

## **Naming Animals in Japanese Mythology: an Anthropolinguistic Study**

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### **Abstract**

This article discusses the naming of animal names in Japanese mythology based on anthropolinguistic studies. The data took 20 mythological animals in Japan and then the research focused on finding out the names, visualizations and shapes and meanings. This research uses a qualitative descriptive research method. The data collection method used is the library method and note-taking techniques. The data that has been obtained is analyzed using semiotic analysis to study naming, a structural approach to study visualization and form, and a meaning approach based on cultural concepts. The research results are (1) naming the names of mythological animals based on writing names, shapes and visualizations, and other things. (2) 10 of 20 Japanese mythological animals whose visualization and shape are based on writing their names and most of them have unique and colorful visuals. (3) Every mythological creature in Japan has a different meaning. There are mythological animals that are believed to bring good luck and there are also those that are believed to bring bad luck, disaster or misfortune.

**Keywords:** Mythological animals, Japan, Anthropolinguistic

### **Introduction**

Anthropolinguistic studies are also commonly called ethnolinguistic studies. Ethnolinguistics is a branch of linguistics, ethnography and ethnology. Ethnology and ethnography are branches of humanities that study culture. Japan has many mythological creatures, some in the form of gods and goddesses and some in the form of animals.

As time goes by, stories about mythological creatures are still popular in Japan. This is proven by several stories in famous comics/manga and anime series such as *Naruto*, *Pom Poko* and *Spirited Away*. Unfortunately, until now not much knowledge about traditional Japanese culture has been translated into Indonesian, so there is very little insight into Japanese culture that is known by Indonesians, especially for those who are interested and students of Japanese culture. Therefore, through research entitled *Naming Names of Animals in Japanese Mythology: Anthropolinguistic Studies*, Indonesian people will know more about Japanese culture in the form of mythological animals that are believed in by Japanese people. Textbooks, books and research that discuss Japanese mythological animals in Indonesian are also rarely found, so this research can add to the list of research literature on Japanese literature and culture based on anthropolinguistic studies.

### **Method**

The problem approach method used in this research is a qualitative descriptive research method. The focus of this research was to analyze the names, visualizations and shapes, as well as meanings focused on 20 names of Japanese mythological animals. This research uses data sources from books, previous studies, journals, articles and the internet. The method used in the data collection stage in this research was the library method and note-taking techniques. In analyzing the data, the author uses morphological analysis which linguistically examines the process of name formation. Next, the data was analyzed based on semantic studies to analyze the meaning of these mythological animals (Sutedi: 2004).

### **Results and Discussion**

*Tengu*

*Tengu* (天狗) means dog of heaven. In the book *Youkai attack! The Japanese Monster Survival Guide* explains that there are two types of *Tengu*, namely:

### *Daitengu*

Physically, *Daitengu* is much larger than *Kotengu* and appears in a more human-like form. *Daitengu* usually looks like a man in ascetic robes with a red face, large feathered wings growing from his back and a very long nose (the longer the nose, the stronger the *Tengu*).

### *Kotengu*

*Kotengu* (小天狗) means lesser *tengu*. Another name for *Kotengu* is *Karasutengu* ‘烏天狗’ which means *Tengu* crow because its physical shape resembles a large predatory crow with human-like characteristics. *Kotengu* often wear mystical ascetic robes called *yamabushi* and sometimes carry fine weapons or other items stolen from human homes or temples. *Karasutengu* behave like wild monsters, living solitary lives but on certain occasions will unite with other *youkai* to achieve their goals.



Picture 1 *Daitengu*  
(www.youkai.com)



Picture 2 *Kotengu*  
(www.youkai.com)

### *Kappa*

*Kappa* consists of two kanji letters, namely 河 (*kawa*) and 童 (*warawa*). 河 is the kanji *kawa* which means river and 童 is the kanji *warawa* which means little child who is about ten years old.

In Japanese Mythology A to Z (Roberts, 2010: 63-64) explains *Kappa* as an evil and aggressive water spirit in Japanese legend. *Kappa* are known as mythological creatures who like to drown small children and no one is safe from their attacks if they travel near water. The *Kappa*'s turtle-like body cannot stay on land for long. Water gives them strength and to survive on land, they have a cup-like shape on their heads. When they meet someone, they will bend so they lose strength when the water runs out. The more water spilled, the weaker the power.



