

# PRESS RELEASE

## **"Japan's World of Spirits and Demons" - A Fascinating Journey into the Spiritual Dimension of Japanese Culture**

With his latest work, "Japan's World of Spirits and Demons: Myths and Legends in Japanese Folk Belief," the author transports readers into the complex and mysterious world of the Japanese supernatural. This comprehensive work, designed for Japan enthusiasts as well as religious scholars and those interested in culture, is now available in three languages ??(German, English, and French) from bookstores.

Interest in Japanese culture is continuously growing worldwide. Terms such as "yokai" and "kami" are increasingly finding their way into Western pop culture. This book provides a profound insight into Japan's complex religious and folkloric traditions. The author combines profound expertise with accessible language, creating a work that meets scholarly standards without overwhelming the general reader.

The importance of the spiritual dimension in everyday Japanese life can hardly be overestimated. From Shinto shrines in modern urban areas to Buddhist temples in rural regions, the coexistence of tradition and modernity is impressively reflected in Japan's religious landscape. This fascinating paradox forms the starting point for the author's detailed investigation.

The work is distinguished by its methodical rigor and respectful approach to Japan's spiritual heritage. It is neither sensationalist nor superficial, but rather strives for an authentic understanding

of the Japanese spirit world in its cultural and historical context. The author deliberately avoids the exoticization of Japanese traditions and instead explores the nuances that characterize this unique spiritual landscape.

The monograph is divided into thematic sections ranging from the origins of Shinto beliefs and the evolution of yokai representations in art and literature to the transformation of spiritual concepts in modern Japan. Of particular note is the detailed analysis of the relationship between humans and supernatural beings in Japanese folk belief, which sheds light on numerous previously neglected aspects.

The book begins with an introduction to the fundamental concepts of Japanese spirituality and explains the syncretic relationship between Shinto and Buddhism, which has shaped religious practice in Japan for centuries. The author explains the fundamental distinction between kami (divine beings) and yokai (supernatural beings or monsters) and demonstrates how fluid the boundaries between these categories can be.

A central chapter is devoted to the historical development of the yokai tradition from the Middle Ages to the present day. This highlights how closely spirit beliefs have been linked to social and political upheavals. For example, the author analyzes how the Edo period, with its urban culture and the rise of popular prints, contributed to the standardization and dissemination of certain yokai depictions.

The examination of regional differences in spirit beliefs is particularly insightful. The book presents previously little-documented local legends from remote regions of Japan and demonstrates how geographical factors have influenced the

manifestation of specific supernatural beings. For example, the water-based yokai of the coastal regions are contrasted with the mountain-dwelling tengu of the forest areas.

Hermann Candahashi places great emphasis on embedding these spirit beliefs in their everyday context. He illustrates that yokai were not only figures of terror, but often also served explanatory functions for natural phenomena or social taboos. At the same time, their role as a projection surface for social anxieties and cultural tensions is analyzed.

Particular attention is paid to the transformation of traditional spirit beliefs in modern times. The author traces how the Meiji Restoration, with its forced modernization and distancing from "superstition," initially marginalized the yokai tradition before it experienced a renaissance in literature, manga, anime, and video games in the 20th century. This revival is critically reflected upon and placed in the context of the search for cultural identity in a globalized world.

The work concludes with a consideration of the current significance of ghost beliefs in the everyday lives of modern Japanese. The author conducted numerous interviews and fieldwork for this purpose, painting a nuanced picture beyond exoticizing stereotypes. He demonstrates how traditional practices such as Obon (the Festival of the Dead) and the veneration of local protective deities continue to exist in contemporary urban Japan, and what new forms they are taking.

Another highlight of the book is the comprehensive portrayal of the Oni – demonic beings deeply rooted in Japanese mythology. The author traces their development from early Buddhist concepts of hell to their depiction in contemporary media. He illuminates

the ambivalence of these figures, who, on the one hand, are seen as the embodiment of evil, but on the other hand, can also be worshipped as powerful protectors.

The chapter on the female spirits and demons of Japan is also fascinating, in which the author analyzes gender-specific aspects of the Yokai tradition. From the vengeful Onryo to the seductive Kitsune – female supernatural beings often reflect societal ideas and fears about femininity. The author contextualizes these depictions historically and demonstrates their transformation over the centuries.

