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Monsters at War: The Great Yōkai Wars, 1968–2005

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# Monsters at War: The Great Yōkai Wars, 1968–2005

Miike Takashi, the Japanese director of infamous films such as *Koroshiya Ichi* (2001, *Ichi the Killer*) and *Zeburaaman* (2004, *Zebraman*), surprised audiences by directing the 2005 remake of the 1968 horror/fantasy film, *Yōkai daisensō* (*The Great Yōkai War*).<sup>1</sup> With its cast of cute folkloric monsters (generically referred to in Japanese as *yōkai*), this was the first child-friendly movie produced by Miike, whose work is better known for excessive Tarantino-like violence, gangster stories, and blood spilled on screen. But, despite their association with simple and straightforward horror tales and family entertainment, both the 1968 classic and Miike's 2005 remake use *yōkai* to communicate strong, if also strongly differing, political messages. This essay compares the two films and also traces the evolution of the *Yōkai daisensō* story through several manga, anime, and live-action versions produced over the past forty years.

The emergence of *yōkai*-themed films in Japan dates from the 1960s and coincides with the television broadcast of Mizuki Shigeru's 1968–69 *Gegege no Kitarō* animation series, based in turn on Mizuki's hugely popular manga. The series traced the adventures of the *yōkai* boy Kitarō and his monster companions, particularly their battles with various other malevolent *yōkai* entities. Following the success of the television series, the film production company

Daiei pioneered the Japanese yōkai film genre in the late sixties, producing *Yōkai hyaku monogatari* (1968, One hundred monster stories), *Tōkaidō obake dōchū* (1969, Journey with monsters along the eastern sea road), and *Yōkai daisensō* (1968).

There has been a revival of these films in the twenty-first century, not only Miike's remake of *Yōkai daisensō* but also the film version of *Gegege no Kitarō* (2007) and its sequel in 2008, and film adaptations of other yōkai manga classics: *Dororo* (2007), based on Tezuka Osamu's 1967–68 manga, and *Nekome kozō* (2006, Cat-eye boy), based on the 1967–68 manga by Umezu Kazuo. The latter two films equate yōkai with sublime, subconscious emotions in a way that suits postmodern sensibilities, but the sequential art these films were based on did not manage to capture the art history of yōkai in a convincing way, so it has been Mizuki Shigeru's work that has carried the legacy of centuries of yōkai art into twentieth- and twenty-first century popular culture.

The *Yōkai daisensō* story spans the entire evolution of yōkai in popular media as described above: it began as an episode in Mizuki's *Gegege no Kitarō* manga, published in *Weekly Shōnen Magazine* in April 1966.<sup>2</sup> It was later adapted for two episodes of the *Gegege no Kitarō* television anime in 1968. A live-action film version followed in the same year, produced by Daiei and directed by Kuroda Yoshiyuki. And then there is Miike's 2005 live-action remake, produced by Kadokawa Film.

What follows examines the evolution of narrative patterns and character design in these four versions of *Yōkai daisensō*—the manga, the TV animation, and the two live-action films—to point out how the seemingly apolitical yōkai are positioned in twentieth- and twenty-first-century visual media to communicate different political messages.

## THE YŌKAI DAISENSŌ MANGA (1966)

Whether in the manga, animation, or live-action film versions, the *Yōkai daisensō* narratives center on a war fought between two groups of yōkai, a set of aggressors and defenders. The visual depiction of yōkai and yōkai wars goes back hundreds of years; for example, the Muromachi-period (1392–1573) *Tsukumogami emaki* (Utensil wars picture scroll) and Utagawa Yoshiiku's 1895 print *Kokkei Yamatoshiki* (Comical records of Japanese history) both depict wars between humans and yōkai. In the latter, each yōkai is designed to represent and ridicule soldiers from the Chinese army conquered in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95), Meiji Japan's first important military victory.<sup>3</sup> By the

time of the Pacific war, *yōkai* (mainly *oni* or demons) were routinely used in wartime cartoons to represent the Allied forces.<sup>4</sup> But the *Yōkai daisensō* narrative is the first work where two groups of *yōkai* fight each other in combat: in the 1960s manga, anima-

tion, and film, two sets of *yōkai*—one distinctly Japanese and one distinctly “Western”—reenact the traumas of the Second World War and the Cold War.