Picture 3 *Kappa*  
(KUO, 2007: 17)

### Tanuki

*Tanuki* (狸) read *Tanuki* means raccoon dog. *Tanuki* are sometimes also called “raccoon dogs” because their appearance is similar to raccoons and dogs. *Tanuki* is a mythological animal that has strong magical abilities. They are similar to *Kitsune* in their incredible ability to change shape. *Tanuki* have a cheerful nature and like to play tricks on humans but are also easily deceived and absent-minded. *Tanuki* has a magical object in the form of a leaf which can give him the power to change form into another figure. Apart from the ability to change shape, the *Tanuki*'s most famous extraordinary power is their large, soft, magical testicles, which can be adapted to any need. His testicles can be used as weapons, fans to keep cool, fishing nets, drums, even umbrellas.



Picture 4 Tanuki  
(Ukiyo-e painting by Tsukioka Yoshitoshi)

#### Kitsune

*Kitsune* is an onomatopoeia that comes from the Japanese sound of a fox "*kitsu*" and the suffix "*ne*" is added to show affection. In *The Book of Youkai Mysterious Creatures of Japanese Folklore*, it is explained that *Kitsune* often change into women because Japanese women have fox-like faces (high cheekbones, thin faces and thin eyebrows) which are considered beautiful. According to reports, the fox-incarnated woman was so beautiful that she was able to make men fall in love and even want to marry her.

In the *Shinto* belief, *Kitsune* is called *Inari* who has the task of being a messenger from *Kami*. Some people make offerings to *Kitsune* because they are thought to have supernatural powers. Apart from that, ancient Japanese people believed that *Kitsune* could help farmers get rid of pests (rats) in their fields.

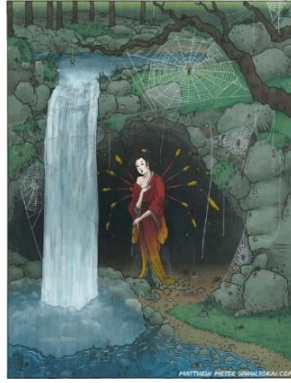


Picture 5 Kitsune disguised as a girl  
(www.tofugu.com)

#### Jorogumo

*Jorogumo* (絡新婦) written with modern kanji, means "entangling bride". *Jorogumo* has the form of a female spider monster. *Jorogumo* considers humans like insects as food and to satisfy his lust, especially handsome young men who are looking for love.

Apart from being scary, *Jorogumo* can also transform into a very beautiful woman with the ability to change shape to trick her prey. After successfully tricking the man he was targeting, he transformed again into a scary spider monster. It traps its prey using strong and poisonous webs which function to weaken and torture its prey.



Picture 6 Jorogumo  
([www.youkai.com](http://www.youkai.com))

### Hōō

Hōō is written with the kanji 鳳凰 which means phoenix. Hōō is depicted as having a rooster's beak, a swallow's jaw, a pheasant's head, a snake's neck, a turtle's back, a crane's legs and a peacock's tail. Hōō has brilliantly colored feathers consisting of five color elements, namely black, white, red, yellow and blue and has five distinctive tail feathers representing the five elements of wood, fire, earth, metal and water.



Picture 7 Hōō  
([www.youkai.com](http://www.youkai.com))

### Yamata no Orochi

Yamata no Orochi (八岐の大蛇) or Orochi which means big snake. This mythological animal takes the form of a giant snake with eight heads and eight tails. He is described as having bright red eyes and a red belly. This creature has a very large body, its body can even cover a distance of eight valleys and eight hills. Fir and fir trees grew on its back, with its body covered in moss.



Picture 8 Yamata no Orochi  
([www.greenscene.co.id](http://www.greenscene.co.id))

### Inugami

*Inugami* is written with two kanji letters, namely *inu* (犬) which means dog and *kami/gami* (神) which means god. In public, *Inugami* looks identical to an ordinary dog in order to blend in with society. However, its original form was a dried and mummified dog's head, often decorated with ceremonial decorations. The original form is kept safe (and away from prying eyes) in a secret shrine in the owner's home.



Picture 9 Inugami  
([www.youkai.com](http://www.youkai.com))

### Yatagarasu

*Yatagarasu* (八咫烏) means “Eight-Range Crow”. Initially *Yatagarasu* was depicted with two legs, but in 930 CE (Common Era), the Chinese myth about the three-legged crow was combined to become the story of *Yatagarasu*. Since then, *Yatagarasu* and the three-legged crow have been synonymous with each other. Some religious schools in Japan equate *Yatagarasu* with *Karasutengu* and consider them to be great creatures with no fear.



