

## Garuda and Vishnu



# Story of Garuda

from the Mahabarata

Garuda is an important deity in the Hindu religion. He is shown as a bird, or part bird- part human. He is known primarily for being Lord Vishnu's vehicle or mount.

Who is Garuda, and why is he shown with Lord Vishnu? Here is his story:

Vinata and Kadru were two sisters who were jealous of each other. Both wanted a son. To Kadru was born a thousand snakes called Naga. Vinata gave birth to two eggs. From one egg emerged a fully grown bird, immense and powerful. Thus, was born Garuda, King of the Birds. Not long after, the two sisters made a foolish bet and Vinata lost. As a result, she became a slave to Kadru and the Naga.

Garuda was determined to free his mother and asked how he could do this. The Naga requested a magical liquid of immortality which was guarded by the gods in exchange for her freedom. Garuda flew up to the heavens, fought valiantly past the gods' defenses, and returned with the magical liquid.

However, Garuda tricked the Naga and prevented them from drinking the magical liquid after his mother was freed. From this point on, Garuda is the enemy of the Naga, and he eats snakes as food. On his way down from the heavens, Garuda met Lord Vishnu, one of Hinduism's most important gods who knows of Garuda's bravery, and asks Garuda to be his trusted mount. Garuda therefore gains immortality and a place of lasting importance within Hinduism.



In Japan, the crane represents a lot of traits, values, and virtues. Its appearance, Behavior, and the myths surrounding its existence all contribute to this symbolism. Let's Explore some of the symbolic meanings associated with the crane in Japan:

- **Good Luck:** Seeing a crane is considered good luck because of its role as a messenger of the gods. Folding a paper Japanese crane (origami) or using crane-inspired art at events like wedding and New Year celebrations is also said to bring good luck.
- **Longevity:** Cranes can live for multiple decades, which is long for a bird. Hence the myth that lives for 1,000 years. That is why the crane is seen as a symbol of longevity.
- **Fidelity:** Cranes stay with their mates for life. Hence, they represent fidelity in marriages and relationships.
- **Happiness:** In Shinto religion, the crane has close ties to the god of happiness.
- **Strength:** The crane has a tall frame and strong flight pattern, which makes it a symbol of strength and power.
- **Auspiciousness:** Cranes often symbolize the promise of a successful outcome, especially during New Year celebrations and marriage ceremonies.
- **Hope:** The image of the crane is considered a sign of hope during challenging times.
- **Peace:** Cranes and their origami portrayals represent peace in Japan and other countries in the world.



## How the Koi Became a Dragon

*The ancient koi dragon folk tale recounts how a humble carp lived in the sea, and aspired to know a different life, a vaster world, and more diverse experiences. The koi met many different creatures, who each helped the carp along its quest. Even animals and demons who tried to eat or hinder it actually helped the koi develop skills, confidence, and resolve.*

According to legend, far upriver there was a very high, extremely steep waterfall called “Dragon Gate.” Its water thundered with torrential force from a fissure between two lofty mountain peaks.

The Numerous cap that had made it upstream gathered at the pool below the waterfall. Only three resolved to ascent the waterfall to the top.

Their efforts spanned years as they tried and failed and tried again, overcoming many formidable obstacles. Finally, only one yellow card could ascent the falls and then leap over its top.

When this carp finally succeeded, the mythical Jade Emperor rewarded its heroic efforts by transforming it into a dragon with golden scales. Thunder boomed, lightning flashed in the sky, rain fell, and the golden dragon flew off into the sky.



## Golden Lion

The gold lion often symbolizes **strength, courage, and wisdom** in spiritual contexts. Its golden color adds an element of wealth, prosperity, and divine power, suggesting a connection to higher spiritual realms.

Guardian lion statues, known as *Shishi* (stone lions) or *Tongshi* (bronze lions), are common fixtures at the entrances of palaces, temples, government offices, and wealthy homes. While often made of stone or bronze, "golden" versions in brass are popular for their association with wealth.