The *Yōkai daisensō* story in Mizuki’s original manga is based on the Japanese folktale of Momotarō, a young boy who leads a band of animal allies to rescue the island of Kikaigashima from the demons that infest it. The Momotarō story was repeatedly adapted for propaganda animation during WWII, in a process John Dower identifies as the “Momotaro paradigm,” where simplified quasi-folkloristic characters are equated with aspects of a perceived patriotism in an effort to justify acts of aggression.<sup>5</sup> In Mizuki’s updated manga narrative, an exotically dressed boy, wearing a Vietnamese leaf hat (*nón lá*) asks for the help of Japanese *yōkai* to liberate his remote Okinawan island from “Western” invading monsters. Despite the warning “Western monsters are cruel,” Kitarō gathers “pure-blooded” Japanese *yōkai* to go into war against the Westerners in Okinawa, to answer this Vietnamese child’s call for liberation from Western aggression.<sup>6</sup> The aggressors include a series of stereotypically Western monsters: a generic witch and werewolf as well as a Dracula figure derived from Béla Lugosi’s character in the 1931 film *Dracula* and a monster based on Boris Karloff’s monster from the 1931 film *Frankenstein*.

Analogies to the Pacific War (1942–45), the Battle of Okinawa (1945), and the Vietnam War (1959–75) are articulated early within the manga narrative, while visual references to the Korean War (1950–53) and the hydrogen bomb experiments on Bikini Atoll (1954) appear later in the episode. When the villagers hide in a cave waiting for death, the visual rendering of the cave is a close copy of the *kamekōbaka* (turtle-back tombs), ancient Okinawan tombs built on cave openings that Japanese defensive forces and local Okinawans used for cave warfare during the Battle of Okinawa. Caves were also put to similar use during the Vietnam War, which is explicitly mentioned within the narrative.<sup>7</sup> The Western monsters, trying to trick Kitarō into creating a demilitarized zone that alludes to the outcome of the Korean War, claim: “Hey Kitarō, we don’t want to fight a meaningless war, like Vietnam.”<sup>8</sup> The war ends when the Western monsters are blown up in a fireball in the middle of the ocean, a scene that evokes images of the Bikini atomic tests carried out by the United States military.<sup>9</sup>

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WORLD WAR AND THE COLD WAR.

One of the central nationalist tropes of the narrative is Kitarō's magical vest, Chanchanko, which is taken hostage by the Western forces. According to the manga, Chanchanko is woven from the hair of the deceased ancestors of the Hakaba no Kitarō lineage, as articulated by Kitarō's father:

Our kind, when we die, we leave one thread of spirit hair that keeps on living. Your vest is woven from those hairs. Your superpowers . . . are all thanks to the power of the spirit hair of your ancestors . . . If we cannot get back your vest, it will be a great insult to your ancestors.<sup>10</sup>

This aspect of the vest is reinforced on several occasions within the narrative. Without his vest, Kitarō is naked, injured, and powerless. He soon succumbs to sickness in the middle of the jungle, after losing his trademark long hair in one final, desperate fight. This echoes images of the manga-Mizuki character in Mizuki's autobiographical manga, who falls ill with malaria while stationed in Rabaul during World War II, and loses his hair.<sup>11</sup> However, in the midst of this desperate situation, the vest comes to the rescue of the Japanese troops:

The vest started to emit a tremendous power to aid its descendants. At the moment when the final member of the Japanese ghost lineage was about to die, the Chanchanko turned a stark shade of red, the color of the anger it felt against the Western monsters!<sup>12</sup>

In the closing credits, where insects sing the final theme songs, Kitarō again proclaims: "This time, sing the Gegege song for the Chanchanko, made of the spirit hair of my ancestors. I have never felt more grateful to them."<sup>13</sup>

Finally, the story comes full circle when the Vietnamese boy expresses his gratitude to his Japanese liberators.<sup>14</sup> In the figure of the helpless South-east Asian subjects awaiting rescue by pure-hearted Japanese heroes, the Momotarō paradigm that appears in the wartime Momotarō animation trilogy is now transplanted to a postwar popular visual narrative.<sup>15</sup>

