



Hyakki yagyo, 1865, Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (1839-1892); Courtesy of International Center for Japanese Studies

Spirits of the Countryside

Exploring the folklore and yokai of rural Japan

Michael Dylan Foster, USA



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*The bust of Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962)
at the former Takazen Ryokan, Tono
Monogatari no Yakata ©Suzuki Keiji*



Taiko drumming performance at Namahage Sedo Festival, Oga ©oganavi

Motivation

Folklore, or folkloristics, is a wide-ranging field of study that explores the expressive culture of a given group of people. This includes everything from narrative forms such as myths, legends, folktales, even jokes, to material objects and complex customary forms such as rituals, festivals, and belief practices. My own exploration of Japanese folklore began twenty-five years ago when I happened to visit the rural city of Tono, discussed below, and read a book by the putative father of Japanese folklore studies, Yanagita Kunio. I particularly found fascinating the mysterious spirits, monsters, ghosts, goblins, and other supernatural creatures that these days are often called yokai. Many of these have become famous today because of their presence in Japanese popular culture – in anime, manga, film, and video games – but often their origins can be discovered in the legends, folktales, festivals, and belief systems of rural communities.

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Objective The goal of this essay is to briefly introduce and describe three rural cities that have been shaped in some fashion by a profound connection to folklore, especially to the monstrous creatures generically known as yokai. The first of these communities is the city of Tono, located in Iwate Prefecture, which was the subject of Japan's first modern collection of folklore published in 1910. Next, we travel to Oga City in Akita Prefecture, famous for its rituals and festivals featuring a demon-deity called Namahage. And finally, we visit the seaside community of Sakaiminato in Tottori Prefecture, hometown of Mizuki Shigeru, whose manga and anime reinvigorated rural yokai in the popular national imagination of the late twentieth century.

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Context Readers will find both similarities and differences between these three sites, but they all convey the ways in which folklore played a role in the history of the communities and, perhaps even more importantly, still plays a role in the contemporary life of residents and the nation more broadly. In twenty-first century Japan, we can see how folkloric creatures become emblematic of a region, often serving as a factor in economic revitalization, tourism development, and community identity. Moreover, these three communities are beautiful places to experience a rural side of Japan often overlooked by visitors to Tokyo, Kyoto, and other more famous tourist sites.

In recent years, the popularity of games such as Pokemon and Yo-kai Watch, as well as numerous manga, anime, and films, has brought international attention to the many monstrous, ghostly, or weird beings and creatures found in Japan. While many of these – like Godzilla or Ultraman – are fairly recent commercial creations, others have their roots in much older Japanese folklore. This essay describes three rural communities that have each, in different ways, influenced our understanding of Japanese folklore, and particularly our conception of the strange and mysterious creatures that animate traditional legends and beliefs. All three of these communities have also been influenced themselves by their association with folklore, an association that is deeply embedded in their contemporary identities.

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Visitors can delve into the world of local folklore at Tono Monogatari no Yakata ©Tono Folktale Museum



The Tono Municipal Museum explores regional history through exhibits associated with The Legends of Tono ©Iwate Tourism Association



Tono is a rural community where folklore remains important in contemporary life and is a major attraction of tourism ©Iwate Tourism Association

Tono City, Iwate Prefecture

In the history of Japanese folklore studies, perhaps the most important single village is Tono (population of approx. 27,000) in Iwate Prefecture, located in the Tohoku region in the northeast of the main island of Honshu. During the early twentieth century, while Japan was in the process of rapidly modernizing, urban intellectuals in Tokyo thought of Iwate, and especially a remote village such as Tono, as a rural hinterland still undiluted by modernity. Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962), who would go on to establish the field of folkloristics – *minzokugaku* in Japanese – recorded the stories told by Sasaki Kizen (1886-1933), a young student from Tono, and published them in a book called *Tono monogatari*, translated as *The Legends of Tono*, in 1910. Many of the tales collected in this short book describe ghostly events and strange creatures, from the kappa water spirit to zashikiwarashi house spirits to mysterious mountain people living in the hills surrounding the community. Only 350 copies of the book were printed at the time, but it would eventually come to be seen as the seminal text for minzokugaku, and the small city of Tono has been identified with it ever since. One of Tono's mottos greets you at the train station: *minwa no furusato*, or *hometown of the folktales*.

