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Intro to Folklore

A Folklore Collection

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### **Japanese Mythology**

The Japanese have some very interesting mythology. Most of all Japanese mythology are stories that are obtained from old folk beliefs, which also includes Buddhist and Shinto religions. But it is not just based on religion, it is also based on a number of stories that have been passed down. There are 5 really well known legends in Japan and they are called, “Japanese Creation Myth, The Sun, the Moon and the Wind myth, Amaterasu and the Cave myth, Hare of Inaba myth, and the Japanese legend of Emperor Jimmu. There are also some Japanese folklore about some demons and spirits

The first legend is the Japanese creation myth. This myth comes from the “Record of Ancient Matters” or also known as the Kojiki, which is the first book that was written in in Japan, which dating back to 712, as well as the Nihon Shoki, which dates back to 720. The story of the creation myth starts off in a limitless, formless chaos of darkness, silent universe. After many Eons have passed, a lot of particles started to move and it created sound. Then particles that were the lightest rose up and they became the heavens, creating the first three gods, also known as the Three Creating Deities. The rest of these particles dropped down and created the Earth, but since it is a lot of particles, it takes about a million years for the Earth to solidify. And instantly two more deities were created, sprouting from a reed on Earth. There were a lot more gods that were created but they really have nothing to do, and so they just exist and watch as the universe is in chaos. Then two gods are summoned, they are called Izanagi and Izanami, who are told to go down to Earth and rule the creation, which life on earth begins.

The legend of the Sun, the Moon, and the Wind, is what happens shortly after the creation. This legend goes that it happened after Izanagi and Izanami came down to earth. Izanami had died during childbirth, and so to be able to bring her, Izanagi travels to the land of the dead, which is also called Yomi no Kuni. But Izanagi was too late, for Izanami's body had already started to decay. Izanagi returned back to Earth, and purified himself from the miasma that the land of the dead produced. While he was purifying himself, three new deities had appeared and they are known as Amaterasu, the sun goddess, Tsukuyomi, the moon god, and Susanoo, the god of the wind.

The next legend we will be talking about is about the sun goddess, Amaterasu, who is one of the most well-known Japanese goddesses. Most of the Japanese mythology tells about her rivalry with her brother Susanoo. Amaterasu and the Cave legend is a famous tale, about how Amaterasu went and hid inside a cave after she and her brother Susanoo had a fight, which is said to have caused the entire world to sink into darkness, which allowed evil spirits to start to roam the Earth. The other gods tried their best to get her to come out from inside the cave. The goddess of merriment, Ame-No-Uzume, had dressed up in flowers and started to dance on an upturned washtub. The flowers started to fall off of her body, causing the male gods to laugh really loudly. Amaterasu became curious and she peeked out of the cave to see what was happening, and a god named Amenotejikara pulled her from the cave, which returned light to the world.

The legend of the Hare of Inaba has two different versions to it, and the most widely-accepted is about a metaphor of how civilization struggled against barbarism to form the Japanese nation. This myth tells about how a hare tricks a crocodile into forming a bridge which would make it so he would be able to cross to an island. However, the crocodiles had figured out this trick, and then they teamed up on the hare and pulled off all of the hare's fur. About the same time, some men who resembled the king's son passed the hare and the hare called out to them asking for help. The brothers told the hare to wash in the seawater and dry in the sun. The hare listened and because of the salt in the seawater, it made the hare even more uncomfortable, and the hare laid in the field and cried out in pain. Afterwards, the brothers told the hare to

wash in fresh water and then roll in cattails pollen, and after the treatment the hare rewarded the brother, who turned out to be the fairy Okuni-nushi-no-Mikoto, and told him that he will marry Princess Yakami.

The Japanese Legend of Emperor Jimmu is about a Emperor named Jimmu, who is the great-grandson of the goddess Amaterasu, who is said to be the mythical founder of Japan. The legends starts out by saying he was born in 711 BCE and died in 585 BCE, which means he was 126 years old when he died. There is very little evidence that Jimmu ever existed. Modern-day scholars believe that of the nine emperor, Suizei, who was Jimmu's successor, was the only one who had actually lived. Even though they are not quite sure if Jimmu was actually a real person, this myth is still important for it tells the story of how the imperial family, who still exist today, began.

Something else in Japanese mythology is about the demons and spirits which are in Japanese folklore. Oni means demon and yurei means ghost in Japan and has played a role in Japanese culture for thousands of years. There is a myth about a woman named Kiyohime who was a young woman who was scorned by her lover, who was a monk named Anchin and he grew cold and lost his interest in her. Kiyohime realized he had left her and so she followed him to a river and then she transformed into a serpent while swimming after his boat. Anchin was terrified by her monstrous form, so he sought refuge in a temple, where the other monks hid him beneath a bell. Kiyohime found him by his scent, she coiled around the bell, and with her tail she hit the bell loudly. Then she breathed fire onto the bell, melting it and killing Anchin.

There is a woman who goes by the name of Kuchisake-onna or also known as slit-mouth woman. This is an urban legend from 1979 and it swept through Japan. Kuchisake-onna wears a surgical mask and she will go up to children and ask them if they think she is beautiful. If they say yes, she reveals her mouth that is slit from ear to ear, and then asks the question again. The only way to escape is to give her a

noncommittal answer such as telling her she looks okay. Or you could distract her with Japanese candies. But if the children say yes again, she will cut their mouths so they look just like her.

When it comes to Japanese mythology, there are a lot of different views and ways for these legends and myths are passed down. These myths and legends can be passed down from one generation to another. When looking at Japanese mythologies from an individual perspective, it is very interested and entertaining. When looking at these legends through social perspective, it seems like a few of the myths that were told to scare little children in listening to their parents. Through a cultural perspective, some myths and legends are told because of religious beliefs, ancient records, and sometimes just for some entertainment depending on the legend that is told. By looking through a comparative perspective at other mythologies from different parts of the earth, they will have their own myths and legends making their mythologies unique to them.

### Work Cited

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