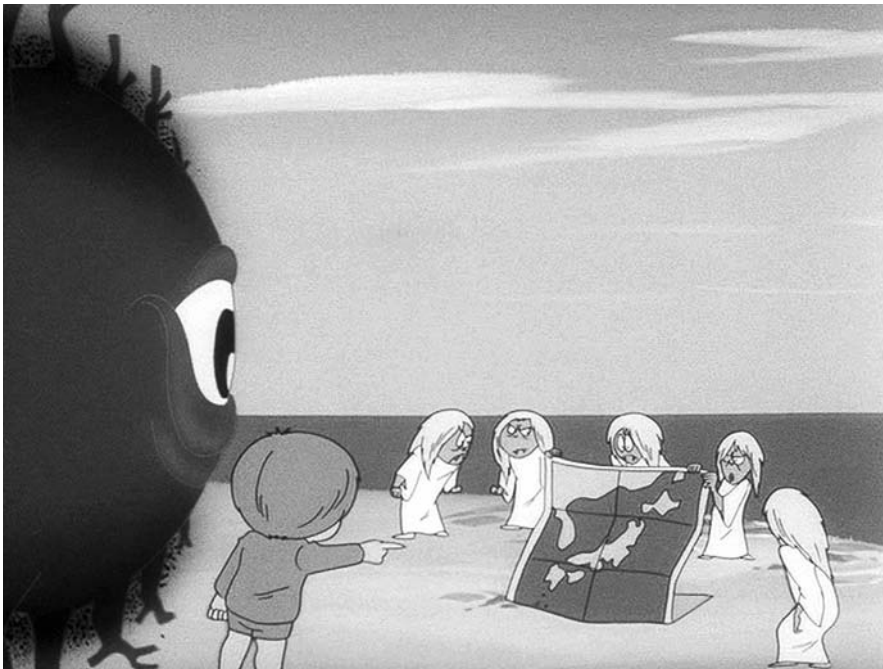
## YŌKAI DAISENSŌ ON TELEVISION AND ON FILM (1968)

The animated version of *Yōkai daisensō* aired on Fuji Television as part of the *Gegege no Kitarō* series on March 6 and 13, 1968 (two years after the manga version), and toned down the manga original somewhat. The notions that Western

monsters smell different and are cruel, aggressive, and dangerous were re-stated several times in the animation, and the discourse of pure-bloodedness remained. But references to the Vietnam War were cautiously cleared away, and the little boy asking for Kitarō's help was pictured as strictly Okinawan.

The cave fight scenes in the animated version no longer resemble historical images from the Battle of Okinawa as readily as in the manga version, but at one point the Western monsters pull out a map and plot their landing on Kyūshū, the southern main island of Japan. They thus reenact Operation Downfall, the Allied plan for the invasion of the Japanese mainland in 1945, with added references to a kind of “biological warfare” that will use a local monster to spread disease (Figure 1). The central message of the story is also unaltered. Chanchanko, the vest woven from the hair of Kitarō's ancestors, is still the symbol of ancestral lineage, and without the help of the ancestors the Japanese fight cannot be won.

The live-action film of *Yōkai daisensō*, directed by Kuroda Yoshiyuki, also appeared in 1968, though it did not feature the *Gegege no Kitarō* character. It was the second in a trilogy of yōkai films produced by Daiei Motion Pictures between 1968 and 1969. The two other films, *Yōkai hyaku monogatari*



**FIGURE 1.** A reenactment of Operation Downfall, the planned Allied invasion of Kyūshū, in an episode of the animated TV series *Yōkai daisensō*, 1968.

and *Tōkaidō obake dōchū*, followed story lines borrowed from period dramas (*jidaigeki*) and their narratives romanticizing Edo-period samurai virtue. The monsters in these two films have minimal dialogue and appear only as a supporting cast that allegorizes human weaknesses and fallacies.

In Daiei's *Yōkai daisensō*, on the other hand, *yōkai* take center stage, fighting a war with an invading monster from “the West” (*seiyō*). Perhaps because this genre was more accessible internationally than manga or Japanese television animation were in the late 1960s, the film toned down both visual and verbal references to the Pacific and Vietnam Wars and distilled the theme of the monster war as a metaphor for Japanese patriotism down to its most politically correct and nonconfrontational form. In this version the “Western” invader is an ancient Babylonian monster, Daimon, who arrives in Japan to take over the souls of humans and threatens the habitat of native monsters based on Japanese folklore—the *yōkai*. The film is set in the Edo period (1603–1867), and accordingly neither the invader nor the occupied land invites comparisons with world conflicts in 1968.