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Sasaki Kizen (1886-1933) devoted his life to anthologizing the oral traditions and tales of Tono

©Michael Dylan Foster



L-shaped farmhouse at Denshoen Park

©Michael Dylan Foster



Many tales in The Legends of Tono come from the Tsuchibuchi community in Tono, birthplace of Sasaki Kizen ©Tono Culture Research Center

Tono is situated in what the Japanese refer to as a *bonchi*, a flat fertile valley surrounded by mountains. It is a small, unpretentious city that has worked hard to develop its connections with folklore, with Yanagita Kunio, with Sasaki Kizen, and with the tales collected in *The Legends of Tono*. A short walk from the small train station is a museum complex called *The Tono Folktale Museum* – Tono monogatari no yakata – which features information about Yanagita and Sasaki, and some of the legends in the collection. The complex incorporates the ryokan (Japanese style inn) in which Yanagita stayed on the occasions he came to visit Tono; it also includes Yanagita's retirement home, which was moved to Tono from its original location in Tokyo.

You can get much more detailed information about the Tono region and the world of *The Legends of Tono* at the Tono Municipal Museum (Tono shiritsu hakubutsukan) just a few minutes' walk away. First opened in 1980, the museum was completely refurbished in 2010, with exhibitions centering around Yanagita's work but also presenting a visually rich sense of the history of Tono as a castle town and a market town. You can also get some insight into the daily lives of its residents and learn about annual festivals, local belief systems – such as Oshirasama worship, associated with silk production – and the region's close ties to horses. You can see a model of the traditional L-shaped farmhouse, known as a *magari-ya*, one part of which was a horse stable, while the other part was living quarters for the human family. Although the exhibits themselves only have limited English explanation, the museum provides a guidebook with excellent English-language descriptions.

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Oshirasama is a local belief system associated with silk production ©Iwate Tourism Association

For folklore aficionados and particularly visitors who speak Japanese, the museums in town are fascinating resources. But several of Tono's most interesting sites are located a short distance from the center of town – some are accessible by bicycle, while some may require a car or bus ride. Bicycle rental, car rental, and bus information are all readily available at the excellent tourist information center across from the train station.

About six kilometers into the countryside is Denshoen Park, a small assemblage of traditional farm buildings including a restored magari-ya. There is also a shrine to Oshirasama, and information on the sericulture industry – with mulberry plants and silkworms – that used to be a staple of the local economy.

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Visitors can offer the kappa its favorite food, cucumbers

©Michael Dylan Foster



A small shrine at Kappa buchi, dedicated to worshipping kappa

©Michael Dylan Foster



Kappa buchi is only a short walk from Denshoen Park

©Iwate Tourism Association

Nearby you can also visit the *Kappa buchi* – Kappa pool – the site of a famous narrative recounted in *The Legends of Tono*. A yokai found in rivers and ponds throughout Japan, kappa are often described as being about the size of a small child; they look like gigantic turtles with beaked mouth and shells. But they walk upright, have supernatural strength, are mischievous, sometimes even murderous, and very fond of cucumbers – hence the *kappa roll* found in sushi restaurants around the world. Kappa appear several times in *The Legends of Tono*; the most famous anecdote tells of a particularly hapless creature who tries to pull a horse into the water but ends up being pulled by the horse all the way back to the stable. Today the Kappa buchi features a small shrine dedicated to kappa, complete with offerings – at least during the summer – of fresh cucumbers.

Although kappa are only one small part of the folklore of the Tono region, they have become a local icon, a lighthearted counterpoint to the harsh realities of early twentieth-century rural life recounted in *The Legends of Tono* and shown at Tono City Museum. Throughout Tono, there is a kappa motif: kappa statues frolic in a fountain in front of the station, manga-esque kappa can be found on signs everywhere you go, and there is even a police box shaped like a kappa's face.

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Namahage in frightening costumes visit houses in the community ©oganavi

Oga City, Akita Prefecture

On the other side of Tohoku from Iwate, jutting out into the Sea of Japan, is the Oga Peninsula of Akita Prefecture. At about the same time Tono was becoming famous for its association with folklore through the work of Yanagita and Sasaki, Oga City (population approx. 27,000) was becoming well known as the stomping grounds of a frightening monstrous figure called Namahage. Every New Year's Eve, young men attired in straw raincoats and demon masks, and brandishing large knives and wooden staffs, march through the snow from house to house. Once inside, these Namahage roar and stamp, chasing children around the room and shouting such threats as: *Are there any bad kids here? I'll take them away to the mountains.* After several minutes, they calm down and kneel in front of trays prepared with sake and food. The Namahage often end their visit by wishing the residents good fortune for the coming year.