Picture 10 Yatagarasu  
([www.idntimes.com](http://www.idntimes.com))

### Komainu

*Komainu* (狛犬) means *Goryeo Dog* (ancient Korean dynasty) or guard dog. *Komainu* are noble sacred animals, usually employed as guardians of sacred sites. Their size can vary from a small dog to the size of a lion. Due to its similarity to these two creatures, this mythological creature is often called the lion-dog in English.

They have thick, curly manes and tails, strong, muscular bodies, and sharp teeth and claws. Some *Komainu* have large, unicorn-like horns on their heads. However, many also do not have horns. *Komainu* is a wild and noble animal. They act like guard dogs, guarding gates and doors and preventing bad guys from entering. They live together in male-female pairs and are always found together. The pair is usually carved in two poses: one with the mouth open in a roaring position, and one with the mouth closed. Symbolically, these creatures represent yin and yang, or death and life.



Picture 11 Komainu  
([www.akibanation.com](http://www.akibanation.com))

### Kirin

The name *Kirin* is written with the kanji 麒麟 which means Giraffe. However, this mythological animal *Kirin* does not have distinctive physical characteristics like the giraffe which has a long neck. Kirin is described as a mythical creature with a body like a deer, dragon-like scales covering its body, a dragon-like face, a bull's tail, horse hooves and more than one horn. His body and mane were covered in brilliant holy flames.

*Kirin* are known as gentle animals, never eating the flesh of other creatures, and are very careful not to step on any living creatures. When he walks, he does so without stepping on a single blade of grass. Due to its rare existence, *Kirin* is like a unicorn that only appears during periods of world peace.



Picture 12 Kirin  
([www.akibanation.com](http://www.akibanation.com))

### Maneki Neko

*Maneki Neko* (招き) means to call, or invite. Meanwhile, *neko* (猫) means cat. So it can be concluded from the name *Maneki Neko* means "calling cat". *Maneki Neko* is a display of Japanese cat characters made of porcelain or ceramic with one front leg (hand) raised. For Japanese people, cats are special animals. It is even said that Japanese people prefer to keep cats compared to keeping dogs.

In describing its physical form, *Maneki Neko* is created with various types of legs, such as a raised front leg, either a right leg or a left leg. Beliefs regarding which leg is raised vary depending on the time and place where the *Maneki Neko* is placed. However, there are also *Maneki Nekos* that don't lift their front legs at all.



Picture 13 Maneki Neko  
([travel.tribunnews.com](http://travel.tribunnews.com))

*Maneki Neko* has various colors. Even though the original color is white, *Maneki Neko* are made with a variety of different colors and attributes. Each color is believed to have different benefits.

#### Shachihoko

The writing of the name of this mythological animal is “鯨” which is a combination of the two characters for ‘fish’ and ‘tiger’. *Shachi* itself means Orca (killer whale). *Shachihoko* is a scary sea monster with the body shape of a large fish and a tiger-shaped head. *Shachihoko* has a dorsal fin that has many sharp spines and wide fins and tail that always point towards the sky.

*Shachihoko* lives in the cold western ocean and is able to swallow large amounts of water in one gulp and hold it in its stomach. *Shachihoko* is also believed by the people to have the ability to summon clouds and control rain. Therefore, many traditional Japanese buildings install *Shachihoko* statues on the roofs of their houses to avoid fire disasters.



Picture 14 Female Shachi on the right  
([www.indozone.id](http://www.indozone.id))

#### Nue

*Nue* (鵺) is written with a combination of the kanji for night and bird. However, even though her name contains a word meaning bird, *Nue* does not have physical characteristics like birds that have wings to fly. *Nue* is visualized as a mythological animal with the head of a monkey, the tail of a snake, the body of a *Tanuki* and the legs of a tiger. Throughout history it is known that *Nue* rarely appears, but Japanese people consider it a very evil monster. There is a myth that if humans cross paths with *Nue* there will be a disaster.



Picture 15 Nue  
([www.youkai.com](http://www.youkai.com))

#### Nekomata

*Nekomata* is written with kanji (猫又 / 猫股), "猫" read '*neko*' means cat and "又/股" read '*mata*' means branched. *Nekomata* is a type of mythological creature, the *bakeneko* type, which is very scary and has a forked tail. *Nekomata* are also known as giant black cat monsters that are sometimes shown with two large black angel wings. *Nekomata* can be found in towns and villages and live in small towns and big cities.