The character design and iconography of Daimon emphasize its Babylonian origins: it is partly based on the Burney relief, a Babylonian terra cotta wall carving (ca. 2000 BCE) from southern Iraq, often associated with Lilitu, the Babylonian female demon depicted with bird wings and claws.<sup>16</sup> Lilitu, mentioned in the Gilgamesh Epic (ca. 2000–2150 BCE), is a vampiric night demon that, like Daimon, lives on the blood of women and children. Daimon's ability to enter the bodies of its victims can be related to another Babylonian mythical being, Ekimmu, a vampire-like spirit that lives off the life force of its human victims. In the film, Daimon's body structure is based on the late Assyrian (ca. 1800 BCE) monumental sculptures and on reliefs found in Babylonia and Assyria, in the area where Iraq stands today. Those sculptures depict anthropomorphic demon beings with upright winged torsos and the hindquarters of birds of prey, wearing pointed caps on their horned, human heads.<sup>17</sup>

In the film, the giant Daimon has lain dormant as a statue since approximately 2000 BCE in the ancient Mesopotamian city of Ur, until it is awakened by treasure hunters. Once disturbed, it flies to Edo-period Japan and enters the body of a local feudal lord. Daimon lives off the blood and life energy of children and women, takes over the bodies of its victims, and can multiply itself into an army of demons or grow to huge size like the giant reptile Godzilla, popular in *kaijū* monster films since the mid-1950s.<sup>18</sup> Daimon's first battle with native Japanese spirit beings occurs when he tears down the Shintō shrine and the Buddhist altar at the feudal lord's home. These atrocities soon wake the Kappa water spirit, who is the first Japanese *yōkai* to be defeated by Daimon.

Following that, local monsters gather to protect their homeland and after several encounters they finally defeat the invader by stabbing it in the eye, its weak point. The monster is not killed, but it does fly away from Japan.

The film painstakingly attempts to avoid offending postwar and Cold War sensibilities by portraying the fight as one between Edo-period Japanese and Babylonian monsters, but the film's structure nevertheless repeats the Momotarō paradigm established by the animated Momotarō films produced during the Second World War and repeated in the *Yōkai daisensō* manga and anime. The Western monster is a tall, thin figure with sharp bodily features and a long face and nose: a lonesome figure against the cavalcade of Japanese monsters (Figure 2). It is dark, scary, and monochromatic, a generic monster without many features, and its cold temperament more closely matches the *kaijū* reptile entities of the Godzilla and Gamera films. The Japanese monsters, on the other hand, repeat the Momotarō motif of a youthful savior leading a team of endearing native heroes: they lack an adult, male leader figure, as they consist of comical creatures with childlike features such as big round heads, small bodies, and weak voices.

Accentuating the youth, humor, and colorfulness of the Japanese *yōkai* is the contrasting Daimon, who only enters the bodies of male authority figures. It remains a serious male adult character throughout the story, like the *oni* devil characters in the wartime animation *Momotarō: Umi no shinpei* (1945, Momotarō: Divine troops of the ocean). And following the Momotarō paradigm, Daimon is not killed but expelled from the islands. The monster also repeats motifs from ancient chronicles that could be said to constitute founding texts of the Japanese state: stabbed in the eye, it is defeated in the same way as the chief deity of Japanese folklore, the *Yama no kami* (mountain god) described in *Kojiki* (680 CE, Records of ancient matters) and *Nihon shoki* (720 CE, Chronicles of Japan).

In sum, then, the manga, animation, and film versions of the *Yōkai daisensō* produced in the late 1960s all center on the idea of a Western invasion of Asian regions, exoticized by geographical or temporal distance: Vietnam and Okinawa in manga and animation, and Edo Japan in the film version. In all cases, the adult-like foreign forces are defeated through the cooperation of childlike local monsters. In the manga and animated versions, the importance of ancestor reverence is also accentuated, in alignment with the Momotarō paradigm.