This ritual was first documented in 1811, but is probably much older. Today it takes place in a number of communities throughout Oga, each with slightly different procedures and costumes. The common feature, however, is that the Namahage themselves appear as demon-deities: threatening in appearance and behavior, but sacred and respected. Although they are not commonly called *yokai*, they are certainly powerful, frightening beings of the folkloric imagination.

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Visitors can experience various aspects of the Namahage ritual through the Namahage Sedo Festival, Shinzan Shrine ©oganavi

Because the Namahage ritual takes place in private households on New Year's Eve, it is not the type of event that tourists can visit easily. But in 1963, the residents of Oga created another annual Namahage-related event, specifically for visitors from outside the community. Held in the middle of February at the Shinzan Shrine, the Namahage Sedo Festival takes place three nights in a row and features all sorts of Namahage-themed events, including taiko drumming, dancing, and most spectacularly, a showy descent from the mountain by fifteen roaring Namahage bearing fiery torches.

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The Namahage Museum, Oga
©oganavi



Masks and costumes of Namahage vary throughout Oga. Many of them are exhibited on life-size figures at the Namahage Museum ©oganavi

Even if you cannot make the visit to Oga in the snowy depths of mid-winter, however, you can still experience Namahage. Near the Shinzan Shrine, the Namahage Museum (Namahage-kan) features historical information about Namahage, as well as information about people who have researched it (including Yanagita Kunio). There are dozens of masks and costumes on display, and a film featuring scenes of the New Year's Eve ritual. You might also have a chance to see a mask maker at work. Next to the museum is a small magari-ya farmhouse; this is the Oga Shinzan Folklore Museum (Oga Shinzan Densho-kan), where visitors can experience a reenactment of the New Year's Eve ritual with live Namahage performers.

The Oga area itself is mountainous, with picturesque stretches of rice and vegetable fields, an active fishing industry along the coast, an aquarium, and several onsen (hot spring) resorts. Transportation can be a little difficult, with limited reach by trains, but a drive through the region gives a good sense of rural life in a fairly remote part of the country.

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Japan's iconic yokai manga,
GeGeGe no Kitaro ©Mizuki Productions

Sakaiminato City, Tottori Prefecture

Finally, any exploration of folklore, and especially yokai, would be incomplete without a pilgrimage to Sakaiminato City (population approx. 36,000), located in Tottori Prefecture. For many years an important fishing port – especially for the sardine industry, which has since declined – Sakaiminato is best known today as the hometown of Mizuki Shigeru (1922-2015), one of Japan's most prolific and famous manga artists. Although Mizuki's creative output was immense and varied – including war memoirs, a history of Japan, and even a biography of Hitler – his most famous creation is *Gegege no Kitaro*, which started as a manga and has been made into numerous anime series since the 1960s. These narratives relate the adventures of a boy yokai named Kitaro and his entourage of quirkily monstrous friends as they take on more demonic yokai. Kitaro was invented by Mizuki, but many of the yokai featured in his work are derived directly from folklore; in fact, Mizuki was a serious yokai researcher, producing numerous encyclopedia-like guidebooks.

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Mizuki Shigeru and his characters near Sakaiminato Station

©Michael Dylan Foster (photography), ©Mizuki Productions (characters)

Almost anybody who grew up in Japan from the 1960s to the present is familiar with Mizuki's work. In a sense, he is responsible for *animating* these folk creatures in the popular urban imagination of late-twentieth century Japan. Mizuki was extremely media savvy; along with his manga and anime, his production company creates or licenses hundreds of spinoff products, from yokai figurines, kitchen magnets, bean cakes, clothing, card games – pretty much anything one can sell with a Mizuki brand. In other words, his yokai are deeply embedded in contemporary commercial culture. But as he explains in his own memoirs, he first encountered yokai in a folkloric context, as a child growing up in Sakaiminato. It was there that he learned about all sorts of mysterious creatures from an old woman called Nonnonba; it was there too that he was mesmerized by the images of hell on display at a local temple – Shofukuji.