A special focus is placed on the depiction of yurei – the spirits of the deceased who, for various reasons, cannot find peace. The author analyzes the iconographic characteristics of these apparitions, such as the white shroud and missing feet, and explains their cultural significance. He traces the development of yurei depictions from classical Noh dramas to kabuki theater and modern Japanese horror cinema.

Also noteworthy is the detailed treatment of water yokai such as kappa. The author illuminates the ecological aspects of these legends and their function as warnings about the dangers of water. He shows how these traditions are still present in environmental awareness and local customs today.

The book also addresses the phenomenon of tsukumogami – everyday objects that come to life after prolonged use. The author explains the cultural-historical background of this idea and its connection to animistic concepts and the appreciation of material objects in Japanese culture. This analysis is illustrated by fascinating examples from art and literature.

Another central theme is the role of supernatural beliefs in Japanese medicine and in dealing with illness. The author examines rituals and practices for warding off disease-causing spirits and the significance of amulets and talismans in popular belief. He demonstrates the persistence of these traditions in modern Japan and their coexistence with Western medicine.

The book also addresses the significance of spirit beliefs in Japanese art. From early spirit scrolls (*hyakki yagyo*) to *ukiyo-e* prints of the Edo period and contemporary art forms, the author analyzes the visual representation of the supernatural and its influence on Japan's aesthetic tradition. Particular attention is paid to the works of artists such as Toriyama Sekien and Utagawa Kuniyoshi.

The book comprehensively covers the role of the supernatural in Japanese literature, from classic works such as the *Genji Monogatari* and the *Kaidan* collections to contemporary novels. The author analyzes the literary function of ghosts and demons and their significance for the development of narrative traditions in Japan.

Special attention is also paid to regional protective deities and local spirits. For this chapter, the author conducted extensive fieldwork in various regions of Japan and documented previously little-known local traditions. He demonstrates how these cults contribute to strengthening communities and the role they play in modern Japan.

The book concludes with a reflection on the global spread of Japanese notions of ghosts in the wake of the worldwide popularity of Japanese horror films, anime, and manga. The author discusses the transcultural appropriation of these concepts and

their transformation in new cultural contexts. He demonstrates how Japanese yokai have become global icons and the intercultural misunderstandings and reinterpretations that accompany them.

The author, who has decades of experience in researching Japanese culture and religion, combines academic depth with narrative accessibility in this work. His respectful and nuanced approach to the subject reflects his deep understanding of Japanese culture. His numerous stays in various regions of Japan have enabled him to look beyond the well-known urban centers and document even remote local traditions.

"Japan's World of Spirits and Demons" is more than just an inventory of supernatural beliefs – it is a cultural-historical journey that illuminates fundamental aspects of Japanese identity. The book impressively demonstrates how spiritual concepts reflect cultural, social, and political developments and how they remain relevant even in the modern age.

The publication comes at a time of growing international interest in Japanese culture and spiritual traditions. It offers both beginners and connoisseurs of Japanese culture valuable insights into a fascinating dimension of Japan that often remains hidden behind the facade of high-tech society.

The work is particularly distinguished by its thoroughness, its cultural sensitivity, and its ability to convey complex religious and folkloric concepts in an understandable way without oversimplifying them. It closes an important gap, not only in German-language literature on Japan, and makes a significant contribution to intercultural understanding.

## **About the Author**

The author is a renowned expert on Japanese culture and religion, having published numerous books on these topics. He spent several years, with interruptions, in Japan, where he intensified his knowledge in various places and cities. His field research took him to numerous regions of Japan, from Hokkaido to Okinawa, and gave him deep insights into local traditions and customs. In addition to his travels, he also sees himself as a cultural mediator and has authored numerous books on Japanese spirituality and folklore. He is particularly interested in the connection between traditional ideas and modern society, as well as the intercultural dialogue between Japan and Western cultures.

## **Availability**

"Japan's World of Spirits and Demons" is now available in three languages (German, English, and French) in bookstores, as a hardcover, paperback, e-book, and audiobook. Further information, excerpts and event announcements can be found on the publisher's website.

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# JAPAN'S WORLD OF GHOSTS & DEMONS

Myths and legends in Japanese  
folk belief



Hermann Candahashi



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