This reflects the economic and political atmosphere of 1960s Japan: in 1968, Japan's Gross National Product became the second largest in the world. In an era when Japanese postwar economic recovery was at its turning point,



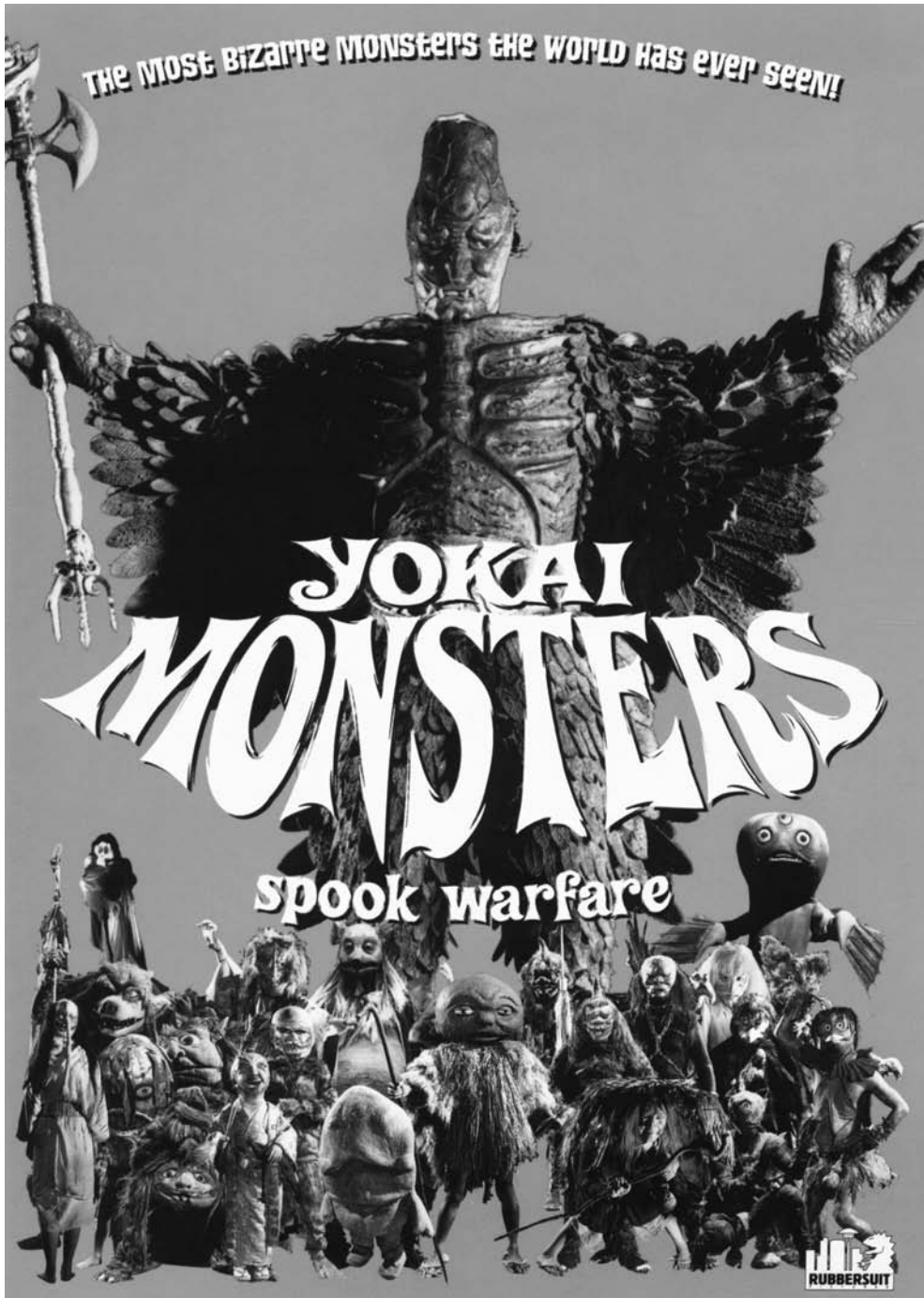


FIGURE 2. Daimon and the Japanese yōkai as depicted in the 1968 film version of *Yōkai daisensō*. The image is from the cover of the English-language DVD.

the Japanese monsters that reappeared in popular family-oriented media may have appeared guileless or innocent, but they reinforced the idea of a demarcation and rivalry between “Western” interests and Japanese ones. Simultaneously, the portrayal of Japan as protecting Asian cultures against Western occupation unmasks the ambivalent relationship of Japan toward the United States during the Cold War.

