

Film Viewing Report on Religion

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Yokai presentation is very important in Japanese pop-culture. They are often seen in supernatural-style animations and are popular characters in children's shows and games. This aspect of Japanese culture has been incorporated into the daily lives of Japanese people and is making its way across the globe. In America today, one of the most popular series featuring yokai is an anime called *Yokai Watch*. Whether we realize it or not, Japanese animation has helped yokai weasel their way into our lives.

The supernatural and mystical have always been a popular concept among young and old alike. As we learned in class, there's even artwork dedicated to certain yokai and other supernatural stuff. Japanese people will say that they aren't especially religious, but aspects of Shintoism and Buddhism become apparent with how regular yokai are represented in anime and manga. The concept that kami inhabit animate and inanimate objects that are relevant to us in our everyday lives proves that the Japanese believe in the unseen, and even go as far as to leave offerings to special kami in order to bring luck and happiness to themselves as well as the area of which the kami reside in. This philosophy suggests that if our surroundings are in good shape, then we will also be prosperous in some shape or form.

In comparison to US animation, Japanese anime dives deeper. Animation in the US tends to be shallow and caters mainly to younger audiences, so themes are generally bland and based on the power of kindness amongst peers. There is a lack of the supernatural undertones that Japanese anime possess; we tend to leave out any implication of religion at all, seeing as it may come off as offensive to some viewers. Because the concept of Shintoism is basically inbred in all Japanese people, bringing yokai into anime is hardly a matter of concern for anyone. Yokai in Japanese anime is the equivalent to McDonalds in the US: you can always see one somewhere, but it doesn't necessarily mean you have to eat there. If you don't like yokai, don't watch the genre that contains the most of it.

As for the anime we watched in class, *Mushi-shi* is a good example of how kami inhabit both the living and nonliving and their effect in our lives. Mushi are everywhere and try to exist in the world doing what they are naturally designed to do. Sometimes, however, this becomes problematic for the people trying to coexist with them. In the first episode, there are mushi who take on a humanoid form, though you cannot see their faces. They hold a ceremonial ritual and have an honored human guest drink a 'sake' that is full of mushi. This ceremony manages to end on a bad note and a part of the guest is left in the world of mushi. This side of her is eventually retrieved, but she again has to drink the false sake full of mushi. When the mushi overflow, they leave behind a beautiful green moss, having nourished the area that was exposed to them. The way the cup was overflowing could be seen as an artistic expression of life being poured into nature. The mushi, expected to be the kami of the area, was only doing what it was designed to do. Humans learn to live with the repercussions.

A different depiction of yokai was shown in the anime *Natsume Yuujinchou*. The story tells of a boy who plans on giving the names back of all the yokai who are in this book he inherited. The relationship he builds with the yokai around him is something similar to what Japanese people do in order to make the yokai and kami be happy so that everyone is able to live without discomfort. If Natsume is able to make the yokai happy, then he will be able to find peace within himself as well as make the yokai less troublesome for everyone.