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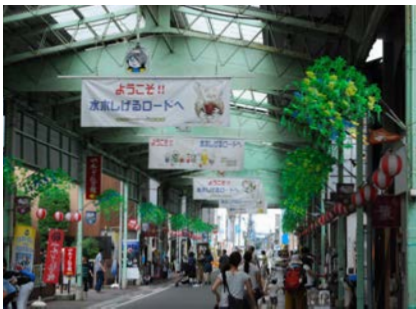
Mizuki's popular characters placed along the sidewalk

©Michael Dylan Foster (photography), ©Mizuki Productions (characters)

Just as Tono developed its relationship with Yanagita and *The Legends of Tono*, so too Sakaiminato has actively nurtured its connection with Mizuki and his yokai for tourism and village revitalization. Arriving at the Sakaiminato Train Station – also called Kitaro Station! – you immediately see a life-sized bronze statue of Mizuki sitting at a desk surrounded by Kitaro and other characters. From there you walk down Mizuki Shigeru Road, a lively shopping street dotted with dozens of souvenir shops selling yokai/Mizuki souvenirs of all sorts. You also might bump into a figure costumed as a giant Kitaro, or one of Mizuki's other characters, sauntering down the street taking pictures with excited visitors. There is even a yokai shrine, selling traditional ema (votive plaques) with pictures of Mizuki's yokai. But the real attraction of Mizuki Shigeru Road are the small bronze yokai figurines – over 170 of them – placed every twenty or thirty feet along the sidewalk.

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Mizuki Shigeru Road extends about 800m from Sakaiminato Station, and is filled with yokai and Mizuki related items for sale

©Michael Dylan Foster (photography),
©Mizuki Productions (characters)



People in costumes of Mizuki's characters outside the Mizuki Shigeru Museum
©Mizuki Productions

At the end of the Road is the Mizuki Shigeru Museum (Mizuki Shigeru kinen kan). There you can learn about Mizuki's eventful life and career: from his childhood in Sakaiminato, to his near death in World War II where he lost his left arm – to his struggles as a young manga artist in Tokyo, to his international multi-media success. Though the museum is perhaps overly hagiographic in its praise of Mizuki, it does give the visitor a good introduction to his world and to his yokai. For visitors from abroad, there is a special discount on admission (only 300 yen), and the museum provides headphone guides in English for free.

Although Mizuki and his yokai are certainly the main attraction to tourists, hopefully visitors will also take some time to wander a few blocks off the Mizuki Shigeru Road to get a taste of the small-town atmosphere, smell the sea air, and have an exquisite meal prepared with local vegetables and fresh fish.

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A stable at Tono Furusato Village ©Iwate Tourism Association

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Closing The three rural communities described here are all different in terms of location, environment, and history, but each one is profoundly identified with the folklore of Japan. Even for domestic Japanese tourists, these rural communities represent a nostalgic sense of *hometown* or *furusato*, an older version of Japan that no longer exists – if it ever really did. But of course, these rural communities also exist fully in the present, and their residents are very conscious of building and presenting an identity associated with Japanese folklore and the mysterious creatures that populate its legends, folktales, and festivals. By visiting these small cities today, you may get a sense of what they were like in the past; more importantly, you also experience a Japan that is different from major cities such as Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka – but just as contemporary and relevant.

Finally, although the particular communities discussed here happen to play a significant role in the history of Japanese folklore and popular culture, they are not unique. Visit any small village in Japan, or even a small neighborhood in a bigger city, and you will find local legends – often concerning yokai or strange events. Wherever you go, all you have to do is ask questions and you will meet people with stories to tell. Ultimately, the study of folklore, in Japan and elsewhere, provides insight into the beliefs and fears and values of people in the past, as well as in the present. We can find changes and continuity, and see how ideas and stories and characters are preserved in museums, celebrated in festivals, and, most strikingly, reimagined and reinterpreted for the needs and desires of each generation.

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Places **Denshoen Park**

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About six kilometers from the center of Tono City, accessible by car or bicycle, this park has a small collection of traditional farm buildings, including a restored magari-ya. There is also a shrine to Oshirasama, and information on the sericulture industry – with mulberry plants and silk-worms – that used to be a staple of the local economy. A small gift shop sells local items, Tono-themed products and souvenirs. Admission is 320 yen.

028-0555, Iwate, Tono shi, Tsuchibuchi cho, Tsuchibuchi 6-5-1

[web-site](#)

Kappa buchi

Kappa buchi or *kappa pool* is a wide spot on a slow-moving creek that appears in Yanagita Kunio's *Legends of Tono* as the site of a kappa story. Today there is a small shrine dedicated to kappa; you can also rent a fishing rod with a cucumber – the kappa's food of choice – if you would like to try to catch one yourself. The Kappa buchi is about six kilometers from the center of Tono City, very close to Denshoen Park. Admission is free.