But a notable deviation from the Momotarō paradigm lies in the fact that until the end of the Second World War, yōkai were used as metaphors for foreigners and outsiders in popular visual media, while the yōkai in the *Yōkai daisensō* narratives represent “Japaneseness.” This important change can be attributed to the effect of the yōkai-themed sequential art produced by Mizuki, of which *Gegege no Kitarō* was just a part: Mizuki’s work contributed to the mascotization of these monsters, changing their roles from outsiders to representatives of an imagined, shared nostalgic Japanese past.<sup>19</sup>

## YŌKAI DAISENSŌ IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

As noted above, Miike Takashi, the director of the 2005 *Yōkai daisensō* remake, is noted for his visually exaggerated use of sexual and violent content as well as frequent application of surreal narrative and character development patterns, and, true to form, Miike delivered a relatively complex reworking of the simply structured fantasy story that constituted the 1968 classic. Miike’s version is situated in futuristic Tokyo, where yōkai fight the embodiment of pollution and alienation: mecha (mechanical objects) created from discarded rubbish and yōkai souls, brought to life by ancient yin–yang sorcery in the form of *onmyōdō* wizard Katō Yasunori, a villain based a character in *Teito Monogatari* (1971, Tale of the capitol), a novel by historian and yōkai researcher Aramata Hiroshi.

In Aramata’s novel, Katō is the descendant of native tribes that lived on the Japanese islands and who were annihilated by the Yamato court that constitute the ancestors of today’s Japanese. Katō’s parents were killed by the tenth-century Onmyōdō court wizard Abe no Seimei, and Katō was born from a dying mother. Katō, the human manifestation of the wrath of the annihilated tribes,<sup>20</sup> was raised in the Onmyōdō wizardry tradition and has returned to Japan throughout history to cause disasters, including the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923.<sup>21</sup>

In Miike’s film, Katō combines the supernatural powers of yōkai with the wrath of used tools that have been thrown away, to create *kikai*, a play on

words meaning “machine-monsters.”<sup>22</sup> (Here Miike draws on an older yōkai visual tradition: the wrath of discarded utensils is the central theme of the Muromachi-period *Utensil wars picture scroll* mentioned earlier.) The manga

MIZUKI APPEARS IN THE FINAL SCENES AS THE YŌKAI DAIŌ (GREAT YŌKAI ELDER), WHO MAINTAINS THE BALANCE BETWEEN MONSTERS AND HUMANS. HIS FINAL MESSAGE IN THE FILM IS “WAR IS MEANINGLESS. YOU ONLY GET HUNGRY.”

and animation series *Gegege no Kitarō* also frequently used yōkai characters as metaphors of environmental pollution, but Miike’s 2005 film is the first instance of yōkai and mecha being combined to achieve this effect. There is no mention of Western foreigners in the story; instead, modern Japanese have themselves become foreigners or invaders in their own

land, given that Katō represents the wrath of the native tribes that once inhabited Japan. The scope of the narrative has also changed: the fight takes place in the psyche of the combatants. With this intricate story line and characters, Miike has harnessed his cynical genius as a director to create a surreal setting and downplay the melodrama that fantasy films often risk.

If yōkai in the Meiji period (1868–1911) were often equated with outsiders and were feared for their harmful powers over humans, those in the 1960s retained their power but were often transformed into native heroes. But in the narrative of the 2005 film they are treated as a fragile and vulnerable endangered species, the symbols of a nostalgic, rural Japanese communal life. They do not fight but simply gather for a festival in the capital. (This is a reference to the “one hundred demons night parade” that appears in one of the earliest yōkai picture scrolls, the Muromachi period *Hyakki yagyō*, but the parade is now transported to a contemporary and distinctly alienated urban setting.)

Produced during the consolidation phase of the invasion of Iraq by the United States military (2003–2006), the 2005 film does not display monsters from Babylonia/ancient Iraq; in fact, Miike instructed Muroi Shigeru, the actress playing yōkai character Sunakake Babaa (Sand Throwing Witch), to throw sand toward the imagined direction of Iraq as a tribute to the casualties of war. In contrast to the texts or subtexts of the 1960s narratives, this film emphasizes a strong antiwar message, delivered by Mizuki Shigeru himself in a final sequence (Figure 3). A production consultant on the film, the eighty-three-year-old Mizuki appears in the final scenes as the Yōkai Daiō (Great Yōkai Elder), who maintains the balance between monsters and humans. His final message in the film is “War is meaningless. You only get hungry.”<sup>23</sup>



FIGURE 3. Mizuki Shigeru on the set of the film *Yōkai daisensō*, 2005. Photograph by author.

Despite Mizuki's cameo, the 2005 *Yōkai daisensō* was not linked to Mizuki's production company, Mizuki Pro, and consequently *yōkai* characters based on Mizuki's designs were omitted from the film in order to avoid copyright infringement. Instead, the film's producers, Kadokawa Eiga Film Corporation, created more than five hundred *yōkai* characters based on art historical *yōkai* depictions as well as on original ideas of the filmmakers.