Picture 16 Nekomata  
([www.youkai.com](http://www.youkai.com))

### Genbu

*Genbu* comes from the word 玄 read ‘gen’, which means dark, mysterious, or mysterious, and 武 read ‘bu’, which means warrior. *Genbu* is a mythological creature that has the appearance of a large turtle or tortoise combined with a snake and sometimes *Genbu* is also visualized as a giant turtle with a snake tail. This animal is believed by people who live in the northern sky.

*Genbu* is known as one of the shijin, or Four Symbols, which are important mythological figures in Taoism. *Genbu* is believed to be the guardian figure of northern Japan. It is associated with the water element, winter, the planet Mercury, and the color black. *Genbu* is thought to represent the virtues of knowledge and controlling the cold. His figure is enshrined at *Genbu Shrine* located north of the Kyoto Imperial Palace.



Picture 17 Genbu  
([www.akibanation.com](http://www.akibanation.com))

### Seiryū

*Seiryū* is written with the kanji 青 (read: ao/sei, which means blue) and 龍 (read: ryū, which means dragon). *Seiryū* is a shijin in the form of a large blue-green dragon with a long tongue. His house is in the eastern sky and is believed to be the guardian of the eastern region of Japan. *Seiryū* spans seven of China’s twenty-eight constellations, occupying a quarter of the entire sky.

*Seiryū* is associated with the Chinese element wood, spring, the planet Jupiter, and the colors blue and green. His figure is believed to represent virtue, and symbolizes creativity, being able to control the rain. *Seiryū* is believed to live in seas and rivers and is believed to cause floods. *Seiryū* is enshrined at the entrance to *Kiyomizu Temple*, Kyoto (in the eastern part of the city) and in Japan there is also an annual festival held in his honor.



Picture 18 Seiryū  
([www.akibanation.com](http://www.akibanation.com))



### Byakko

*Byakko* is written with the kanji 白 (read: *shiroi*, *haku/byaku*, which means white) and 虎 (read: *tora/ko*, which means tiger). *Byakko* is a shijin depicted as a heavenly white tiger. His house is located in the western sky and is believed to be the guardian of western Japan. *Byakko* spans seven of China's twenty-eight constellations, occupying a quarter of the entire sky.

*Byakko* is associated with the Chinese metal element, autumn, the planet Venus, and the color white. He is believed to represent virtue, truth and is able to control the wind. The figure of *Byakko* is often seen as a protector and guardian, so that in ancient times many burials of prominent people such as kings and generals had their burials covered with metal in the hope that the deceased would always receive protection from *Byakko*.



Picture 19 *Byakko*  
([www.akibanation.com](http://www.akibanation.com))

### Suzaku

*Suzaku* is written with the kanji 朱 (read: *shu*, which means bright red) and 雀 (read: *suzume*, which means sparrow). *Suzaku* is a shijin depicted as a large, dark red, phoenix-like bird. His house is in the southern sky and is believed to be Japan's guardian of the southern region.

*Suzaku* spans seven of China's twenty-eight constellations, occupying a quarter of the entire sky. This mythological animal is associated with the Chinese element of fire, summer, the planet Mars, and the color red. *Suzaku* represents virtue, politeness and being able to control heat and flame. The ancient capitals of *Fujiwara-kyō*, *Heijo-kyō* and *Heian-kyō* were each guarded in the south by a large gate called *Suzakumon* (*Suzaku Gate*).



Picture 20 *Suzaku*  
([www.akibanation.com](http://www.akibanation.com))

### Baku

*Baku* consists of one kanji letter, namely "獺", which can be directly read as *Baku*. *Baku* (獺) is a mythological creature in Japan that has the physical appearance of various combinations of other animals. *Baku* is said to be a strange sacred animal that has the body of a bear, the head of an elephant, the eyes of a rhinoceros, the tail of an ox, and the legs of a tiger. Despite its hideous appearance, *Baku* is revered as a powerful force of good and as one of the sacred protectors of humanity.

Legend has it that when the world was new and the gods made animals, *Baku* was put together from scraps left over at the end of creation. This explains the reason for its strange appearance, and why *Baku* was considered a favorite of the gods.



Picture 21 Baku  
([www.pinterest.com](http://www.pinterest.com))

## Conclusion

The names of mythological animals can be classified based on three things, namely based on the writing of the name, based on shape and visualization and based on both. 10 of 20 Japanese mythological animals whose visualization and shape are based on writing their names and most of them have unique and colorful visuals. Each mythological creature in Japan has a different meaning, there are *yokai* called *Nigi Mitama*, namely *yokai* who are believed to bring good luck, and *Ara Mitama* are *yokai* who bring bad luck, disaster or misfortune.

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