028-0555, Iwate, Tono shi, Tsuchibuchi cho, Tsuchibuchi

[web-site](#)

Mizuki Shigeru Museum

Museum in Sakaiminato dedicated to manga artist Mizuki Shigeru: his eventful life, his manga and anime, the many characters he created, and his legacy as an artist. Admission is 300 yen, and English-language head-phone guides are available free of charge.

684-0025, Tottori, Sakaiminato shi, Hon cho 5

[web-site](#) (Japanese)

Mizuki Shigeru Road

Outdoor shopping street and arcade in Sakaiminato that has souvenir shops and restaurants, and over 170 bronze statuettes of manga artist Mizuki Shigeru's yokai characters.

684-0004, Tottori, Sakaiminato shi, Taisho machi

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Places **Namahage Museum**

Excellent small museum dedicated to the Namahage. You can see displays of most of the local masks, read about the history of Namahage, watch videos of the ritual on New Year's Eve and meet a professional mask maker. Located close to Shinzan Shrine and the Oga Shinzan Folklore Museum.

Admission is 500 yen.

010-0686, Akita, Oga shi, Kitaura shinzan, Mizukuisawa

[web-site](#)

Oga Shinzan Folklore Museum

The Oga Shinzan Folklore Museum is connected to the Namahage Museum. A small, traditional farmhouse where you can experience live Namahage performances all year round.

010-0685, Akita, Oga shi, Kitaura shinzan, Mizukuisawa

[web-site](#)

Shinzan Shrine

Site of the annual Namahage Sedo Festival in February, close to the Namahage Museum and the Oga Shinzan Folklore Museum in Oga, Akita Prefecture

010-0685, Akita, Oga shi, Kitaura shinzan, Mizukuisawa 97

[web-site](#) (Japanese)

Shofukuji

Temple in Sakiminato where Mizuki Shigeru was entranced by images of hell as a child. The images are still on display, and there is also a memorial stone to Mizuki, along with a seated statue of the famous manga artist.

Accessible by bus or taxi.

684-0041, Tottori, Sakaiminato shi, Nakano cho 5016

[web-site](#) (Japanese)

Tono Folktale Museum

This museum complex features information and interactive exhibitions on Yanagita Kunio and Sasaki Kizen; it also includes an old Japanese style inn and Yanagita's retirement home, moved from its original location in Tokyo. Easily walkable from Tono train station. Admission is 500 yen.

028-0515, Iwate, Tono shi, Chuo dori 2-11

[web-site](#) (Japanese)

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Places **Tono Municipal Museum**

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Only a few minutes' walk from Tono train station, this museum features visually rich exhibitions of the history of the region, everyday lives of the residents, and local festivals and beliefs. An excellent English-language guidebook is available. Admission is 300 yen.

028-0515 Iwate, Tono, Higashidate cho 3-9

[web-site](#) (Japanese)

Publications **The Birth of Kitaro**

Mizuki, Shigeru; Davisson, Zack (Trans.); 2016, Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly

Recent translation of some of Mizuki's early Kitaro stories

The Book of Yokai: Mysterious Creatures of Japanese Folklore

Foster, Michael Dylan; 2015, Oakland: University of California Press

This book discusses the origins and cultural context of supernatural creatures and phenomena that appear in Japanese folklore and popular culture

The Legends of Tono, 100th Anniversary Edition

Yanagita, Kunio; Morse, Ronald A. (Trans.), 2008, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield

English translation of Tono monogatari

Haunted Travelogue: Hometowns, Ghost Towns, and Memories of War

Mechademia Vol. 4, pp. 164-181

Foster, Michael Dylan; 2009, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press
Short article about Mizuki Shigeru, with background about his childhood in Sakaiminato as well as his war experiences

[web-site](#)

Inviting the Uninvited Guest: Ritual, Festival, Tourism, and the Namahage of Japan

Journal of American Folklore Vol. 126, No. 501 (2013), pp. 302-334

Foster, Michael Dylan; 2013: University of Illinois Press on behalf of American Folklore Society

Article introducing and discussing Namahage – both the New Year's Eve ritual as well as the Namahage Sedo Festival