Mizuki's *yōkai* do appear in the 2007 film *Gegege no Kitarō*, a live-action adaptation of the *Gegege no Kitarō* animation, produced by Shōchiku Film Production Company. Shōchiku purchased the copyrights to the *yōkai* characters that appear in the *Gegege no Kitarō* manga and animation series, so the film's *yōkai* design adheres closely to Mizuki's style. Therefore, this film did not produce new innovations in *yōkai* representation, but it did update Mizuki's character design to cross over to the live-action film genre, and some details of that transition offer an interesting final perspective on the changing identification of *yōkai* as foreign, native, or liminal figures.

The 2007 *Gegege no Kitarō* film showcased the efforts of a cast of eminent designers. Set designer Inagaki Hisao (*Narayama bushikō* [1983, *The Ballad of Narayama*]; *Kuroi ame* [1989, *Black Rain*]; *Tokyo Zombie* [2005]), special effects artist Egawa Etsuko (*Teito Monogatari* [1988, *A tale of the capitol*]; *Kogitsune*

*Helen* [2006, Little fox *Helen*]), and costume designer Hibino Kozue (who designed advertising campaigns for Shiseidō and Comme des Garçons in the 1990s) were teamed with a distinguished cast of actors including Katō Koyuki (*The Last Samurai*, 2003) and Kabuki actor Nakamura Shidō (*Letters from Iwo Jima*, 2006). The film was a tribute to the *Gegege no Kitarō* manga and animation series, and an attempt to remake the image of the Kitarō franchise for a new generation of adolescents.



FIGURE 4. Wentz Eiji in the role of Kitarō, on a flyer for the film *Gegege no Kitarō*, 2007.

Kitarō’s character was updated by casting the television celebrity, model, and boy-band member Wentz Eiji in the role. Casting Wentz to play the all-Japanese boy hero was a risky and perhaps risqué choice: the young actor appeared in black leather shorts, wearing a Chanchanko vest made of a skunk pelt, with long silver hair falling into his face (Figure 4). But the choice proved a success, attracting enough fans to lead to a sequel film in 2008. Yet Wentz’s popularity with young people was not the sole reason for casting him in the role of Kitarō: Shōchiku said that he was chosen based on his “otherworldly looks.”<sup>24</sup> Similarly, an interview with Tsujimoto Tamako, casting coordinator and associate producer for Tōhō’s 2007 yōkai film *Dororo*, reveals that the actress Tsuchiya Anna was cast as *Dororo*’s main yōkai character Mai Mai Onba because she

combined “beauty with eerie otherworldly looks.”<sup>25</sup> What makes these comments significant is that Wentz and Tsuchiya are both half Japanese: Wentz’s father is German American, while Tsuchiya’s father is Russian American.

Yōkai, as visual symbols, traditionally occupy a niche on the borderline between the familiar (*uchi*) and the outside world (*soto*) in Japanese visual narratives. This is why some texts can cast them as the foreign threat, others as the native Japanese heroes, and still others—including several versions of *Yōkai daisensō*—as both. Half-Japanese, half-Western actors like Wentz and Tsuchiya have been cast as yōkai because, according to the filmmakers, their facial features are attractive but at the same time unfamiliar. If Westerners

are decisively part of the Other (*soto*), then “halves” (the colloquial Japanese expression used for persons of mixed ethnicity, mostly with one Japanese and one Caucasian parent) occupy a niche in Japanese society that can be paralleled with the traditional role of *yōkai*: on the borderline between insiders and outsiders, like us, but not quite.

This twist in *yōkai* representation represents a new role for *yōkai* that corresponds to changing social dynamics in Japan. With attributes perceived as desirable but at the same time upsetting, half-Japanese represent a social stratum that emerged largely in the postwar period. At one end of the spectrum are half-Japanese entertainers like Wentz and Tsuchiya whose “exotic” physical and facial features have added to their popularity and who have become increasingly visible in popular media toward the end of the millennium; at the other end are the estimated four thousand Amerasian offspring of local Okinawans and temporarily stationed U.S. military personnel, who often become social outsiders from an early age.<sup>26</sup>

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## CONCLUSION

In the guise of innocent fantasy, visual representations of *yōkai* have always served an agenda pertaining to the specific historical periods in which they have appeared and reappeared. From Yoshiiku’s post-Sino-Japanese war print *Kokkei Yamatoshiki* (1895), ridiculing the Chinese army, to the *Momotarō* animation trilogy produced in the final stages of World War II, visual representations of *yōkai* have served the needs of militarist propaganda since the Meiji period, and the *Yōkai daisensō* narratives in manga, animation, and cinema follow in this tradition.