**Origin:** Lions are not native to China; their image was introduced from Central Asia along the Silk Road during the Han Dynasty. They were perceived as majestic, exotic animals and embraced as a divine beast (*suan-ni*) in Chinese lore, sometimes envisioned as a cross between a lion and a dragon.

**Protection:** They are powerful mythical creatures believed to ward off evil spirits, negative energy (*shar chi*), and people with bad intentions. They are loyal and fierce protectors in both the physical and spirit worlds.



## Golden Toad

In Chinese restaurants around the world, it is common to see a **golden toad** displayed at the front counter near the cash register. The toad, seated on stacks of golden coins with another coin in its mouth, is a classic and popular folk symbol of wealth and prosperity.

In Chinese folklore, a three-legged toad biting a coin can bring wealth and good fortune to a household.

The legend of the three-legged toad is associated Liu Hai, one of the eight immortals. Because the pattern on the skin of a toad resembles coins, it is believed to have the power of spitting gold coins out of its mouth. In the story, Liu Hai obtains numerous gold coins with the help of the three-legged golden toad, which he then uses to help the poor. Liu Hai is thus worshipped as a god of wealth; the three-legged golden toad is worshipped as an auspicious animal that can bring forth prosperity and blessings.



## Background and Popular Stories of Baku

Like many of Japan's mythical creatures, the baku originally came from China, arriving sometime between the sixth century (along with Buddhism) and the fifteenth century (accounts vary). The Chinese version of the baku had an entirely different duty; its job was to offer protection to a person from pestilence and evil. Once in Japan, this chimera shifted into more of a nightmare eater. In fact, it needs nightmares to survive.

It's said that back in the day, children who woke from nightmares would know to repeat three times, "Baku-san, come eat my dream." There are several different versions of this chant, one being, "Kono yume, baku ni agemasu," which literally means, "I give this dream to the baku."

However you phrased it, after repeating the prayer three times, the baku would enter your room slink its way over, and gobble up your distressing dream. You would then never have that particular nightmare again. The bizarre-looking baku spent long nights hopping from rooftop to rooftop, listening for someone to call out so it could hurry over and feast.

Back in the Muromachi era (1336-1573), a person who was on their deathbed would be given an image of the baku to hold as protection against evil spirits. More recently, in the Edo era (1603-1867), baku "pillows" were employed to fend off nightmares. These pillows were not the kind we have today – in that time, they consisted of a small cloth tube filled with rice, soba, or buckwheat husks that was tied to a wood or ceramic block. It was the bottom, hard part of the pillow that could be shaped like a baku or have one painted on or carved into it. Later, after modern pillows arrived, talismans or drawings were slipped under them, or even embroidered on pillowcases, all to ensure pleasant dream.



知らないうちに、拡めちゃうから。



**STOP!**  
**感染拡大**  
— COVID-19 —

## **Amabie Yokai**

The Amabie yokai is a three-legged, mermaid-like spirit or monster with a bird's beak and long hair. The Amabie appears from the sea to prophesize good harvests or epidemics, instructing people to draw its image to ward off illness. The Amabie was not well known in modern times but was re-discovered during the COVID-19 pandemic. People shared Amabie drawings online as a symbol of hope and protection, turning it into a viral cultural phenomenon and even a Japanese government mascot.



## The Mythical Fox- Kitsune

**The fox in Japanese culture, often referred to as the kitsune, is one of the most fascinating mythical creatures in Japan's folklore.** More than just an animal, the fox represents wisdom, mystery, and transformation. Across centuries, kitsune legends have evolved from ancient Shinto beliefs to modern anime, films, and video games. This dual role—spiritual guardian and cunning trickster—makes the fox a symbol deeply embedded in Japanese tradition and pop culture.

### Duality of the Kitsune: Trickster and Protector

What makes the kitsune especially intriguing is its duality. On one hand, foxes are revered as wise guardians who bring fortune and protection. On the other, they are feared as mischievous tricksters capable of deception.

Many folktales describe **kitsune** as shape-shifters, often transforming into beautiful women. In some stories, they marry unsuspecting men, only for their true identity to be revealed later. This ability to deceive symbolizes the thin line between reality and illusion in Japanese beliefs. At the same time, legends also portray the kitsune as a loyal guardian spirit, especially in connection with Inari shrines. This dual nature—protector and deceiver—has kept the fox a captivating figure in Japanese storytelling.

### Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

**What is a kitsune in Japanese mythology?** A kitsune is a fox spirit in Japanese folklore, known for its intelligence, shape-shifting abilities, and connection to the deity Inari.

**How many tails can a kitsune have?** Kitsune can grow up to nine tails. Each additional tail represents greater age, wisdom, and power.

**Why is the fox connected to Inari shrines?** The fox is considered the divine messenger of Inari, the Shinto god of rice and fertility, making fox statues a common sight at Inari shrines.



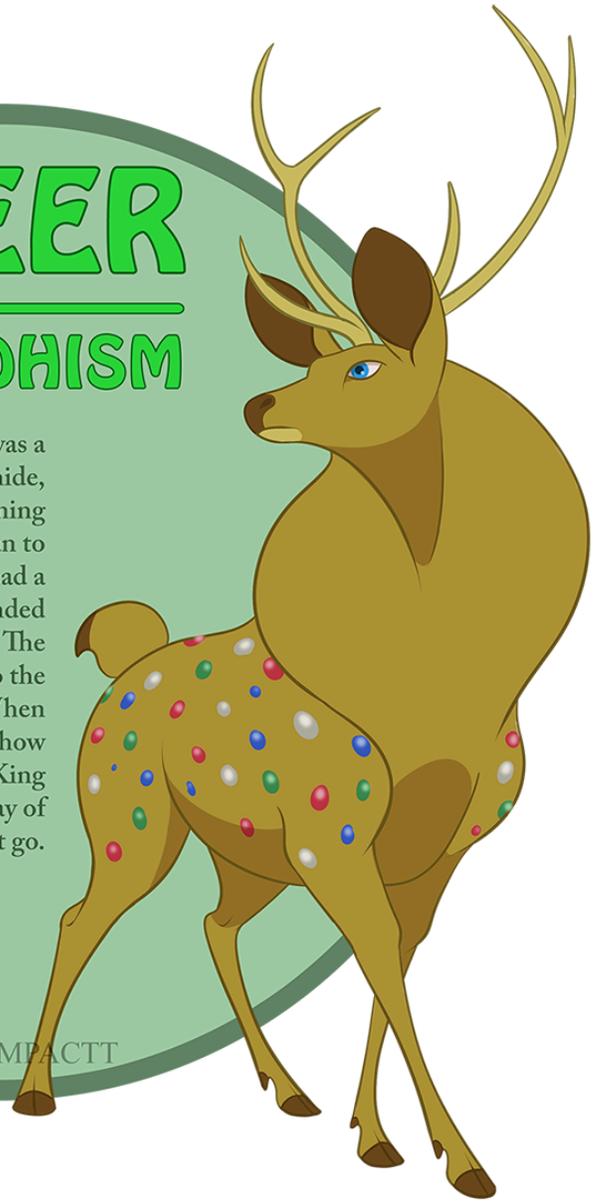
**Is the kitsune myth still popular in Japan today?** Yes, the kitsune remains a strong cultural symbol in Japan, celebrated in festivals, literature, art, and widely represented in anime, manga, and games like the Pokémon Card pictured above.

# RURU DEER

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## BUDDHISM

One of Buddha's many reincarnations was a golden deer with multiple colors on its hide, soft fur, and blue eyes. He saved a drowning man and only asked in return for the man to keep his location a secret. The Queen had a dream of the magnificent deer and demanded the King to find it and bring it to her. The rescued man heard of this, and rushed to the King to tell him where to find the deer. When the deer was found he told the King of how his kindness was betrayed, and the King was so moved by the display of compassion that he let it go.

