in *The Making of Modern Japan* by Kenneth Pyle
“Monsters and Mockery by Robert Jay Lifton in *Death in Life*
“Introduction” by William Tsutsui and “When Godzilla Speaks” by Susan Napier in *In Godzilla’s Footsteps* edited by William Tsutsui and Michiko Ito
“Akira and the Postnuclear Sublime” by Freda Freiberg in *Hibakusha Cinema*

Visuals

Excerpts from *Barefoot Gen* (manga)
Godzilla (movie)
Scenes from *Akira* (anime movie)

Week 13 Electronic Ecstasy, Android Anxiety: The Economic Miracle and the Technological Society

Readings

Reading in *The Making of Modern Japan* by Kenneth Pyle or “Technologies of Desire” in *Assembled in Japan: Electrical Goods and the Making of the Japanese Consumer* by Simon Partner
“Akira and Ranma ½: The Monstrous Adolescent,” “Doll Parts: Technology and the Body in *Ghosts in the Shell*” and “Ghosts and Bodies: The Technological Body” in *Anime: From Akira to Princess Mononoke* by Susan Napier
“From Ashes to Cyborgs: The Era of Reconstruction (1945-1960)” in *Millennial Monsters* by Anne Allison

Visuals

Scenes from *Ghosts in the Shell* (anime)

Week 14 Is that a monster in your pocket, or are you just happy about overseas sales figures?: Pokemon and Globalizing Japan

Short Paper 5 Due (Monday)

Readings

“Pokemon: Getting Monsters and Communicating Capitalism” in *Millennial Monsters* by Anne Allison
“Gotta Catch ‘Em All: The Pokemonization of America (and the World)” in *Millennial Monsters* by Anne Allison
“Panic Attacks: Anti-Pokemon Voices in the Global Market” by Christine Yano in *Pikachu’s Global Adventure*

Visuals

Scenes from *Pokemon* (anime TV series) and *Juon??* (movie)

Week 15 Build-a-Monster Due

Appendix

Short Paper Assignments

1. Apply one or more of the ideas/theories we have discussed regarding the meaning of monsters and use it to analyze one of the primary sources we read during the second week.
2. In what ways do monsters come to reflect the syncretic nature of religion in Japan? Or, in other words, how do monsters display both Shinto and Buddhist values?
3. What did urbanization do to folk monsters?
4. Can it be argued that modernization, rather than diminishing the importance of monsters, actually strengthened their presence in Japan?
5. Are Post-WWII monsters essentially the same as Tokugawa period monsters? What is different about them?

Build-a-Monster

Playing with the idea that monsters become more prevalent in societies during times of transformation or crisis, you will design a monster that helps to explain an event in Japanese history. The event you choose should **not** be one that we have spent a great deal of time on in class, and must be approved by the professor. Among possible choices the rise of Minamoto rule, the rise of Oda Nobunaga, conflagrations in Edo, news of the Opium Wars, the Sino-Japanese War, the Russo-Japanese War, U.S. Occupation, and Nixon's visit to China. However, you may also consult with the professor about other possibilities. There are three components to this assignment: the monster, the explanatory paper, and the presentation.

1. *The Monster*: Your monster may be visual (ie., a painting, a sculpture, a drawing, a cartoon, a video, a computer game, etc.), textual (ie., a story, a newspaper account, etc.), or performative (ie., a song, a play, etc.). Your imagination is your only limit. This component will be assessed based largely on the apparent effort you put into it, but part of that effort should be to incorporate aspects of Japanese monsters we have seen throughout the semester.
2. *The Explanatory Paper*: You will write a 4-6 paper to accompany your monster. This paper will explain the historical event and why your monster might have appeared at that time. This component will be assessed based on your understanding of the event and your rationale for the monster. You must use at least four academic (not internet) sources as reference works.
3. *The Presentation*: You will give a 5-10 presentation of your work. It should be organized and polished.

Descriptions of Visuals

(no particular order)

Gojira/Godzilla

The director of the original Japanese-version of *Godzilla*, *Gojira*, made the movie as a protest against nuclear weapons and the U.S. weapons program. The movie appeared in the aftermath of an accident during which a Japanese fishing vessel, the Lucky Dragon, was drenched with fallout from a American nuclear test in the Pacific Ocean. The American version sought to take advantage of the monster craze in the U.S. by importing the movie, but did a great deal of editing in order to soften the movie's critical nature and spliced in scenes with Raymond Burr.

Jigoku

This horror movie, made in 1960, tells the story of a couple of college students who are involved in a hit-and-run accident. The life of one of the students spirals into hell.

Ghosts in the Shell

This is the first in a series of animated movies that follow cyborgs in the year 2029 as they become independent of their creators and run amuck. It has a similar feel as the novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* or the short story "I, Robot."

Onibaba

Set in Japan's war-torn 14th century, an abandoned wife and mother make a living by ambushing warriors. The mother begins to wear a demon mask taken from upon of the murdered soldiers, only to find that it will not come off.

Eejanaika

This movie deals with period just before the fall of the Tokugawa government in 1868. This was a period of social, political, and economic chaos during which commoners reported tales of mysterious amulets falling from the sky and the appearance of strange creatures. Though not a "monster movie" per se, *Eejanaika* does show scenes of these fantastic creatures arriving in the city of Edo.

Princess Mononoke

This animation uses a fictional society (along with spirits and monsters/gods) to address the impact of industrial development on the environment. The presentation of the close connection between monster-like gods and nature present ideas related to Shinto.

Barefoot Gen

This animation is based on a series of comics published in the early 1970s by Keiji Nakazawa, who was 7 years old when the atomic bomb was dropped on his home city of Hiroshima. The comic looks at the aftermath of WWII through the eyes of a boy. Many of his scenes of the dying immediately following the bombing resemble ancient images of Buddhist hells, and indeed many of the survivors describe their experiences using as metaphor the Buddhist term Mappo ("end of the world").

Akira

Set in post-apocalyptic, this is not an anime about monsters. However, it does present a world in which youth have nothing grounding their lives, leading them to do monstrous things.

Spirited Away

This is a fantastic tale of a girl who is drawn into a spirit world full of monsters, ghosts, and strange creatures. It draws on folk images of these types of creatures in Japan.

Gegege no kitaro

A comic series that was turned into a television animation series about the lives of *yokai*, or Japanese folk spirits.

Hell Scroll

Japanese scroll from the twelfth century depicting various hells.

Pokemon

A television cartoon created in 1995 in which characters attempt to capture various “pocket monsters.”

Juon

Title of a successful series of horror movies. *The Grudge* was a Hollywood remake of one of these movies.