[web-site](#)

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Web-Sites

Oga's Namahage

English-language introduction to Namahage, including links to information on visiting museums and other sites in Oga

[web-site](#)

Sakaiminato Guide for Sightseeing

English-language site with links to information on Mizuki Shigeru Road, Mizuki Shigeru Museum and other sightseeing and regional information about Sakaiminato

[web-site](#)

Tono: Japan's Eternal Home

English-language site about Tono with links to museum sites, transportation, and other information for visitors

[web-site](#)

Yokai.com

Online yokai database with colorful original illustrations and clear descriptions

[web-site](#)

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Glossary

Akita Prefecture

Prefecture in Tohoku, the northern region of Honshu, Japan's main island

[web-site](#)

- ▶ Namahage
- ▶ Namahage Sedo Festival
- ▶ Oga
- ▶ Tohoku

Anime

Japanese animated film and television, for both adults and children

- ▶ Kitaro
- ▶ Pokémon
- ▶ Yo-kai Watch

Ema

Small wooden votive plaque sold at shrines and temples. Visitors can write their hopes or prayers on the blank space provided and leave it on a dedicated rack at the shrine.

[web-site](#)

Furusato

Word for *old home* or *hometown*, often tinged with a sense of nostalgia

Godzilla

Called *Gojira* in Japanese, a monster that first appeared in a film of the same name in 1954, today a globally recognized icon

Iwate Prefecture

Prefecture in Tohoku, the northern region of Honshu, Japan's main island

[web-site](#)

- ▶ Minzokugaku
- ▶ Oshirasama worship
- ▶ Sasaki Kizen (1886-1933)
- ▶ Tohoku
- ▶ Tono
- ▶ Tono Monogatari
- ▶ Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962)

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Kappa

Water spirit or goblin, said to lurk in pools and rivers throughout Japan

[web-site](#)

►Yokai

Kitaro

Yokai boy hero, one of Mizuki Shigeru's most famous manga and anime characters

►Anime

►Godzilla

►Manga

►Pokémon

►Ultraman

►Yo-kai Watch

►Yokai

Magari-ya

Traditional L-shaped farmhouse, one part of which was a horse stable, the other part the living quarters for the family. Famously found and preserved in the Tono region, but also found elsewhere in Tohoku, including Oga.

[web-site](#)

►Akita Prefecture

►Iwate Prefecture

►Oga

►Tohoku

►Tono

Manga

Japanese graphic literature and comic books, popular among both adults and children

►Anime

►Kitaro

Matsuri

Seasonal festival

[web-site](#)

►Namahage Sedo Festival

►Taiko

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Glossary

Minwa

Folktales and other traditional narratives

- ▶ Sasaki Kizen (1886-1933)
- ▶ Tono Monogatari
- ▶ Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962)

Minzokugaku

Japanese term for folkloristics, the study of folklore

[web-site](#)

- ▶ Sasaki Kizen (1886-1933)
- ▶ Tono
- ▶ Tono Monogatari
- ▶ Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962)

Mizuki Shigeru (1922-2015)

Celebrated manga and anime artist, most famous for his yokai-themed work

[web-site](#)

- ▶ Kitaro
- ▶ Nonnonba
- ▶ Sakaiminato
- ▶ Tottori Prefecture
- ▶ Yokai

Namahage

Deity-demon figure that visits households in the Oga region of Akita prefecture on New Year's Eve. Also, the name of the ritual involving these figures.

[web-site](#)

- ▶ Akita Prefecture
- ▶ Namahage Sedo Festival
- ▶ Oga

Namahage Sedo Festival

Three-day festival held at the Shinzan Shrine in Oga every February

[web-site](#)

- ▶ Akita Prefecture
- ▶ Matsuri
- ▶ Namahage
- ▶ Oga
- ▶ Taiko

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Glossary

Nonnonba

Epithet for Kageyama Fusa, an old woman who helped in Mizuki Shigeru's family home in Sakaiminato when Mizuki was a child. She told him many yokai stories.

web-site

- ▶ Mizuki Shigeru (1922-2015)
- ▶ Sakaiminato
- ▶ Yokai

Oga

Small town (population approx. 27,000) on the Oga Peninsula that juts into the Sea of Japan north of Akita City, famous as the location of the Namahage festival