The role of *yōkai* could be manipulated in postwar visual media because of the *yōkai*’s inherent ambivalence. In the postwar manga, animation, and cinema versions of *Yōkai daisensō*, *yōkai* were transformed to represent a nostalgic Japanese past. This was the era of the Cold War and of Japan’s economic recovery, and what emerged in popular visual media was the narrative of a West versus Japan power struggle, in which *yōkai* served as righteous patriotic entities, legitimized by ancestral lineage, who guarded Japan from outside forces.

But in the case of Miike Takashi's surreal contemporary vision of *Yōkai daisensō*, one set of yōkai are equated with environmental pollution and metropolitan alienation. Like the process of gradual degradation of local minor deities theorized by Yanagita Kunio, the yōkai of *Yōkai daisensō* have become less and less powerful with each remake.<sup>27</sup> While yōkai fought off the enemy in Okinawa in the 1966 manga and 1968 animated versions, they become timid and vulnerable in the 1968 film version, and by the 2005 remake, they are rendered useless, cowardly, and childish or senile; in Miike's film it is ultimately only their utter incompetence that leads them to victory. Finally in films like *Dororo* and the 2007 version of *Gegege no Kitarō*, yōkai regain a heroic quality, but their "celebrity" status is created or regained by equating them with liminal ethnic or racial categories that are viewed ambivalently in postwar Japan.

Their fluidity as visual symbols permits yōkai to be adapted to new roles in contemporary media, including manga, film, animation, and computer games, and these roles change with each new patriotic war they undertake to protect the Japanese homeland from invaders. Nonetheless, their core feature remains unaltered: they live in a no-man's-land between right and wrong, which readily lends them to new interpretations in their constant visual evolution within Japanese popular visual culture.

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## Notes

1. *Yōkai daisensō*, dir. Kuroda Yoshiyuki (1968); translated as *Yōkai Monsters: Spook Warfare*, DVD (ADV, 2004); *Yōkai daisensō*, dir. Miike Takashi (2005); translated as *The Great Yōkai War*, DVD (Tokyo Shock, 2006).
2. Mizuki Shigeru, *Gegege no Kitarō* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1988), 1:918.
3. Stephen Addiss, ed., *Japanese Ghosts and Demons: Art of the Supernatural* (New York: George Braziller, 1985), 18.
4. Noriko T. Reider, "Transformation of the Oni: From the Frightening and Diabolical to the Cute and Sexy," *Asian Folklore Studies* 62, no. 2 (2003): 147.
5. John W. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 255. On wartime Momotarō animation, see the chapters by Thomas Lamarre and Ōtsuka Eiji in this volume.
6. Mizuki, *Gegege no Kitarō*, 1:154, 157.
7. *Ibid.*, 1:175, 179.
8. *Ibid.*, 1:187. In 1969, Mizuki published a six-volume manga in which Kitarō joins the Vietnam War. Kitarō's yōkai army goes to Vietnam to help the local people there, joining the National Liberation Front against the American forces. At one point Konaki Jiji (Old Crybaby monster) fights a Scorpion submarine. The story, which appeared in mainstream children's comic magazines, also narrates the history of Vietnam. Mizuki, *Kitarō no Betonamu senki* (Kitarō's Vietnam war diary) (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū, 2000), 12, 40.

9. Mizuki, *Gegege no Kitarō*, 1:198.
10. *Ibid.*, 1:174.
11. Mizuki Shigeru, *Manga Mizuki Shigeru den* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2004), 2:280.
12. Mizuki, *Gegege no Kitarō*, 1:188.
13. *Ibid.*, 1:202.
14. *Ibid.*, 1:203.
15. Dower, *War without Mercy*, 255.
16. Thorkild Jacobsen, "Pictures and Pictorial Language (the Burney Relief)," in *Figurative Language in the Ancient Near East*, ed. M. Mindlin, M. J. Geller, and J. E. Wansbrough (London: University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987), 1–11.
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