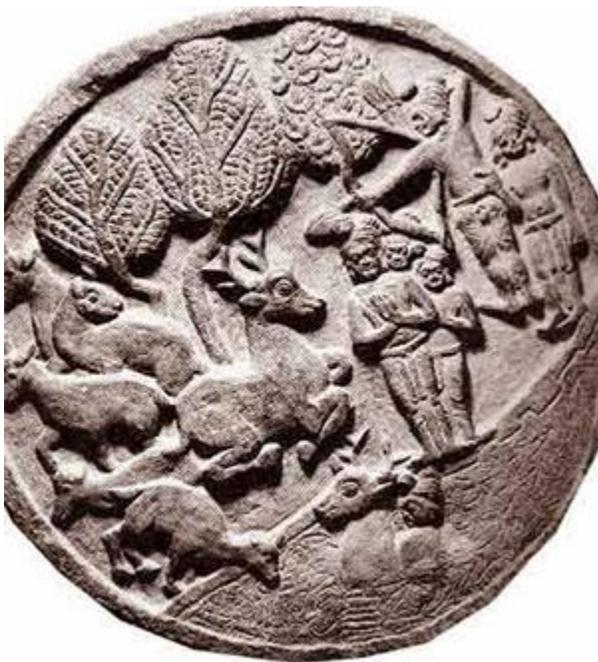


LOSTT IMPACTT

## Ruru the mythical deer

The bodhisattva is reborn as a ruru deer (evidently a particular species of deer). One day he hears a man shouting for help and rescues him from a river. The man agrees to keep the whereabouts of the ruru deer secret. Later on, the queen dreams of a ruru deer preaching the dharma and desires to see such a thing. The king offers a reward to anyone who knows the whereabouts of a golden ruru deer and the man who was previously rescued from the river takes the king there. The ruru deer feels pity for the man and forgives him, then travels to the kingdom and preaches the dhamma.

- **Dhamma** - (Pali, the language of the oldest, original teachings of Buddha)
- **Dharma** - (Sanskrit, the language of the Mahayana Buddhist scriptures and those of some of the other older [Dharma Paths](#))
- 1. The Buddha's teachings.
- 2. Truth
- 3. Wisdom
- 4. A natural condition
- 5. Mental quality.





Yokai Appearing in a Dream to the Retired Emperor Go-Toba Shūsai, 1865 ☆ This is the story of how Emperor Go-Toba was visited by yokai monsters in his dreams while suffering from a severe illness, only to be completely cured when he awoke. These pictures depict the yokai who appeared in the dream, and the strong influence of the Hyakki Yagyō (Night Parade of One Hundred Demons) can be seen in the many monsters prancing about, some of which are identical to those in the Hyakki Yagyō. In the final scene, the Buddha appears with the shining sun to his back, and the yokai are dispersed.

## Yokai

- Chinese Influence: Yōkai are supernatural beings and mysterious phenomena in Japanese folklore, but their origins can be traced to earlier Chinese concepts. For example, the "night parade of 100 demons" (Hyakki Yagyō), a prominent yōkai concept in Japan, has roots in similar Chinese traditions from the Han period.
- Broader Exchange: The spread of Buddhism from India to China and then to Japan via these routes also brought various shared mythological motifs and supernatural figures that were integrated into existing local folklore, contributing to the diverse pantheon of yōkai.
- Adaptation: The exchange was not a direct import but a process of synthesis, where Chinese ideas merged with indigenous Japanese animistic beliefs to form the distinct yōkai culture that flourished particularly during the Edo period with the rise of illustrated encyclopedias

In sum, the Silk Road was a dynamic network that facilitated the movement and synthesis of foundational ideas and belief systems across Asia, including those that influenced the development of practices like feng shui and the folklore surrounding yōkai

## Bali Shadow Puppet (Wayang Kulit)



## Bali Shadow Puppet (Wayang Kulit)







THE SILK ROAD

IRAN  
(Persia)  
● Gurgan  
● Nishapur

Yaozhou  
Yellow River

C H I N A

Yangzi River  
Yixing  
Jingdezhen  
Longquan

KOREA

● Gwangju  
● Imari

JAPAN

I N D I A

Arabian Sea

Bay of Bengal

Sawankhalok  
(Si Satchanalai)

THAILAND

VIETNAM  
Hoi An

South China Sea

PHILIPPINES

TAIWAN

Pacific Ocean

Indian Ocean

*Traditional Trade Routes*

SUMATRA

I N D O N E S I A  
JAVA