- ▶ Akita Prefecture
- ▶ Namahage
- ▶ Namahage Sedo Festival
- ▶ Tohoku

Oshirasama

Tutelary deity associated with agriculture and silk production, worshiped especially in the northeast of Japan

web-site

- ▶ Iwate Prefecture
- ▶ Tohoku
- ▶ Tono
- ▶ Tono Monogatari

Pokémon

Globally popular multi-platform media franchise featuring creatures called *Pokémon*, short for *pocket monsters*

web-site

- ▶ Anime
- ▶ Godzilla
- ▶ Kitaro
- ▶ Ultraman
- ▶ Yo-kai Watch

Spirits of the Countryside

Exploring the folklore and yokai of rural Japan

Glossary

Sakaiminato

Small port town (population approx. 36,000) in Tottori Prefecture, famous as the childhood home of manga artist Mizuki Shigeru

[web-site](#)

- ▶ Mizuki Shigeru (1922-2015)
- ▶ Nonnonba
- ▶ Tottori Prefecture
- ▶ Yokai

Sasaki Kizen (1886-1933)

Native of Tono whose local tales became the subject of Yanagita Kunio's *The Legends of Tono*. Sasaki himself would go on to become a famous folklorist in his own right, sometimes known as the *Japanese Grimm*.

- ▶ Iwate Prefecture
- ▶ Minwa
- ▶ Minzokugaku
- ▶ Tono
- ▶ Tono Monogatari
- ▶ Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962)

Taiko

Form of drumming, often an ensemble performance

[web-site](#)

- ▶ Matsuri
- ▶ Namahage Sedo Festival

Tohoku

The northeast region of Honshu, the main island of Japan. Made up of six prefectures: Aomori, Akita, Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima, and Yamagata

[web-site](#)

- ▶ Akita Prefecture
- ▶ Iwate Prefecture
- ▶ Oga
- ▶ Tono

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Tono

Small town (population approx. 27,000) in Iwate Prefecture, famous as the setting of *The Legends of Tono*, and celebrated as the *hometown of folktales*

web-site

- ▶ Iwate Prefecture
- ▶ Minwa
- ▶ Minzokugaku
- ▶ Oshirasama worship
- ▶ Sasaki Kizen (1886-1933)
- ▶ Tohoku
- ▶ Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962)

Tono Monogatari

Translated as *The Legends of Tono*, a collection of stories about Tono that Yanagita heard from Sasaki Kizen. Written by Yanagita Kunio and published in 1910 it is considered to be the foundational text of Japanese folkloristics.

- ▶ Iwate Prefecture
- ▶ Kappa
- ▶ Minwa
- ▶ Minzokugaku
- ▶ Sasaki Kizen (1886-1933)
- ▶ Tohoku
- ▶ Tono
- ▶ Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962)

Tottori Prefecture

Prefecture in the Chugoku region of Japan, and one of the least populated of all Japan's prefectures. Its notable features include the Tottori Sand Dunes, which span roughly 16km of the eastern coast.

web-site

- ▶ Manga
- ▶ Mizuki Shigeru (1922-2015)
- ▶ Nonnonba
- ▶ Sakaiminato

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Ultraman

Superhero character of a monster-packed television series of the same name that started in the 1960s and became a popular culture phenomenon still celebrated today

[web-site](#)

- ▶ Kitaro
- ▶ Pokémon
- ▶ Yo-kai Watch

Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962)

Founder of *minzokugaku* – Japanese folklore studies. Also worked as a government bureaucrat and a journalist.

- ▶ Minwa
- ▶ Minzokugaku
- ▶ Sasaki Kizen (1886-1933)
- ▶ Tono
- ▶ Tono Monogatari

Yo-kai Watch

Multi-platform media franchise featuring cartoonish yokai characters first released in Japan in 2013, but now distributed worldwide. Includes video games, anime series, films, toys, etc.

- ▶ Anime
- ▶ Godzilla
- ▶ Kitaro
- ▶ Pokémon
- ▶ Ultraman
- ▶ Yokai

[web-site](#)

Yokai

Traditional apparitions of Japanese folklore – and now popular culture, variously translated as monsters, goblins, ghosts, supernatural creatures or mysterious phenomena

- ▶ Kappa
- ▶ Kitaro
- ▶ Mizuki Shigeru (1922-2015)
- ▶ Nonnonba
- ▶ Sakaiminato
- ▶ Yo-kai Watch
- ▶ Zashikiwarashi

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Zashikiwarashi

House spirit, often in the shape of a young child

[website](#)

►Kappa

►Yokai

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